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Notes on Contributors

Adewale Christopher Oyewo holds a Ph.D from the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He currently teaches in the department of Performing Arts, Osun State University, Nigeria. Jonah Monday Caleb teaches in the department of English and Literary Studies, Federal University, Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria. He has published widely in the field of Literary Environmentalism.

John Charles Ryan is an Adjunct Associate Professor at Southern Cross University and an Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at the Nulungu Research Institute, Notre Dame University, Australia. His research interests include contemporary poetry, Southeast Asian literature, ecocriticism, critical plant studies, and the environmental humanities. His latest co-edited book is titled *Australian Wetland Cultures: Swamps and the Environmental Crisis* (2019, Lexington Books, with Li Chen). His textbook *Introduction to the Environmental Humanities* (with J. Andrew Hubbell) is forthcoming with Routledge in 2021. The botanical poetry collection *Seeing Trees: A Poetic Arboretum*, with Western Australian poet Glen Phillips, was published in 2020 by Pinyon Publishing in Colorado. In 2020, he served as Visiting Scholar at the University of 17z August 1945, Surabaya, and Visiting Professor at Brawijaya University, Malang, Indonesia, as well as Writer-in-Residence at Oak Spring Garden Foundation in Virginia.

Kehinde Oluwabukola is a Research Scholar in the department of English and Literary Studies, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria. His research interest includes, literary theory and criticism and the Environmental humanities.

Mugo Muhia Ph.D is a lecturer and Head, department of Literature, Linguistics & Foreign Languages, School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.

Risha Baruah is a PhD Scholar in the department of English, Cotton University. Her areas of research include Posthumanism, Anthropocene studies, Ecocriticism, Indian Literature, Animal Studies and Literary theory. She has contributed articles to local and international journals.

Samson Maleya Lusinga is a graduate of the department of Literature, Linguistics & Foreign Languages, School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya. He has written extensively in the area of ecocriticism.

Stephen Ogheneruro Okpadah is a Chancellor International PhD Scholar, University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom. He is co-editor of *Language of Sustainable Development: Discourses on the Anthropocene in Literature and Cinema* (2021), a special issue of the journal: *Language, Discourse and Society*. Books that he has co-edited are, *Committed Theatre in Nigeria: Perspectives on Teaching and Practice* (Lexington Books, 2020); *Locating Transnational Spaces: Culture, Theatre and Cinema* (IATC and the University College of the North, Canada, 2020); and *The Road to Social Inclusion* (UNESCO/Janusz Korczak Chair's Book Series, 2021). He is currently researching participatory theatre and climate justice in the context of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Okpadah is the recipient of the 2021 Janusz Korczak/UNESCO Prize for Global South in emerging scholar category, and he is also a Director at the Theatre Emissary International, Nigeria. He is also a Non-resident Research Associate at the Centre for Socially Engaged Theatre, University of Regina, Canada.

Tekena Gasper Mark had his PhD in the department of Theatre and Film Studies, University of Port Harcourt. He is a lecturer in the same department. Also, he has published widely in dramatic criticism, film studies and cultural studies.

Call for Papers

The Lamar Journal of the Humanities is an interdisciplinary journal published twice yearly by the English Department of Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. Papers of interdisciplinary or general interest in the fields of literature, history, contemporary culture, and the fine arts are appropriate for submission. Languages accepted are English, German, French, and Spanish. Detailed studies of highly specialized topics, literary explications which do not elucidate broader historical or ideological issues, and statistical essays in the social sciences are not encouraged but will be considered. Manuscripts, normally not to exceed 6000 words, should conform to *The MLA Handbook* or *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Two copies of the manuscript, along with return postage, should be sent to the Editors. Submissions may also be made by e-mail to the editors at anemmers@lamar.edu.

An Introduction to Ecological Violence and Resistance in the Postcolonial Text

Stephen Ogheneruro Okpadah

The growing attention of the United Nations in the area of climate change mitigation and climate sustainability has amplified the interest of scholars towards reimagining how the broad field of the Humanities can be used to negotiate the connection between man and the physical environment. Studies in the intersection of the environment and literature have been prevalent from the late 1970s. William Rueckert's work, *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* (1978) has ushered in the large body of discourses on Ecocriticism, "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to literature" (Glotfelty 3). Ecocriticism emerged according to Derek Gladwin as "a broad way for literary and cultural scholars to investigate the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture, and the physical environment" (1). According to scholars such as Downing Cless, from the last decade of the 20th century, a large volume of literary works, films and theatre practice that focus holistically on the impact of ecological violence on people and communities, and how this violence have been resisted by particular groups in ecologically degraded communities began to emerge. These new creative representations fully capture the culture-nature entanglement and transnational dimension of ecological degradation. Perhaps, one of the reasons for the growth of scholarship and art works in this direction stems from the growing consciousness of scholars and creative artists from the global south about the capacity of the Humanities, especially the arts to engage fully issues that bother on ecological violence and ecological resistance. Una Chaudhuri in *There Must Be a Lot of Fish in that Lake: Toward an Ecological Theatre* avers that "ecological victory will require a transvaluation so profound as to be nearly unimaginable at present. And in this the arts and humanities-including the theatre-must play a role" (25). Creative works such as Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007), which explore the Bhopal gas explosion, Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meat* (1998), a creative ecofeminist discourse, and Helon

Habila's petrofiction, *Oil on Water* (2010), attest to the canonization of the novel of ecological violence and resistance. Ahmed Yerima's play, *Hard Ground* (2006), Greg Mbarjiorgu's play, *Wake Up Every One* (2011) and films like Jeta Amata's *Black November* (2012) and Ruud Elmendorp's documentary film, *Ken Saro-Wiwa: All For My People* (2014) reveal that the content of the larger postcolonial text embraced the critical subject of transnational ecological degradation and its opposition by indigenous groups from below the ladder. Also, these texts explore how the people and environmental geography of the global south have been subjected to 'civil death' (Mbembe 12) by external colonizers in conjunction with internal colonialists.

To this end, the postcolonial text which investigated ecological themes, shifted from the discussion and negotiation of the human-nature association (as the first wave ecocriticism investigates), into a more political conversation, where the text became a space for the discourse on environmental colonialism and a medium to discuss the imbroglio between the West and the Others. I use the term postcolonial text to accommodate play texts, stage performances, films, poems and novels produced after the colonial era, that indicate examine issues of environmental degradation and toxic colonialism in the global south caused by the dominance and hegemony of the West. The postcolonial text interrogates the resistance of bare citizens of the global south against transnational or simply put, the global North's destruction of nature and examines what Achille Mbembe terms Necropolitics, "the systematic subjection of particular peoples to the power of death and to precarious conditions of life" (12). Necropolitics is "the right to expose other people to death, the license to kill and other forms of political violence" (Tatlic 4). The ecological violence in the global south is most appropriate to explain the concept of necropolitics. People living in environmentally degraded communities in the global south are perpetually enslaved economically. In 1988, the Italian government quietly transported drums of toxic waste to a small fishing community, Koko in Nigeria. Despite the international outcry and subsequent relocation of the substances from the community, the people still continue to grapple with its effect. The Koko incident is only an exemplar of degradation of the environmental of developing nations and especially Africa. The massive deforestation of the Amazon

forest in the South American continent and what Macarena Gómez-Barris calls the extractive capitalist enterprise in Zambia, South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria has led to an upsurge in environmental degradation and climate change. Oil spill and gas flare onshore and offshore by transnational corporations have resulted into massive resistance. This resistance as I have stated, is a major component of the postcolonial text.

The collection of articles in this issue emanate from, the extent to which Western colonialism framed the environmental geography of developing countries and the origin of violence and or resistance against environmental degradation in the global south. The volume examines the postcolonial text as agency for the environment of degraded communities, and as resistance against necropolitics in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which most of the discourses focus on. The Niger Delta has experienced more than six decades of oil extraction which has caused untold hardship to host oil producing communities. According to Augustine Ikelegbe and Nathaniel Umukoro, “the major challenge the region’s inhabitants face is caused by multinational oil corporations. In fact, oil has made the region underdeveloped (26). While the oil companies produce the oil from lands owned by indigenous people of the region, the people continue to languish in poverty with their being displaced of their lands and rivers, their only source of livelihood.

Tekena Mark’s research in this journal issue draws from the displacement of the people of the Niger Delta. His article, “Social and Ecological Justice in Sophia Obi’s Oloibiri and Eni Jologho Umuko’s *The Scent of Crude Oil*” employs David Schlosberg’s theory of environmental justice to examine environmental activism in the Niger Delta with a content analysis of Sophia Obi’s poem, Oloibiri and Eni Jologho Umuko play *The Scent of Crude Oil*. He explores how Obi and Umuko capture in their works, the dynamics of resistance against ecological devastation by youths in the Niger Delta. The complex nature of the oil crises in the Niger Delta is the focus of Christopher Oyewo’s “Hostility in the Age of Oil: A Critical Study of J.P Clark’s *All for Oil*.” Oyewo’s uses J.P Clark’s *All for Oil* to buttress Richard Auty’s concept of resource curse. He examines how oil hinder democracy and how does its politics impede social justice. In “Eco-terrorism and Nigerian Home Videos in Conflict Resolution,” Stephen Okpadah examines how the

Nigerian film has become a space for the representation of potent conflict resolution approaches. He argues for the capacity of the film text to communicate positive transformations. His qualitative study explores conflict resolution approaches alternative to warfare, interrogated by filmmakers. He does a critical reading of Ikenna Aniekwe's film, *Amnesty* (2010), as a discourse in conflict resolution.

There is the discussion of how nature is represented in indigenous or Aboriginal poetry. In "Giba Jagi Binji (With Fire In Your Belly)": Fire Ecologies, Human-Tree Relations, and Anthropocene Resistance in Aboriginal Australian Culture" John Ryan examines the emphasis indigenous Australian poetry and art lay on the biocultural significance of fire as an animate force demanding sustained care, attention, and management. He contends that Aboriginal Australian cultural production is essential to elucidating the importance of indigenous fire management in response to precarities of the Anthropocene. The study uses the frameworks of ecocriticism, ecopoetics, and phytopoetics to validate this position. Also, Samson Lusinga and Mugo Muhia's "A Representation of the Sovereignty of Nature in Henry Kulet's *Vanishing Herds*" examines how nature is conceptualized and represented in *Vanishing Herd*, a novel written by Henry Kulet. The research interrogates how Kulet's text serves as protest against man's hegemony of non-human species. Using the concept of Biocentrism, which advocates for, equality and interconnectedness of man and other species, the study appraises Kulet's multidimensional representation of 'nature' through the cultural imperatives of an indigenous community. "Ecocide and Ecological Resistance: An Eco-Deconstructive Reading of Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful we Were*" by Monday Jonah and Oluwabukola Kehinde is an eco-deconstructive reading of Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful we Were*. Their study examines tensions and contradictions that abound in the ecological text. The duo argue in their paper that every attempt to resist exploitation is superfluous because man depends on natural resources for his survival and in the process, despoils nature. This implies that the idea of exploitation of nature is an ethical issue because it takes the exploitation of nature for man to continually survive.

The last part of this issue is Risha Baruah's review of the edited volume, *Environmental Postcolonialism: A Literary Response*, edited by Shubanku Kochar and Anjum Khan. The collection of essays through the lens of literature, explore various dimensions of ecological imperialism and the changing ecological conditions in the Global South. The review examines how the chapters in the book highlight a common legacy of cultural and environmental imperialism and theorises the concept of postcolonial-ecocriticism in the framework of engagements in ex-colonial nations.

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Social and Ecological Justice in Sophia Obi's Oloibiri and Eni Jologho Umuko's *The Scent of Crude Oil*

Tekena Gasper Mark (Ph.D)

Introduction

Agriculture was the mainstay of Nigeria's economy before the discovery of oil in 1956 in Oloibiri in Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Following this, Nigeria switched to an oil economy and the Niger Delta region came into prominence as the extraction of oil in commercial quantity by Shell Darcy Petroleum Company had begun in the region. Since the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta, many multinational oil companies have made their way into the Niger Delta. Fegbeja et al., note that Nigeria's oil and gas reserves have been estimated to be 35.9 billion barrels and 185 trillion cubic feet, respectively, making it the Sub-Saharan African country with the largest oil and gas reserves (qtd. in Bodo & Gimah 163). Oil revenue is used by Nigeria's government to build assets and settle its liabilities.

Interestingly, one would think that an important site like Oloibiri where oil was first discovered would have attracted immense development, in terms of job opportunities, good roads, health care and other basic amenities but that is far from the truth as the site has been left in impoverished state, and the host community has been rewarded with oil spillage, gas flaring, and other forms of environmental hazards that put the lives of residents in great danger. According to a report by the World Wild Fund, the world conservation union, with representatives from Nigeria and the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, the Niger Delta is one of the five most polluted spots in the world (qtd. in Onyema 208).

The Niger Delta is a huge swath of land in southern Nigeria. It has a population of roughly 30 million people. Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta states are referred to as the Niger Delta. However, neighboring states like Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Abia, Imo, and Ondo are sometimes included as part of the Niger Delta. According

to Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Ojua, the Niger Delta is home to a variety of ecological zones, including the Mangrove Forest and Coastal Vegetation Zone, Fresh Water Swamp Forest Zone, Lowland Rain Forest Zone, Derived Savannah Zone, and Montane Zone, and rich with vast oil resources that have been exploited by the Nigerian government and foreign oil companies for decades (2).

Following the discovery of oil in Ogoni in Rivers State in 1957 by the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), oil companies moved in as oil exploration and extraction increased and indigenes were forced to give up their land without due compensation from the government, with the hope that they will benefit from oil wealth generated in their land. Unfortunately, this has not been the case, rather the people have been forced to deal with the environmental degradation and pollution caused by oil spillage in the region. Jaja and Obuah observe that:

In 1970, seven Ogoni chiefs sent a memorandum to Shell and to the military governor of Rivers State complaining of environmental degradation caused by SPDC's operations in the area. As a result of oil spills and industrial waste dumped into the Niger River Delta, fishing as a means of livelihood for the people was no longer an option because very few fish remained in the river. The groundwater was contaminated and unsafe for drinking, and the rainwater could not be collected for drinking because of its acidity (102).

In spite of pressures from national and international civil society groups, Ogoni communities and other concerned stakeholders, have asked the Federal government to implement the hydrocarbon pollution remediation project of Ogoniland as recommended by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) after its study of the region in 2011. Unfortunately, 11 years later, very little has been achieved.

As of January, 2022, Joseph Erunke observes that Nigeria's government had stated that the Ogoni cleanup will continue after President Muhammadu Buhari's tenure and hinted that the work cannot be completed even in the next ten years (vanguardngr.com). The foregoing shows the lack of commitment on the part of Nigeria's successive governments to address the environmental challenges of the Ogoni people.

In reaction to the deplorable state of affairs in the region that has led to poverty and unemployment, Niger Delta youths have embraced all forms of crimes such as stealing, kidnapping, ritual killing, militancy, internet fraud, pipeline vandalization and illegal oil drilling in order to survive, and these have increased tension and the sense of insecurity in the region. Although the federal and state governments have been successful in arresting some operators of illegal oil refining sites, there exists many illegal refining sites, run by people who collaborate with members of communities and are rewarded with cash. As such, while the government is fighting these operators due to the environmental and health hazards caused by their activities such as the increasing presence of black soot in the city of Port Harcourt, amongst others, many Niger Deltans have embraced illegal refining as a means of survival irrespective of the risks and dangers involved, and the most common is fire outbreaks at illegal refining sites that has led to the deaths of many youths in the Niger Delta. The tragic loss of over 100 persons on the 23rd of April, 2022, in Imo State due to an explosion at an illegal crude oil refining site at Abaezi forest, is another example of the dangers of illegal crude oil refining.

Similarly, poets like Ebi Yeibo, Nnimmo Bassey, amongst others, and dramatists like Ben Binebai, Ahmed Yerima, and many others have used their arts as mediums to advocate for the environmental challenges in the Niger Delta. The term “ecocriticism” refers to the observation and study of the relationship between literature and the natural world. Lawrence Buell views ecocriticism “as a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist’s praxis” (430). Ecocriticism therefore aims to rethink the relationship between human culture and nature and to regulate human activities in ways that ensure the continued existence of man, other life forms and the earth’s ecosystem in general.

In the poem “Unyielding Clouds” in the collection *The Forbidden Tongue*, published in 2007, Yeibo laments how the Niger Deltans are deprived of sleep due to environmental pollution and the resort to the use of force and killings by the federal government to silent Niger Delta agitations. The owners of the black gold are

deprived of its benefits and made restless by constant military bombardments and interventions in the region. They are so militarily surrounded that they cannot even perceive the sun's brightness.

In "We Thought It Was Oil, But It Was Blood", from the anthology *We Thought it was Oil—But it was Blood: Poems*, published in 2000, Nnimmo Bassey details the history of oil-related conflicts in the Niger Delta and reveals how big oil companies, in partnership with the Nigerian government, use military forces to stifle all forms of resistance in the region. In this regard, Aghoghovwia observes that, in order to portray a story of socio-environmental catastrophe, the poet compares oil to the picture of blood. The poet uses concrete depictions of filth, violence, war, and death such as "blood," "gallows," "black holes," "slaughtered on the slab," and "bright red pools" to illustrate the graphic ways in which the Niger Delta oil encounter, in all of its forms, has caused environmental destruction, human suffering, and violence(66). By using poetry as a form of resistance and advocacy for environmental protection, Bassey charts how exploration, exploitation, and environmental destruction are related.

In Drums of the Delta by Ben Binebai, Prince Ebitimi who symbolizes the crude oil of the Niger Delta, is forcefully married away by the Queen of Odokoland against the wishes of the people of the Niger Deltans. Isaac Boro, the leader of the Delta Revolutionary Front, who sets out to fight for freedom of the Prince Ebitimi, is killed by the Queen while the Niger Delta suffer distrusts, fire disaster and ecological degradation. Boro returns as Mijab and rescues Prince Ebitimi, while the Queen is killed during the battle and the people of the Niger Delta rejoice.

In *Hard Ground*, Little Drops and Ipomu, Ahmed Yerima engages the challenges of the Niger Delta region from multiples perspectives. In *Hard Ground*, mistrusts and uncertainties existing among family members due to the oil politics and its attendant crisis are underscored as Nimi, a Niger Delta militant, loses his colleagues in a raid by the police and is blamed for their deaths by his Boss, the Don. The Don places a ransom on the life of Nimi, while Nimi fights for his life as the Don orders the killing of his pregnant girlfriend. In the end, Nimi kills the Don, only to realize that the Don is his father is Baba.

In *Little Drops*, the horrific state of the conflict between the government Joint Task Force and Niger Delta militants is depicted, as well as its devastating impact on the civilian population, particularly women and children. In the play, the militants had blown up a refinery and taken the white oil workers hostage, prompting soldiers to launch an attack, raping women, burning down homes and even holy sites, and killing and maiming anyone they come across.

Ipomu examines the natural and supernatural challenges of the Niger Delta as the audience with a degraded and displaced world. The rivers are contaminated by oil spills, leading to deaths of aquatic life and producing abhorrent odour. Secondly, the King's first wife, Ebriere, laments a loveless life after being dumped in favour of younger ladies as a result of the King's contact with oil money. Thirdly, there is the problem of militant distrust, which leads to them tricking and haunting one another.

The above reviews, reveal how Nigerian poets and dramatists have used their works as avenues to advocate for the environmental challenges of the Niger Delta region. Still, there is the need for more critical studies on the subject as most of studies focus on established poets and dramatists, ignoring the works of emerging ones. In order to reveal fresh insights on ecocriticism of the Niger Delta, this qualitative study examines environmental activism and the search for social and ecological justice in the Niger Delta using Sophia Obi's poem *Oloibiri* and Eni Jologho Umuko play *The Scent of Crude Oil* as case studies.

Defining Social and Ecological Justice

Social justice is concerned with the fairness with which the benefits and liabilities of communal life are distributed among members the society. John Rawls, the American political philosopher, in his book *A Theory of Justice*, defines social justice as “the adequate repartition of benefits and burdens arising from social cooperation” (4) or “the just state of affairs ... in which each individual has exactly those benefits and burdens which are due to him by virtue of his personal characteristics and circumstances” (Miller 20). The Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenants on Human Rights, identified three areas of priority with regard to equality and equity, which are equality of

rights, equality of opportunities, and equality in living conditions. It also highlighted the highlighted areas of inequality as inequalities in the distribution of income, assets, opportunities for work and remunerated employment, access to knowledge, health services, social security and the provision of a safe environment, and opportunities for civic and political participation (*Social Justice in an Open World: The Role of the United Nations* 15-19).

There have been several debates that the idea of justice is an exclusive preserve for humans alone which is what social justice is primarily about. A notable exponent of this argument is John Rawls, who in his 1973 edition of his book *A Theory of Justice*, asks “on what grounds do we distinguish between mankind and other living things and regard the constraints of justice as holding only in our relations to human beings?”(504). Then he goes on to answer thus: The natural answer seems to be that it is precisely the moral persons who are entitled to equal justice. Moral persons are distinguished by two features: first, they are capable of having (and are assumed to have) a conception of their good (as expressed by a rational plan for life); and second, they are capable of having (and are assumed to acquire) a sense of justice... Thus equal justice is owed to those who have the capacity to take part in and act in accordance with the public understanding of initial situation... one should observe that moral personality is here defined as a potentiality that is ordinarily realized in due course (Rawls 505).

From Rawls’s position, only humans are entitled to equal justice because they have the ability to know what is good and bad for them, as such, our relationship with other subordinate species in our ecosystem are not regulated by a sense of justice. In defining what makes all animals equal and deserving of equal justice, Michael Walzer advances that, “the answer has to do with our recognition of one another as human beings, members of the same spaces, and what we recognize are bodies and minds and feelings and hopes and maybe even souls” (XII). Walzer highlights the possession a body, mind, feelings, hopes and soul, which is common to humans and lower animals with the exclusion of hope, irrespective of specie, background, race or colour as the deciding factors for the recognition and administering of justice. Still, Walzer’s definition does not cover other specie like plants, and other members of our ecosystem.

The need to include non-human species in the sphere of justice has led to the idea of ecological justice. In defining ecological justice, theorists like Schlosberg have prioritized recognition in the context of humans' relationship with nature and argued in *Defining Environmental Justice* that "...respect for nature's 'bodily integrity', the recognition of the potential in nature to develop, its autonomy, resilience, or a respect for autopoiesis" (136), are the responsibilities of humans to the environment. By this, humans are obligated to recognize and respect the non-human world or other forms of life which they share the world with. Other life forms have a right to a fair share of environmental resources, according to Brian Baxter, and satisfying the welfare interests of non-humans necessitates a fair distribution of resources, and those interests elicit claims of justice, which must be supported by proxies who "articulate the interests of inarticulates" (4; 117–123).

Ecological justice as a concept is entrenched in the fact that humans depend on the natural world for their resources and must act in ways that enable its sustenance and improvement and that guarantees a healthy functioning ecosystem for human and non-human species. Speaking on the impact of human activities on future generations, James Fishkin argues that, "no defensible theory of justice can neglect the fact that people are born and die and that our actions may have serious effects on the interests of those yet to be born" (9). Doing justice to nature essentially entails removing barriers to nature's ability to function and maintain its integrity.

