

University of Nevada, Reno

Towards an African-Focused Ecocriticism: The Case of Nigeria

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

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Abstract

My dissertation explores early African environmental literary criticism, which I argue, can be traced back to the 1960s. Looking closely at early African environmental literary criticism enables us to recognize the genesis of an Africa-focused ecocriticism, a perspective that emerged in order to critique the impact of colonialism, neocolonialism, and more recent globalization on various African environments. My dissertation also compares the genesis of an Africa-focused ecocriticism to that of early Anglo-American ecocriticism, an environment-oriented approach developed originally from Anglo-American literary criticism in the 1990s in response to “the global Environmental Crisis.” Comparing the genesis of these ecocriticisms enables us to recognize a “rhizomatic,” rather than “derivative,” development of ecocriticism that occurred and prospered in different regions of the world.

To understand and approach environmental issues in African literatures, I suggest that we should not explore the extent to which African literatures might respond to global environmental issues using an international ecocriticism defined and practiced in Anglo-American literary studies, but rather, following Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's concept of “poor theory,” to look to African literary texts themselves. My dissertation demonstrates how African environmental literature can provide a “theory” for an Africa-focused ecocriticism. How do African authors represent African environments and address African environmental issues through *literature*? Focusing on the “literary aesthetics” of African environmental literature enables us to see culturally, historically, and geographically particular representations of African environments. In turn, we might

question how standard histories of and approaches to environmental writing in Anglo-American literature rely on a definition of nature as pristine and untouched, while in the African context we encounter an idea of nature as interdependent with human culture. My dissertation thus explores how alternative methodologies may be applied to African literature with the larger project of imagining a global ecocriticism that does not universalize but finds its local echoes in a series of complex, lateral relations across the world. In the same vein, I locate environmental tropes and concepts that are unique to the African context.

My dissertation focuses on Nigerian novels specifically in an effort to demonstrate how that problematized nation-state might both require very local, historicized approaches while enabling us to come up with new methods for reading more broadly in African literature. These novels include Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), Cyprian Ekwensi's *Burning Grass* (1962), Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* (1964), Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985), and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010). I pair these novels with a specific environmental trope in each of my body chapters—tropes including the forest, the country and the city, and oil. My dissertation carefully examines these environmental tropes recurrent in these Nigerian novels in order to show the promise, uniqueness, and complexity of an African-focused ecocriticism. While early Anglo-American ecocriticism tends to treat the first two tropes as reflections of universal human conditions, I aim to show how ecocriticism in an African context would question such universalism. As for the third trope, I argue that African writers' portrayals of the resource wars in the Niger Delta critique Western

forms of state-run environmentalism—a colonial legacy in the postcolonial world that includes much of Africa.

The conclusion of my dissertation indicates potential challenges an Africa-focused ecocriticism may encounter in contemporary crises related to “Chinese”-driven resource exploitation of the continent perpetrated in the name of global, neoliberal capitalism. Introducing Chinese presence in Africa and its attendant impact on African environments to an Africa-focused ecocriticism reminds us of the limit of postcolonial ecocriticism in approaching environmental crises caused by non-Western sources.

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Working on *Toward an Africa-Focused Ecocriticism: The Case of Nigeria* afforded me the opportunity to demonstrate a model for an Africa-focused ecocriticism—“theory,” as I argue in my dissertation, has to develop from African literary texts per se. Now that this long journey of dissertating has come to a close, I see many new doors begin to open. It is with this in mind that I must express my sincere appreciation to my dissertation chair, Dr. Jen Hill for her encouragement, inspiration, and full support during this process. Not only has Dr. Hill offered intellectual inspiration and academic advice, but she guided me through the rigor and depth of critical writing. Her guidance improved my writing significantly, enabling me to realize my vision.

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I would also like to thank Dr. Fiona Moolla, the editor of *Natures of Africa* (2016), an edited volume in which my essay “Towards Ecocriticism in Africa: Literary Aesthetics in African Environmental Literature” appears. The readers’ reports of Dr. Moolla and others strengthened and deepened the argument of my essay—and helped me think through and draft what is now the introduction to my dissertation.

Finally, I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my family and friends, all of whom have provided invaluable support during the process of my dissertating. My husband, Brian Krueger, is usually the first reader of my drafts. His unconditional support of my work enabled me to concentrate on my writing. My mother, Yu-Rong Xu, who spoke with me on the weekly basis, provided spiritual guidance throughout my journey. My sister, Cheng-Hsien Wu, a Doctor of Educational Psychology, is my best friend who always listens to me. I would also like to express my appreciation for the support I have received from my friends all over the world who witnessed my efforts throughout this process—Ariel Hung, Kelly Tse, Estibalitz Ezkerra, Heidi Lizbeth, Kyle Bladow, and Siobhain McGuinness. My family and friends provided a strong support system that energized me when I needed it the most.

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Introduction

Towards an Africa-Focused Ecocriticism: Literary Aesthetics in African Environmental Literature

What is African Environmental Literature?

What is African environmental literature? What environmental issues are revealed in African literature? How do African authors represent African environments? Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), a classic of African literature, for example, has been read and studied as an African postcolonial novel that aims to reconstruct pre-colonial African cultural identity in general and traditional Igbo cultural identity in particular. However, this novel can also be read as an environmental novel. In his "Things Fall Apart Fifty Years After: An Ecocritical Reading" (2009), Nchoujie Augustine foregrounds Achebe's environmental consciousness by examining "the ecological component" (107) that Achebe integrates into his writing, such as the imageries of the African forest, especially the forest's influence on the sustainability of the Igbo community as well as its correlation with Igbo customs. Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, in their introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011), argue that the "narrative shift" (7) of Achebe's novel from an oral, Igbo-centered narrative (as revealed in the first two parts of the novel) to a written, colonial-dominated narrative (as revealed by the District Commissioner's *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of Lower Niger* in the last part of the novel) suggests the author's critique of the environmental transformation in Igboland caused by European colonization. As DeLoughrey and Handley state, "Chinua Achebe emphasized the radical ontological shift in understanding place that occurred through the process of European colonialism and Christian missionisation in

his 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*” (6). My essay “From Cultural Hybridization to Ecological Degradation: The Forest in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*” (2012) argues that Achebe represents the indigenous Igbo relationship with the land and the earth goddess (Ani)—a relationship between ancestral spirits, gods, use of the land, harvest, and community sustainability—in order to critique how the advent of British colonialism undermines that relationship. These recent environmental readings of Achebe’s novel remind us that to understand environmental issues in the context of the Igbo society represented by Achebe, we need to understand not only the physical environment of Igboland but also the Igbo people’s relationship with it through spiritual and social practices. Achebe’s novel therefore represents traditional Igbo cultural life as intertwined with environmental concerns that are also necessarily social. Therefore, the novel’s critique of European colonialism is not only from an overtly political or cultural perspective, but also from an indigenous environmentalism attached to politics and culture.

An emphasis on the environmental perspective of Achebe’s novel reminds us that the challenge of locating environmental issues in African literature lies in the fact that they may not look like environmental issues as addressed or represented in Anglo-American environmental literature. In the case of Achebe’s novel, the environment refers to the Igbo land as a *whole*—composed of the inhabitants, the gods and ancestral spirits they worship, village compounds, and the forests surrounding the community. Indigenous Igbo environmentalism, as represented by Achebe, is based on Igbo attachment to the land their ancestors had settled for

centuries—an attachment they passed on to their descendants.¹ As made apparent by Achebe, “environment” is not a universal concept, as Anglo-American environmental literature often tends to assume and endorse, and therefore ecocriticism cannot be founded on universal principles. In *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (2005), Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley are pioneering critics who bring ecocriticism to postcolonial literature, especially Caribbean literature. They point out the problem of universalism recurrent in American nature writing, a literary genre from which ecocriticism is originally developed and to which it is intrinsically connected. To be more specific, DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley point out the limits of American nature writing with regard to its understanding and explanation of the causes of human alienation from nature:

Unlike the masculine Anglo-American insistence that alienation from nature is caused by excessive mobility and transience, here [in the context of the Caribbean] we see that there are various causes for alienation from nature that differ according to the historical conditions of people in the wake of the violence of Western expansion. As recent work in environmental justice demonstrates, answers to ecological problems are possible only through a close examination of such specificities. Postcolonial literature has given more attention to this problem than has U.S. nature writing; placelessness in the former tends to be seen more as a particular political problem rather than as a universalized moral one, as in the latter. Wendell Berry, one of the

¹ The theme of the indigenous African relationship between people, their ancestors, and the land is recurrent in early African literatures, including Cyprian Ekwensi's *Burning Grass* (1962), Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land* (1966), and Sahle Sellassi's *The Afersata* (1968).

foremost voices of environmentalism in the United States, believes, for example, that for the modern American, “geography is artificial; he could be anywhere, and he usually is” (53). While this maybe true of many white male Americans, it is certainly a harder argument to make for immigrants, women, and/or people of color. (5)

Although Anglo-American nature writing, specifically examples that foreground white male Americans’ perspective, targets the impact of modernity (and attendant developments in industrialism, capitalism, and technology) on colonial societies and their home environments, it pays less attention to the fact that both modernity and industrialism go hand in hand with European colonial expansions into non-European regions, and that colonialism has led to environmental degradation in these places. DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley also remind us that treating modernity, capitalism, and industrialism as universal developments within human cultures may gloss over the complexity of environmental issues caused by colonialism/neocolonialism and/or related to inequalities due to racial, class, and gender differences. As shown in several regions of the colonial and postcolonial worlds, modernity, capitalism and industrialism were introduced to or imposed on non-European lands and cultures. For example, British Romantic writing that may criticize the impact of industrialism and the enclosure system on British rural lands may ignore the dispossession of non-Europeans and the exploitation of their lands caused by British colonization. Likewise, although American nature writers like John Muir in the late nineteenth century and Edward Abbey in the middle of the twentieth century appreciate American wilderness and argue for its protection in their writings, they tend not to address Native American removal from federal lands.

While Muir and Abbey represent a school of American nature writing that

emphasizes the importance of wilderness conservationism, the environmental agenda these authors attempt to promote in their writings also to some extent overlaps with the theoretical and methodological paradigms that dominate early Anglo-American ecocriticism.² Developed in the 1990s in response to Anglo-American literary criticism's lukewarm attitude toward "the global Environmental Crisis,"³ ecocriticism was inspired and fueled by American nature writing in terms of the genre's appreciation of nature and wilderness, as well as its promotion of wilderness conservationism.⁴ In order to develop critical stances and theories that work with African environmental literature, we need to attend to geographical and historical particularities with regard to African environments. What does "environment" mean

² Three features dominate early ecocriticism in the 1990s. These features have also led to debates and revisions in ecocriticism. First, early ecocriticism has been criticized as having tendency to recapitulate ideas and values rather than provide critical perspectives in reading environmental literature. In "Blues in the Green: Ecocriticism Under Critique" (2004), Michael Cohen calls US ecocriticism a "praise-song school" (11) that tends to celebrate assumptions made by traditional American natural writing rather than question those assumptions. Second, early ecocriticism tends to endorse the concept that nature is pristine, pure, and somewhere "out there." As Timothy Morton, in *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007), states, ecocriticism, as practiced in American literary academia, "is too enmeshed in the ideology that churns out stereotypical ideas of nature to be of any use" (13). This endorsement of nature is similar to the field's reinforcement of the idea that "ecology" is an organic, unified whole. For a more-detailed critique of ecocriticism's justification for using "ecology" to bring up environmental ethics in interpreting literature, see Dana Phillips's "Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology" (1999). Third, ecocriticism's critique of modernity and its attendant impact on the environment assumes that modernity is a universal human condition. This assumption was challenged by DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley in their introduction to *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* (2005). For them, human alienation from nature is not a universal human condition but rather depends on geographical and historical differences. Last but not least, ecocriticism's emphasis on "the local" has been criticized as ignorant of global environmental issues. Ursula K. Heise, in *Sense of Place And Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008), questions American environmentalism's endorsement of localism without taking globalization into consideration.

³ See Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), the founding text of Anglo-American ecocriticism. Glotfelty and Fromm point out the inadequacy of Anglo-American literary criticism, calling for its response to "the global Environmental Crisis" (xv).

⁴ Early Anglo-American ecocriticism has been criticized by other developments of ecocriticism, including 1) Environmental Justice that gained its popularity in the early 2000s with the publication of *Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy* (2002) edited by Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein); 2) Postcolonial Ecocriticism that started to develop in the early 2000s and gained its recognition with the publication of *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (2005) edited by Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley. In addition, ecocriticism has also developed a "comparative approach" since the late 1990s, starting with the publication of Patrick Murphy's edited volume *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook* (1998) and his book *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature* (2000).

in an African context? What shapes an African environmental consciousness? To avoid generalizations, what does “environment” mean to specific African ethnic groups? We might ask, for example, to what extent would environment mean in a Kikuyu context and how it might be similar to or different from an Igbo conception of environment? If modernity, industrialism, and technology contribute to an Anglo-American environmental consciousness, then how have these practices unfolded and been experienced in Africa? How do African literary writers approach environmental issues in their literary productions? And what role does African *literature* play in expressing environmental issues and activism?

Even though at first glance Achebe’s novel is not really about environmental degradation, it is arguable that the novel’s criticism of European colonialism and Christian missionization presciently points towards future African environmental crises in the postcolonial era, such as those with which Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991) engages.

Environmental Criticism in African Literary Studies before the 1990s

While in recent years more and more environmental criticism has focused on African literary texts,⁵ I focus on environmental criticism of African literary studies before the 1990s in order to trace a “rhizomatic,” rather than a derivative development of ecocriticism as occurring in various regions of the world. African environmental

⁵ For example, see *Eco-Critical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes* (2013) edited by Ogaga Okuyade; Senayon Olaoluwa’s “Ecocriticism beyond Animistic Intimations in *Things Fall Apart*”; Augustine Nchoujie’s “Landscape and Animal Tragedy in Nsahlai Nsambu Athanasius’s *The Buffalo Rider*: Ecocritical Perspectives, the Cameroon Experiment”; Anthony Vital’s “Ecocriticism, Globalized City, and African Narrative, with a Focus on K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*” (These essays are anthologized in *Ecocriticism of the Global South* (2015) edited by Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran.); Laura A. White’s “Beyond the Eco-flaneur’s Footsteps: Rerambulatory Narration in Zake Mda’s *Ways of Dying* (This essay is anthologized in *Ecoambiguity, Community, and Development: Toward a Politicized Ecocriticism* (2014) edited by Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran.)

literature and criticism can be traced back to the 1960s, pre-dating “ecocriticism” as a specifically environment-oriented literary approach that began to prosper in Anglo-American literary studies in the last two decades of the twentieth century. That being said, a common assumption among ecocritics that ecocriticism is not applicable to African literature needs to be re-examined. Without exploring the roots of African environmental literature and criticism, non-Africanist scholars may be inclined to treat ecocriticism in Africa as more or less an extension of globalized Anglo-American ecocriticism, as if the former has to participate in global environmental issues under the guidance of the latter. My aim in developing ecocriticism in the context of African literature is therefore not to explore the extent to which African literature might respond to the popularity of international ecocriticism and global environmental issues, or the extent to which African literature can be approached by ecocriticism, as defined and practiced in Anglo-American literary studies.

William Slaymaker, in his essay “Ecoing the Other (s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses” (2001), emphasizes the potentiality and the need to “spread” ecocriticism to African literary studies:

The 1990s was *the* decade of rapid and global environmentalist literary growth, and anthologies, literary histories, and the like are notoriously behind the times. Bibliographies of black African literature that appear in the first decade of the twenty-first century will likely reflect a significant growth of interest in ecocriticism and environmental literature. The low visibility of ecolit and ecocrit in recent black African writing is temporary. The green revolution will spread to and through communities of readers and writers of African literature, ‘ecoing’ the booming interest in other parts of the literary world. (139)

Six years after the publication of that essay, Slaymaker, in “Natural Connections; Unnatural Identities: Ecocriticism in the Black Atlantic” (2007), conveys a similar idea again that ecocriticism is not highly developed in African literary studies though he believes that African literature is potentially rich in environmentalist discussions: “To date, there are few African ecocritics and creative writers of environmental literature but the number is growing” (129). His later essay pays more attention to the current dearth of African “ecophilosophy” and “afroecophilosophers” (134), both of which, for Slaymaker are crucial for the development of an Africa-focused ecocriticism:

While ecological studies of West African and Ghanaian environmental problems are relatively easy to uncover, ecophilosophy and afroecophilosophers are rare to find. They are not endangered because their genesis has yet to evolve fully. Their speciation is in process. African philosophers have yet to specialize in environmental philosophy. (134)

I agree with Slaymaker regarding recognizing the inadequacy of ecocritical work on African literature. However, we need to be cautious about this urgent call for the development of an Africa-focused ecocriticism if it is based on the assumption that since ecocriticism is not widely applied to African literature, it is necessary to “spread” ecocriticism to African literary studies. Instead, Byron Caminero-Santangelo, in his essay “Shifting the Center: A Tradition of Environmental Literary Discourse from Africa” (2011) (published in *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*), emphasizes the need to bring the perspectives of “the environmentalism of the poor” (150). These perspectives are revealed by environmental writing, activism, and other forms of environmentalist traditions in

Africa to broaden ecocritical work on African literature. As Caminero-Santangelo states,

Such a project also contributes to the larger, ongoing effort to widen the scope of ecocriticism not only through the diversification of ecocritical canons but also through the use of critical frameworks informed by environmentalism developed by activists working within marginalized communities in the West and majorities in the Global South—activists like Maathai. (149)

Following Caminero-Santangelo's strategy, I aim to show that African literature was already responding to environmental issues before the 1990s, even though these issues were addressed more on a local than global level. I also show that African literary criticism had already developed environmental perspectives—ones that do not originate in “ecocriticism” as practiced in the American academia. African environmental philosophy—or “afroecophilosophy,” to use Slaymaker's terms—though not theorized or systematized in the same way that might occur in the discipline of philosophy in Western academia, can be found not only in pre-colonial African oral traditions (as Slaymaker suggests in his essay), but also in contemporary postcolonial African literature.

Ojung Ayuk's 1982 essay “Environmental Decadence: A Theme in Post-Independence African Fiction” is one example of environmental criticism produced in early African literary studies. In this essay, Ayuk focuses on issues of “environmental decadence” represented by African fictions published in the 1970s:

Decadence is a process or a period of decline or deterioration, as in, say, literature or morals, in the present essay, the word *decadence* is used to denote the subject or theme in recent African fiction, that is as

reflected in an author's preoccupation with the decline in the physical environment from a state of normality or excellence. This decadence entails the destruction of the splendid landscape that characterizes much of the African physical environment and the well-structured and peaceful way in which most Africans have traditionally lived their lives, as well as the installation of the devastation and the degenerate atmosphere that are manifest features of most colonial towns and urban centers inherited by the new nations upon decolonization. (142)

Ayuk's essay presents an example of African environmental literary criticism outside of the context of "ecocriticism" as developed in Anglo-American literary studies in the 1990s. Ayuk's environmental reading of African fiction in the 1970s that portrays the degradation of African urban environments is not the root of all African ecocriticism, for there are other essays written even earlier than Ayuk's that bring other environmental perspectives to African literature. For example, Jacques L. Bede's "African Town Environment in Contemporary Literature" (1975) provides a survey of African novelists' representations of the urban environment (especially in South Africa and Nigeria) that critique the city's corrupt and destructive influences on its dwellers: "In fact, they [African authors] all have shown that, by uprooting people, destroying ancestral organization and sanction, on the one hand, inducing into people's hearts an immoderate love of money and futile things, although they are unable to achieve their aims, the City is profoundly immoral and destructive" (31). In learning that African environmental literature and criticism already existed before the 1990s, we might see that it is not Africanist scholars and African literary authors who have remained indifferent or lukewarm to environmental issues and criticism, but

rather than Anglo-American ecocriticism has developed so narrowly that it has ignored ecocriticism that developed outside of Anglo-American contexts.

Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, in their anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), point out the inadequacy of Anglo-American literary criticism, calling for its response to “the global Environmental Crisis” (xv). While ecocriticism made its official debut with the publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Gerald Moore, in his essay “Literature and Environment in East Africa” (1966), predicted a potential environmental direction for African literary studies 30 years before *The Ecocriticism Reader*, calling for an African literary response to the African environmental degradation in the post-independence era. Citing George Lamming’s idea of “nationalism as a feeling of total harmony with the presence of a native place” (115), Moore explores African environmental sensibility/consciousness based on the postcolonial development of nationalism:

Nationalism is not only frenzy and struggle with all its necessary demand for the destruction of those forces which condemn you to the status we call colonial. . . . It is the private feeling you experience of possessing and being possessed by the whole landscape of the place where you were born, the freedom which helps you to recognize the rhythm of the winds, the silence and aroma of the night, rocks, water, pebble, and branch, animal and bird noise, the temper of the sea and the mornings arousing nature everywhere to the silent and scared communion between you and the roots you have made. (Lamming qtd. in Moore 115)

For Moore, the future of East African literature lay in the focus on a nationalism through which an indigenous African attachment to the environment could be

expressed: “And my first question is this: will East Africa be able to jump right over the exile phase and get straight down to the task of realizing its own sense of place, in the manner indicated by Lamming?” (116). If—as early as 1966—Moore argued that nationalism, as developed in post-independent East African literature, aims to express not only African political and cultural rebellion against colonial legacies, but also an African environmental attachment or sensibility to land, then surely ecocriticism, in the present day, does not need to expand or “spread” to African literary studies. Likewise, if environmental perspectives have already been part of African literary studies for some time, as shown by Ayuk’s and Bede’s essays, then why has African literary criticism been seen as indifferent to environmental issues?

More examples of the early environmental criticism developed in African literary studies can also be found in the 1998 special issue of *BRIDGES: An African Journal of English Studies*. This issue focuses on “Literature and the Environment”—particularly “the way the Environment appears in discourses, especially *literary* discourses” (i). Essays included in this special issue focus on “environmental issues” portrayed in Anglo-American literature and African literature.⁶ What makes this issue surprising and interesting is that although the issue was published after Glotfelty and Fromm’s *The Ecocriticism Reader*, none of the African essays included in this issue refers specifically to the literary approach “ecocriticism,” as newly-developed in Anglo-American literary criticism. This suggests the existence of some particular environmental perspectives in African contexts that are outside the scope of Anglo-American ecocriticism.

⁶ Essays that focus on environmental issues revealed in African literature include Gorgui Dieng’s “Environmental Issues in Buchi Emecheta’s *Naira Power*,” Noel Dossou-Yovo’s “Village and City Environments in [Cyprian] Ekwensi’s Major Works,” and Ibrahima N’diaye’s “*The Interpreters: A Study in Urban, Social, and Scatological Imagination*.”

Recognizing and foregrounding early African environmental criticism enable us ecocritics to avoid making misleading assumptions and conclusions, such as the idea that environmental criticism is not popular in African literary studies, as if Africanist scholars and/or African writers are not interested in environmental issues in Africa. In his 2001 essay, Slaymaker provides an explanation for his assumption that “the African echo of global green approaches to literature and literary criticism has been faint” (132). According to him, one possible reason for this lack of ecological readings of African literature is that African scholars are suspicious of ecocriticism. Slaymaker uses the neologism “ecohesitation” to describe this phenomenon, because the field originally developed and prospered in Western metropolitan centers so to apply ecocriticism to African literature is to subsume African literature into Western environmental values:

For some black African critics, ecolit and ecocrit are another attempt to “whiteout” black Africa by coloring it green. To some African critics and writers, who directly practiced in the liberation of their nation-states from colonialism, what ecocritics offer is not another theory of liberation like Marxism. Rather it appears as one more hegemonic discourse from the metropolitan West. . . .

This ecohesitation has been conditioned in part by black African suspicion of the green discourses emanating from metropolitan Western centers. . . . And the suspicion that environmentalism in all its various shades of green (including red greens) is a white thing is borne out by the explosive growth of research and participation in it by white scholars in and outside Africa. (132-33)

Slaymaker’s assumption that African scholars are sceptical about ecocriticism as one

of the dominant Western discourses corresponds to some literary critics' critique of ecocriticism more generally. According to environmental-justice critics and postcolonial ecocritics, ecocriticism has come under fire as a perspective that privileges white middle-class-male values of environmentalism, and ignores class, racial and gender difference, and the neo/colonial violence perpetrated on colonial/postcolonial environments.⁷ To expand on Slaymaker's assumption about an African "eco-hesitation," I would suggest that what African scholars are sceptical about with regard to ecocriticism is not ecocriticism itself as an environment-oriented approach, but rather the methodologies or values and assumptions that early Anglo-American ecocriticism tends to endorse and treat as universal. The two examples of early African environmental literary criticisms I cite above—Moore's correlating the development of African nationalism with African expressions of indigenous attachment to the land and Ayuk's critique of degeneration of African urban environments—show how environmental perspectives developed well before ecocriticism became popular in the West.

Instead of calling for African responses to ecocriticism or global environmental issues, what seems to be more important is to focus on how African literature expresses different ideas and highlights different environmental issues from Anglo-American literature, and how African literary criticism approaches environmental issues differently from the way Anglo-American ecocriticism does. In the introduction to *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*

⁷ For environmental justice's critique of ecocriticism, see essays in *The Environmental Justice Reader* (2002), including Mei Mei Evans's "'Nature' and Environmental Justice" and Devon G. Pena's "Endangered Landscapes and Disappearing Peoples? Identity, Place, and Community in Ecological Politics." For recent postcolonial ecocriticism's critique of traditional ecocriticism, see DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley's *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (2005); Rob Nixon's "Postcolonialism and Environmentalism" (2005); Susie O'Brien's "'Back to the World': Reading Ecocriticism in a Postcolonial Context" (2007); and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010).

(2010), Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt point out that although in the age of globalization environmental issues are global issues, Western powers still play the dominant role in deciding on global environmental policies and take a patronizing attitude towards environmental issues in non-Western countries: “While much has changed, much seems familiar: Western powers come to the economic, humanitarian, and occasionally military ‘rescue’ of ‘developing’ nations as predominantly ‘white’ civilization rides to the rescue of those needy ‘others’” (2). Instead of finding universal environmental issues in vexed and various postcolonial locales, Roos and Hunt emphasize the importance of paying attention to a variety of issues or problems related to postcolonial environments:

As we see it, postcolonial green scholarship must define itself not as a narrow theoretical discourse but as a relatively inclusive methodological framework that is responsive to ongoing political and ecological problems and to diverse kinds of texts. . . . Our goal is not to suggest a universalizing approach through some magical half-way, in-between ‘common ground,’ but rather to grapple with the issues that each of the various writers presented here offers us. (9)

Like Roos and Hunt, both of whom critique the hegemony of Western environmentalism, DeLoughrey and Handley, in their anthology *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literature of the Environments*, also foreground the limits of ecocriticism’s seemingly theoretical and methodological universalisms:

In fact, adopting one genealogy of ecocriticism as the normative one that is blind to race, class, gender, and colonial inequities tends to marginalize the long history of precisely this critique articulated by

indigenous, ecofeminist, ecosocialist, and environmental justice scholars and activists, who have theorized the relations of power, subjectivity, and place for many decades. (9)

DeLoughrey and Handley also emphasize rhizomatic trajectories of ecocriticism in their exploration of

a broader, more complex genealogy for thinking through ecocritical futures, and a turn to a more nuanced discourse about the representation of alterity, a theorization of difference that postcolonialists, ecofeminists, and environmental activists have long considered in terms of our normative representations of nature, human and otherwise. (9)

Building upon DeLoughrey and Handley's project in *Postcolonial Ecologies* and Roos and Hunt's in *Postcolonial Green*, I aim to develop an ecocritical methodology in an African context, showing how African environmental literature pushes beyond Anglo-American pastoral traditions and wilderness/conservation narratives by emphasizing Africa's colonial history, which complicates global environmental issues, as well as emphasizing its literary productions that enrich globalized ecocriticism.

Africa-focused Ecocriticism: Alternative Methodologies

Examining African literature for narrative strategies that turn upon the environment and people's relations to the environment enables us to see how standard histories of and approaches to environmental writing in American and British literature rely on a definition of nature as pristine and untouched, in contrast to a

nature interdependent with human culture. Whereas Anglo-American environmental literature critiques the impact of modernity, industrialism, and technology on human society, that results in the alienation of humans from nature, and pollution, and climate change, African environmental literature critiques the impact of colonialism/neocolonialism and globalization on African environments, traces the weakening of indigenous inhabitants' attachment to the land⁸ and dispossession from the land to the more specific political context.⁹ If Anglo-American environmental literature tends to endorse concepts of the pristine nature (or the sublime) and of wilderness (or wilderness conservation), then African environmental literature is concerned more with issues of urban slums and urban environmental degradations brought about by the colonial demands of modernization.¹⁰ And where Anglo-American environmental literature conveys nostalgia about pastoral and agrarian life, African environmental literature highlights the crisis of famine and food shortage caused by the shift from subsistence farming to global, market-oriented farming under globalization.¹¹ These contrasts remind us that “nature” and “environment” are not universal concepts, and that environmentalism in the context of Africa, or “environmentalism of the poor,” to use Ramachandra Guha's term,¹² should not be founded on universal principles.

I am arguing for a specifically African approach to and comprehension of the environment and its place in culture, I also want to be clear that this dissertation does

⁸ For example, see Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) and Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2007).

⁹ For example, see Cyprian Ekwensi's *Burning Grass* (1962).

¹⁰ See footnote 1.

¹¹ For example, see Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977).

¹² For more discussions of “environmentalism of the poor,” see Ramachandra Guha's *Environmentalism: A Global History* (2000); Joan Martinez-Alier's *Environmentalism of the Poor* (2002); Dean Curtin's *Environmental Ethics for a Postcolonial World* (2005); and Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011).

not seek to uncover or recover a pure, essentialist methodology of Africa-focused ecocriticism. Locating and defining the particularity of an Africa-focused ecocriticism and environmental awareness enable us to see alternative methodologies applied to—and more environmental concepts and tropes revealed in—African literature with the larger project of imagining a global ecocriticism. This ecocriticism does not universalize but finds its local echoes in a series of complex, lateral relations across the world. The resulting disaggregated vision of a global theory and praxis for ecocriticism in turn allows us to see convergences, tensions, and distinctions between and among many different “natures.”

Michael Lundblad, in his essay “Malignant and Beneficent Fictions: Constructing Nature in Ecocriticism and Achebe’s *Arrow of God*” (2011) responds to Slaymaker’s 2001 essay, by questioning the validity of Slaymaker’s call for African responses to ecocriticism without first listening to African expressions of their environmentalist ideas. He states:

But the terms of this hope are still flowing outward from the metropole, refusing to listen to the message being generated by activists like Ken Saro-Wiwa and writers like Achebe. . . . But the answer, it seems to me, lies in the broadening of our definition of what counts as ‘the environment’ and continually questioning whoever claims to be speaking for nature. (16-17)

Like Lundblad, Byron Caminero-Santangelo, in “Different Shades of Green: Ecocriticism and African Literature” (2007) questions the “criteria” Slaymaker uses to suggest the potential richness of ecological readings of African literature:

Yet although Slaymaker claims that ecocriticism is global, the criteria he uses to determine if a piece of writing is properly environmental

come from a primarily Anglo-American ecocritical framework, associated with the application of the sciences to literature and with deep ecology, which focuses on attacking “anthropocentrism.”

Now, it is true that if one uses these criteria, there has certainly been little environmental writing—literary or critical—from Africa. The problem, however, is precisely that Slaymaker embraces these criteria and the principles underpinning them—principles which represent a potential ecocritical orthodoxy, primarily developed in the West using American and British literature, and which have some serious limitations (at least in the African contexts). (698)

If the concept of “environment” in Anglo-American literature needs to be challenged, re-examined, and revised in the context of African environments, as Lundblad and Caminero-Santangelo attempt to do, then what should ecocriticism do in terms of interpreting African literature? Anthony Vital, in “Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology, and *Life and Times of Michael K*” (2008)—the first essay in African literary studies that uses the term “African ecocriticism”—emphasizes the importance of paying attention to “regional” and “national” differences as well as to colonial history in treating environmental issues in an African context. He states:

Ecocriticism, if it is to pose African questions and find African answers, will need to be rooted in local (regional, national) concern for social life and its natural environment. It will need too, to work from an understanding of the complexity of African pasts, taking into account the variety in African responses to currents of modernity that reached Africa from Europe initially, but that now influence Africa

from multiple centers, European, American, and now Asia in the present form of the globalizing economy. (88)

While Vital reminds ecocritics of the geographical and historical particularity of African environments, Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers, in their anthology, *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa* (2011)—the first collection of essays that aims to create dialogues between African literary studies and African environmental issues—foreground the interdisciplinary nature of developing an Africa-focused ecocriticism. They state:

The two key questions that we focused on were how African literatures and modes of analysis drawn from literary studies might contribute to ways of reading the environment in the other disciplines and how African literary studies might productively draw from studies of African environments. These questions point to the need for dialogue across disciplines to develop better understandings of different discourses regarding African environments and people's relationships with them. (2)

The key questions that Caminero-Santangelo and Myers focus on in their book show that to understand and develop ecocriticism in African literary studies, one cannot simply follow already established methodologies in ecocriticism and in African literary studies. Instead, one has to question how these two disciplines must adjust to each other and learn from each other's provenances.

Methodologically, I aim to pursue Caminero-Santangelo and Myers's questions further, exploring the extent to which African environmental literature complicates an Anglo-American notion of the environment and enriches global ecocriticism by creating dialogues between disciplines. Four broad directions can help

locate environmental issues that are different from those found in Anglo-American literatures. First, African literature conveys indigenous Africans' attachment to the land that the ancestors settled and left to the descendants, in other words, "kincentric" relationships with, and understanding of, the land and environment. Taku Victor Jong uses the word "kincentricity" (793) to describe traditional Cameroonian ecological knowledge—a knowledge that underscores the traditional Cameroonian relationship between humans (especially people in a family), animals, and nature.¹³ Second, African literature criticises the West's colonization of Africa, and its impact on African environments and ecologies (in the form of development, modernity and resource exploitation).¹⁴ Third, African literature portrays the impact of war (colonial military invasions and postcolonial political turbulences) and other forms of violence—such as Western biological invasion—against the environment and on African ecologies.¹⁵ Last but not least, African literature focuses on neocolonialism, especially on the continued global multinational exploitation of African natural resources and the imposition of Western mainstream environmentalism on postcolonial Africa.¹⁶

These four directions suggest that ecocriticism in Africa involves interdisciplinary and contextual understandings of African environments. For example, without gaining a rich, complex understanding of indigenous African cultures as historically situated and politically diverse entities, one may not fully grasp the meaning of an indigenous African "kincentric" attachment to the land. Likewise, one

¹³ See Jong's essay published in *ISLE*: "Landscape, Visual Arts, and Ecocriticism: A Reflection on the Scenic Apertures of Mount Fako in Cameroon" (2010).

¹⁴ See Toyin Falola's *Britain and Nigeria: Exploitation or Development* (1987).

¹⁵ See Alfred Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe 900-1900* (1986); Christine Ombaka's "War and Environment in African Literature" (1998); and Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson's edited volume *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (2007).

¹⁶ See Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (1992) and Michael Renner's *The Anatomy of Resource War* (2002).

needs postcolonial theory and postcolonial ecocriticism to trace the complex politics of environmental degradation in the African continent.¹⁷ One also needs to have some knowledge of postcolonial environmentalism to understand the complicity between colonial/neocolonial discourses and the development of Western environmentalism, especially its impact on postcolonial environments and its influences on the postcolonial practices of Western environmentalism.¹⁸ The complexity of African environmental issues makes ecocriticism in Africa more than simply a perspective composed of African responses to ecocriticism and global environmental issues.

Towards Literary Aesthetics in African Environmental Literature

These four directions that can help locate environmental issues in African literature, as I explain above, may lead to an exclusively content-oriented or justice-oriented criticism of African environmental literature, which focuses on environmental issues, including environmental policies and problems (e.g., dispossession, exploitation of natural resources, pollution, population, and urbanization). Yet if an Africa-focused ecocriticism focuses exclusively on environmental justice, it might ignore the role that African literature plays in responding to environmental issues and, in turn, the role of literary aesthetics in political debates. We must also pay attention to the formal aspects of African environmental literature, such as narrative form and narrative perspective, structure, characterization, plot, setting, metaphors, figures of language, and more, through

¹⁷ See Graham Huggan's "Greening Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives" (2004); Rob Nixon's "Postcolonialism and Environmentalism" (2005); Susie O'Brien's "'Back to the World': Reading Ecocriticism in a Postcolonial Context" (2007); Cara Cilano, and Elizabeth DeLoughrey's "Against Authenticity: Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism" (2007); and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010).

¹⁸ See Richard Grove's *Green Imperialism: Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (1996), and Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin's anthology *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Empire* (2007).

which a specific African environment is represented and environmental issues are addressed. Elaborating on how African authors use varied literary devices to represent an African environment of a specific time enables us to recognize African literature's critique of colonialism and neocolonialism, and more importantly, its reconstruction of an indigenous African environmental consciousness and environmentalism.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, and Environment* (2010), argue for the need to bring both postcolonialism and ecocriticism together as “a means of challenging continuing imperialistic modes of social and environmental dominance” (3), as exemplified by the continuing development of global capitalism and multinational corporate exploitation of postcolonial countries. In addition to issues of environmental justice/injustice, they also suggest the importance of paying attention to the function of “representation” and “imagination” in postcolonial literature:

What the postcolonial/ecocritical alliance brings out, above all, is the need for a broadly materialist understanding of the changing relationship between people, animals and environment—one that requires attention, in turn, to the cultural politics of representation as well as to those more specific “processes of mediation. . . that can be recuperated for anti-colonial critique” (Cilano and DeLoughrey 2007: 79). This suggests (1) the continuing centrality of imagination and, more specifically, imaginative *literature* to the task of postcolonial ecocriticism and (2) the mediating function of social and environmental *advocacy*, which might turn imaginative literature into a full-fledged form of engaged cultural critique. (12)

In the case of African literature, Huggan and Tiffin's emphasis on the imaginativeness of postcolonial literature reminds us not to reduce the function of African literature simply to political responses to current environmental issues in Africa, but to appreciate the complexity of aesthetics in African environmental literature. Although some Africanist ecocritics might indeed critique colonialism and neocolonialism, to focus solely on that is to define the African experience as always being beholden to colonialism, a perspective that is as limiting as it is ahistorical. Instead, paying attention to African environmental imaginations, as revealed in African literary productions, enables us to recognize indigenous African environmentalisms and avoid misconceptions or oversimplifications that ignore the possibility of *resistance* or the existence of an agency, or an ethnic and local-based environmentalism.

In her afterword to Roos and Hunt's *Postcolonial Green*, Heise pushes Huggan and Tiffin's reminder further, arguing that postcolonial ecocriticism should shift from social justice/injustice (content-oriented criticism) to addressing "questions of aesthetics" (258) or "questions of literary form" (258) in postcolonial literature—questions that explore the relationship between literary representations of environmental issues and social justice. She writes:

This question of the aesthetic arises with double force . . . [T]he aesthetic transformation of the real [environmental issues] has a particular potential for reshaping the individual and collective social imaginary, then the way in which aesthetic forms relate to culture as well as biological structures deserves our particular attention. (258)

Heise suggests that the emphasis on issues of justice/injustice in postcolonial ecocriticism is not enough because that would ignore literary particularities (and literary aesthetics) in postcolonial literature with regard to its expression of

environmental issues. Like Heise, DeLoughrey and Handley, in *Postcolonial Ecologies*, shift their focus from the postcolonial notion of nature/landscape as history, as emphasized in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, to a focus on the notion of environmental imagination and representation in postcolonial literature. DeLoughrey and Handley's emphasis on the postcolonial "literary imagination" about the land or "a spatial imagination made possible by the experience of place" (4) corresponds to what Heise reminds us: instead of paying attention mainly to issues of environmental justice/injustice in postcolonial literature, postcolonial ecocritics should also focus on the literary reconstruction and representation of postcolonial environments. Focusing not only on issues or the trope of social justice/injustice in African environmental literature, but on the literary imaginations and varied representations of colonial/postcolonial African environments, enables us to see how, in unique and particular representations of African environments, environmental issues and ideas have already been included in African literature.

The following is a list of environmentalist themes or tropes recurring in African novels, a list that would help us approach African literature from an Africa-centered perspective—both literally (content-oriented criticism) and literarily (form/aesthetic-oriented criticism):

1. Indigenous "kincentric" attachment to the land (a communal consciousness expressed through oral traditions, dialogues, and dialects)
2. Dispossession of the land and displacement (caused by land-tax imposition and enclosure)
3. Agriculture (competition between local, subsistence farming and global, market-oriented farming)
4. Country and city (tensions between tradition versus modernity, nostalgia,

“retreat and return”)

5. Colonial/neo-colonial biological control (conservationism, hygiene, birth control, population)
6. Extreme weather/climate change (heat, drought, rain), especially its impact on humans (food shortage, famine, disease)
7. Natural resources (such as oil, mines, and forests exploited by multi-national corporations) and resource control
8. Specific African landscapes, such as savannah, desert, bush, mountain, river, and their impacts on human psychology, memory, social practices, customs (representation, Africa-focused environmental aesthetics/imaginings)
9. Urban environments (rapid urbanization, elite neighborhood versus working-class slum or industrial neighborhood)
10. Plant, food, animal, disease (native and imported, local colors)
11. Modernity/development (technology, car, railroad) and its impact on human living conditions and psychology
12. Impacts of war (civil war, “white man’s war,” resource war)
13. Indigenous knowledges (holistic worldview, religion, local practices/customs) versus Western knowledges (Cartesian dualism, rationalism, technology and science)

Although the environmentalist tropes or themes recurrent in African literature are not limited to those listed above, these themes demonstrate that African authors have already addressed environmental issues and incorporated environmental aesthetics into their works. While some of the tropes are also popular in Anglo-American environmental literature, looking closely at those tropes in African contexts reminds us that although environmental consciousness may exist in all cultural systems and

products, it should not be treated as a universal human condition. Instead, it is historically, socio-economically, and geo-politically situated.

Towards an Africa-focused Ecocriticism: The Case of Nigeria

In order to discuss what an African world of ecocriticism might be like, I will look at novels in the chapters that follow. The novel, a genre with specific historical and aesthetic contexts, of complex plots, settings, and characterizations, and of rich literary components including metaphor and symbol, offers a wide range of materials for my project. More specifically, among African novelists, I will focus on Nigerian novelists, ranging from those of the first generation, including Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, and Gabriel Okara, those of the second generation, including Ken Saro-Wiwa and Ben Okri, to those of the present, including Helon Habila. As an African country with a prolific and vibrant literary culture and traditions, Nigeria is known for its novels. It has become, as Onyemaechi Udumukwu, the author of *Social Responsibility in the Nigerian Novel* (1998), points out, “a model for the development of a mature African literature” (1). While I am careful not to conflate my conclusion about Nigerian novels with an assertion about all African novels, Nigeria offers a good test case. Composed of multiple ethnicities, Nigeria is a model for how we might approach the complexity of African literature as a whole. Looking at Nigerian novelists with different ethnic backgrounds, I explore the particularities and complexity of environmental issues of specific African ethnic groups and locales and avoid generalizations and oversimplification. For example, I compare indigenous environmental consciousness as represented respectively by Chinua Achebe in an

Igbo context and by Ben Okri with his interest in Yorubaland.¹⁹ Likewise, I am also interested in exploring an indigenous environmentalism represented by Cyprian Ekwensi in his expression of a tradition Fulani nomadic life and by Gabriel Okara, who incorporates the Ijaw language into his predominantly English representation of a postcolonial environment. Finally, the notorious environmental crisis and continued resource wars in the postcolonial Niger Delta provide the setting for Ken Saro Wiwa's *Sozaboy* and Halon Habila's *Oil on Water*, two texts that discuss problems of postcolonial nationalism, environmentalism, the global and the local, in Africa.

Towards an Africa-focused Ecocriticism: The Case of Nigeria focuses on three specific environmental tropes recurrent in Nigerian novels—the forests, the country and the city, and oil—and use them to demonstrate the uniqueness and complexity of an Africa-focused ecocriticism. In contrast to early Anglo-American ecocriticism that tends to treat the first two tropes as reflections of universal human conditions, an Africa-focused ecocriticism questions such universalism. As for the third trope, I will argue that African writers' portrayals of the resource wars in the Niger Delta critique state-run environmentalism as a colonial legacy in the postcolonial world.

Chapter One “Toward Globaletics of African Forests: Representations of the Forest in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*” analyzes the role of the forest in indigenous Igbo and Yoruba cultures, as represented by Achebe and Okri in their novels, by foregrounding the novels' formation and explanation of the function of the forest. How might a novel's representation of the forest reveal a specific environmental consciousness in an African context? While in Achebe's novel, the forest maintains and protects the social, cultural, and religious

¹⁹ Ben Okri is actually a member of the Urhobo people in the region of the Niger Delta. His internationally-known novel, *The Famished Road*, has been discussed as a Yoruba text since the novel represents a Yoruba belief system and its setting is identified as a slum in Lagos.

order in Igbo society, in Okri's novel, the threatened forest serves as a reminder of a dying spiritual life and endangered indigenous knowledge in postcolonial Yorubaland. Recognizing the various functions of the forest in Achebe's *Igboland* and in Okri's Yorubaland enables us to understand how a specific indigenous African environmental consciousness is contextual and socially- and politically- situated. Moreover, looking closely at an African indigenous consciousness as reflected in representations of African forests also enables us to recognize a human-nature relationship that emphasizes holistic and inter-dependent relationships between human activities and the natural world. In doing so, we may contest the concept of the nature-culture divide that has dominated mainstream Western environmentalism..

While investigating particularities of African environmental thought, as displayed in Achebe's and Okri's novels, this chapter does not intend to promote and prioritize indigenous knowledges in an ahistorical context. Instead, by using Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o theory of "globaletics,"²⁰ I argue how Okri uses an African local forest to reconnect African indigenous knowledges to a global knowledge system, particularly in the face of global climate change.

Chapter Two "The Country and the City in Early Nigerian Novels: (Anti-) and (Post-) Pastoral Narratives in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Burning Grass* and Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*" examines examples of African pastoral narratives, including ones composed by Ekwensi and Okara in their novels in order to demonstrate the complexities of the pastoral and its role in literary convention as well as social, political and environmental critiques in African literature. Both Ekwensi and Okara incorporate pastoral formulas into their narratives, yet also alter them, in order to provide a deeper critique of colonialism, particularly its impact on African

²⁰ See Ngũgĩ's *Globaletics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (2012).

landscapes, traditional African practices, and the subjectivity of colonized Africans. Ekwensi foregrounds the tension between the countryside and the city in Fulaniland in his novel in order to criticize how British colonization of Fulaniland has endangered traditional Fulani practices. In addition, Ekwensi also reverses the traditional pastoral movement in his novel in order to restore an indigenous Fulani environmentalism. In contrast to Ekwensi's pastoral, the environmental crisis, as addressed in Okara's novel, is more of an inner one that highlights, to use Ngũgĩ's idea of "colonial alienation,"²¹ the impact of colonial education on the subjectivity of colonized Africans. Okara presents an anti-pastoral in his novel in order to foreground a subjectivity crisis under which colonized Africans suffer the consequence of a dichotomized world-order (culture/nature, mind/body, reason/instinct) and the attendant collapse of a holistic view and meaning of the world after European colonization.