Robert Heilbroner criticizes the idea of justice for future generations when he writes that, "why should I lift a finger to effect events that will have no more meaning from me seventy-five years after my death than those that happened seventy-five years before I was born? There is no rational answer to that terrible question" (191). Heilbroner believes that since human life ends with death, as such, it is baseless to attempt to preserve the environment for future generations, as we are not sure if past generations were intentional about preserving the world for us after they are gone. However, his idea of intergenerational justice is faulty, because if past generations were careless in the way they related with the environment, we wouldn't have met it the way it was when we came, as such, we share and uphold that continued sense of responsibility of preserving our world for future generations.

Robert Bullard is regarded as the “Father of Environmental Justice” in the United States because of his works on environmental pollution in minority communities and environmental racism. He observes that the media reports on African American communities almost daily that are battling some sort of environmental threat from landfills, waste dumps, or incinerators. Lead smelters, petrochemical facilities, refineries, motorways, bus stops, and so forth are just a few examples. For years, locals watched helplessly as their neighborhoods turned into garbage dumps. The public, however, soon broke their silence. Environmental justice is a cause for which local activists have been mobilizing since 1968 (“Environmental Justice for All” 1). Bullard demonstrates how racism can fuel environmental pollution especially in minority communities of African Americans, and how residents are responding to these threats through environmental activism. In the essay “People-of-Color Environmentalism”, Bullard examines the challenges environmental activists face in the United States when he observes that:

It has been an uphill battle to try to convince some government and industry officials and some environmentalists that unequal protection, disparate impact, and environmental racism exist. Nevertheless, grassroots activists have continued to argue and, in many instances, have won their case (Bullard 237).

Unfortunately, the above challenges observed by Bullard, are still experienced in minority areas like Nigeria’s Niger Delta, that has warranted environmental activists to call on government to address the environmental needs of the region. Bullard projects a much more inclusive conception of environmental justice when he argues that:

Environmental justice is defined as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. Fair treatment means that no group of people including racial, ethnic or socio-economic groups should bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local and tribal programs and policies (qtd. in Herculano 144).

Bullard's definition of environmental justice is targeted at government policies that target certain sites as dumping ground for environmental wastes, with little or no consideration of the adverse effects of this on the environment or the human and non-human species that reside in such sites. It therefore places environmental justice in the heart of policy makers and government agencies responsible for environmental laws and regulations.

Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro was Niger Delta's first environmental activist who formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), an armed militia, composed of fellow Niger Delta men. Boro and his group declared the Niger Delta Republic on February 23, 1966, and fought Nigeria's federal forces for 12 days but was eventually jailed by the Aguiyi-Ironsi Federal Military Government for treason. Boro argued that "there are just a few hospitals of ordinary health centre status" in the Niger Delta and that the "few dispensaries (where available) are not better than first aid boxes... Economic development of the area is certainly the most appalling aspect"(64-56). The Twelve-Day Revolution made reference to a condition in which the region's oil was "being pumped out daily from...(the) veins" of the Niger Deltans (Boro 117), which was a reference to the oppression of the Niger Deltans by Nigeria's government.

Ken Saro-Wiwa, another Niger Delta ecoactivist who founded the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1990 to draw attention to the devastation oil extraction had brought to Ogoniland, argued in the "Bill of Rights" of MOSOP, that "Ogoni people lack education, health and other social facilities" and that "it is intolerable that one of the richest areas of Nigeria should wallow in abject poverty and destitution" (95). After Adaka Boro and Saro-Wiwa, several new waves of militant groups and their leaders such as General John Togo (commander of the Niger-Delta Liberation Force), Ateke Tom (leader of the Niger Delta Vigilante Force), Government Owezide Ekpemupolo or Tompolo (commander of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta), Asari Dokubo (founder of Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force), Ebikabowei Victor-Ben "General Boyloaf" (commander of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta), Osama Blatter (leader of Niger Delta Sea Commandos), Aboy Francis Muturu "General Aboy", an alleged member of the most recent group, Niger Delta Avengers, and many others, have been involved in armed conflicts

with security forces of Nigeria's government over control of the oil resources in the region. However, while many of these groups and their leaders have dropped arms and embraced the amnesty programme by Nigeria's government, new groups like the Niger Delta Avengers have emerged, and their activities include vandalization of pipelines, kidnapping of oil company expatriates, illegal crude oil refining etc., in reaction to the deplorable state of the Niger Delta.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on David Schlosberg's "Theory of Environmental Justice", propounded in 2013, which argues that "when we interrupt, corrupt, or defile the potential functioning of ecological support systems, we do an injustice not only to human beings, but also to all of those non-humans that depend on the integrity of the system for their own functioning" ("Theorising Environmental Justice" 44). Environmental justice is therefore concerned with the disruption and increasing vulnerability of the integrity of ecosystems; conditions that threaten their functioning, integrity, and flourishing. This theory therefore focuses on the relationship between humans and nature and their manipulation of nature for economic gain.

Similarly, Bell Derek contends that environmental justice is not concerned primarily with basic goods such as clean water, uncontaminated land caused by environmental hazards but deals with the general idea of "environmental quality" and being able to "experience quality environment" (291 – 292). The strength of Schlosberg's "Theory of Environmental Justice" is that it argues against the idea that only humans deserve justice because of their ability to moralize, a position that justifies the unfair treatment of animals and other non-human species in our ecosystem due to the lack of these characteristics. By expanding the definition of justice to both human and non-human species, this theory is a much-more inclusive way to define justice and protect the environment from the destructive activities of humans against other species. Its weakness however, is that, since animals and non-human species cannot speak for themselves, humans have to define what they think is justice and fair for these species, which could lead to misrepresentation. This theory will be used to interrogate how the activities of humans,

impact on ecological system of the Niger Delta of Nigeria using Sophia Obi's Oloibiri and Eni Jologho Umuko's *The Scent of Crude Oil*.

Social and Ecological Justice in Sophia Obi's Oloibiri and Eni Jologho Umuko's The Scent of Crude Oil

The poem Oloibiri was written by Sophia Obi, a Nigerian poet who hails from Oloibiri town, in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. It is was part of her first collection of poems entitled *Tears in a Basket* and was published in 2006. The poem's title 'Oloibiri' is same with the historical town of Oliobiri in Bayelsa State, where crude oil was first discovered in commercial quantity in West Africa in 1956. The poem is an elegy in which the poet expresses grief for her community. The persona describes how the discovery of oil which brought smiles and the hope of a better future, took away the pride and happiness of her people. It is a 12-stanza poem and the first stanza begins with the lines:

At last I am free,
Free from bondage
Yet,
Desolate like a wealthy aged whore
Wrapped up in gloomy attire,
I lay on the altar of a faded glory,
Oily tears rolling through my veins
To nourish households in the desert
(Obi 13).

In the first two lines, the poet celebrates the freedom of the people of Bayelsa for having their own state in Nigeria. Bayelsa State was created on October 1, 1996, from the old Rivers State by General Sanni Abacha, who was Nigeria's Head of State at the time. This freedom meant that the people of Bayelsa could have a say in the running of their affairs and the income generated from the oil well in Oloibiri, which until then, was controlled by the then Rivers State government. However, in lines three, four, five and six, the poet laments that in spite of this freedom, the people of Bayelsa are desolate like an old harlot that has used up her youth selling away her pride

and glory. Here, one could compare the present state of Oloibiri to that of a fishing pond, abandoned by fishermen because it dried up. When crude oil was discovered in Oloibiri, people trooped into Bayelsa State to mine the newly discovered black gold (crude), and the town came to be famous and a symbol of Nigeria's pride, and what ensued was the continued mining of Oloibiri's resource. In lines seven and eight, the poet symbolizes the crude oil in Oloibiri as oily tears from the Niger Delta that are tapped through pipelines and processed to benefit the Northerners who are symbolized by the desert. The choice of using desert is because, in the actual sense, there are no deserts in Nigeria. However, the northern part of Nigeria shares a border with a region known as the Sahel, which forms the edge of the Sahara Desert next to Nigeria and has been a source of concern for the Nigerian government as the Sahel stretch continues to spread on Northern Nigerian towns. Also, unlike the Niger Deltans that are giving to fishing and subsistent farming, Northern Nigerians are giving to farming and nomadic pastoral life especially amongst the Hausa-Fulanis. However, since the discovery of crude oil, Nigeria abandoned farming and focused on crude oil exportation as its main economic mainstay. Hence, the Niger Delta has remained the life-wire of Nigeria's economy as revenue generated from crude oil are used to develop big cities like Abuja in the North, while oil producing towns like Oloibiri, have been abandoned by the Nigerian government ever since its oil well dried up, while the people face development challenges and environmental pollution caused as a result of oil spills, and the site of the dried up Oloibiri oil well has been overtaken by weeds. In the second and third stanzas, the poet continues:

Along my coast,
The smoke and stench
Of my crude flow desecrates
My marine reserves

This is the coated freedom of torment
When anguish enfolds joy
(Obi 13).

In the above, the poet weeps because of the environmental pollution caused by oil spillage in Oloibiri and other parts of the Niger Delta where oil exploration and extraction are taking place. As a result, rivers and surrounding water bodies are contaminated, and rendered toxic for aquatic life. The poet also suggests that the creation of Bayelsa and other oil producing states, is a freedom that comes with torment and a joy that is drowned in agony.

In the fourth stanza, the poet is angry at the discovery of oil in various parts of the Niger Delta and the fact that the Federal government is milking her by taking the larger share as only 13 percent of the oil revenue, goes to oil producing states. In her words:

I frown,
Yes, I frown at the daily discovery
Of unrequited oil returns
The harvest belongs to the tyrant
And so I frown
(Obi 13).

The poet compares the unjust activities of Nigeria's federal government to that of a cruel and oppressive ruler or dictator, who has no feelings or regard for the concerns of the people they rule. This is because, in spite of efforts by the Niger Deltans, calling for the practice of true federalism that grants oil-producing states the autonomy to control and use their resources for their own developmental need, while remitting only a certain percentage to the federal government, the government has rather adopted all forms of intimidation to silent them. Assess to equal opportunities, and fairness in terms of the distribution of the resources of a society to its members, are at the core of social justice. Hence, the denial of Niger Deltans to equal share in the revenue derived from the exploitation of her resources is an injustice to the Niger Delta, and the refusal to attend to the environmental needs of the region in terms of pollution resulting from the activities of oil companies, is another level of environmental and ecological injustice. This is because the federal government do not recognize the fauna and flora, as deserving justice by taking actions that endanger the lives and future of the human and non-human life forms that make up the Niger Delta.

In the fifth and sixth stanzas, the poet recalls how years have gone by since the discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri and although, oil exploration and extraction activities have ceased because the well dried up, still, there are strings of pipelines no longer in use that stand as evidence of the exploitation of the Niger Deltans by Nigeria's government, and in spite of the fact that the government is yet to give justice to the socioecological needs of the region, it still services the nation's economy as the Government continues to mine its resources and remains Africa's largest economy for over 30 years now.

In the seventh and eight stanzas, the poet admits that the Niger Delta is being drained as a result of the constant drilling of its crude oil, which she describes in the second line of the seventh stanza as a "generosity that hangs me on the scale of extinction" (Obi 13). Here, the poet fears that the Niger Delta would be eventually drained of her resources without justice for its ecological life-forms due to the attitude of the federal government and oil companies towards the region. In the third and fourth lines of the seventh stanza, she demonizes the crude oil of the Niger Delta as a poisonous substance that has made youths in the region to be restive as "they fight to survive the torment" (Obi 14), and this has made the terrain of the Niger Delta a difficult one as tension and insecurity are common phenomena. In this instance, I argue that Niger Delta youths discovered that Nigeria's government exploits violence when dealing with the Niger Delta, in order to achieve its objectives. For example, on November 20, 1999, Nigeria's President, Olusegun Obasanjo ordered military troops to Odi community in Bayelsa State, after 12 police officers had been killed by Niger Delta militants. The soldiers flattened the community, killing many civilians. According to Julius Bokoru, "the infantry moved in, killing all in their path. When the assault was over, Odi was completely destroyed. Houses tumbled in flames, bodies decomposing on empty streets. The survivors had fled. Human right groups put the death toll at 600" (premiumtimesng.com). This exemplifies how violence has become a common currency in the Niger Delta, and because of poverty and unemployment, the need to survive at all costs has made youth in the region to embrace militancy, engage in illegal refining activities, kidnapping, killing, pipeline vandalization and other atrocities,

perpetuated through the currency of violence giving in exchange for their survival and a share of the region's wealth.

In the ninth stanza, the poet laments that the Niger Delta quenches the thirst of “the desert dwellers” (the Northerners) who hold on to the seat of power, and use the oil generated revenue to build “elegant monuments” (Obi 14) and gigantic structures. In the tenth stanza, she highlights how “bridges and mansions grow out of dusty lands” while children in the Niger Delta “wallow in the crude mud peculiar to” its swampy terrain (Obi 14). Here the poet calls attention to the denied access of the Niger Deltans to a fair use of the nation's resources, resources sourced from the Niger Delta, but used to develop the North while the Niger Delta region in the South, is left undeveloped.

In the eleventh stanza, the poet likens the present state of the Niger Delta to one that has “lived a grey life of despair” and the land, drained of its fertility due to exploitation of its resources by oil companies, it has resorted to carrying a “begging bowl” to the federal government in demand for its rights, “unable to form a sovereign body to build a monument to my forsaken glory” (Obi 14). Here the poet condemns the lack of unity amongst the Niger Deltans and their inability to transform the historical site of Oloibiri to a heritage site, this is in spite of promises by the federal government to build an oil museum there, although, a foundation stone had been laid by former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2001, the site is a sad testimony of Nigeria's oil and gas industry.

In the final stanza, the poet ends with a sense of hope that, although, she is “weakened by the oily tears of the Ijaw Nation”, she hears “the laughter... the celebration... the joyful uproar that comes with controlling the blessings of my God-given inheritance” (Obi 14). The poet in a futuristic gaze, envisions a time when the Niger Deltans would have the autonomy to control and use the benefits derived from their crude oil resources for their own good.

The Scent of Crude Oil, published in 2010, is a play by Eni Jologho Umuko, a Nigerian playwright, theatre director and administrator from Okere-Warri in Delta State (in the old Western Region)

of Nigeria, that satirizes the tragedy of oil in the Niger Delta. Set in Esidi, a fictional town in the backwaters of one of the creeks of the Niger Delta, the play dramatizes the events leading to a pipeline fire disaster that led to the loss of lives and properties due to illegal crude refining.

The main action begins as Esidi youths elect leaders to take up various leadership positions in the community. Tafa, a jobless university graduate presents his manifesto to the people, as he contests for the position of the Youth Chairman and says his programmes for the community will be based on the Millennium Development Goals, while Maku-Maku, an illegal crude oil bunkerer and thug, also declares his intention to run for the same position and his friend, Jugunu warns the people that if they don't vote for Maku-Maku, there will be trouble. Chief Huri-Huri, the community leader, asks the youths to line up behind their preferred candidates and Tafa emerges the winner, However, Jugunu, Aluta, and Pelele, who are Maku-Maku's colleagues, pull out their guns, firing in the air, then they carry Maku-Maku shoulder-high and announce him as the new Youth Chairman, while Tafa and other youths, escape for their lives.

The above highlights how violence and intimidations are used by youths in the region against the collective will of the people, to actualize their selfish intentions. A week later, Tafa, speaking to his friends, Sodinye and Amparo, who are also unemployed, recounts what transpired:

Tafa: It was outright daylight robbery! You needed to be there to see the charade. When almost everybody had lined up before me, the hoodlums brought out their guns; yes, real guns, AK-47, and chased everybody way! They then carried Maku-Maku shoulder-high and danced round the community claiming victory (Umuko 19).

Tafa's girlfriend, Amparo suggests they leave the community for the hoodlums while Sodinye reveals how they have been unemployed for three years after graduation. Reiterating Sodinye's concerns, Tafa and Amparo speak thus:

Tafa: Yes, three years, and we got frustrated and came back home. We tried fish farming. My old man gave me his last savings of ₦ 25, 000.00 to construct the fish ponds and buy the fingerlings...

Amparo: (Sadly.) And they all died due to pollution of our creeks from oil spillage. Even the shoals of fish in our creeks have all migrated to less-polluted waters (Umuko 20-21).

From the above exchange, we are exposed to the social injustice of unemployment that youths in the Niger Delta face, while multinational companies are in the region, and to the environmental pollution and injustice occasioned by oil spillage that contaminates the water bodies and makes fishing, which is a major source of livelihood of the Niger Delta difficult. Tafa convince Sodinye and Amparo to stay back and join him to fight back those who took power from them and they agree.

In a camp used for illegal bunkering in the creeks, Maku-Maku and his colleagues contemplate leaving the business because of the risks involved but decide they will leave it when they become successful. Recounting an incident, Pelele speaks, "...Remember the one for Bennet Island where pipe burst catch fire and kill people? Na God save us we no go burst pipe that day..." (Umuko 22). From Pelele's submission, they were lucky not to have gone out to burst crude oil pipes, else they would have died like their colleagues who did and were killed in a fire outbreak.

The action progresses as Mama Kongo, a trader, arrives the creek to inform Maku-Maku and his colleagues that there will be an installation of a 500KVA generator to give electricity to the community, so they can collect their development levy. Arriving there, they meet Tafa, Chief Huri-Huri, Sensekolo; an elder and the NDDC contractor, and say they have come to negotiate the development levy. Reacting to this, Tafa rages:

Tafa: Are you people gone mad? This man has come to give us generator kamala, to use your language, so that our community can develop and you want him to pay "dev" to you, the direct beneficiaries of NDDC largesse? Are you insane? (Umuko 24).

Make-Maku tells the contractor that he will pay the ₦ 250, 000.00 naira they are demanding, else he won't install the generator. This development reveals how youths in the region deny oil producing communities, benefits they are entitled to because of the lack of education, unemployment and corruption. Maku-Maku and his colleagues are less educated unlike Tafa, and his friends. Still, they are unemployed, and this makes education unprofitable in the eyes of Maku-Maku and his colleagues as getting education cannot give you a good job. However, carrying guns and engaging in illegal bunkering can guarantee your survival in the petro-induced harsh terrain of the Niger Delta.

The action progresses as Jugunu, Pelele, Aluta, and Maku-Maku regret missing the ₦250, 000 naira development levy and the generator for the community because of their selfishness. Maku-Maku suggests they continue with the bunkering business. They agree and plan to burst a pipeline that runs through the neighbouring Okidi community, so that they can refine the oil by mixing it with kerosine before selling. Jugunu suggests they begin kidnapping whitemen and request for ₦ 50 million naira as ransom. Maku-Maku rejects the idea, but they are able to convince him and he accepts. They prepare for an operation and kidnap Obobo, an albino, mistaken for a whiteman and take him to their camp in the creek. The foregoing shows how youths in the Niger Delta, either resort to kidnapping expatriates or illegal refining as a means of survival. Not minding the human and non-human implications of these activities on the Niger Delta's biosphere.

Fafa meets with Amparo, Sodinye, and other youths of Esidi in the persons of Monima, Misaren and Odiri and convinces them to form a pipeline monitoring team that will report any suspicious activities to government and security agencies. He informs them that the contractor carried the generator to his community and installed it, even if his community was not listed as a beneficiary of the NDDC (Niger Delta Development Commission) largesse (Umuko 50). This also highlights how developmental projects meant for oil producing communities in the Niger Delta are taken to non-oil producing communities due to selfishness and corruption on the part of Niger Deltans, who prioritize individual interest at the expense of

that of the community. It is a common phenomenon for youths in the region to demand huge sums of money from companies mandated to carry out projects aimed at ridding the environments of toxic wastes from oil companies, but such projects are either slowed down or abandoned when Niger Delta youths make unrealistic demands from these companies. The result is that the region is left to deal with the effects of polluted land and water bodies. Tafa also informs his friends that Jugunu and his colleagues reached out to him to help them write a letter to an oil company, demanding for a ransom having kidnapped an expatriate. He tells them he won't write the letter. Rather, he would write to the company, assuring them of the cooperation of Esidi indigenes and thanking them for the scholarship they gave to some Esidi children. The actions of Tafa and his colleagues, exemplify how Niger Deltans should relate with multinational companies in the region, so as to create favourable environment for communities where these companies are located to benefit from them.

Emma, an SPDC (Shell Petroleum Development Company) Official, visits Esidi community and educates his father, Chief Huri-Huri, his mother Patience, and Sensecolo on SCDC's sustainable community development programme to host communities where it drills oil which includes provision of scholarship and employment to indigenes, amongst others. He tells them that they will train NGOs who would come and educate host communities on SCDC's sustainable community development programme and urges them to welcome the NGOs when they come (Umuko 61-62). In the next scene, Emma laments the despicable activities of youths in Esidi community who use guns to disrupt elections and force their candidates on the people. Reacting to this, his colleague Ade advances that:

Ade: It is the oil. The oil is the cause of this malevolence in our society. In my own area, where we don't have oil, where cocoa farming is the main economic activity, youths don't carry guns during elections and still respect elders (Umuko 63).

From Ade's argument, the oil in the Niger Delta has become a curse than a blessing because of the violence associated with it, and like

Ade opines, Nigeria's dependence on oil alone as its main economic stay has not helped the situation. Perhaps, if Nigeria returns to agriculture and develops that as a second means of generating revenue, more jobs will be created, youths would be employed, and the desire to engage in anti-social behaviours that threaten the existence of human and other life-forms in the Niger Delta, would be reduced if not erased.

Later, Zik, Feko and Isi; NGO Officials, meet with members of Esidi community and educate them on SCDC's sustainable community development programme which is anchored on sustainability, partnership, transparency and accountability. Jugunu tries to disrupt the meeting as there won't be development levy, but Tafa tackles him, arguing in favour of the SPDC. Obobo escapes from the camp to the meeting, and exposes how he was kidnapped by Jugunu and his colleagues who mistook him for a whiteman. Chief Huri-Huri and others reinstate Tafa as the Youth Chairman, while Maku-Maku and his colleagues are humiliated. They return to their camp and resolve to return to bunkering. The above demonstrates how Niger Delta communities can collectively curtail and deal with youths whose activities are inimical to their development. Consequently, having removed Maku-Maku from the leadership position of the Youth Chairman, and with the support of Chief Huri-Huri, decisions that would enable developmental projects and benefit Esidi community and its citizens can be taken.

Teacher Johnson, a primary school teacher, makes plans to evacuate students out of the community due to rumours of an impending plan of Maku-Maku and his colleagues to burst pipelines. Maku-Maku informs his colleagues of the new development and that Tafa had alerted security operatives. In his words, "I hear say Tafa and co don go report to JTF make dem come catch us as we dey burst pipe tomorrow night. But I go show dem say me, Maku-Maku, alias, I go die, I pass dem; dem no reach" (Umuko 99). They change the execution time which is the next day, to the night of the present day and the location is a pipeline at the boundary between Esidi community and Okidi. They split into two groups and arrive the location at night for the operation. However, in course of the operation, gunshots are heard, then fire engulfs Jugunu and his crew,

and later Maku-Maku and his crew, and spreads to Esidi community, destroying lives and properties. Assessing the level of disaster with other survivors, Tafa and Amparo speak:

Tafa: ...Just look at the devastation! Everything razed down! Human beings roasted to death because of the greed of misguided youths! Just look at this! Look at Esidi!