Ekwensi's and Okara's deployments of the pastoral in their novels that foreground particular African environmental crises in the postcolonial era enable an Africa-focused ecocriticism. While Ekwensi's representation of Fulaniland foregrounds a post-pastoral that challenges Western conceptions of nature, Okara imagines a postcolonial social space in Africa, be it one in the countryside or in the city, as a dystopia that questions the possibility of reclaiming traditions under colonization.

Chapter Three "De/Constructing Nationalism: Oil, Ethnic Minorities, and the (Anti-) *Bildungsroman* in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* treats *Sozaboy* and *Oil on Water* as oil novels in the form of *bildungsroman*. In

²¹ See Ngũgĩ's *Deconinsing of the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986).

these novels, oil is used as a trope to reveal resource crisis and/or pollution in the Niger Delta, as well as to criticize the legitimacy of the Nigerian nation. Saro-Wiwa and Habila foreground oil and its relation to the formation of the Nigerian nation in their novels in order to criticize the hegemony of Nigerian nationalism and its administrative and ideological apparatuses, including state-run and militarized resource control in the name of the unity of the nation, as it is imposed on minorities of the Niger Delta. Narrated by minority subjects from the Niger Delta, both *Sozaboy* and *Oil on Water* convey social and environmental criticisms within the frame of the *bildungsroman*. However, instead of national allegories that celebrate the parallel growth of colonial subjects as protagonist-narrators and the independence of the nation that the narrator-protagonists identifies with, both Saro-Wiwa and Habila present counter-national allegories in their novels that question the validity of the Nigerian nation and the possibility of the successful formation of a minority subject within a unified nation built on the exploitation and the oppression of the minorities. Focusing on the oil-nation trope, as used in *Sozaboy* and *Oil on Water*, enables us to recognize a “double colonialism” that occurs in postcolonial Nigeria—a colonialism not only from outside, as manifested by neocolonialism and global capitalism, but also from within, as revealed by Nigerian nationalism imposed on the minorities.

Counter-national allegories, as revealed in *Sozaboy* and *Oil on Water*, can also be read as resistance narratives that expose, what Homi Bhabha has called the “ambivalence”²² of the postcolonial nation and projects, as well as foreground these narratives’ corresponding political and environmental ramifications, including, to use Michael Watts’ terms, the “oil complex” and a “double movement” in the Niger

²² See Bhabha’s introduction to his edited volume *Nation and Narration* (1990).

Delta.²³ *Sozaboy* and *Oil on Water* remind us that the Niger Delta is not only a locus of resource wars but also a locus that questions the boundary of the nation-space of Nigeria.

The conclusion of this dissertation, “Neo-Colonialism from the East? Problems of Applying Postcolonial Ecocriticism to Chinese Impact on African Environments,” discusses the emergent role of China in African environments in the postcolonial era—an issue that remains under the radar of most postcolonial ecocriticism with an emphasis on Africa. The Africa-focused ecocriticism I attempt to develop and promote in this dissertation, in order to enrich and complicate globalized ecocriticism(s), targets the impact of colonial legacies on African environments. However, in the postcolonial era, especially in the past two decades, persistent colonial and neo-colonial impacts on African environments come not only from the West, but also from the East, especially from China. The West is therefore no longer the only exploiter of African natural resources, and the current environmental crises in Africa are not all simply persistence of Western colonialism under another guise. Postcolonial and ecocritical studies that neglect Chinese power, especially Chinese impacts on African environments, show the limits of a globalizing ecocriticism that is situated in a western context. Based on these concerns regarding questions of Chinese presence in Africa and its impact on African environments, I conclude *Towards an Africa-focused Ecocriticism: The Case of Nigeria* by suggesting that the future of an Africa-focused ecocriticism depends on carefully watching and incorporating Chinese-African relations and developing geopolitics between those regions.

²³ See Michael Watts’ working paper “The Sinister Political Life of Community: Economies of Violence and Governable Spaces in the Niger Delta” (2004).

Chapter One

Towards Globaletics of African Forests: Representations of the Forests in Chinua

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*

In his *Forests* (1992), Robert Pogue Harrison raises questions to the cultural function and production of the forests in Western civilization, particularly “the appropriation of the forest as a metaphor for human institutions,” as he elaborates:

Human beings have by no means exploited the forest only materially; they have also plundered its trees in order to forge their fundamental etymologies, symbols, structures of thought, emblems of identity, concepts of continuity, and notions of system. *From the family tree to the tree of knowledge, from the tree of life to the tree of memory, forests have provided an indispensable resource of symbolization in the cultural evolution of humankind.* (7-8)

Harrison investigates the history of Western literature, particularly its representations of the forests, to demonstrate how the forests function as the “shadow” of Western civilization, or more specifically, as a reminder of Western civilization’s (inevitable) alienation from nature. As the Brothers Grimm use the German forests in their folktales in order to conjure up nostalgia about “the lost unity” as well as reconstruct the myth of the German cultural unity,¹ so William Wordsworth incorporates his recollections of “the

¹ See Harrison’s “Forests of Nostalgia” in his *Forests*, p.164-77.

presence of nature” in his poem “Tintern Abbey” in order to conjure up an imagination about a remote time when nature still exists.² Human alienation from *nature* caused by *culture* that Harrison traces in literature has contributed to the development of Western environmentalism. Questions of the nature-culture divide have also created debates in early Anglo-American ecocriticism. If Western literature’s representations of the forests highlight questions of the nature-culture divide, what role, then, does literature play in African thinking about forests? This chapter will focus on two African literary classics, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991), and discuss how these authors’ representations of the forests in Igboland and Yorubaland respectively reveal a unique and complex (yet not static and ahistorical) indigenous environmental consciousness in Africa. More specifically, both Achebe and Okri use the forest as a trope in order to reconstruct an indigenous environmental consciousness in Africa that challenges the nature-culture divide—a concept that has dominated Western environmentalism.

Achebe and Okri use *forests* as a trope to remind us of the disappearing traditions and order in indigenous African cultures. Their treatment of the forest conveys an indigenous environmentalism, which, unlike Western environmentalism, is founded on a holistic, interdependent, and unalienated relationship between the human community and the surrounding natural world. In highlighting the contrast between Western environmentalism and an African environmentalism in terms of questions of the nature-culture divide, I do not intend to prove that the latter is based on a nature-culture unity in contrast with a nature-culture dichotomy. To look at an African thinking about nature

² See Harrison, p.155-64

from the perspective of a nature-culture unity would idealize as well as ahistoricize indigenous African cultures. More importantly, a nature-culture unity, like a nature-culture dichotomy, is still founded on a binary mode of thinking, as if there is always a “nature” that pre-exists in human “cultures” or non-Western indigenous cultures are part of that “nature.” Bruno Latour, in his *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (2004), points out problems of the ethnographic use of the concept of “nature” in differentiating Western cultures from non-Western cultures (“comparative anthropology” in his term). He states,

By asserting that other cultures brought the natural order and the social order into ‘correspondence,’ the anthropologists were still taking this division for granted, maintaining that it was in some sense in the nature of things. Now the other cultures under consideration did not blend the social order and natural order at all; *they were unconcerned by the distinction*. To be aware of a dichotomy is not at all the same thing as combining two sets into one—still less ‘getting beyond’ the distinction beyond the two. (45)

Latour’s comment reminds us of the danger of looking at non-Western culture in terms of the nature-culture division. So although it might be convenient to replace a nature-culture dichotomy with a nature-culture unity as a way to understand an indigenous environmental thought, we must attend to the reliance of non-Western environmentalisms on this seemingly Western concept of “nature.”

By exploring Achebe’s and Okri’s representations of the forest in order to discuss African environmental consciousness, I will not, therefore, demonstrate how the forest in

an African context is simply a “natural” landscape with which indigenous African “cultures” maintain good and harmonious relationships. The forest (the “Evil Forest”) in Achebe’s novel is represented not simply as a natural landscape surrounding the Igbo villages, but rather more importantly, as the site of the maintenance of Igbo social order. Paying attention to and incorporating “nature” and “culture” in Achebe’s and Okri’s novels enables me to critique the discourse of a nature-culture division and to demonstrate how an indigenous environmental consciousness as gestured at by Achebe and Okri rejects that division. Yet focusing exclusively on an indigenous African environmental consciousness in Achebe’s and Okri’s novels would lead to an exclusively anthropological reading of both novels and ignore the literary. That being said, while showing what an African indigenous environmental consciousness looks like in these texts, I will also pay attention to how these two authors use “the forest” to construct an African indigenous environmental consciousness in their critiques of European colonialism and globalization. Thus, “the forest” in both novels is not only an anthropological marker, but also a literary device that enables and situates the authors’ political, social, and ecological critiques.

In his recent book *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (2012), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o uses his own experiences as an African novelist and dramatist to explain that African literary products can be read as “poor theory”—“poor” not in the sense of “appertaining to poverty” (2) or being in some way impoverished, but in the sense of “being extremely creative and experimental in order to survive” (3). Expressing the urgency of present environmental and political crises, as Ngũgĩ puts it, “Poor theory

and its practice imply maximizing the possibilities inherent in the minimum” (2). In the case of Achebe and Okri, these novelists convey their social, cultural, and environmental critiques through their imaginations about the local forests— locales where a traditional social order/custom/knowledge is maintained and/or preserved, yet is also threatened by the arrival of colonialism and/or neocolonialism and globalization. That being said, Achebe and Okri should not be understood as privileging indigenous cultures and/or knowledges, but instead, as arguing for a contemporary African subjectivity that connects indigenous knowledges to global issues both to assert their region’s participation in modernity and to show how the political and environmental crises in Africa are, in fact, linked to and have an impact on global knowledge systems. As Ngũgĩ describes it,

Globaletics is derived from the shape of the globe. On its surface, there is no center; any point is equally a center. As for the internal center of the globe, all points on the surface are equidistant to it—like the spokes of a bicycle wheel that meet at the hub. Globaletics combines the global and the dialectical to describe a mutually affecting dialogue, or multi-logue, in the phenomenon of nature and nurture in a global space that’s rapidly transcending that of the artificially bounded, as nation and region. The global is which humans in spaceships or on the international space station see: the dialectical is the internal dynamics that they do not see.

Globaletics embraces wholeness, interconnectedness, equality of potentiality of parts, tension, and motion. It is a way of thinking and relating to the world particularly in the era of globalism and globalization.

(8)

Both Achebe and Okri engage the uniqueness of an indigenous African environmental consciousness that participates in the “globaletics” project proposed by Ngũgĩ. That is, the “globaletics” of Achebe and Okri, for example, may be seen as contesting colonial discourses on traditional African cultures (as revealed in Achebe’s re-writing of Igbo history), or as pushing the boundaries of narrative and the novel form (as revealed in Okri’s magic realist writing), in order to challenge specifically the hegemony of Western knowledge and value systems (including progress, modernization, development, etc).

Focusing on Achebe’s and Okri’s representations of the forests as a particular landscape offers a path to understanding relationships between human and nature in specific historical and cultural contexts while enabling us to recognize alternative environmental consciousness revealed in African literary aesthetics. This study, I hope, will enrich Anglo-American ecocriticism and postcolonial criticism and theories.

Landscape Aesthetics in African Literature: A Review

Since the eighteenth century, Anglo-American landscape aesthetics have developed well-worn tropes that both evoke and fit British and American landscapes: descriptions of color and light, of foreground-background relations, of the sublime, the picturesque, and the pastoral. As W. J. T. Mitchell states in his essay “Imperial Landscape” (2002), “Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a

frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum” (5). Contemporary African literature, developing hand in hand with postcolonialism and with an emphasis on history and time, has been read largely as texts that critiques mainly the impact of colonialism on African politics and subjectivity in the postcolonial age. Landscape representations and their functions in Anglophone African literature have gained relatively small attention from Anglo-American literary criticism. Specific analyses of literary representations of the forests as well as their environmentalist connotations are rare. For example, Adrian Roscoe, in his *Mother is Gold: A Study in Western African Literature* (1971), points out the rarity and limits of African authors’ expressions of their native environments, linking their scarcity to colonial discourses under which African landscapes are usually despised, degraded, and even demonized. Roscoe emphasizes the need to “*celebrate anew a landscape which [African] poets have largely forgotten,*” yet at the same time suspects the “authenticity” of “an Africanized language” used in African poetry (36). Focusing on Nigerian poet J.P. Clark’s poetry, Roscoe admires Clark’s celebration of the African landscape, yet concludes that the poet’s expressions of his relationship with the local environment are more or less imitations of traditional Western nature poetry. In a more recent scholarly discussion of landscapes in African literature, Paoi Hwang, in his “Language and Landscape: Conflict in Chinua Achebe’s *Anthill of the Savannah*” (2004), explains how Achebe, writing in English, has to create new imagery and metaphors in order to represent African landscapes: “In Achebe’s view, Africa’s oral tradition may offer alternative aesthetic experiences for the making of a ‘new’ English. It may contain new methods of perception and presentation that can act as replacements for the western picturesque. It might also mean the removal of certain aesthetic associations behind the

picturesque . . . ” (173). For Hwang, African authors like Achebe have to abandon Anglo-American landscape aesthetics in order to accurately depict African landscapes.

Unlike Roscoe and Hwang, Gerald Moore, in his essay “The Negro Poet and his Landscape” (1967), focuses more on the way in which African poets look at their relationship with the environment than on their use of colonial language. Moore differentiates between landscape descriptions revealed in African poetry and those in Anglo-American nature poetry. For him, instead of creating a boundary between the poet as the subject and the natural scenes as the object, African poets express “a continual interfusion of the poet’s physical presence with the feature of his landscape” (153). As Moore explains in the following:

What seems to be involved is a complete identification of the poet with the constituent features of the landscape around him. He [an African poet] does not so much inhabit this landscape as become inhabited by it. Its rivers flow through his veins, its branches toss in his hair, its planets burn through the bone of his forehead and irradiate his skull, its volcanoes stir and grumble in his throat. This is something quite different in order from the pantheistic ecstasies of a Wordsworth or a Shelley, who “stand before” nature and “contemplate” it. (151)

Moore’s reading of African poets’ relationship with the natural world, though attempting to locate an authentic postcolonial position, suspiciously re-inscribes a “primitive” reading. Moore tends to conflate Africans (particularly African bodies) with nature. This Africans-as-nature conflation only reinforces colonial discourses of non-Western

cultures. Christine Loflin, the author of *African Horizons: The Landscapes of African Fiction* (1998)—the first African literary criticism that focuses on African landscapes—expands Moore’s investigation (mainly on African poetry) to African fiction, foregrounding African novelists’ descriptions of the interdependent relationship between Africans and their environments. She states, “African writers do describe the African landscape. Characters in African fiction are always carefully situated within their environment. The description of that environment is extremely varied and differs from the European model, especially in its insistence on the inclusion of the human community within the natural world” (3). More importantly, for Loflin, “landscapes” in an African context should not be confined only to natural landscapes as defined by the Anglo-American literary tradition, for “African landscapes are interventions in a historical dialogue about the meaning and significance of Africa, African people, and African land” (5). While both Moore’s and Loflin’s readings of African authors’ representations of African landscapes remind us of an indigenous belief in the interdependence between nature and culture, we should be cautious not to reduce that belief into ethnographic stereotypes or “facts.” Instead, to understand landscape aesthetics in African literature, one must avoid stereotypes and explore how African authors use literature to depict and/or reconstruct an environmental consciousness that questions the colonial discourse of non-Western culture as well as mainstream Western environmentalism.

While Anglo-American ecocriticism has paid little attention to African landscape aesthetics, perhaps due to the field’s relatively little access to this literature and due to British and American critics’ preoccupation with other regions of the world, postcolonial

readings of African landscapes in African literature have paid more attention to cultural environments and their historical and political significance. Yet, such an exclusive focus on the cultural ignores the role of nature in constructing African human environments. Simon Gikandi, in his “Chinua Achebe and the Poetics of Location: The Use of Space in *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*” (1993), argues that instead of simply adopting time-or history-focused perspectives as dictated by most of the postcolonial approaches, one should “pose the question of location and space and its relation to the development of meanings” (2). He states, “Achebe provides us with an indigenous, but paradoxical, deployment of space: he wants, on one hand, to counter the heterotopic representation of the African in the colonial text by making Umuofia an epistemological presence, one defined not only by the process of time, but also by an ensemble of spaces” (3). Gikandi focuses on how Achebe reconstructs a pre-colonial Igbo village—especially the protagonist Okonkwo’s “household space” (5)—in order to question colonial representations of Africa that depict Africa as having nothing but wild forests, treacherous river, and barbarian natives such as those depicted in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1898). However, Gikandi’s emphasis on Achebe’s representation of a cultural space in Igboland may ignore the interdependence between domestic spaces and the natural surroundings in Igbo culture. As this chapter will argue, Achebe’s depiction of a pre-colonial Igbo village surrounded by the “Evil Forest” reasserts not only the cultural and historical richness of the Igbo, but also a particular Igbo social order founded on the interdependence of natural and cultural spaces. In this way, Achebe’s reclamation of African indigenous culture challenges Western constructions of non-Western cultures and their relation to nature.

As Gikandi poses “the question of location and space and its relation to the development of meaning” (2) in order to explore alternative postcolonial representations of pre-colonial and colonial history in Achebe’s novels, so Laura Murphy reminds postcolonialists to understand African history—especially that of the slave trade—through African authors’ representations of African landscapes, especially those of the forests. In her “Into the Bush of Ghosts: Specters of the Slave Trade in West African Fiction” (2007), Murphy argues that the “violence” and “brutality” of the slave trade has been written into the forests in West African novels, including Amos Tutuola’s *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, D.O. Fagunwa’s *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, and Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*. She states,

The landscape itself seems to produce physical brutality and enslavement, demonstrating the way in which the bush has historically come to be marked with the violence of the slave trade. Within the imagination of West Africa, the very landscape itself works as a captor.

There is an essential conflation here of the two terrors associated with the bush in the West African literary tradition. The two most terrorizing inhabitants of the forest—slave raiders and spirits of the dead—are made one and the psyche. . . . The bush, then, is a site of magical capture, through which the ghosts of the bush are able to lay complete claim upon the body of the protagonist. . . . (148)

As “a site of magical capture,” the forests in West African novels thus also highlight a collective trauma of West Africa rather than simply recapitulate the colonial representations of the African forests. Murphy’s reading of the representations of the

forests in West African novels therefore reminds us that in approaching a natural landscape in a postcolonial African text, we need to be aware not only of the way in which the landscape is represented but also a specific *historicity* attached to it.

Both Gikandi's and Murphy's focuses on landscapes in African novels—the former on an Igbo domestic landscape and the latter on the historical connotations of the West African forests—challenge colonial discourses that reject the existence of cultural meanings of African landscapes. However, if the particularity of African landscape aesthetics lies in “its insistence on the inclusion of the human community within the natural world” (3) as suggested by Loflin, then Gikandi's and Murphy's expansions of postcolonial literary criticism to include discussions of landscape representations in postcolonial African literature are still limited in the sense that both critics focus only on either the cultural or the historical construction of the African landscape, ignoring the role of Africa's natural environments in producing cultural meanings of African societies. This lack of attention to Africa's natural environments as well as their interdependent relationships with African communities may result in readers overlooking environmental arguments suggested by African authors.

Another tendency in recent postcolonial readings of landscape aesthetics in African literature is to adopt a seemingly celebratory attitude toward postcolonial African landscapes, treating them as sites of cultural hybridity where various cultures meet, interact, and transform. Brenda Cooper, in her essay “Landscape, Forests, and Borders within the West African Global Village” (2001), argues how Okri's representation of the Yoruba forest—a space transformed from originally a scared and forbidden site in

indigenous Yoruba religion to an ever-changing, constructed hybrid space of animism and modernization—celebrates the inevitability and vitality of cultural and spatial hybridization in the era of globalization. She states,

What makes the landscape of *The Famished Road* original is the fact that Okri liberates his fictional sites from the organicist tradition by rendering them wholly kinetic. . . . A refusal to be bound by the conventions of narrative realism enables Okri magically to shift forests and re-position roads. These shifting forests, which merge and transform themselves in a changing world context, are particularly significant in terms of *The Famished Road*'s denial of such simplistic binary opposition as local-as-home and global-as-London. . . . Okri perceives globalization as a vast network of locations, from London to Lagos, interacting and mutually transforming. (284)

Similar to Cooper, Maik Nwosu, in his essay “The River, the Earth, and the Spirit World: Joseph Conrad, Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri, and the Novel in Africa” (2007), focuses on “the river” in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, “the earth” in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, and “the spirit world” in Okri’s *The Famished Road*, arguing that “all three writers reflect the intersection and contestation of cultures and ideologies in modern Africa, the meeting of two native or base sign-systems and the consequent creation of a third or cross-cultural signifying field rooted in both the European and the African imaginary” (94). Cooper and Nwosu both use the perspective of globalization to interpret the Yoruba forest and the Igboland. These perspectives treat African landscapes represented by African authors

merely as a space for cultural exchanges, transformation, and reconstruction. The authors' critiques of ecological and environmental issues with regard to the forest under the threat of rapid modernization and globalization are displaced and ignored. Achebe's and Okri's representations of the forests in their novels not only convey an understanding of cultural and social meanings of forests in indigenous African cultures, but also enable visions of forests that reveal environmental consciousnesses in African contexts that, in turn, demonstrate that Africans participate in global knowledge production with regard to environmental issues.

African Representations of the Forests and African Environmental Consciousness

Several critics have shown the correlation between Achebe and Okri in terms of their use of African indigenous beliefs and concepts—focusing on the theme of the spirit-child or *abiku* (in Yoruba)/*ogbanje* (in Igbo), for example—but few have paid attention to representations of nature in their works.³ Looking closely at the varied functions of the forest in *Igboland* in Achebe's work, and in *Yorubaland* in Okri's, enables us to understand how two specific indigenous African environmental consciousnesses are constructed as well as politico-historically situated and related. In Achebe's novel, the forest functions to maintain and protect social, cultural, and religious order in traditional Igbo society gradually undermined by European colonialism and missions. In Okri's novel, the threatened forest in Yorubaland is a reminder of the dying of both the richness

³ See my *JALA* essay: "From Cultural Hybridization to Ecological Crisis" for more details about the scholarships of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Okri's *The Famished Road* with regard to both novelists' integrating indigenous knowledges into their fictional writings.

of spiritual life and of natural resources in postcolonial Nigeria under colonization and neocolonialism/globalization. While Achebe's forest conjures up nostalgia about pre-colonial Igbo cosmology, Okri's forest conveys anxiety about the danger of deforestation for indigenous Yoruba culture and ecology. At first glance, the weakening of the Evil Forest in Achebe's novel has little to do with the disappearing forest in Okri's novel. The former is caused by the nineteenth century Christian mission in the West African hinterland, whereas the threat of deforestation and the dying of the indigenous Yoruba spirit world in Okri's novel are caused by neocolonialism and globalization. Despite the two novels' historical and geographical differences—one set in the late nineteenth century and published in the late 50s and the other set on the eve of Nigerian independence and published in the early 90s—the cultural crisis written into the forest in Achebe's novel in fact predicts the cultural and ecological crisis as dramatized in Okri's novel. The connections between Achebe and Okri enables us to recognize a trajectory of colonial legacies that link cultural crisis to ecological degradation in postcolonial Nigeria. More specifically, the correlation of the cultural and the ecological crises in colonial/postcolonial Nigeria as revealed via the trope of the forest in Achebe's and Okri's novels demonstrates that Christian missions and European colonialism in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries not only brought a political and cultural invasion, but that invasion in turn results in ecological degradation in post/colonial Nigeria. Connecting two unique indigenous African environmental consciousnesses as constructed respectively by Achebe and Okri thus enables us to detect a sustained Nigerian crisis in the postcolonial era—a crisis that underscores the entanglement of cultural and ecological crises in Nigeria. Moreover, while postcolonial readings of Africa's cultural and natural

landscapes (as exemplified by Gikandi and Murphy) have focused heavily on the impact of colonialism on indigenous African cultures and psychologies, juxtaposing Achebe's and Okri's novels and their representations of Africa's forests enables us to see how African authors reclaim their cultural heritages, including their belief in the reciprocity between human activities and the natural world, and how Africa's natural environments fulfill the cultural meanings of Africa's ethnic communities.

Last but not least, looking at Achebe's and Okri's representations of Africa's forests from the perspective of Ngũgĩ's theory of "globaletics" foregrounds African participation in knowledge production regarding environmental issues in the colonial/postcolonial era. Achebe's novel reveals a "dialectical" representation of an African forest in order to reclaim a local/indigenous social order/knowledge that is rejected by colonial discourses. Okri's novel, in contrast, reveals a "globalectical" representation of an African forest in order to reconnect indigenous knowledges/beliefs to global environmental issues. Connecting Achebe's and Okri's knowledge production via their representations of African forests reformulates and complicates how indigenous African knowledges regarding human relationships with nature have been discussed. Indigenous African knowledges written into the forest by Achebe and Okri should not be treated simply as African "traditions" that can only be reclaimed and preserved, but also as dynamic discourses that persist in questioning univocal and static systems (such as the Western discourse of the nature-culture divide) for mediating environmental issues. Achebe and Okri use African forests in their novels not really to pursue the authenticity of indigenous African cultural heritage, but rather to initiate a discourse that de-centers

global knowledge systems dominated by the West.

When the Evil Forest Is Not *Evil* Anymore: Cultural Hybridization in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Cultural hybridization of indigenous societies—for better or for worse—is an inevitable process and consequence of European colonization of the post/colonial worlds, including Igboland in Africa. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* highlights several aspects of cultural hybridization in pre-colonial/colonial Igbo, including indigenous Igbo's conversion into Christianity. As Joseph McLaren states in his essay "Missionaries and Converts: Religion and Colonial Intrusion in *Things Fall Apart*" (1998): "Achebe presents missionaries as 'agents' of cultural change for which religion is the ultimate justifying goal" (48). Although Achebe's attitude toward Christian missionaries in pre-colonial and colonial Igboland—positive and/or negative⁴—has been discussed in Achebe's scholarship, this issue is seldom discussed from the perspective of the Evil Forest. Looking at cultural hybridization of the pre-colonial and colonial Igboland from the perspective of the Evil Forest enables us to recognize a traditional Igbo environmental consciousness threatened by Christian missions—a crisis that, as I will elaborate later in this chapter, predicts ongoing ecological degradation in postcolonial Nigeria, later dramatized by Okri in his novel.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe reclaims the uniqueness of Igbo cultures through his

⁴ See Joseph McLaren's "Missionaries and Converts: Religion and Colonial Intrusion in *Things Fall Apart*." In this article, McLaren argues that Achebe's novel "in some respects offers reasons to support conversion" (p. 51).

representation of a fictional pre-colonial Igbo village named “Umuofia.” Surrounded by the forest where an Igbo culture prospers before British colonization, “Umuofia,” literally translated as “children of the forest,”⁵ suggests Achebe’s intention to reconstruct a traditional Igbo culture in a manner that an African ethnic-national epic would highlight, that is, as a mature culture founded on its people’s working with nature. Achebe introduces a number of key components of an Igbo culture in his writing, including community life, the land/Earth Goddess (*Ani*), and the Evil Forest, and uses them to reconstruct what a traditional Igbo village is like as well as to highlight the interdependence between nature and culture that sustains the village. Looking closely at these three components, particularly at the interdependence between them, enables us to see how Achebe represents cultural landscapes of a traditional Igbo village in order to show the richness of traditional Igbo cultures, as well as to illuminate an indigenous African environmental consciousness.

Achebe highlights the inter-relationships between community, *Ani*, and the forest in traditional Igbo village life in order to show that Igbo civilization is founded on the cooperation between nature and culture. Traditional Igbo society centers on autonomous villages in the same vicinity, each of which is composed of a group of compounds occupied by numbers of a large family.⁶ Each village worships *Ani*, the Head of the land, as well as the Earth Goddess. The Head of the land is the eldest male representative of the first family to settle on the site, who ranks as a god after he dies and is worshipped by his

⁵ See Augustine Nchuojie’s “*Things Fall Apart* Fifty Years After: An Ecological Reading” (2009).

⁶ See Marcellina U. Okechie-Offoha’s “The Igbo” in *Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Nigeria* (1996) and Don C. Ohadike’s “Ibo Culture and History” (1996).

descendants.⁷ The Earth Goddess, a central deity in the Igbo society, is worshipped because she determines the principles of law and social order and influences the welfare of the whole society. The duality of *Ani* suggests that he/she is a conduit between human and spiritual/natural worlds as well as between social and natural orders/law. As *Ani* are described in the novel, “She [the Earth Goddess] was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct. And what was more, she was in close communion with departed fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to earth” (36). The duality of *Ani* worshipped by the Igbo people also indicates an indigenous Igbo environmental consciousness that endorses sustainability of the community. This can be seen in an episode where Okonkwo breaks the rules of “the Week of Peace”—a “sacred week” before which the community plant crops and during which any violent deeds are forbidden—by beating his second wife. Okonkwo is condemned and punished because what he did is an offense to the Earth Goddess, who like the Head of the land, will influence the harvest: “Our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbor. We live in peace with our fellows to honor our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crop will not grow” (30). The *Ani* thus determines the sustainability of community life, for it represents a leverage between natural forces and human conducts. By foregrounding the importance of *Ani* in Umuofia, Achebe reconstructs an indigenous environmental consciousness founded on the close relationship between community and the land/gods. In “The Environment and Sustainable Development” (2002), Paul O. M. Njemanze underscores this inter-

⁷ See G.T. Basden “The Ibo People” in *Niger Ibos* (1966).

relationship between community and the land/gods as it is practiced in the sustainability in Nigeria and what Herbert Macaulay calls “Native Land Tenure”:⁸

The land tenure system was based on the religion and worldview of the people of Nigeria. Land, as the abode of the dead and the ancestral spirits, was sacred to all. The utilization of the land and its resources was governed by mores and principles. As the abuse of land was seen as capable of offending the earth goddess, resulting in a calamitous impact on the entire community, the role of law as an agency of social control was particularly effective. (Macaulay qtd. in Njemanze 581)

While the native land tenure system has evoked indigenous Igbo religious beliefs and worldview as Achebe describes it in his novel, the method used under this system, “shifting cultivation,” puts belief in practice. “Shifting cultivation” is aimed at maintaining the sustainability of the land. As Njemanze continues explaining: “As land was communally owned and utilized, the agricultural practice, known as ‘shifting cultivation,’ whereby land was used and allowed for several years to fallow, ensured wise exploitation of natural resources. This guaranteed the continued existence of the ecosystems and the maintenance of the symbiotic relationship between man and his environment” (Njemanze 582). In Achebe’s novel, Okonkwo’s father, Unoka, demonstrates the consequence of not following the principle of sustainability. As the priestess of Agbala (the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves), warns Unoka, “You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of your machete and your hoe. When your

⁸ See Herbert Macaulay “Nigeria Land Policy” in *Macaulay Papers*.

neighbors go out with their ax to cut down virgin forests, you sow your yams on exhausted farms that take no labor to clear. They cross seven rivers to make their farms, you stay at home and offer sacrifices to a reluctant soil” (17). Okonkwo’s father’s refusal to engage in sustainable practices causes infertility of his land and hunger for his family.

If Achebe’s novel emphasizes the role of *Ani* and Igbo people working with the land in order to underscore sustainability in traditional Igbo society, then the novel highlights the Igbo people’s *fear* of the Evil Forest in order to show the Igbo sense of justice. Like *Ani*, the Evil Forest is another conduit in the Igbo society that both connects and distances the villagers from land/Earth spirits and serves as a preserver of the Igbo social order. Both the Igbo people’s respect for *Ani*/land and their fear of the forest create an Igbo system of justice that highlights the reciprocity of a human-nature relationship. For the villagers of Umuofia, the forest is “evil” because it is identified with “sinister forces” and “power of darkness”: “Every clan and village had its ‘evil forests.’ In it were buried all those who died of really evil diseases, like leprosy and smallpox. It was also the dumping ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine men when they die. An ‘evil forest’ was, therefore, alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness” (148). The Evil Forest, with “sinister forces” and “powers of darkness,” is thus a site of taboo and punishment—a site that enforces the social order established by the land and the Earth goddess. The death/punishment of Okonkwo’s father in Achebe’s novel demonstrates this social function of the Evil Forest. Okonkwo’s father is carried to the Evil Forest and is left there to die because “his sickness is an abomination to the earth” (18). He is forbidden to have a proper burial because his sickness may contaminate the community’s

land and thus might have bad impact on the entire community. The Evil Forest, carrying the authority of the law to punish people who break rules of the land, is thus a realm where social and spiritual negotiation takes place. Through punishments conducted in the Evil Forest, the affliction of the entire community could be relieved or avoided.

The duality of male and female, human and non-human *Ani* signals Igbo attachment to nature/land, and the Evil Forest, personified as *egwugwu* or judges (living villagers masked as ancestors' spirits), has two faces as well—one as the leader of the judges and the other as the place where punishments are conducted—that reinforces Igbo dependence on borrowing the authority of nature in enforcing law. As judges, the Evil Forest represents a juridical system in Umuofia—a system founded on the villagers' awe at the power of nature and their belief in the judgment of the departed ancestors. Achebe represents a traditional Igbo court in his novel (88-89) in order to show this other aspect of the Evil Forest. As the novel indicates, the Evil Forest refers not only to the place that the house of the *egwugwu* faces, but also to the leader of the *egwugwu*. The house of the judges faces the Evil Forest because the Evil Forest is a forbidden and sacred place for the Igbo people in Umuofia. It reminds the community that they are forbidden to cross the boundary of gods' land where order and law are established and determined. On the other hand, the leader of the *egwugwu* is also called "Evil Forest" because he represents ultimate justice given by the land/gods and should never be affected and undermined by humans. As shown by this relationship, the social order of a traditional Igbo society is founded on a mutual relationship between the Evil Forest and the Igbo people's trust in the power of the land/gods. In other words, the Igbo social order is maintained not only

through a top-down authority, but also through bottom-up trust, namely, the people's willingness to share the maintenance of the social order. As the narrator describes the women who painted the outside walls of the house of the judges: "These women never saw the inside of the hut. No woman ever did . . . If they imagined what was inside, they kept their imaginations in themselves. No woman ever asked questions about the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan" (88). Likewise, even though the Igbo people know the *egwugwu* are in reality humans in disguise, they are still awed and afraid of the power possessed by the *egwugwu* on behalf of the land/gods:

Okonkwo's wife, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second *egwugwu* had the springy walk of Okonkwo. And they might also have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of *egwugwu*. But if they thought these things, they kept them within themselves. The *egwugwu* with the springy walk was one of the dead fathers of the clan. He looked terrible with the smoked raffia body, a huge wooden face painted white except for the round hollow eyes and the charred teeth that were as big as a man's fingers. On his head were two powerful horns. (90)

The forest Achebe represents in his novel is thus not simply a celebratory and romantic setting where an indigenous African culture originates and prospers, or where African poets find a sanctuary for their creative inspirations, as Moore suggests. Instead, Achebe's forest is a reminder of the holistic relationship between the Igbo and their land. Achebe uses the Evil Forest in his novel to reconstruct an indigenous Igbo environmental

consciousness that is built on the correlation between the community, the land/gods, and the forest.

When Okonkwo accidentally kills Ezeudu's youngest son during Ezeudu's funeral, Okonkwo's punishment—his house is destroyed and he is exiled from Umuofia—reinforces the Igbo idea of the interdependence between the community and the land: “They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth Goddess, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman” (125). Obierika's reflection on Okonkwo's misfortune demonstrates again the correlation between the Evil Forest, the land/Earth goddess, and the social order in the Igbo culture: “He [Obierika] remembered his wife's twin children, whom he [Obierika] had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offense to the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offense against the great goddess, her wrath was loosened on all the land and not just on the offender” (125). In his reflection, Obierika emphasizes the importance of maintaining the justice carried by the Evil Forest for the welfare of the whole community, yet he also claims the innocence of the twins being thrown away in the forest. The ending of the first part of Achebe's novel that suggests Obierika's ambivalent attitude toward a justice carried by the Evil Forest foreshadows the coming challenges to Umuofia. The arrival of Christian missionaries and European colonialism will shake and undermine the social order of a traditional Igbo

village.

In the first part of the novel, Achebe highlights the inter-relationships between the Igbo, the land/*Ani*, and the Evil forest in order to reconstruct an indigenous Igbo environmental consciousness. In the second part of the novel, he focuses on how European missionaries cause the gradual alienation of the Igbo from the Evil Forest and the consequence of that alienation. This alienation is, again, conveyed via the forest, particularly via the other characters' questioning the authority of the Evil forest. Even as Okonkwo and Obierika complain that Christian missionaries debase Igbo gods as merely "pieces of wood and stone" (146), Okonkwo's first son, Nwoye, is fascinated by the new religion. Nwoye's rejection of the Evil Forest indicates his rejection of an Igbo justice founded on the correlation between the land, gods, and the forest. With the arrival of Christian mission, a new social order, based on the idea of brotherhood, is introduced to Umuofia. Ikemefuna's execution in and by the Evil Forest leads Nwoye to question and finally reject justice carried by the Evil Forest. Ikemefuna has to die according to the order of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves (57), which says his stay will threaten the welfare of the entire community. Haunted by his memories of twins crying in the Evil Forest and the death of Ikemefuna in the same forest (61, 147), Nwoye finds solace from the Christian doctrine of brotherhood: "It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul—the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed" (147). If

Nwoye's turning to Christian "brotherhood" means his rejection of an Igbo justice system, then it is the missionaries' building of churches in the Evil Forest that weakens the social order of Igbo society. When the Evil Forest loses its awe and power and when the Earth goddess is seen as nothing more than a masked human being, the Igbo belief system is undermined in the sense that the Igbo lose their connection with the land/*Ani* to which they originally pay homage and on which they depend for the welfare of the community. The local inhabitants assume that the Evil Forest will punish the missionaries due to their violation of Igbo customs. However, punishment never happens. Because of this, more and more Igbo people convert and abandon their traditional beliefs. The Evil Forest no longer is "evil":

The inhabitants of Mbanta expected them [the missionaries] all to be dead within four days. The first day passed and the second and third and fourth, and none of them died. Everyone was puzzled. And then it became known that the white man's fetish had unbelievable power. It was said that he wore glasses on his eyes so that he could see and talk to evil spirits. Not long after, he won his first three converts. (149)

When Enoch, one of the provocative converts, "unmasks an *egwugwu* in public" during the ceremony in honor of the Earth goddess—a blasphemous deed regarded as "killing an ancestral spirit" (186)—he publicly declares his rejection of the power of the Earth goddess as well as Igbo people's humble relationship with the deity. "Umuofia was thrown into confusion" (186) after the relationship is challenged and questioned. Under the influence of the Christian mission, the Igbo and their culture are thus being uprooted.

As Don C. Obadike explains in “Ibo Culture and History” (1996), “Yet, if necessary, missionaries were prepared to destroy the entire system of Igbo customs and beliefs in order to convert the people to Christianity” (xlili). Although Achebe’s novel does not show the entire destruction of Igbo customs under Christian missions, the novel suggests an unequal cultural exchange between the Igbo and European missionaries. In the novel, the conversation between Mr. Brown and Akunna regarding the difference between Chukwu (the highest god in Igbo religion) and Jesus indicates this inequality. While Brown reduces an Igbo deity into simply “a piece of wood” (179), Akunna, portrayed as a typical Igbo man who is tolerant of non Igbo-religions, is willing to learn other religions and even sends his children to Christian school to learn reading and writing.⁹ For Achebe, Christian missions urge the Igbo people to reflect on their culture and customs as revealed positively by Nwoye’s and Obierika’s questioning twins being thrown away in the Evil Forest. However, Achebe is not positive about the result of the cultural exchange between the Igbo people and European Christians, for the exchange is not founded on mutual respect, as shown by Okonkwo’s stubbornness and Brown’s intolerance.

While not being entirely negative about cultural hybridization in an Igbo society caused by Christian missions, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe is skeptical of the extent to which European missionaries and colonists can accept and respect indigenous cultures. In the second part of the novel, Achebe highlights the aggressiveness of Christian missions, particularly their collaboration with the colonial government and policing. Christian missions introduce not only “benign” institutions, including churches, schools, and

⁹ See Marcellina U. Okehie-Offoha. Ibo people are known for their religious tolerance.

hospitals, but also a number of invasive and oppressive institutions, such as government, trading stores, and courts. While churches and schools stimulate cultural hybridization in Igboland, the colonial government and court aim to destroy traditional Igbo life, including its relationship with the land, gods and the forest, and by extension Igbo communities founded on that relationship. In his conversation with Obierika, Okonkwo points out that the Igbo people have “lost the power to fight” (175). Obierika replies to Okonkwo in the same conversation that “he [the white man] says that our customs are bad, and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peacefully with his religion. . . Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one.” (176). The disintegration of Igbo culture and community caused by European missions/colonialism is further dramatized by Umuofia’s indifference to Okonkwo’s rebellion. Okonkwo’s awareness that “Umuofia would not go to a war” (205) leads to his tragic suicide at the novel’s end. The final episode that focuses on Umuofia’s treatment of Okonkwo’s body seems to re-emphasize indigenous respect for the land: “It is against our custom,” said one of the men. ‘It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offense against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it. This is why we ask your people [the white men] to bring him down, because you are strangers.’” (207). Yet, the episode ends up becoming material for the District Commissioner’s studies of “primitive customs” (207) for a colonial project. While Umuofia treats Okonkwo’s body under Igbo customs that are highly evolved in their own social context, the District Commissioner treats Okonkwo’s

suicide simply as a result of “a pacification of the primitive tribes of the lower niger” (209). His interpretation is a colonial mis-recognition and wrong “truth” produced unilaterally by colonial assumptions about a non-Western indigenous culture. The Commissioner’s book project is not motivated by the authenticity of Okonkwo’s story or a desire to understand how people treat the body of a suicide. Rather, he is concerned with how to make “the story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself” “interesting reading” (208) for European readers:

In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learned a number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undignified details as cutting a hanged man from the tree. Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him. In the book which he planned to write he would stress that point. (208)

The District Commissioner’s job is thus not to follow the truth of Okonkwo’s suicide or provide information from an Igbo perspective, but rather to interpret Okonkwo’s death that is suitable and legible to colonial discourse. Subsumed into colonial discourse, Okonkwo’s death, is the cornerstone of a model of cultural hybridization in which indigenous culture is overshadowed by colonial domination.

This ending of *Things Fall Apart* indicates the inevitability of Igbo culture being subsumed by colonial knowledge production, with Igbo beliefs weakened by European-dominated missions and Igbo customs reduced to meaningless practices and empty ritual. When more and more Igbo are converted to Christianity and go to Christian schools, their

connection with the land/*Ani*, along with the attendant commitment to the community life, will be broken. When the Evil Forest loses its power, it will be treated as nothing more than “trees” that can be cut down and sold. Achebe’s novel, set in the late nineteenth century, thus depicts the challenges an indigenous African environmentalism faces if it is to look to traditional sources, since those traditional sources have been unevenly effaced and erased as a result of cultural hybridization brought about by European missions and colonization. The novel also predicts African ecological crises that can be traced to colonization that ruptured bonds between human and nature and introduced new systems of economic exchange.

Okri’s novel, set in Yorubaland on the eve of Nigerian independence, lends credulity to Achebe’s prediction by showing how sixty years of British colonization of Nigeria has already led to Yoruba alienation from nature and the ecological degradation of Yorubaland. Connecting Achebe’s novel to Okri’s novel in terms of both authors’ representations of Africa’s natural environments provides a time line of approximately one hundred years of colonialism and neocolonialism’s complicity in cultural and ecological crises in the colonial/postcolonial worlds like Nigeria.

Celebrating the Hybridity of Nigerian Landscapes? Ecological Crisis in Okri’s *The Famished Road*

Following Achebe’s prediction regarding the impact of European-dominated cultural hybridization on Africa’s environments, Okri depicts Yorubaland in the late

1950s and early '60s as suffering both cultural crisis and ecological degradation. On the one hand, the Yoruba people suffer an alienated urban life caused by dispossession, capitalism, and colonial demand of urbanization. On the other hand, Yorubaland suffers deforestation due to development and modernization (as revealed by the endless construction of the road). In his representation of the Yoruba forest threatened by colonialism and continued neocolonialism, Okri indicates a weakening of the Yoruba spirit life where an indigenous environmental consciousness is derived, as well as the crisis of environmental degradation in Yorubaland.

The Famished Road is a magic realist novel set in an urban slum (probably of Lagos) in the time of independence. It is narrated by Azaro, an *abiku* child or a “spirit child” (487), a figure who according to Yoruba beliefs, never truly grows up and suffers endless cycles of birth and death.¹⁰ The story of the novel centers upon a family composed of the son Azaro, his father Dad and his mother Mum, and their neighbor Madame Koto who runs a bar in the neighborhood. Section One of the novel revolves around a series of Azaro’s adventures that occur in his neighborhood and the surrounding forest. Through his random wanderings, Azaro comes to realize the Yoruba wisdom regarding the interconnectedness among things in the world, as well as witnesses the impact of colonialism on his homeland, as revealed by the endless construction of the road and the disappearing forests. In addition, Azaro also serves as a witness to a series of political turbulences that occur in his neighborhood during the time of independence.

¹⁰ Okri makes his protagonist-narrator an *abiku* child also for metaphorical purposes. As Azaro suffers from endless cycles of birth and death, so Nigeria suffers from colonialism and difficulties of getting independent from the British Empire. Azaro’s experience as presented in *The Famished Road* thus can be interpreted as reflections of the experience of Nigeria as a nation.

Section Two of the novel focuses on Dad and his political involvement in the coming election/ independence. Dad attempts to unite the poor in the slum, as manifest through his practice of boxing. He establishes the Party of the Poor fueled by the power of hunger in opposing to Madame Koto, a supporter of the Party of the Rich composed of elites and rich people. Section Three of the novel focuses on Dad waking up from a coma after a boxing match. He gives a speech to his son and his wife, emphasizing the importance of remembering the wisdom of their forefathers in order to face challenges from the new age. The novel ends in Azaro, after listening to his Dad's speech, deciding to grow up and live with the independence of his country.

In Okri's magic realist writing, Yorubaland in the late 1950s and early '60s is depicted as being composed of various landscapes, including the urban slum, the forest, the road, the marketplace, and the spirit/abiku world, around which the novel's main character, Azaro, wanders seamlessly throughout the novel. Through Azaro's wandering around and perception of his neighborhood, Yorubaland is a world where all life forms, including humans, spirits, trees, and animals, interact with each other and where various landscapes, including the slum, the forest, the road, the street, the marketplace, and the spirit world, all mingle together. Okri depicts Yorubaland as an animistic, seamless world via his abiku protagonist-narrator in order to highlight an indigenous environmental consciousness founded on a belief that "all things are linked," as Mum says to Azaro in the novel (483). As an *abiku* child, Azaro interacts with spirits and non-human life forms throughout the miscellaneous neighborhood. During his wandering, there are no clear boundaries between the forest and the road, nor between the street, the marketplace, and

the spirit realm. The opening episode of *The Famished Road* captures the malleability and interconnectedness of Yoruba landscapes. After the slum fire, Azaro “wander[s] through the violent terrain, listening to the laughter of mischievous spirits” (11). Trapped between the slum neighborhood and the spirit realm, Azaro is kidnapped by several women in veil and brought to the forest, which is “like an overcrowded marketplace” “swarmed with unearthly beings” (12). Azaro returns to the streets of the city where he encounters “the marketplace”—a place teemed with humans, spirits, and other beings. Under Azaro’s perception, the marketplace is portrayed as “the whole world”:

I watched crowds of people pour into the marketplace. I watched the chaotic movements and the wild exchanges and the load-carrier staggering under sack. It seemed as if the whole world was there. . . . I shut my eyes and when I opened them again I saw people who walk backwards, a dwarf who got about on two fingers, men upside-down with baskets of fish on their feet, women who had breasts on their backs, babies strapped to their chests, and beautiful children with three arms. . . .

That was the first time I realized it wasn’t just humans who came to the marketplaces of the world. Spirits and other beings come there too. They buy and sell, browse and investigate. They wander amongst the fruits of the earth and sea. (15-16)

The marketplace is depicted as a microcosm of the Yoruba world—a holistic and organic realm where death is continuation of life, where spiritual life mingles with secular life, where multiplicities and abnormalities replace binaries and symmetries, and where each

of the components are participants and are dependent on each other.

This kidnapping/escape episode at the beginning of the novel presents a picture of what the Yoruba animistic world is like, but by no means celebrates Azaro's adventures in this world. Rather, through his abiku protagonist-narrator's wandering around the colonized Yorubaland, shows how British colonization of Yorubaland has undermined and weakened this animistic world. Throughout the novel, the animistic world is overshadowed by the plight of Azaro's family in the urban slum and the disappearance of the local forest caused by the continued expansion of the slum and the endless construction of the road. The slum and the road, depicted by Okri as two invading landscapes created by colonial developments of urbanization, capitalism, and development, expose the consequences of European-dominated cultural hybridization, among them ecological degradation in Yorubaland and the Yoruba people's alienation from the natural/spirit world where their culture heritage is rooted.

Okri's depictions of the urban slum in Yorubaland on the eve of Nigerian independence depict how colonization has already destroyed the traditional Yoruba social structure and life. Traditional Yoruba culture is known for its urbanism,¹¹ in contrast with Igbo culture, which is known for its tribal-oriented society. Yet, an Igbo village and a Yoruba town share some similar social and economic structures. Like a traditional Igbo village composed of a group of compounds occupied respectively by one large family in the same vicinity, a traditional Yoruba town is composed of patrilineal

¹¹ See William Bascom's discussion of urbanism in Yorubaland in *The Yoruba of Southern Nigeria* (1969), Eva Krapf-Askari's *Yoruba Towns and Cities* (1969), and Matthew Sadiku's "The Yoruba" in *Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Nigeria* (1996).

“clans” whose members are descended from a remote common ancestor.¹² The Yoruba people see the clan they belong to as a cooperative unity composed of “a corporate group, owning the compound in which it dwells, the land on which the compound stands, and farm land outside of town” (43).¹³ Like a community-oriented, self-sufficient Igbo village, a Yoruba clan is a “self-perpetuating unit” whose economy is based on agricultural farming, craft specialization, and trade.¹⁴ The urban slum as represented by Okri is a typical postcolonial urban environment whose residents are not owners of the land but tenants, whose residents are not independent farmers but low-waged workers, and whose surroundings are undergoing a seemingly endless capitalistic and industrial expansion (as shown by the success of Madam Koto’s bar and the endless construction of roads). These slums have a causal connection to the colonial era. As Olusegun Areola explains in his *Ecology of Natural Resources in Nigeria* (1991), slums are products of Nigerian urbanization under British colonization rather than part of the traditional urban settlements in Yorubaland. For Areola, the rapid development of urban areas under colonialism leads to the “disintegration of the family compounds and the rise of slum housing conditions” (202). Okri depicts an urban slum in colonial Yorubaland in order to criticize how the colonial policy of Nigerian urbanization weakens family and kinship ties that originally sustain traditional urban settlements. Throughout Okri’s novel, the readers are informed of little of the history of Azaro’s family (except that Azaro’s paternal grandfather is the “Priest of the God of Roads” (70)), let alone their relationship with the family compound and the practice of traditional Yoruba business. What Okri

¹² See Bascom. Chapter 5 “Social Structure.”

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. Chapter 3 “Economics.”

presents instead is a family, dwelling in an urban ghetto, bullied by their landlord and creditors, oppressed by capitalism and politics, and suffering poverty and hunger. The plight of Azaro's family in an urban slum on the eve of Nigerian independence indicates that sixty years of British colonization of Yorubaland has caused alienation from traditional modes of cultural belongings, including the clan, the land, and the farm.

The oppressive life in urban slums highlights Yoruba alienation from and forgetfulness about the natural/spirit world to which they used to be attached. Even though traditional Yoruba religious beliefs are still influential in Azaro's neighborhood (as shown by Mum's belief in traditional herbalists, by the general public's practice of the sacrifice for the King of the Road, and by Azaro's constant perceptions of the animistic surroundings), these beliefs are losing their power under colonization. As Dad says in the novel, "our old people are very powerful in spirit. They have all kinds of powers . . . We are forgetting these powers. Now all the power that people have is selfishness, money and politics." (70). Dad's view is that European introduction of capitalism and its subsequent development in Yorubaland has alienated his people from the power they originally possessed. Echoing Okonkwo's frustration in *Things Fall Apart* about how Christian missions have caused people to "lose power to fight" (174), Dad criticizes how colonialism, along with the attendant capitalism and corrupt politics, has caused his people to "forget" their cultural roots. The motif of "forgetfulness" regarding Africa's experiences of colonization has been discussed in Okri's scholarship. Eleni Coundouriotis, in her essay "Landscapes of Forgetfulness: Reinventing the Historical in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*" (1999), points out that the absence of colonial memories

in Okri's novel is caused by Nigeria's apparently repetitious history after European contact. She argues that Okri reconstructs this seemingly repetitious history through the metaphor of *abiku*—the spirit-child, who is “unwilling to be born or to become” and “keep coming and going until their time is right” (Okri 487)—in order to reveal the inevitability of indigenous Nigerians' lack of consciousness of history. As she states, “The novel presents a construction of postindependence history from the perspective of a moment which preceded it. Through his narrative prefiguration, history is experience as repetition. The collective forgetfulness results from a willingness to accept the premise of repetition” (45). If for Coundouriotis, “forgetfulness” and “repetition” in Okri's novel are symptoms of colonial residue that impedes progress, then Okri incorporates the motif of “forgetfulness” into the narrative of his novel in order to critique uneven and problematic cultural hybridization. Instead of Europeans' biased knowledge production of indigenous African culture as suggested by Achebe, cultural hybridization in Yorubaland as revealed by Okri leads to a “collective forgetfulness” about an indigenous tradition. In Okri's novel, Dad's prediction about the continued expansion of the slums in Yorubaland in the near future suggests his concern about the demise of a Yoruba spiritual life founded on their attachment to the forest. In the novel, Dad leads Azaro into the forest, showing him what “the new world” (34) of post-independence Nigeria would be like. He warns Azaro of how the forest surrounding the city will be destroyed soon due to the continued expansion of urban slums. As Dad says, “But sooner than you think there won't be one tree standing. There will be no forest left at all. And there will be wretched houses all over the place. This is where the poor people will live.” (34). In addition to the plight of slum life, Okri highlights the endless construction of the road in Yorubaland in order to

show the inevitability of the Yoruba people's forgetfulness about their spiritual life. The construction of the road, like the expansion of the slum, has changed Yoruba landscapes and their associated traditional Yoruba social structure, making the Yoruba people farther and farther away from their cultural roots. As Azaro's observation suggests:

Steadily over days and months, the paths had been widening. Bushes were being burnt, tall grasses cleared, tree stumps uprooted. The area was changing. Places that were thick with bush and low trees were not becoming open space of soft river sand. I could hear the sounds of dredging, of engines, of road builder, forest clearers . . . Each day the area seemed different. Houses appeared where parts of the forests had been. Places where children used to play and hide were now full of sand piles and rutted with house foundations. . . . The world was changing. . . . (104)

"The road," representing colonial demand for development and modernization, is ironically a "famished" road for Yoruba, for it by no means leads to the Yoruba's economic and spiritual progression, but rather the Yoruba's regression from their cultural roots and spiritual life. The non-stop construction of the road, with its attendant changes of the surrounding landscape (including the expanding slum and disappearing forests), thus foregrounds the community's forgetfulness of their past and tradition. The landscape of the road in the colonial environment as depicted by Okri turns out to be the landscape of forgetfulness—a landscape that suffers constant transformation and thus is subject to forget.

In contrast to the slum and the road depicted in *The Famished Road* in order to foreground forgetfulness, the forest depicted in the novel serves as a reminder of Yoruba past and its waning tradition. Okri's forest is a site of remembrance—a site where the human and the living can reconnect to spirits, nature, and the dead. Similar to the forest in *Things Fall Apart* that conjures up memories of indigenous Igbo cultural roots and a land-oriented environmental consciousness, the forest here is a location where the richness and “riddles” (40) of indigenous Yoruba spirit world is preserved and reminded. Brenda Cooper, in her *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye* (1998), points out that the bush or the forest, a recurrent motif in traditional West African oral tradition and contemporary West African writings, is a symbolic site in West African magical realist novels where indigenous beliefs or local knowledges are preserved and incorporated into literary narratives. She states,

The bush, as a symbolic site, is crucial to the [West African] texts. . . .
 Contemporary writers approach the dangerous forest by way of representational power of the word. Traditionally, this was the spoken word. Beliefs were acted out, verbalized, ritualized and passed on through the oral tradition, which continues to play a fundamental part in cultures across the continent, albeit transformed and syncretized through writing.
 (41)

If the slum and the road have caused the Yoruba to forget about their cultural roots, then “the forest” where the tradition is preserved reconnects them to their tradition. Dad brings Azaro there to learn “riddles” of indigenous Yoruba wisdom. For traditional Yoruba,

“Life is full of riddles that only the dead can answer” (40) and “the world is full of riddles that only the dead can answer” (75). It is a world “where all forms are mutable, where all things exchange their identities, and where everything dances in an exultation of flame and wisdom” (457). In highlighting the role of the forest in West African magical realism, Cooper also reminds us of “the danger of essentialism” (37)—a danger of treating the indigenous beliefs in West African magic realist writing as composing “static, homogenous African authenticities” (37). Treating the forest into which indigenous knowledges/beliefs are written as “strategic devices” that serve aesthetic and political purposes rather than as “African authenticity” (38, 37), Cooper is, however, unclear about how we might avoid this essentialist perception of the forest and its associated traditions in West African magical realist writing. In her chapter about Ben Okri’s novel, Cooper points out that “the wild forest,” “the road,” and “Madame Koto’s bar” (68) are the three important sites in the novel, yet focuses mainly on the road and the bar in her study of Okri’s ambiguous attitude toward indigenous concepts.¹⁵ While elaborating on Okri’s ambiguous representations of both the road and the bar as hybrid sites that reveal the inevitability of indigenous Yoruba beliefs (such as *abiku* and “King of the road”) being contaminated by globalization, Cooper still sees “the forest” in the novel as “the natural world of the pre-colonial past” (80) or a spirit world where local knowledges and the oral tradition are preserved and borrowed by African authors. Cooper’s treatment of Okri’s forest indicates problems of a primitive reading of Africa’s forests, which Michael J. Sheridan calls “the Relic Theory of the sacred groves” (13).

¹⁵ See Cooper’s “‘Out of the Center of My Forehead, An Eye Opened’: Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*” in her *Magical Realism in West African Fiction*.

Michael Sheridan, in his anthropological essay “The Dynamics of African Sacred Groves: Ecological, Social & Symbolic Processes” (2008), points out that “sacred groves have long been considered examples par excellence of ahistorical cultural and ecological equilibria, but closer scrutiny shows them to be sites where ecological, social, political, and symbolic dynamics intersect (and disconnect) over time” (10). Treating Okri’s forest as a reminder of the Yoruba past and a site in which indigenous Yoruba beliefs are inscribed, Okri cautions us that more than a natural environment is lost to modernization and its demands.

Functioning as a bridge between humans and the spirit/natural world or between the living and the dead, Okri’s forest is not a static and timeless landscape, but rather a dynamic landscape that reveals the history of Yorubaland. In opposition to the invasive landscapes, including the slums and the road, where history is forgotten, Okri’s forest is the landscape where history is recorded and re-imagined. This forest records the Yoruba past, reveals the present situation in Yorubaland, and predicts what would happen in Yorubaland in the future. Okri represents Yoruba histories via his protagonist-narrator’s visions of the evolving local forest that connects the past, the present, and the future in order to re-locate indigenous Yoruba cultural heritage as well as predict the consequence of this cultural loss. Through a mask, Azaro sees the Yoruba forest evolved from an undivided world into a dystopia. The mask, described as “the face of one of those paradoxical spirits that move amongst men and trees, carved by an artist who has the gift to see such things and the wisdom to survive them” (244), embodies a bond between the human world and the spirit/natural world. Produced through a mutual understanding

between humans and spirits, the mask Azaro wears is a collaborative artifact that demonstrates an indigenous wisdom carved into a piece of wood. It enables him to see a spirit realm inhabited by beings that highlights the malleability and fluidity of the realm, including “a tiger with silver wings and the teeth of a bull,” “dogs with tails of snakes and bronze paws,” “cats with the legs of women,” and “midgets with bright red bumps on their head” (245). This world reveals no distinction between civilization and the natural world, for “the trees are houses,” and “music,” “dancing,” and “celebration [rise] from the earth” (245). In this world, the inter-relationships between nature (“trees” and “earth”) and human constructions/activities (“houses,” “music,” “dancing”) suggest that human history and natural history depend on and evolve with each other. However, Azaro’s vision of the undivided Yoruba world is soon succeeded by another vision that presents Yorubaland in the colonial time when the local forest is sacrificed to a process of development and urbanization. Yorubaland where Azaro and his family live is a hybrid site where the Yoruba animistic world confronts modernity, development, and globalization. As Azaro continues to describe,

So I wore the mask and looked and saw that what was a clearing was in fact a village of spirits. In the middle of the village was a great iroko tree, golden and brown, with phosphorescent leaves and moon-white birds in the branches, twittering out the sweetest essence of music. I saw skyscrapers and flying machines and fountains, ruins covered in snails and flowering climbers, grave stelae, orchards, and the monument of a black sphinx at the gate of the village. (246)

Azaro's vision that juxtaposes the iroko tree with a skyscraper and other modern constructions suggests the Yoruba spirit world being contaminated and endangered under modernization. The iroko tree, a native tree in West Africa that appears recurrently throughout the novel, embodies the "soul" of the Yoruba spirit world. Earlier in the novel, Azaro encounters an old, gigantic iroko tree felled for the sake of the construction of the road. Comparing the death of the iroko tree to the death of "a great soul," Azaro mourns for the death of the Yoruba spirit world at the cost of colonial development: "And then I came to a place where I thought the roads terminated. An iroko tree had been felled across it. The tree was mighty, its trunk gnarled and rough like the faces of ancient warriors. It looked like a great soul dead at the road's end. Beyond, the road sheered into a deep pit. Across, on the other side, were sand-carrying lorries. Strange sounds lisped in the tree trunk, voices echoed in its hollows (115). Climbing up to the top of the iroko tree, Azaro has the final vision of the forest via the mask—a vision that suggests the atrocity that will be Yorubaland in the future:

From the back of the tree, I saw a completely different world to what I had been seeing. I saw a different reality. For a moment I expected to see birds twittering in my eyes, spirits dancing around me, luminous and dazzling. But when I looked out the spirits vanished, the white birds had somehow flown away, the village was not there. Instead I heard the earth trembling at the fearsome approach of a demonic being. . . . I was confused by the new world. The earth shuddered. The tree moved beneath me. And when I looked out through the mask, I saw before me in that new spirit world a

creature ugly and magnificent like a prehistoric dragon, with the body of an elephant, and the face of a warthog. . . . A devourer of humans, of lost souls, of spirit, of all things wonderful, this creature opened its dreadful mouth and roared. Beneath me the tree began to change. Suddenly it seemed that the trees was no longer a thing of wood. It became a thing of quivering flesh. The wood rippled slowly into flesh, transforming beneath me. (246-47)

In this vision of “the new world,” the Yoruba spirit world is not centered upon organic mechanisms embodied by old, gigantic iroko trees (where spirits dance and sing) and the earth (where music and dance rise), but is rather dominated by unlimited development/exploitation as embodied by a magnificent, ugly monster that relentlessly devours “humans,” “lost souls,” “spirits,” and “all things wonderful.” The transformation of the Yoruba forest from “wood” into “flesh” suggests a spirit world materialized and made exploitable, a world where the human relation to nature is ultimately an instrumental one. Okri’s depiction of the “new world” as a dystopia for both the human and the non-human extends Achebe’s concerns about the Evil Forest undermined by Christian missions. Azaro’s final vision of Yorubaland, a world ruled by endless consumptions and exploitations, suggests Okri’s skepticism about the consequence of cultural hybridity in the postcolonial world brought about first by colonialism and later enforced by neocolonialism and more recent globalization.

In Okri’s scholarship, Okri’s forest is often treated as a trope that the author uses to celebrate cultural hybridity. In her 2001 essay “Landscape, Forests, and Borders within

the West African Global Village,” Cooper revised her view on Okri’s forest, treating it not only as a symbolic site, but also an unstable, changeable landscape that responds to globalization. For Cooper, under globalization, the Yoruba forest in Okri’s novel is a celebratory space for endless cultural exchange and transformation. In contrast to Cooper, I argue that Okri foregrounds the hybridity of the Yoruba forest in order to highlight the crisis of the Yoruba spirit/natural world caused by deforestation. Historicizing Okri’s forest in the context of globalization without paying attention to the author’s environmental critiques of the endangered local forest and culture reduces the forest simply to a backdrop to globalization.

Okri’s environmental critiques conveyed through his representation of the Yoruba forest/ spirit world challenged by globalization suggest that the author’s intention is not only to reconstruct the indigenous Yoruba spirit world and indigenous Yoruba knowledges, but also, more importantly, to reconnect that world/knowledge to a global knowledge system regarding global environmental issues. Okri’s forest is not only a locale where an indigenous knowledge is revealed and reasserted, but also a place where local issues and global issues are conflated. Jonathan Eccard, in his essay “African Historicities: Okri’s Three-Volume Cycle” (2008), argues that the goal of Okri’s novels is “not to simply reclaim local tradition for the sake of local audience, or to rethink the world through a post-colonial perspective” (145). He continues, “Okri’s land must grow out of the land, out of the indigenous beliefs and practices of the people who suffer and struggle and express while acknowledging the global significance of a local historical consciousness and the local significance of a global historical consciousness” (149).

Following Eccard's commentary on Okri's novel that underscores the global making of local histories and vice versa, we should also treat Okri's forest as a site on which indigenous African beliefs/knowledges and global environmental issues are mediated. With that being said, the Yoruba forest provides "historicity" as well as "environmentality" of the novel. "Environmentality," a concept coined by Lawrence Buell in his *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005), refers to a "property of any text" in which "the non-human environment must be envisaged not merely as a framing device but as an active presence, suggesting human history's implication in natural history" (25). The "environmentality" of Okri's novel emerges as a critique of ecological degradation caused by colonialism and continued neocolonialism, one that extends the local to the global critiques of environmental degradation. In this sense, Okri reconstructs an Yoruba indigenous environmental consciousness via the forest in order to reinforce, to borrow and extend Eccard's concept, the global significance of a local environmental consciousness as well as the local significance of a global environmental consciousness. Okri thus globalizes a local forest as well as contemporarizes an indigenous Yoruba knowledge where a local environmental consciousness is embedded, in response to issues of globalization, particularly the global environmental crisis.

If Okri focuses on Azaro's experience with the changing landscapes and the disappearing forest in Yoruba in order to highlight the local ecological and cultural crises and their relations to the global environmental crisis, then he focuses on Dad's experience, particularly his involvement in the local politics on the eve of independence,

in order to comment on the validity of postcolonial Nigerian politics in handling the local and global ecological crises. The last two sections of the novel, covering elections and the competition between “the Party of the Poor” (led by Dad) and “the Party of the Rich” (supported by Madame Koto) with regard to which party should rule Nigeria in the post-independence era, highlights the political futility in postcolonial Nigeria in providing solutions to ecological crisis without taking consideration of traditional forms of belief and values. The competition between Dad and Madame Koto, as depicted in Okri’s novel, suggests a futile attempt to end poverty and neocolonial exploitation in Nigerian in the post-independence era. On the one hand, Dad presents himself as a candidate as legendary boxer or rebel named “Black Tyger,” and aims to “change the world” by uniting the power of the poor or “hunger” (419). On the other hand, Madame Koto, portrayed as a successful business woman who becomes “bigger and fatter” (373) with the expansion of her business, endorses the Party of the Rich that believes capitalism and development are solutions to Nigerian problems. Dad’s party—composed mainly of the lower classes, including “beggars,” “soldiers,” “load-carrier,” “boxers,” and “thugs,” (418)—intends to abolish capitalism and poverty. However, Dad’s idealism ends up in anarchy:

Pandemonium broke over the party, orchestrated by the soaring cruelty of the accordion’s resonant ugliness. A woman screamed. A soldier accidentally fired a shot in the air. . . . A witch slapped the herbalist . . . The beggars attacked the soldiers. . . . I saw people fighting, chairs hurling themselves in perfect parabolas through the air, members of the political

parties pouncing on one another. Bodies tumbled in bizarre entanglements, fists connected with faces. . . . (420)

The “pandemonium” points to the difficulty of organizing based on “hunger” as the desperate and outcast turn on one another rather than uniting and focusing their demands. In contrast, Madame Koto’s party, composed of rich and powerful people, including “politicians,” “merchants,” and “white men” (454, 455, 456), is complicit in colonial development and the exploitation of Nigeria. The success of Madame Koto’s business predicts continued neocolonial exploitation of Nigerian development in the post-independence era. As Azaro observes in a party hosted by Madame Koto for the Party of the Rich:

Crowded spaces suddenly became empty. And in the emptiness I saw the ghost forms of white men in helmets supervising the excavation of precious stones from the rich earth. The excavation was done with spectral machines. I saw the ghost figures of young men and women, head bowed, necks and ankles chained together, making their silent procession through the celebrations. They kept moving but stayed in the same place. Over them the celebrants danced to the music of a new era that promised Independence. (455)

Exploitation haunts and undermines the Party of the Rich, with these wraith-like apparitions serving both as a haunting of the colonial past and a warning about a timeless future in which exploitation of people and resources continues, albeit under a different flag. The futility of the competition between Madame Koto and Dad reveals a novel

deeply cynical about any new political agenda and related solutions.

For Okri, local issues, including slum poverty, cultural hybridity, and deforestation, are national issues that inform Nigerian independence from British colonialism, as well as global issues. The novel reveals the imbrication and embeddedness of colonialism/neocolonialism and global capitalism/development, particularly in causing both local and global environmental crises in the postcolonial age. The crises in Yorubaland on the eve of Nigerian independence as depicted by Okri are thus symptomatic of a structural complicity. Okri incorporates local discourses, including the Yoruba animistic worldview and an indigenous Yoruba environmental consciousness, and global environmental issues, into the last two sections of his novel, in order to suggest the need to develop a new political agenda for Nigeria in the post-independence era. Toward the end of the novel, in spite of Dad's failure as the leader of the Party of the Poor, his defeat of "the man in white" (one of the guests in Madame Koto's party) (469) in a boxing match, enables him to propose an alternative political agenda for post-independence Nigeria. The sudden appearance of the man in white in Madame Koto's party reinforces the obstacle of Nigerian independence from British Empire. "The man in white"—a mysterious character who "went on pounding Dad's nose, extending the territories of his bruises, discoloring and generally realigning Dad's face, altering his physiognomy, disintegrating his philosophy, dissolving his reality, dislodging his teeth, and sapping the will from his sturdy legs" (472)—is a symbolic figure in the novel, who epitomizes the components of the Party of the Rich. Portrayed as a colonized African under the garment of the colonizer, the man in white embraces the colonial culture, as

revealed by his obsession with his luxury white suit and his shame at his own cultural roots:

Beneath the shirt and coat the man was bare-chested and hairy. He had curious tattoos on his stomach and amulets round his neck. He had a hollow chest and a deep hole in his navel. He was so hairy, and his hair was so much like that of a bush animal that the spectators gave a shocked cry when they saw how inhuman he looked. The man began to cower. Dad feinted a punch to his head, the man blocked his face with both his hands, and Dad grabbed his trousers, tripped him, and tore the trousers off him. He had long, thin legs, the legs of a spiderous animal. His eyes filled with fear and shame at being unmasked. (473)

While “tattoos” and “amulets” on the body of the man in white reveal his African identity, his white garment indicates his colonial mimicry. The man in white predicts a political dead end for Nigerian independence. Dad’s defeat of him thus can be interpreted symbolically as the former’s rejection of the colonial legacy, as it will continue to haunt Nigerian politics in the time of post-independence. Dad’s victory, followed by a serious coma and a celebratory awaking, suggests a process of rebirth that marks Dad’s transformation from an activist who attempts to preserve local beliefs and values, to a prophet who introduces holistic and global perspectives to look at local issues and vice versa. Dad’s coma allows him to “redream the world” (492), to envision a new world, and to predict the coming of a “new age” (498). The “new age” Dad sees in his dream refers not only to the time of Nigerian independence, but also to a time when all human

beings will have to unite and collaborate with the non-human in order to survive the impact of the global ecological crisis. Dad's vision of the coming new world/age is translated into his political agenda via his speech to his son and wife after he wakes up. This political agenda, based on the Yoruba concept that "all things are linked" (483), is aimed at developing an environmental consciousness in response to the global environmental crisis. In his vision, Dad connects local sufferings to continental and global sufferings in terms of the global environmental crisis:

And Dad travelled the spheres, seeking the restoration of our race, and the restoration of all oppressed peoples. It was as I followed Dad that I learnt that other spheres of higher energies have their justice beyond our understanding. And our sphere too. The forces of balance are turning every day. The rain lashes the bloated and the weak, the powerful and the silenced. The wind exposes the hungry, the overfed, the ill, the dying, and those who feed on the unseen sufferings of others. But the restorations are slow because our perception of time is long. (494)

Through Dad's vision, Okri suggests that in the post-independence/globalization era, not only socio-economic and geopolitical inequalities, but also ecological crises, will cause sufferings, as embodied by the unpredictable impact of "the rain" and "the wind" on human life. Under the global ecological crises, both "the weak"/"the hungry"/"the silenced" and "the bloated"/"the overfed"/"the powerful" will be suffering. With that being said, for post-independence Nigeria, globalization is the major challenge of the coming new age not only in the sense that global capitalism/development will exacerbate

the suffering of the poor (as Dad predicts the unlimited expansion of the slum), but also in the sense that it will lead to global ecological degradation under which the whole human race will suffer. For Dad, in this new age, “the oppressed people” are therefore not limited to the Yoruba people, but also includes the whole African race (“our race”) as well as people from “other spheres.” With this realization of the potential impact of the global ecological crisis on the human race, the new political agenda proposed by Dad for the post-independence era is aimed at conducting a reforming process by re-channeling the tension between politics of the rich and politics of the poor, as limited largely to issues of socio-political inequality on the local level, into developing a global environmental consciousness that can reunite “all oppressed people” in order to fight the global environmental crisis.

Dad’s emphasis on the survival of the human race under the impact of the global environmental crisis makes *The Famished Road* a postcolonial novel that not only targets globalization and its attendant exacerbation of the uneven political-economic development in the postcolonial world, but also anticipates the coming of the global ecological crisis, including global warming or climate change, as the consequence of the complicity between globalization and global ecological exploitation. Though putting *The Famished Road* written in early 1990 in the context of climate change might sound anachronistic, I argue that the novel anticipates climate change and helps us think about the connection between globalization and climate change, and more importantly, the role of “the human” in that connection, particularly from the point of view of the Global South. In his essay “Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change” (2012),

Dipesh Chakrabarty point out the theoretical limits of postcolonialism in thinking about the role of “the human” in treating the global environmental crisis, including climate change:

We are left with the three images of the human: the universalist-Enlightenment view of the human as potentially the same everywhere, the subject with capacity to bear and exercise rights; the postcolonial-postmodern view of the human as the same but endowed everywhere with what some scholars call ‘anthropological difference’—differences of class, sexuality, gender, history, and so on. This second view is what the literature on globalization underlines. Then comes the figure of the human in the age of the Anthropocene, the era when humans act as a geological force on the planet, changing its climate for millennia to come. (2)

Chakrabarty’s emphasis on “the figure of the human in the age of the Anthropocene”¹⁶ and its attendant impact on the global environment seems to echo Dad’s vision of the global ecological crisis under which all humans will suffer in the new age. If looking at Dad’s vision from Chakrabarty’s point of view, we can see “the rain” and “the wind” that affect human life, as envisioned by Dad in his dream, as not simply “natural” phenomena, but are largely part of a “human-induced” geophysical force initiated by human development on a large scale and for a long time. Chakrabarty points out that global climate changes are caused by the “human” intervention in natural history:

¹⁶ Although “the Anthropocene” is a relatively new concept in Anglo-American literary studies, postcolonialists, such as Chakrabarty, have introduced the discourse of climate change to postcolonial studies. See his essay “The Climate of History: Four Theses” (2009).

What is remarkable about the current crisis is that climate scientists are not simply doing versions of natural history. They are also giving us ‘human history.’ And this is because they assign an agency to humans at the heart of this story. According to them, current *global* (and not regional) climate changes are largely human induced. This implies that humans are now part of the natural history of the planet. (10)

In *The Famished Road*, Azaro’s visions of the Yoruba forest that reveal Yorubaland transforming from an unalienated, organic world, where humans evolve with or under nature, into a highly materialized world, where human constructions and development dominate nature under the guidance of global capitalism and modernization, indicate a human history intervening and even replacing a natural history. Although Azaro’s visions focus on “local” histories, Okri shows that Yoruba histories, particularly its colonial history, are actually entwined with global histories with regard to unlimited human development and its attendant impact on both the local and the global environments. The construction of “the road,” depicted by Azaro as symbolic of human development/progression, connects Yorubaland to global history of development:

The road was endless. One road leads to thousand others, where in turned fed into paths, which fed into dirt tracks, which became streets, which ended in avenues and cul-de-sacs. All around, a new world was being erected amidst the old. Skyscrapers stood high and inscrutable beside huts and zinc abodes. Bridges were being built; flyovers, half-finished, were like passageways into

the air, or like future visions of a time when cars would be able to fly. Roads, half-constructed, were crowded with heavy machinery. (113)

A “new world” perceived by Azaro is composed of “the road” in its various forms of human construction—a world that announces the domination of the human and the end of nature.

If in the age of globalization human history has superseded natural history, and natural disasters occurring in local regions are largely intrinsic to human activities, as Chakrabarty argues, then in a local region like Yorubaland, as Okri depicted in *The Famished Road*, the extremities of local climates should not be treated simply as isolated phenomena. Okri depicts the extremity of the rainy season in Yorubaland on the eve of Nigerian independence in his novel in order to indicate the impact of global development, specifically deforestation, on a local climate. Azaro juxtaposes his experience of “the rainy season” (286) with that of the “Road Construction Sites” in the forest (287) in order to indicate the correlation between a local climate change and unlimited globalized development. The extremity of a local rainy season, as Azaro depicts, underscores an ecological imbalance caused by the expansion of the slum, the construction of the road, and the attendant depletion of the local vegetation. As Azaro describes, “The downpour as a persistent weight. The force of the wind knocked me sideways and blew me off the ground. . . . The earth turned fast into mud. When I could see, the street seemed to have vanished. The forest was distorted. The house quivered” (286). Azaro attributes the sudden downpour to the power of nature, as he describes the water “soaking fast into the ground and rising quickly above the land” (285-86) as “the mysterious aroma of a new

season, of leaves and rustic herbs, wild bark and vegetation, the secret essences of a goddess rising from the earth” (286). However, Azaro’s seemingly celebratory sentiment about nature is quickly replaced by his witness to a “natural” disaster that is largely caused by human activities, including deforestation and endless road. Azaro thus does not really celebrate a local rainy season, but rather conveys his concern with a human-induced natural disaster that occurs in a local region. As he describes,

The rain and wind forced me on to the forest edge, to the pit where they dredged up sand. The white man stood there with his foot on the log. . . . Suddenly the path turned into a ditch. The earth moved. Floodwaters from the forest poured underneath us. The white man shouted, his binoculars flew into the air, and I saw him slide away from view. . . . The earth gave way in clumps and covered him as he disappeared. . . . Three workers volunteered to dive in and search for him. They never returned. The pit that had help create the road had swallowed all of them. (288)

The apocalyptic scene above, which highlights the complicity of a road construction site (“the pit”) and natural forces (“floodwaters,” “the earth”) in destroying the vegetation, human habitations and lives, can be read as an allegory of local ecological degradation in relation to unlimited development and exploitation. That being said, Okri’s dramatization of a local environmental crisis, as inherently related to global environmental exploitation, into his novel by no means conflates all human experiences of ecological degradation without recognizing the unequal contribution to the crisis. Okri is cautious not to conflate the rich in the Global North with the poor in the Global South in terms of the degree of

the suffering. Dad's vision implies that the global environmental crisis will make people all over the world suffer. However, Azaro's experience of the extremity of a local climate suggests that in the post-independence era when neocolonialism and globalization continue to afflict the postcolonial worlds, local regions in the Global South are likely to suffer more due to the already impoverished environment. As Azaro continues to describe the impact of rain on his homeland: "Our street turned into one big stream. Water flooded into our rooms from the gutters. Sometimes it rained so much the compound began to stink because of the water that flowed past the pail latrine. During that time children fell ill, and many people caught strange diseases. . . . The noise of the falling rain penetrated our bones, our silences, and our dreams" (312). The paradox of these opposing sensations of the "silence" of the poor and the "noise" of the rain underscores Okri's foresight into another form of inequality detected in the age of globalization—one caused not only by global economic unevenness, but also more specifically by the impact of global ecological crisis on local environments, particularly ones in the Global South. This inequality exposes the complicit configuration of global capitalism/development and global environmental crisis with regard to local environmental degradation. Okri foregrounds a local region suffering from the global environmental crisis in order to point out that globalization is likely to turn local inhabitants like Azaro's family into environmental refugees.

By highlighting a local region suffering from the global environmental crisis, Okri moves Africa to the center of discussions about global capitalism and its attendant impact on the global environment and suggesting Yoruba/local solutions as a world solution.

Dad's speech to Azaro and Mum after he wakes up from his coma provides such solutions, as revealed by Dad promoting a new environmental consciousness that will re-connects local issues to global issues. This new environmental consciousness, founded on the Yoruba concept that "all things are linked" (483), however, does not reassert or privilege the intactness of an indigenous African knowledge, but instead, intends to revise and expand that knowledge in response to challenges in the post-independence era. In *The Famished Road*, an indigenous knowledge as preserved in the Yoruba forest is said to be full of "riddles." Okri's magic realism highlights not only the animism of the Yoruba forest/spirit world, but also "riddles" in an indigenous knowledge—a dynamic system that should not be treated as rigid, static, and immovable. As Azaro says, "There are many riddles of the dead that only the living can answer" (427). This proverb-like statement about "riddles" suggests that an indigenous Yoruba knowledge is by no means an entity that can be possessed, but rather a dynamic system created and participated in by both "the dead" (ancestors and spirits) and "the living." For Okri, an indigenous knowledge/belief should be recognized and preserved, yet it also needs to involve "the living" in order to continue to update its meaning in the face of neocolonialism and globalization in the post-independence era. Toward the end of the novel, however, Azaro again twists the meaning of "riddles" in relation to the formation of an indigenous knowledge. This time, instead of a dialectical formation of knowledge that highlights the interactions between "the dead" and "the living," Azaro suggests an ongoing process of knowledge formation that connects the past, the present, and the future. As he states, "Anything is possible, one way or another. There are many riddles amongst us that neither the living nor the dead can answer" (488). At the first glance, Azaro makes this

statement in order to announce his rebellion against his *abiku* identity that is trapped forever between the living and the dead. However, his statement also suggests a way in which an African indigenous knowledge should be looked at in the time of globalization. While depicting his narrator-protagonist as a non-traditional *abiku* character in the sense that Azaro chooses to break the cycle and “want[s] to live” (488), and that he constantly twists meanings of “riddles” throughout the novel,¹⁷ Okri at the same time cautions us not to fossilize an African indigenous knowledge, but to recognize the vitality of that knowledge in alignment with a continuum, and more importantly, to re-introduce that knowledges to “globaletics.”

Conclusion: Towards Globaletics of African Forests—From an “Abiku” Perspective

Connecting Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* to Okri’s *The Famished Road* in terms of the local forests enables us to trace African local histories inherently related to global histories, and to imagine a future under the guidance of “globaletics,” through which local experiences will have to reconnect to global issues and vice versa, in order to respond to the global environmental crisis. In his *Globaletics*, Ngũgĩ states, “Globaletics combines the global and the dialectical to describe a mutually affecting dialogue, or multi-logue, in the phenomena of nature and nurture in a global space that’s rapidly transcending that of the artificially bounded, as nation and region” (8). Toward the very end of Okri’s novel, Dad reconnects an indigenous world view to colonial histories and

¹⁷ See Douglas McCabe’s “‘Higher Realities’: New Age Spirituality in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*” (2005) for more discussion of Okri’s non-traditional representations of *abiku* in his novels.

“future histories” he dreams about (498) in order to propose a global environmental consciousness that by no means privileges pre-colonial cultures/indigenous knowledges and simply rejects globalization, but rather embraces various knowledge systems developed from human experiences in different spaces and during different time periods: “‘Many people reside in us,’ Dad said, as if he were reading our thoughts. ‘many past lives, many future lives. If you listen carefully the air is full of laughter. Human beings are a great mystery.’” (499). In recognizing interconnections between human beings as well as emphasizing exchangeabilities between knowledges humans have developed, Dad suggests that the “road” that should be built in the coming age is not a road to progress or development, as dictated by Western experiences, but instead, a road to embrace knowledges that transcend temporal and geographical limits. As Dad states, “Our road must be open. A road that is open is never hungry. Strange times are coming.” (497). In referring to the post-independence era as “strange times,” Dad, using the Yoruba wisdom that “all things are linked” (483), suggests reconnecting humans to nature in terms of looking at human history along with natural history. However, Dad’s emphasis on the importance of the Yoruba wisdom should not be treated as outright nostalgic. He is not trying to locate some action in a romantic, backward-looking wholeness, but somehow a backward-looking with “difference.” In other words, the “abiku” position is somehow necessary in developing a global environmental consciousness—a consciousness that is able to negotiate between real and spirit, human and natural worlds if only we are somehow attentive to different forms of meaning and value other than capitalism, modernity, and progression. For Dad, to be prepared to enter this “new age” is to “look at the world with new eyes” (498), that is, with a new perspective that puts human beings

not simply back to “nature,” but in the geological time instead. To be more specific, in this new age, humans should not be treated as isolated groups separated by time and space, but rather as a species that plays a crucial role in changing the dynamics of the earth and therefore has brought a tremendous impact on the global environment. Looking at human beings as a species in a deep time enables us to reconfigure human relationships with nature—relationships that underscore interconnectedness and co-evolution among species. As Dad says,

The heart is bigger than a mountain. One human life is deeper than the ocean. Strange fishes and sea monsters and mighty plants live in the rock-bed of our spirits. The whole of human history is an undiscovered continent deep in our souls. There are dolphins, plants that dream, magic birds inside us. The sky is inside us. The earth is in us. The trees of the forest, the animal of the bushes, tortoises, birds, and flowers know our future. (498)

Dad looks at “one human life” not as simply an individual and independent life, but rather a holistic, “abiku” life that connects to “the ocean,” “the sky,” “the earth,” “the forest,” “animals,” and other beings, in order to emphasize that humans have become, in Chakrabarty’s term, a “geophysical force” that contributes to the global ecological crises. As a “geophysical force,” humans have gained agency via a “collective existence” revealed often in non-human forms. As Chakrabarty explains in his essay, “But in becoming a geophysical force on the planet, we have also developed a form of collective existence that has no ontological dimension. Our thinking about ourselves now stretches

our capacity for interpretive understanding. We need nonontological ways of thinking the human” (13). In Okri’s novel, “the floodwater” brought about by the rainy season that devastates the slum and the road construction site carries a human agency with a non-ontological existence. Dad acknowledges “nonontological ways of thinking the human,” however, is not to simply accept the new role of human beings in the new age, but instead to use it to develop a new environmental consciousness that aims at creating a global collective consciousness with an emphasis on the recognition that “all things are linked” (483). Within this consciousness, the hierarchy between culture and nature or between homo sapiens and other species is dissolved. In fusing human and natural histories, Dad suggests “a new language” with which all beings begin to see, understand, and learn from each other rather than oppress and exploit each other. As Day continues saying:

The world that we see and the world that is there are two different things. . . . We need a new language to talk to each other. Inside a cat there are many histories, many books. When you look into the eyes of dogs strange fishes swim in your mind. All roads lead to death, but some roads lead to things which can never be finished. Wonderful things. There are human beings who are small but if you can SEE you will notice that their spirits are ten thousand feet wide. . . . (498)

Seeing histories from a cat or exploring our mind via the eyes of dogs requires a new language that goes beyond limits of human languages and involves various ways of communication, as well as an inclusive knowledge system that operates via collaboration. Last but not the least, Dad suggests that people’s fear to “love” has been the major

obstacle that prevents this global consciousness from developing. Seeing human beings as a species as well as a geophysical force means to reunite people and their knowledges in the face of the global environmental crises. For Dad, only “love” can make the reunion happen. As he states, ““People who use only their eyes do not SEE. People who use only their ears do not HEAR. It is more difficult to love than to die. It is not death that human beings are most afraid of, it is love.”” (498). With this consciousness developing in his mind, Azaro, an *abiku* child, who represents the future of Nigeria in the post-independence era as well as that of human beings in the time of the global environmental crisis, decides to live and embrace the world with love. As he says at the end of the novel, “In my sleep I found open spaces where I floated without fear. The sky was serene. A good breeze blew over our road, cleaning away the strange excesses in the air. . . . The sweetness dissolved my fear. I was not afraid of Time” (500). *The Famished Road* that ends in Azaro’s willingness to “live” and face the future thus aims to promote a holistic, “abiku” perspective in looking at the world—a perspective that puts African wisdoms in the center and enables “gloaletics” to happen.

Chapter Two

The Country and the City in Early Nigerian Novels: (Anti-) and (Post-) Pastoral Narratives in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Burning Grass* and Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*

The “Pastoral” has been a recurrent trope in Western literature since the Alexandrian poet Theocritus in the Hellenistic period. In a broader sense, however, the pastoral is also a trope used in cultural, political, and environmental criticisms as shown in mainstream Western environmental movements as well as in Anglo-American ecocriticism. In his *Pastoral* (1999), Terry Gifford defines the three main functions or uses of pastoral motifs in Western literary tradition—as a “literary convention,” as a “literature of the countryside,” and as “a pejorative of idealization” (147). As a literary convention, a pastoral motif involves the pattern of “retreat and return” between country and city (Gifford 1). As a literature of the countryside, it describes the countryside with the tendency to idealize the environment, inhabitants, and life style of the countryside in contrast to that of the urban (Gifford 2). As a pejorative, it highlights the harshness of the economic realities in the countryside in contrast to the idealized countryside (Gifford 2). As a literary convention and creation in the Western world, the pastoral has also shaped the Western mindset about “nature,” conveying nature as harmonious, generous, resilient, and controlled by ecology—a mindset that contributes to Western environmentalism first developed in the Romantic era.¹ The pastoral also serves as a critical tool in Anglo-

¹ See Joanne Schneider’s “Romantic Legacies: Nationalism and Environmentalism” in her *The Age of Romanticism* (2007).

American ecocriticism when this environment-oriented approach initially developed in Anglo-American literary studies in response to the “Global Environmental Crisis.”² In his *Ecocriticism* (2004), Greg Garrard explains the correlation between the literary and cultural functions of the pastoral in the Western world:

Since the Romantic Movement’s poetic responses to the Industrial Revolution, pastoral has decisively shaped our construction of nature. Even the science of ecology may have been shaped by pastoral in its early stages of development, and we have seen that the founding text of ecocriticism, *Silent Spring*, drew on the pastoral tradition. No other trope is so deeply entrenched in Western culture, or so deeply problematic for environmentalism. With its roots in the classical period, pastoral has shown itself to be infinitely malleable for differing political ends, and potentially harmful in its tensions and evasions. However, its long history and cultural ubiquity mean that the pastoral trope must and will remain a key concern for ecocritics. (33)

While Garrard reminds us that the Western frame of the pastoral could be “problematic” in its practice of environmentalism and that its political intention could be “potentially harmful,” he also emphasizes the pastoral’s malleability and “cultural ubiquity.” This chapter focuses on the pastoral’s “malleability” in the context of African literatures, showing that the pastoral is not exclusively a “Western” phenomenon in spite of its Western roots. Focusing on the pastoral in African literatures reminds us that while its

² See Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm’s “Introduction” to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996).

form and attendant political intentions vary according to cultural contexts and historical particularities, the pastoral occurs across traditions.

If in British tradition, the Romantic pastoral critiques impacts of industrialism on British rural land, as Garrard mentions above, the pastoral in African literatures critiques impacts of colonialism on indigenous communities in Africa. However, in contrasting the pastoral produced in a Western setting to that produced in an African setting, I am not suggesting that there is an essentialist mode and/or function of the pastoral in each cultural system. Indeed, simply attaching a geographical descriptor like “Western” or “African” to pastoral is misguided as it depicts the pastoral as determined and stable across cultures. Rather, the pastoral and its dynamics are specific to cultural systems of specific times. Even in specific contexts, as Lawrence Buell, a leading American ecocritic, reminds us in his *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), various pastoral forms serve different purposes:

The ideological valence of pastoral writing cannot be determined without putting the texts in the contextual frame. . . . The ‘retreat’ to nature can be a form of willed amnesia, as in [John] Burroughs passage; but it means something different when held up self-consciously, as by Thoreau, to appeal to an alternative set of values over and against the dominant one. It means something still different when the alternative framework is employed by one like Elizabeth Wright, for whom that framework is not as predictable and acceptable a vocabulary as it was for a male writer of

the same era. (49-50)

Following Buell's emphasis on the importance of treating works of the pastoral in American literature individually and putting each piece in a "contextual frame," in the chapter that follows I treat the pastoral in African literatures not as a unified cultural product that conveys consensual meanings. Thus, when I use the pastoral in "Western" literature and the pastoral in "African" literatures throughout this chapter, I do it mainly to indicate their geographical, historical, and anthropological differences between how the form is generally deployed in the west and how the form is deployed in Africa, rather than to demonstrate, emphasize or claim any essentialist entities of each.