Amparo: All the houses razed down, animals—goats, dogs, hens—all roasted as is for barbecue...(Covers her face with her hands and turns away...) And look at human bodies, too... (Umuko 115).

The above reveals the consequences of the activities of Maku-Maku and his colleagues that led to the death of humans, other animals, plants, trees, and the pollution of Esidi land and water bodies because of oil spillage, and demonstrates how human activities can bring injustice to both human and non-human life forms in the Niger Delta. Tafa and the remaining survivors organize a mass burial for the dead, and pledge to build a better community where oil will be a blessing and not a curse. They decide to do a film about the old Esidi and the fire disaster as a legacy project.

Conclusion

Human beings depend on nature for survival because nature provides the energy that powers our body cells, the nutrients that our bodies need, the clean water that we drink, and the air we breathe. As such, man has a responsibility to recognize and respect nature's right to exist by engaging in environmentally friendly activities and actions that do not threaten the existence of humans and other life forms in the ecosystem. This is the primary objective of ecocriticism which interrogates man's relationship with nature in literary works with the intention of preserving and protecting it from man's destructive tendencies. This qualitative study examined environmental activism and the search for social and ecological justice in the Niger Delta using Sophia Obi's poem *Oloibiri* and Eni Jologho Umuko's play *The Scent of Crude Oil*. It observed that while poets and dramatists continue to use their artistry to advocate for justice

in the Niger Delta due to government's insensitivity to address the environmental needs of the region, the following levels of social and ecological injustices continue to play out in the region. First is the socially unjust sharing pattern of the proceeds from crude oil between the federal government and the Niger Delta that leaves only 13 percent to the Niger Delta, and the resort to violence on the part of the federal government through military intervention to kill and silent all forms of agitation for a fair share in the oil revenue. Ecological injustice also plays out in the activities of oil companies in the region that pollute its fauna and flora. For example, the presence of black soot in the city of Port Harcourt poses a lot of health risks for the inhabitants.

Similarly, Niger Delta youths have resorted to environmental and human violence such as illegal crude oil refining activities that pollute land and water bodies due to oil spillage and pipeline vandalization, and the destruction of humans and non-human life forms and properties due to fire outbreaks at illegal refining sites. These are another level of social and ecological injustices perpetuated by Niger Delta youths. The use of guns to intimidate and appoint corrupt leaders who divert or deny host communities benefits from oil companies, the resort to killing and kidnapping of oil company workers and expatriates, security officials by Niger Delta militants, is another form of social injustice perpetuated by Niger Delta militants on residents in the Niger Delta. Violence is therefore a currency given in exchange for guaranteed access to the region's oil wealth, and only those who can afford the commodity of violence, profit from the region's militarized oil resource, either as militant groups or by violating environmental standards. The study therefore recommends that government should allocate a fairer percentage of revenue generated from crude oil to oil-producing states, train and engage youths in the region through employment, and carry out environmental enlightenment programmes that discourage illegal oil refining, felling of trees, hunting of endangered species etc., and remediating projects aimed at detoxifying areas affected by oil spillage, whether on land or water so as to save the region from the menace of petro-violence.

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Hostility and Social Justice in the Age of Oil: A Critical Study of J.P Clark's *All for Oil*

Adewale Christopher Oyewo, Ph.D.

Introduction

After the abolition of the trans-atlantic slave trade, the Europeans continue to justify their presence in various regions of West Africa as trade merchants, dealing in palm oil. Palm oil is a very important agricultural product used as a staple food in West Africa. For thousands of years, palm oil had become an essential produce among human beings. In the ancient Benin Kingdom, palm oil was used in lighting up the streets and as a building material on the king's palace walls (Carrere 48). It also served different ritualistic and medicinal uses, in particular, as a skin ointment and a common antidote to poisons. In addition, the sap of oil palms is tapped for palm wine, and palm fronds provided material for roof thatching and brooms. Evidence that people are buried with casks of palm oil in Egyptian tombs abounds (Lynn 27). Thus, this reflects the high societal value placed on the product. Needless to say, with its origin in West Africa and evidence of use in Egypt, palm oil is considered one of the earliest commodities of trade between Africans and Europeans (Thoenes 84). It was known to have been an essential commodity in Europe since the 15th century. Palm oil gained its prominence with the large-scale importations by Liverpool and Bristol slave traders in the early 19th century. With the abolition of the slave trade in the Americas in 1807, British West African traders turned to palm oil as a natural resource and essential commodity for industrial development. According to Lynn, "Britain declared itself for the Oil Rivers protectorate and other lands to form a federation, now known as Nigeria to gain a monopoly of the palm oil trade" (77). He avers further that;

At this time, the Royal Niger Company was formed and it became the standard commercial operator, while the indigenous people of that area, the Niger Delta, were the suppliers of the raw materials that Britain needed for industrial development (Lynn 86).

The British Industrial Revolution and the expansion of international trade benefited greatly from palm oil production which was abundant in West Africa. From candle-making to industrial lubricants, palm oil became a driving major force behind the expansion of industrial production (100). Palm oil was a vital asset on long seafaring voyages and this was another factor that led to an increase in its demand. Even though palm produce continues to play a significant role in West African rural economies in the 19th century, local control of the trade was soon hijacked under the colonial administration, fostering the birth of the problems that plagued the producers of the product—the Niger Delta region. This new development stampedes the aspiration of the local producer to gain from the now very popular trade. The Europeans had by now realized that the local leaders like Jaja of Opobo and some other chiefs were becoming stupendously popular and rich from the trade, hence they introduced a divide between the chiefs, the producers, and themselves-the buyers.

Moreover, to make the trade less rewarding for the local people, the European merchants expanded their reach elsewhere in the tropics. Martin Lynn thus observed that “within a few decades, expanses of Southeast Asian forest had been cleared, creating a fast track to industrial-scale monoculture plantations, thus ending West Africa’s position as the global hub of palm oil production”(101). As the palm oil trade began to wane, attention shifted to fossil fuel search. The oil discharge observed at Araromi in the present-day Ondo State in the first decade of the last century informed the hydrocarbon search (Faleti 20). It was this occurrence that encouraged a German company to begin exploration in 1908 making the very first attempt to hydrocarbons search in the colony. Unfortunately, the operations had to be stalled because of the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 (63). Two decades later, another major exploration effort was embarked upon. An Anglo-Dutch consortium commenced exploration activities in 1937 after being awarded the sole concession rights covering the whole territory now known as Nigeria. However, their activities were also interrupted by the Second World War and exploration will not resume until 1947 (64).

After years of oil search, petroleum was finally discovered at Oloibiri in the Niger Delta in 1956. Precisely in 1958, oil production and exportation from the Oloibiri field commenced (Ukeji 25). Since the operation of oil exploration and exportation, the Nigerian economy had benefited hundreds of billions of dollars from oil revenues. Oil revenue makes up over 90% of the country's financial capital base (Maier 60). However, the saddest part of the story is that in post-colonial Nigeria, as the oil revenue increases, so is poverty, and so is the wild divide even though the government is now in the hands of the locals.

Although Nigeria is the eighth largest exporter of crude oil in the world, the Nigerian people remain some of the poorest in the world (Watts 186). The country's woe is multitudinous. There is a continuous rise in the infant mortality rate, the average life expectancy continues to plummet, the education system is disrupted, there is social infrastructure decay, and food hunger is a wild spread phenomenon. All these were a result of the combination of inefficiency and endemic dishonesty on the part of the government and the multinational companies: and, divide, and sellout among the representatives of the oil-producing regions. The larger percentage of the total money accrued from oil sales disappears into the hands of few, making most Nigerians live on less than one dollar a day (Okpadah 298). It is rather appalling for a country that used to be a net exporter of agricultural products to now imports more food than it produces. More disheartening is the fact that Nigeria imports refined fuel since there is no functioning refinery.

Given this, the concern of this paper takes its cue from the overriding question of whether or not the discovery of oil is a 'curse' as stated in the works of earlier researchers (Rob Nixon, Timothy Mitchell, and Nnimmo Bassey). Specifically, the questions that emanate from the foregoing are, how does oil hinder democracy and how does its politics impede social justice? If indeed it does, how can multinational oil companies and the international community engineer a more holistic social justice framework characterized with redistribution, participation, inclusion and devoid of hostility? These are the questions that this research intend to investigate.

What is Social Justice?

Social justice is conceived as a situation where everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities. This concept must have inspired the Theory of justice as articulated by John Rawls, who declares that social justice aims to constitute a system that ensures the fair distribution of primary social goods in a society (37). John Rawls' theory of justice is a states that a well-ordered society needed a solid concept of justice. For him, a system requires the establishment of institutions to distribute primary social goods according to the principles of justice and fairness. Essentially, the theory simply advocates that every person should be treated with fairness and recommends equal basic liberties and equal opportunities to all. In response to Rawls's theory of justice, Robert Nozick goes on to expand on Rawls's theory, bringing up a broadminded position known as the theory of Distributive Justice.

In his book, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Robert Nozick stresses that distributive justice is most desirable in any society. He described distributive justice as an unbiased allocation of resources. Distributive justice is often contrasted with the just process, which is concerned with the administration of law. Robert Nozick in his theory of distributive justice emphasised that there is no central distributor that can be regarded as such in the process of justice. What each person gets, he or she gets from the outcomes of what he called Lockean self-ownership (a condition that implies one's labor mixed with the world), or others who give to him in exchange for something, or as a gift (13). For him, "there is no longer the distribution of shares than there is a distribution of mates in a society in which persons choose whom they shall marry" (33). It thus means that there can be no pattern to which to conform or aim at. The market and the result of individual actions provided the conditions for libertarian principles of just acquisition and exchange (contained in his Entitlement Theory) will have as a result a distribution that will be just, without the need for considerations about the specific model or standard it should follow. I will now move on to examine the trend of hostility and social justice in Clark's *All for Oil*.

Hostility in J.P Clark's All for Oil

J.P Clark's *All for Oil* opens with Bekederemo and his brother-in-law Egbe, elders in the community, who just returned from a community celebration where they welcome the Governor-General of the newly amalgamated British protectorate named Nigeria. While struggling to settle down on getting home, the duo was joined by another elder statesman in the community, Dore. Dore is an embittered person. This was eloquent in his reaction on his entry below.

DORE: There, get out of my! Bekederemo, you disgraced me today, yes—right in front of His Excellency the Governor General, His Honour the Resident, His Worship the District Officer. Who made you head masquerade? (6).

He objected bitterly to almost everything that happened at the event most especially, he detested how he was treated with scorn in front of the government officials and guests. His complaint was based more on the way he was out-shown by Bekederemo who was the talk of the occasion because of his majestic appearance. Dore abhorred both Bekederemo and his associates including Egbe. In what was exposed in the opening scene, it was obvious that there was local rivalry which was unhealthy for the development of a community. The next scene was a school report scene in which Fuludu one of Bekederemo's sons was punishing one of his children who played truant at school. In the scene, emphasis is placed on education. At the same time, the overall gain of getting educated was interrogated. The scene was immediately followed by the court scene where Dora was the presiding Judge. The happenings in the scene is a pointer to the corrupt leadership in the society. Take for instance his lines below:

DORE: Make sure seven at least are taken to my boat the gods at home are dry right now. Not to mention my ancestors. It's a bull our late Olu really want. But what are we to do? The people are getting wiser every day, thanks to agitators like Bekederemo. His people at Ayakoroma used to bring me bundles of aloku poles to provide me with beautiful rafters for my compound without asking questions. Now it

takes the threat of a warrant of arrest to make them behave, I have to deal with them (24).

The above portrays the kind of leadership characterized of the Nigerian society. There is the norm of leaders using the law to deprive people of their possession. These are the kind of leaders who force their will on their subjects. Once more the heavy rivalry between Dore and Bekederemo is portrayed in this scene. The animosity is well-expressed in Dore's intentions to get Bekederemo arrested at all costs. In *All for Oil*, it is obvious that the new dispensation recognises Bekederemo over and above Dore and the result is the unending rivalry between them. Without doubt, the awful situation of the Niger Delta environment surely reveal a sellout, divide and rule, greed, and a great rivalry among local leaders.

The play is an enactment of the tragedy of the Niger Delta people. It captures the decline in the flora and fauna of the Niger Delta. Clark's concern, is how the injustices met on people in the region can be addressed. He thus thinks that in this 21st century what is communally owned should not commonly be shattered, bringing in communal death and destruction. For Bekederemo, the displacement of community or collective struggle rooted in ethno-cultural, ontological identity by individualism and its concomitant self-centeredness, greed, strife, and many other divisive tendencies is what made the Niger Delta a hotbed of violence. The violence which is fueled by belligerence from the Nigerian Government and the oil companies on one hand, and internal, intra-community crises on the other hand constantly sets the region against one another.

The Nigerian state in Clark's artistic vision is that the hero (Bekederemo) will not die until the injustices in the Niger Delta and the injustices generally in Nigeria are corrected. Hence, Clark becomes a human rights activist in *All for Oil*. His development of the main characters, which is fully adequate, convincing, and realistic, is reinforced by the roles of minor characters like Branuvwere who is afraid and worried that Bekederemo's generosity to his children and other people may wreck him. It is also heightened in the character of Nemugha who gives independent and objective advice

and opinion to Bekederemo on any issue without giving him the room for necessary adjustment.

Moreover, the character of Piniki Ederume who inspires Bekederemo through his songs or provision of a necessary piece of information at all times, especially during the abortive arrest masterminded by Dore gives reality to the play. Such characters are in existence in all society Fuludu and Fiobode who always kowtow to the wishes of Bekederemo without differing views depict loyalty, a reality in the society. Mitovwodo, Fetaroro, and Egerton Shyngle who gives Bekederemo the ideal love; hope, and necessary legal opinion also gave the play a realistic representation.

Just like in real-life situations, there is a character like Johnson Nana who gives a situation report to Bekederemo. In one of his reports, he expressed his worries about the fate of the Itsekiris following the nefarious activities of Dore and his cohorts who forcefully captures people's livestock on the pretense of sacrifices to the gods. The rogues do not stop at that, they also seize young girls and raped them. Their misdemeanor is endless for they also extort farmers and carried out devious leasing of people's lands in Okere, Sapele, and Alder's town in the name of Olu which is long dead.

In reality, there are people like Bar Rolle (Warrant Chief) appointed by Copeland Crawdor who displaces and drives Ogbe people from the headland to build a trading post now called Warri. Bar Rolle is the sychophants who tells Dore Numa of how Bekederemo breaks a court session in Okpare which quickly reawakens him to the knowledge of how the same Bekederemo scatters the court in Frukama and how he refuses to pay fine impose on him by a legally constituted court leading to the incarceration of Egbe who was later released on payment of the fine by people other than Bekederemo. The same Bar Rolle gives an inventory of the steady flow of goodies and gratifications sent to Dore Numa by the Ijaws, Urhobos, Isokos, Abohs and Kwales in fear, respect, recognition, and anticipation of favour from him.

Mr. Burns, the white man who sees Bekederemo as an objectionable troublesome character whose maritime trade hacks away the profitability of the white men's palm oil and kernel business in Sapele, Koko, and other areas reported as the representatives of the firms complains bitterly about the steady decline in profit-accrual. Mr. Burns is racist who gives vindictive excuses and tries to dissuade Col. M.C. Moorhouse from giving audience to Bekederemo's petitions against Dore Numa. Another interesting character is Egbe (Bakederemo's in law), who always protects Bekederemo's interest he also plays a mediatory role between Dore Numa and Bekederemo anytime they clash in words, thus making himself a constant cooler of the ever-rising temperatures between the two.

Dore holds the strong view that Egbe is always on the side of Bekederemo because he is married to his sister Fiobode. Babigha, is a character that sees Dore Numa as his only instrument to confront Bekederemo for justice over the burning of his shrine, and S.L. Bucknor who always gives a candid opinion to Dore Numa on legal matters concerning Bekederemo. It is the conglomeration of the various voices of these characters that give Bekederemo, Dore Numa, and Col. M.C. Moorhouse their individual qualities and identities.

All of these individuals reflect what holds sway in the Niger Delta. Clark draws on these individual qualities and identities to build his artistic vision about the characters and problems plaguing the different nationalities manipulatively fused into unholy union by the colonial masters. Clark's character representation shows that both the minor and major characters are germane to the development of the plot—the plot itself being chronological in the arrangement because the characters are drawn from history.

All for Oil is the exploration of historical materials in the construction of his vision for Nigeria using a language that is skillfully a mixture of prose, poetry, and quotable philosophical expressions. The following lines between Bekederemo and Fetaroro explicate what we mean:

Bekederemo: Fetaroro, you know life is only a bubble made in the river. We see ourselves large in it, but it bursts in our faces before we know it.

Fetaroro: And we also know the deepest track we make here on earth, and call our careers, is no more than the wake a boat makes. It tears up the river with pride but the river soon swallows it up. Arrival is all, yes, it is the arrival that matters. (76)

Lines such as the above are moving, evocative and gripping in construction. One is compelled to commit them to memory. They are enduringly appropriate, both the piercing poetic rhythm and the philosophical echoes and truism that the lines exemplify. The Niger Delta has been a major hub of economic activities right from the earliest period of European contact, partly due to its enormous natural resources (first palm oil and later crude oil), and partly due to its geographical location (waters and sea). The drama of the colonial period portrays the peoples of the Niger Delta as gainfully involved in economic activities: many communities, kings, or members of communities have warrior-businessmen who are middlemen between the white men (individual merchants or representatives of trading companies) and members of hinterland communities in the chains of palm oil trade, slave trade, and trade in other diverse commodities. As dramatized in historical plays such as Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* and Minima's *Odumege* these Niger Delta Kings or community leaders are just businessmen. They sign formal treaties with British colonial authorities, treaties that guarantee their monopoly of trade and commerce in their domains.

In the treaties, no colonial agency or white merchant was allowed to trade directly with members of hinterland communities. Thus, hinterland communities considered to be under the "colonial" control of Niger Delta monarchs were grossly exploited, abused, and oppressed. Community chiefs and elders fix prices for the producers of the commodities. If the sellers or their community leaders do not accept such arbitrary and exploitative prices, they are beaten up and their goods seized. If they accept prices imposed on them, the Niger Delta buyers would determine what to give in exchange for the goods, and sometimes they could give a bottle of gin for many kegs of palm oil, for example. Thus, there was a case of gross inequalities and injustices.

It was this economic exploitation and injustices that foster the incessant tension and uprising that enveloped the entire region since the merger of the protectorates. Sad enough, it is still ongoing at this age. It has always been the case that tyrants and selfish leaders have always been in charge of the community. The depiction of power, status, and politico-economic clouts of King Jaja in Minima's King Jaja or The Tragedy of the Nationalist, depicted in Rotimi's Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, Bekederemo and Dore in Clark's *All for Oil*, demonstrates the view that Niger Delta kings, chiefs and politico-economic elite are the worst enemies of their people. Certainly, most of the chiefs and community leaders do not fight to wrestle power from the Federal Government or the Oil Companies that exploit the resources of their land and ruin the lives and the environment of their people. Their business or stock in trade is to betray their people in their unbridled quest for wealth. They liaise with other people against their people, a situation that makes the struggles of the well-meaning masses of the Niger Delta over resource control and self-determination almost an impossible quest.

Premised on the contours of the thematic preoccupation located in social corruption, in *All for Oil*, the aspiration of Clark's desire is shrouded in artistic cultural costumes often deployed by the Marxist ideologist. The pulverisation of all institutions and structures of exploitation and oppression on any planet using any necessary instruments as a potent counter-force is Clark's new revolutionary persuasion. In the play, *All for Oil*, Clark's main character, Chief Bekederemo is the antagonistic and pulverisation of invading oppressive structures represented by the likes of Chief Dore. The displacement of community or collective struggle rooted in ethno-cultural, ontological identity by individualism and its concomitant self-centeredness, greed, strife, and many other divisive tendencies have made the Niger Delta a hotbed of violence fueled by external aggression from the Nigerian Government and oil companies on one hand, and internal, intra-community crises on the other hand.

More than ever before, the Nigerian situation continues to demonstrate a cursed nation. By this, we mean that even though the natural resources are in abundance, poverty spreads like the proverbial Harmattan fire. Selfishness and greed continue to reign supreme. So, given this kind of picture, one then wonders whether or not the community is caused. Nevertheless, from the issues raised

and addressed in this paper, the origin of Nigeria's perpetual misery is not farfetched. And there is no known 'curse' anywhere. Social tribulations experiential in the Niger Delta are not out of place. They are bound to happen where human beings operate. By nature human being are greedy, selfish, and race conscious. However, the question now is what the country is doing to address the social menace and injustices on the land. Undoubtedly, the postcolonial Niger Delta is still bedeviled by the traitor archetype. The drama that is continuous in the postcolonial Niger Delta and the rest of Nigeria is unhealthy conspiratory, greed, and domineering whim. No doubt, the challenges facing the hydrocarbon industry in Nigeria are copious—but so are the rewards.

Conclusion

This study has explored the culture of exploitation of the resources and peoples of the Niger Delta from the colonial era through the post colonial era. Oil politics is both exclusionary and divisive; it corrupts and breeds traitors among those who ought to fight against external and internal oppression. The play reveals that the unity of all people in the region is imperative for an end to their exploitation. The structures of oppression cannot be dismantled when various groups in the region continue to engage in internal squabbles.

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Eco-terrorism and Nigerian Home Videos in Conflict Resolution

Stephen Ogheneruro Okpadah

Introduction

Studies in environmental and ecological dysfunction, conflict resolution, peace and strategic studies are replete in African Scholarship. Perhaps, this is because of the numerous attendant effects of ethno-religious conflicts, eco-terrorism and or the conflict of resource control prevalent on the continent, especially in Nigeria. The multiplicity of crises, has led to the employment of conflict resolution methods such as warfare, arbitration and mediation. However, attempts at mitigating the crises with the above approaches seem to have hit brick wall as Augustine Ikelegbe and Nathaniel Umukoro note that “the Nigerian government’s initiatives to quell the crises in the Niger Delta have been futile as a result of the complexity of the approaches adopted” (26). The environmental crises and conflict resolution mechanisms in the region have been a subject of discussion in Nigerian films. Nigerian Filmmakers’ resolve to venture into the discourse of ecology, conflict and resolution on the region stems from their perceived communication and transformation capacity of the medium. Films that explore the conflict of resource control such as Jeta Amata’s *Black November* (2012), Ikenna Aniekwe’s *Amnesty* (2010), and Prosper Edesiri’s *Tamuno* (2022) are representations of conflict resolution mechanisms that are alternative to warfare. In this study, I examine how the Nigerian film has become a space for the representation of potent conflict resolution approaches and argue that the film text has the capacity to communicate positive transformations. This qualitative study explores conflict resolution approaches alternative to warfare, interrogated by filmmakers. He does a critical reading of Ikenna Aniekwe’s film, *Amnesty* (2010), as a discourse in conflict resolution.