The current scholarship on the pastoral in African literatures focuses on the violent history of colonialism that imposes urbanism on traditional Africa's rural societies, as well as underscores its attendant tension between the countryside and the city. Pastoral forms and pastoral motifs' critiques of colonialism as seen in African literatures, however, are often contingent upon geography, time, and race. Anthony Chennells, in his essay "Pastoral and Anti-Pastoral Elements in Alex La Guma's Later Novels" (1989), explains the historical complexities and particularities of pastoral tropes used in African literatures that approve of rural communities and denounce urban life styles. For him, on the one hand, the pastoral is used in African literatures with a purpose of "developing national literature" (41) that "recover[s] the pre-colonial past [especially preserved in villages]" as well as "recreate[s] [rural] communities with powerful communal links, in which the individual feels accounted for within the collective" (40-41). In this sense, the history of colonialism and the experience of colonization generate

motifs of the pastoral in African literatures that “yearn for the cultural integrity beyond the city” (41). On the other hand, however, Chennells also reminds us that in the case of South African literatures, pastoral motifs are often not popular among black writers, for those motifs have been appropriated by an apartheid rhetoric that conflates the black population with a “backwards” rurality. Such rhetoric rejects black claims to modernity and the city, and justifies the apartheid exploitation of black labor in urban areas (41). Against this rhetoric, an “anti-pastoral” is more commonly used in South African black texts that “reject rural traditions” (41) while exposing the poverty of urban black proletariats. In short, whereas the “pastoral” in postcolonial African literatures can be understood as a trope used to reclaim pre-colonial cultural heritage undermined by colonialism, the “anti-pastoral” in postcolonial South African literatures suggests the danger of an escapism that ignores urban realities and violence and forecloses the possibilities and politics of urban black experience. As Chennells puts it, “Only with an explicit recognition that the past, the countryside, and the rural cultures of the countryside exist in the living tension with the city and with the urban culture can pastoral become a significant mode in progressive art” (41-42). The pastoral in various historical contexts of postcolonial Africa is thus not only a literature of the countryside that may tend to “give an idealized image of life in traditional society” (25), as G.N. Ofor states in his essay “The Urban Novel: A Historical Experience” (1991), but also a literature of urban struggle that critiques colonial legacies, such as apartheid, as well as the naïveté of pastoral idealization and escapism.³ Moreover, in contrast to the pastoral in *black* African

³ For more discussions about the pastoral in African literatures that focus on the tension between the countryside and the city, see Ofor’s essay. Like Chennells, Ofor focuses on how the pastoral in African literature, whether it is set in rural or urban areas, is produced in response to the violence of colonialism.

literature that revolves around the tension between the countryside and the city, pastoral tropes used by *white* settlers in settler colonies like South Africa highlight different perspectives on colonial history, one that questions entitlement and ownership. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, in their *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), focus on the concept of “entitlement” (82) recurring in white settlers’ pastoral that reveals the “irony” (86) of the pastoral in the settler colonies as it is to bolster problematic, exploitative politics of inequality. While reclaiming the ownership of the “family farm” (98) in the countryside, South African white settlers’ pastoral also exposes “the crisis of belonging” (82) and “ironies of dispossession” (86). As Huggan and Tiffin state, “The Cape Colony, in other words, was an ‘anti-pastoral space, a site of barbarism and degradation, a space repeatedly explored in white South African literature, in which pastoral values and romantic myths have always co-existed uneasily, ‘under a sardonic scrutiny’ that questions them both” (98). Whereas Chennells emphasizes an “anti-pastoral” in black South African literature in the sense that “the countryside” is used to stereotype and thus is rejected by black communities, so Huggan and Tiffin emphasize another type of “anti-pastoral” in white South African literature in the sense that “the countryside” is a reminder of the violent history of settler colonialism.

Ofor explains how colonialism brought “colonial administration” to and established “alien institutions” in traditional Africa’s rural communities, and how the imposition of the colonial regime contributed to “the historic shift from a subsistence economy to a monetary economy” as well as “loosen[ed] the co-operative ties binding the individual to his clan and lineage members” (23). In contrast to Chennells, however, Ofor focuses on the common political and cultural critiques shared by both the rural and the urban novels in African literature. As the rural novels convey concerns with the village tradition threatened by the advent of colonialism, so the urban novels “explore the effects of alien facilities and institutions on the inhabitants of the city” who are “forced to be drifted to the city” (24). Another approach similar to Ofor’s is seen in John McClusky’s “The City as a Force: Three Novels by Cyprian Ewkeni” (1976), an essay arguing that Ewkeni “established the tensions of urban-country attitude” (221) in order to contrast the city, represented as chaotic, materialistic, and full of temptations, with a countryside presented as “a sanctuary, promising stability and spiritual health” (212).

Nevertheless, both Chennells and Huggan and Tiffin complicate the pastoral used in African literatures by highlighting the darker and more negative connotations of “the countryside” that reveals the history of apartheid and of settler colonialism in South Africa.

The Pastoral in early Nigerian Novels: Cyprian Ekwensi and Gabriel Okara

This chapter explores further the complexity of pastoral forms and motifs in African literatures, specifically the tension between the countryside and the city, by looking particularly at two early Nigerian novels, Cyprian Ekwensi’s *Burning Grass: A Story of Fulani of Northern Nigeria* (1962) and Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice* (1964). Focusing on these two examples of African pastoral narratives published in the 1960s, the time right after Nigerian independence, enables us to recognize how various incarnations of the pastoral as explained by Gifford and Garrard—pastoral as a literary convention, a political, social agenda (environmentalism), and a critical perspective (ecocriticism)—work in a specific region of Africa like Fulaniland in Northern Nigeria and/or in a specific time like Nigerian Independence. Ekwensi and Okara use pastoral motifs in their novels in order to address a significant historical shift as well as cultural and environmental crises in a specific African context—crises that do not follow a Western historical trajectory. Ekwensi focuses on Fulaniland in northern Nigeria during the colonial period—particularly on its savannah landscape, its cattle-herding people (Bororo-Fulani), and its nomadic life style—in order to access and reclaim an indigenous environmental thought/practice in Fulaniland in opposition to colonial environmental subjugations.

Okara's novel, set in an imaginary African village (Amatu) at the dawn of independence, on the other hand, questions the possibility of reclaiming tradition, suggesting that returning to "the village"—an ahistorical "natural" society—is impossible. Moreover, focusing on the literariness of these two examples of African pastoral narratives, including their narrative structure, representations of the countryside and the city, narrative perspective, characterizations, and other formal aspects of the novels, enables us to recognize the dynamics of pastoral modes appropriated in African literatures. The formal aspects of these two African pastoral narratives contribute to an argument about a possible environmentalism or environmental thought that exists outside of a Western genealogical trajectory, one that also avoids escapism and idealization.

While the nostalgia revealed in African pastoral through tensions between the countryside and the city looks similar to that in Western pastoral in the sense that the countryside represents tradition or an ideal life and the city represents change or corruption, each tension is created within a specific historical and cultural force. The colonization of Fulaniland in Ekwensi's novel should not be treated as the same experience as the industrialization of England (though the former is caused by the latter in terms of its economic and political expansion outside of Europe). Although Buell complicates the "'ideological grammar' of American pastoral" (50) by suggesting that the pastoral used as a cultural expression should not be treated as possessing a stable entity, in an earlier essay "American Pastoral Ideology Reappraised" (1989), he tends to subsume the nostalgia addressed in postcolonial pastoral, such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, into *universal* (or Western) human history. In this essay, Buell recognizes the role

of colonialism in creating a nostalgic sensibility found in African pastoral.⁴ Although recognizing a historical difference with regard to pastoral motifs used in non-Western cultural systems like that of the Igbo in Achebe's novel, Buell contradictorily emphasizes that the nostalgia expressed in Achebe's novel makes the novel a "conservative pastoral" that "taps into the Western plot paradigms of historical novel" (22). While Buell encourages Americanists to recognize the particularities of pastoral discourses used in postcolonial literatures, his intention is ironically to glorify the "multivalence" of a specifically *American* pastoral. As he states, "the value of placing American pastoral in postcolonial context is that it corroborates and further illuminates American pastoral's ideological multivalence" (21). Buell's conclusion that a postcolonial text like Achebe's novel uses pastoral tropes to display "an archetypal story of loss of innocence" (23) thus subsumes African pastoral under a Western cultural and literary tradition. Achebe's novel indeed conveys a nostalgia about the disappearing of pre-colonial Igbo culture. However, reading this nostalgia as displaying an "archetypal story of loss of innocence" sounds an imperialistic note. Conflating "the loss of innocence" caused by colonialism with that caused by industrialism, as Buell suggests in his essay, is to ignore the real and particular violence that occurred in the colonial context, including the displacement of native inhabitants, the dispossession of the land, the destruction of the traditional kinship, the collapse of the traditional worldview, and the exploitation of the rural labor and the environment. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Renee Gosson, and George Handley, in their

⁴ While analyzing Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Buell defines Achebe's pastoral as both an "indigenes' pastoral" and a "radical pastoral." Whereas the former refers to a pastoral narrative based on an "imaginative access to a pre-colonial land-based tradition destabilized by colonialism" (21), the latter refers to a pastoral narrative that "rewrites the received version of history codified in Euro-American pastoral canonical literature and contributes to critical analysis of the historical class and role structure of its own society during its premodern phase" (22).

introduction to *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (2005), point out the similar problem of conflating humanity's alienation from nature without considering the geographical and historical differences:

Unlike the masculine Anglo-American insistence that alienation from nature is caused by excessive mobility and transience, here [in the Caribbean] we see that there are various causes for alienations from nature that differ according to the historical conditions of people in the wake of the violence of Western expansion. . . . Postcolonial literature has given more attention to this problem than has U.S. nature writing; placelessness in the former tends to be seen more as a particular problem rather than as a universalized moral one. (4-5)

Following DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley's reminder of the role of Caribbean literature in providing the material that complicates and broadens historical accounts of human experiences of displacement, this chapter will look at Ekwensi's and Okara's novels as examples of African pastoral that provides clues to "various causes" for African communities' alienation from their land and people as well as various environmental connotations implied by this alienation.

"The Land" in African Pastoral

The pastoral in African literatures also serves as a critical tool in African literary studies, particularly in an Africa-focused ecocriticism. Examining various modes of the

pastoral in African literature as demonstrated by Ekwensi's and Okara's novels enable us to re-examine Western concepts of "nature," "wilderness," and "the environment," as well as recognize a more holistic perception of the human relationship with "the land." I am differentiating "the land" from "nature," "wilderness," and "the environment" here because the latter three have been to a large extent social, cultural, and intellectual constructs throughout Western history that are not applicable to African contexts.⁵ The Western conception of "nature" is founded on the nature-culture dualism.⁶ In contrast, an indigenous attitude toward "the land" in the African world is based rarely on such a dualism. In his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Frantz Fanon provides a counter-discourse to the dualistic feature of the Western concepts of nature by emphasizing a more holistic meaning of "the land" for a colonized people, in contrast to the metaphysical underpinning of "nature" in the Western world. He explains,

For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity. But this dignity has nothing to do with 'human' dignity. The colonized subject has never heard of such an ideal. All he has ever seen on his land is that he can be arrested, beaten, and

⁵ For more details about the evolvement of the Western conception of nature or wilderness, see Neil Evernden's *The Social Creation of Nature* (1992) and Roderick Frazier Nash's *Wilderness & The American Mind* (1962).

⁶ See Evernden's *The Social Construction of Nature*. In this book, the author elaborates on the evolving concepts of nature in Western history—concepts revolving around the nature-cultural dualism. For Evernden, in spite of various approaches to and attitudes toward nature throughout Western history, "nature" was created initially as a *category*—a category defined as *everything-but-us*, which means, something *separate* from its creator, the human subject. Toward the end of his book, Evernden concludes that the conception of nature in the Western world is problematic, for it is founded on dualism. As he states, "The paradox we encounter, of this perpetual oscillation between the domains of nature and culture, arises from a fundamental errors. The dualism cannot actually be resolved, because *it never existed*" (99).

starved with impunity; and no sermonizer on morals, no priest has ever stepped in to bear the blows in his place or share his bread. (9)

While emphasizing that “the land” provides “bread” as well as “dignity” for a colonized people, Fanon is trying to say that the “dignity” comes not only with sustenance, but also more importantly, with a sense of wholeness manifest in the unity of the land and the human. This realization of the human and the land as a whole thus should not be understood as a transcendent and intellectual experience as preached by Western philosophy. In other words, the “dignity” provided by the land in an indigenous African culture has little to do with the dignity in the sense that the “human,” situated in opposition to and/or separate from “the land,” is treated as a higher intelligent entity that endows “the land” with intellectual and aesthetic meanings for human imaginations (as implied by Western conception of nature). Fanon therefore highlights a holistic human-land relationship, as often seen in many of indigenous African societies, in order to critique the colonizer’s imposition of the Western values on the colonized—values that are often indoctrinated as “abstract” and “universal” (9).

Whereas the pastoral in early Anglo-American ecocriticism is used initially as a critical tool to arouse an environmental consciousness in Western academia in response to environmental crises like pollution, as well as to promote environmental activism like wilderness conservation,⁷ an Africa-focused ecocriticism demands a re-conceptualization and re-contextualization of the pastoral in African literature that foregrounds an indigenous concept of “the land,” as well as critiques the impact of colonialism on a

⁷ See Greg Garrard’s *Ecocriticism* (2004).

holistic worldview practiced in most African societies. To be more specific, while the pastoral used in Ekwensi's *Burning Grass* is aimed at highlighting a particular human-nature relationship that is founded on the interdependence between human activities (as revealed in Fulani practices of "burning grass" and seasonal migration) and natural forces ("harmattan"), the pastoral used in Okara's *The Voice* dramatizes various experiences of alienation that colonized Africans suffer in the colonial world—those caused by colonial education (as displayed by Okolo's subjectivity crisis) and/or by capitalism introduced to Africa along with colonialism (as displayed by an African local community being disintegrated). An Africa-focused ecocriticism thus pays attention to anthropological differences in the sense that it highlights various relationships between humans and the non-human world as well as cautions us not to treat Western experiences of and articulations about the non-human world as universal human conditions.

Environmental Crises in Ekwensi and Okara

Ekwensi's and Okara's pastoral narratives also highlight two seemingly different, yet related environmental crises on the African continent. Ekwensi's pastoral addresses an indigenous environmental thought and practice threatened and/or banned by colonial environmental policies. In contrast, Okara's pastoral highlights an "ontological" crisis the colonized subject suffers due to colonization, as revealed by his protagonist Okolo's need to search for "it"—a sense of wholeness undermined by colonial education. *The Voice* dramatizes the consequence of colonial education imposed on African subjects in order to critique how the colonial indoctrination of the concepts of nature-culture and mind-body

dichotomies has alienated African subjects from the surrounding world. Moreover, Okara also highlights an “epistemological” crisis in his novel, as revealed by a holistic, organic worldview commonly believed in pre-colonial African societies being undermined and weakened by a binary, mechanical worldview dictated by colonialism. In his *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon refers to the colonial world as “a compartmentized world” (3) “divided in two” (3) and characterized by the “dichotomy” (10)—a “Manichaean world” (6) where colonized subjects are “penned in” (15). While the “dichotomy” Fanon observes in the colonial world is mainly racial, including dichotomies of “white” and “black,” “Europeans” and “Africans,” and “the colonist” and “the colonized,” in broader colonial contexts as provided by Ekwensi and Okara, the “dichotomy” is multi-dimensional and permeated throughout colonized societies in Africa, for it also refers to dichotomies of “individual” and “community,” “human/culture” and “nature,” “holism” and “dualism,” “spiritualism” and “materialism,” just to name a few. In this sense, the environmental crisis as suggested in Okara’s novel is more of an “inner” and a philosophical one. Juxtaposing Ekwensi’s *Burning Grass* with Okara’s *The Voice* therefore enables us to recognize a double alienation in the colonial world—one that is caused by cultural confiscation and the other due to colonial education. In this sense, an Africa-focused ecocriticism would suggest that environmental crises in Africa are never simply “environmental” nor social/cultural issues and may also manifest in individual and mass subjectivity.

Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, and Post-Pastoral in Ekwensi’s *Burning Grass*

Several critics have read *Burning Grass* as a novel inspired by Ekwensi's 2-year experience as a forestry officer in Northern Nigerian and therefore as a dramatization of the nomadic nature and life style of Fulani people in the region.⁸ Noe Dossou-Yovo's essay "Village and City Environment in Ekwensi's Major Works" (1997) highlights the "local color" (26) of *Burning Grass*, writing, "The originality of *Burning Grass* at the time of its publication lies in the fact that its author succeeded in conveying to a rather unprepared readership *a sense of place and people* that made up both the physical and human environments of Northern Nigeria in the early 1960's" (27). This emphasis on Ekwensi's anthropological portrayals of Fulani, though noting his efforts to reclaim an indigenous community's cultural heritage (a feature of much African literature produced in the 60s), ignores the broader socio-political and environmental critique of the text. While the pastoral in *Burning Grass* features "local color," expresses nostalgia, and mourns for the disappearing tradition, it also addresses the author's cultural, political and environmentalist critiques. My analysis of *Burning Grass* will focus not only on how the novel conveys a unique pastoral sensibility that features nomadic Fulani ways of life, but also on how Ekwensi's pastoral avoids idealism as well as highlights an indigenous Fulani environmental thought founded on the inter-dependence between Fulani cultural activities and its environment—a relationship that complicates and particularizes the pastoral set in a specific African locale.

Burning Grass tells the story of a nomadic Fulani family composed of Mai Sunsaye (the father), Shaitu (the mother), Jalla (the first son), Hodio (the second son),

⁸ Ekwensi completed his studies of forestry at the School of Forestry, Ibadan, in 1944 and served as a forestry officer in Northern Nigerian between 1945 and 1947.

Rikku (the youngest son), and Leibe (the only daughter), and their friend Ligu (a Fulani female herder). The novel is deeply engaged with “movement” in all of its various forms, including questing, wandering, escaping, and migrating. The plot consists of several episodes about each individual characters’ experience moving between places in Northern Nigerian, including “Dokan Toro,” the savannah Fulaniland and the home of the Sunsaye family; “New Chanka,” a colonial town built by the British; “Old Chanka,” a traditional Fulani town destroyed by British colonialists; and “Kontago,” a city in the borderland. Each episode focuses on the characters’ interaction with people they encounter while moving, including fellow Fulani (Baba and Ligu), people from other African ethnic groups like Kanuri (Fatimeh, Shehu, Kantuma), British officers (“the Bodejo” in Fulani), hunters, farmers, blacksmith, cattle thieves, and tax-gatherers. Mai Sunsaye’s questing, wandering, and migrating are the backbone of the plot, as he moves and travels the most throughout the novel. While Mai finally reunites with his family in Ligu’s camp, Rikku is kidnapped when he visits Kantago. Rikku’s absence interrupts and delays the family’s plan to migrate with their cattle to the south (for better grazing). The novel reaches its climax toward the end when Rikku is rescued by his father, and the family (except Hodio) successfully fulfills the Fulani tradition of migration. The novel ends in the death of Mai with Rikku’s promise to follow Fulani traditions.

The opening of *Burning Grass* sets a pastoral tone for Ekwensi’s representation of Fulaniland in Northern Nigeria—a region dominated by the savannah countryside. The opening paragraph shows how the region’s vegetation, inhabitants and their practices,

climate and weather forms a unique eco-system based on the cooperation of natural forces and cultural practices:

When they begin to burn the grass in Northern Nigeria, it is time for the herdsmen to be moving the cattle southwards to the banks of the great river. And the hunters, lurking on the edge of the flames with dane gun, bow and arrow, sniff the fumes and train their eyes to catch the faintest flicker of beasts hastening from their hiding places.

It is time too for the harmattan to blow dust into eyes and teeth, to wrinkle the skin: the harmattan that leaves in its wake from Libya to Lagos a shroud of fog that veils the walls and trees like muslin on a sheikh. (1)

Here, Fulaniland is constructed not as an arcadia, but rather a land where “the trees were skeletons bleached in the sun—barren, with peeling skins bruised by decades of thirst and hunger”(1) and where “in the thorn forest, in the very heart of rock and stream, darkness could mean encountering with the agents of swift death: the big wild cows, the leopard” (11-12). This is a land of anti-pastoral where, as Gifford explains, “the natural world can no longer be constructed as a ‘land of dreams,’ but is in fact a bleak battle for survival without divine purposes . . .” (120). Paradoxically, under such grim surroundings, a seemingly romantic Fulani sensibility develops:

He [Mai] sat with his son [Rikku] in the dry atmosphere of Northern Nigeria. . . . The somnolence in the air crackled. Gusts of heat rose from

the earth and shimmered upwards to an intense blue sky that hurt the eyes. . . . He and his son lifted their eyes and took in the undulating hills, the rivulets and rocks. And it was lonely. But they were nomads, wandering cattlemen, and loneliness was their drink. (1)

This nomadic “loneliness” in Ekwensi’s Fulani characters, developed from their wandering in the vast savannah on the daily basis, paradoxically becomes a celebration of their survival. As they “drink” their loneliness, their singularity is expressed necessary to their survival. In addition to the severe physical environment, a harmonious human society as usually associated with pastoral forms is also an illusion in Ekwensi’s Fulaniland. Throughout his novel, tribal conflicts are another dangerous and unpredictable factor that reinforces the anti-pastoral nature of Fulaniland. Rikku, at fourteen years old, has already developed an alertness to the treacherous environment as revealed when Ardo, the rival of his father, attacks in the darkness: “Rikku woke in the small hours of the morning. Something, a slight unusualness in the air, had awoken him. He sat up with that immediate instinct of the nomad, developed over a lifetime of exposure to danger from man, beast, and nature” (14). *Burning Grass* juxtaposes an anti-pastoral environment with a pastoral tone in order that a specific Fulani cultural sensibility that highlights the Fulani characters’ interaction with the environment emerges without idealization.

This juxtaposition, more importantly, suggests an Africa-focused post-pastoral—a pastoral that complicates and enriches the pastoral used not only as a literary convention, but also as a political trope that critiques colonial environmentalism while it locates a

local environmentalism. Furthermore, looking closely at an Africa-focused post-pastoral as demonstrated by *Burning Grass* also enables us to re-examine the particularity of a human relationship with the land in the context of a specific African environment.

The Africa-focused post-pastoral in *Burning Grass* promotes an inter-dependent relationship between Fulaniland and its inhabitants—a relationship which, in contrast to the post-pastoral as defined and approved by early Anglo-American ecocriticism, does not isolate the land and/or nature from socio-cultural practices and human history. According to Gifford's *Pastoral*, the post-pastoral as revealed in Anglo-American literature highlights mature relationships between humans and the natural environment in the sense that it “has avoided the traps of idealization in seeking to find a discourse that can both celebrate *and* take responsibility for nature without false consciousness” (148). Such relationships that combine celebration and ethical responsibility endorse early Anglo-American ecocriticism's concept that nature is outside of the human realm and is seen as a bigger, more inclusive entity that humans have to depend on. Gifford, adopting Buell's critique of traditional pastoralism, further describes the post-pastoral observed in Anglo-American literature as pursuing ““a mature environmental aesthetics”” that goes beyond “the closed circuit of pastoral and anti-pastoral to achieve a vision of an integrated natural world that includes the human” (148). At first glance, Gifford and Buell's emphasis on “an integrated natural world that includes the human” fits in an Africa-focused post-pastoral as revealed by *Burning Grass*. In Ekwensi's novel, the Fulani characters work and negotiate with the land. The characters have to follow the land in order to practice cattle-herding. The land needs its inhabitants and their practices

to stay fertile, as evidenced by the Fulani practice of burning grass. The inter-dependent relationship between Fulaniland and its inhabitants as depicted by Ekwensi thus underlies how his characters collaborate with nature, a feature of the post-pastoral. In contrast, the post-pastoral as explained by Gifford actually emphasizes the genre's endorsement of the independence of nature from the human world, as Gifford quotes Buell: “As this ecocentric repossession of pastoral has gathered force, its center of energy has begun to shift from representation of nature as a theater for human events to representation in the sense of advocacy of nature as a presence for its own sake” (148). This concept that nature exists “for its own sake,” rejecting anthropocentric construction of nature, tends to elevate “nature” to an ideal whole treated as an abstract, transcendent, and universal entity that carries its own agency. In other words, the post-pastoral as defined by early Anglo-American ecocriticism ends up constructing a seemingly isolated “nature” that transcends “human” fabrications, a relationship that emphasizes reconnecting humans to nature through responsibilities, but ironically reinforces a nature-culture dualism.

The post-pastoral in *Burning Grass* highlights the socialization of Fulaniland while re-conceptualizing early Anglo-American ecocriticism's assumption about “nature” and its relation to humans. Early Anglo-American ecocriticism assumes that “nature” is an independent, universal ambience out there, while humans, despite their cultural and anthropological differences, are all subordinate to that common, broader “nature.” Bruno Latour, in his *Politics of Nature* (2004), calls this perception of nature “mononaturalism.”⁹ For him, “mononaturalism” recognizes differences between cultures

⁹ In his book, Latour questions this dominant perception in Western scholarships—a perception of the “common world” composed of “one nature, [and] a multiplicity of cultures” (48). For Latour, a non-

in looking at and treating nature, yet treats “nature” as a universal environment that embraces and unifies humanity. Such a perception of the human relationship with nature to some extent reinforces the concept of the nature-culture divide. The post-pastoral as depicted in *Burning Grass*, however, provides an alternative perspective that promotes multi-naturalism and questions the nature-cultural dualism used in understanding an indigenous people’s relationship with nature. “Multi-naturalism,” in contrast to “mononaturalism,” does not treat nature as a universal ambience for all humans, but instead, attends to the dynamics of nature as being understood in various human societies. Instead of singularizing “nature,” Phillipe Descola, a French anthropologist, in his *The Ecology of Others* (2005), suggests that we recognize other cosmologies than the Western one (based on that division) in approaching non-Western cultures. Descola proposes a new view of multi-naturalism by highlighting the extent to which an indigenous people “socializes” the physical environment. He states,

It has become indispensable in the West to reflect upon the effect of the disintegration of our notion of the natural world by locating this problem in a more general framework; this framework would allow the examination of the different conceptions of the biological dimension of humans and of the relations with the physical environment that they have developed in various places in the course of history. (83)

Western culture does not often possess or share the same concept of “nature” as Western cultures, as he says, “Non-Western cultures have never been interested in nature; they have never adopted it as a category; they have never found a use for it. On the contrary, Westerners were the ones who turned nature into a big deal” (43).

Promoting multi-naturalism, Descola is also careful not to fall into the pitfall of dualism, as he reminds us in his 1996 essay “Constructing Natures: Symbolic Ecology and Social Practice:”

If every culture is considered as a specific system of meanings arbitrarily coding an unproblematic natural world, which everywhere possesses all the features that our own culture attributes to it, then not only does the very cause of the nature-culture(s) division remain unquestioned, but, declarations to the contrary notwithstanding, there can be no escape from the epistemological privilege granted to western culture, the only one whose definition of nature serves as the implicit measuring rod for all others. (84-85)

Despite targeting anthropology, both Latour’s and Descola’s critiques of mononaturalism remind us of the particularities of non-Western conceptions of their environments.

Ekwensi’s post-pastoral, like Descola’s theory, provincializes Western cosmology, arguing that “nature” should not be treated as a single, universal entity that possesses the same values for and the same impact on humanity. Rather, multiple natures exist in and among diverse human communities. Fanon’s concept of “the land” that emphasizes the “dignity” generated by the inter-dependence between humans and nature can be seen as one of the alternative conceptions of nature developed in a non-Western society. The post-pastoral in Ekwensi’s novel is another example that foregrounds a particular “nature” in the context of Northern Nigeria.

The post-pastoral in *Burning Grass* highlights the socialization of Fulaniland in

order to re-examine assumptions that colonial ethnography makes about “nature” and its relation to indigenous communities. The colonial discourse on the human relationship with nature in indigenous non-Western worlds tends to conflate indigenous communities with nature, treating them as children of nature. In *In the Society of Nature: A Native Ecology of Amazonia* (1994), Descola critiques this discourse in contemporary Western anthropological scholarship. In his book, Descola points out that scholarship on the Amazonian tribes is limited to two schools of thought, both of which ignore how indigenous communities interface with the surrounding natural environment. The first approach treats nature as an “object” or “matter” used mainly by indigenous Amazonian tribes for utility and survival (2). The second approach treats nature as playing a “determining” role in shaping an indigenous tribe’s society and their activities (2). For Descola, the first approach tends to downgrade an indigenous people’s relationship with nature as simply a utilitarian one, as if they have little spiritual or symbolic attachment to their use of the natural resources surrounding them. On the other hand, the second approach sees indigenous societies and their cultural practices as simply products of their environments. The result is an environmental determinism that rejects possibilities of an indigenous people’s agency and efficacy in interacting with the surrounding environment. Both approaches treat nature as merely a physical and objective ambience or background for indigenous communities—an ambience that is either inactive in that it is composed mainly of matters or active, in that it determines human activities. Both, paradoxically, imply that indigenous peoples are merely passive participants who lack imagination or sophisticated relations with the environment. Descola, in contrast, examines various ways in which an indigenous Amazonian people, specifically the Achuar, “socialize nature” (4)

—practices that reveal both their use/knowledge of nature and the symbolic meanings of these practices (4).¹⁰ While specific to the Amazon, Descola’s approach is important here because it eerily describes Ekwensi’s depictions of the Fulani in *Burning Grass*. Ekwensi dramatizes the Fulani’s relationship with nature by foregrounding how his characters endow the land with social and political functions without being simply atavistic in Western definitions. Through their knowledge of and experience with the land, Ekwensi’s characters socialize their environment by developing a Fulani identity that is tied to their attachment to the land and their cattle, as well as by fulfilling the seasonal migration, a Fulani custom that addresses their rebellion against colonial subjugations.

Ekwensi’s characters actively shape Fulaniland, enabling the author to represent the Fulani as active and self-determining. The Fulani in *Burning Grass* are obviously to some extent a social, historical, and literary construct, an identity that functions more as a political agency than an object of anthropological studies. Frank A. Salamone, in his essay “Colonialism and the Emergence of Fulani Identity,” explains:

Ethnic groups, moreover, are not ‘natural’ ones. Ethnicity itself is a socially used cultural symbol. Therefore, something in the nature of the situation must trigger off the mobilization of the principle of ethnicity before a coherent group can be formed around it. That something is the need, for political, social, or economic reason to distinguish one group

¹⁰ In his book *The Socialization of Nature*, Descola explains how he demonstrate the Achuar’s socialization of nature surrounding them: “I have taken over the spatial divisions used by the Achuar themselves to differentiate the ways of socializing nature according to the metaphorical form and the place of practice (house garden, forest, river)”(4).

from another and to structure relationships between members of different groups.

No ethnic group, however, has impermeable boundaries, for people can and do change ethnic identities. . . . In sum, a functional-structural, or relatively static, approach to the study of ethnicity would be beside the point, or even miss the point entirely, for it is the process which ethnic groups help structure that hold the most value for the understanding of social action. (194)

Although Ekwensi portrays the “(M)Bororo-Fulani” (or Cow-Fulani, a more indigenous Fulani people who maintain traditional way as cattle herders), rather than the “Huasa-Fulani” that Salamone focuses on in his essay,¹¹ Salamone’s emphasis on the “process” by which the ethnicity of the Fulani is formed and constantly evolving, reminds us that the “Fulani” as represented by Ekwensi are a political community whose sense of identity derives from British colonial subjugation. Ekwensi constructs a Fulani community around his characters’ movements between the countryside and the city. Through their journeys, Ekwensi’s Fulani characters are in contact with outsiders. The movement among Ekwensi’s Fulani shows how Ekwensi foregrounds his characters’s mobility and “cosmopolitanism.”¹² More importantly, through their experiences and interactions with

¹¹ In this essay, Salamone explains how Huasa-Fulani in Northern Nigerian have manipulated and cooperated with colonialism in order to maintain their privilege as the ruling class in Northern Nigeria. Different from the more more traditional (M)Bororo-Fulani who are nomadic cattle herders in the region, Huasa-Fulani has been practicing a more settled life in towns and cities.

¹² Francis B. Nyamnjoh’s essay “The Nimbleness of Being Fulani” (2013) uses Ekwensi’s *Burning Grass* to demonstrate the “cosmopolitan” (106) nature of Fulani as shown in the flexibility of Fulani identity and the mobility of Fulani people. As he states, “It does little justice, in our present case, to the complex reality of Mbororo-Fulani as nimble navigators and negotiators of various identity margins as indigenous and

outsiders and the Fulani fellowmen, a Fulani identity as well as Fulani values are re-inscribed and reinforced. Scholarship on Ekwensi's *Burning Grass*, although emphasizing the social, historical challenges the Fulani suffered in colonial and post-colonial eras, tend to fix Fulani in and as a static cultural system opposed to modernity. This perspective sites the Fulani in rigid binary relationships, such as those between primitive Fulani and civilized British or traditional Fulani versus modern British or African postcolonial subjects. Such a perspective reinscribes colonial stereotyping even as it notes the novels's efforts to undo it. Umar Adburrahman's essay "Cyprian Ekwensi's *Burning Grass: A Critical Assessment*" (1987) essentializes the Fulani as being unable to keep up with modernity and thus only able to be seen as victims under colonization and modernization.¹³ He states: "no matter how attached the nomadic Fulani are to their cattle and grazing land, they cannot afford to be left out in their nation's race to modernization. They must move and seek their fortune in the cities. . . . This then, is the main message of the novel"(98). Although Ekwensi's novel focuses on the conflict between tradition and modernity in a Fulani community, a critical overemphasis on the vulnerability of his Fulani characters might efface the possibility that through conflict, a Fulani identity is actually reinforced rather than weakened.

The overarching narrative structure of *Burning Grass* revolves around the

stranger, farmer and herdsman, bushman and townsman, citizen and subject, pure and impure, authentic and copy, and as permanent work in progress" (110).

¹³ In his essay, Adburrahman points out that Ekwensi incorporates motifs, including "mystery, magic, heroism, adventure and good and evil" (84), in his novel—motifs that add authenticity and charms to Fulani depicted by Ekwensi. For Adburrahman, Ekwensi uses those motifs to demonstrate the distinctiveness of indigenous Fulani people threatened by modernity introduced by colonialism: "Ekwensi is surely being sincere in his portrayal of the Fulani people and their traditions. Viewing this vanishing African traditional culture, it is uplifting to see that people who adhere to traditions that make them so proud, so distinct still exist" (86-87).

Sunsaye family's seasonal migration that is also an essential Fulani tradition. The opening of the novel suggests an upcoming migration for the family: "When they begin to burn the grass in Northern Nigeria, it is time for the herdsmen to be moving the cattle southwards to the banks of the great river" (1). Throughout the narrative, however, the fulfillment of the migration is frustrated by other incidents/movements between the characters. Sunsaye's chivalric rescue of a slave girl Fatimeh at the beginning of the novel triggers a series of movements among the family members that delay the migration. Paradoxically, it is through those disturbances and movements that a Fulani cultural and political identity is reinforced. Particularly, the Fulani characters' movements between the countryside (their pastureland) and the city (New Chanka and Kantago) critique the colonial context of the Fulaniland, including the taxation of cattle, biological control, development of cities, and imposition of capitalism.

Burning Grass traces the episodic movements among the family members. Each episode documents the characters' experiences with the land, their cattle, and the people they encounter—experiences that reinforce their identity as cattle herdsmen as well as highlight their lives under colonialism. Mai's wandering (caused by *Sakugo*, a wandering disease) takes him first to a place close to his oldest son Jalla's camp where he encounters some Fulani, "the Bodejo" (a "white vet" who is a Medical Officer of Health), a Forest Officer wearing "a khaki helmet," and Jalla (18-19). His interactions lay out issues with which the rest of the narrative engages. First, British colonialists impose biological controls on the Fulaniland, mandating western-style conservationism and disease controls for cattle. "The donkey owner," one of the Fulani folks Mai encounters in this episode, is

afraid of running into the Bodejo for fear of an injection: “The donkey owner now had his beast in check. ‘By Allah, if he [the Bodejo] sees us, we are for the needle.’”(19). Mai’s son Jalla is questioned by a Forest Officer (19). The Bodejo also checks Jalla’s camp for whether or not there is “any recurrence of the rinderpest”(22) in his cattle. As a witness to his son’s interaction with the white vet, “Mai Sunsaye had heard that the Doctor is a fine man, but being near him now he could well believe it. Dr. McMinter stood well over six foot six and had a smile like Mexican. Yet, in spite of his tan he seemed to carry that breath of England that made Sunsaye feel he was in contact with a new civilization” (22). While those colonial practices seem exotic to Mai, the colonial imposition of tax on their cattle threatens him and his son. There are several moments in the novel where Mai and other characters express their concerns about “tax-gatherers” (19, 21). As Jalla reminds his father, “But remember, one does not always want to pay the tax on all one has.” (22).

Ekwensi critiques colonial taxation of Fulani herdsmen. Although taxation itself is not really new to Fulani herdsmen since it existed before British colonization, colonial taxation removes capital from the area and reappropriates it elsewhere. According to G. Adebayo’s essay “Jangali: Fulani Pastoralists and Colonial Taxation in Northern Nigeria” (1995), in the pre-colonial time tax or *jangali* “began as a tribute paid in cattle or other animals to the local ruler” (121). Ekwensi makes clear that the colonial government misunderstands the relationship of the Fulani to their cattle. As Adebayo explains, “*Jangali* cannot be viewed as an income tax. British officials had argued that since livestock and cattle represented the visible signs of a pastoralists’ wealth, a tax on cattle

was a tax on income. But that was not the way the Fulani saw it. Being less materialistic, the Fulani conception of cattle is much deeper than can be explained here” (142). While the ownership of cattle is tied to social status for Fulani herdsmen, their cattle do not equate to “wealth” or any Western concept of property used for economic activities. Mustafa B. Ibrahim’s essay “The Fulani—A Nomadic Tribe in Northern Nigeria” (1966) explains this particular relationship between Fulani herdsmen and their cattle: “the Bororo [Fulani] regards cattle as the all-in-all of his life. To him cattle rearing is a way of life rather than an economic activity; cattle are an end in themselves as much as a means to an end” (173). Cattle-herding is thus a cultural activity that defines Fulani social order rather than their wealth. They sell milk, butter, and yogurt, but they do not really sell their cattle and thus do not understand them as property.

Ekwensi’s novel depicts the survival of the Fulani, ascribed to their resilience, conveyed as the persistence of Fulani culture. While Mai wanders, Jalla is portrayed as an ideal Fulani herdsman whose life revolves around herding, his cattle, and the land:

The cattle moored. The wide span of their sweeping horns clacked against one another. Their humps danced. This was always the most difficult part of it, arousing them from their lethargy and getting them moving. Once they understood what was afoot, it was not so difficult. But the smaller ones would always be in the way. Jalla lashed out with his whip. “Kai!” He made clucking noises with his tongue, bullying this, calling out to that one by name. A good herdsman must know each other of his cattle by

name, colour, and habits. Sunsaye smiled at his son's expert herdmanship. (25)

Jalla's relationship with his cattle, though not highlighting the Fulani attitude toward the land per se, demonstrates the inter-dependence between the land, the herdsman, and his cattle. Fulani herdsman are not cultivators and do not really work with and own the land. But their cattle-rearing culture depends on the land. Jalla knows, for example, when "the grass here was becoming sour" and "he must think of moving camps soon. He would go northwards and seek the river banks" (27). Ekwensi's depiction of Jalla that focuses on the character's relationship with the cattle, and by extension the land, constructs a Fulani cultural identity, one that is attached to cattle herding. This cultural identity is reinforced with Mai's continued wandering to Old Chanka—a traditional Fulani town destroyed by the colonialists. This episode about Old Chanka features Mai's interactions with Baba, a Fulani fellowman displaced for the destruction of Old Chanka. While the previous episode that features Mai's interactions with Jalla suggests Ekwensi's critique of colonial taxation, this episode about Old Chanka highlights the author's critique of the colonial biological control that undermines Fulani peoples' sense of place. Baba, displaced but insisting on remaining on his homeland, explains to Mai how the British colonial government destroyed the town: "There has been a war! You are in your own house, where you were born and your father before you. An officer of the Government comes and says it is not good for you. It is full of sickness. He burns or breaks down your house, and builds you another, far away, in another land. *Tau!*" (35). This governmental hygiene campaign suggests colonialism's ignorance of the long and complex relationship

between Fulani, their cattle, and the land. Fulani has practiced cattle herding for hundreds of years, but the colonialists hold prejudice that Fulani herdsman possess no skill of cattle breeding and knowledge of epidemic sickness.¹⁴ While the colonial government claims that their veterinary services benefit the Fulani (and thus justify the government tax on the cattle), the Fulani see “sickness” as part of their lives. As the narrative continues, “‘All these places,’ Baba said, sitting on a stone, ‘were once inhabited by people like you and me. Farmers and their wives, traders. They were happy full of sickness.’” (36). Baba’s commentary criticizes the colonial misunderstanding of traditional Fulani life style that is built largely upon a commitment to community and communal sharing, including that of the “sickness.” For the Fulani, “sickness” is part of their life rather than a problem of their life as defined by the colonists. For Baba, New Chanka, built by the colonialists, is “too clean” (38) for a Fulani. As for Mai, his response to the ruined Old Chanka is similar to Baba’s, though as an active Fulani herdsman in the countryside, his disappointment with the abandoned town does not lie in displacement, but in his feeling out of place.

Ekwensi highlights his Fulani characters’s mourning for Old Chanka in order to convey a particular Fulani sense of place that is developed also through Fulani people’s attachment to the local vegetation. Baobab trees—native in northern Nigeria—play an important role in reinforcing Mai’s identity as a herdsman from Fulaniland. As a nomadic Fulani, Mai is familiar with baobabs because he sees and lives with them everyday. Seeing “a giant baobab tree twisting its knotty and leafless branches against the sheer blue sky” (32) on his way to Old Chanka quickens Mai’s pace to enter the town. Despite

¹⁴ For more details about the colonial prejudice against Fulani cattle-herding, see Adebayo’s essay.

feeling disappointed by the abandoned Old Chanka, Mai enjoys his stay with Baba because of a baobab tree in his roofless house: “Baba’s house amused Mai Sunsaye. It was one of the abandoned huts, roofless, and curiously damp. Baba had made futile attempts to pull a roof over it, but the only comfort came from a baobab tree near with a log at the bottom of it” (37). This episode ends in Baba’s hospitality and Mai’s strong awareness of what it means to be a Fulani herdsman: “They soon got a meal ready: sweet potatoes, toasted peanuts. Sunsaye, being a Fulani, would not eat the meat from cattle; it was forbidden by herdsmen” (38). A strong sense of Fulani attachment to their cattle is revealed again here, yet this time it is the baobab tree that reminds Mai of his attachment to Fulaniland.

In presenting Mai’s interactions with his Fulani fellows, Ekwensi’s novel highlights a collective Fulani perspective that reinforces a Fulani identity developed from their experience of being colonized. Fulani identity as constructed in Ekwensi’s novel, however, not only reclaims authority of an indigenous culture, but also addresses rebellion against colonialism’s ecological subjugations. If in *Burning Grass*, Fulani cultural identity that highlights a relationship with the land and tradition is constructed through the novel’s pastoral narrative, then local environmental issues are addressed through dialogues between various Fulani characters about colonial biological control of the cattle and the herders, colonial invasion of the Fulaniland (“war”), biological invasions (imported trees), the destruction of the Old Chanka (32-45), and the exploitation of the natural resources by white men “digging for gold in that part of the river” (61). By incorporating dialogues between his Fulani characters into the novel’s

narrative, rather than adopting a third-person, omniscient perspective, Ekwensi creates a communal environmental consciousness that reasserts a Fulani identity tying into the Fulani attachment to the land and their cattle.

In contrast to Old Chanka, the location of a Fulani idyllic past, New Chanka weakens Fulani identity in the sense by alienating the characters from their agricultural roots. New Chanka, founded on capitalism, industry, and colonial concepts of order and cleanness, opposes traditional Fulani life. It is a colonial town devoid of the “smell” of cattle. As Mai says to his other son Hodio when he arrives in the New Chanka, ““There is no smell of cattle-dung. It is like a hospital. A town must have the smell of cattle to please a Fulani.”” (44). The vegetation of New Chanka also disturbs Mai, who “felt like one in another world” (44): “Mai Sunsaye set off, arriving at New Chanka in the early afternoon. The village was quite unlike the Old Chanka he had left behind him. There was no town wall. The huts were built in a rectangle, and young mango and orange trees had been planted in every courtyard. No baobabs, Sunsaye, unable to repress his excitement, hurried early forward” (40). Seeing no baobabs but only “mango” and “orange” trees in New Chanka—two imported trees introduced by British colonists—Mai is disappointed and loses his desire to stay. The layout of the new town, dominated by houses arranged orderly, also makes Mai feel out of place, ““It is too clean,’ Sunsaye grumbled. He looked through the window, at houses geometrically laid out, each one standing good distance away from the next house, each one with the same number of guava trees and orange trees” (44). Hodio, however, is ready to settle down in New Chanka and embraces the new lifestyle. As he says to his father, ““The white men and the

Medical people were moving the villagers from the Old Chanka to New Chanka . . . So I came here with them. I heard about the sugar mill and they helped me buy this one. I pay back money every month from what I earn. Some day it will be my own, with nothing more to pay. Then I can live like a town dweller.”” (43). Hodio’s interest in money, ownership, and the life of the city, contrasted to his father’s aversion to the city, indicates the tension between the country and the city in Fulaniland, a divide that alienates the younger generation from Fulani traditions. Mai’s experiences with Jalla in his camp (in the countryside) and with Hodio in New Chanka (in the city) spans this tension that plays out in the survival of the cattle and the herdsman and the survival of the traditional practice despite relocations to urban spaces.

The pastoral as deployed in *Burning Grass* that highlights the tension between the countryside should be looked at as a form of resistance against European colonial subjugations. If Ekwensi incorporates the pastoral movement into the narrative of his novel in order to construct a Fulani identity that foregrounds the dynamics and historicity of an African ethnicity in a specific time, then similarly, he also reverses the movement in order to reconstruct an indigenous Fulani environmental practice that was rejected by colonial environmentalism. To be more specific, Ekwensi incorporates migration into the text and subverts traditional pastoral movement in order to reassert an indigenous environmentalism and agency. While Ekwensi’s characters develop Fulani identity through their journeys between the countryside and the city, it is through their return to the countryside toward the end of the novel that Fulani environmental thought and practices can be restored.

The narrative structure of *Burning Grass*, coordinating with the theme of migration, highlights the characters' responsibility to leave and then return to their homeland in order to fulfill the Fulani tradition of migration—a tradition that can be seen as Fulani environmental thought and practice, both. After the episode in New Chanka, the narrative suggests again and again the urgency of the migratory tradition: ““You know when they begin to burn the grass in this country, that is the time the herdsmen all move southwards. They are looking for green grass. . . .””(61), says a man Mai encounters after he leaves New Chanka. In a later chapter, Jalla explains to Mai that his responsibility as a man of cattle is to fulfill the migration for better pastures: ““Father, we are men of cattle. Our cattle come first, and since it is our wish to take them to better pastures, all else must succumb to that wish.”” (76). While the first half of the narrative foregrounds Mai's interactions with Jalla, Baba, and Hodio with regard to their colonial experience in order to construct a Fulani identity, the second half of the narrative, focusing on the tension between the countryside and the city in Fulaniland, emphasizes the importance of seasonal migration/Fulani tradition. The second half of the narrative focuses on Mai's youngest and favorite son, Rikku and his movements between the countryside and the city. Highlighting his experience with his oldest brother Jalla in the Fulani pastureland, it contrasts to that of a Kanuri woman, Kantuma, in Kotago (a city in Northern Nigeria). As a young apprentice to herdsman, Rikku's decision to return to the Fulani countryside continues the tradition. Like Mai's wandering, Rikku's journey reveals challenges for, yet reinforcement of, his identity as a cattle herder. After being reunited with Jalla (after Ardo's attack), Rikku is first given a task of moving half of Jalla's herds separately to Ligu's camp in order to evade tax-gatherers. The cross-country movement is a test of the young

apprentice's preparation for the family's annual migration as well as an acknowledgement of the oppression of colonial taxation. Seeing the tax-gatherers approaching, "Rikku ran in front and around them [the cattle], trying to mobilize them, cursing, using all the skills his father had given him" (56). While Rikku successfully moves the cattle to Jalla's second camp, his visit to Kontago creates another crisis for the family. Kontago, built on capitalism, is a center for materialism and corruption. Kantuma tempts Rikku to abandon the traditional Fulani herdsman's life, offering Rikku "a cup with dark contents" (86) and inviting him to "play cards" (87) with her. She showers the fourteen-year young boy with alien material luxuries but Rikku, though tempted to stay, refuses Kantuma's offer, saying "Allah above knows that. But you must not detain me. I am the son of a cattleman. We live in the pasturelands. For us the town life is not the life." (86). In refusing, Rikku cites his identity as a Fulani cattle herder: "I am used to discomfort. We live a simple life. The floor is our bed, and nature is always a companion. But above all, Allah drives the fly for the tail-less cow." (86). For Rikku, leaving the pastureland means abandoning his identity as a Fulani cattleman. Ligu, a Fulani cattlemaster, who plans to migrate with the Sunsaye family, condemns Kantuma in terms that assert resistance to cultural miscegenation, "You took a young boy and tried to make him forget his father and mother. Understand this: we Fulanis do not like you town dwellers. We love our simple life which make men free and brave and give women a strong position." (105). Mai and Rikku's return to the countryside at the end of the novel is thus necessary for fulfillment of a Fulani tradition.