A Conceptual Clarification of Eco-terrorism

Eco-terrorism is a portmanteau word for ecology and terrorism. The term is one of the most critically appraised in environmental and conflict studies. According to Steve Azaiki, eco-terrorism is “an act of violence ostensibly committed against people and processes whose engagement leads to some forms of destruction of the physical environment. It is a form of radical environmentalism that arose out of the same school of thought that brought about deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology and bioregionalism (60). Azaiki’s presents a clear insight into the concept. He defines eco-terrorism as forms of resistance against local or transnational enterprise that destroys nature in the name of resource extraction and Western development. This implies that eco-terrorists are those who use violent means in their fight against the destruction of the environment. The above definition of eco-terrorism comes to ply in the *Marriam-Webster* dictionary. The dictionary expatiates that eco-terrorism is a “sabotage intended to hinder activities that are considered damaging to the environment” (1). The term is therefore, attributed to militant or armed ecologists.

Precursory to the discovery of crude oil, many factors defined the Niger Delta. The region was characterized with a friendly eco-system and natural ecosphere, the grasses were green and immaculate, the rubber trees stood tall from the fertile soil, the rivers simmered with aquatic lives and the air was fresh to breathe in. Farmers in the Niger Delta made their living from the soil in the farm and the streams where a space for source of income for fishermen. Despite the utilization of nature by the people of the region, they reverend the air, the soil and the water bodies with the medium of planting of trees and purification of the streams.

The people’s peace with nature was disrupted with the discovery of crude oil first, in Oloibiri, a present settlement in Bayelsa state. The government in collaboration with Shell BP notified the people in the region that their youth would be employed in various capacities and the region, developed. To facilitate the so called development, rubber trees were cut down to create space for crude oil exploration, the spiritual essence of the region was degraded as

the tabernacle of traditional worship were pulled down, the gods whose abode were in the trees and rivers were left homeless. This caused excessive hardship on the inhabitants as the few remaining lands were destroyed with the oil spill and became infertile. Crops withered, fishes died in the streams the whole eco system was affected and the educated youths in the region were never unemployed.

The above status quo was the impetus for the genesis of eco-terrorism in the region. Hence, eco-warriors such as Isaac Boro, of Kaiama extract, a town in the Niger Delta sought for support from the international community. With the failure of support by the international community, separatist agitation came to bear. In the words of Benedict Binebai:

Isaac Boro recruited, trained and led a group of volunteers known as the Niger Delta Volunteer Service and revolted against the Nigerian federation for twelve days during which he declared the independence of the Niger Delta. His revolt is based on political sovereignty and economic self determination and cultural expression. (431).

The Boroic phenomenon was suppressed by Aguiyi Ironsi led military government. In the years that followed, though there were series of revolt against the oil multinationals and their activities, the most significant of them all was the Ogoni uprising. The Ogoni tribe, one situated in the Niger Delta region, is a good paradigm of the travail and agony characterized by the region. The Ogoni taxonomy was a lot dissimilar to the Isaac Boro revolution. The Ogoni people started their notification of the government about the attendant effect of the activities of the oil multinationals with peaceful protests. Led by a renowned human rights activist, literary icon and television producer, Ken Saro Wiwa, the international community became abreast of the suffering meted by the government and the crude oil activities on the Niger Delta.

Martins Tugbokorowei and Ifeanyi Ogu-Raphael note that “the ecological devastation and total oppression of the people, especially in the denial of their rights, including land rights are very much incidental to the conflict in the region” (195). Tugbokorowei

and Ogu-Raphael's assertion is corroborated by Henry Ajumeze who posits that "the Ogonis had demanded royalties for the three decades of oil exploration in their land, and the restoration of degraded environment before allowing further oil production activities" (181). The plea of the Ogoni people was forcefully suppressed by the military government. Male protesters were killed, women raped and properties destroyed. According to Kalu Uka, "Ken Saro-Wiwa, an Ogoni was dispatched by the military regime's hangman" (233). Saro-Wiwa's hanging was the crescendo of the Niger Delta crises as the attention of the international community on the Delta chaos became prominent as a result of Saro-Wiwa's hanging. I will now move on to explore conflict resolution mechanisms applied to the above crises by the Nigerian government.

Eco-terrorism and Conflict Resolution in the Niger Delta

The first attempt at mitigating the impact of the oil venture on the indigenous people of the Niger Delta was in the early 1960s when the government of Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, in 1961, established the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB). According to Aghalino, "the NDDDB was established mainly to tackle the developmental problems of the depressed areas of the Niger Delta region as enshrined in the Independence constitution" (178). The NDBB did not live up to its expectation at developing the region. I argue that the reason for their failure is the application of top-down approach in the body's initiatives. The indigenous communities who are directly affected by the problems were not included in the policy and development frameworks formation. This is one of the major reasons for the failure of development initiatives in developing countries. The imposition of ideas and positions by donors and external bodies could be dangerous. In fact, such imposition could create more problems for transformation.

The Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) was established in 1976 due to the inability of the NDDDB to fulfill its purpose. This novel body was not different from the NDDDB in its policy formulations. This led to its minimal impact in the region. In 1981, the Oil Mineral Production areas Development Fund Committee was set up but there were also limitations and draw backs

in the activities and operation of the above commission. The failure of the aforementioned body in resolving the region's miasma, led to the formation of the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992. Despite the establishment of OMPADEC the Niger Delta imbroglio could not be tackled. Apart from the politics of exclusion of people at the grassroot characterized of the above bodies, corruption is another predominant factor. According to Obam Chimene and Emmanuel Wonah, "corruption has in the Commission has posed a great challenge to the realization of its mandate. The challenges of the Niger Delta persists partly as a result of corruption" (37). Democratic governance in 1999 ushered in the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), was established in 2000 by President Olusegun Obasanjo in his attempt to address the conflict in the region.

The corruption in the fabric and web of the NDDC was the driver for the high intensity conflict in the area as various militant groups sprang up. The Ugborodo crisis of early 2002 that was championed by the women, ended in negotiation as Steve Azaiki notes that "Chevron flew with their top management staff to negotiate with the women. After negotiation, they signed the famous July 2002 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)" (198). Unfortunately, the negotiation failed in resolving the crisis.

With the influx of militant organizations in the early 2000s, the Nigerian government discovered that it needed to strike a truce with these violent bodies agitating for the emancipation of their people. Having applied warfare and the establishment of top-down developmental frameworks and their limitations being observed, The Nigerian federal government led by President Umaru Yar'Adua, to introduce the Amnesty program, an act of clemency. In the light of the above, Osewa avers that "President Musa Yar'Adua hereby granted amnesty and unconditional pardon to all persons who directly or indirectly participated in the commission of offences associated with militant activities in the Niger Delta" (9). The presidential pardon culminated into the disarmament of the militants and this led to their (the militants) oversea training in various trades, scholarship schemes to study in Nigerian universities and abroad, employment in various companies as well as a monthly allowance for them. Unfortunately,

the initiatives contained in the amnesty programme have not put an end to militant activities in the region. The ex-militants have several times complained that the conditions for the amnesty programme have not been fully met. The ministers and the luminaries in charge of the programme had either siphoned the funds or indulged in mismanagement of the funds. Although the amnesty programme has drastically reduced the conflict, it has not brought the desired peace to the Niger Delta region.

In an evaluation of the Amnesty programme accorded the Niger Delta militants, James Adeyeri observes that “it is instructive to note that despite the amnesty and rehabilitation programme initiated by the federal government in late 2009, militia-related violence has not left the Niger Delta completely” (52). Though the amnesty program favoured the youth who took to arms in the Niger Delta region as the agenda for the program include payment of monthly stipends to the ex-militants, sending them overseas for formal education and technical training, the benevolent and peace keeping citizens who were not involved in the conflict, were left out of the scheme. In the same vein, some of the militants claimed to have been excluded from the scheme. These factors and other political indices have led to a continuation of the imbroglio in the region. More recently, militant groups such as the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) continue to indulge in kidnapping of expatriates, pipeline vandalism, crude oil bunkering, and bombardment of oil pipelines. I will now proceed to examine alternative conflict resolution approaches engaged by filmmakers, with a critical reading of the film, *Amnesty*.

Synopsis of Ikenna Aniekwe's Amnesty

Ikenna Aniekwe's *Amnesty* (2010) is a post Niger Delta amnesty film. This film was produced after the amnesty programme was initiated by the Nigerian government. In *Amnesty*, the new federal government is poised in having a dialogue with the militants in Bayaka state so as to put an end to the militant activities. A faction of the militants accepts the gesture while the core group rejects the decision, stating that the idea would be a failure like the initiatives instituted by the previous government. Meanwhile, Alhaji Usman Gambo a major stakeholder in the emergence of the president, kicks

against the dialogue idea since he benefits from the chaos in Bayaka state hence, with the help of an agent, he pays Pere, the leader of a militant group to cause more havoc in the area. Pere and his boys bomb the only refinery and this culminates into the president using military action on the region and Alhaji Usman Gambo's refineries abroad are patronized by the country. Dumbraye Silva, the leader of the uncompromising militant group is arrested by the federal government as they (the federal government) were given a tip off by the compromising militants' leader, Pere. Mrs. Rahim, the minister of information holds evidence of sabotage of the government against Alhaji Usman Gambo. To extract the evidence from her, the latter has her daughter, Aisha Rahim, kidnapped by the militant now led by Tamuno Tekena. This makes Mrs. Rahim go ahead and report Alhaji Usman Gambo to the president. Aisha is released by Tamuno Tekena on the condition that she would propel the release of his brother who was arrested by the police. In the company of her mother, she goes to the president and convinces the president to tread softly with the militants. The president finally declares amnesty for the militants and all those arrested for militant related issues are released.

A Reading of Amnesty in Conflict Resolution.

Amnesty advocates for negotiation and inclusion as major indices in resolving the Niger Delta conflict. First, it captures the warfare approach to resolving the crises in the Delta. The crises in Bayaka state, a metaphorical state for the Niger Delta region is caused by the marginalization of the people in the state by the government and the oil multinationals. This is compounded with the underdevelopment in the region. For this reason, the youths take to arms. Surprisingly, the militants are jobless graduates. They are educated, yet they are unemployed. Despite the fact that they hail from a region flowing with what many people call the Liquid Gold, they still live from hand to mouth. This is not far-fetched from Azaiki's assertion, that "the corporation rolled out her drums as her managers and shareholders wined, dined and danced to celebrate the billions of dollars looted from poor indigenous peoples all over the world" (104). There is a direct argument for the natural resource, the crude oil in Bayaka state. Hence, Dumbraye says that: Dumbraye: Our ultimate goal is the control of our resources (105).

The endemic poverty in the region spurs a direct argument for existing property/power relations. If the government cannot tackle the issue of unemployment and underdevelopment in Bayaka state, then the region ought to control their resources themselves so that they could use the proceeds to develop the area. Here in lies the major bone of contention. The dastardly action carried out by the militant is greeted with a negative appraisal by the president. This is an action taken by the youths as a warning to the government that they are ready to disrupt the exploration of oil and thereby reducing the nation's income.

The pains of the unemployed youths in Bayaka state is portrayed in Dumbraye's statement below:

Dumbraye: Of what use is the gas plant to our people? You nor fit be manager for that gas plant? Why them nor employ you? You nor go school? On a daily basis, they pollute our environment, they destroy our farmlands, look at our parents, nowhere to farm and fish, yet billions of money dey enter some people pocket. (115).

Dumbraye and some of the youths take to arms to frustrate the oil companies, kidnap the oil expatriates, vandalize oil pipelines and indulge in oil bunkering. This leads to a massive decline in the nation's revenue in the oil sector, the Gross domestic product and it also makes life unbearable for foreign investment in the nation. For this, the president becomes dominating. He takes a coercive measure by using the military to combat the militants in the creeks. The film preaches the disadvantage of applying such methods in conflict resolution. No matter the number of security operatives assigned to combat the militants, militancy cannot be totally eradicated. There are some cabals who gain from the conflict in the region as Alhaji Gambo's statement below implies:

Alhaji Gambo: We make more money when there is chaos in the oil producing area.(125)

For this reason, Alhaji Gambo, a metaphor for the cabals in Nigeria, pays the Niger Delta militants to blow up the refineries so that they will cease to function and then, his refineries abroad can be patronized

by the government. The film preaches that for the society to be better, the dubious acts and the excesses of the likes of Alhaji Gambo have to be checked and they need to be ostracized. Because of his selfish interest, Alhaji Gambo advises the president to handle the Niger Delta militants with an iron hand.

The president orders the arrest of Dumbraye Silva the leader of the radical cum uncompromising militant group. Dumbraye Silva, sees the request for his arrest as the beginning of their struggle. However, his arrest is made possible by Pere, the leader of the other militant group. The arrest of Dumbraye Silva does not put an end to the militant activities. The foregoing reflects the frailty of the application of warfare in conflict resolution.

In the first place, the uncompromising militants were/are not against dialogue, rather, they are so critical that the amnesty programme might be characterized with corruption. Hence, they are fighting for an amnesty with sincerity. The brother of Tamuno Tekena, a member of the uncompromising militant group is arrested. Alhaji Gambo who had given Tamuno Tekena the contract of kidnapping the daughter of the minister for information is requested by the militants to effect the release of Tamuno Tekena's brother for business to continue but Alhaji realizes that if he facilitates his release, the militant will vie for peace and there will be tranquility in the Niger Delta, and this will impede the illegal money he makes from the crisis in the region. In the light of the above, Azaiki posits that "oil has been given the image of a big business ruled by naked politics and dominated by the ruthless men who are sensitive to nothing except their profit" (101). Therefore, Alhaji Gambo's approach to tackling the conflict is selfish and narcissistic.

Mrs. Rahim on the other hand, believes that warfare will not solve the imbroglio in Bayaka state. She believes that the crises of resource control should be resolved from below. She is aware of the people in the communities have been silenced by their oppressors, how the subaltern as Gyatari Spivak referred to such marginalized groups and communities have been deprived of their possessions, homes and source of livelihood. Mrs. Rahim is aware that when all vulnerable and marginalized groups are heard, there would be lasting

peace and cohesion in Bayaka state. In the context of the Niger Delta, Augustine Ikelegbe and Nathaniel Umukoro highlight some of these dimensions of exclusion to include “the exclusion of some ex-militants; the exclusion of victims; the exclusion of reconstruction; the absence of a peace agreement; the absence of a structural framework for peacebuilding at regional and community levels; and the exclusion in implementation” (25). The film captured this trend in Bayaka state. Hence, Mrs. Rahim insists on amnesty, albeit, one that would be driven by the militants themselves and not some group of elites Bayaka state. Aisha Rahim, the daughter of the minister for information is kidnapped as facilitated by Alhaji Gambo since Mrs. Rahim knows a lot about his (Alhaji Gambo) illegitimate trade and also has documented evidence of his illegal activities that sabotage the effort of the federal government. With the few days she spends with them, she is made to see the plight the region is going through. Hence, on her release, she meets the president and relates the statement below:

Aisha Rahim:... your Excellency, they fight for their people, they fight for justice. (132)

Mrs. Rahim’s daughter, Aisha shares the same views as her mother. To her, the conflict in the region should be resolved amicably and not with arms and bombs. Any form of coercion would serve nobody. The film ends with the president granting amnesty to the militants. However, the film presents a form of amnesty that departs from the President Yar’Adua engagement. Here, all militants arrested by the government are released and there is also negotiation at the grassroot level. There is negotiation from below the ladder and participation as delegated power. The militants and bare citizens determine how, when and what is negotiated. As Sherry Arnstein notes, “at this level, the ladder has been scaled to the point where citizens hold the significant cards to assure accountability of the program to them.” (217).

The Special Adviser to the president on political matters is aware that only when power is distributed among all social strata and only when those who are more vulnerable to the impacts of the activities of the oil companies come into the public sphere to engage

in the ecological discussion, will genuine transformation become evident in the region. These transformations will in turn translate into lasting peace and development in the Niger Delta. Hence, he (the Special Adviser on political matters) insists on dialogue with the militants and advises the president to employ a more democratic approach in the case of the crises in Bayaka state.

Conclusion

Environmental crises in the Niger Delta have persisted as a result of the dearth of mechanisms that are dialogic, interactive and more citizens driven. However, dialogic communication could be tricky when not properly coordinated. In other words, particular groups may also arise to dominate vulnerable categories. Also, while the Nigerian government and international community claim to employ some participatory methods, only a few of them have the colouration of participation without holistic inclusion in the decision making process, thereby lacking in the area of sustainable conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Thus, Amnesty ia an enactment of the intricacies attached to the non-dialogic approach to ecological crises management and the advocacy for the empowerment of environmentally endangered communities.

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Giba Jagi Binji (With Fire in Your Belly): Fire Ecologies, Human-Tree Relations, and Anthropocene Resistance in Aboriginal Australian Culture

John Charles Ryan, Ph.D

Introduction

In the Anthropocene epoch, humankind has become a geophysical agent capable of profound biospheric alteration. In this context of grave ecological transformation, disturbing images circulating in the media, such as those of Mallacoota, a small coastal town in the East Gippsland region of Victoria, Australia, highlight the inherent potential of fire in the Anthropocene to result in catastrophic loss. During the 2019–2020 bushfire season known as the “Black Summer,” photos in mainstream and social media outlets brought attention to the broad-scale ecological and cultural crisis that engulfed Australia (Davidson). Between July 2019 and March 2020, more than 11,000 fires ravaged about 18.6 million hectares—or 46 million acres—of land. Thirty-three people as well as an estimated one billion wild and domestic animals perished. Intensified by prolonged drought across much of eastern Australia, the conditions underpinning the tragedy stemmed from pervasive anthropogenic, or human-induced, climatic disturbance. In fact, the Black Summer wildfires contributed more smoke to the atmosphere than any event previously observed globally. Approximately one million metric tons of smoke particles altered the climate of the Southern Hemisphere for more than a year after (Leibniz Institute for Tropospheric Research). To be certain, the decade 2010–2019 was the hottest in recorded history with eight of the ten warmest documented years occurring during this time.

For Aboriginal Australian societies, however, controlled fire has been essential to preserving biocultural traditions and managing the environment sustainably over many thousands of years. In response to the Black Summer tragedy, the first half of 2020 saw a proliferation of stories in international and Australian news media outlets concerning Aboriginal management of the landscape through the judicious use of fire as a biocultural technology.

A story in *TIME*, for instance, comments that the recent surge in interest in Indigenous fire management is an implicit sign that many Australians recognize the value of what was very nearly lost” (Betigeri para. 2). In order to delineate the potential future contribution of Aboriginal ecologists to environmental management in Australia—past, present, and future—this article surveys indigenous cultural productions with an emphasis on poetry published between 2010 and 2020. The analysis begins by elaborating some of the key frameworks—ecocriticism, ecopoetics, phytopoetics—for reading Aboriginal poetry and art from an ecological perspective. The article then turns to an overview of human-tree traditions in Aboriginal culture as narrativized in literary and artistic works. The article, finally, shifts to a treatment of Aboriginal cultural burning and fire ecology, concluding with two contrastive perspectives on human-fire relations narrated in recent poetry by Yankunytjatjara/Kokatha writer Ali Cobby Eckermann and Ndjebbana poet-activist Alice Pearl Daiguma Eather. The central argument developed in this article is that the analysis of Aboriginal Australian cultural production is integral to illuminating the value of Indigenous fire management practices in response to the precarities of the Anthropocene.

Aboriginal Cultural Production as Biocultural Intervention

Aboriginal Australian art and poetry are based in oral traditions and song-poetry bearing a more than sixty-thousand-year lineage. Works of art and poetry tend to reverberate with ethnobiological (or nature-culture) allusions frequently embedded in Dreaming (or traditional creation) stories. The genre of poetry emerged in full as a contemporary textual form with the publication of Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s (Kath Walker’s) collections *We Are Going* from 1964 and *The Dawn Is At Hand* from 1966. Current, active poets of note include Jeanine Leane, Ali Cobby Eckermann, Lionel Fogarty, Ellen van Neerven, and Kirli Saunders (Whittaker, Fire Front). Edited by Gomeroi writer and researcher Alison Whittaker, *Fire Front: First Nations Poetry and Power Today* from 2020 is a significant recent anthology of fifty-three poems by Aboriginal poets of different generations—from Oodgeroo Noonuccal to Sachem Parkin-Owens. In her introduction to the anthology, Whittaker contends, “It’s a cliché to say that Indigenous poetry is powerful. From where does that

power come? Like *Fire Front*, does it come from challenging and subverting the English language, or the poetic forms and traditions of the West? Or does it come from creating space for other ways of thinking and rethinking and returning to proper thought? Does it nurture its Indigenous readers?" ("Introduction" ix). To be certain, as this article maintains, the contemporary power of Aboriginal poetry inheres in its capacity to make all of the interventions outlined by Whittaker possible, often at the same time.

Reprinted in *Fire Front*, "My Ancestors" by Parkin-Owens first appeared in the literary journal *Overland* in 2017 and received the Oodgeroo Noonuccal Poetry Prize the same year. Parkin-Owens is a young Aboriginal and African-American poet whose Indigenous ties come from Minjerribah, or North Stradbroke Island, Queensland. Alternating between English and Aboriginal languages, the poetic narrative construes the act of writing as ancestral in itself but also a potent means to invoke one's ancestors, both human and other-than-human:

I write from the heart
The source of my ink
Each line I write
Isn't written from what I think
Rather what is held close to my heart;
My Ancestors. (Parkin-Owens 153, ll. 37–42)

As invoked by Parkin-Owens in the poem, the term *giba jagi binji*—"with fire in your belly"—signifies the material and metaphorical, corporeal and spiritual, dimensions of fire negotiated by Aboriginal societies—killfully over many millennia.

Another major recent anthology, *Guwayu: For All Times*, also appeared in 2020. *Guwayu* is a Wiradjuri word meaning "still and yet and for all times." Edited by Wiradjuri poet and researcher Jeanine Leane, this vibrant collection features Aboriginal poetry commissioned by the organization Red Room Poetry over the past sixteen years. *Guwayu* comprises sixty-three poems from thirty-six Aboriginal poets in twelve Indigenous languages. In her foreword (reprinted in *Sydney Review of Books*), Leane marks cogently

and passionately, “The Australian literary landscape needs this bold, brave intervention to wake it up from the 232-year slumber and the dream of the settler mythscape. Guwayu breaks the silence—feel the beauty—hear our words. Feel the texture of the sublime vessels woven within this living, breathing archive of us crafted from the living literature of our words” (para. 18). Leane emphasizes the interventional agency of Aboriginal cultural production in resisting the colonialist residues of Australian settler society and, in particular, refusing the outlook on the environment as merely a commodifiable resource to be exploited in service to nationhood.

Reading Aboriginal Cultural Production Ecocritically

One of the ways in which Aboriginal Australian cultural production can be read is ecocritically, that is, for its environmental and ecopolitical implications. Aboriginal poems and paintings are “living, breathing” environmental texts, defined as those texts—novels, poems, films, oral narratives, visual works, websites, television programs, magazine articles, advertisements, and so forth—that represent the environment, ecological issues, and/or human-nature dynamics. The pioneering American ecocritic Lawrence Buell famously characterized an environmental text as that in which “the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence” (7). The literary and historical analysis of environmental texts belongs to the domain of ecocriticism, of which Buell remains a cofounder and important figure. In a seminal analysis, Cheryll Glotfelty delineated the interdisciplinary field as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment [demonstrating] an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (xviii). Since the 1990s, however, ecocriticism has diversified into manifold specializations such as affective and empirical studies. A number of emerging focus areas also include climate change, Covid-19, and the Anthropocene as well as Indigenous, postcolonial, zoocritical, phytocritical (plant-focused), and ecomedia/eco-communications-based orientations (Ryan). In the Australian context, in addition to C.A. Cranston and Robert Zeller’s edited volume *The Littoral Zone* from 2007, arguably the first in-depth publication on ecocriticism focused on Australia, there is also Brian Elliott’s *The Landscape of Australian Poetry*, a groundbreaking proto-ecocritical study published in 1967.

Another theoretical framework valuable for eliciting the ecological dimensions of Aboriginal Australian poetry and art is ecopoetics. With multifarious signifiatory registers, the term ecopoetics, on the one hand, refers narrowly to a genre of poetry that expresses prominent ecological values, critiques environmental degradation, and reinforces an ethics of the natural world and non-human life. As a literary genre, ecopoetics is often associated with contemporary environmental activism and advocacy. In its literary-activist dimensions, ecopoetics is distinct from nature poetry (as related to British Romanticism and the pastoral tradition) as well as landscape poetry (as related to aesthetic appreciation of the visual features of an environment). On the other hand, ecopoetics also presents a mode of literary analysis in which any genre of poetry—from any historical period—can be understood through an ecological lens; in other words, literary critics can conduct ecopoetic readings of poems. Moreover, the term has been used to characterize creative environmental activism-based projects generally focused on sustainability, conservation, and human-nature equilibrium. Thus, one can speak of ecopoetic community environmental projects that do not necessarily engage directly or explicitly with poetry as such but which develop a poetic outlook on ecological concerns (Hume and Osborne).

The steady diversification of ecocriticism over time has yielded specialized modes of analysis concerned with the construction of animals and plants in literary and cultural texts. Animal texts can be understood as those depicting animal life and human-animal relations. Emerging from animal ethics debates and the broader scholarly field of human-animal studies, abbreviated as HAS, zoocriticism involves processes of critically reading literary-cultural texts through an animal-focused lens. In botanical—or vegetal—terms, plant texts are those attentive to plant life and human-flora relations. Arising from debates in plant ethics and the new academic field of human-plant studies, or HPS, phytocriticism entails the examination of literary-cultural texts through a plant-focused optic (for example, see Pick, Ryan). Also of note is the burgeoning scholarly area of Indigenous ecopoetics, which is crucial to consider in relation to ecological readings of Aboriginal Australian poetry (Magrane). Building on work in Indigenous ecopoetics, the term

Indigenous phytopoetics denotes the ways in which texts authored by First Nations writers narrativize human-vegetal imbrications, critique ecological issues disproportionately impacting Indigenous peoples' access to plants, and inspire place-based expressions of cultural-botanical sovereignty.

For Craig Santos Perez, Indigenous eco-poetics underscores “how the primary themes in native texts express the idea of interconnection and interrelatedness of humans, nature, and other species” (para. 14). Attuned to particular beingness of plants, Indigenous phytopoetic narratives call attention to the significance of botanical life to First Nations genealogies, ontologies, and epistemologies. What’s more, Indigenous phytopoetic work critiques (neo)colonialist constructions of plants as objects to be appropriated, commodified, homogenized, exhausted, and eradicated. Indigenous phytopoetic narratives thus inflect a view of plants—and creative works derived from them—as sources of recuperation, resistance, and reciprocity (Perez para. 14). In intermediational terms, Indigenous phytopoetics proffers a vibrant substrate linking creators, audiences, plants, materials, and technologies in dialogic interchange. In addition to Perez’s poetic writing, notably the recent collection *Habitat Threshold*, seminal examples of Indigenous phytopoetics include Aboriginal Australian Elder Bill Neidjie’s verse narrative *Story About Feeling* from 1989 and Papua New Guinean writer Steven Edmund Winduo’s *Hembemb* published in 2000.

Aboriginal Fires Ecologies as Restorative Practice

A major element of the legacy of ecological devastation in Australia is the disruption of traditional Indigenous landscape firing regimes. With this assertion in view, the following section turns from ecological frameworks to the traditions of Aboriginal cultural burning and fire ecology that underlie many contemporary poems. Throughout Australia today, Indigenous rangers continue to conduct prescribed burning to manage the ecosystems of places such as the East Kimberley of Western Australia. Aboriginal cultural burning such as this features as a prominent motif in colonial Australian art. Painter Joseph Lycett, for instance, was transported to New South Wales in 1813, a convicted forger. His *Aborigines Using Fire To*

Hunt Kangaroo from 1817 is an example of landscape painting in which Aboriginal people pursue kangaroos while managing the environment with fire in a precolonial domain uninterrupted by European settlement. Moreover, Lycett's Corroboree at Newcastle, from 1818, is the first known European oil painting to depict a night-time corroboree by Aboriginal people. The role of fire as a medium of social and cultural cohesion is evident throughout the painting's foreground.

Within Aboriginal art, however, fire tends to be strongly implicated in Dreaming narratives rather than constructed exclusively as a dangerous force. Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's Warlugulong from 1977 narrates the story of an ancestral being named Lungkata starting the world's first bushfire. The painting invokes nine distinct Dreamings, of which Lungkata's tale is the central motif. Lungkata was the Bluetongue Lizard Man, a dreaming figure responsible for creating bushfire to punish his two sons who did not share with their father the kangaroo they had harvested. The sons' skeletons are shown on the right side of the painting against a background of smoke and ashes. Many of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's subsequent works, such as *Fire Dreaming* from 1988, also depict Dreaming narratives centralizing fire. At the viewer's bottom left corner, the painting evokes the regeneration of plant foods through cultural burning.

More recently, there is Barbara Weir's *Fire Dreaming* from 2015. Weir comments that "I paint my mother's country, the land where we live, find and prepare our food. I paint the same old stories I heard as a child, only my personal style is different" (para. 1). The artist's work underscores how fire—as an agential persona in itself—remains an integral part of the old *Dreaming* stories and contemporary Aboriginal art. Moreover, Pitjantjatjara artist Jorna Newberry's Waru Tjukurrpa or Fire Dreaming narrates the use of fire for hunting and land management on traditional Aboriginal lands. This *Dreaming* story relates to Jorna's mother's country at Utantja near the intersection of the three state boundaries of Western Australia, Northern Territory and South Australia. In the painting, the land (the area in white) is being burned off in a controlled manner while the swirling areas of red signify the bushfire and effects of the wind.

In relation to contemporary art featuring traditional firing practices, the terms fire-stick farming and cultural or cool burning refer to the regular, traditional burning of vegetation to facilitate hunting, change the composition of plant and animal species in an area, control weeds and increase biodiversity. The term fire-stick farming was devised in the 1960s by archaeologist Rhys Jones to account for the active management of ecosystems by Aboriginal communities through burning that encourages the growth of certain species of flora and fauna. Systems of patch-mosaic firing—in conjunction with small-game hunting—maintained biodiversity over time. A recent example of restoring cultural burning traditions comes from the Kaurna community of Adelaide. In May of this year, the City of Adelaide partnered with the Kaurna community, Green Adelaide, and the National Parks and Wildlife Service of South Australia to deliver a pilot burn in Adelaide’s southeastern parklands (Kemp).

Despite the deliberate, strategic, and restorative nature of the practice of landscape firing, some colonial Australian observers regarded cultural burning as indiscriminate and disorganized. In the 1790s, for instance, the naturalist Archibald Menzies observed “the busy capricious disposition of the natives who are fond of kindling frequent fires round their huts” (qtd. in Hallam 17). Sylvia Hallam called attention to these early misconceptions in her classic *Fire and Hearth* from 1975, one of the first in-depth studies of Aboriginal firing practices. Historian Bill Gammage builds on and extends the work of Hallam, Jones, and others in *The Biggest Estate on Earth*. He comments:

...knowing which plants welcome fire, and when and how much, was critical to managing land. Plants could then be burnt and not burnt in patterns, so that post-fire regeneration could situate and move grazing animals predictably by selectively locating the feed and shelter they prefer. (Gammage 1).

What’s more, in *Dark Emu, Black Seeds*, Bruce Pascoe reviews evidence suggesting the use of fire by Aboriginal Australians as early as 120,000 years ago. The dominant method of cultural burning was “a mosaic pattern of low-level burns” (Pascoe 116). Pascoe further

argues that “almost all early European visitors to Australia remarked on the frequency of small-scale burning” (116). He identifies the five principal features of cultural burning as rotating mosaic firing patterns; deep awareness of seasonality; acute attunement to the weather; communication with neighboring clans in order to avoid conflicts; and the avoidance of burning during plants’ growing season.

Trees and Fire in Aboriginal Works of Art and Poetry

Shifting from the history of landscape burning in Australia to specific human-nature intersections in Aboriginal cultural production, the following discussion outlines key literary-artistic engagements with Australian trees. In Aboriginal biocultural traditions, trees and fire are intimately connected. Among the Noongar people of Southwest Australia, sacred trees include the mudja or the Western Australian Christmas tree (*Nuytsia floribunda*), the world’s largest parasitic tree. The flowering of mudja in December each year signifies the beginning of the traditional season of Birok, also known as the first summer, characterized by intense heat, aridity, and fire. The six-season calendrical model of the Noongar features Birok along with Kambarang, Djilba, Makuru, Djeran and Bunuru. Hence, trees are linked to fire, both materially and spiritually, in Aboriginal worldviews.

In Australia, an island continent highly vulnerable to climate change, the clearance of ancient trees, such as the mudja and boab, still proceeds at an alarming rate despite the exigencies of climate change. Nonetheless, a salvage event garnering extensive media attention was the relocation of Gija Jumulu, an enormous 750-year-old boab tree (*Adansonia gregorii*) transported two-thousand miles south from the Kimberley region of Western Australia to Kings Park in Perth, the state capital. Taking place in July 2008, the unparalleled four-day relocation involved the longest known terrestrial journey of a tree of this size (Government of Western Australia). Weighing 79,000 pounds, Gija Jumulu constituted a formidable obstacle to the construction of a highway bridge in the Kimberley. Two years later, arborists at Kings Park in Perth observed the appearance of necrotic tissue, the removal of which left extensive scarring on the

trunk. Notwithstanding uncertainties over the tropical tree's acclimatization, in 2016 the pockmarked boab was declared healthy. In the Mediterranean environment of Perth, nonetheless, Gija Jumulu remains an arboreal refugee displaced by a neoimperialist agenda from the Kimberley, a region in Northwest Australia having its own endemic seasonal patterns and climatic cadences.

The cultural importance of trees figures extensively into Aboriginal art. Painter Albert Namatjira's water colour *Ghost Gum, MacDonnell Ranges, Central Australia* from 1945 depicts a solitary gum tree with two trunks atop a rocky outcrop in the Macdonnell Range outside the city of Alice Springs in the outback of Central Australia. Contorted by the elements, the tree is adapted perfectly to the arid environment and is a non-human kin of local Aboriginal people. Tragically, however, two ghost gums painted by Namatjira were in recent years found toppled over and burned, non-human victims of a suspected arsonist. Owing to their prominence in Namatjira's artwork, these same trees were due to soon be placed on Australia's national heritage register. This prominent instance of botanical vandalism is a lucid example—from an Aboriginal standpoint—of the element of fire becoming imbalanced through inappropriate usage that violates an ethics of the arboreal world. Similarly, Noongar artist Bella Kelly's work, focused for the most part on the biodiverse Southwest region of Western Australia, features landscapes undergoing various stages of transformation from bushland to agricultural production. In an untitled watercolor landscape from 1967, gum trees frame the right side of the composition near a cluster of grass trees in the middle. The fence in the midground and cattle in the distance signify material processes of pastoral transformation. Pockets of trees throughout the composition represent the ever-increasing biocultural fragmentation of the landscape—a condition compounded by the infrequency of Noongar burning in the wake of colonization.

The biocultural importance of trees depicted by Namatjira and Kelly recurs in the work of Aboriginal Australian poet and cultural spokesperson Bill Neidjie. Published in 1989, his verse narrative *Story About Feeling* deals to a great extent with the botanical knowledge of the Gaagudju people whose traditional lands

include World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory. Throughout Neidjie’s work, human-tree relations—especially those activated and sustained through the senses of touch, taste, and smell—express long-standing connectivities between Indigenous Australians and the botanical world. A salient instance is Neidjie’s narrativization of Gaagudju knowledge of yam procurement, preparation, and consumption. One of Neidjie’s foremost concerns was the transmission of complex seasonally-attuned understandings of yams, paperbarks, gum trees, and other culturally-salient plants between generations of Aboriginal people: “You hang on for this country; nobody else. / That way I fight for” (Neidjie26). An ethics of botanical life manifests in the dialogue between the speaker and a novice bush crafter:

“I’m your old-man but I’m telling you!

You dig yam?”

“Yes”

“Well one of your granny or mother
you digging through the belly.

You must cover im up, cover again.

When you get yam you cover

so no hole through there

because you killing yam other thing.

And you got to hang on...” (Neidjie 25, italics original).

In these lines, Neidjie likens the yam ground to the maternal body as the tuber rises from the Earth-umbilicus. Collecting the yam inevitable disturbs nearby species, so the traditional harvester must “cover im up” respectfully in order to protect ecosystemic health. Elsewhere in the narrative, Neidjie admonishes a young man for irresponsibly chopping down an ancient tree:

‘Yes...

I chop it down that big tree.

I play...I cut it, yes’.

‘You cutted yourself!

When you get oh, about fifty...

you’ll feel it...

pain on your back

because you cutted it’ (Neidjie 25)

Written in Aboriginal English, a dialect used by Aboriginal people throughout Australia, the lines speak of the physical implications of cutting the big tree down: “When you get oh, about fifty... / you’ll feel it... / pain on your back.” In other words, from Neidjie’s perspective, humans and trees are corporeally co-implicated; impacts on the body of one resonate in the body of the other.

Like Neidjie’s *Story About Feeling*, Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s poem “Municipal Gum,” first appearing in *The Dawn Is at Hand* from 1966, narrates the biocultural significance of trees. In the form of an elegy addressed to an urban gum, the poem discloses a worldview shared among Aboriginal cultures of trees as encompassed within a network of human-to-non-human kinship relations. The repercussions of settler colonialism, however, impinge upon the gum’s physical vitality in the degraded landscape: “Gumtree in the city street, / Hard bitumen around your feet” (Noonuccal ll. 1–5). The narrator engenders empathy for the gum by drawing equivalences between human and tree anatomies in images such as “your feet.” Later, the gum appears “castrated,” “broken” with a “hung head” and “listless mien,” signifying its isolation and hopelessness (ll. 8, 10). Although a “fellow citizen,” the tree has become an outlier estranged from its own ancestral ecological network (l. 15). The poem’s final question calls attention to the interspecies trauma of Australian colonialism: “What have they done to us?” (l. 16).

Poet, activist, and educator Lionel Fogarty’s “Black Gum Trunk” from 1982 recuperates traditional Indigenous understandings of arboreal life including the crucial role of trees within fire regimes. Fogarty’s use of the four-syllable phrases “Hey, him silly” and “Him life finished” rhythmically evokes the friction between Anglo-European and Aboriginal Australian perceptions of trees (Fogarty 127, ll. 34–35). The poem deftly satirizes the dominant Anglo-Australian view of talking with trees as “silly”—that is, as reserved for the domain of myths, folklore, popular culture, and non-scientific discourse. Human-tree relations are mediated in the work through the senses of taste (“Gum fetched sweeter”) and touch (“Hug sugar gum numb”) as well as empathic identification (“Laid. Spread out. Poor gum trunk done”)(Fogarty 127, ll., 5, 8, 14). As evident in other poems by Aboriginal Australian writers, the image

of the lonely tree symbolizes the consequences of (neo)colonialism for people and plants, especially the repercussions of diminished landscape firing practices.

For poet, playwright, and Aboriginal rights campaigner Jack Davis, trees impart a prevailing sense of belonging, solace, and identification. Published in 1992 in his collection *Black Life*, Davis's poem "Forest Giant" opens with a direct address to the solitary tree: "You have stood there for centuries / arms gaunt reaching for the sky / your roots in cadence / with the heart beat of the soil" (Davis 4, ll. 1–4). These opening images, in particular, evoke the deep temporality of Australian trees in the Aboriginal worldview. Rather than a one-dimensional symbol of morality, virtue, or nationalism, the tree is a sentient presence—"arms gaunt reaching for the sky"—and, moreover, a witness to ecocide and the denial of sustainable landscape regimes such as low-intensity, intermittent burning. Davis's narrative affirms the intimate entanglements between human and tree lives in assertions such as "Now you and I / bleed in sorrow and in silence" (Davis 4, ll. 10–11). In the concluding lines of the poem, the desecration of the tree's body is analogized to the defilement of the female body.

Like Noonuccal's poem "Municipal Gum," Goernpil poet and activist Lisa Bellear's "Beautiful Yuroke Red River Gum," originally published in 1996 in her collection *Dreaming in Urban Areas*, concerns urban trees and their ecologies. The scarce trees that remain in the postcolonial city landscape are "survivors of genocide" who "watch / and camp out, live, breathe in various / parks 'round Fitzroy," a suburb of Melbourne (Bellear 15, ll. 18–20). Native trees are being cleared for urban infrastructure and replaced by species imported from Europe. As also apparent in the poetry of Fogarty and Davis, images of lonely red river gums evoke the ecocide—or, even, arborcide, the eradication of trees—beginning with colonization in the late-eighteenth century and persisting into the present. Bellear references "a scarred tree which overlooks the / Melbourne Cricket Ground" (15, ll. 16–17). Although this allusion suggests environmental vandalism, it also evokes the extensive cultural tradition of dendroglyphs, or carved trees. For Aboriginal societies, the ceremonial carving of trees, including eucalypts and

boabs, has constituted a form of artistic and cultural expression for many thousands of years. These trees, often old, gnarled, and solitary, also impart messages for subsequent generations about ethical practices involving the landscape.

Moreover, poet and academic Peter Minter's ode "The Tree, The Tree" extends the tradition within Aboriginal Australian poetry of lyricizing arboreal life and, in doing so, affirms humankind's interdependencies with trees through shared subjectivities. As also seen in Davis' work, Minter's trees are subjects commanding poetic address. The highly lyrical poem opens with, "What am I, the tree / who stands before thee / just as thee are tree for me, / Or I am thee" (Minter ll. 1-4). Minter's verseframes the tree as an "addressee" throughout, thereby asserting the agency and autonomy of trees as communicative subjects, echoing Aboriginal Australian Creation narratives. Comparably, "Story Tree" is an epistolary poem presumably based on an email exchange between Native American poet Joy Harjo, the outgoing United States Poet Laureate, and Aboriginal Australian poet Ali Cobby Eckermann of the Yankunytjatjara/Kokatha people of South Australia. The narrator in Harjo's section of the collaborative poem reflects on her son who labours on the railroads to which Eckermann replies, "There are no trains here. The railway lines have been removed, the station house vacant in disrepair. I wait by the broken platform for my son's return. There is no view of him. I no longer know where he lives" (Eckermann and Harjo, "Dear Sister" para. 1). Eckermann's personal reflection shifts into an ecological imperative as she considers the "millions of trees...demolished to build the railroad. Now barely a tree survives" (Eckermann and Harjo, "Dear Sister," para. 2). Yet, "old trees hold memories" and, again, the survivors are witnesses to widespread arbicide underlain by arborphobia, or fear of unknown trees and forests (Eckermann and Harjo, "Dear Sister" para. 2). However, despite efforts at ecological regeneration, for the poem's speaker, "There is no returning. There is no re-turn. Truth is a lonely weight to carry" (Eckermann and Harjo, "Dear Sister," para. 3). The narrative thus links personal and cultural isolation to the legacy of ecological devastation in Australia.

Conclusion: Two Views of Fire

Concerning the biocultural traditions that embed burning regimes, contemporary Aboriginal Australian poetry and art reveal the abiding commitment of Indigenous people to land and culture, including the sustainable use of fire. Through their ecological creativity, writers such as Lionel Fogarty keep the flame of the poet-activist tradition of Oodgeroo Noonuccal alive and burning. In conclusion, two poems offer contrastive views of fire—that is, on the one hand, fire as an element of cultural and environmental balance and, on the other, fire as an agent of destruction and suffering. Beginning with the latter, Ali Cobby Eckermann’s visual or concrete poem “Thunder Raining Poison” from 2016 confronts the impact of nuclear testing on her traditional lands at Maralinga, South Australia, by the British government from the 1940s to ’60s. In the shape of a bomb, the poem communicates the trauma of neocolonialism in Australia, particularly the pernicious assumption of terra nullius—of the land as empty and unoccupied. Eckermann makes use of questions and repetition to convey the trauma of this history for Aboriginal people. The final three lines read, “two thousand. two thousand or more / our hearts grow as we mourn for our Land / it’s part of us. we love it. poisoned and all (Eckermann 151, ll. 36–38). Eckermann evokes the extreme peril of fire-out-of-balance in the form of the atom bomb, indubitably a symptom of settler society’s distorted relationship to fire.

In contrast, “Yúya Karrabúrra (*Fire Is Burning*),” originally published 2018, by poet-activist Alice Eather, addresses the capacity of fire to heal and reconcile longstanding cultural divisions. As a woman of both Aboriginal and European ancestry, Eather must negotiate the deep fractures lingering in postcolonial Australian society today. She writes, “Sitting in the middle of this collision / My mission is to bring / Two divided worlds to sit beside this fire / And listen / Through this skin I know where I belong” (Eather 30, ll. 31–35). And the poem continues: “My ancestors dance in the stars / And their tongues are in the flames / And they tell me: / You have to keep the fire alive” (Eather 30, ll. 39–42). The compellingly hopeful tenor of Eather’s poem is crucial as Australia continues to grapple with the precarities of climate change, catastrophic bush-

fires, and biodiversity loss in the Anthropocene. Alongside scientific approaches to traditional burning and other regenerative ecological practices, the poetry and art of fire will continue to be essential to the Anthropocene debate in Australia.

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A Representation of the Sovereignty of Nature in Henry Kulet's *Vanishing Herds*

Samson Maleya Lusinga and Mugo Muhia

Introduction

The claim that humanity is presently on the threshold of a new geologic epoch christened ‘anthropocene’ was first mooted by the Australian chemist and Nobel laureate, Paul Crutzen and a Marine scientist, Eugene Stoermer in an article published in 2000. Etymologically, the term ‘anthropocene’ combines the prefix “anthropo” signifying “human” and “cene”, the standard suffix for “epoch” in geologic time. The anthropocene is designated as a new period either after or within the Holocene, the current epoch, which began approximately 10,000 years ago with the end of the glacial period (*The Encyclopedia of Earth*). Admittedly, human civilization is currently faced with an imminent environmental cataclysm that threatens its very existence. Our planet, scientists warn, is rapidly warming due to anthropogenic environmental pollution. The dawn of this disturbing reality is evidenced by the frequency of hurricanes, droughts, flooding and forest fires currently being witnessed in various parts of the world (Okpadah 187). While the concerns raised by the scientific community are valid insofar as human’s myopic exploitation and neglect of nature is concerned, this paper is of the view that the assumptions and prescriptive claims advanced by proponents of the concept are bound to raise some ethical concerns. Critics have already pointed out the concept’s skewed representation of the term ‘nature’ as an offshoot of the hegemonic Western philosophic thought and practice. The concept’s universalization of nature ignores the existence of alternative modes of knowing what is fundamentally different from the dominant western perspective. Commenting on some of the inconsistencies presented by the idea of the anthropocene, Jeremy Baskin states that:

The Anthropocene concept appears to promotes [sic] a dual movement in relation to nature. Firstly, what nature does exist is held to be largely a constructed or heavily-modified

consequence of human activity. Deprived of exteriority, agency and otherness, nature is de-natured and we are held to be post-nature. Second, humanity is re-inserted into 'nature' only to simultaneously be elevated within it and above it: 'In this new era, nature is us'. (10).