Both Mai's and Rikku's return to the countryside not only demonstrates their attachment to the land, but it also suggests their political action. Ekwensi's portrayals of

the Fulaniland, its inhabitants, and their customs not only highlight the local color or his anthropological interests, but more importantly, also endow his characters with agency of their environmental thought. An Africa-focused post-pastoral like *Burning Grass* presents a narrative of leave and return—the pastoral movement that is aimed at going back to tradition/the countryside rather than negotiating between tradition and modernity (a moment more commonly seen in Anglo-American pastoral narratives). Such a reverse movement might seem unrealistic or idealistic. Yet, for Ekwensi, the reversal of the traditional pastoral movement enables his characters to fulfill a Fulani environmental practice that results in them being able to reclaim their authority in Fulaniland. Toward the end of the novel, the Sunsaye family's migration to the south restores disintegrating and threatened traditional values and practices. A closer look at the opening passages of the novel and its final chapter enables us to understand this process of restoration more clearly. Thematically, while the first passage foretells an upcoming migration of the Sunsaye family, the second passage reassures the happening of the migration. Both passages echo each other in the sense that both express a pastoral mood that highlights Fulani attachment to the land/cattle. To be more specific, while the former presents a pastoral that celebrates the uniqueness of the local ecology that includes Fulani customs and cultural activities, the latter conveys a post-pastoral that aims to reconstruct Fulani identity and reclaiming a Fulani environmentalism that rejects colonial control. The fulfillment of migration toward the end of the novel thus has a political intention—to critique colonial environmentalism imposed on Fulaniland and reclaim an indigenous authority on the land:

Indeed it was time to be moving the cattle southwards to the banks of the great river. Everywhere on the veld the hunters were burning the grass, throwing smouldering dung into the fields. At night the distant sky was illuminated by enormous sheets of flame, and from the thatch huts in the village the people could hear the crackle of burning grass and smell the acrid smoke that choked the beasts and brought them running their holes.

They burnt the grass so that with the early rains the young sweet shoots of grass would push out and the cattle would graze with joy. It was their way and although the Forest Conservators had told them it was a bad thing for the trees, they would not stop when the season came round: a stealthy hand would always throw dry dung into the grass and vanish before the smoke exploded into flame. (114)

The passage conveys the necessity of the herdsmen's seasonal migration and the rationale of the practice of burning grass in Fulaniland. The colonialists see burning grass a bad practice because they do not understand the interdependence between the land, the cattle, and the herdsmen, echoing their misunderstanding of cattle as being simply a form of capital for Fulani herdsmen. Since the colonial period, the impositions of taxes, conservationism, and other state controls on Fulaniland have gradually forced the Fulani to change or abandon their traditional life style—either to shift from a nomadic life to a settled life, from cattle-herding to cultivation, or to adapt to the city environment.¹⁵ While the narrative is composed of episodic movements between characters who recognize the

¹⁵ See Ibrahim's essay (174-76).

weakening of Fulani tradition and the transformation of Fulani landscape caused by colonization, migration continues to restore traditional Fulani relationship to the land and strong cultural traditions.

Reasserting values of indigenous Fulani practices, Ekwensi avoids idealization of indigenous community by foregrounding generation gaps between his Fulani characters. With the Sunsaye family's fulfillment of the migration, the narrative of *Burning Grass* appears to end in a pastoral celebration of the Fulani countryside/tradition. However, Mai's death and lingering suspicion of whether or not Rikku will stick to Fulani traditions at the end of the novel suggest continued challenges for the Fulani, especially at the dawn of independence: "“Thus it is that our people are drifting more and more away from the hard life to the soft life of the city.””(115). Rikku, though promising to join Ligu's camp as an apprentice, also expresses his desire to visit Hodio in New Chanka (116). On his death bed, Mai holds the belief that his favorite son will truly stick to Fulani tradition:

In a short while, he [Mai] knows Rikku would be going without him to join Ligu as herdsman. Rikku would work as apprentice to Ligu until she gave him some cattle to start off on his own. That was a good thing. The boy needed the sympathetic care of an elderly person. Let him go to New Chanka to see Hodio and his sugar mill. But to cattle he belonged and to Ligu he must return. (118)

Will Rikku really return to the countryside again? The narrative does not say. Ekwensi highlights the competition between brothers in the Sunsaye family and the generation gap between Mai and his sons in order to indicate challenges for the future of Fulani under

the impact of modernity and colonization. Throughout the novel, Mai represents the pride of Fulani. He is the chief of Dokan Toro, the medicine man of the tribe, and the master of Fulani “magic” (49). Jalla represents an ideal model for a Fulani herdsman. He is the only character in the family that moves only in the Fulani countryside and is never exposed to the town life. Hodio is portrayed as a rebel in the family, who holds grudges against his father’s favoritism on his youngest brother. His rebellion, as displayed by his abandoning his herdsmanship and starting a colonial business in New Chanka, foreshadows the obstacles the family will have to undergo for the fulfillment of migration. As Mai says earlier in the novel, ““There will be trouble. Trouble enough: for Hodio will always be at war with you [Rikku]. Brother against brother. O abomination! In own own family! Broken is the family; gone is the pride of the Fulani.””(8). Rikku, in contrast to his two elder brothers, is torn between tradition and temptation of the town life. Though declaring his strong sense of attachment to the Fulani countryside and tradition, he cannot but show his infatuation with Kantuma (Chapter Twenty). Rikku’s return to the countryside helps maintain a Fulani tradition, however, his ambivalent attitude toward the city still suggests an inevitable change in the younger generation of Fulani. While the narrative of the novel ends in the fulfillment of a Fulani tradition, Ekwensi’s complex characterizations of the Sunsaye family suggest a crisis in Fulaniland in the postcolonial era—a crisis of the younger generation’s alienation from their homeland.

Environmental Crisis from Within: Anti-Pastoral in Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice*

Published in the same decade as Ekwensi’s *Burning Grass* (1962)—a newly

independent era in Nigeria—Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice* (1964) features an allegorical narrative about the protagonist Okolo’s quest for and questioning about “*it*,” his expression for meaning or “the bottom of things” (36). His quest starts after he “came out of school” and “returned home to his people” (23). However, the villagers of his hometown, Amatu, disapprove of his quest, with the exception of Tuere (a woman seen as a witch) and Ukule (a crippled villager). Chief Izongo and the Elders of the village, especially Abadi, who has “an M.A. and a Ph.D. in England, America, and Germany” (43), resent Okolo’s quest/questioning. Okolo’s refusal to give up his quest as well as conform to the community’s will leads to his exile to the city Sologa, where he thinks he can find “*it*.” On a boat trip to the city, Okolo encounters several passengers—people from different walks of life—who show their obsession with wealth, fame, and material life. The boat trip ends up with Okolo being accused (probably unjustly) by a woman passenger of “touching” (65) the body of her daughter-in-law. Upon his arrival at Sologa, also known as the home to “the Big One” (75), a euphemistic reference to the country’s revolutionary political leader, Okolo is stunned by the corruption of the city. The city dwellers he encounters during his visit are described as “listeners of the Big One” and follow only “slogans” (83). Instead of finding “*it*” in Sologa, Okolo finds himself trapped in a “think-nothing stream” of people (84)—a post-independence dystopia where “nothing has any more meaning but shadow-devouring trinity of gold, iron, and concrete” (89). Disillusioned by the city, Okolo decides to return to Amatu and confront his people again, with a belief that if he cannot find “*it*” anywhere in his society, he can at least “create *it*” or “plant *it*” in his people’s inside and his place of origin. However, Okolo’s final confrontation with the villagers of Amatu ends up with his death

sentence. The narrative ends with the scene where Okolo is tied with Tuere at in a canoe “drawn in a whirlpool” (127). Okolo’s sacrifice suggests the death of African cultural roots in the time of independence.

Scholarship on Okara’s *The Voice* focuses mainly on the novel’s allegorical narrative, particularly on how the author uses specific narrative techniques and a unique language¹⁶ in the novel in order to dramatize moral and social corruptions that are colonial legacies to a postcolonial society.¹⁷ My analysis of *The Voice*, however, focuses on the novel’s use of pastoral features, particularly in its account of Okolo’s journey between the countryside and the city, as well as the novel’s anti-pastoral motifs, incorporated into a narrative that blurs boundaries between the countryside and the city. The resulting narrative is engaged with questions regarding the in/validity of the pastoral used in postcolonial African literature in order to reclaim pre-colonial cultural and subjective unities.

¹⁶ For essays that focus on Okara’s narrative techniques, see Yashoda Ramamoorthy Prune’s essay “Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice*: An African Quest in the Face of Colonialism” (2008); Soloman Iyasere’s “Narrative Techniques in Okara’s *The Voice*”; Hugh Webb, in his “Allegory: Okara’s *The Voice*” (1978); and Albert Olu Ashaolu’s “A Voice in the Wilderness: The Predicament of the Social Reformer in Okara’s *The Voice*” (1979). For essays that focus on Okara’s language in his *The Voice*, see Patrick Scott’s essay “Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice*: The non-Ijo Reader and the Pragmatics of Translingualism” (1991) and Katherine Williams’s “Decolonizing the World: Language, Culture, and Self in the Works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Gabriel Okara” (1991).

¹⁷ For example, Prune’s essay emphasizes that Okara critiques colonialism and its legacies via his protagonist’s quest—particularly “in the form of introversion, not in the form of external militancy” (161). For Prune, this internal quest, in Okolo’s case, is to seek the meaning of life (“*it*”)—particularly from “an African point of view, rather than a perspective of Western materialism”: “This alternative viewpoint: an African viewpoint which is central to the novel, is presented in a most natural and benefitting way by using English language the way an Ijaw-speaking person would use (presumably), which by implication refers to African way of looking at things” (168). Similar to Prune’s essay, Iyasere’s essay emphasizes the novel’s social criticism in terms of how the novel is “an internally-directed” work charged with socio-political analysis” (6). For Iyasere, Okara’s narrative techniques, particularly his “juxtaposition of contrasting scenes and characters” (10), highlights how Okolo looks at the world through “metaphor” rather than materialism: “Appropriately, Okara depicts what Okolo sees in terms of metaphor, in direct contrast to materialism of the messengers and of the other people of Amatu” (10).

Okara's *The Voice*, in contrast to Ekwensi's *Burning Grass*, presents another type of pastoral in African literature—an anti-pastoral that highlights the author's skepticism about nostalgia and the possibility of returning to the past/the village in the postcolonial era. If Ekwensi's pastoral highlights the tension between the country and the city in order to convey nostalgia about Fulani cultural heritage and to reclaim an indigenous environmental practice threatened by colonial environmentalism, Okara's pastoral blurs tensions between these spaces in order to show the reach of colonialism and to question any possibility of a cultural reclamation in the countryside in the postcolonial era. To be more specific, the journey between the countryside and the city as undergone by the protagonist of Okara's novel indicates the inevitability of the encroachment of colonial values on the countryside and comments upon the inexorability of change as well as the impossibility of ever returning to a pre-colonial condition associated with traditional agrarian societies. In the novel, Amatu is depicted as hostile and oppressive throughout the narrative. However, it is not the physical environment of the village, that is hostile, but the people in the community. Instead of being a sanctuary for tradition, the countryside in Okara's novel is depicted as a dystopia where "things have no more roots" (34) and whose residents claim their separation from "the old times" (29). There is no sense of nostalgia or loss among the villagers, except Okolo, who is aware that "what was there was no longer there," and thus "started his search for *it*" (23). There is no appreciation of tradition or past, either, as the villagers are "all church people" (30) or "know-God people" (32), except Tuere, who worships traditional gods, yet is excluded from the community and defamed as a witch. While the traditional political structure of the village remains as represented by Chief Izongo and the Elders, it does not defend or

perpetuate tradition, but rather persecutes those who attempts to invoke tradition and question changes. As Chief Izongo tells Okolo, ““Do not ask the bottom of things. I have told you so many times. . . . Asking the bottom of things in this town will take you no place. Hook this with your little finger. Put it into your inside’s box and lock it up.”” (36). In contrast to Ekwensi’s novel, which opens with an imagery of burning grass in Fulaniland in celebration of a unique local ecology, *The Voice* opens with rumors and gossips about Okolo in the community of Amatu: “So the town of Amatu talked and whispered; so the world talked and whispered. Okolo had no chest, they said. His chest was not strong and he had no shadow. Everything in this world that spoiled a man’s name they said of him” (23). In Okara’s novel, the village of Amatu is thus depicted as a triumph of colonialism, for its residents accept and celebrate the changes.

The Voice presents a pastoral hero without a place (“the countryside”) that can sustain his hero’s quest. In contrast to Ekwensi’s Fulaniland where his heroes celebrate Fulani traditions and identity, Okara’s Amatu foregrounds his hero’s alienation from his community. Unlike the pastoral hero Mai Sunsaye of *Burning Grass*, who is proud of being a traditional Fulani herdsman, Okara’s hero Okolo is a misfit in his home after he returns from colonial education. Portrayed as a pastoral hero at the beginning of the novel, Okolo looks at his village and his people with a kind of nostalgia:

It was the day’s ending and Okolo by a window stood. Okolo stood looking at the sun behind the tree tops falling. The river was flowing, reflecting the finishing sun like a dying away memory. It was like an idol’s face, no one knowing what is behind. Okolo at the palm tree looked.

They were like women with hair hanging down, dancing, possessed. Egrets, like white flower petals strung slackly across the river, swaying up and down, were returning home. And, on the river, canoes were crawling home with bent backs and tired hands, paddling. A girl with only a cloth tied around her waist and half-ripe mango breasts paddled, driving her paddle into the river with a sweet inside. (26)

Highlighting “the flowing river,” “the finishing sun,” the swaying “palm tree” (like dancing women), flying “egrets” (like white flower petals), and local people paddling their canoes on the river, the passage creates the picture of a rural idyll. However, under the setting sun, the river that traditionally symbolizes eternity ironically reminds Okolo of the “dying away memory” of tradition that flows away and will never come back. The pastoral imagery is soon replaced by an ominous imagery of the night that foreshadows the futility or at least insufficiency of his nostalgia:

To the window he went once more and looked at the night. The moon was an about-to-break moon. A vague circle of light surrounded it, telling a dance was going on up or down river. Across the moon’s face and the dance circle, menacing dark cloud idled past, casting shadow after shadow on the river. Larger and darker clouds, some to frowning faces, grimacing faces changing, were skulking past without the moon’s ring, suffocating the stars until they too lost themselves in the threatening conformity of the dark cloud beyond. (26)

The imagery of the night, dominated by the dark “menacing” and “suffocating” clouds as

well as “shadows” produced by the clouds, suggests Okolo’s—and by extension the conscious postcolonial subject’s—situation. As the moon is submerged under the “threatening conformity of the dark cloud,” so Okolo is surrounded by a hostile community that demands his conformity. Okolo’s questioning the roots of changes, along with his refusal to join the joy of the “coming thing” (23) of independence, makes him an enemy of the whole village. He is treated by his people as a nuisance whose “eyes are not right,” and whose “head is not correct” (23). Therefore, although Okolo’s nostalgia provides a pastoral tone for the novel, the novel highlights rifts and clashes in the community of Amatu instead. In contrast to the countryside represented in many traditional pastoral narratives, the countryside in *The Voice* ironically is the source of oppression that forces Okolo to turn to the city instead to continue his quest. Sologa, the city in *The Voice*, however, is “worse,” as Tebeowei, one of the Elders who dissuades Okolo from his quest, describes: ““Things are worse there and a person like you cannot stay there unless you want to be a beggar. It is a dog eat dog there in Sologa.”” (51). Even though *The Voice* emphasizes the corruption of the city, the novel’s representation of the countryside by no means suggests that the countryside is a better environment than the city.

Okara’s depictions of Amatu and Sologa both as oppressive and corrupt in the post-independence era highlight how colonization has turned an African society into a dystopia for colonial and postcolonial subjects like Okolo, who received European education, yet is persecuted by his own people and has no place to go. In *The Voice*, as Amatu is depicted as hostile and claustrophobic, so Sologa is depicted as dream-like,

extremely sensual/materialistic, and corrupt. Sologa is depicted as a city dominated by “the black night” that is so overwhelming for Okolo as if the city/night will consume and empty his inside and thought, turning him into a mindless zombie: “At last the black black night like the back of a cooking pot entered his inside and grabbing his thoughts, threw them out into the blacken than black night. And Okolo walked, stumbled, walked with an inside empty thoughts except the black black night” (76). As the ominous imagery of the cloudy night in Amatu foreshadows Okolo’s exile, so the imagery of “the black black night” (76) in Sologa foreshadows the failure of his search: “Okolo stood on the soil of Sologa trying to pierce the thickness of the night with his eyes”—a “black night like the back of a cooking pot” (75). Sologa, probably the capital of the newly-independent nation, is composed mainly of dark cells full of “evil darkness” (76) and “cold cold floors” (76-77); of chaotic streets (77-78) crowded by see-nothing and think-nothing people (77-84); and of slums (Chapter Eight). Sologa is described as a purgatory that highlights its inhabitants’ suffering in the time of independence:

Okolo found himself standing in daylight in a street, hither and thither turning his eyes. He stood turning his eyes this way and that way in the street. Thus he stood with the crowd passing him by: cars honking, people shouting, people dying, women delivering, beggars begging for alms, people feasting, people crying, people laughing, politicians with grins that do not reach their insides begging for votes, priests building houses, people doubting, people marrying, people divorcing, priests turning away worshippers, people hoping, hopes breaking plate like on cement floors.

(78)

By foregrounding Amatu's oppression and Sologa's corruption, Okara re-examines the naïveté of the traditional pastoral discourse that tends to foreground the tension between the countryside and the city in order to glorify values of the former and condemn those of the latter. Instead of re-locating and celebrating an indigenous African culture/identity, Okara suggests pessimism about reclaiming an African tradition said to be preserved in the countryside. While blurring the tension between the countryside and the city, Okara also reverses the pastoral journey in order to suggest the futility of nostalgia. In contrast to pastoral journeys reversed in *Burning Grass*—journeys undertaken in order to re-discover Fulani identity and fulfill Fulani tradition, Okolo's journey, undertaken initially with Okolo's assumption that he will be able to find "it," ends in failure and disillusion instead. *The Voice* therefore shows how the pastoral is not useful as tropes in African literature. That is, Okara's novel claims that the reach of the colonial in culture/society is so vast that there is no "originally" pastoral moment/relationship to return to, no countryside that can offer transcendent connection to traditions.

The failure of Okolo's journey foregrounds a deeper crisis in a postcolonial society—an ontological crisis revealed by the postcolonial subject suffering a sense of alienation as the consequence of colonization. *The Voice* re-examines how European colonization of a local African community initiates a process of "subjectification" during which community members suffer a subjectivity crisis caused by the colonial imposition of Western values, including capitalism, materialism, and rationalism, on colonial subjects. In the case of Okolo, he suffers a subjectivity crisis, as displayed by his

alienation from both his community and the surrounding world after he received colonial education. While several of Okara's critics see Okolo's inner quest as a way to purify the society,¹⁸ I argue that his internal quest is not really presented as a solution to social corruption, but rather a "symptom" of a subjectivity crisis caused by colonization. *The Voice* highlights a series of "symptoms" of European colonization that affect the colonized from both the village and the city. Foregrounding the subjectivity crisis in the postcolonial era, as Okara dramatizes in his *The Voice*, enables us to recognize that colonization has caused not only environmental degradations, but also socio-environmental problems in Africa, as revealed by various forms of alienation the colonized subject suffers.

The postcolonial crisis of subjectivity, as Okara reveals, occurs at personal, communal, and even epistemological levels. To be more specific, Okara's *The Voice* reveals symptoms of alienation among the colonized in terms of how they look at themselves, how they interact with one another, and how they perceive their relationships with the surrounding environment. On the one hand, Okara's characterization of Okolo suggests the crisis of subjectivity at the personal level. His desire to search for "it" can be read as a symptom of his receiving colonial education. Okara's characterization of the people with whom Okolo experiences in both Amatu and Sologa, on the other hand, suggests the crisis at the communal level. They are portrayed as possessing a "mass subjectivity" generated by the colonial indoctrination of materialism and consumerism.

¹⁸ See Ashaolu's essay on *The Voice*. He sees the novel as an "allegory of the artist as social reformer" (111). Ashaolu argues that Okara makes Okolo a "poet-reformer" in order to highlight "the predicament of the social reformer in a predominantly corrupt society" and that the author's mission is to use his "literary creativeness" to "reform and purify society" (112).

Okara also incorporates conversations between the “messengers”—characters sent by Chief Izongo to arrest Okolo—into the narrative in order to expose the crisis at the epistemological level. Their conversations reveal a competition between an African indigenous holistic perception of the world and a Western dualistic perception—a competition that highlights a “politics of knowing” in the postcolonial era.

In *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o argues how European colonization of Africa has caused alienation among the colonized in terms of how they acknowledge their own culture, and how they relate themselves to their community and the surrounding world. In his book, Ngũgĩ emphasizes the role of language in maintaining the dynamics of a people’s culture, particularly in reinforcing their sense of belonging to the community, their belief in or practice of certain values/activities, and their understanding of the surrounding (natural) world. As Ngũgĩ explains:

We spoke Gikuyu as we worked in the field. We spoke Gikuyu in and outside the home. I can vividly recall those evenings of story-telling around the fireside. It was mostly the grown-ups telling the children but everybody is involved . . . The stories, with mostly animals as the main characters, were all told in Gikuyu . . . The language, through image and symbols, gave us a view of the world . . . The home and the field were then our pre-primary school but what is important, for this discussion, is that the language of our evening teach-ins, and the language of our immediate and wider community, and the language of our work in the fields were one. (10-11)

For Ngũgĩ, Gikuyu spoken at home and in the field conveys and preserves Gikuyu cultural traditions/practices and enables their transmission to later generations. Through that language, a unique Gikuyu-centered perception of the world is produced. However, the colonial imposition of European languages on cultures of the colonized undermines Gikuyu and other African cultures' wellbeing. Ngũgĩ focuses on the harm of European languages imposed on the mind of the colonized, as these languages affect "the mental universe of the colonized" and dictate "how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world" (16). For Ngũgĩ, this is a kind of "mental colonialism" that hinders a Gikuyu subject from developing a sense of self, of community, and a Gikuyu-centered view of the world (11). As he states, "Since the new language as a means of communication was a product of and was reflecting the 'real language of life' elsewhere, it could never as spoken or written properly reflect or imitate the real life of that community" (16). Ngũgĩ calls the consequence of this mental domination the "colonial alienation":

For a colonial child, the harmony existence between the three aspects of language as communication was irrevocably broken. This resulted in the dissociation of the sensibility of that child from his natural and social environment, what we might call colonial alienation. The alienation became reinforced in the teaching of history, geography, music, where bourgeois Europe was always the center of the universe. This dissociation, divorce, or alienation from the immediate environment becomes clearer when you look at colonial language as a carrier of culture. (17)

Ngũgĩ's concept of the "colonial alienation" can be found in Okara's *The Voice*, as the novel dramatizes such experience in the broad spectrum of a colonized society.

In *The Voice*, Okolo's need to search for "*it*" highlights the "colonial alienation" as critiqued by Ngũgĩ. Okolo feels alienated from the new time and his community, for his people has abandoned the belief and value systems they once possessed. His colonial education also confuses his understanding of his position within the community in the new time:

Okolo started his search when he came out of school and returned home to his people. When he returned home to his people, words of the coming thing, rumours of the coming things, were in the air flying like birds, swimming like fishes in the river. But Okolo did not join their joy because what was there was no longer there and things had no more roots. So he started his search for *it*. (23)

In the time of independence ("the coming things"), Okolo does not join his people's celebration, but instead, he starts his search for "*it*"—something that is never clearly defined in the narrative. "It"—something mysterious, nebulous, yet being "there"—haunts Okolo, as he says to Tuere, "I cannot stop this thing. I must find *it*. *It* is there. I am the voice from the locked up insides which the Elders, not wanting the people to hear, want to stop me." (34). While "*it*" can be easily defined as "the meaning of life" (understood as a somehow organic, African experience as opposed to a meaning attached

to Western martial life), or “African tradition,” as several critics have discussed,¹⁹ I suggest that the lack of the definition of “it” in Okara’s novel is a mark of “its” ineffability and unnameability, and thus is evidence that “it” is the complex tangle of colonial subjectivity. In other words, Okara presents a hero devoted to something that is lost and can never be clearly defined in order to suggest how under colonization, a colonial subject like Okolo has been deprived not only of an autonomous or unalienated subjectivity, but of agency to express and experience his own cultural heritage. After receiving colonial education, Okolo feels lost and alienated from his roots, as he is described as someone who “had not chest” and “had no shadow” (23). In a debate with Abadi, one of the Elders who received an M.A. and a Ph.D. from Europe, Okolo confronts Abadi: ““You have your M.A., Ph.D., but you have not got *it*.”” (44). Okolo rejects Abadi’s agency because his European perspective is exactly a cause of, rather than a solution to, the loss of “it.” Abadi’s speech to the people of Amatu is composed of nothing more than concepts borrowed from the West. For Okolo, Abadi uses concepts like “democracy” and one’s “right,” as well as slogans like ‘logical conclusion,’ “representative of the people,” and “collective responsibility” (43-44), in order to “make a show” rather than reach “*it*” (44). Likewise, for Okolo, the coming of independence does not help with “*it*,” either, because independence by no means suggests returning to the roots or restoring the tradition, but rather embracing European values and practices—things that “have no more roots” (34). In his conversation with another Elder Tebeowei, Okolo uses the metaphor of “paint” to question the possibility of erasing “*it*.” As he says to Tebeowei:

¹⁹ See essays on *The Voice* by Ashaolu, Iyasere, Ramamoorthy, and Webb.

“If you put a black paint over a white paint, does it mean there is no white paint? Under the black paint the white paint is still there and it will show when the black paint is rubbed off. That is the thing I am doing—trying to rub off the black paint. Our father’s insides always contained things straight. They did straight things. Our insides were also clean and we did the straight things until the new time came. We can still sweep the dirt out of our houses every morning.” (50)

In spite of Okolo’s optimism about invoking “*it*,” Tebeowei reminds him of “the fact of the new time:” “I know, Okolo, but you must see the fact of the new time. Everybody is now filled with money, cars, and concrete houses and money is being scattered all around. If any falls at my feet, I stoop and pick it up. If I don’t and kick it away, I will be called a know-nothing man and I will be kicked away.” (50). Okolo is trapped between tradition and modernity, between past and present, between spiritualism and materialism, and between integrity coming from his “inside” and conformity demanded by his community. His quest aims at re-locating the lost agency of the colonized subject and restoring the collapsing equilibrium of the community that does not even sense its collapse.

Okara depicts Okolo’s people—including villagers of Amatu, passengers on the boat, and city dwellers of Sologa—as obsessed with material needs, in order to dramatize the “colonial alienation” as observed at the communal level. Possessing a collective subjectivity produced by capitalism’s indoctrination of standardized desire, manner, and life style into the mind of the colonized subject, the “inside” of Okolo’s people, as

Tebeowei describes, is “filled with money, cars, and concrete houses” (50). Seen as a collective rather than individuals, Okolo’s people represent a mass subjectivity produced by colonization. The villagers of Amatu are first described as “a mass of faces” gathering to capture Okolo for his refusal to be part of them: “Faces, a mass of faces glistening with sweat in the moonlight stood, talking, arguing. Grim faces like the dark mysterious forest afire with flies” (28). Led by Chief Izongo, the villagers are referred to also as “know-nothing footsteps” (34, 35)—a collective that follows mainly order and power: “Izongo laughed a laugh that did not reach his inside and crowd swayed this way and that way like tall grass being swayed by a gust of wind” (35). Similar to the villagers, the Elders of the village are portrayed as “puppets” without individual thought: “Elders shook their heads, others nodded in agreement and yet others tried to do both, resulting in a confusion of heads bobbing and swaying from side to side like the heads of puppets” (42). In capturing Okolo, the villagers are portrayed as ants-like zombies: “The people snapped at him like hungry dogs snapping at bones. They carried him in silence like the silence of ants carrying a crumb of yam or fish bone” (38). Okara’s depictions of the villagers mostly as subjects obsessed with conformity as well as lacking independent judgment—as either “grim faces,” “think-nothing footstpes,” “puppets,” “swaying grass” or “hungry dogs”—imply that in the time of independence, the colonized subject has been transformed into a new collective subject under the guidance of capitalism and materialism. The episode about Okolo’s journey to Sologa, which occurs mainly on a boat, reifies this postcolonial subjectivity obsessed with money and material needs. Under Okolo’s eyes, the passengers on the boat are individualized. Each of the passengers conveys his or her desire in the time of independence, and interestingly, their

desires are all associated with money made through colonial institutions. One of the passengers, “a whiteman’s cook,” talks about how money would come “like water flow” once his son finishes college and “joins the Council” (59). Another passenger, a woman “dyed her hair which was now fading,” talks about how her son has “passed standard six the previous year and was now a clerk,” who is making a “heap of money” (59). Another passenger, a policeman, brags about how his job (working for the white men) has made him bring home “bags of money” (60). Okolo individualizes those boat passengers in order to highlight a collective desire circulated through education, politics, and many other colonial institutions. It is through this desire for money-making that colonialism successfully subjugates the colonized. Not only are the villagers of Amatu, but also the city dwellers of Sologa, are part of this new collective subject shaped by colonization. As the villagers are described as “a mass of grim faces,” so the city dwellers are described as a mass of “nothing-caring eyes”: “So Okolo walked in Sologa of the Big One passing frustrated eyes, ground-looking eyes, harlot’s eyes, nothing-looking eyes, hot eyes, cold eyes, bruised eyes, despairing eyes, nothing-caring eyes, grabbing eyes, dust-filled eyes, aping eyes. . .” (80). As the villagers are referred to as “know-nothing footsteps” guided by the power-driven Chief Izongo, so the city dwellers are referred to as a mass of “think-nothing stream” (84) guided by “the Big One.” “The Big One,” a symbolic character that never really shows up in the novel, is a triumph of colonialism—a mimic man or, to use Fanon’s term, a “colonized elite,” or “national bourgeoisie”—a figure who leads the revolution, yet ironically has “the whiteman” (86) as his spokesman.²⁰ “The Big One” probably received his education in the Western world or at a Western institution. He

²⁰ See Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*.

brings concepts and values he learned from the West back to his country, and practices them in his newly-independent state. “The Big One” thus can be seen as an iconic figure, an ultimate symbol of a collective postcolonial subject that circulates the desire of the citizens of Sologa—the “listeners of the Big One” (83). As followers and police of “the Big One,” the city dwellers form a collective subject that enforces consumerism and conformism, repudiating genuine opinions and inquiries. Wandering around Sologa, Okolo encounters one of the “listeners of the Big One,” who listens to no one but his fellow listeners: “Looking at something far away the man appeared to be with his eyes listening, with his ears opened wide to catch every sound, every word spoken by the passing crowd. But Okolo’s voice he heard not” (80). While Okolo calls himself “the voice from the locked up insides”—a voice that will never stop questioning—his voice obviously does not reach the crowd. At an “eating house,” Okolo is advised by the owner to simply follow the “stream”: ““The people who have the sweetest insides are the think-nothing people and we here try to be like them. Like fogs in the river, we float and go whither the current commands and nothing enters our inside to turn the sweetness into bitterness. So my man, here stay and be one of us.”” (84). Okolo’s journey to Sologa and his experience with the citizens of Sologa thus ends up with disillusion. Instead of finding “*it*” and speaking up his voice in Sologa, Okolo is denied and silenced by the people of Sologa, who like the people of Amatu, have become unthinking capitalist bodies with collective desire for money. As Okolo says to himself toward the end of his journey to the city: “Man has no more shadow, trees have no more shadow. Nothing has any more meaning but the shadow-devouring trinity of gold, iron, concrete” (89). Under the

oppression of this collective greed and corruption, individual creativity and dissension, as represented by Okolo, are suppressed and rejected.

On the epistemological level, *The Voice* presents another alienation the colonized subject suffers—one brought about by the colonial enforcement of African modernity. Okara critiques how European colonialism rejects an indigenous holistic thinking by debasing it as “primitive” and “backward,” and aims to destroying it and replacing it with a rationalism founded on Cartesian Dualism. Holism, commonly believed in most indigenous African societies, is a belief or a worldview that puts emphasis more on organic, symbiotic, and interactive relationships between humans and the external world than on a rationalistic, hierarchical, and utilitarian perception of the world. Under dualism, meanings are not produced through human interactions with the surrounding environment, but rather through abstract principles like rationality, logic, and hierarchy. *The Voice* dramatizes the competition between holism and dualism in a colonized society in order to highlight a politics of knowing in the postcolonial era. Similar to Ngũgĩ, who critiques how the English language imposed on the mind of the colonized has alienated the colonized from their cultural heritage, practices, and communal commitment, Okara critiques how a dualism he associates with the West imposes on the mind of the colonized, weakening the way in which the colonized knows the world. In other words, the colonial imposition of dualism channels the mindset of the colonized into a Western perception of the world—a perception under which meanings of the world exist nowhere but in the human mind and under which the world is treated as a machine mainly for human use.

In *The Voice*, Okara critiques the colonial politics of knowing through two ways—first, through the dialogues/debates between 3 messengers incorporated into the narrative of the novel, and second, through a stylized, deliberate language he invents for his novel. If Okolo’s need to search for “*it*” exposes a symptom of colonization in terms of how the colonized has lost their agency in expressing their cultural roots, then the “*it*” he searches for also refers specifically to an African-centered worldview that highlights a holistic understanding of the human relationship with the surrounding world. This perception of the world embraces a more symbiotic production and interpretation of meanings—a perception that emphasizes inter-relationships between humans, animals, plants, and other elements in the world. This more organic understanding of the world runs counter to a more rational, binary understanding of the world, through which humans, seen as the highest entity among the rest of the species and elements, dominate the production of meanings. This competition between an indigenous holism and a Western dualism is suggested in the dialogue between the three messengers, who are sent to arrest Okolo at the beginning of the novel. The first part of their dialogue questions how meanings are created and understood under each of the worldviews:

First messenger: “My right foot has hit against a stone.”

Second messenger: “Is it good or bad?”

First messenger (*solemnly*): “It’s bad.”

Second messenger: “Bad? My right foot is good to me.”

Third messenger: “Your nonsense words stop. These things have meanings no more. So stop talking words that create nothing.”

First messenger: “To me there is meaning. My right foot always warns me.”

Second messenger: “To me there is meaning. If my left foot against something hits as I walk, it’s a warning be.”

Third messenger (*with contempt*): “Nonsense.”

First messenger: “Listen not to him. He speaks this way always because he passed standard six. Because he passed standard six his ears refuseth nothing, his inside refused nothing like a dustbin.” (24)

This part of the conversation reveals a crisis regarding how meanings are created in correlation with humans’ relationships with the surrounding environment. For the first and second messengers, a meaning is created through a process that connects life events to their larger contexts. To be more specific, for them, if one’s right foot stumbles on something, this suggests an omen or a warning that means something more than simply the fact that his foot stumbles on something. This could mean a coming bad luck or a failing task. However, for the third messenger, who has received colonial education, if one’s foot stumbles on something, this is simply a fact without other connotations. In other words, for the first and the second messengers, meanings are created and interpreted according to an understanding of the interconnected-ness between the human and the natural world. But for the third messenger, his colonial education has taught him to shun and abandon that understanding. The second part of the conversation highlights how colonial education has weakens the colonized’s attachment to the outside world:

First messenger: “Listen not to him. He speaks this way always because he

passed standard six. Because he passed standard six his ears refuseth nothing, his inside refused nothing like a dustbin.”

Third messenger: “Your spoken words call nothing. What I say is, things have changed, so change.”

First messenger (*Spit on the ground*): “Hear his creating words—things changeth, Ha, ha, ha. What is the whiteman’s word, the parable you always say. . . ‘the old order changeth’? I forget the rest, you always. . .”

Third messenger (*Angrily*): “Shut your month. You know nothing.” (24-25)

The third messenger looks down upon an animistic, holistic worldview because it is founded on fluid, instinctive associations between random events, rather than on linear, logical thinking. For the third messenger, colonization has brought enlightenment and modernity. In contrast, for the first and second messengers, under colonial education the third messenger has alienated himself (“his inside”) from the natural world, rejecting possibilities that meanings are also created via humans’ collaborations with the outside world.

The third part of the dialogue between the three messengers highlights a politics of knowing in terms of knowledge formation and agency—that is, “how to know” and “who can know”—in the postcolonial era. While the third messenger claims that the first messenger “knows nothing” because the latter received no Western education, the first messenger continues to question problems of knowing in the postcolonial era. As the dialogue proceeds: “First messenger (*Also angrily*): ‘Me know nothing? Me know

nothing? Because I went not to school I have no bile? I have no head? Me know nothing? Then answer me this. Your hair was black black be, then it became white like a white cloth and now it is black black be more than blackness. The root, what is it? You keep quiet. Answer me. I know nothing, you say.” (25). The first messenger questions why his knowledge and the way in which he gains knowledge are treated lower or less reliable than Western knowledge and methods used to gain knowledge. For him, his “bile” and his “head” provide information he needs in his life, for it is based on his personal experiences with the outside world. He uses the metaphor of the shift between “black” and “white” hair—a metaphor referring to the process of de/colonization in Africa—in order to question the hierarchy between Western knowledge and indigenous knowledge set up by colonialism. To be more specific, the first messenger questions why Western knowledge still prevails in the post-independence era, and why decolonization leads to rejection and abandonment of the traditional knowledge rather than its restoration.

Later in the novel, Okara presents another dialogue—one conducted by two messengers—in order to reassert the value of indigenous knowledge or “earth knowledge” (93), as one of the messengers terms it. This dialogue indicates how capitalism, particularly its promotion of materialist life style, has led the colonized away from the natural world and “earth knowledge” (93) their ancestors have passed down for generations:

“Why are you still with empty feet walking on this cold cold ground?” so asked one messenger of the other.

“On this cold cold ground we have been walking. Your money, what did

you take to do?”

“Nothing I did with the money?”

“Nothing, why?”

“It is bad money. Bad money never brings good to anyone.”

“They are buying engine canoes with the money. Is that not good? My feet are not empty and this cold cold ground does not touch my feet anymore. Is that not good? Your money, what did you take to do?”

“Nothing I take to do.”

“You are keeping it?”

“I do not know what I should take the money to do.” (92)

This dialogue, highlighting the disagreement between one messenger with bare feet and the other with shoes, critiques how money, described as “bad” for it is brought by colonialism, creates false material desires (a need to wear “shoes,” for example) among the colonized, and more importantly, how such desires have caused the colonized’s alienation from nature, such as that from direct contacts with nature/“cold cold ground.” Later in the same conversation, the messenger with bare feet questions the limit of “book learning,” asserting the authority of “earth knowledge”:

“You say water has my inside entered. I know not whiteman’s book. Their book learning is different from earth’s knowledge, which has come down from our ancestors. Book reaches not that. You say water has my inside entered, but you know not the power of water”

“Your eyes, don’t they see the river? Your eyes, don’t they see the yams,

coco-yams, sugar canes, plantains? Can they grow without water? And what is behind the power of water? Without water can you in the world live? Water is soft but is it not the strongest thing be? My spoken words come out of the water in my inside.” (93)

Echoing the first messenger appearing in the earlier part of the novel, one that claims his “bile” and “head” as his agency in gaining knowledge from nature, the messenger with bare feet emphasizes the correlation between human sensory experience (“eyes”), human activities (agriculture), and natural resources (“water,” “river”). He uses “water” as a metaphor in order to highlight the interference between human activities (agriculture) and power of nature (water). The messenger with bare feet recognizes the inter-relationship between humans and nature and the precedence of people’s appreciation of “earth knowledge” produced through direct experiences with nature, over a “book learning” focused on theories and abstract notions. Okara contrasts the nature of Western knowledge—an institutionalized and hierarchized learning system centered on books—with that of an indigenous knowledge—a relatively more organic, and holistic system of learning—in order to remind us that even in the postcolonial era, the domination of Western knowledge makes it difficult, if not impossible, to reclaim an indigenous cultural heritage that often depends on “earth knowledge.”

In *The Voice*, Okara also critiques the colonial politics of knowing through his mixed use of Ijaw and English syntax and vocabulary. The language of *The Voice* looks simple, and its tone, conveyed in simple sentences, sounds almost innocent. Okara’s critics tend to see Okara’s linguistic experiments as a celebration of postcolonial

multiculturalism or the author's overcoming linguistic or "cultural particularity" in search of an "ideal universal language."²¹ Under-discussed, I argue, are linguistic experiments that reveal what to Okara are ultimately unrepresentable or untranslatable conditions of a world that is dichotomized, binarized, and highly-materialized in the postcolonial era. Seen in this light, Okara's incorporation of Ijaw expressions into his English narrative may not be a simple celebration of multiculturalism. Rather, the hybrid, stylized language in the novel makes visible an alienated world in the postcolonial era. The language of *The Voice* represents a microcosm of the postcolonial world—a dichotomized and materialized world perceived and experienced by its residents. Okara creates a lexicon for the narrative of *The Voice*—a lexicon in which specifically chosen words are either paired into binary sets (of objects, concepts, phenomena and spaces,) or used to represent (metaphorically) specific concepts, emotions, or values. Binary sets recurrently used throughout the narrative of *The Voice* include "chest"/"shadow," "inside"/"outside," "flame [light]"/ "darkness," "the old time"/"the new time", "inside [voice]"/"spoken words," just to name a few. Okara uses those binary sets in his novel in order to dramatize the consequence of the colonial indoctrination of a dualism into the daily life of the colonized. Under colonization, a colonial subject is a fragmentary subject, for his body and mind are split up. While "chest" refers to the physical body of a colonial subject, "shadow" refers to his metaphysical entity (soul or spirit). Throughout the novel, characters are either said to have lost their "chest," "shadow," or both. Okolo is portrayed as suffering a dichotomous subjectivity after receiving European education. He

²¹ See Scott's and Williams' approaches to *The Voice*—in contrast to the social and political criticism—tend to celebrate Okara's novel as a work of art that aims at transcending cultural clashes and conflicts in the post/colonial era.

is seen at the beginning of the novel as lacking both his “chest” and “shadow” (23), and as a colonized body that loses connections to his roots as well as fails fitting in his community and the surrounding world. He is also portrayed as constantly battling conflicts between his “inside” and the “outside” hostility and between “the old time” and “the new time.” In Sologa, he struggles to escape from “darkness” and reach “light.” Whereas “inside,” a specific word recurrently used in the narrative, refers to the inner voice or the integrity of a colonial subject, “outside” or “spoken words” refers to what the subject actually says or does in their community. Okara highlights the discrepancy between the “inside” and “the spoken words” of the colonized (as shown by the villagers of Amatu) in order to show the collapse of one’s integrity under colonization.

The Voice, highlighting the dichotomized subjectivity of the colonized in the materialized environment in the postcolonial era, suggests the author’s concern that when a holistic and spiritual perception of the human relationship with the outside world collapses, what is left is confusion, as shown in Okolo’s crisis, as well as constant clashes, such as those in the community between values/beliefs (modernity versus tradition) and between life styles (materialism versus spiritualism). Okolo, though suffering from a broken and materialized world, still believes in “it.” “It” in this context can be seen as the “root” or “the voice” of a culture that connects the intricate, yet holistic web of words, values, beliefs, and morals, all of which are continuously followed by people and sustain the world of that culture. Although Tebeowei reminds Okolo that in “the new time” “the world is no longer straight” (49), for “everybody’s inside is now

filled with money, cars, and concrete houses” (50), Okolo still believes in the integrity of “words”—words without distinctions between “inside” and “spoken words”:

His talking seems to him throwing words away like one throws money into the river. That’s what they [the villagers of Amatu] think. But they do not see it in their insides that words and money are not the same thing. Money maybe be lost forever but words, teaching words, are the same in any age. Some of these teaching words are as true as today as they were centuries ago. They may be given different meaning to suit the new times but the root is the same. (51-52)

Whereas the people of Amatu, such as Chief Izongo and Albadi, treat “words” as merely tools used for utilitarian purposes, such as gaining power and money, Okolo treats “words” as life principles produced from generation to generation through his ancestors’ experience and knowledge—principles that are supposed to be followed and defended by his people in order to maintain the integrity of their culture. *The Voice* indicates that when “words” are used simply for performance and have nothing to do with one’s “inside,” not only the integrity of an individual but also that of the culture as a whole will collapse. Okolo’s conversation with “the whiteman” in Sologa suggests the consequence of such a cultural collapse. As Okolo says to “the whiteman:” “Belief and faith in that something we looked up to in times of sorrow and joy have all been taken away and instead what do we have? Nothing but a dried pool with only dead wood and skeleton leaves. And when you question they fear a tornado is going to blow down the beautiful houses they have built without foundations”(89). Comparing a postcolonial society to a

“dried pool,” Okolo indicates that the independence of a colonial state from European powers is likely to become a sterile world if it does not involve cultural and mental independence at the same time.

Okolo’s death/sacrifice at the end of the novel, though reinforcing Okara’s pessimism about the possibility of reclaiming “it,” still has a positive influence on his people. His return, along with his death/sacrifice, can be read as an initiation of developing a new subjectivity/social consciousness in a postcolonial society, though whether or not this new subjectivity will eventually come into being still remains uncertain at the end of the novel. Okolo returns to Amatu with the mission to “plant *it*” in the insides of his people: “But this time he would the masses ask and not Izongo and his Elders. If the masses haven’t got it, he will create *it* in their insides. He will plant *it*, make *it* grow in spite of Izongo’s destroying words. He will uproot the fear in their insides, kill the fear in their insides and plant *it*” (90). For Okolo, in order to “plant” or “create it” in the postcolonial era, the colonized’s “fear” caused by neocolonial censorships and their desire generated by capitalist consumerism have to be eradicated. That is, a process of total decolonization has to happen—one that has to cover the personal, communal, and epistemological. Okolo’s return is aimed at starting that process, and his martyrdom will serve as a lesson to wake up “it” from the inside of his people. As Tuere tells Ukulele before she and Okolo are executed, ““You go and leave us. You stay in the town and in the days to come, tell our story and tend our spoken words.”” (127). Toward the end of *The Voice*, the growth of “it” in the inside of Okara’s people can be detected, as revealed in the second dialogue between the two messengers. While the first half of their

conversation focuses on their debate over whether to accept “book learning” or to stick to “earth knowledge,” the second half of the conversation indicates the influence of Okolo’s “spoken words” on his people:

“You think Okolo is the first to have these words grow in his inside? No. Just as you are trying to kill them, many there are who are the same thing doing. Nobody withstands the power of the spoken word. Okolo has spoken. I will speak when the time is correct and other will follow and our spoken words will gather power like the power of a hurricane and Izongo will sway and fall like sugar cane.”