The rejection of nature's subjectivity and the elevation of humanity above what can be described as the 'remnants' of nature is quite untenable. This state of affairs raises a number of critical questions. For instance, what exactly does nature entail? Does it belong to humanity or does humanity belong to it? The positioning of human species as the most dominant force in the universe seems to suggest the 'death' of nature in this age of the anthropocene. In practical terms, the new status conferred upon human race makes it the new creator (God) with absolute powers to alter, re-design and re-create the universe in its own image. This in our view is a dangerous proposition. It should be recalled that the privileging of human subjectivity, scientific truth and rationality over the 'irrationality' of religious beliefs, myths, and traditional social order is a basic tenet of Enlightenment that has since the advent of Industrial Revolution been viewed as a marker of modern civilization. It is this principle of 'scientific truth and rationality' that has driven humanity into the current quagmire of global ecological crisis. The study will go on to examine how nature is represented in Henry Ole Kulet's novel *Vanishing Herds*.

Nature as a Self-Articulating Subject in Ole Kulet's Vanishing Herds

Vanishing Herds (2011) is Henry Ole Kulet's seventh novel and undeniably one of his most compelling creative works. Set in the East African Savannah, the novel grapples with the critical issue of anthropogenic environmental degradation. The novel is based on the tribulations of a young Maasai couple—Kedoki and Norpisia whose epic journey through the wilderness provides a window through which the destruction of the physical environment can be viewed. Additionally, the text catalogues the challenges faced by a pastoralist community's attempt to come to terms with the socio-economic realities of a fast-evolving postcolonial society.

In *Vanishing Herds*, Kulet conceptualizes nature as an active self-articulating subject; a conscious living organism that is highly sensitive and responsive to anthropogenic misuse and abuse. The fashioning of nature as an active and speaking agent subverts the privileged human subjectivity underpinned by the anthropocene concept. Fundamentally, the natural order is an egalitarian one in which there is no hierarchy that puts humans on top of everything else (Dryzek 195). This basic deep ecology principle reverberates in the novel's representation of the natural world. An appreciation of the spiritual underpinnings of the relationship between humans and the physical environment is central to understanding indigenous communities' reverence for nature. The novel celebrates the interconnectedness of the physical environment and the supernatural realm. This holistic perspective of human collective destiny with other living creatures on earth has a religious expression among indigenous communities (Tangwa 389). In the novel, the manifestation of nature's consciousness is premised on two female characters—Norpisia, the novel's protagonist and her unnamed grandmother; an enkoiboni (medicine woman) reputed to possess supernatural powers. The author uses Norpisia's deceased grandmother as nature's 'voice' in the text. She is the link between the physical landscape and the supernatural realm. Her presence in the text undergirds Maasai's traditional view that regards the natural and the supernatural realm as interwoven and interdependent domains. Throughout the text, the grandmother uses her supernatural powers to clairvoyantly prevail upon Norpisia to collude with nature to fight against anthropogenic environmental degradation. The fight against humans is a crucial motif in the novel. It foregrounds Mother Nature's fury at human's ecological transgressions.

Kulet regards the arrogance and insensitivity exhibited by those who harm the physical environment as an offshoot of colonial denigration of indigenous cultural norms that recognizes the interconnectedness of humans and non-human life forms. This anthropocentric shortsightedness is arguably an offshoot of Judeo-Christian theological traditions. This perspective is given credence by the Historian Lynn White. In an article titled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" he contends:

Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion that the world has seen ... Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions ... not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends" (25).

This proposition is evident in the biblical Book of Gen.1:28 in which God prevails upon Adam and Eve to be "fruitful and multiply ... [to] fill the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over ... all the wild beasts that move upon the earth". Thus according to White's thesis, western religious traditions have desacralized Mother Nature and encouraged her exploitation by humans who were seen as separate and superior. Interestingly, a cursory glimpse at most ancient religious text reveals a counter-narrative to the doctrine of human dominion. For instance, in the ancient Mayan sacred text, Popol Vuh, plants and animals are portrayed as the first living beings to be created and subsequently, they helped in the creation of human beings. Humans were made of corn (plant life), and animals helped to collect the food which entered into the flesh and blood of the first men and women (Montejo176). Thus the Mayan creation account, unlike its Judeo-Christian counterpart, celebrates the interconnect-edness that subsists between humans, plants, and nonhuman animals. Kulet portrays the abuse of this collective survival principle as an affront to the ecological sensibilities of the Maa community as epitomized by Masintet's disgruntlement at the senseless violation of the Mau forest. He tells Kedoki:

During the period you were away, people invaded forests, cut down trees, cleared the undergrowth and turned thousands of acres into farmlands. The trees that were not suitable for timber were not spared either. They have been stripped of their barks and they now look like ghostly skeletons. Their only use before they are cut down for charcoal is to provide perching points for flocks of angry staring crows. (62)

The text portrays the myopic invasion and destruction of the Mau forest complex; the most significant water tower in Kenya by settler communities in postcolonial dispensation as a manifestation

of unbridled capitalism. The sacrilegious ‘grabbing’ of the community’s ancestral land is therefore a source of immense psychological discomfort. In an interview with Fitzhenry, Meitames Olol-Dapash; the founder of Maasai Environmental Resource Coalition, underlines the Maa community’s veneration for the physical landscape:

... land is not just the foundation of our livelihood; it is also the foundation for our spirituality. Land is central to our spiritual beliefs because we believe that God dwells not only in and beyond the deep blue skies (Keperror shumata) but also in the thick forests, rivers, and beneath the earth ... it is from the forest that leaves and barks of holy trees such as the olorien and olrete are obtained and used in the process of offering sacrifices to God, the creator of the forests, mountains, lowlands, and the people, their cattle, and wild animals. (1)

Though the Maa people view the forest with great spiritual reverence, there are sites within the forest ecosystem that are revered as the abode of ancestral spirits. Most of these sites are normally found on slopes, hills, and around natural springs. Mortal beings are strictly prohibited from entering or cutting down trees in such sacred sites embodied in the text by the Medungi forest. According to legend, “if a tree was cut in this forest, it would bleed profusely and the rest of the tress would wail and scream like tormented human beings. The blood of the felled trees would flow to the rivers, turn them red and poison man and beast” (63). Such taboos anthropomorphized the physical environment as a conscious living entity with ability to experience pain, bleed, and retaliate when enraged. More importantly, they helped to deter human encroachments on forests thus making sacred groves important sanctuaries for plants, animals, birds, and insects. This explains why sacred groves are presently regarded as important sites of biodiversity conservation. The novel therefore depicts the desecration of the Medungi as the final straw that eventually sets nature on a collision course with humans.

As indicated earlier in this paper, Norpisia’s grandmother personifies nature’s consciousness in the novel. Once in a while, the old woman would appear to her grand-daughter in a vision to ‘voice’ nature’s discontentment with humanity. In one of these visions, we are told:

Her grandmother surfaced and pointed at her scolding, accusing her of not obeying her instructions to go to the forest in the highlands and join the animals to fight the forest invaders. Then, the human and animal conflict was replayed. She saw men with spears facing a combined force of angry elephants, rhinos, buffaloes, giraffes, wildebeest, zebras, elands, lions, leopards, cheetahs and many other animals that stood their ground, declaring that they had much right to the forest, just like man did. (70)

Here, Mother Nature's ire at anthropogenic violation of wild animals' rights is exemplified by the old woman's distressed spirit. In the vision, wild animals are represented as rational subjects endowed with the ability to reason and fight for their rights. This fashioning of nonhuman nature as self-articulating subjects is a deliberate departure from the nature/culture binary of Western philosophy. The novel therefore endorses a biocentric consciousness premised on equality and interconnectedness of humans and other nonhuman live forms.

Nature as a 'Malevolent' Force

Oftentimes, media coverage of 'natural disasters' such as floods, famines, landslides, earthquakes, tsunamis, and droughts is replete with ominous images. 'Nature's monstrous force', 'Nature's blind fury' and 'Dark angel of doom' are some of the common eye-catching headlines that describe the devastation caused by nature. For instance, in its coverage of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, *The New York Times*, ominously reports that "The deadly wave was unimaginably big, stretching to the horizons, ... it struck suddenly, looming up with a roar like a monster from the deep". Similarly, *The Guardian* in its headline depicts the tsunami as a highly unpredictably phenomenon "Out of the blue, a deadly wall of water". This negative representation of nature as a giant, extraordinarily powerful, violent, frightening and cruel creature tends to hide the real socio-economic factors underlying such disasters. While it may be true that some phenomena such as earthquakes and tsunamis may have a natural cause and humans' ability to mitigate their impact is limited, not all 'natural' disasters are exclusively occasioned by nature's 'blind'

fury. In fact, the term ‘natural disaster’ is a misnomer as it potentially depicts nature as the villain and mask humans’ agency in such calamities. In *Vanishing Herds*, Kulet is critical of the representation of nature as a ‘blind’ malevolent force. This tendency is viewed in the novel as an aspect of the nature/culture dualism that has separated humans from nature. The novel regards ‘natural disasters’ as a manifestation of nature’s sovereignty; a just punishment dispensed by Mother Nature for humanity’s ecological transgressions. This view is a cultural imperative among the Maa people. Thus as mere custodians of the universe; the human species is duty bound to honour and respect the sacredness of the earth. This commitment entails upholding the deep ecology principle of interconnectedness of all life forms on earth.

Kulet makes extensive use of the apocalyptic trope in *Vanishing Herds* to portray the awesome force of nature. The novel makes frequent references to the impending catastrophic destruction of the human species for violating ecological laws. Interestingly, the build up to the imminent environmental apocalypse is analogously modeled on the biblical account of the great deluge recorded in Gen.7:18 where God is reportedly enraged by mankind’s transgressions. However, unlike in the scriptures where God vows to destroy from the face of the earth all living things, Mother Nature’s anger in Kulet’s novel is specifically directed at humans for the violation of nonhuman animals’ rights. Thus like in the days of Noah, Norpisia is instructed by Mother Nature (God) through her grandmother to “go to the forest in the highlands and join the animals to fight the forest invaders” (70). Norpisia is therefore the chosen one: an environmental priestess anointed by nature to spearhead the fight against environmental degradation. The geographical significance of the ‘highlands’ in the grandmother’s decree is analogous to Noah’s biblical ark. The elevated landscape is meant to cushion Norpisia and her companions from the perils of the imminent deluge. Thus on the eve of the deluge, Norpisia and her husband “decided to set up their camp for that night on top of the ridge overlooking the vast cleared lands that used to be a dense forest” (105). The approaching deluge is preceded by thunder and lightning and ominous signs in the skyline:

The setting sun sent up giant red rays that streaked across the sky like the light silky thread which spiders leave on grass and between bushes. Norpisia watched the luminous display for a while. The strange light in the sky worried her. At Olomuruti where she grew up, the sunset signified danger. She recalled that evening when bandits struck her father's homestead. The setting sun thus had sent up giant red rays, like the one she was watching. The sight was unnerving and she wished she could discern its meaning. (106)

It is instructive to note that in Maa cosmology, powerful forces of nature such as floods, thunder, drought, and lightning are a manifestation of Enkai's (God) grandeur and majesty. Enkai according to Meitamer Olol-Dapash has two qualities "Enkai Narok, which is associated with the Good, the Black, the Superior, and the North, and is embodied by thunder and rain, and Enkai Na-nyokie, which is associated with the Angry, the Red, the Minor, and the South, and is frequently embodied by lightning (Fitzhenry 1). This description undergirds the awesome power of nature over humanity. Enkai's dualistic nature is symbolized in the novel by thunder, rain, and lightning. These elements are a constant reminder that nature is alive and capable of hitting back when provoked. The following passage aptly demonstrates nature's supremacy over human frailty as shown by Norpisia and Kedoki's desperate struggle to save their souls in the wake of nature's rage:

They staggered and fell when another burst of lightning flashed and a loud roar of thunder shook the ground violently. They skidded over the slippery ground and darted fast, past a tree that had been struck by lightning and was burning. Before the fire died out, they saw some trees leaning precariously. Then another rumble and the trees began to fall. (109)

Curiously, as Masintet and Lembarta frantically fight to save their souls and Kedoki's cattle from the raging waters, wild animals as if on cue had sought refuge from higher grounds:

All species of animals had converged there. An agitated herd of elephants stood uneasily on one side, occasionally trumpeting noisily. Buffaloes, zebra, wildebeest and all kinds of gazelles and antelopes mingled with their cattle, sheep and goats, and quietly stood in the rain. Lions, leopards and hyenas hid in thickets, occasionally growling to assert their presence. However, none was aggressive to the other and none was fearful. The plateau was like the legendary Noah's ark. Only human beings were resented by the animals ... (112)

The text's representation of non-human animals as possessing an instinctive capacity to discern natural disasters in advance is a phenomenon that has been observed globally in regions that are prone to earthquakes and tsunamis. In Sri Lanka during the 2004 tsunami, nonhuman animals (domestic and wild) reportedly survived the disaster by instinctively moving to safer grounds prior to the onset of the deadly waves. The tsunami claimed tens of thousands of lives human lives with a few nonhuman animals among the victims. This unusual behaviour exhibited by nonhuman animals prior to the tsunami suggests that they are innately equipped with a sophisticated disaster warning mechanism. Whether we choose to call this mechanism instinct or by any other name, the mere existence of the faculty deconstructs the notion that humans are the only perceptive beings in the universe. It is worth noting that apart from Norpisia and her companions who had been forewarned about the impending floods, the rest of the human population is literally caught off guard. This shows that nature is not blind in its wrath as commonly assumed. It is the offending human population that is often destined for retribution for its arrogance and insensitivity towards the welfare of other members of the universe. After the deluge, Mother Nature is presented as beaming with satisfaction. The narrator says "the sun shone radiantly over the landscape" (110). It is as if the sun is satisfied with the damage inflicted upon humans.

Soon after the floods, nature unleashes a second bout of retribution in the form of a biting drought. The landscape is relentlessly scorched by the blazing sun drying up streams, crops, and pasture for livestock. The ferocity of the drought is so severe that by the time Kedoki and his companion cross Enkipai river, we are told:

... the drought had become so severe, that whole plain across the river had become a sprawling limitless stretch of brown bare land, with patches of desiccated brush that dotted the hillocks. On the distant hills, there appeared an occasional tree, beyond which lay a desolate wasteland. (124).

The deluge and drought are represented as justifiable retributions from nature. They are a warning to the human species against engaging in activities that undermine and violate nature's sanctity. Thus having abused nature's sacredness, humans have no option but to seek atonement. It is at this critical moment that Eddah Sein, the renowned conservationist, is introduced in the novel as an environmental prophetess sent by nature to lead humans in the restoration and resuscitation of the depleted forests and the degraded environment. Her messianic mission is to re-establish humans' wise stewardship on earth. As a concept, wise stewardship is essentially a reaction against Judeo-Christian doctrine of human dominion over nonhuman nature. The ecocritic Linda Hogan, in her book titled *Dwellings*, underscores the importance of upholding the principle of wise stewardship in the way we related with non-human nature:

We are of the animal world. We are part of the cycle of growth and decay. Even having tried so hard to see ourselves apart, and so often without a love for even our own biology we are in relationship with the rest of the planet, and that connectedness tells us we must consider the way we see ourselves and the rest of nature. (114-115).

The reconceptualization of humanity's relationship with nonhuman nature is critical to the restoration of the degraded environment. It is a message that is fundamental to the reading of *Vanishing Herds*. Towards the end of the narrative, Eddah Sein, the prophetess leads the local community in a reforestation campaign. In a speech at the launch of a local tree planting campaign, she impresses upon villagers the need for a programme of reforestation "If trees were planted and nurtured to maturity, and human interference curbed the land would heal and the environment restored" (168). The villagers heed her call and embark on a massive tree planting campaign. Thus

within no time as the narrator observes “The Inkiito river that was drying up, now looked robust and rumbled on with cascading waters, its banks flourishing with deep, green undergrowth. Rising up beyond the tableland, was the breathtaking vista of Oldonyo-Orasha mountain” (199). The bubbling Inkiito river symbolizes the spirit of nature’s grandeur and splendour. Most importantly, the novel uses the rainbow metaphor to mark the restoration of peace between human and nonhuman nature:

The sun behind them illuminated the colours and shapes of the mountain rocks, the vegetation around it and contrasted it with the now upcoming dense forest that the Eorr-Natasha people had planted and nurtured to maturity. While they watched, the sun and the cascading waters of Inkiito river created a glowing rainbow that straddled the mountain in a beautiful multi-coloured arc. (199).

The rainbow is symbolic. It portends the end of the ecological apocalypse. In its biblical context, it symbolizes the sealing of the covenant between God and humankind in which God promised never again to annihilate human civilization. The novel therefore ends on a promising note; a bright future for the local community is assured as long as they learn to respect and uphold the sanctity of all life forms on earth. Destabilization of the eco-system by humankind as shown in the text is bound to trigger a backlash from Mother Nature. Thus the torrential rains that ensue immediately after the rejuvenation of the physical environment can be read as a demonstration of nature’s contentment with the local community. It is a necessary restorative gesture from the heavens. Though the torrential rains nearly kill Kedoki, Norpisia and their son and robbed them of their wealth; it is Kedoki’s hubris that is responsible for the loss of his livestock. He unwisely taunts nature by attempting to cross the flooded Ilkarian river. By disregarding his wife’s sound advice to defer the crossing of the river for a later day, Kedoki effectively seals his own fate and that of his family. Thus throwing caution to the wind, he drags his wife and their domestic animals into the treacherous river. The ensuing catastrophic scene witnessed by Sein, Lembarta, and Masintet aptly illustrates humanity’s powerlessness in the face of nature’s awesome might:

... they watched in horror, they saw the swift flooding water sweep away Kedoki's cattle, sheep, goats and donkeys. They witnessed the herd literally vanishing downstream. They could see Kedoki running up and down frantically, shunting wildly. His little boy, Kinyamal, was on his shoulders, howling and crying his heart out. Norpisia was nowhere to be seen. (214-215).

The passage underscores the amazing power of nature over humans. Indeed, nature does not need humans; it is humans who need nature. Thus as Kedoki and his young family bitterly found out, it is their actions that determines their fate.

Nature as Pharmacy

In the preface to their work, *Plants, People, and Culture: The Science of Ethnobotany*, Michael Balick and Paul Cox contend that "... the very course of human culture has been deeply influenced by plants, particularly plants that have been used by indigenous peoples around the world" (vii). This observation resonates well in Kulet's *Vanishing Herds*. The text represents nature as a healer and a trove of innumerable medicinal plants species. More significantly, the novel highlights the interconnectedness of the material and the spiritual realm as a fundamental facet of indigenous medicine. As pointed out earlier in our discussion, sacred groves such as the Medungi are venerated spaces within the forest ecosystem. These locations act as reservoirs of rare plant species considered holy by the local community. The forest is therefore the community's pharmacy; a vast laboratory where trainees receive lessons through empirical observations. Norpisia learns from her grandmother a cocktail of mystical arts that include clairvoyance, divination, and incantation. The old woman is described as "an expert in mixing and preparation of herbal medicine [who] ... took Norpisia with her into the forest where she exposed her to various types of roots, barks, berries and nuts from which she derived her medicinal preparations" (12). Kulet is critical of the skepticism shown to indigenous medicine by modern medical practitioners. The lackluster reception of the efficacy of indigenous medicine in the modern medical field is probably a manifestation of colonial epistemic prejudice. David Arnold, a science historian at the

University of Manchester opines that during the colonial era Western medicine was taken “as a prime exemplar of the constructive and beneficial effects of European rule ... [it] was to the imperial mind... one of its most indisputable claims to legitimacy” (Balick and Cox 36). This epistemic assumption is contested in the text through the representation of traditional healers as highly skilled persons with extensive specialized knowledge on the healing power of plants and herbs. The novel draws an important distinction between western and indigenous medicine. The success of western medicine is often credited on the rationality and precision of scientific knowledge that is often viewed as a status symbol of western civilization. This assumption stems from a dualistic mindset that polarizes humans from the spiritual realm. The novel makes extensive references to a wide array of plants drawn from the local landscape that have been used for generations by the Maa community to effectively treat a number of ailments. In the following passage, the novel highlights the healing properties of herbal medicine:

She [Norpisia] searched for herbs that she would use to treat the swelling on Kedoki’s leg. She found olmasiligi with its thick large succulent leaves, uprooted several whole plants that she was to heat over the fire. She would place the hot, fleshy leaves on the swollen part of his leg. She would also boil the whole plant to make a wash, for it contained skin-healing and wound-separating curatives.

... she saw the tiny leaves of olmagiro-giro, she picked them to add to the solution. She knew they were excellent for healing anything from bites to boils, even severe ulcers and wounds. Further out of the forest where it was dryer, she dug out roots of olkonyl to add to his soup as a general antidote for poisons and other toxic reactions. They already had olki-tolosua roots that they often added to their soup to help boost energy and warm their bodies.

She was quite pleased to find the bright green leaves of olosiate which she valued most for the antiseptic and quick-healing properties. They were also effective in keeping flies away from a wound. She would pound them and make a strong solution that she would often splash on Kedoki’s wound.

Growing at the sunny edges of the woods, she found olcani-lenkashe herb, which was not only a good fly-repellent when made into an infusion for an external wash, but an excellent addition to the soup that made a person sweat profusely and helped to open up pores on the skin. She then dug up tubers and collected twigs, berries and barks of trees and carried them all to their temporary camp. (85 – 86)

Here the author underpins the existence of a vibrant indigenous knowledge system based on an intimate communal kinship with the natural landscape. The use of indigenous names for uniquely native plant species foregrounds the community's rich botanical knowledge that was acquired through practical experience and transmitted orally from one generation to the other.

Nature as Epitome of Beauty

Nature is undoubtedly endowed with awe-inspiring beauty. Humans have throughout history sought artistic inspiration from the splendour and tranquility of the natural environment (Buell 2). In *Vanishing Herds*, Kulet uses inspirational images to capture the supreme beauty of the Savannah. The text depicts objects of nature as representations of Enkai's splendor and magnificence. In this regard, therefore, the physical pleasure experienced by humans from direct contact with nature is viewed as a spiritual kinship with the Creator as revealed in the following passage:

Outside the kraal, she walked through the damp grass that was dripping wet with dew, towards a small narrow stream that flowed between giant trees. As she walked, she sensed the rising of the sun in the east. She observed the eastern sky shade from glowing grey to soft blue, with a scattering of pink clouds, reflecting the glory of the morning sun. She watched the slowly changing patterns with wonder, held by the magnificence of the black side of the sunrise (85).