“These words are not your words. They are the words of your father’s father’s father who had said knew everything,” said the black shoe man and started to walk with silence. (94-95)

Acknowledging Okolo’s “spoken words” connecting directly to the power of their cultural roots, the messenger with bare feet suggests that a collective voice has to gather in order to empower those words. In other words, a new collective consciousness has to develop in order to reclaim “*it*” or the “earth knowledge.” However, the two messengers still have to keep their voice/words silent until “the time is correct”: “Our words will have power when we speak them out. Let's wait till the time is correct.” (95). The two messenger’s concerns over “time” suggest a possibility, yet also deferment of a total decolonization of an African society in the postcolonial era. While Okara’s return and his sacrifice may have wakened up his people’s rebellion against the colonial and neocolonial subjugations, it is a pre-mature time for a real and radical change.

Conclusion: Challenges for African Pastoral in the Postcolonial Era

Concern about “time,” as expressed by the two messengers toward the end of *The Voice*, indicates challenges African writers have faced in incorporating the pastoral into their writings. If it is during the time of independence that various modes of African pastoral were produced, then paradoxically, it is also during that time that this genre in the African context became problematic in terms of its validity. As the ending of *Burning Grass* suggests the uncertainty of Fulani culture in the post-independence era, so the ending of *The Voice* highlights the uncertainty of decolonization in postcolonial Africa. Writing in the 1950s and 60s, both Ekwensi and Okara used the pastoral as a trope to address nostalgia and discuss the in/validity of re-locating and preserving cultural roots in the post-independence era. Okara’s novel, however, goes further, suggesting the need for a radical socio-mental revolution in African societies—a process that must happen in order that the colonial subjectivity can be replaced with a new subjectivity, one that will re-connect African subjects to their roots. *The Voice*’s concern about “the correct time” therefore may also question the validity of “it” per se: will this “it” that Okolo attempts to plant in the insides of his people be the same thing as the “it” he has been trying to conjure up throughout the novel? Will this “it” be something else instead that has to be reformed and/or invented in order to fit the new time? The revolutionary process, as Okara suggests in his novel, may have little to do with relocating or endorsing the old, pre-colonial subjectivity/knowledge, but more to do with developing a new subjectivity that withstands traumas of colonization, as well as a new knowledge that will adapt to changes in the new time.

Chapter Three

De/Constructing Nationalism: Oil, Ethnic Minorities, and the (Anti-) *Bildungsroman* in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*

In his essay “The National Longing for Form” (1990), Timothy Brennan points out the complexity of postcolonial fiction with regard to how it constructs the postcolonial nation and conveys anti-colonial nationalism:

In fact, it is especially in Third World fiction after the Second World War that the fictional uses of ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ are most pronounced. . . . ‘Uses’ here should be understood both in a personal craftsmanlike sense, where nationalism is a trope for such things as ‘belongings,’ ‘bordering,’ and ‘commitment.’ But it should also be understood as the *institutional* uses of fiction in nationalist movements themselves. At the present time, it is often impossible to separate these senses. (46-47)

For Brennan, connections between postcolonial writing and the nation reveal how the latter is imagined via the former, in both literary and political senses, in order to rebel against colonial domination. In anti-colonialism, postcolonial texts, particularly novels, are treated often as “national allegories.” Frederic Jameson writes in his essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” (1986): “All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way, they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of

representation, such as the novel” (69). For Jameson, the novel, a genre invented and developed with the emergence of European nationalisms and colonialism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was “introduced” or imported to colonies due to colonialism. Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983), theorizes the evolution of the nation in correlation to the development of the novel, emphasizing how this Western form travels across the world.¹ Associating the postcolonial novel with the nation in the context of colonialism therefore inevitably subsumes postcolonial writing into a European literary genealogy, reinforcing the novel as a “mature” or “progressive” cultural product developed along with the nation, and thus superior to other forms of cultural expressions, such as oral literature associated with indigenous societies, including those in pre-colonial Africa. In his essay, “European Pedigrees/African Contagions: Nationality, Narrative, and Communitary in Tutuola, Achebe, and Read” (1990), James Snead contests connections between postcolonial African novels and national allegory, particularly those which are based on an assumption of “linear continuity between origin and maturity” (236):

The European, whose invention [the novel] ‘begins’ African literature, once more finds himself flatteringly represented as the ‘author of

¹ In his book, Anderson provides seemingly universal principles of how a modern nation-state/nationalism was developed in both European world and its former colonies (South Asians, particularly). One major principle is that the nation is a community “imagined” with the help of “print capitalism,” specifically with that of its cultural products, such as newspaper and the novel. More importantly, for Anderson, this principle was “modulated” (from the French Revolution, for example) and freely “pirated” outside of the Western worlds via colonialism in the twentieth century. As he states in his, “In much the same way, since the end of the eighteenth century nationalism has undergone a process of modulation and adaption, according to different eras, political regimes, economies and social structures. The ‘imagined community’ has, as a result, spread out to every conceivable contemporary society. Above all, the very idea of ‘nation’ is now nestled firmly in virtually all print-language; and nation-ness is virtually inseparable from political consciousness” (157).

progress,' and it is now possible to speak of first-and second-generation African writers, who are alternately beatified and vilified, depending upon their closeness or remoteness to this primal African source . . . The notion of 'progress,' then, seems tied not to any internal logic, but to a sense of closeness or distance from European influence. (239)

Snead's critique of looking at the postcolonial African novel solely from the perspective of its relation with Europe also cautions us not to treat postcolonial African nation-states and nationalism simply as products of colonial legacies.² Behind the notion that the emergence of the postcolonial novel parallels the emergence of postcolonial nation-states and nationalisms is an assumption that postcolonial nation-states, like postcolonial novels, are "derived" or "modulated" from their European models or origins.³ As Ania Loomba argues in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (2005), "Nationalism is thus a 'derivative discourse,' a Calibanist model of revolt which is dependent upon the coloniser's gift of language/ideas" (158). Under this "derivative discourse," European experiences and cultures, such as the nation and nationalism, are rendered "universal"

² The notion that postcolonial nation-states are products of European colonialism has been widely recognized among postcolonial critics. For example, in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (2ed edition, 2005), Ania Loomba adopts Benedict Anderson's theory to re-address this notion: "In the colonies, the native intelligentsia played such a crucial role in foraging nationalist consciousness because they were bilingual and had access to 'modern Western culture in the broadest sense, and in particular, to the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation-state produced elsewhere in the course of the nineteenth century' (Anderson qtd in Loomba). In other words, anti-colonial nationalism is itself made possible and shaped by European political and intellectual history"(158).

³ Several postcolonial critics have questioned and revised Anderson's approach that looks at postcolonial nation-states as exclusively "derivatives" from European empires. See Partha Chatterjee's books *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986) and *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993); Timothy Brennan's essay "The National Longing for Form" (1990); James Snead's essay "European Pedigrees/African Contagions: Nationality, Narrative, and Communitarity in Tutuola, Achebe, and Read" (1990); and John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan's book *Represented Communities: Fiji and World Decolonization* (2001).

values or standards and are seen as applicable to any other regions of the world.⁴ Anti-colonial agenda proposed in postcolonial novels in the name of the nation thus contradictorily “aspire” to or are modeled on European legacies.

This chapter re-examines two common assumptions in Anglo-American literary criticism regarding postcolonial African literatures: first, an assumption that associates postcolonial African nationalisms with colonialism and modernity as solely defined by and derived from European experiences, and second, an assumption that associates the postcolonial African novel with national allegory. Loomba emphasizes that in the context of the postcolonial worlds, the nation provides a narrative space for postcolonial writing—a discursive space—in which ideas of the nation not only are constructed (in order to fulfill an anti-colonial nationalism), but are also contested and often undermined. As she states,

Perhaps the connection between postcolonial writing and the nation can be better comprehended by understanding that the ‘nation’ itself is a ground of dispute and debate, a site for the competing imaginings of different ideological and political interests. If so many so-called ‘third world’ writings return to this site, it is not at the expense of, but as an expression of, ‘other’ concerns—those of gender, ethnicity, race, religion, caste, language, tribe, class, religion, imperialism and so on. While it is patently excessive to claim that ‘all third world texts’ are allegories of nationalism,

⁴ For more critiques of treating European cultures, including the development of the nation and the novel, as a universal phenomenon, see Snead’s essay.

we can certainly see why the construction of, and contestation of, ‘the nation’ becomes such a charged issue for so many writers. (173)

Following Loomba’s treatment of “the nation” as a ground of “dispute and debate,” I focus on Nigeria, exploring the roles of oil and ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta (“‘other’ concerns”) in contesting ideas of the nation in this particular postcolonial African nation-state. This chapter examines the dynamics of nationalism in post-colonial Nigeria, particularly in relation to the exploitation of oil in the Niger Delta during the oil boom of the 1970s. The chapter also investigates literary productions of Nigerian oil after the oil boom, particularly the *bildungsroman* of the Niger Delta that question and reject nationalism fueled by petro-capitalism. Oil, in the case of Nigeria, is not only a natural resource and a commodity, but also a potent political agent that paradoxically constructs and deconstructs nationalism in the region out of which it flows. While oil provided wealth that promoted the nation-wide infrastructures as well as a unifying symbol for a newly prosperous post-colonial Nigeria, it also exposed unequal distributions of national wealth among and across Nigeria’s classes, regions, and ethnic populations. Oil’s impact on the Niger Delta, in particular, led various ethnic minority groups to pursue self-determination from the 1970s onwards.⁵ In this sense, while oil drilling and trading arguably consolidated Nigerian nationalism, the oil boom also mobilized dissident rights campaigns against the state by various ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta, including the

⁵ For more detailed analyses of the oil-generated self-determination movements in the Niger Delta, see Michael Watts, Ike Okonta, and Dimieari Von Kemedi’s working paper “Economies of Violence: Petroleum, Politics, and Community Conflict in the Niger Delta, Nigeria (2004); Ike Okonta’s *When Citizen Revolt: Nigerian Elites, Big Oil and the Ogoni Struggle for Self-Determination* (2008); Andrew Apter’s “Death and the King’s Henchmen: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Political Ecology of Citizenship in Nigeria” (1998).

Ogoni. The oil boom in Nigeria and its attendant politico-cultural productions, including both nationalism and self-determination movements, enable us to re-examine post/colonial assumptions or theorizations that postcolonial nation-states are primarily products of colonization. In other words, highlighting nationalism in the context of the oil boom in Nigeria forces us to include in any postcolonial discourse on modernization and the nation the context of a system of global capitalism.

The tensions surrounding intersections of nationalism, global capitalism, and indigenous movements in the Niger Delta are both the context and subject of two novels examined in this chapter: Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985) and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010). In addition to underscoring the paradox of petro-nationalism developed in post-colonial Nigeria, these novels participate in the tradition of, yet show the limits of the *bildungsroman*. Like many postcolonial *bildungsromane*, national allegory is the focus of both Saro-Wiwa's and Habila's texts, yet both, I will argue, reveal how the logic of the *bildungsroman* reaches its limits in their presentation of *counter*-allegories that reveal and account for the "ambivalences" of national projects, particularly as they are entangled with larger forces of global capitalism. Both authors appropriate the *bildungsroman*, reconfiguring it in order to question or reject Nigerian nationalism as it consolidates and acts around oil exploration, pumping, and exportation.

Looking at Nigerian oil as a trope for the nation—as both Saro-Wiwa and Habila do—reminds us that we should pay attention to not only the neo-colonial exploitation of the oil in the Niger Delta by "foreign" agents in the context of globalization and neo-liberal capitalism, but also to the complex struggles *within* Nigeria that take the form of class and ethnic struggles in a modern petro-state in which minorities are alienated and

excluded. The status of the minority-protagonist as revealed by Saro-Wiwa and Habila in their novels problematize the official narratives of nationalism in Nigeria. These novels of the Niger Delta, as they communicate perspectives of protagonists from the minority of the region, may be read as a form of literary resistance or activism that highlights the minorities' rebellion against the resource control of the nation-state. Moreover, depicting the relation of the delta's population with an increasingly threatened and polluted landscape, Saro-Wiwa and Helon Habila situate their discussions of political oppression and alienation in larger debates on environmental justice criticism, and thus encourage and engage critics seeking to define an Africa-focused ecocriticism that might address the region's long and complex relationship to the land, particularly in correlation with the region's tangled politics within and between communities. Saro-Wiwa's and Habila's novels depict the imbrication of these many conflicts and the difficulty of sorting out relationships, participations, belonging, and even survival in this context.

Nation and Anti-/Nationalism during the Nigerian Oil Boom: A “Double Movement” in the Niger Delta

Nigeria provides various models of nationalism and anti-nationalism, including the pan-African nationalism during the decolonization (of the 50s and 60s), the petro-nationalism promoted by the government (of the 70s), and self-determination of the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta (from the 80s to the present)—all of which show that the nationhood of and nationalism in Nigeria are historically contingent and thus are subject to change as well as challenge. Nationalism in Nigeria (or other colonial states of the African continent) during the independence movement of the 50s was a nationalism

founded more on the concept of the unity of the African or Black race and culture than on that of “Nigeria” as separate from the rest of the continent. It is a pan-African nationalism (associated with “Negritude movement” popular mainly among French-speaking black intellectuals and “Pan-Africanism” popular mainly among black people living in English-speaking worlds) that promoted the value of the Black/African race and culture as a whole.⁶ Pan-African nationalism emphasizes the liberation of the colonized Black from the European White—a nationalism “racialized” as explained by Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963): “Colonialism’s insistence that ‘niggers’ have no culture, and Arabs are by nature barbaric, inevitably leads to a glorification of cultural phenomena that become continental instead of national, and singularly racialized. In Africa, the reasoning of the intellectual is Black-African or Arab-Islamic. It is not specifically national” (154). An African national consciousness seen during this period, then, according to Fanon, was developed from the colonized black’s rebellions against Europeans—a consciousness aroused via the thinking of the race rather than that of the nation. “Nigeria” during the time of the independence can therefore be said as a community imagined via a racial thinking, a community directly connected to the rest of the continent that were all suffering from colonialism. It is not until in the 70s—the time when Nigeria underwent the recovery and a rebirth from the civil war—that nationalism in Nigeria became *national*. As one of the major oil producers of the world, which means

⁶ See Loomba’s *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (2ed edition, 2005). In her book, Loomba explains the correlation of Negritude movement, Pan-Africanism, and Pan-nationalisms in Africa during the time of independence: “In the writings of the Negritude movement, or Pan-Africanism, ‘nation’ itself takes another meaning, a sense of shared culture and subjectivity or spiritual essence that stretches across the divisions of nations as political entities. . . . Both these movements articulated pan-national racial solidarity, demanded an end to white supremacy and imperialist domination and positively celebrated blackness, and especially African blackness, as a distinct racial-cultural way of being” (176).

a key player in the global economy, Nigeria was re-imagined as a nation as well as a leader of the African continent for its rapid economic and cultural progressions. It is a *petro*-nationalism in action—a nationalism fueled by Nigeria’s oil economy in the sense that it not only promoted the black race and culture as a whole, but it also helped build a Nigerian government on the central and the regional levels as well as create Nigerian national culture. The Nigerian oil boom contributed to an official nationalism under the guidance of the Nigerian government that aimed at making Nigeria into a modern African state—one run by a centralized government, fueled by capitalism, and possessing (or at least claiming to possess) a culture beyond tribalism that was identifiably “Nigerian.” Oil, therefore, was central to Nigeria’s nation-building project. Not only was the government re-fashioned into a more centralized authority system for gaining the total control of oil, but this system also created new regional government authorities that were in charge of the revenue redistribution throughout the nation.⁷ Oil also revitalized the Nigerian economy, bringing revenues that financed nation-wide infrastructures, transforming naira into a powerful currency and allowing consumptions of luxury commodities.

Under this petro-nationalism, the federal military government consciously attempted to create a national culture—a culture that minimizes differences and highlights commonalities among the ethnic groups—as well as to educate the people, turning them into “Nigerians.”⁸ Andrew Apter, in his *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (2005), provides insights into the Nigerian oil boom, particularly its production of the national culture and tradition. He focuses specifically on

⁷ See Andrew Apter’s *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (2005).

⁸ *Ibid.*

FESTAC '77 (known as the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture), seeing it presenting a “spectacle of opulence that Nigeria presented as a major oil producer on the international scene” (2). Held in Lagos (the capital of Nigeria at that time), FESTAC captured, according to Apter, a “Nigerian vision of the black and African world—self-centered, to be sure—that reflected the global circuits of oil in an expansive model of racial equivalence and inclusion” (3). Such vision led by Nigeria, Apter continues, “broke from the earlier discourse of negritude and Pan-Africanism by placing their essentially oppositional strategies within an emerging black world that shaded into lighter hues at its edge” (3). With the wealth and prospects provided by the Nigerian oil boom, black African culture was presented in the context of a cosmopolitanism that highlighted its progression and modernity, rather than as a form of localism or essentialism as taken by colonial exhibits. As Apter says, FESTAC “revealed how the national recuperation of cultural traditions was by no means limited to local festivals and village dances, but involved the Economic Organisation of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), thus remaking the local within a modern framework of regional, national, and global ‘communities.’” (3). Oil, then, put an official nationalism into practice, and we can understand that the accompany vision of a unified nation and its people cannot be separated from a larger context of global capitalism. As Apter puts it: “Nigerians might be divided by region and ethnicity, but they were dramatically united by the ‘blessing’ of oil, which circulates, like blood, through the national body” (23).

The emergence of Nigerian petro-state and petro-nationalism during the 70s therefore provides an alternative model of the postcolonial nation-state and nationalism

that re-examines an assumption that postcolonial nation-states are founded on previously colonial states carved out and/or assembled by European empires. The framing of postcolonial states as products of colonial legacies conveniently subsumes the development of the post-war nation-states into European history and in particular into narratives of colonialism and modernity that keeps Europe as the center and privilege and conflate progress and liberalism. While the colonial legacy has been critiqued for its having undermined and destroyed traditional socio-political systems of the formerly colonized societies, the critique itself might structurally acknowledge and even endorse the same grand narrative in the sense that colonialism and modernity, treated as part of the historical momentum of humanity, are somehow understood as being meant to happen or inevitable in the non-European regions.⁹ That being said, before we take a closer look at how Nigerian petro-nationalism contests this grand narrative, it is helpful to briefly review how the nation/nationalism as developed in Western thought is a “derivative discourse,” particularly how this discourse ignores *other* elements (or “other concerns” for Loomba) of post-colonial nation-building projects.

In the introduction to his edited volume *Nation and Narration* (1990), Homi Bhabha describes the “nation” as one of the most powerful and complicated thoughts in Western political and historical discourses: “Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myth of time and only fully realized their horizons in the mind’s eye. Such an image of the nation—or narration—might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that

⁹ Ibid. One of the important critics of Anderson’s theory is Partha Chatterjee. See Chatterjee’s book *Nationalistic Thought and the Colonial World* (1986).

the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west” (1). Bhabha’s statement highlights the two crucial features of the nation imagined and constructed in the Western world: first, the Western conceptions of the nation are based on imaginations about *time/history*; second, those conceptions come with *narration*, a prominent cultural expression that constructs the nation. As Bhabha’s observations suggest, Western nationalists and intellectuals, ranging from German nationalist Johann Gottfried von Herder in eighteenth century, French philosopher Earnest Renan in nineteenth century, to the more contemporary American anthropologist Benedict Anderson to name a few, attempt to locate, define, and theorize origins of the nation, treating nations as an evolutionary and inevitable development in Western history. While Herder attempts to trace (German) nationalism back to the origin of a people, bounded by nature and sharing the same language and culture, Renan, though rejecting the role of race and language in sustaining a nation, emphasizes the nation as a collective “moral consciousness” rooted in the citizens’s shared memories.¹⁰ Anderson’s theory foregrounds developments of nations and nationalisms across continents that correspond to modernity—a process that first started in European communities and later spread out to the rest of the world via colonial and capitalist expansions. For Anderson, then, the nation or the *modern* state, to be more precise—be it the one originating and fully-developed in the Western worlds or the one modulated and inchoate in the non-Western worlds—is largely a result of modernity and colonialism. Tied to modernity, postcolonial nation-states and national consciousness are understood largely as a colonial inheritance in terms of modernization.¹¹ Furthermore, for

¹⁰ See Renan’s 1882 lecture “What is a Nation?”

¹¹ Partha Chatterjee, in his book *Nationalistic Thought and the Colonial World* (1986), contests this tie between postcolonial nations and modernity, emphasizing that postcolonial nationalism is not only a

Anderson, the nation-state in the postcolonial worlds is officially formatted through three colonial institutions, including “the census, the map, and the museum,” all of which were taken over by the colonized nationalists during independence.¹² Anderson’s theory about these colonial institutions inherited by postcolonial nation-states therefore endorses the nation/nationalism used as a derivative discourse that reassures the linearity of history, the universality of modernity, and the necessity of colonialism/modernization as imposed on the postcolonial worlds.

John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan, in their book *Represented Communities: Fiji and World Decolonization* (2001) point out that the downfall of Anderson’s theory lies in its associating nation with “periodization,” particularly the latter referring specifically to the “modern” (3). For them, this association represses the role of “decolonization” in contributing to the formation of nation-states in the postcolonial worlds. To be more specific, Kelly and Kaplan argue that “decolonization,” with its attendant independence of colonial states after the WWII, is to a large extent contributed by the UN and the US influences—two elements absent from Anderson’s theorization of the “last wave” of nationalism. Like Loomba, Kelly and Kaplan call Anderson’s theory a “derivative discourse” (24), a discourse, which for them, is founded on “dialectical accounts of nationalism” that “can be connected to simple or complicated model of modes of production, such as Anderson’s print capitalism or to more intrinsically ideological

“political movement,” but also a “cultural construction”—a creative project that draws its energies from “indigenous sources” (Loomba 159): “If nationalism in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity” (Chatterjee qtd. in Loomba, 158-59).

¹² These three institutions commonly seen in colonial states were invented by the colonialists in the nineteenth century in order to control native populations, imperial territories/ borders, and cultural hierarchies of colonies. See Chapter 10 of Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* for more detailed discussions.

stages, such as some sort of generalized modernity” (6). Instead of dialectics, Kelly and Kaplan take a “dialogical” method that treats global history as “a series of planned and lived responses to specific circumstances that were irreducibly constituted by human subjects, creating not a single vast chain of ‘the subject’ changed by ‘the object’ and vice versa, but a dense, complete network of individual and collective subjects continually responsive to one another” (6). Kelly and Kaplan’s emphasis on “decolonization” (rather than modernity) as well as a “dialogical” (rather than dialectical) method is helpful for my critique of the Western concept of the nation/nationalism used often as a “derivative discourse.” Nations and nationalisms as developed in the postcolonial worlds should be understood not only by their relation to European/colonial history dominated by modernity and concepts of legacy and roots, but also by global history that emphasizes unevenness, particularities, and temporalities.

Looking at Nigerian petro-nationalism during the oil boom from the perspective of Kelly and Kaplan’s method enables us to re-examine the Western concept of the nation/nationalism understood as a product of historical continuity/colonialism, and more importantly to pay attention to other elements, including oil and global capitalism that surrounds it, that contribute to the Nigerian nation-state in the 70s. The oil boom in Nigeria is a historical contingency that highlights temporality and particularity, rather than part of a historical continuity that acknowledges origins and inheritance. “Nigeria,” a postcolonial nation-state assembled by British colonial government in the early twentieth century, thus provides insights on how its nationhood by no means show a complete product of colonization, but rather is constantly changing in the postcolonial era.

The Nigerian oil boom of the 1970s is one historical contingency that made

Nigeria re-imagined as a nation—a nation that is re-built yet paradoxically undermined by oil. Propelled by the exploitation of oil, a natural resource of which the Nigerian government claimed the ownership, Nigeria of the 70s was a modern state re-imagined via the prospects of the *oil* and re-built via the nationalized management of the oil. This petro-state or nationalism created a particular African modernity that is *atypical* and operated outside the trajectory of modernity understood from European experiences. The petro-modernity of Nigeria in the 1970s corresponded unevenly (if at all) to the development of the modern European states, and was more of a *spectacle*, something transient and contingent in Nigerian history, in contrast to a different sort of nationalism that we can imagine emerging (although it didn't) at that time, one of a unified but diverse culture built on the material characteristics of the location itself rather than on one specific commodity and the economy that surrounds it. This modernity, contingent on the oil boom, was built more on consumptions (of the wealth generated by the oil) than productions (generated from the wealth).¹³ The centralization of the government aimed at controlling oil production and managing distributions of wealth, and that led to a class formations that ironically created a new oil-ruling elite that monopolized contacts with the oil companies, as well as exacerbated “prebendalism” that according to Apter, was usually combined with “ethnic patronage” and “political clientelism” (30)¹⁴—a corrupt and incestuous socio-economic system that operated from within and benefited those

¹³ For more details, see Apter's *The Pan-African Nation* (Chapter One).

¹⁴ “Prebendalism” is understood as Nigeria's unique system of corruption, which Apter describes as “political coalition and pacts formed around elite access to the regional governments and their marketing boards.” (30)

from within.¹⁵ The reform of the government conducted in the name of oil thus ended up creating both a monopoly and bureaucratic corruption, both of which blocked access to the wealth of the oil by a large number of people. Structural corruption, along with the lack of domestic productions, contributed to the failure of the government's modernization program. Nigerian official nationalism of the 70 thus presented a nationalism that first envisioned and initiated a modernization, yet could not catch up with and practice it for the lack of material and systematic foundations.

Last but not the least, petro-nationalism, by creating more local governments in the oil-producing region, engendered resource-based wars not only between the Nigerian state and the ethnic minorities in the region, but also between minorities ("inter-community" conflicts) and within minorities ("intra-community" conflicts).¹⁶ The implosive violence of the resource wars in the Niger Delta led to the minorities' rebellions, militancies, and self-determination movements, posing further challenges for the validity and legitimacy of the Nigerian federation, a situation that Michael Watts' calls a "double movement." In his essay "The Sinister Political Life of Community: Economies of Violence and Governable Spaces in the Niger Delta" (2004), Michael Watts identifies what he calls a "double movement" in Nigerian petro-capitalism:

Nigerian petro-capitalism contains a sort of double movement, a contradictory unity of capitalism and modernity. On the one hand, oil has been a centralized force that has rendered the (oil) state more visible and

¹⁵ Apter calls the Nigerian Federation "state vampirism" in his essay "Death and the King's Henchmen: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Political Ecology of Citizenship in Nigeria."

¹⁶ See Watts' working paper "The Sinister Political Life of Community: Economy of Violence and Governable Spaces in the Niger Delta, Nigeria" and "Imperial Oil: The Anatomy of a Nigerian Oil Insurgency" (2008).

globalized, underwriting a process of state-building and national community imagining. On the other hand, oil-led development, driven by an unremitting political logic of ethnic claims-making and staggering corruption by the political classes, has become a force of fragmentation and illegitimacy, radically discrediting the state and its form of governance. It produced a set of conditions/communities that have compromised, indeed undermined, the very tenets of the modern nation state. In short, one might encapsulate this double movement as the tension between fiscal centralism and regional/local dispersion. (8-9)

Self-determination movements of ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta exposed Nigeria's "governability crisis" that tested Nigeria's political future.¹⁷ In short, behind Nigerian oil boom is the tension between Nigerian official nationalism and self-determination of ethnic minorities or "sub-nationalism"¹⁸ in the Niger Delta—a "double movement" that paradoxically created and crumbled the Nigerian nation.

The "Double Movement" in the Niger Delta: The Case of The Ogoni

The Ogoni struggle for self-determination demonstrates that an ethnic minority of the Niger Delta under the oil economy was made into a community through their long term experiences of marginalization. The Ogoni nation is, according to Ike Okonta in his

When Citizens Revolts: Nigerian Elites, Big Oil, and the Ogoni Struggle for Self-

¹⁷ See Watts, Okonta, and Von Kemedi's working paper "Economy of Violence: Petroleum, Politics and Community Conflict in the Niger Delta, Nigeria." (3)

¹⁸ I borrow the term "subnationalism" from John Boye Ejobowa's essay "Who Owns the Oil?: The Politics of Ethnicity in the Niger Delta" (2000). In this essay, Ejobowa distinguishes the "nation state" from "subnational communities" (ethnic communities in the Niger Delta) in order to highlight "two competing notions of citizenship" in Nigeria .

Determination (2008), “a still-ongoing process of imagining, inventing, and reinventing” (29)—a process stimulated by the Ogoni (particularly Ogoni intellectuals’) awareness that they have been marginalized historically and culturally as well as disadvantaged politically and economically since pre-colonial times. Similar to how Fulani identity was developed and reinforced via their experiences with European colonialists, as I have explained in the previous chapter, so Ogoni identity was also formed in the context of and in response to interactions with outsiders, interactions that included neighbors (including Ijaw traders and Igbo migrants) and Europeans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as more recent conflicts in their struggle for self-determination after the oil boom. Historically, the Ogoni have been ignored, compared to more centrally-organized ethnic groups in Nigeria, such as the Yoruba. Economically, the Ogoni never played a crucial role in trades, as opposed to Ijaw palm traders who dominated the economy of the Niger Delta before colonial rules. During colonial times, the Ogoni were culturally despised and perceived as “cannibals” by the European colonialists—as a lower ethnic group, in contrast to more politically organized, lighter-skinned Hausa-Fulani in northern Nigeria. Consequently, the marginalized Ogoni were also disadvantaged in participating in colonial politics, compared to the more-educated and mobilized Igbo. This disadvantaged situation continued after Nigerian independence when the country was controlled by majority ethnic groups of Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa-Fulani. The oil boom exacerbated the Ogoni marginal situation. Not only were the Ogoni blocked from equal participation in new national wealth, but their land was exploited and severely polluted by the oil industry. Though the oil boom reformed local governments, such as the Rivers State of which the Ogoni had been a part (since 1967), in that government the Ogoni were under-

represented and had little say in their own region even as they were the most affected by the rapid environmental changes of oil exploration and export.¹⁹ The oil economy thus exacerbated the Ogoni's position of being a minority population in Nigeria as well as a micro-minority in the Niger Delta. Paradoxically, of course, these multiple experiences of marginalization and exploitation continue to contribute to Ogoni re-examinations of what is meant by "Ogoniness" and/or what it is to be Ogoni.

The formation of *Ogoni-ness* under the oil economy therefore complicates the concept of ethnicity in the sense that Ogoni-ness refers not only to a cultural identity with an emphasis on a shared past and unique ethnic and cultural characteristics, but also to a political identity with an emphasis on legal representation, political participation, and economic redistribution. In contrast, the "community" in which the Ogoni reside is, as Michael Watts, Ike Okonta, and Dimieari Kemedi define in "Economies of Violence: Petroleum, Politics and Community Conflict in the Niger Delta, Nigeria" (2004), an "oil community" produced via the "oil complex" of the Niger Delta—"a configuration of community, oil company, and state and local government institutions (3). Yet as the competing interests of community, company, state, and local government make clear, the Ogoni do not have equal participation in this community, defined as it is by the oil economy under the Nigerian federation, the consequences of the oil-generated violence seen in the environmental degradation of the Ogoniland. As a result, Ogoni-ness from the 1970s onward coincided with a very local Ogoni nationalism that aimed at Ogoni representation in the Nigerian federation. Ogoni nationalism in the post-oil boom era

¹⁹ See Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and A Day* (1995) and Ike Okonta's *When Citizens Revolt*. During the oil boom, the Rivers State was dominated by the Ijaw, a minority of the Niger Delta. Because of that, the Ogoni intellectuals and activists of the 70s like Ken Saro-Wiwa were attempting to create a new regional state (Port Harcourt State) for the Ogoni. They never succeeded.

therefore should not be understood as a separatist independence movement, but rather as a civil rights movement with the goal of protection of ethnic minorities's rights and their participation in the Nigerian federation and an increased role in defining the reach of the Nigerian state.

The Ogoni asserted these positions largely via “legal routinization”—a process that according to Kelly and Kaplan’s *Represented Communities*, involves dynamics of political representation such as “strikes, boycotts, elections, commissions,” constitution-making, and bill-submission.²⁰ While an Ogoni nationalism can be traced back to the time before the Nigerian independence and has undergone several stages under different leadership, I will focus mainly on the role and leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa, particularly after the oil boom in the early 90s.²¹ Saro-Wiwa, a major leader of the Ogoni self-determination movement and an environmental activist/novelist, is known for his efforts to mobilize the Ogoni and his attempts to represent them on both the national and international scenes and for his execution by the state in 1995. In the speech he delivered at the Kagote Club (an Ogoni elite club) right after the submission of the Ogoni Bill of Rights (1990), Saro-Wiwa described the Ogoni as “fierce,” “independent,” productive, artistic, and resourceful, all of which, for Saro-Wiwa, contributed to the prosperity of Ogoni society in pre-colonial times and enabled the Ogoni to survive the eras of the trans-atlantic slave trade and British colonization (*A Month and a Day* 72). He also emphasized “the purity of the Ogoni” (72) in terms of their blood, culture, and language

²⁰ Kelly and Kaplan in their *Represented Communities* use Max Weber’s concept of “routinization” in order to critique Benedict Anderson’s theory, which for them, is based exclusively on Marx’s dialectics and means of productions in shaping modern nation-states. Kelly and Kaplan, instead, focuses on the role of “legal regulation” in the process of the post-WWII nation-building (6-9; 22-24).

²¹ Okonta’s *When Citizens Revolt* provides detailed chronological explanations of the development of the Ogoni identity/nationalism.

in order to distinguish them from the other peoples of the Niger Delta. However, British colonialism and “Nigerian domestic colonialism” (73) in Saro-Wiwa’s term, ruined Ogoniland and endangered the Ogoni.²² According to Saro-Wiwa in his speech, the Ogoni “merely exist; barely exist . . . Our languages are dying; our culture is disappearing” (74). Recognizing the threat of Nigeria’s oil economy to their culture, Saro-Wiwa urged an Ogoni identity politics as a form of resistance.²³

Demanding a “recognition” of Ogoniness, however, was not enough for Saro-Wiwa. Gaining political autonomy and equal rights as citizens in the Nigerian federation, as well as demanding a “redistribution” of the oil wealth based on Ogoniland, were his major goals.²⁴ While recognition could be achieved via public media, speech, and publication, the redistribution and representation had to be done via changes to law and regulations. The composition and submission of the Ogoni Bill of Rights (1990) by Saro-Wiwa as the president of Ogoni Central Union and signed by five of the six Ogoni kingdoms, revealed such a legal action (yet proved to be futile under the administration of the General Ibrahim Babangida).²⁵ The following is an excerpt from the Ogoni Bill of Rights that summarizes the Ogoni demand:

²² In his *A Month and A Day*, Saro-Wiwa describes “Nigerian domestic colonialism” as “a colonialism which is cruel, unfeeling and monstrous”: “Its method has been an outrageous denial of rights, a usurpation of our economic resources, a dehumanizations which has sought to demoralize our people by characterizing them as meek, obscure, and foolish” (73).

²³ As Saro-Wiwa pointed out in his speech, “Ogoni people must co-operate with one another, as individuals, as groups, because that is the only way we can survive. Wherever they may be, they must proclaim their Ogoniness, from the rooftop if possible” (*A Month and A Day* 75-76).

²⁴ For concepts of “recognition” and “redistribution,” see Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth’s *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (2003).

²⁵ Saro-Wiwa also brought the legal routinization of the Ogoni nation to the international level. After the Babangida administration denied the Ogoni Bill of Rights, Saro-Wiwa continued the fight, particularly with the help of the UN institution of representation and its affiliations, including Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Nigeria, the Nigerian Society for the Protection of the Environment, Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Africa (EMIROAF), the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Population, and the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples (UNPO). More details about Saro-Wiwa’s involvement with the UN, see the Chapter 4 of his *A Month and A Day*.

Republic of Nigeria, we make demand upon the Republic as follows:

That the Ogoni people be granted Political Autonomy to participate in the affairs of the republic as a distinct and separate unit by whatever name called, provided that this autonomy guarantees the following:

- a) Political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people;
- b) the right to control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development;
- c) adequate and direct representation as right in all Nigerian national institutions;
- d) the use and development of Ogoni languages in Ogoni territory;
- e) the full development of Ogoni culture;
- f) the right to religious freedom;
- g) the right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation.

We make the above demand in the knowledge that it does not deny any other ethnic group in the Nigerian Federation their rights and that it can only be conducive to peace, justice and fairplay and hence stability and progress in the Nigerian nation. (*A Month and A Day* 69)

Not only does the bill demand that the Ogoni should be politically autonomous and equally represented in the Nigerian federation, but it also re-imagines the structure of the Nigerian federation from an Ogoni point of view, which Saro-Wiwa identifies as “the Ogoni agenda” (*A Month and a Day* 77). Ogoni nationalism as proposed in the Ogoni Bill of Rights that aimed at legitimizing “the Ogoni agenda” can, for Saro-Wiwa, “save

Nigeria from future destruction” (*A Month and a Day* 76). Against a centralized official nationalism that provided citizenships by diluting ethnic particularities, “the Ogoni agenda” proposed that the Nigerian federation had to provide all of its people with citizenship via the recognition of difference and the enfranchisement of all ethnic groups, big or small. The Ogoni agenda’s concept of citizenship suggests a participatory and even symbiotic relationship between varied ethnic groups and the Nigerian state with an emphasis on the priority of ethnic groups rather than the state. In other words, the negotiation between citizenship and ethnicity foregrounds the role of “ethnicities” in formatting an African nation-state like Nigeria in the post-colonial era. In his essay “Who Owns the Oil: The Politics of Ethnicity in the Niger Delta of Nigeria” (2000), John Boye Ejobowah points out problems of “national” identity in Africa, claiming that in “sub-Saharan Africa, citizenship is most meaningful at the subnational level or ethnic group as opposed to the states” (32). In Saro-Wiwa’s formulation of citizenship as proposed by “the Ogoni agenda,” Okonta points out, there is “ambiguity” in the sense that the Ogoni or any other ethnic group in Nigeria is “a people who [had to] become tribesmen in order to become citizens” (74). The ambiguity of the Ogoni people as both “tribesmen” and “citizens” within the Nigerian federation suggests a possible model for a modern multi-ethnic nation-state developed in post-oil boom Nigeria—a nation-state based on the reclamation of both ethnicity and citizenship. In his speech at a book fair dedicated to Nigerian literature (1991), Saro-Wiwa re-asserted his belief in “the development of a stable, modern Nigeria which embraces civilized values; a Nigeria where no ethnic group or individual is oppressed, a democratic nation where minority rights are protected, education is a right, freedom of speech and association are guaranteed, and where merit

and competence are held as beacons” (*A Month and A Day* 82). Under Saro-Wiwa’s vision, Nigeria was re-imagined as an *utopia* that instead of being characterized by centralization and homogenization, would be a “federation of ethnic groups” (*A Month and a Day* 83) that foregrounded and reinforced democratic governance and protection of minorities’ rights.

While the submission of the *Ogoni Bill of Rights* was ignored by the Babangida administration, Saro-Wiwa began to bring Ogoni nationalism to the international level via international institutions of representation, including the United Nation and its affiliations.²⁶ At the international level, Saro-Wiwa emphasized the ecological degradation of Ogoniland as well as the attendant violation of the Ogoni human rights imposed by both the Nigerian government and the multi-national oil companies, as shown by one of the items listed in the *Addendum to the Ogoni Bill of Rights* (submitted to the UN):

That multi-national oil companies, namely Shell (Dutch/British) and Chevron (American) have severally and jointly devastated our environment and ecology, having flared gas in our villages for thirty-three years and caused oil spillages, blow-outs, etc, and have dehumanized our people, denying them employment and those benefits which industrial organization in Europe and America routinely contribute to their areas of

²⁶ See Saro-Wiwa’s *A Month and a Day*. As an *Addendum to the Ogoni Bill of Rights* (1991) states, “Now, therefore, while reaffirming our wish to remain a part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, we hereby authorize the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) to make representation, for as long as these injustices continue, to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the Common Wealth Secretariat, the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights, the European Community and all international bodies which have a role to play in the preservation of our nationality” (90).

operation. (*A Month and A Day* 91)

This formulation emphasizing environmental degradation and its impact on human rights shifted the discourse of Ogoni nationalism from a focus on an ethnic minority's civil rights to an environmental activism focused on the violation of human rights, community rights, and land rights. Saro-Wiwa's incorporation of environmentalism into "the Ogoni agenda" thus further complicated the dynamics of nationalism in postcolonial Nigeria. For Saro-Wiwa, oil pollution in Ogoniland is both an Ogoni issue and a "national" issue. Nigeria was re-imagined again by Saro-Wiwa—this time as a potential victim of a *larger* ecological disaster that might happen in the near future if the federation refused to conduct a good management of oil manufacturing by cooperating with the minorities of the Niger Delta. In a speech he delivered in 1991, Saro-Wiwa argued:

Oil pollution is a great menace to the Nigerian environment. I wish to warn that the harm being done to the environment of the Niger Delta must be ameliorated by the oil companies, which prospect for oil there; the degradation of the ecosystem must end and the dehumanization of the inhabitants of the areas must cease and restitution be made for past wrong.

The two tasks I have outlined above are fundamental to the health of the nation, and to the improvement of all other facets of our national life. (*A Month and A Day* 84)

Connecting environmentalism and the Ogoni agenda to issues of "the health of the nation" and "the improvement of all other facets of our national life," Saro-Wiwa re-asserts the inter-dependence between the Nigerian nation and the sub-nations of ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta in terms of the shared governance of civil and

environmental issues.

The “double movement” in Nigerian petro-nationalism as exemplified by the tension between the Nigerian nation-state and the Ogoni nation under the leadership of Saro-Wiwa therefore complicates a Western assumption about the formation of the postcolonial nation-state.²⁷ Fueled by oil, Nigerian nation-building project in the postcolonial era involves issues regarding how to enshrine (rather than transcend) multiple “ethnicities” (the real political components in Nigeria) in an abstract, overarching “national” machine operated by global capitalism. In addition, Saro-Wiwa’s emphasis on the importance of “local” ecologies, particularly on their potential influence on the health of the “national” life, also presents a unique rhetoric of nationalism in post-oil boom Nigeria, one that foregrounds the role of local environmentalism in shaping the Nigerian nation.

De/Constructing Nationalisms: Counter-National Allegory and Ambivalence in the *Bildungsroman* of the Niger Delta

The Nigerian oil boom and the aftermath have created not only a political phenomenon in recent Nigerian history as indicated by the “double movement” caused by the petro-nationalism/capitalism, but also a *literary* phenomenon as revealed by the emergence of the literature of the Niger Delta that often dramatizes the “oil complex” in the oil-producing region. Chinyere Nwahunanya, in the introduction to the edited volume *From Boom to Doom: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the Literature of the Niger*

²⁷ See Anderson’s “The Last Wave” in his *Imagined Communities*. “The interlock between particular education and administrative pilgrimages provided the territorial base for new ‘imagined communities’ in which natives could come to see themselves as ‘nationals.’” (140)

Delta (2011) describes the literature of the Niger Delta as indicating a new horizon of subject matter in Nigeria's literary history: "At some point in Nigeria's literary history, the Nigerian Civil War was the subject matter of popular choice, but it has been overtaken by the Niger Delta" (xiii). Focusing on the political productions of the Nigerian oil boom enables us to recognize that Nigeria's oil is not just a natural resource whose function is limited to its material utility, but is also a politico-ideological agent, one that engages nationalism in Nigeria in order to highlight the paradox of the mutual construction and deconstruction of the Nigerian nation-state and its ethnic counterparts. Nigeria's oil thus surprisingly is a shared trope in the literature of the Niger Delta, including Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*. In these texts, oil is identified as fundamental to the formation of oil communities in the Niger Delta and thus functions to question the discourses of nation/nationalism. In postcolonial ecocriticism, oil has been discussed largely in the manner of environmental justice, an approach that highlights exploitation, pollution, and human rights violation.²⁸ Saro-Wiwa's and Habila's novels, however, remind us that oil in the case of Nigeria is used not only as a trope for pollution, but also a trope for the nation/nationalism. Looking closely at oil as a trope for the nation/nationalism illuminates a double colonization of the Niger Delta in the postcolonial era, that is, colonization caused by both neocolonialism (imposed mainly by multi-national oil companies under the guidance of neoliberal capitalism) and domestic colonialism (imposed by the Nigerian nation-state/nationalism).

Both *Sozaboy* and *Oil on Water* critique the danger of nationalism on the

²⁸ See Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animalism, Environment* (2010) and Rob Nixon's "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism" (2005).

environment and minorities of the Niger Delta via the *bildungsroman*. The *bildungsroman*, a literary genre popularized in the European world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, originated in German literature with the nationalist agenda. The *bildungsroman* or the novel of formation foregrounds a kind of plot that is associated with a subject formation that corresponds to the emergence of the modern subjectivity—a subjectivity tied into modernity and the nation in the European world.²⁹ The protagonist of a *bildungsroman* is a figure (usually a white male) whose experience endorses modernity’s belief in progress and rationality and thus also functions as a mouthpiece of modernity’s political and cultural productions, such as the nation and nationalism. When this European genre is appropriated by postcolonial writers in twentieth century, it foregrounds particularities of “postcolonial” conditions that complicate and/or question the genre’s endorsement of European cultures and values.³⁰ In the case of Africa, the postcolonial African *bildungsroman* foregrounds African subjects’ struggle for independence.³¹ As Apollo Amoko, in his essay “Autobiography and *Bildungsroman* in African Literature” (2009), points out:

Like its European forebear, the emergence of the African *bildungsroman*

²⁹ See Franco Moretti’s *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, 2nd edition (2000); Jose Santiago Fernandez Vazquez’s “Subverting the *Bildungsroman* in Postcolonial Fiction: Romesh Gunasekera’s *Reef*” (1997) and “Recharging the Geography of Genre: Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* as a Postcolonial *Bildungsroman*” (2002); Simon Hey’s “Nervous Conditions, Lukacs, and the Postcolonial *Bildungsroman*” (2013).

³⁰ See Hey’s “Nervous Conditions, Lukacs, and the Postcolonial *Bildungsroman*” (2002); Mark Stein’s *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004); Water Collins’s *Tracing Personal Expansion: Reading Selected Novels as Modern African Bildungsroman* (2006); Apollo Amoko’s “Autobiography and *Bildungsroman* in African Literature” (2009); JoCollins’ “Novels of Transformation and Transplantation: The Postcolonial *Bildungsroman* and Haitian American Youth in Danticat’s *Behind the Mountains and Breath, Eyes, Memory*” (2012).

³¹ See Feroza Jussawalla’s “Kim, Huck, and Naipaul: Using the Postcolonial *Bildungsroman* to (Re)define Postcoloniality” (1997); Vazquez’s “Recharting the Geography of Genre”; Amoko’s “Autobiography and *Bildungsroman* in African Literature” (2009).

coincided with a period of radical transformation and social upheaval when, in the wake of colonialism, the traditional ways of being were seriously undermined, if not forever transformed. Like its European counterpart, the African *bildungsroman* focuses on the formation of young protagonists in an uncertain world. (200)

Amoko's commentary that underscores the timing of the emergence of the postcolonial African *bildungsroman*—that is, the time of independence and decolonization—automatically associates the African *bildungsroman* with the postcolonial nation. In spite of being read as national allegory, the postcolonial African *bildungsroman* do not often promote or endorse values of its European counterpart, but re-examines them instead, as the previous chapter's discussion of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) shows.³² Okri's *abiku* protagonist-narrator—a colonized subject that suffers endless cycles of life and death—is a metaphor for the nation's constant struggle for independence and reinvention, and through him the novel questions the possibility of the formation of the modern subjectivity/nation in Africa due to colonialism. Simon Hay, in his essay “*Nervous Conditions, Lukacs, and the Postcolonial Bildungsroman*” points out how the label “postcolonial *bildungsroman*” is “inherently contradictory” (318). For him, “*bildung*” and “postcolonial” are contradictory—thematically and formally—because the formation of the colonized subject is often not guaranteed due to the postcolonial conditions:

. . . the *bildungsroman*'s idea of successful adulthood is imperialist, colonial, and patriarchal and as such requires that colonized people,

³² See Vaquez's “Recharging the Geography of Genre.”

especially women, remain precisely objects and not subjects—strange semihumans in opposition to whom a modernized, adult self can emerge. If this is so, then the *bildungsroman*, from an anti-imperialist perspective, needs to be discarded, so that writers could work out for themselves entirely different modes of narrating and describing what “coming-of-age” is to mean, no longer embedded in European models. (322)

For Hay, in contrast to the traditional *bildungsroman* built upon the promise of the formation, the postcolonial *bildungsroman* subverts its European counterpart by foregrounding the absence or “deferment” of the formation (Hay 318). The postcolonial *bildungsroman* therefore echoes its European counterpart, as it is understood as a type of national allegory emerging in the times of transition, while at the same time paradoxically exposing limits of the genre in terms of the in/validity of the formation of the postcolonial nation/subjectivity.

In contrast to texts of the postcolonial *bildungsroman*, particularly ones set in the time of independence and understood in the framework of national allegory, the *bildungsroman* that surrounds Nigerian oil and confronts “the oil complex” of the Niger Delta presents a counter-national allegory instead. Looking closely at the oil-nation trope incorporated into the *bildungsroman* of the Niger Delta, specifically *Sozaboy* and *Oil on Water*, enables us to recognize a political agenda that complicates the anti-colonial agenda in the sense that it highlights “domestic colonialism” instead. The *bildungsroman* of the Niger Delta thus shows a double subversion of the genre used in postcolonial fictions. Not only does it challenge the European concept of the unity of the nation in accordance with the formation of the modern subjectivity, but it also questions the agenda

of anti-colonial nationalism commonly seen in much postcolonial *bildungsroman*.

Saro-Wiwa and Habila present counter-national allegories that revolve around the perspectives of minorities of the Niger Delta who express their alienation/exclusion from the national culture, politics, and economy. The *bildungsroman* narrated by a protagonist-narrator from minorities of the Niger Delta—Mene in *Sosaboy* and Rufus in *Oil on Water*—aims to disrupt the discourse of Nigerian official nationalism, or as Homi Bhabha puts it in the broader context of postcolonial literature, to “contest the traditional authority to those national objects of knowledge—Tradition, People, the Reason of State, High culture, for instance—whose pedagogical value often relies on their representation as holistic concepts located within an evolutionary narrative of historical continuity” (*Nation and Narration* 2-3). Through Mene’s and Rufus’s narrations of their own journey either to or out of their home environment, they undergo a formation that does not lead to an identification with the Nigerian nation or the values it provides, but rather an awareness of their marginalization and mis-recognition. The process of Mene’s and Rufus’s formations reveals their rebellion against assimilation and reconciliation with the national culture, as well as their constant struggle between centralism and localism, between “Nigerian” and ethnicities, and between modernity and tribalism. Their rebellion and struggle highlight the role of minorities of the Niger Delta in participating in de/constructing nationalisms in Nigerian history. Unique perspectives provided by the minorities, in Bhabha’s words, present approaches that are “valuable in drawing our attention to those easily obscured, but highly significant, recess of the national culture from which alternative constituencies of peoples and oppositional analytic capacities may emerge—youth, the everyday nostalgia, new ‘ethnicities, new social movements, the

politics of difference:” “They assign new meanings and different directions to the process of historical change” (3, *Nation and Narration*). Highlighting the perspectives from minorities of the Niger Delta reminds us that Nigeria is always in the process of re-imagining and de/constructing, as Bhabha points out, a “nation-space in the *process* of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are in *medias res*; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made” (3).

Sozaboy and *Oil on Water* provide an alternative way to look at the postcolonial Nigerian nation state—from a bottom-up perspective that highlights *differences* rather than a top-down perspective that demands homogenization (of the sort celebrated in the FESTAC '77 run by the Nigerian federation). “The nation” in these novels thus contests “the nation” as envisioned by the Nigerian federation (that sees the oil boom as unifying Nigeria and initiating Nigerian modernity), or “the nation” as conceptualized in the Western worlds (that see the nation as a product of modernity that reflects historical continuity). Such asymmetrical concepts of the nation underscore the “ambivalence”³³ of the postcolonial nation-state, as Bhabha puts it: “it emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the ‘origins’ of nation as a sign of the ‘modernity’ of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality” (*Nation and Narration* 1). In the case of Nigeria, while the oil boom, a historical contingency, created Nigerian nationalism of the 70s, it is minorities’ suspicions of and rebellion against the top-down nationalism as dramatized by Saro-Wiwa and Habila that create narrative spaces (from the bottom-up) that expose the ambivalence of the Nigerian nation-state. Saro-Wiwa and Habila turn the Niger Delta

³³ In his *Nation and Narration*, Bhabha states, “Nation is by nature ‘ambivalent.’” (2)

into a narrative interstice where antagonizing ideologies, discourses or subjects clash and compete. These conflicts include those between nationalism and sub-nationalism, between localism and centralism, between the state-run environmentalism (resource control) and local environmentalism (land-oriented tribalism), between the inhabitants/minorities and the government, and between the military and the militants. While postcolonialism and postcolonial ecocriticism have produced a large amount of scholarship on the Niger Delta, particularly on Saro-Wiwa, critics have paid more attention to his human rights and environmental activism than to his literary achievements.³⁴ Instead of simply treating his literary work as a background for his environmental activism, an Africa-focused ecocriticism also pays attention to the aesthetics of his writing, treating them as another form of activism performed via particular literary devices.

In the Name of Salt/Oil: the Minority, Nationalism, and Resource Control in *Sozaboy*

Sozaboy is an anti-war novel narrated by Mene, a young apprentice driver born and raised in a small town Dukana. Mene's narrative focuses on his experience as a minority and his people's relation to bigger political entities, including "the Government," "the Enemy," and "the country," to all of which they are forced to succumb. Mene is attracted by the rhetoric of the government with an emphasis on his

³⁴ See Huggan and Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*; Nixon's "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism" and *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011); Laura Wright's *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial Environment* (2010); Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011); Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt's *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives* (2010); Deane Curtin's *Environmental Ethics for A Postcolonial World* (2005).

responsibility as a citizen of the country, as well as by the romanticization of war as related to masculinity. However, Mene's disillusion from his war time experience contributes to his realization of his status as a minority subject. Though throughout the novel no specific ethnic groups, names, and political regimes are mentioned, and nor are "Nigeria" and "Nigerian Civil War," the Dukana can be identified as a minority group of the Niger Delta who stand in for the Ogoni, based on Mene's description of the location (between rivers and forests) and the life style of the Dukana (fishing and farming). "The government" can refer to either the Nigerian Military Federation (the first junta) or the Republic of the Biafra. Since Mene indicates "the new government" as "the government of soza and police" (1), I assume that it refers to the Nigerian Military Federation. In that sense, "the Enemy" should refer to the Biafran State, though it is ambiguous throughout the novel. As Mene finally reveals, "the Enemy" paradoxically refer to both sides of the war as proven by the character "Manmuswak" who works for both sides. Mene highlights his experience with this ambiguous character in order to foreground the conflicts between the minorities and their oppressors. *Sozaboy*, using the Nigerian Civil War as a background, is a counter national allegory that dramatizes the minority's situation in the sense that no matter which side the Dukana people (or Ogoni) take, they are all victims.³⁵

Sozaboy has attracted a lot of scholarly attention, particularly the novel's narrative and language in relation to the author's social, political and moral criticisms.³⁶ While the

³⁵ Either the Yoruba-dominated Nigerian Military Federation or the Igbo-ruled Biafra.

³⁶ The scholarship of *Sozaboy* mainly focuses on the language of the novel in terms of how Saro Wiwa uses what he called "Rotten English" as a political tool in order to show the power structure of the Nigerian society that is composed of the powerful/the ethnic majorities and the powerless/the ethnic minorities. See Maureen N. Eke's "The Novel: *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*"(1999); David Eka's "Aspects of Language in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*" (2000); Michael North's "Ken Saro-

novel has been treated as as a *bildungsroman*,³⁷ few critics connect Saro-Wiwa's appropriation of the genre to the plight of minorities of the Niger Delta. I argue that reading *Sozaboy* as a *bildungsroman* of the Niger Delta enables us to see how the novel deploys that form in order to challenge it, and in doing so, questions of minorities of the Niger Delta, specifically ones related to the legitimacy of the Nigerian nation, are highlighted. While Mene highlights his struggle between localism (Dukana) and centralism ("the government" or the nation) or between his ethnicity (the Dukana people) and the nation (Nigeria or Biafra?), his identity formation shows his struggle between two identities in conflict—between a Dukana boy, who imagines himself being rich as an apprentice driver, and a "sozaboy" who imagines himself being part of the national power and sharing the national wealth. Mene, the protagonist-narrator of *Sozaboy*, therefore should be recognized not as "a kind of everyman" or an ordinary "Nigerian," but rather as a *minority* voice from the Niger Delta whose coming-of-age experience narrates a particular "national" experience that indicates national failure or at least the faultiness and parameters of the Nigerian nation in the late twentieth century. Mene's formation that is stimulated and contributed by his experience with the Nigerian Civil War (or the Biafran war) of 1967-70 reveals not only his moral and mental growth (his anti-war attitude), but also more importantly, his realization of his status as a minority subject (in both sides of the war) in opposition to a citizen under the protection of his nationality.

Wiwa's *Sozaboy: The Politics of 'Rotten English'* (2001); Akachi Ezeigbo's "Discordant Tongues: Language and Power in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*" (2008).

³⁷ Some critics look at the novel as a *bildungsroman* or a "child soldier narrative" that highlights the narrator-protagonist's moral growth and his formation contributed by his experience of the war. See Helen Chukwuma's Characterization and Meaning in *Sozaboy* (1992); Charles Nnolim's "Saro-Wiwa's World and His Craft in *Sozaboy*" (1992); and Patrick Corcoran's "'Child' Soldiers in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* and Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah N'est pas Oblige*" (2002).

Seeing questions of the minorities as the backbone of Saro-Wiwa's literary creation cautions us not to treat the novel as simply critiquing universal moral corruptions caused by war or social corruptions in Nigeria, but to read Saro-Wiwa's discussion of the Nigerian Civil War as a background that highlights the plight of minorities of the Niger Delta, as minorities might suffer any centralized political system resulting from the war (the "Nigerian" federation or the "Biafran" State) and accompanying forms of nationalism.

In *Sozaboy*, Saro-Wiwa deliberately creates a protagonist-narrator with a limited point of view as revealed in Mene's limited understanding of (standard) English that he uses to narrate his experience in order to foreground the plight of minorities of the Niger Delta in regard to the nation. For Mene, Dukana is geographically isolated and socially, economically, and politically marginalized. As he describes,

Dukana is far away from any better place in this world. You must go far in motor before you can get to Pitakwa. All the houses in the town are made of mud. There is no good road or drinking water. Even the school is not fine and no hospital or anything. The people of Dukana are fishermen and farmers. They no know anything more than fish and farm. Radio self they no get. How can they know what is happening? Even myself who travel everyday to Pitakwa township with plenty brick house and running water and electric, I cannot understand *what is happening* well well, how much less all these simple people tapping palm wine and making fisherman, planting yam and cassava in Dukana? (4 italics mine)

While Mene understands how the remoteness of Dukana makes it isolated and less developed compared to bigger cities like Pitkawa, something more specific in his narrative above (as suggested by “I cannot understand what is happening well well”) indicates what the Dukana people are really marginalized from: Dukana people do not have direct access to the government where power is exercised and decisions are made. They are looking forward to the coming of the new government for they expect that the new government will end their suffering and make their life much better; however, they have no ideas about “the trouble” attached to the new regime. The Dukana people do not have the access to the particulars of “the trouble” that turns out to be the war fought between a Yoruba-dominated Nigerian Federation and the Igbo-ruled Biafran State. The only information they can get about this new regime is via radio; however, they do not fully understand the language they hear from the radio. The gap between the Dukana people and this new government everyone is talking about is not only a cultural gap, but a linguistic one—a gap caused by the “big big grammar” and “long long words” (3). Language thus represents the initial stumbling block that prevents Dukana people from participating in the national dialogue. The first few pages of Mene’s narrative expresses the ambiguous relationship between the Dukana people and the government as dramatized by two languages that do not correspond with each other—the language of the government (“big big grammar”) versus the language of Mene’s narrative that Saro-Wiwa called “rotten English.” “Rotten English,” according to Saro-Wiwa, is “a mixture of Nigerian pidgin English, broken English, and occasional flashes of good, and even idiomatic English”—an English that is “disordered and disorderly” (*Sozaboy*, Author’s Note).

Saro Wiwa uses “Rotten English” to characterize Mene not only to make his protagonist-narrator sound “authentic” but to address the inequality existing in the Nigerian society where minorities have limited access to education, let alone participation in national affairs.

Fittingly, however, “Rotten English,” while limiting the access a minority character like Mene has to the national participation and mobility, creates a narrative fissure that serves as a disruptive agent that serves to re-articulate and re-configure the make-up of the Nigerian nation in the narrative. In this fashion, Mene’s narrative composed of “Rotten English” represents a narrative space that highlights the ambivalence of the Nigerian nation/nationalism. Mene’s narrative—broken, ambiguous, contradictory, and disruptive—can thus be read not only as a victim narrative but also a *resistance narrative* that functions to disrupt and unveil the self-serving nationalism under which the minority is subsumed. Through Mene’s translation of what Chief Birabee says about the order he receives from “the Government,” Mene re-articulates a discourse of Nigerian nationalism in the language he understands, yet his re-articulation interestingly illuminates the oppressive nature of that discourse imposed on the minorities:

“My people, listen to me very carefully. As all of you know, there is plenty of trouble now. True, the trouble never reach Dukana yet. But plenty of trouble dey all the same. So therefore, nobody here must give trouble. At All. Because Dukana people do not give trouble since the world begin. Now, Government say we must give money, chop, and cloth to all those who run home. Because we are good people, we must respect

and obey government. Everybody. Man. Woman. Picken. Anybody ho get money, chop or cloth must bring it. We give am to those porsons wey jus return. Is not by force, oh. We cannot byforce anybody. That is what government talk. But as you know, government cannot talk say it will by force anybody. But talk that it is byforcing anyone, still it will byforce. So therefore, we must try to find all those things that government is asking for.” (6)

Under Mene’s translation, Chief Birabee’s speech that points out the authority of “the Government” as well as the responsibility of Dukana as citizens of the Nigerian nation (the Dukana people as “good people”) reveals the colonial, exploitative nature of the Nigerian federation with regard to questions of the minorities. Under the Nigerian federation, the Dukana people are not just under-represented, but not represented at all. Chief Birabee’s sincerity reveals that he does not function as a representative of the Dukana but as a cog of the national apparatus. Dukana interest is not really the government’s interest, yet they have to submit to the government’s orders. Dukana is therefore treated more as a colony of the new regime rather than as members of the nation (domestic colonialism).

The initial phase of Mene’s narrative is shaped by his limited understanding of “the trouble” as well as his suspicion of “the government” and the Dukana relationship with it. Mene’s evolving narrative shows the dynamic nature of his identity formed by the tension between his minority ethnicity and nationality. The coming of “the new government” and “the trouble” introduces him to the concept of “the country” (7)—a community in which he is automatically included (by listening to the radio and Chief

Birabee's speech), yet one that he cannot really touch and participate in (because of "the big big grammar"). Though Mene's point of view is limited because of his status as a minority, Mene is by no means characterized as unreliable or simply too funny (to take him seriously). Mene is naïve, but—like most protagonist of traditional *bildungsromans*—he also has the potential to grow. As Mene says,

I myself as apprentice driver in 'Progress', I am going to Pitakwa everyday, I am learning new new things. In the motor park, I must speak English with other drivers and apprentice and passengers. Even some time I will see all those small small books that they are selling in the park. . . . I will use some of the money to buy the books and improve my English. So I was getting money and learning plenty things. (12)

Saro-Wiwa presents his protagonist-narrator as a "cosmopolitan" who travels frequently and learn new things constantly in order to suggest how a minority subject like Mene, like a contemporary Ogoni, is not trapped in the past or passively and ignorantly subject of politics, but is in fact an active agent in the present. As Mene travels and collects information about "the trouble of the country" (17), so his cosmopolitanism urges him to respond to "the trouble" and make decisions about it.

Despite his cosmopolitanism, Mene's agency, and by extension (following the allegorical logic of the *bildungsroman* as Saro-Wiwa conceives of it) the agency of the Ogoni, is severely conditioned or limited by the context of a dominant Nigerian nationalism. Saro-Wiwa dramatizes the effect of nationalism, particularly the imposition of its ideological-administrative apparatuses, on the psychology of a minority subject as displayed by Mene's ambivalent attitude toward the nation/government in order to

highlight the manipulative and rhetorical nature of nationalism. When the sozamen first visit Dukana, not only is the concept of the nation, but also its ideological apparatuses, including the “sovereignty” of the government, the “pride” of sozas (soldiers), the “responsibility” of citizens, and the “necessity” of patriotism—are further imposed on the Dukana people. As Chief Birabee told the Dukana, “I am friend of the government now, you see. You stupid people of Dukana. When I tell you to do what I say, you cannot understand. Do you see now? Government have sent soza here to come and see you people, protect you people, love your sons and daughters.” (39-40). Behind the propaganda of nationalism that highlights the mutual responsibility of the government and the citizen is, in reality, the government’s justification of giving orders and pillaging Dukana. As Chief Birabee gave orders on behalf of the sozas: “Ehm, tell everybody to bring out all the goats, chicken, and plantain they have. We must give it to these big sozas, my friends who have been getting here in Dukana.” (39). Bombarded with the propaganda from the government, the Dukana people are persuaded that they “must” support the war and work for the country in order that they can benefit from values like patriotism and masculinity. Agnes, the woman Mene met at the bar and became his wife later in the story, constantly gives Mene an impression that sozas are “fine fine” and “brave” men (40) and suggests to Mene that she needs a brave man like a soza to protect her during the trouble (43). In addition, Mene’s Dukana friends, Zaza, a WWII veteran who fought in Burma, also questions Mene’s masculinity, as he said, “Let young people like Mene here go and fight.” (34). Duzia, a crippled man in Dukana, also encourages Mene to fight, as he said, “the young men should go and fight now. It is their time.” (34). The propaganda plus the pressure from his own people leads Mene to make his first

judgment about soza, one that will lead to his decision to go to war—"I think it is a good thing to go to army. To be soza, Praps" (43). Mene's approval of going to war exposes the manipulative nature of nationalism: joining the war is a way to become a "real" man and upgrade your social status.

"Praps," which means "perhaps," however, also suggests Mene's ambivalent attitude toward the war. Mene is actually attracted by, while simultaneously reluctant to join the war. The ambiguity of Mene's attitude toward nationalism and its military apparatus, the war, underscores the ambivalence of the nation as promoted during the Nigerian Civil War (and by extension, during the Nigerian oil boom): the nation is inclusive, yet is also oppressive. Mene's ambivalent attitude is further indicated by his dream (nightmare) in which he is afraid of being recruited to the military, as well as his trip to Pitakwa where he is awed and amused by the spectacle of the marching and singing sozas. Saro-Wiwa presents these two episodes consecutively—one about Mene's reluctance to join the military and the other about his attraction to it—in order to underscore the ambivalence of Nigerian nationalism. On the one hand, via Mene's dream, nationalism represents an oppressive and intimidating force that activates his sense of inferiority as well as violates his will as a minority in the nation. In his dream, the soza leader delivered a speech on why Dukana boys should join the military. Like the talk on the radio, the soza leader's language of the speech is full of "big big words and grammar" that do not really communicate but rather impose:

The man with fine shirt stood up. And begin to talk in English. Fine fine English. Big Big words. Grammar, Fantastic. "Overwhelming. Generally. In particular and in general." Haba, God no go vex. But he did not stop

there. The big grammar continued. “Odious. Destruction. Fighting.” I understand that one. “Henceforth. General mobilisation. All citizens. Able-bodies. Join the military. His Excellency. Powers conferred on us. Volunteers. Conscription.” Big big words. Long long grammar. “Ten Head. Vandals. Enemy.” Everybody was silent. Everywhere was silent like burial ground. Then they begin to interpret all that long grammar plus big big words in Kana. In short what the man is saying is that all those which can fight will join the army. (46-47)

Mene’s translation of the man’s speech—though broken and clumsy—serves to highlight the *discursive* nature of nationalism in the sense that nationalism is reliant on the incomplete understanding of its elevated discourse. On the other hand, nationalism has a tangible, material component, delivered via the spectacle of the marching soldiers Mene saw in Pitakwa. Via this spectacle, nationalism provides a medium through which Mene re-imagines himself as someone more substantive than a Dukana apprentice driver:

Then I saw the people who were singing it. Young young boys like myself, all of them with gun and uniform. It is that uniform that I like very much. When I see how they are all marching, prouiding and singing, I am very happy. But when I see all their uniform shining and very very nice to see, I cannot tell you how I am feeling. Immediately, I know that this soza is wonderful thing. With gun and uniform and singing. And marching, left, right, left, right, my father don’t you worry, left right, my mother don’t you worry, left right. (53)

For Mene, the marching of sozas, along with its attendant values, underscores the

provinciality of Dukana, making it downgraded as “bush” (compared to the more glorious “nation”) (52). Nationalism as highlighted in Mene’s narrative is thus not a recognition of how one fits into the nation, but a desire to be someone different with a different role. Saro-Wiwa highlights Mene’s ambivalence in order to critique how nationalism is not, in fact “progressive” and “inclusive” but fascist and hegemonic in this presentation. Mene’s struggle, as displayed in his dream and the spectacle he sees, interestingly shows his participation in de/constructing the meaning of the Nigerian nation/nationalism from the point of view of a minority.

Mene’s experience with the government of the sozas that underscores the hegemony of nationalism also highlights the complicity of Nigerian nationalism and resource control that exacerbates the minorities’ situation. Read from the perspective of resource control, *Sozaboy* is an oil novel ironically without “oil.” For Saro-Wiwa, the major cause of the Nigerian Civil War was the ethnic majorities’ competition over the control of oil in the Niger Delta.³⁸ *A Month and A Day* suggests that Saro-Wiwa started to write *Sozaboy* during the oil boom when oil became nationalized (though the novel was not published until 1985). Perhaps to avoid censorship, Saro-Wiwa substitutes civil war for the oil boom as the background of his story in order to critique the federal government’s control of natural resources in the Niger Delta. In *Sozaboy*, Saro-Wiwa dramatizes the complicity between nationalism and resource control by using “salt” instead of oil. Substituting “salt” for oil, Saro-Wiwa is able to show the structural causes for the situation rather than get caught up in the politics of oil in particular.

Salt in Dukana, like oil in the Niger Delta, is a trope. As Nigerian oil is referred to

³⁸ See Saro-Wiwa’s *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (1992) and *A Month and a Day*.

as a natural resource as well as a national symbol for wealth and a political agent for nationalism, so “salt” in Mene’s narrative is referred to a sustenance of the Dukana as well as values of their life. Minority groups like the Dukana in *Sozaboy* or the Ogoni of the Niger Delta, have limited or almost no access to natural resources (salt/oil) under the oppression of nationalism. The Dukana, have to participate in national affairs, such as joining the military and fighting in the war, in order to regain their access to salt. “Salt” thus provides the Dukana with a a sustenance for survival as well as a social and political agency with regard to their status in the nation. In *Sozaboy*, Zaza’s experience of salt shortage in Dukana during the WWII foregrounds a discourse of nationalism that emphasizes the subordinate role of colonial subjects and/or minorities in accessing resources: only when the colonized or the minorities (like the Dukana people) fight for his “nation” (the “British Empire” and/or “Nigeria”) could they have a chance to share resources like “salt.” As Zaza says, “So I tell him [the British District Officer] it is because that man Hitla is stopping salt from reaching my people in Dukana and I cannot allow that type of thing otherwise all my people will die because of no salt which will be big shame for ever because to die because of no salt means that porson is very very poor and it is big shame to be poor.” (27). Zaza’s WWII experience serves as a reminder to Mene that after independence, the minority status of Dukana does not really improve in terms of resource distribution. In Mene’s case, moreover, “salt” is used as a trope for extended values of life, including pride, camaraderie, and masculinity—values that are emphasized to boost Dukana pride, yet ironically feed and support Nigerian nationalism. *Sozaboy* includes a speech delivered by an unnamed Dukana character that Mene calls “the thick man” (probably a man with education) in order to highlight that irony. In his

speech, “salt” is connected to the virtue of good, brave Dukana men who should fight for their own people and bring glory back to Dukana:

What are you fearing, you people of Dukana? Where will this fear take you to? Everytime you are dancing, singing, and you do now know what is happening outside, and you do not ask. All these sozas who are coming to tief and beat up people in Dukana, making debt collectors, are they not men like ourselves? Why is there no Dukana boy among the sozas? Cannot our own boys join the sozas? Suppose Dukana boy is soza do you think they will beat our Zaza, that old soza, as they beat am the other day? No, you people. Don't forget that you are salt. And salt must inside your salt otherwise they will throw you away like *mumu*, foolish idiot, Amen.

(43)

If Zaza's fighting for salt and the dignity of his people has to be achieved by fighting for the British Empire, then, similarly Mene's desire to bring glory and salt back to Dukana can only be fulfilled by fighting for the nation. Zaza's experience and the thick man's speech thus depict salt's relevance to daily life of the minorities and their social statuses with an emphasis on a large degree they have to participate in the nation/nationalism. Saro-Wiwa incorporates the salt/oil metonymy in order to highlight how minorities like the Dukana have no choice but to cooperate with the government, for that is the only way they could have a chance to gain access to the resource (salt/oil), as well as the political and social values attached to that resource. Mene's decision to go to the war provides him a formative power. For him, joining the army and becoming a soza will expand the scope of his identity and increase the value of his life.

Mene's experience in the army (particularly his experience in the soza-training camp) critiques how Nigerian nationalism uses its machine of war to invent a new people ("sozas")—a people whose identities are reshaped through the internalization of nationalist values on their bodies (via objects like "uniform" and "gun") and into their minds (via slogans like "war is war"). Similar to "Nigerians" created during the oil boom in order to promote Nigerian nationalism—a people that transcends ethnic particularities as explained by Andrew Apter³⁹—"sozas" as portrayed by Saro-Wiwa are created by the military government during the civil war to fully support the nation as well as to personify the ideals of the nation, including pride, power, and glory. In this phase, Mene is renamed "sozaboy" (65) and enjoys his new identity. However, it is not until he receives military training during which he puts on a "soza uniform" and is equipped with a "gun" that he feels his full transformation in terms of his national identity. Mene "inside" the soza uniform is transformed from "sozaboy" to "soza proper" (72-73):

It is this uniform that I am waiting for. As soon as I have it, I will know that I am soza proper. So we continue to march up and down. . . . Then after about one month, one fine day, they called us to the store. And gave us uniform. Oh how I am prouiding because of this uniform! Look how strong and can stand by itself. And when I wear it, it fits me *helele*. In fact I am thinking as I am wearing that uniform for the first time how Agnes will feel if she sees me inside it. And if Zaza and Bom see it, they will also be prouiding because Dukana boy is now inside new fine soza uniform.

(72)

³⁹ See the hapter titled "Producing the People" in Apter's *The Pan-African Nation* (2005).

Mene's "soza uniform" is not just a surface but a space of identity that he can occupy. "Inside" the uniform, Mene feels that he is a legitimate member of the nation (as a soza "proper"). The "uniform" represents a nation-space—an abstract, yet seemingly potential and neutral space that a minority subject like Mene can touch and invest in. However, "uniform," the outfit that upgrades Mene's social status, also alienates him from his family and his connection to Dukana. Since "uniform" also means the state of being the same, the uniform obliterates personal backgrounds and destroys traditional ties Mene once possessed. Soza-training thus makes people homogenized through uniforms and guns, erasing both ethnic difference and personal will as the sozas surrender to the authority of the nation.

Mene's new identity as a "soza proper," however, conflicts with his moral consciousness. Saro-Wiwa focuses on the discrepancy between Mene's national identity and his morality at this stage of his formation in order to highlight illusions about the war imposed by nationalism. Mene soon realizes that the war he is fighting has little to do with glory, pride, and camaraderie, but more to do with deception, betrayal, insult, brutality, and death. Realities of the war justify the slogan that "war is war" (75), yet violates Mene's morality. Saro-Wiwa dramatizes the discrepancy between Mene's identity as a soza and his morality via his characterizations of two other figures in the novel with whom Mene closely interacts during the war—Bullet and Manmuswak. Bullet is a character (the leader of Mene's camp) that shows Mene brotherhood and provides him with friendship during the war, while Manmuswak, the opposite of Bullet, is a character (works mainly for "the Enemy") that blurs the boundary between "the friend" and "the enemy," manipulating them to gain whatever he wants during the war. Bullet

fulfills Mene's romantic imaginings about the war and his career as a soza. Bullet's rank is above Mene's. He is probably from different ethnic group than Mene's and has received more education than Mene. In spite of those elements that separate their experiences, Bullet and Mene's develop a shared camaraderie due to their war experiences. It is shortlived, however, as Mene witnesses Bullet being insulted by other sozas in higher rank provides a new perception of the war: the war has nothing to do with brotherhood but more about corruption, greed, and manipulation of hierarchy among people: "My brother, I cannot tell you what I was thinking that night. I see for my eyes as the soza captain was urinating into the bottle and as he gave the bottle to Bullet. I see as Bullet closed his eyes to drink that bottle of urine. I see as the soza captain was laughing. I see Manmuswak with his white handkerchief. I see all these things. And I see other things" (103). Mene underscores the realities of his wartime experience ("I see"), in contrast to his imaginations about the war, in order to critique how war that occurs in the name of the nation dehumanizes people. His shock suggests that the larger ideals of the nation come at the expense of dehumanizing people, particularly the minorities. Mene's witnesses to the casualties of an air-raid conducted by Manmuswak further highlights this process of dehumanizing during the war: "All our camp don broke down well well. Everywhere was full of pit and pit and pit. And inside one pit, you will see the head of soza, and in another pit, the leg of soza and in another pit, the hand of soza. Everywhere, soso human flesh in small small pieces! Finger, hair . . ." (111). For Mene, war does not elevate human beings but instead exposes their vulnerability ("human flesh in small small pieces!"). As the only survivor of the attack, Mene comes to a conclusion that "the war is a very bad thing" (113).

In contrast to Bullet, Manmuswak is the character in the novel that perfectly personifies the concept that “war is war”—a figure that carries no conscience, no morality, and no compassion. He first appears in the novel as a soza who works for the side of the enemy, yet provides cigarettes and drinks to Mene’s camp. He acts like a “friend” in preparation for the air-raid that intends to kill all of the sozas in Mene’s camp. The second time Manmuswak appears in the novel is when Mene is captured by the enemy after his camp is destroyed. This time, he appears ironically as a nurse who takes care of Mene. Manmuswak is an allegorical figure that represents and propagates the character of the nation. As the nation paradoxically includes and excludes/oppresses (as manifested by the experience of the Dukana people), so Manmuswak can play the role ironically as a nurse who take care of people and also as a killing machine. As the nation paradoxically preserves and destroys the people, so Manmuswak can save and kill Mene any time:

He [Manmuswak] told me that his work is war. And war means many things to soza like himself. You can be anything when there is war. He say that he can carry gun and dead body. Chooking needles and grenade. And he is real soza. He will fight if they just tell him to fight. Anywhere. Anytime. And he must obey because orders is orders. And no nonsense. He can fight and kill his brother, he does not care. He can be friend today and enemy tomorrow. He does no care. Once it is war. (120)

Mene’s experience in the war and his interaction with Manmuswak teach him a clear idea of what it is really like to be a minority with regard to the nation/the war: no matter which side of the war he takes and whether or not he participates in the war/national affairs, he

is fated to be sacrificed:

And I will be seeing how there is nobody for road at all only sometimes rotten man or woman with soso bone and sometimes a dog looking for something to chop. True, true, every time when I see something like that, I will just remember Bullet and all those boys in my group who are now spirits all because of this Manmuswak who have save my life. And then I will remember that war is useless nonsense and all this uniform and everything is just to cause confusion and make porson fine like goat that they have make fat and ready to kill for chop during Christmas. So I was not very happy. (127)

When Mene joins the military in the Nigerian Federation, he and his fellow sozas like Bullet are trampled upon by those big sozas who are probably from ethnic majorities. When he is a soza in “enemy’s uniform,” his life depends on Manmuswak, probably a majority member who knows politics of both sides and can manipulate the situation. In this world, minorities, like “goats,” are meant to be sacrificed for the sake of the nation they are obliged to serve but will never be recognized and equally represented.

Sozaboy presents an anti-national allegory as manifested in the final stage of Mene’s formation: instead of becoming a “Nigerian,” an identity imposed on Mene through a top-down community-thinking, Saro-Wiwa’s protagonist-narrator abandons his national identity as a soza and reclaims his local identity. In this final phase, he expresses a strong sense of community and of belonging to “Dukana. He constantly calls the Dukana people “my people:” “I was thinking to myself how I will just drive the land rover straight to the war front and I will just cross the other side to see if my people are

there” (137). Mene in this final stage also shows that he has developed a stronger personal voice and opinion. When Mene witnesses Bullet being bullied by sozas in higher rank, he starts to develop a sense of a distinctive self driven by his morality in opposition to a “corrupt” national self provided by his uniform that dictates silence and absolute obedience. The last portion of Mene’s narrative is composed of assertive expressions, such as those like “I tell you” or “I am telling you” rather than of passive voices, such as those like “they said” or “people said” as more often seen earlier in his narrative: “I will not allow anybody to tell me that this is enemy and the other is no enemy. They are all doing the same thing” (139). The change of Mene’s tone in narrating his experience of the war shows how his experience as a soza in both sides of the war has made him grow up and realize the inevitable difficulties a minority group like the Dukana people will have to face in an oppressive nation, which he describes as a “wicked world.” “I am not small boy again. That I cannot keep on thinking of my mama and Agnes because the other things that I am seeing in this war are even more important than anything that can happen to me or to my family. I begin to think that the world is not a good place even. That if person die, it is better for that person than to continue to live in this wicked world” (164). Mene’s dream about becoming a member of the nation and possessing the power and wealth that the nation promised turns out to be a delusion. For Saro-Wiwa, a minority’s life is a bare, disposable life—a life that in *Sozaboy*, is further displayed by Mene’s representation of the refugees who he finds his people become during the war.

Saro-Wiwa focuses on the displacement of the Dukana in the final phase of Mene’s journey in order to critique the danger of nationalism in terms of human rights violations. Dukana, representing Ogoniland, is exploited in the name of nationalism. The

war destroys Mene's home village (129), turning his people into simply "refugees" (147), a displaced and dispossessed people deprived of dignity and without cultural presence.

Mene describes Nugwa, the first refugee camp where he visits in order to find his people, as a "human compost pit" where people are thrown away like "rubbish" (148):

I begin cry when I see all these men and women without no clothes at all, some of them with dirty clothes round them waist and some with cloth full of holes. And all of them carrying small small bowl or dish waiting for small gari without no fish or meat. And not even good water to drink. And many of them sleeping on leaves of banana that they have cut because they have no mat. . . . And all these people with long long hair, and big big belly, and mosquito legs, with their eyes inside inside their long long face were very many in every camp. And many of them were crying because of sickness or hungry or because dem brother was dying and all of them with black body so, so that when you look far, it is like either bad forest in the night or like mangrove swamp when the water have gone to visit the ocean. (148)

For Mene, "refugees" are a new collective identity of the minorities. They possess no ethnic distinctions and cultural references but bare bodies merged with the surrounding nature ("black body" like "bad forest in the night" or "mangrove swamp"). Similar to Nugwa, Urua, a "refugee town" (150) where Mene finally finds his people, redefines refugees by showing that statelessness created by the war is not a temporary status of being, but is a way of existence for displaced minorities: "True true, this Urua is not just a camp. It is a new town, new dirty town born by the foolish war" (150). Urua presents a

horrid spectacle of the abject refugees, in contrast to the glorious spectacle of the uniformed sozas Mene earlier encountered and admired in Pitkawa:

If I have seen black forest or black swamp before, it is lie. Because the only black forest or black swamp in this world is Urua. So many people, oh God! And all of them put together in one wide open space. And some are sleeping, some are walking, some are cooking, some are drawing water, some are cutting firewood, some are wearing cloth that have tear, some have no cloth at all, many picken with big big belly and mosquito legs, some picken just look like young ghost. (150)

Mene's representation of the abjectivity of Urua disrupts a univocal narrative of the nation. The particulars of the abject, as Mene sees in Urua, are in stark contrast to the univocal consistency of the uniformed forces as represented by the marching soldiers. The minorities, under the machine of the war operated by nationalism, are dehumanized and processed into "refugees." The abjectivity of the refugees further manifests the minorities being deprived of agency within the nationalist agenda.

Mene's narration of his trip to Nugwa and Urua highlights a failed formation of a national identity. The final phase of Mene's formation shows that he is transformed from a naïve young Dukana boy with a desire to expand his identity via an identification with the nation, to a grown-up man with a strong social consciousness about the plight of the minorities within the oppressive nation. The anti-national narrative of *Sozaboy*, which highlights the marginalization of the minorities in Nigeria, can therefore be read as a form of Saro-Wiwa's political activism that demands equal recognition and representation of the Ogoni people within the Nigerian Federation. Saro-Wiwa's

representation of the refugees via Mene's perspective can also be read as a form of the author's human rights and environmental activism that demands the Ogoni people's control of the resource in the Niger Delta.

In the Name of the People/the Environment: the Ambivalence of Community in *Oil on Water*

Oil on Water critiques neocolonial exploitation of the Niger Delta as well as how exploitation has caused the environmental degradation of the region. Yet, *Oil on Water* is an oil novel that dramatizes the "oil complex" of the Niger Delta while it critiques the danger of environmentalism that occurs in the name of "the people" or "the nation." If Saro-Wiwa dramatizes the Nigerian Civil War in order to highlight questions of the minorities, particularly resource control in terms of unequal recognition and representation among the minorities, then Habila dramatizes the "oil complex" of the Niger Delta in order to re-examine the concept of community itself with regard to the politics within and between oil communities of the Niger Delta. Saro-Wiwa highlights the vertical relationship between the nation and its minorities. In contrast, Habila highlights not only the vertical relationship between the nation and the minorities of the Niger Delta but also various *horizontal* relationships existing within and between the minorities. Like "nation," "community" (particularly at the local level) has been largely romanticized and essentialized in various social discourses or movements, including environmentalism. *Oil on Water* indicates that community should not be understood as a pre-given, harmonious entity, but rather as a historical, cultural, and socio-political construct (like the Ogoni). In *Sozaboy*, Mene rejects nationalism, seeing its machine like

the war as a “very bad thing.” In *Oil on Water*, however, Rufus’s identification with “the people” or the local communities does not necessarily provide a solution. In contrast to Mene’s narrative, which is composed mainly of his translation or re-interpretation of the nationalist discourse that in turns exposes the ambivalence of the nation, in *Oil on Water*, Rufus’s narrative is confined primarily to of the perspectives of the various communities in the Niger Delta that he encounters, exposing the ambivalence of community, as it is constituted at both national and local levels.

Oil on Water is also a *bildungsroman* revolving around the protagonist-narrator Rufus, an apprentice journalist born and raised in the Niger Delta. Characterized as a young man in crisis in the novel, Rufus negotiates both his identity as a minority member of Nigeria and the violence that attends to the “oil complex” of the Niger Delta, his home. As a minority from the Niger Delta, he is traumatized by a broken family caused by an oil accident after which his father went to jail, his mother went back to her village, and her sister was left burned. As an apprentice journalist, he is anxious to compose “great stories” that he can use to establish himself and be successful. Like Saro-Wiwa’s characterizations of Mene in *Sozaboy*, Habila’s characterization of Rufus focuses on the character’s desire to improve himself. Rufus volunteers to join four other journalists, including Zaq, a well-known and experienced journalist, in search of a white British woman said to be kidnapped by the rebels in the Niger Delta, hoping that the journey will provide material for a great story he would compose, and thereby bring him fame as well as compensation that might relieve his family’s suffering. During the search, Rufus establishes an apprentice-mentor relationship with Zaq. Their partnership enables them to further investigate the “oil complex” of the Niger Delta while at the same time Rufus

comes to realize the resilience of individual and community as manifested in his sister Boma, and by oil communities of the Niger Delta he visits during his journey, including Chief Ibiram's village and the holy community on Irikefe Island where his sister eventually settles. In this plot, *Oil on Water* presents a counter-national narrative that questions various forms of community-thinking, both national and local.

In *Oil on Water*, Rufus serves as a collector of stories about oil communities in Nigeria that unfold the complexity of the "oil complex" and the "double movement" in the Niger Delta. The novel's focus on the "oil complex" of the Niger Delta reveals multiple layers of violence in the region traced to the oil economy. Chief Ibiram's story about the decline of his village highlights the complicity between oil companies and the Nigerian government as well as the violence caused by the oil economy: the Nigerian petro-economy has disintegrated, dispossessed, and displaced minority communities. Chief Ibiram's village is originally harmonious and self-sufficient, run by traditional practices and composed of humble people: "Once upon a time they lived in paradise. It was a small village close to Yellow Island. They lacked for nothing, fishing, and hunting, and farming and watching their children growing up before them, happy. The village was close-knit, made up cousins and uncles and aunts and brothers and sisters . . ." (42). The emphasis on the villagers' attachment to the land suggests how the petro-economy has disintegrated the community in ecological terms: "This was their ancestral land, this was where their fathers and their father's fathers were buried. They'd been born here, they'd grown up here, and though they may not be rich, the land had been good to them they never lacked for anything" (43). The resistance of the villagers and the secret execution of their leader, Chief Malabo, remind us of the Ogoni struggle for self-determination

under the leadership of Saro-Wiwa. Similar to the way the Ogoni nation was formed in response to their marginalization and struggle against the petro-economy, Chief Ibiram's village becomes an oil community when they resist pressures from both the Nigerian Federation and the oil companies. By contextualizing a local community of the Niger Delta in the oil boom, Habila underscores the historicity of the oil community and the dynamic geo-politics of the "oil complex." Chief Ibiram's original depiction of his village contains all of the elements through which a community is romanticized—elements including a mythical settlement ("once upon a time"), a self-sufficient life style ("farming and fishing"), geographical insulation, attachment to the land ("ancestral land"), and respect for the tradition. However, this seemingly timeless and apolitical community enters "the present" in response to the oil companies and the government, as well as neighboring communities who are poised to profit:

[T]hough they were happily insular from the rest of the world by their creeks, and rivers and forests, they were not totally unaware of the change going on all around them: the gas flares that lit up neighboring villages and all day and all night, and the cars and TVs and video players in the front rooms of their neighbors who had allowed the flared to be set up. Some of the neighbors were even bragging that the oil companies had offered to send their kids to Europe or America to become engineers, so that one day they could return and work as oil executives in Port Harcourt. For the first time the close unified community was divided. (42)

Inter-community competitions and intra-community conflicts in the Niger Delta as dramatized in Chief Ibiram's story highlight the fragility of community and the myth of

self-containment as commodities and opportunities lure members away. Habila recognizes not only the violence caused by oppressions from external forces, but internal forces that may unite in minority groups' self-determination in the Niger Delta. Ogoni self-determination, for example, operating in opposition to the top-down Nigerian nationalism, was not a harmonious movement but rather was challenged constantly by a socio-economical imbalance that had existed within the community as revealed by tensions between the rich and the poor, between the elite and the common people, and between the older generation and the younger generation of the Ogoni.⁴⁰

In contrast to this depiction of petro-violence and its effects on the community, the story of the village that Dr. Dagogo-Mark shares with Rufus suggests other forms of violence brought about by oil, including the vast wealth that transforms the cultural life of the villagers and the accompanying pollution that destroys the environment and the health of the villagers. Dr. Dagogo-Mark, a medical doctor Rufus meets during his trip when he is captured by the military, recounts his experience with another oil community in the Niger Delta he once served. This village, like the neighboring villages of Chief Ibiram's, chooses to welcome and introduce the oil industry. Dagogo-Mark highlights the poverty of the village likely linked to their minority status. As one of the villagers tells Dr. Dagogo-Mark, "I am not ill. I am just poor. Can you give me medicine for that? We want that fire that burns day and night." (152). Marginalized, starved, and ill, this village has no choice but to participate in the petro-economy. The villagers enjoy the fast wealth brought by the oil business while at the same time suffering the consequence of the rapid

⁴⁰ See Okonta's *When Citizens Revolt* and Watts and others' working paper "The Sinister Political Life of Community" for more details.

change. Oil reshapes and vitalizes the life of the villagers; however, it does not really improve the poverty of the village, but rather propels consumption. As Dr. Dagogo-Mark describes,

The villagers feasted for weeks. They got their orange fire planted firmly over the water at the edge of the village. Night and day it burned, and now the villagers had no need for candles or lamps, all they had to do at night was to throw open the doors and windows and just like that, everything was illuminated. That light soon became the village square. At night men and women would stand facing it, lost in wonder, for hours, simply staring till their eyes waters and their heads grew dizzy. Village meeting, which used to take place early in the mornings on Saturdays in one of the school classrooms, now took place at night under the orange fire . . . A night market developed around that glow, and every evening women brought their wares. Some came from from the neighboring villages, they bought and sold, they set up portable iron hearths and fried akara and fish, which they sold to happy children under that fire. (152)

Under the “orange fire,” the villagers consume the wealth they temporarily obtain from oil, yet soon the village is consumed by pollution. As Dr. Dagogo-Mark continues, “More people fell sick, a lot died. I watched the night market fold up and the council meetings cease. . . Almost overnight I watched the whole village disappear, just like that” (153).

The “national” wealth generated by oil, destroys a local economy.