Here Norpsia is totally immersed in the spell cast by the solitude and the sublimity of the natural environment. One can sense a mystical connection between Norpsia's inner calmness and the natural

harmonization of colours enacted by the enchanting glow of the sun. The natural environment embodied by the sun, the stream, and the vegetation stands out in a symbiotic relationship with Norpisia. Norpisia's mystical experience is echoed by Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the founding fathers of American transcendentalism in his groundbreaking book *Nature*:

To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds will separate between him and vulgar things. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. (Bradley and Long 356)

Thus for Norpisia, her communion with nature in the woods is presented in the text as a spiritual experience that enables her to enjoy what Emerson calls nature's 'perpetual presence of the sublime'. In another passage, the author weaves a picturesque description of the internationally acclaimed annual wildebeest migration across the Mara River:

What a spectacular scene! He [Kedoki] recalled with a reminiscent smile, how he stood there entranced at the breathtaking view before his eyes. The scene was still so fresh in his mind that he could still see the wildebeests with their compact sturdy bodies as they jumped into the water, as if pushed into it by a power they could not resist. They struggled against a strong tide, their heavily built chests and shoulders rippling, as they swam across the swiftly flowing river. They jostled in the water, pushing one another with their large heads that were protected by their massive short black horns. Some of them were killed by crocodiles that waited for them at the edge of the water. Those that managed to cross the river crowded together at the river bank, as they struggled to run uphill. As they scrambled, their small hooves raised red dust that covered them, making them look as if they were engulfed in a ball of fire. (38)

The breathtaking drama enacted by tens of thousands of wildebeests, zebras and antelopes as they struggle to cross the treacherous Mara River is one of the magical wonders of Mother Nature. It projects nature's glory and grandeur manifest in the animal's awe inspiring battle for self-preservation. The astounding display of the undulating rhythm of nature in the Savannah is undoubtedly a major manifestation of the perpetual sublimity of the natural world.

The text also depicts nature as a place of refuge, a sacred temple where humans can seek solace and tranquility from the bustle and hustle of life. Seeking refuge in nature is therapeutic as it helps in the restoration of inner equilibrium and peace in times of uncertainties and deepens the spiritual connection between humans and the landscape. Thus earlier in the novel when Norpisia is summoned by her father from her grandmother's village, the narrator reports "When they arrived, they were informed that the family was in the nearby forest, where her father often retreated when he was in need of privacy or when he wanted to slaughter a sheep exclusively for his family" (13). Apparently, Norpisia's father retreats to the forest to seek divine enlightenment regarding Kedoki's proposition to marry his daughter. This eco-therapeutic perspective is a common aspect of Maa epistemology since the forest is revered as Enkai's abode.

Conclusion

Kulet's portrayal of nature in *Vanishing Herds* is influenced by a culture that ascribes great reverence to nature as a conscious living entity. The natural environment, according to indigenous communities' philosophy and practice, is an embodiment of God's sovereignty. This spiritual ecological ethic is fundamental to understanding the harmonious relationship that had existed since the dawn of time between indigenous communities and the physical environment. As the novel has clearly shown, the violation of indigenous ethics is undoubtedly responsible for ecological disequilibrium experienced in postcolonial states. Thus, Kulet's *Vanishing Herds* can be read as an indictment of humanity's myopic design to emasculate and silence Mother Nature. The future of humanity as ecological citizens of planet Earth as revealed in the novel is not necessarily a

preserve of science and technology. The ecological wounds inflicted by humanity on the physical environment can genuinely be healed through a spiritual re-connection with Mother Nature by promoting harmonious, family-like relationships between ourselves and other parts of nature.

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Ecocide and Ecological Resistance: An Eco-Deconstructive Reading of Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful we Were*

Jonah Caleb Monday and Kehinde Oluwabukola

Introduction

Ecological disaster, pollution and degradation of the natural environment have created a fertile ground for philosophical discourse in literary studies where critics and theorists give voice and tackle issues on ecocide. It is a world that is “increasingly lost to pollution, contamination and industry-sponsored bio-disaster”; a world “that mankind is efficiently committing ecocide, making the planet inhospitable for life of any kind” (Nayar 328-329); thus, a world of “habitat loss, species extinction, and climate change” (Fritsch, et al. 1). Hence, the need to have an analytical view for sensitizing the public about the devastating and life stifling effects of industrialization, pollution, and ecological disaster or environmental hazard on human and non-human life led critics and theorists of environmental studies – such as William Rueckert, Cheryl Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, Harold Fromm, and Timothy Morton – to develop a conceptual framework known as “Eco-criticism”. The advent of Eco-criticism within the praxis of cultural and literary studies is not to subvert or halt the ecological activities of imperialist-capitalist exploitation of nature; rather, it sets out to investigate the process whereby “theoretically informed readings of cultural texts can contribute not only to consciousness raising but also look into the politics of development and the construction of ‘nature’” (Nayar 329). Therefore, a critical conception of nature is a product of theoretically informed discourse.

The term “Eco-criticism” has been used interchangeably with environmental studies, nature writing, and green studies in order to describe an ideological movement or environmental literary studies that gained attention in the mid-eighties and flourished in the early nineties as different departments began to dedicate journals to nature writing and organize literary conferences. Some institutes

established new institutes for nature and culture studies, and some departments incorporated green studies in their curricula and offer it as a “minor” course in literary studies (Glotfelty xvii.). However, it is important to note that the term eco-criticism was first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay entitled “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” where he defines the term as “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (cited in Glotfelty xx). In this regard, eco-criticism is a critical approach to the relationship between “literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty xviii). In a similar manner, Richard Kerridge offers a perceptive description of ecocriticism:

The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis (5).

The above indicates that the core task of an ecocritic is to spot key arguments on the sustainable use of nature towards identifying the salient ideas that contribute to environmental despoliation as well as those which can ensure a healthier natural environment as represented in any form of textual representation. The need for the sustainable use of nature is hinged on the argument that implicit in a healthy natural environment is the continuous sustainability of man since man gains his basic needs from nature. This opens up the argument that man, his culture, and entire existence is hinged on the viability of nature. In view of the above, Buell (2005), contends that eco-criticism focuses on the complex interrelationship between environment and culture. Central to ecocritical literary theory therefore are some fundamental questions:

How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In addition to race, class, and gender, should place

become a new critical category? Do men write about nature differently than women do? In what ways has literacy itself affected humankind's relationship to the natural world? How has the concept of wilderness changed over time? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture? What view of nature informs U.S. Government reports, corporate advertising, and televised nature documentaries, and to what rhetorical effect? What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies? How is science itself open to literary analysis? What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics? (Glotfelty, xviii-xix)

Buell's view emphasizes the fact that ecocriticism is a multidisciplinary approach to the study of the natural environment as represented in literary texts. There has however been theoretical discontent on the practice of adopting scientific methods and non-literary texts to study literary texts (see Sarver, 1994 and Dixon, 2011). Although, eco-criticism might appear to be nature-centred, there is no unified approach to the study of eco-narratives and eco-discourse. In essence, eco-criticism transcends the idea of generalization, codification, definition, limitation in terms of its methodology and poetics; instead, it opens itself to irresolvable contradictions and divergent methodologies or ideologies. For instance, some group of students might be asked to do an eco-critical reading of Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful we Were*. Such reading is to engage the students in different ideological positions at work within the premise of eco-criticism: eco-feminism, eco-phenomenological, eco-deconstruction, eco-marxism, and eco-postcolonial or postcolonial ecocriticism. In view of divergent points of view within a theoretical practice, Gregory Castle discursively writes that:

as with the differences between theories, the differences that arise within the conceptual or historical development of a single theory have to do with the construction of new or the modification of existing assumptions and principles. The activities of thinking and working theoretically remain fairly constant. Even theories that attack the very possibility of

generalization are grounded on the general principle that generalities are useless. (4)

The excerpt above reinforces the argument that theories are sites of continuous debates and it is these debates that lead to the refinement of ideas in a particular theoretical field. This is because inherent in every ideology are the seeds of its infinite dispersal. Therefore, achieving a state of consensus in theoretical discourse is hardly realizable.

On the above note, Nayar maintains that eco-criticism operates on two levels: “Discourse: drawing together a culture’s ecological approaches/problems and its cultural texts that address or ignore the same. Praxis: contributing to ecological awareness by re-reading canonical cultural texts” (331). As a theoretical framework, eco-criticism serves an intermediary between man and nature; as a conceptual or analytical framework, it shares boundary between literary studies and environmental studies. According to Laurence Coupe, ecocriticism is an ideological approach to literature which “considers the relationship between human and non-human life as represented in literary terms and which theorizes about the place of literature in the struggle against environmental destruction” (cited in Caminero-Santangelo 705). Hence, despite the overlapping ideological principles at work within the premise of eco-criticism, eco-critics are, Buell maintains, unified in their goal to centralized nature at the centre of their literary endeavours. As Glotfelty puts it, “Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism makes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature” (xix). In addition, the rise of industries and exploitation of natural resources signal “the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet’s basic life support systems” (Glotfelty 1996 xx). Hence, ecocriticism focuses on the dialectics associated with the idea of exploitation of nature by man. This is because the very idea of exploitation itself is an ethical issue. Indeed, while man exploits nature to meet his basic needs, which is positive, nature is degraded and in the long run, a

degraded nature may not effectively support the existence of man. The exploitation of nature therefore becomes an unstable activity in the discourse of environmental sustainability.

The study of “ecolit” and “ecocrit” have received little or no attention in the creative and critical works of African critics and writers, in that it is regarded as a brainchild of European writers which bears no semblance with the condition and concerns of African people. Even when writers and critics articulate ecological devastation they tend to narrow it towards a nostalgic feeling for a loss in “a golden age when many of the environmental evils resulting from colonialism and the exploitation of indigenous resources have been mediated” (William Slaymaker 683). Slaymaker goes further to offer an insight into the “ecohesitation” among African writers and critics. Central to the ecohesitation is the presupposition that, Slaymaker writes, “the green discourses [ecolit and ecocrit] emanating from metropolitan Western centers” are calculated “attempt to ‘white out’ black Africa by coloring it green” (Slaymaker 684; emphasis in parenthesis is mine). On the other hand, African writers and critics who have participated in anticolonial-imperialism movements deride ecocriticism because its philosophical outlook stands in sharp contrast to “the theory of liberation like Marxism. Rather, it appears as one more hegemonic discourse from the metropolitan West” (Slaymaker 684). Furthermore, ecocriticism has severally challenged Marxism and poststructuralism “for suggesting that nature itself is always, already, a cultural construct tied to human political interest” (Caminero-Santangelo 699). It is on this ground that Marxism alongside with anthropocentrism’s notion of nature, as possessing intrinsic value only for humans, has been criticized. Therefore, ecocriticism gears its theoretical towards recontextualization of nature as the “centre” of theory and criticism, as opposed to anthropocentrism’s nature as an object (Caminero-Santangelo 699). Thus, the obsession with nature subjectivity has made African critics cast a grave doubt on the potency of ecocriticism as a viable theoretical tool for addressing the piercing issues confronting Africa and Africans. Caminero-Santangelo succinctly captures this feeling of skepticism:

Recent environmental studies in Africa bring into question those aspects of ecocriticism which would downplay the

social and political implications of representation of nature, especially as these representations are related to the claim to speak for and to protect nature. They also bring into bold relief the danger of subordinating in the African context has been tied to heinous (hegemonic) political ideologies and goals rather than leading to a liberatory, counter-hegemonic agenda. (701)

In fact, Jhan Hochman argues that the lack of concern for environmental and ecological studies by African writers and critics when compared to the European counterpart could be attributed to the fact that “whites have more time for nature than blacks since blacks must use a great deal of energy resisting or coping with white hegemony. Whites, more than blacks, also have greater access to some semblance of nature because blacks have been forced into urban areas for jobs” (cited in Slaymaker 684). In a similar view, Amitav Ghosh, in his seminal text titled *Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, outlines some of the reasons for the perceived failure or inability of the postcolonial writer to imaginatively and fully portray the extent of current global environmental crises. One of the reasons highlighted by Ghosh is that the depiction of intense natural disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes, and storms are largely relegated to the genres of science fiction and fantasy as such there is a dearth of such depictions in postcolonial literary texts. In addition, the idea ecological crises are viewed as originating and limited to a single geographical location thus making it “personal moral reckoning” (Vincent 2) of a single geographical space. On this note, Ghosh argues for the concerted collaboration of all cultures to confront the current ecological crises and this is the promise that eco-criticism holds.

While the views of Hochman and Ghosh are succinct, they are limited in fully capturing African writers’ and indeed postcolonial writers’ engagement with ecological issues. Although, the issues of ecological studies are not explicitly articulated in African literature and criticism but it is implicitly suggested in their depiction of the destructive effects of African encounter with the West and in their responses to the hegemonic constructs of African identity by white colonial-imperialists. Thus, Hochman’s claim that Europeans are

closer to nature than Africans shows a subtle silence on the menace of European ecological degradation and devastation of land and animals in Africa under the guise of “civilization”, “development”, industrialization, and modernization. Roughly speaking, the resistance to bio-depredation and deforestation in Africa serve as undeniable facts that Africans, more than Europeans, are more conscious and share some semblance of nature. Most African writers who incorporate anticolonial struggles together with environmental devastation are not considered as ecowriters. For example, Ngugi wa Thiongo’s narratives, such as *Weep Not Child* and *The River Between*, set in the past illustrate how anticolonial struggle challenge not only the enslavement of mind and body, but also Western environmental degradation:

In [these narratives], this degradation cannot be separated from the continued colonization of the land, despite the imminence of Uhuru, and the perpetuation of capitalism as a form of ownership. [These narratives suggest] that true political and economic liberation will result in a healthy land, since its well-being is determined by a return to the proper economic and political relationship which define its identity. Using nature—and nature’s protection—as a means to naturalize its anti-colonial construction of “people” and the nation, [these narratives] can be aligned with much early nationalist and anti-colonial African literature which embraced a pastoral vision of a pre-colonial African order aligned and in tune with nature over and against a corrupting, mechanized European modernity.
(Caminero-Santangelo 702)

The above reveals that the African writer’s engagement with issues of environmental pertinence is an age long consciousness. However, there are distinctive ecological tropes built upon an awareness of historicity in contemporary African literature (Egya). This implies that imaginative recollection on ecological issues is evident in recent literary narratives in Africa.

In line with the aforementioned and without losing sight of the bioregional resistance to multinational corporations from

Europe (especially America) and corrupt postcolonial-tyrannical government, the analysis of Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful we Were*, using an eco-deconstructionist conceptual framework, subverts Hochman's claim by discursively pointing out how European exploitation of natural resources in Africa has dispossessed and forced the rural people to seek greener pasture in white owned factories and companies in the urban areas because their soil and water have been contaminated with toxic chemical and oil spills which prevent the rural people from carrying out agricultural activities for their daily needs.

Caminero-Santangelo lucidly argues that the complex relationship between environmentalism and imperialism in Africa is inseparable. The "wisdom" of environmentalism within the context of Africa by Western critics is one of colonial discourse of urbanization, civilization, growth, development and enlightenment. For the white exploiters and colonialists, Africans have little or no knowledge of how to utilize the natural resources underneath their land "and Westerners (or those with Western training) need to protect it" (Caminero-Santangelo 700). On the other hand, many environmental historians have launched revolutionary discourses toward this Western ontological conception:

...what has been seen as a lack of environmental wisdom among African peoples can reflect a more accurate understanding of environment and environment change. Furthermore, such work suggests, resistance to conservation efforts (past and present) by locals is not necessarily to be understood only as resulting from ignorance or simple self-interest; rather it can be about a political struggle over the meaning of environmental conditions and the policies and power dynamics enabled by such meanings. (Caminero-Santangelo 700)

The excerpt emphasizes the idea that critical arguments in ecological issues cannot be separated from the dynamics of politics. This means that the activities of political actors in a social group, either locally or in collaboration with foreign political agents, play a major role in the extent to which nature's resources of that social group are wantonly exploited or sustainably used.

Away from the political dimensions of the discourse of nature, Nfah-Abbenyi offers an ecofeminist discourse of postcolonial African women's literature. African women's writings show the manner in which transitions from colonial to postcolonial have altered African women's affinity with the land with emphasis on how children's and "women's lives have tended to be the most affected by these local and global shifts" (708). Prior to the advent of colonialism, African women toiled the soil for living and to contribute and support their husbands in the upkeep of the family which, Nfah-Abbenyi argues, promote "an acceptable sexual division of labor and creating a balance in gender relations" (708). Nfah-Abbenyi's notion of "a balance in gender relations" is questionable because women have always been relegated to the status of second-class citizens and silenced. This serves as another concern of this study. In what follows, the study engages in an eco-deconstructive reading of Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful we Were* and examines tensions and contradictions that abound in ecological writings.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study is Jacques Derrida's environmental philosophy or eco-deconstruction (1997). Derrida's environmental philosophy is contained in a long essay he presented at the Cerisy Conference in France and was published posthumously in 2008 with the title: *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. Since the methodological paradigm of deconstruction contributes to the paradigm of eco-deconstruction, it would be adequate to highlight what deconstruction entails. Deconstruction is a theoretical practice propounded by Derrida. Derrida's seminal intervention in literary-cultural studies could be situated against the consistent failure of preceding theoretical models to vindicate the central arguments of their so-called presuppositions. Whereas all of these models strive to create "centers or origins" for their analytical discourses, Deconstruction sees these centers as the infinite crafty play of irreducible centers without a transcendental signified. In a sense, the act of discourse does not find its resting place in theoretical and social practices; rather, discourse is directly committed to the stereographic movement of signifying practice.

On the other side of the scale, Derrida's oft-quoted remark that "there is nothing outside of the text" is the same as saying there is nothing as text-free. By implication, there is no reading and discourse foregrounded within the premise of, for instance, deconstruction could claim to be "Derrida-free" or entirely devoid of ample references to his writings and to "other" texts affiliated to it. Thus, the actualization of textual meaning must pass through theoretical presupposition, but this presupposition is not its final destination. The destiny of discourse is not eternally tied to any given theoretical model. Notably, deconstruction should not be uncritically conceived as the disavowal of meaning; far from it, what deconstruction simply does, to be sure, is to advance the structure of literary criticism towards the simulated "playfulness" of meaning at the surface without delving deeper for the final or proper meaning. Therefore, deconstruction calls into question and challenges all kinds of religious, political, ideological, social and cultural practices that affirm dogmatic and logocentric assumptions about presence, truth, identity, meaning and subjectivity (Derrida & Vatimmo 8). Deconstruction, therefore, is a rational and critical feature of public space and critical practice that challenges logocentrism.

However, the scope of deconstruction is not strictly restricted to literary and philosophical discourse; it is also a way of coming to term with environmental studies. To grasp Derrida's thoughtful reflection on environmental studies, it is important to cast an eye back on Derrida's text on anthropo-logocentrism, anthropologico-historical knowledge, ontico-thanato-biological knowledge and anthropo-thanatology, from, but not strictly limited to these texts, *The Gift of Death* (1992) and *Aporias* (1993) to *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008), and *The Beast and the Sovereign* Vol. 1 and Vol. 2 (2008 and 2009). Hence, Derrida's concern for environmental studies is hinged on the argument that there is nothing outside of the context; that is, the discourse of nature cannot be taken outside of its representation in the text. Fritsch, et al. stress that the prefix "Eco" both helps to situate discourse within natural or environmental context and focuses the attention of the readers and critics toward what is at stake "interpretations of nature," which are always historically situated and culturally permeated, and which in various ways reflect (or stand back from) our own species' interest" (5). Then, it might

be argued that the poetics of eco-deconstruction is to put pressure on the significance of context in theory and praxis. It is most pertinent to emphasize here that Deconstruction is not a methodological reform for a better understanding of nature representation; “but, among other things, a marker of methodological openness [and caution]” (Fritsch, et al. 6). What Deconstruction does, within the context of nature studies, is to open up fresh dimensions of understanding nature as well as challenge existing notions of nature.

For Deconstruction, the process of reading and interpretation cannot be taken outside or beyond the context of the narrative itself, but no context, at the same time, permits saturation; that is, meaning is context bound but no context is an end in itself (Derrida 9). In this regard, Eco-deconstruction is regarded as a counter-discourse to Deep Ecology which seeks for final direction of meaning in discourse. Fritsch, et al. maintain that: “Eco-deconstruction vigorously maintains a tension between contextual expansion and caution toward any impatient totalizing consolidation of a new frame of reference” (6). Hence, Derrida’s concern with environmental philosophy could be situated against the backdrop of Deconstruction’s tenet of critique of logocentrism. The idea of logocentrism presumes the Western mythology of the binary oppositions between privileged and marginalized elements of signification; that is to say, the privileged element is the center, presence, truth, life, survivor, reality and superior, while the marginalized element is conceived as Other, absence, false, death, myth, and inferior (see also Jacques Derrida 1982; Jonathan Culler 1982; Barbara Johnson 1995, 39-49). The task of Deconstruction is to expose and undo the philosophical construct that stands behind the binary in order to show the contradictions, tensions, paradoxes and heterogeneity inherent in it: “The deconstruction of logocentrism, then, was perhaps always an eco-deconstruction, one that tracks and reconsiders not only the subjection of femininity and animality, but our appropriative mastery and alleged sovereignty over nature” (10). In the light of the above, this paper critically examines the terms “ecocide” and resistance to the perceived “ecocide”.

The Fluidity of Ecocide in How Beautiful we Were

How Beautiful we Were is the second published text of Cameroonian novelist, Imbolo Imbue. The text focuses on the experiences of several members of the Nangi family (Thula, Juba, Yaya, and Bongo) in the fictional town of Kosawa. The experiences of these family members emphasize the age long fight for environmental justice in the face of the exploitation of Kosawa land in several generations by American oil company, Pexton. Despite the contamination of the land, water, and air of Kosawa by oil spills for Pexton activities, a village chief, Woja Beki continues to collaborate with Pexton officials to pillage the natural environment of Kosawa. Also, His Excellency, the dictatorial president of the country of which Kosawa is a region, continually renews the operating license of Pexton despite calls and protests to have it revoked due to the diseases and deaths informed by the environmental pollution occasioned by the oil exploration activities of Pexton.

The need to save the land of Kosawa amidst the failure of Pexton and its collaborators to clean up oil spills in Kosawa, the bloodbath that followed the protests against and kidnapping of Pexton workers—which claimed the lives of Thula’s father (Malabo Nangi) and his brother (Bongo Nangi)—radicalize Thula Nangi. She pores over revolutionary books and organizes meetings in the village on how to drive out the exploitators of the natural resources of Kosawa. Thula gains admission to study in the United States of America and returns more radical. She buys guns for the youths and decides when they are to use them. Despite leading the youths of Kosawa against local and foreign exploitation of Kosawa’s natural resources, some village chiefs decry the fact that Thula, an unmarried woman, leads such protests in a community where there are men. As a result, they conspired with Sakani and Jakani, the chief priests of Kosawa, sedated Thula, and artificially inseminated her. At the end of the story, following the kidnapping and death of Mr. Fish (an American oil worker with Pexton) and his wife by the Five (the rebels armed by Thula), His Excellency sends soldiers to Kosawa. Thula, alongside the Five, is killed.

Having highlighted the above, an eco-deconstructive reading of *How Beautiful we Were* (2021), and indeed any literary text, presumes that such text grants prominence to the natural world in the narrative, which thus becomes a space of slips, aporias and infinite postponement of meaning. The diction of the narrator reveals that the words which refer to elements of nature are constantly used in the narrative. For example, words such as trees, valleys, river, wind, sky, and land appear severally in the narrative. The narrator uses these words to call attention to the natural world with which the text is concerned. What happens therefore is that the natural space gains some form of hold in the mental faculty of readers. However, the natural world of Kosawa (the setting of the text) is not depicted in a positive light. *How Beautiful we Were* opens with: “We should have known the end was near. How could we not have known? When the sky began to pour acid and rivers began to turn green, we should have known our land would soon be dead” (6). The apocalyptic vision depicted in these opening words sets the tone for the text’s engagement with issues related to the natural. Evident in the words of the cited excerpt is the fact that the nonhuman world has been explored, polluted, and degraded. This reveals that the spatial setting (Kosawa) for which the events in the story are recounted is declared unsafe for human habitation. Several instances of the depredation of the nonhuman world are depicted: “We took them into the forest, and they saw farms that had been rendered useless after fires; they examined the shriveled-up products of our soil. They took pictures of waste floating on the big river. They pointed at leaves with holes and said it was from acid rain” (150); “There’s also an area south of here, where land is disappearing into the sea. Every day land the size of a small village is lost” (194). These depictions indicate the destruction of the nonhuman world and which, clearly, are not natural occurrences. They are rather products of human interference of the nonhuman world.

The fact that the ecocide depicted in the text is a result of human activities calls into the question the stability of the term ecocide. This is because if ecocide is a product of human activities, then it opens up a binary of who is affected by ecocide and who benefits from ecocide. Therefore, it may not be rational to regard the term ecocide as malicious in ecocritical discourse. Placed in between

Kosawa/Pexton binary, it is evident that what is termed ecocide is actually a matter of subjective interpretation (it must be noted that Kosawa refers to both the human and nonhuman elements of the natural space). For example, the activities of Pexton, an American corporation that deals in the drilling of oil, are regarded as responsible for the contaminated rivers, the non-fertile land, and the polluted airspace of Kosawa. Thus, they are viewed, in the eyes of the indigenes of Kosawa, as being responsible for the several deaths and illnesses experienced by the children of Kosawa. While Pexton and its workers are enriched from the proceeds of the nonhuman world, the natural world suffers degradation and the indigenes of Kosawa are impoverished. This means that Kosawa becomes the “repulsed, delegitimated, occulted, unrecognizable” (Derrida 162) part of the Kosawa/Pexton binary. The destruction of the nonhuman world of the text’s setting may not therefore be a malicious occurrence since it serves as the means of livelihood for a few. In any case, even the indigenes of Kosawa who are not into oil drilling activities also live off the degradation of nature because they are farmers, hunters and fishermen.

In a bid to further label ecocide as the malicious destruction of nature, Mark Gray argues that ecocide is the “causing or permitting [of] harm to the natural environment on a massive scale” (216). In addition, Higgin et al maintain that ecocide is “the extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been severely diminished” (257). For Gray and Higgin et al, ecocide could be caused by humans or could be a natural occurrence. This paper is however preoccupied with the human induced ecocide. If these conceptions of ecocide were to be true, then the term is shrouded in inconsistencies. First, what would “massive scale” and “extensive damage” entail? Or how can we determine “massive scale” and extensive damage”? Does massive scale mean that the damage that the activities of Pexton causes on the natural world of Kosawa? Would “massive scale” be the effects of Kosawa’s activities that impede on the natural environment?

One may argue that Kosawa's activities which affects trees, rivers and the land, does not have as debilitating effects as those of Pexton. However, since the activities of Kosawa's indigenes still have a negative impact on the natural environment, it is only a matter of time before they are considered a threat to the natural environment. Therefore, ecocide which is treated as a malicious term is actually dependent on whose perspective the discourse is made. For the likes of Pexton, ecocide is not destruction of the natural world but an appropriation of the same to meet human ends. Since they cannot immediately obtain the same level of wealth that the natural world has granted Pexton and its collaboration, Kosawa would regard the destruction of the natural world as indeed an infringement of their lands. The fact that a large number of Kosawa indigenes abandon Kosawa when Pexton actually wins the court case against them with regards to the damage on the land reveals that they had not been after the health of the natural environment but rather they had hankered after what they could obtain from the environment. The narrator uses the words of Juba to buttress this point: "Fighting for Kosawa was not my birthright. Which is why I made up my mind, after Liberation Day, to start disentangling myself from my sister's dreams" (p. 290). The Liberation Day was the day of protest led by Thula against the degradation of the nature and its elements which led to the impoverishment of the populace of Kosawa. This shows that not every Kosawa indigene supported the fight against the explorative activities of Pexton. Given the opportunity, the likes of WojaBeki (the village head of Kosawa who amassed wealth from his collaboration with Pexton) and Juba (one of the characters who later becomes wealthy through corrupt means), would exploit the natural resources of Kosawa and perhaps damage nature beyond what Pexton had done. This reveals that man's relationship with nature has moved from the realm of appropriation of nature for basic needs to appropriation of nature for individualistic satisfaction in an increasingly competitive society. If this were to be the case therefore, ecocide becomes an endless chain of signification as individuals approach the appropriation of nature with different motives. While some would then regard ecocide as destruction, others regard it an avenue for wealth creation.

The instability associated with the acclaimed destruction of the nonhuman world makes the idea of resistance to anthropocentric activities weak. For example, Kosawa's land is depicted to have become infertile, the rivers are portrayed to have become contaminated and the air space is described to have become toxic; the atmosphere is thus portrayed to be unsafe for human habitation. Consequent upon this, it is only rational for the victims of this unsafe environment to seek respite. Thus Malabo Nangi, Bongo Nangi and finally ThulaNangi (the daughter of Malabo Nangi) at different times in the text attempt to resist the environmental squalor resulting from Pexton's oil drilling activities.

Malabo Nangi leads a team of six to Bezam, the headquarters of Pexton, to demand the cleaning up of Kosawa's land and to put an end to the deaths and airborne diseases resulting from the polluted air. Malabo and his team however do not return from Bezam and no one could state whether they were dead or not. Bongo later leads a team to Bezam after they had captured and held three white Pexton workers hostage for days. This was after Bongo and his team had forced one of the white Pexton workers (the Sick One) to give them the name of an influential person in government who would help end the ecological challenges faced by Kosawa. Even they too were later arrested and hanged without trial as they were accused of kidnap and murder because the Sick One died while being held hostage. It follows that the resistances led by Malabo and Bongo respectively yield no results as Pexton prevailed. It must be noted that Pexton overcomes the resistance led by Malabo and Bongo because they (Pexton) were in complicity with the host government led by His Excellency, the President of the country. This is thus a case of the host government collaborating with foreigners to degrade its own land and its own people.

The sociopolitical upheaval in Kosawa and its devastating implication on Thula's family may have informed her choice to study in America so as to stage a successful resistance against the depredation of Kosawa's natural space. While studying in America, Thula joins a host of protests. In one of her letters to friends in Kosawa, she

explains: “Across America today are pockets of people who were made prisoners on their land. The land of their ancestors was taken from them, and now they live at the edge of society, a plight worse than ours” (200). This supports the fact that the loss of land faced by Kosawa may not be entirely restricted to them; rather, it is obtainable elsewhere. It is while being away that Thula encourages her friends to stand up against the agents of the environmental degradation of Kosawa’s natural elements. In addition to her frequent letters, she also sends them money and with the money, they are able to get equipment to vandalize pipelines and burn down houses of people at Gardens (the residence of workers of Pexton): “Today it’s a pipeline break. Tomorrow it’s a fire.” (227). One of the negative effects of the vandalism carried out by Thula’s friends is that it further contaminates the atmosphere. Thus, resistance to eco-degradation ends up a support of environmental despoilment.

When Thula returns home, she decides to stage a protest which would not be violent but rather via dialogue. Thula’s decides not to face Pexton, but the government which is the institution that granted license to Pexton to carry out drilling activities. The success of the ecological resistance depicted in the text is however ambivalent. First, there is the barrier of gender construct which appears to weaken the impact of the resistance. In the whole process of gathering support from villages bounding Kosawa, the idea of gender plays a major factor in the limited public acceptance of Thula’s ideas of resisting agents of environmental destruction. An instance of such mockery of the resistance due to gender construct is thus:

Everywhere we went, men seemed perplexed that an unmarried woman—a girl, judging by her size—could be so bold as to tell them that their lives and their children’s future would be brighter if they joined her in her mission to free our country. Once, an elder asked her how many children she had. When she said none, he asked her when she intended to have them. When she said never, the men burst out laughing. The American books in your head, one of them said, look what they’ve done to you. You know, my son is looking for a wife, another added; he likes them small like you, so that if you do anything stupid one good slap is all it’ll take

to straighten you out. His friends collapsed in giggles. A third added that he'd gladly take Thula as a fourth wife if she was still single in a year. It was evident to us that they resented her, a woman who thought she could be happy without the likes of them—how dare she? (263)

The long portion above accentuates that ecological resistance is hardly built on collective gain. This is evident in the fact Thula's environmental activism does not appeal to the male gender in Kosawa. What happens therefore is that in a traditional African setting, gender construct, which usually privileges the male gender over the female gender, limits the widespread success that can be recorded in the campaign against ecological crises. The indigenes of Kosawa, to which Thula belongs, are skeptical of joining Thula in the protests on the grounds that she is a woman: "We believed Liberation Day needed another year or two of preparation. It had become wholly evident to us that, deep as hatred for His Excellency ran, desperate as many were for change, few, if any, would join a movement led by a woman, worse still an unmarried, childless woman" (270). This buttresses the continuous patriarchal attitudes towards women who are deemed to need a man to be successful or make impact in the society. Furthermore, the narrator states that "The elders decided that, because Thula was a woman, the oldest of the village's able men should accompany her, to give the delegation respectability" (265). Indeed, Kosawa focuses on "respectability" of a delegation rather than the functionality of such and in their conception, it is the male gender that would accord such a delegation respect. Faced with life threatening environment and rather than follow a movement that would lead to their emancipation, the people of Kosawa focus on the gender of the brain behind the movement. Even His Excellency who is notoriously known for his ruthlessness against every form of opposition allows the Liberation Day protest to go ahead because it is led by a woman.

It also curious that His Excellency, who "showed no mercy to friends and enemies alike" and who "aging and anxious, had recently been growing even more ruthless" (267), did nothing to stop Thula's planed protest neither did they break up the protest when it takes place in Lokunja, the state capital. The narrator further

recounts His Excellency's ruthlessness thus: "You rise up against me, he declared, and you'll never rise again" (267). This shows that His Excellency is against any form of protest. However, the fact that she is woman explains why he does not take the protest serious since he also belongs to the same patriarchal society where a woman is believed to need a man to be successful.

Hence, the patriarchal gender role is a mainstay of a patriarchal society (a male centered society where men exhibit oppressive attitudes towards women) and it is the conception that men are naturally rational, brave, assertive and protective while the woman is regarded as emotionally irrational, naturally submissive, timid, and requiring the protection of a man (Tyson 85). In the light of these patriarchal gender roles, there are certain roles, opportunities and position that women are denied from accessing. The roles of the woman do not involve leading such protests that are reserved for the male gender. These gender roles have also been accepted, internalized and constantly followed by a woman in a traditionally patriarchal society and form the basis upon which the oppression, discrimination and inequality that women suffer are always justified. This explains why when Thula tries to reject roles expected of a woman, she draws the mockery of the society.

Conversely, arguing that the resistance against ecological oppression led by Thula was not successful on the ground that she is a woman may not be fully sustained. This is because Thula's idea of the protest made the elders of other villages, other than Kosawa, to become more aware of the environmental despoilment facing them and also to believe that one of their own could lead them to progress: "Imitators were springing up nationwide, many hoping to gain a popularity as large as hers and use it to enrich themselves" (279). The mockery of Thula is only a veiled concession of their limitation and inability to stage or lead a protest against oppression. The very fact that men from other villages began to mirror the protest initially led by Thula is testament to the fact that the resistance did not fall through as a result of gender but as a result of other far reaching issues.

While the narrator does not appear to proscribe a template for how a revolution or resistance to ecological disaster can take place, it questions the notion of Thula's resistance stratagem being rooted in Western education. Before going to London, Thula had read and had been inspired by three western oriented books: Karl Max's *The Communist Manifesto*, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. These texts, all written by Europeans except *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, explain the workings of revolution in other countries different from those of Africa. While it can be argued that host governments and private corporations are in constant alliance with themselves (as exemplified in the Pexton–His Excellency alliance), the specific nature of each geographical location entails that what works in one location may not work in another location, and this shows that revolution may not reside in books but in actual societal occurrence which differs among different societies. Thula may have picked up the idea of dialogue as a means of resistance but when she realizes that dialogue may be unfruitful towards getting the attention of the oppressors of Kosawa, she concedes to the use of violence. First, she gives her fellow protesters money to buy guns and later obliges to the kidnapping of Mr. Fish (the head of Pexton in Kosawa) and his wife, coupled with the vandalism of oil pipes, the burning down of houses in Gardens and the killing of indigenous Pexton workers. The fact that the several murders of Pexton workers and the kidnap of Mr. Fish draw the ire of the government which made them release soldiers into Kosawa who subsequently burn down the huts in Kosawa and force the indigenes of Kosawa into exile. This reveals that the violent nature of Thula and her friends is the form of resistance that surely threatens the monopoly of corporations and host governments. Perhaps, had Thula being more financially buoyant to get more guns, instead of the five she was able to fund, she would have led the youths of Kosawa to victory against Pexton and their collaborators.

Away from the geo-centered nature of revolution, the ideas of individualism and ethnophobia may have also impacted upon the functionality of resistance to ecological challenges. After Thula successfully staged the first protest in Lokunja to free her country for ecological imperialists (Pexton and the host government), a number

of ethnic groups realized the possibility having their own leader akin to Thula. Despite the best efforts of Thula to bring about change and forming a political party to achieve this aim:

her party would never take root outside the western part of the country. At some stops in the north and the east, no more than a dozen people attended. Imitators were springing up nationwide, many hoping to gain a popularity as large as hers and use it to enrich themselves... The eyes of other tribes were also opening; they wanted one of their own to be their leader, a man with a familiar name, not a woman they barely knew. Wasn't it time every tribe started looking out for itself? They wondered. (279)

Rather than work towards defeating the common enemy (the perpetrators of ecological destruction), each ethnic group appears to detest the fact that the idea for change emanated from another ethnic group. Thus the fear of being ruled by another ethnic group explains why some ethnic groups refused to support Thula simply because they had "wanted their own to be leader". With such orientation ecological justice remains a mirage. In addition, individuals also focused on what they could get for themselves and not for the common good of the society. This reveals why a resistance may never find fruition. The narrator poses how individualism and ethnophobia impedes a successful resistance:

Good men rose up and fought so that wealth might be spread evenly. Did it happen so? Didn't wealth simply pass from the hands of a few to a new set of hands of a few? Look at the country to the east of yours, where rebels stormed the presidential palace with guns given to them by their overseas backers. They desecrated the palace, sent its inhabitants into hiding. They put bullets in the chest of the man who for long had trampled upon them. They lifted their guns and cheered their new freedom: victory at last, victory at last. What happened next? Didn't tribes turn against tribes, villages against villages, no strong man between them to force a peaceful accord? Look at how the children of that country are now wasting for scarcity of food. Look at how the women there

have been turned into slaves for men who once fought for the liberation of all. If you were to ask these people, would they sing the praises of a revolution? (256)

Similarly, even Juba, Thula's brother, "wished she'd chosen another way of life. I wished she'd chosen Austin over Kosawa. I wished she wasn't sacrificing so much for others, not after what our family had endured" (290). For Juba therefore, Thula should have focused on changing things only for herself and her family rather than attempting to fight for positive change for the larger society. The foregoing is reminiscent of the argument of Amitav Ghosh who argued that the campaign against the global ecological crises is yet to fully be a collective fight. In view of this, it is imperative to note that ecological resistance would remain shrouded in inconsistencies because it is trapped between the Self/Other dichotomy. Thula is thus trapped in several binaries: the man/woman or woman/man dichotomy; the Kosawa/Other ethnic group binary (where Thula represents Kosawa). This dichotomy continually postpones the realization of a healthy natural environment.

Conclusion

The idea of ecocide which is regarded as the destruction of the nonhuman world is actually unstable in terms of being actually a malicious term. This is because ecocide is a matter of subjective interpretation as it can oxymoronically be conceived as a destructive channel to wealth. Thus, there is a need to question the perspective from which the idea of ecocide is engaged in discourse as this makes lucid what the term entails. However, the fact that the nonhuman world is continually degraded as a means to an end calls forth the need for resistance to the proclivity for the despoilment of the natural world. Ecological resistance is infinitely postponed because it is steeped in binaries. The fact that the sides of binaries do not allow for a stable conception of the opposing sides of the binaries, the idea of resistance to human agents of ecological resistance remains an unending discourse, which infinitely postpones the success of ecological movements.

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Book Review

A Review of *Environmental Postcolonialism: A Literary Response*

Risha Baruah

While the effort of ‘greening’ theoretical and literary narratives may have become a common academic discourse in the recent decades, it continues to experience critical rebuttal on its primary objectives to understand the relationship between the ecological world and humans. To this end, critics have attempted to explore the dimensions of nature through Ecocriticism whose framework still continues to be largely anthropocentrically scaled. This situational dilemma within the approach has created an undeniable ‘gap of imagination’ in the ideologies and actions of the Anthropocene. In addition to this, the need to homogenise the representations and narratives of the nonhuman world by ecological studies has further limited its scope for a comprehensive understanding of the environment. This seems to be an outcome of the relentless practice of viewing nature as a social construct framed by the white elitist men who used cultural discourses to reduce and marginalise nature into an inferior and secondary category. Realising these challenges within ecocriticism, attempts have been made by several scholars like Lawrence Buell, Greg Garrard, Scott Slovic, Patrick Murphy, Graham Huggun and Helen Tiffin in the second wave of Ecocriticism to open scope for collaborative interaction of ecocriticism with other mainstream approaches which has resulted in the emergence of several pertinent hybridised concepts like ecofeminism, postnature, anthropocentrism, ecological imperialism, Anthropocene studies, speciesism, Posthumanism, ecoethics, ecospirituality, ecohumanism and ecomasculinism. Acknowledging these efforts, Echterling claimed that most of these theories have essentially been a ‘white man’s movement’ that were shaped by Euro-American discourses with the intention to singularly dominate the social and natural world (95). In this regard, the dialogues concerning the contemporary environmental crisis of the Anthropocene as generated by western ideologies continue to remain reductive in its limited attempts to address and curb the impending Apocalypse. Realizing this major setback, efforts have been made by Rob Nixon, Upamanyu Pablo

Mukherjee, Richard Grove, Ursula Heise, Alfred W. Crosby, Greg Garrard, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Mahesh Rangarajan, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin through the third wave of Ecocriticism to make the approach focus beyond the borders of western ethnicity and culture by recognizing national literatures in international relation and comparative framework.

This trend of transnationality within ecocriticism in recent decades of the Twenty-First century has resulted in the inclusion of ecological narratives from the Global South that has subsequently opened necessary cross-dialogism across the globe to initiate an active participation for ecological awareness and safeguarding. In this attempt Shubhanku Kochar and M. Anjum Khan, in *Environmental Postcolonialism: A Literary Response* explore the idea of ecological imperialism through the diverse and expansive fourteen chapters that aimed to deal with several pertinent concerns of the environment to consequently understand the fast-changing ecological conditions of the Global South experienced in the contemporary Anthropocene. In this regard, most of the chapters highlighted a common legacy of cultural and environmental imperialism. In fact, this effort by the editors stemmed from their deepened interest in the area which has resulted in their continual contribution to the field. Towards this end, the introductory chapter by Kochar and Khan attempted to draw a comprehensive socio-historical, literary and conceptual context to the approach. Taking the concerns of the editors as a road-map, the contributions have attempted to theorise the concept of postcolonial-ecocriticism through the perspective of ex-colonies. In this attempt, the book covered several ecological concerns like post-nature, oil politics, (de)territoriality, land politics, coloniality, agency, anthropocentrism, pollution, migration, hybridity, environmental racism, Euro-centrism, 'othering', climate change, bioethics, spatial colonialism, ecofeminism, capitalism, development, biopiracy, biocolonialism, speciesism and provincializing nature, environmental despoliation, developmental refugees, forced migration and dispossession of the indigenous people, territorial appropriation, natural disasters and (inter)nationally financed resource extractions that have collaboratively altered the material, environmental, cultural and geological imprint of the planet as witnessed in the Anthropocene.

While the book addresses these concerns in great details, it also aimed to highlight their ill-effects on nature and how these factors have managed to accelerate the impending crisis of the planet. These critical interventions provided by the book primarily aims to generate timely warning and awareness among its readers by encouraging necessary environmental solidarity, activism, discussions and debates which could subsequently instil a sense of deepened responsibility among humans through the instincts of co-existence, stewardship, companionship, eco-cosmopolitanism and deep ecology. Addressing these relevant and serious concerns, the range and the applicability of the book seems to be expansive as well as refreshing; as the book has been successful in re-examining the idea of colonial legacy through ecological narratives. Such an effort seems crucial to our contemporary society as it allows us to locate imperialism beyond its socio-eco-political implications by including the concerns of ecology which consequently has allowed us to understand the real and the full impact of colonialism on cultures and natures across the globe. This intersection between (post)colonialism and ecocriticism seems to have also sparked new concepts like ‘slow violence’ advocated by Rob Nixon, ‘environmentalism of the poor’ developed by Joan Martinez-Alier and Ramachandra Guha, indigenous studies and bioregionalism which have opened new vistas for the culturally and ecologically colonised victims of the Global South to speak back to the Euro-American Empire in ways that dismantled the superiority, superficiality and humanitarianism of the West that was endorsed by anthropocentrism, capitalism, modernism, globalisation and imperialism.

The book also discusses the tension generated by the culture/nature and west/east binaries while attempting to expand the environmental canon in the Global South through global discourses on environmental justice and political ecology. To this end, the work highlighted the politics of bio-power contestation between the West and East through the agency of imperialism. In this regard, the collection has been successful to draw not only the perspectives and theories of the west but also has been able to situate indigenous experiences and narratives into mainstream critical approaches with the intention to initiate the process of reterritorialization and reinhabitation of the natives and their local culture and naturescape

through pluralist dialogism of the Global South. In this sense, the work seems to revisit history using the ‘bottom-to-top’ mechanism as it largely focused on stories, rights and experiences of the marginalized sections as reflected in the socio-environmental history of the Global South. To this end, the book has been able to provide an introductory roadmap to all enthusiastic scholars, students and avid readers of literature who are interested in studies in Ecocriticism, literary theory and postcolonial studies. In fact, the diverse range and structural formulation of the edited book makes it a practical exercise to be introduced in academic curriculum that includes contemporary theoretical topics like Ecocriticism, Posthumanism, postcolonial studies, indigenous studies, Animal studies and Anthropocene. The wide framework of the book also aims to mobilize its readers from conventional conceptions like anthropocentrism, speciesism, capitalism and imperialism; with an intention to engage humans with the world beyond Man.

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