Rufus’s story about his hometown reinforces Dr. Dagogo-Mark’s story, critiquing how oil has been largely privatized and centralized by the oil companies and the Nigerian

Federation. Rufus' story about Junction, a town in the Niger Delta where he grew up, shows a similar scenario to Dr. Dagogo-Mark's story, yet the former highlights how a minority family like his has little access to the national wealth. In order to share the national wealth, Rufus' father and others steal oil from the pipelines, which according to his father is "the only business booming in this town" (69). Rufus's father, like the villagers Dr. Dagogo-Mark describes, is desperate for making a living through oil. Yet the cost of it is a broken, alienated family. As Rufus says,

In the two days I spent at home before returning to Port Harcourt, I saw how much my father had changed. He had turned his back on religion, and now smoke and drank *ogogoro* almost nonstop. He left home early in the morning in a pickup truck to go to the bush, where he and his partner bought the petrol from the kids, and he returned home only after midnight, often drunk. The house stank of petrol and cigarettes. He said he smoked just to kill the smell. (70)

The various perspectives in *Oil on Water* highlight how Nigerian petro-capitalism/nationalism has created various particular oil communities in the Niger Delta. The particularity of each community shows different degrees of violence occurring in the Niger Delta brought about by oil.

Oil on Water also discusses the perspectives of the oil companies. Rufus's interview with James Floode, a British engineer working for an oil company in Port Harcourt, highlights a neocolonial and neoliberal attitude the oil companies hold toward the oil economy in Nigeria. Floode's missing wife, Isabel, is said to have been kidnapped by the rebels. He first approaches Zaq and wants him to travel to the Niger Delta to find

his wife. However, Zaq quickly falls ill during the initial search and is trapped on the Irikefe island while Rufus has a chance to return to Port Harcourt and interviews Floode (before he comes back to reunite with Zaq again). Rufus first describes Floode's house as "one of the many colonial-style buildings on Port Harcourt waterfront, where most of the wealthy expatriate oil workers lived"—a house "hidden behind a tall, barbed-wire-topped wall" and in a highly secured neighborhood (100). The neighborhood where Floode lives is obviously isolated from the poverty of the city and the whole oil field where the industry has ruthlessly exploited and polluted. While people are dying in the Niger Delta and their environments are destroyed by the oil industry, Floode cares only about the oil price and the loss of the money caused by the militancy in the Niger Delta. As he says to Rufus, "Our pipelines are vandalized daily, losing us millions . . . and millions for the country as well. The people don't understand what they do for themselves" (103). For Floode, there is only one type of violence happening in the Niger Delta, that is, the vandalism of the oil pipelines and the kidnapping of the oil workers. He has no idea about the multiple layers of petro-violence that have brought to the minorities and the environment of the Niger Delta, let alone understand any particular case of violence happening in a single minority group. "The people" Floode refers to in his commentary are simply an imagined collectivity like "Nigerians" who for him, are "nice" and "hospitable" (100), but are not capable of running their own country and economy. As he says to Rufus: "Such great potential. You people could easily become the Japan of Africa, the USA of Africa, but the corruption is incredible" (103).

Oil on Water dramatizes the complicity between oil companies and the Nigerian Federation in conducting a state-run resource control for the sake of the "unified" nation.

Habila presents perspectives from both the oil companies and the Nigerian Federation in order to show the double colonialism—neocolonialism and domestic colonialism—imposed on oil communities of the Niger Delta. In the novel, Rufus serves as a witness to how state-run resource control is implemented via the militarization of the Niger Delta. For “the Major,” a military officer in charge of the Niger Delta with whom Rufus interacts during his trip, the Niger Delta is a “war zone” where oil security, rather than the inhabitants, is the priority: “But expect a lot of casualties, unavoidable, of course. This is a war zone” (167). Ironically, the Major emphasizes “the innocent children” and “the innocent villages” (61) in his criticism of militancy occurring in the region while at the same time interrogating and torturing (innocent) villagers whom he randomly arrests and accuses as militants: ““You want resource control? Well, control this. How does it feel? This will teach you to kidnap innocent children. This will teach you to terrorize innocent villages.”” (61). The Major manipulates terms like “innocent children” and “innocent villages” in his rhetoric of the state-run resource control. When Rufus endorses the innocence of the villagers, the Major’s response demonstrates the government as being an accomplice of the oil companies’ motives, which are profits that oil will generate. As he says to Rufus, ““You insist? Did you say insist? Do you know what’s going on out there? There’s a war going on. People are being shot. In Port Harcourt oil companies are being bombed, police stations are being overrun, the world oil price is shooting through the roof. You insist? I can shoot you right now and throw you into the swamp and that’s it.”” (64). The complicity of petro-capitalism and petro-nationalism/militarism enforced by the Nigerian Federation is further dramatized in other episodes in *Oil on Water*. In his interview with Floode, Rufus indicates how oil in the Niger Delta is

exploited for the “goodness” of the nation: “And all they [village people from Junction] are told by the oil companies and the government is that the pipelines are there for their own good, that they hold great potential for their country, their future” (103). Rufus’s interview with Henshaw, a militant character arrested by the Major, suggests that militarized resource control is deployed under the agenda of the “unity” of the nation. Henshaw states, ““I know exactly what they’re doing out there: right now the soldiers will be in line, shoulder to shoulder, all twenty of them, one sergeant, two corporals and the rest privates, all standing at attention, and he’ll be telling them why they must hate the militants, why they must fight to keep the country safe and united.”” (165).

The “oil complex” of the Niger Delta as dramatized in *Oil on Water* threatens the unity of Nigeria in the sense that it contradictorily constructs and deconstructs the Nigerian nation—a political phenomenon in Nigerian history that Michael Watts calls the “double movement.” In the novel, this “double movement” is displayed through the competition between two types of discourse of community-building and-thinking, both of which are generated by oil—the top-down “nationalism” versus the bottom-up “environmentalism.” Both discourses of community-building expose the discursive and ambivalent nature of “community” itself. The militants, composed mainly of unemployed youths from the region, represent another type of the oil community in the Niger Delta.⁴¹ Although the militants Rufus interviews during his journey do not demand ethnicity-based self-determination, their rebellion against the Nigerian Federation is founded on their reclamation and ownership of “the land”/“the environment.” As Henshaw tells

⁴¹ See Watts’ working paper “Imperial Oil: The Anatomy of a Nigerian Oil Insurgency” and Ejobowah’s “Who Owns the Oil? The Politics of Ethnicity in the Niger Delta of Nigeria.”

Rufus assertively: ““We are the people, we are the Delta, we represent the very earth on which we stand.”” (163). Henshaw’s assertion, however, shows that both the government and the militants construct a discourse of the community by manipulating the concept of “the people.” Toward the end of Rufus’ journey, another militant character nicknamed “the Professor,” the leader of another rebel groups different from the one Henshaw belongs to, tells Rufus that his militancy is also for “the people” and “the land:” ““We are for the people. Everything we do is for the people, what will we gain if we terrorize them? I am speaking for myself and my group, of course. I am aware that, out there, there are criminal elements looting and killing under the guise of freedom fighting, but we are different. Those kind of rebels, they are our enemies.”” (232). “The people” and “the nation” (defended by the government) or “the environment” (defended by the rebels), are discursively interdependent. *Oil on Water* is skeptical of “the people” treated often as a singular entity in various community-building movements, including nationalism and environmentalism, and shows that “the people” is an unstable and inorganic category instead. While the government claims to secure oil for the sake of “the innocent children” and “the innocent villages,” “the people,” if referred to villagers of the Niger Delta, are actually dispossessed and displaced under the state-run resource control (as revealed by Chief Ibriam’s village). Likewise, while anti-government rebels claim to be “environmentalists” and representatives of the local villages, they also ironically alienate “the people” for whom they claim to speak from their land due to their wars with the government. As Rufus says after he sees Karibi, a villager who he thinks is innocent, arrested by the military: “Communities like this had borne the brunt of the oil wars, caught between the militants and the military. The only way they could avoid being

crushed out of existence was to pretend to be deaf and dumb and blind” (37). The oil communities of the Niger Delta described by Rufus are therefore similar to the “refugees” described by Mene in *Sozaboy*—both are sites and people dehumanized and deprived of agency.

Similar to Mene in *Sozaboy*, Rufus’s narration is formative in the sense that it presents a minority individual’s struggle to form a national identity. The prologue to *Oil on Water* sets up Rufus’s narrative in the form of *bildungsroman*. The opening paragraphs of the novel lay out the initiation of Rufus’s formation. At the outset, he struggles as a journalist, anxious to compose a great story about his search, yet unsure of how to achieve it. The starting point of Rufus’s narration is in the present tense, reflecting a completed journey and his vast archive, yet how he will use those materials, organize and connect them, and finally present them as a “story” is still uncertain:

I am walking down a well-lit path, with incidents neatly labeled and dated, but when I reach halfway memory lets go of my hand, and a fog rises and covers the faces and places, and I am left clawing about in the dark, lost, and I have to make up the obscured moments as I go along, make up the faces and places, even the emotions. Sometimes to keep on course, I have to return to more recognizable landmarks, and then, with this safety net under me, I can leap onto less certain terrain. (3)

The experience he narrates, like the geography of the Niger Delta itself, is complicated, intricate and hard to map. Rufus’ struggle as a journalist-narrator, moreover, is also overlapped with his trauma as a minority-narrator from the Niger Delta whose family has fractured due to the oil economy:

So yes, there was an accident, a fire. An explosion in the barn with the oil drums. The fire flew on the wind from house to house, and in a few minutes half the town was ablaze. Many people died, including John's father. They say he died trying to save my sister, Boma, and if it wasn't for him, she'd have died. My father was imprisoned. My mother returned to her parents' village, where she still lives. And as my sister burned, and my family disintegrated, I was in Lagos listening to lectures, eating dinner in Chinese restaurants, and I didn't hear about the tragedy until I returned home with my journalism certificate. (3)

As a family member who was not present, Rufus is alienated from, yet also victimized by the accident. His awareness of his absence in the accident to some extent accentuates his insecurity as a journalist. While he does not fully understand what actually happened that night in his family, he is also insecure about how to re-construct his journey and mold them into a "story." This double uncertainty, along with his double struggle, reflects Rufus' formation process. His double struggle/uncertainty reveals when he looks at his family from a point of view of a journalist—an outsider who steps back and just watches and observes what is happening. "My mother comes from the village once every month to see him. Occasionally I go with her, and I watch them look at each other, and sometimes they have a lot to talk about, and sometimes they just stare at each other in silence. The last time I went with her was over a month ago, I sit away from them . . . And she calls to me, Rufus, come here. Why do you stand so far by the window? (4). The distance and perspective on his family's accident offered by journalism is not sufficient to the truth that Rufus seeks. The more he remains objective and distant, the more he is

confused and frustrated. As his narrative proceeds, Rufus gradually presents not only stories about the search, but also more importantly, a particular experience with the Nigerian nation—an experience that contests the premise of Nigerian petro-nationalism.

In contrast to Mene's narrative that is aligned with the sequence of his journey, Rufus's narrative breaks the chronology of the journey and starts instead with incidents that occur in the middle it. This temporal rearrangement foregrounds certain incidents that lead Rufus to revelations about his responsibility as a journalist and his marginalized status as a minority member of the Niger Delta in opposition to the oppression from both the oil companies and the Nigerian Federation. In narrating his journey, Rufus re-organizes different and individual incidents that occur during the journey and connects them with overarching questions like whether or not he will find "meanings" (5) and/or encounter a "transcendental moment" (79) of his search and whether or not he can present "the truth" (15, 143, 144) about the Niger Delta and the kidnapping. "Meaning" and "truth" regarding his search are thus formative elements in Rufus's narrative.

Rufus starts his narrative with incidents that occur after he and Zaq are expelled from the Irikefe island in order to highlight broader "meanings" of his struggles as both a journalist and a minority individual of the Niger Delta—meanings that underscore his recognition of the discursive and manipulative nature of Nigerian nationalism. Rufus's second departure from Irikefe island marks a new perspective for Rufus as a journalist. By this time, Rufus has no clue where the missing woman is, but he has already interviewed her husband Floode during his temporary return to Port Harcourt. Rufus has also published a story (based on the initial search)—a story that is probably dominated by sensational details about the violence happening in the Niger Delta rather than a story that

provides analysis and “meaning” of the violence. As an apprentice-journalist, Rufus obviously does his job, according to Zaq, as a “conservationist” (79) in the sense that he has taken notes on and taken pictures of deserted villages, dead human bodies, and any shocking scenes he has seen in the region: “In that lecture you [Zaq] talked about journalists as conservationist . . . that we scribble for posterity . . . and you said most of what we write may be ephemeral, a note here about a car accident, a column there about a market fire, a suicide, a divorce, yet once in a lifetime, comes a transcendental moment, a great story only true journalist can do justice to--” (79). While Rufus does not encounter any “transcendental moment” that occurs during the initial search that would lead to a “great” story, he possesses enough material, which he thinks, will at least help him create a sensation on paper:

I saw us reaching Port Harcourt before noon to a hero’s reception from our colleagues and editors; I saw my story on the front pages; and, finally, I saw myself being restored to my rightful place as a reporter. . . . I had a draft of my story in my head, and trapped for posterity in my point-and-shoot Sony digital camera were images of the gutted bodies half hidden in the bushes, the thatchless, burn-down huts, the bullet-broken palm trees, and the spectacular fire throwing up a cloud of smoke over the tall trees.

(85)

Rufus’s return to the Niger Delta (to reunite with Zaq) enables him to investigate the complexity of the petro-violence occurring in the Niger Delta on a deeper and more intimate level. Their reunion leads to a discovery that Irikefe Island is complicit with the militants with regard to the missing woman. This complicity exposes a political

configuration of oil communities and militants of the Niger Delta. Moreover, Rufus's experience with the local villages, the oil companies, and the military on a more intimate level creates the eventuality of his newly formed impression of the "oil complex" of the region. His better understanding of the "oil complex" of the Niger Delta leads him to confront all of the questions with which he has been bothered as a journalist. His struggle as a journalist who is trying to create a "great story" out of the search and as a minority individual who is figuring out how to recover from his trauma clash at this particular point of his journey. Rufus bears a witness to how the Major tortures the local villagers, who he thinks, are innocent, and this arouses his consciousness of being a minority member from the region as well. While this episode shows that Rufus' points of view as a journalist and as a minority member merge, his experience with the Nigerian military also transforms him from a journalist-conservationist to a journalist-activist (as revealed by his decision to escape from the Major's detention in order to continue his search). However, in contrast to his experience with Floode in Port Harcourt, an experience during which he sees himself as both a "Nigerian" and a minority subject victimized by the globalized Nigerian economy, his experience with the Nigerian military enables him to realize that minorities of the Niger Delta are inevitably doomed under a double colonialism perpetrated by both the multi-national oil companies and the Nigerian Federation. Condemning Floode's ignorance of the petro-violence happening in the Niger Delta, Rufus ambivalently conveys his anti-neocolonial attitude through a kind of nationalist discourse. In accepting Floode's offer (that requires him to return to the Niger Delta), Rufus identifies himself as a "Nigerian" who deserves reparation for what he has suffered from neocolonialism: "I could take his money and walk out and nothing would happen.

Wasn't he in my country, polluting my environment, making millions in the process? Surely I was entitled to some reparation, some rent money from him?" (107). Although Rufus's ethnicity has never been indicated throughout the novel, his experience with Floode highlights the ambivalence of his identity as a "Nigerian" and a "minority" subject of the Niger Delta in the sense that his national identity is not compatible with his ethnicity. If Rufus's interview with Floods arouses his sense of nationality, then his confrontation with the Major is driven by his identification with the minority of the Niger Delta. Rufus's recognition of the double colonialism imposed on the Niger Delta enables his responsibility as a minority-journalist-activist to come to fruition. Instead of focusing simply on sketches of the spectacular with regard to the petro-violence in the Niger Delta, Rufus is now able to render a deeper representation of the minorities from which his identity is formed:

I promised myself that if I got out of here I'd write about this, every detail, even petrol trickle every howl of pain. Now I knew what Zaq meant when he said long ago in that lecture that this job will sometimes break your heart. He said journalism shows you the first hand how nations are built, how great men achieve their greatness. And then he had quoted the proverb about how elephants achieve their great size: they simply eat up everything that stands in their path, trees and ants and plants and dirt, everything. (63)

Rufus's recollection of Zaq's commentary on the nature of journalism with regard to how a nation is built (in the metaphor of elephants) reminds him of the inequity between nationalists and minorities. Minorities of the Niger Delta under global capitalism and

petro-nationalism, like “trees, ants, plants, and dirt,” are meant to be devoured by the gigantic machine called the Nigerian nation. Rufus’s newly developed attitude as a minority-journalist-activist provides him an agency to deepen and better realize his identity as a marginalized minority individual of the Niger Delta.

While the investigation Rufus is engaged in consequently provides a “transcendence” that unveils a deeper and more salient understanding of the relational dynamic between the minorities, the militants, and the Nigerian Federation, it also enables Rufus to re-consider values of “truth” with regard to his practice of journalism. Instead of focusing on truths about who actually kidnaps Isabel Floode and why and how she is kidnapped, Rufus’s narrative ends up exposing problems of “truth” due to the complicity between the local communities and the militants in the kidnapping. On Irikefe island, Rufus and Zaq’s suspicion of the local communities’ participation in the kidnapping is eventually proven true when they find that Naman, a major priest on Irikefe island, lies about the information regarding the woman they are searching for. Naman claims that the missing woman is already dead and has been buried somewhere on the island. Zaq and Rufus dig up the grave and find nothing but a stone in it. Although Rufus’s escape from the military enables him to finally find the missing woman and Salomon (the “original” kidnapper), “truths” he reaches gradually are not only those about tangled, intricate relationships between the oil communities and the militants in the Niger Delta, but also those about tensions between European workers, including Mr. Floode, and Nigerian workers, including Salomon, in Port Harcourt. While Rufus, Mrs. Floode and Salomon are kidnapped together by the militants under the leadership of “The Professor,” this provides him with opportunities to interview Mrs. Floode, Salomon, and

more militants, including Henshaw and “the Professor” himself. These interviews all complicate and confuse “truths” about and even beyond the kidnapping itself. Mrs. Floode’s story indicates a marriage in crisis, and by extension, suggests her marginalized role as a housewife being displaced in an ex-colony where her husband is able to exercise his fully vested role (as a developer and patronizer of Nigerian economy) whereas she is nothing but a dependent:

She had met Floode at university. . . . They got married a year after she graduated. The first years were happy ones. He worked for a chemical company in London, but then he got his present jobs and that was when things began to change. He was a gifted petroleum engineers, and his skill were in great demand. He began to travel a lot, and over the past three years he had lived in five different countries: Hong Kong, Indonesia, Canada, Netherlands, and now Nigeria. At first she was happily went with him to each new place, but after Canada she suddenly lost interest. Why go all that distance only to stay at home watching TV or shopping at the mall, never seeing him till late in the evenings? (199)

In contrast to Mrs. Floode’s story, Salomon provides a side of the story that exposes the inequity between European and local workers in participating in the oil business. As a young man with a college degree, Salomon has little access to the oil wealth, and can only be employed as a driver for Mr. Floode—a situation that reveals the continuation of the colonial labor distribution that is founded on the “white-as-the-master” and “black-as-the-server” mode:

[H]e [Salomon] wasn’t speaking the usual pidgin English that she [Mrs.

Floode] found so irksome and that always had to be explained to her. Today he spoke a grammatically faultless English, and even the accent was modified, easy to understand. Later she discovered that he was a university graduate who, like a lot of young men in the Delta, had been forced to take a job far below his qualifications while he waited for that elusive office job with an oil company. (201)

Behind Salomon's motivation of kidnapping Mrs. Floode is his grudge against his European master. Not only does Mr. Floode (and his European counterparts) monopolize job opportunities in the oil business, but he also challenges Salomon's masculinity by seducing his fiancé Koko, who is also working for the British couple as their housemaid. The initial "truths" about the kidnapping, as provided by Mrs. Floode and Salomon, thus have little to do with the rebels in the Niger Delta. While Mrs. Floode exposes a form of gender inequality rooted in a colonial backdrop, Salomon criticizes the broader problem of the globalized Nigerian oil economy as manifest in the underemployment of the local workers.

When Rufus is presented with multiple "truths" about and related to the kidnapping, his practice of journalism is being challenged because "truth" itself becomes a moving target and more difficult to freeze into an absolute. "Truth" also becomes a rhetoric manipulated by the participants of the kidnapping, particularly the militants. "The Professor" possesses a version of the truth about the kidnapping, one that is beneficial to his freedom-fighting propaganda. He presents his truth to Rufus and asks him to be his mouthpiece in the media: "You reporters, you are always clever with words—me, I am a soldier, I know how to fight, and I will never stop fighting till I

achieve my goal. Write that when you get back.” (231). While Rufus thinks he is the person who observes and reports what actually happened, his credibility is being challenged when “the Professor” literally tells him what is going to happen and what he should write: “By this time tomorrow one of the major oil depots will be burning, I want you to write about it, tell them I am responsible. I can’t tell you more than that, but I can tell you the war is just starting. We will make it so hot for the government and the oil companies that they will be forced to pull out. That is what I can say for now.” (231). “The Professor,” who presents himself as a warrior type of hero and claims to fight for “the people” and “the environment” of the Niger Delta, undermines Rufus’ authority as a journalist whose job is to present “the truth”:

Did you think we’d keep her [Isabel Floode] here against her wish, rape her, maybe? We are not barbarians the government propagandists say we are. We are for the people. Everything we do is for the people, what will we gain if we terrorize them? . . . That is why I am letting you go, so you can write the truth. . . . Write only the truth. Tell them about the flares you see at night, and the oil on water. And the soldiers forcing us to escalate the violence every day. Tell them how we are hounded daily in our own land. Where do they want us to go, tell me, where? Tell them we are going nowhere. This land belongs to us. This is truth, remember that. (232)

Will Rufus write about “the truth” “The Professor” dictates him to write? After having interviewed so many people involved in the kidnapping, and after having realized the “oil complex” of the Niger Delta, how will Rufus interpret the perspectives he has collected during his journey eventually and mold them into a “great story”? The novel does not

say. While we may never know precisely how Rufus interprets the events and their corresponding multiple perspectives, we do know he experiences a transcendent point within which his formation includes the merging of himself as a journalist-activist and a minority individual of the Niger Delta—an experience that highlights the resistance and resilience of community and individual under the oppression of nationalism and global capitalism.

Rufus's formation as revealed at the end of the novel underscores his recognition of the resilience of community as demonstrated by Chief Ibiram's village and Irikefe island. Irikefe island, eerily represented as a peaceful village run by a holy community, provides a unique narrative space for Rufus's narration that highlights the resistance and resilience of a local community in the Niger Delta. Irikefe island, according to Naman, is a "holy community" composed of "peaceful people" attempting to "bring a healing, to restore and conserve" (137). Depicted as an oasis away from the oil-driven violence, Irikefe island is a community untouched by the oil business and is centered on the shrine and the religious rituals instead. However, similar to Chief Ibiram's village, Irikefe island is not represented simply as a paradise type of place as if it has no history. According to Naman, Irikefe island was "rebuilt" after "a terrible war"—a war that, though happening long time ago (the Nigerian Civil War?), is comparable to the resource war occurring in the Niger Delta in the present time. Naman's account of Irikefe island's past foreshadows the inevitable repetition of violence occurring in the Niger Delta after the oil boom. Irikefe island thus epitomizes geopolitics of the Niger Delta where oil, blood, and water are mixed together:

The shrine was started long time ago after a terrible war—no one remember what caused the war—when the blood of the dead ran in the rivers, and the water was so saturated with blood that the fishes died, and the dead bodies of warrior floated for miles on the river, until they were snagged on mangrove on the bank, or got stuck in the muddy swamps, half in and half out of the water. It was a terrible time. The land was so polluted that even the water in the wells turned red. That was when priests from different shrines got together and decided to build this shrine by the river. The land needed to be cleansed of blood, and pollution. (128)

The dark history of Irikefe island serves as a warning to other communities of the Niger Delta which have been devastated by the oil economy. That being said, the survival of Irikefe island also indicates the resilience of community. While the religious community on the island continues with generations, another community on the island—a “frozen community” (130) represented by the sculptures of human figures surrounding the shrine—never dies. Irikefe island is thus a community run by both the living and the dead—a community founded on the resilience manifested through the persistence of the sculpted human forms. That persistent spirit is in turn passed along to those who are living. As Naman says to Rufus and Zaq: ““The sculptures came later. As the priesthood grew, some became specialists in mud and wooden figures. These figures represent the ancestor, watching over us.”” (128).

In contrast to the militancy led by “the Professor,” the resilience of community as revealed by Chief Ibiram’s village and the holy community on Irikefe island presents a silent form of resistance in the Niger Delta. However, Chief Ibiram’s village and Irikefe

island represent two models of community in terms of resilience under the double colonialism. In spite of being dispossessed and displaced, Chief Ibiram's village indicates the diasporic nature of the community. The migration of Chief Ibiram's village from the Niger Delta to Port Harcourt underscores the survival of the community in terms of its mobility. As Chief Ibiram's says:

“—Yes, we couldn't remain there anymore. My people, they are frightened, the violence gets closer every day. We've heard of a place not too far from Port Harcourt, the people there are friendly, most of them are like refugees like us. My people could get some sort of work in Port Harcourt.”

His voice was hopeful, but his eyes were pessimistic, cloudy. Gradually the community was drifting toward big city, and sooner or later it would be swallowed up, its people dispersed, like people getting off a bus and joining the traffic on the city streets. He sighed. (196)

Although the community itself as a whole will disappear once its individual members are gradually absorbed into urban life, they will survive as individuals. On the other hand, Irikefe island represents the healing and regenerative nature of community. Rufus's narrative ends in himself returning to Irikefe Island after he is released by “the Professor.” At this time, Irikefe Island is already ruined during the fight between the militants and the military. However, Irikefe island is again in the process of rebuilding under the leadership of Naman: “Though the number of statues had greatly diminished, those that now stood looked as if they had always been like this. Their scars and punctures seemed to have put there by time and weather and not by random weaponry”

(236). Irikefe island, founded on the bond between the living inhabitants and the dead ancestors and the land, will endure time, regenerate, and survive. Boma's decision to join the holy community of Irikefe island at the end of the novel also suggests her survival as a minority individual of the Niger Delta. Instead of his journalist activism, Rufus ends his narrative by highlighting the silence and inactiveness of Irikefe Island to which he and his sister are now attached. Rufus's narrative therefore presents a counter-national allegory that focuses not only on his journalist activism in opposition to Nigerian nationalism, but also on the silent resistance of the local communities/individuals that emphasizes survival and continuance.

Conclusion: The Anti-*Bildungsroman* of the Niger Delta? Problems of the Minority Subjects' Formation

While the late twentieth-century African nation is post-colonial, *Sozaboy* and *Oil on Water* suggest that the nation itself is a problematic formation. From a formal point of view, Mene's and Rufus's narratives, though being centered on the process of their formation, can also be read as anti-*bildungsromans* for lacking moments of the actual formation at the end. Both *Sozaboy* and *Oil on Water* depict situations so volatile and messy that "narrative" itself—and thus narrators—is stretched to the limits and many indeed "fail," which in turn is why it may be difficult to figure out how to "evaluate" these novels by using traditional definitions and approaches like "*bildungsroman*."

Saro-Wiwa and Habila both present incomplete or uncertain formations of their protagonist-narrators. Both Mene's and Rufus's narratives either reject or suspend what the genre formally promises toward the end of the novel, that is, the narrative moment of

the formation of the protagonist-narrator. To argue both novels are anti-*bildungsromane*, however, is not to say both Mene's and Rufus's experience lacks development,⁴² but to underscore the narratives' denial, obscurity, or deferment of the moment of the narrators' coming-of-age that the traditional *bildungsroman* promises to put at the center of the narrative. In *Sozaboy*, Mene indeed shows signs of self-autonomy when he denounces the war and rejects the nationalist values imposed on him by the government. Mene's rejection of the war, however, is not the fulfillment of his self-autonomy. Toward the end of *Sozaboy*, Mene's formation also depends on his responsibility to share his experience with his people: "I say to myself that I must tell all the Dukana people how those people are useless and nobody should go to church and listen to Pastor Barika because he can sell his mama sake of money and all the preaching that he have been preaching in Dukana is all lies" (171). Mene's self-autonomy thus requires recognition by his people. However, he is rejected by his people toward the end of the novel, making his final formation problematic. The Dukana people think Mene is already dead in the war and has become a ghost that will continue to come back to Dukana and haunt and curse Dukana. Mene is renamed "sozaby, juju, smallpox" (178) by his own people—bad names that shows his own people's denial of his existence and his identity as an independent subject belonging to Dukana. Mene's non-existence toward the end of the novel thus undermines the narrative goal of the *bildungsroman*. On the other hand, in *Oil on Water*, Rufus highlights "a collectivity" of an unnamed people at the end of his narrative, making his personal formation deferred to the narrative future. Rufus's narrative, though centering

⁴² See Hey's "Nervous Condition, Lukacs, and the Postcolonial *Bildungsroman*" for discussions of anti-*bildungsroman* in postcolonial novels.

upon his struggle as both a journalist and a minority subject, ends in highlighting the emergence of a seemingly collective (yet non-unified) identity formed by oil communities of the Niger Delta, rather than that of himself becoming an independent and successful journalist:

Now the worshippers were in the water, swaying and humming; I strained my eyes, trying to determine which of them, was Boma. She'd be happy here. I was sure. This was place of healing and soon she'd forget John, her scars would recede to the back of her mind and one day she'd look in the mirror and see they were gone. I had felt the same optimism days ago when I looked back from the militants' boat at Chief Ibiram and his people. They were a fragile flotilla, ordinary men and women and babies, a puny armada about to launch itself once more into uncertain waters. That day I didn't get a chance to wave goodbye to them to Tamuno and Michael and Ibiram, and Alali and all the nameless ones. . . . (239)

Sozaboy and *Oil on Water* provide examples of the postcolonial anti-*bildungsroman* that highlights a denied or an ambiguous moment of the formation of the postcolonial subject, questioning the im/possibility of the ethnic minorities' independence in the postcolonial worlds due to the double oppression—neocolonialism in terms of global capitalism and domestic colonialism in terms of Nigerian nationalism. Mene and Rufus both challenge and disrupt the discourse of Nigerian nationalism; however, their formative failure suggests Saro-Wiwa's and Habila's pessimisms about the minority subjects being entirely free from the dominant nationalist discourse.

Conclusion

Neo/Colonialism from the East? Problems of Applying Postcolonial Ecocriticism to Chinese Impacts on African Environments

The examples of African environmental literature I have discussed in the previous chapters contest and complicate the concept of “environment” as a universal and objective ambience of “setting” shared by humanity. African environmental literature reminds us that we cannot discuss “environment” without recognizing cultural differences because “environment” is contextual and to a large extent historically, culturally, and politically situated. An Africa-focused ecocriticism therefore is not treated as an expanded Anglo-American ecocriticism, nor should environmental or eco-critical reading of African literature be an application of already established ideas and theories acknowledged in Anglo-American ecocriticism.

The aim of this dissertation has been to promote and try out an Africa-focused ecocriticism that considers colonial legacies and African environmental issues and the crises that surround them. Here in the conclusion, however, I would like to indicate potential challenges an Africa-focused ecocriticism may encounter in contemporary crises related to resource exploitation of the continent perpetrated in the name of global, neoliberal capitalism. In recent decades, the key players of global capitalism are not exclusively Western, but also include rising powers from the East. These include China, a newly formed superpower that offer its financial, technological, and agricultural support

to African countries in exchange for ample supplies of natural resources.¹ In my introductory chapter, I quote Anthony Vital's essay "Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology, and *Life and Times of Michael K*" (2008) to emphasize the need to pay attention to "local and national concerns" while developing an Africa-focused ecocriticism. In his essay, however, Vital also suggests that African ecocriticism must engage with a form of postcolonial critique that targets the impact of globalizing modernity and capitalism on Africa—an impact not only from a single, unified center (the West), but from "multiple" centers, including Europe, America and Asia:

Ecocriticism, if it is to pose African questions and find African answers, will need to be rooted in local (regional, national) concern for social life and its natural environment. It will need too, to work from an understanding of the complexity of African past, taking into account the variety in African responses to currents of modernity that reached Africa from Europe initially, but that now influence Africa from multiple centers, European, American, and now Asia in the present form of the globalizing economy. It is this history of Africa's insertion into a globalizing modernity that indicates the need for an African ecocriticism to engage with one or another form of postcolonial critique. (88)

¹ China-Africa relations are based on the principle of "getting and giving" as explained in Deborah A. Brautigam and Tang Xiaoyang's essay "China's Engagement in African Agriculture: 'Down to the Countryside'" (2009). As she states: "China should offer to combine exploitation of other countries' resources with help for the development of their agriculture. This would implement "the principle of combining 'getting' and 'giving.'" (695). For more detailed investigations about China-Africa relationships in terms of Chinese investment in and extraction of African resources, also see Ian Taylor's "China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa" (2006); Sanusha Naidu and Daisy Mbazima's "China-African Relations: A New Impulse in a Changing Continental Landscape" (2008); Kelvin S.-H. Peh and Jonathan Eyal's "Unveiling China's Impact on African Environment" (2010).

Postcolonial ecocriticism often has focused on the impact of colonialism, neocolonialism, and more recently, globalization, on postcolonial environments, all of which, however, are understood as part of colonial legacies from the West. In the introduction to their edited volume *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2005), Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton, and Jed Esty point out the inadequacy of postcolonialism that lies in the field's adoption of the geographically-framed concepts of the West versus the East or the center versus its peripheries, or Eurocentric (ex-) empire versus (ex-) colony. Although Loomba and others suggest that the old, binary mode of geographical thinking be replaced by de-centered, multilateral globalization, they focus on the outsized role of US Power in globalization and thus treat globalization as still largely West-dominated:

As a corollary to the critique of US power, postcolonial studies has to maintain its historical awareness of imperialism and not too quickly to hail the now decentered mechanisms of empire. Thus postcolonial studies must add to its fields of analysis and explanatory reference not only the distant past but also the rapid mutating present, thus, in a sense, trying to the anticipate the future. (14)

Current intersectional postcolonial and ecocritical studies, similarly, though recognizing and anticipating impact of globalization, specifically that of the “uneven development” of the global politics, on postcolonial environments, also tend to associate the global capitalist system exclusively with the West.² The rise of Eastern powers, specifically China, with its powerful influences on the world economy and its enormous consumption

² See Graham Huggun and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010).

of natural resources, is neglected in both approaches to African affairs. Debates among African/ist, Western, and Chinese scholars over whether or not the Chinese investment in and/or exploitation of Africa replicates the trajectory of Western colonialism and its continuation, neocolonialism, have included discussions from disciplines, including political science, environmental studies, economy, international affairs, and anthropology. Literary studies, however, barely have yet to touch the issue. Yet the importance of regarding current China-Africa relations to global politics and economics highlights the urgency of applying China to African literary studies, particularly from the point of view of postcolonial ecocriticism.

Here I wish to propose a new research direction for postcolonial ecocriticism and Africa-focused ecocriticism by emphasizing the environmental issues not only in the context of Western impacts on African, but considering the Chinese impact on Africa as well. First, how do we define the nature of Chinese engagement in Africa? Is it an imitation of Western colonialism, an outgrowth, an accomplice? Debates that conflate current Chinese investment in Africa with Western colonialism and/or neocolonialism paradoxically expose the hegemony as well as the inadequacy of Western epistemology in understanding Chinese presence in Africa. Second, how can postcolonial ecocriticism interpret Chinese impact on African environments if the approach is founded mainly on an anti-Western and anti-colonial and anti-neocolonial paradigm? I suggest that postcolonial ecocriticism develop a new approach to Chinese issues in Africa—a “comparative” approach that carefully examines specificities of Chinese impacts on

African environments, particularly at local or grassroots levels, as well as recognizes nuanced similarities and differences between Chinese and Western exploitations of African natural resources. Adrian Hadland, in his essay “If the Hat Fits: Revisiting Chinese ‘Neo-Imperialism’ in Africa from a Comparative Historical Perspective” (2012), emphasizes the need to conduct a “comparative study of European and Chinese interventions in Africa”: “If China is to be labeled as the new colonial power on the block, this cannot be on the basis of ill-defined, emotive, or rhetorical notions of imperialism and its guises, a trend that is already evident” (468). Last but not the least, if China has intervened in the African continent for more than two decades, then, why have African literatures and African literary criticism not yet produced substantive work that addresses the issue? Do — and will — African authors write about the Chinese presence in Africa? The lack of Chinese issues in African literary production brings up politics of the global literary market dominated by the West. While it will take years of research to fully investigate these questions, an Africa-focused ecocriticism, with its adoption of methodologies from various disciplines as well as a home-grown emphasis on both social justice and literary aesthetics, will provide a theoretical space to investigate the impact of Chinese investment and presence in Africa.

Chinese “Colonialism” in Africa? A Debate

For about a decade, there have been intense debates among media, scholars, and politicians on both Western and Chinese sides over whether or not recent Chinese

investment in Africa is a practice of colonialism and/or neocolonialism.³ Those who accuse China of practicing colonialism and/or participating in neocolonialism in Africa, are mainly from Western scholars, who view these relations via World-Systems Theory or Modernization Theory, in order to highlight the parallel between European colonial expansion in the 19th and early 20th centuries and the recent history of the rapid economic development and industrialization in China.⁴ For the proponents of China-as-colonialist theory, it is inevitable that China will have to go “out” for natural resources and overseas markets in order to supply its own rapid industrial development and economic growth. On the one hand, conflating recent Chinese investment in Africa with European colonialism, the Western media emphasizes the “corruption” and “amorality” of Chinese colonialism, in contrast to a more “humane” and “responsible” European colonialism. On the other hand, those from the Chinese side who contest the concept that China is practicing colonialism and/or neocolonialism in Africa, argue that “colonialism” and “neocolonialism” are specific historical phenomena that occurred in Western civilization, and to use Western experience to judge the role of China in Africa is to ignore the fact that China-Africa relations, unlike Europe-Africa relations in the 19th and early 20th century or the US-Africa relationship in recent years, are “South-South” relations based

³ The debates can be seen in major newspapers and TV networks from both China and the West. For scholarly analysis of Chinese issues in Africa, see Barry Sautam and Yan Hairong’s “East Mountain Tiger, West Mountain Tiger: China, the West, and ‘Colonialism’ in Africa” for detailed analysis of the debates between Chinese media and Western media over whether or not current Chinese engagement in Africa is neo/colonialist.

⁴ For discussions that put the rise of Chinese power in the context of Worlds Systems Theory or Modernization Theory, see Arthur P.J. Mol’s “China’s Ascent and Africa’s Environment” (2011) and Terrence Jackson’s “Postcolonialism and Organizational Knowledge in the Wake of China’s Presence in Africa” (2012).

on mutual respect for each other's sovereignty.⁵ They argue that the nature of Chinese engagement in Africa is based on Chinese principles of “non-interference” and “non-conditionality”—espousing a relatively equal and non-patronizing relationship that is in general welcomed by African countries.

I do not here decide which argument is more persuasive or more reliable, for both sides are to a large extent biased and limited. Although the anti-China voice, mainly from Western sources, purports to defend Africa, it is arguably based on economic competitiveness, geopolitical strategy, and a continuation of the patronizing attitudes that the First World tends to persist in toward its ex-colonies. Furthermore, the West's distrust of recent Chinese engagements in Africa is also founded on an interpretation of China that is grounded in old-school imperialism: “the myth of monolithic China”—a bias that treats China as old, unchangeable and authoritarian, untouched by modernity and global capitalism. Ian Taylor and Yuhua Xiao, in their essay “A Case of Mistaken Identity: ‘China Inc.’ and Its ‘Imperialism’ in Sub-Saharan Africa” (2009), cautions us not to reduce “China” simply into a “centrally controlled, monolithic, unitary actor”—be it governmental or corporate—with an overarching grand strategy that is aimed at “colonizing” Africa (714). Chinese engagement in Africa also involves layers of competitions between energy companies run by different provinces in China and between individual Chinese entrepreneurs and manufacturers. In their essay, Taylor and Xiao explain how globalization has in fact diminished the role of Beijing in regulating

⁵ See Ian Taylor's “China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa” (2006); Sanusha Naidu and Daisy Mbazima's “China-African Relations: A New Impulse in a Changing Continental Landscape;” and Adrian Hadland's “If the Hat Fits: Revisiting Chinese ‘Neo-Imperialism’ in Africa from a Comparative Historical Perspective” (2012).

individual Chinese investment in Africa:

In fact, Beijing has long had problems in controlling what companies (Chinese or foreign) do in China, and although Chinese companies acting overseas have tended in the past to be relatively strongly regulated and controlled by Beijing, this has all changed as a result of the strategy to “go global” (*zouchugu*). There already exists a situation where control over outward investment and what Chinese companies do abroad has been relaxed, and ongoing reforms will only make it much easier for companies to act, largely free from government control. (718)

Current Chinese engagements in Africa thus reveals a more neoliberal than colonial nature of China’s participation in global capitalism.⁶ As Taylor and Xiao remind us, “Commentators must surely recognize that Sino-African relations are process not of colonization but of globalization and the somewhat chaotic reintegration of China into the global economy—a project that has enjoyed the hitherto enthusiastic support of Western capitalism” (715). China’s reintegration into the global economy thus shows that China is an accomplice in terms of participating in and perpetuating neoliberal capitalism.

The pro-China voice that emphasizes the “equal” relationship between China and African countries tends to gloss over the geographical and historical differences between China and Africa in their contact with Europe and their experience of colonization. While China claims to be a “victim” of Western imperialism and colonialism like Africa, the

⁶ For more analyses of Chinese engagement in Africa as a process of participating in global economy, see Adrian Hadland’s “If the Hat Fits” (481-482) and Sautman and Yan’s “East Mountain Tiger, West Mountain Tiger” (73-74).

former's experience is by no means identical with the latter's in terms of the scope and the mode of European colonization. Unlike European colonization of Africa that was aimed at the entire exploitation of African resources and subjugation of African societies, European colonization of China remained mainly on the coastal regions, mainly targeting control of portal trades. While China claims to establish equal trading partnerships with African countries on the basis of the mutual respect for each other's sovereignty, most African countries do not possess the same political and economic power in the world economy and international affairs as China. As Taylor and Xiao explain well in the following quote:

Paradoxically, as China's leadership increasingly integrate itself into the global economy and starts to tentatively play by essentially Western rules, as exemplified by Beijing's membership in the World Trade Organization, it has sought to strengthen political ties with various African countries, arguably as, in part, a defensive mechanism to be deployed against these very same impulses if and when they threaten influential domestic interests. This irony reflects the overall tension in China's diplomatic policy of pursuing both engagement and a certain distant coolness vis-à-vis the global order. (714)

The "South-South" relationships used to defend Chinese investment in Africa obscure economic inequality between China and Africa. Comparing the Chinese and African global, economical, and political relationships as equitable by using their respective geographically equitable "south-south" coordinates glosses over the economic inequities

between the two. It has become more and more obvious that China's relentless growth in the global economy will eventually undermine its political leverage with Africa, as Taylor and Xiao suggest.

Controversies regarding whether or not the recent Chinese engagement in Africa is colonialist and/or neocolonialist expose the hegemony of and also the inadequacy of Western academia in terms of knowledge production. It is hegemonic for the debates to revolve around concepts like “colonialism,” “neo-colonialism,” imperialism” and “neo-imperialism”—concepts borrowed from Western historical momentum to determine the nature of recent Chinese investment in Africa. To use concepts produced by a Western historical trajectory, such as Modernization Theory or World-Systems Theory or Postcolonial Theory for this new context conflates Chinese engagement in Africa with European colonial experience as well as presumes an automatically antagonistic nature of China-Africa relations without a truly empirical investigation at the grassroots level. In his essay “If the Hat Fits,” Hadland reminds us that “the pejorative nature of the term *neo-imperialism* together with its conceptual ambiguity, greatly weakens its efficacy as an analytical tool” (469) and that “perhaps a new term less redolent with historical prejudice would be more useful” (482) in understanding Chinese investment in Africa. This call to a new approach would better fit the long history of China-Africa relations—relations that are by no means analogous to European colonial history. For example, before the time of Columbus, China had had informal trading relationships with Africa.⁷ During the Cold War, both China and African countries shared the similar anti-West,

⁷ For detailed history of China-Africa relation, see Philip Snow's *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa* (1988).

anti-Soviet, and anti-imperialism attitude.⁸ From the post-Cold War and post-Tiananmen Square to present, China's relationships with Africa have expanded from relationships based on ideological alignment to relationships that involve mutual diplomatic and strategic economic interests. China's non-interference policy in Africa is influenced in part by its antagonism against Western interference in Tiananmen Square.⁹ Ming Xie, in his essay "The Postmodern as the Postcolonial: Re-cognizing Chinese Modernity" (1997), discusses the problem of understanding Chinese situation via Western history and epistemology:

"Postmodern," "Postcolonial," "Third World," "Orientalism": all these labels as applied to Chinese situation are for various reasons inadequate and unsatisfactory and in an important sense, distortive. Their usefulness as cognitive and critical categories is doubtful, beyond the limited heuristic value they may have, since they are all fundamentally *totalizing and homogenizing, standardizing disparate historical and cultural experiences of very different cultures and societies*. The cultural conditions that these labels are meant to evoke have become so consensual and standardized that "the very world of cultural difference and plurality" which they "allegedly [bring] to visibility" is simultaneously named and closed off. (13, italics mine)

Persistent explanations of China's and Africa's experiences tend to depict the former as a

⁸ See Ian Taylor's "China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa" (2006)

⁹ See Sanusha Naidu and Daisy Mbazima's "China Africa-Relations: A New Impulse in a Changing Continental Landscape" (2008).

disciple of its European predecessors that has to be cautious about the lesson of “European” modernity and the latter as a forever immature child of European godfathers and thus always a victim of foreign invasions. Looking at recent China-Africa relations as simply relations composed of “conquerers” on one side and “victims” on the other reinforces the binarism of Western production of knowledge (such as Orientalism) and rejects the possibility of knowledge exchange between China and Africa. Terence Jackson, in his essay “Postcolonialism and Organizational Knowledge in the Wake of China’s Presence in Africa: Interrogating South-South Relation” (2012), suggests investigating interactions between China and Africa (from all levels of investment) in terms of knowledge exchange: “in connection with the possible influences on management knowledge that Chinese organizations may be importing into Africa is a question concerning the influence of Chinese presence in Africa: is this giving greater voice to African local management knowledge?” (195). Following Jackson, we might reject using overarching concepts like “colonialism” to project or assume Chinese influences on Africa, and instead investigate carefully what and how China is affecting and/or changing Africa as well as how Africans respond to and negotiate with this non-Western power. In addition to gaining a more full picture of Sino-African relations, we might determine and perpetuate modes of knowledge production mode that are not dominated by the West.

The key issue here is less the nature of Chinese engagement as colonialist or imperialist, than it is recognizing the impact of neoliberal capitalism practiced in Africa by the Chinese, in comparison to that practiced by Western countries in a time of

globalization. As Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, in their essay “East Mountain Tiger, West Mountain Tiger: China, the West, and ‘Colonialism’ in Africa” (2006), remind us: “The commonalities of PRC and Western approaches to post-colonial capitalism in Africa are fundamental, but not well-known because Western analyses of China-Africa links focus on exploitative and oppressive aspects, while seldom putting these dimension in comparative perspective” (7). Postcolonial ecocriticism especially should be cautious not to use concepts like “colonialism” and “imperialism” as a universal critical garment, but instead take a comparative approach to issues regarding Chinese engagement in Africa—an approach that will combine critical theory and empirical research in order to recognize the nuanced similarities and differences, convergences and breaks between Chinese and Western exploitations of Africa and their impacts on African environments.

Investigating Chinese Impact on African Environments: “Slow Violence” and Challenges for an Africa-focused Ecocriticism

Since Chinese investment in Africa is recent, it will take a large amount of time to produce data and adequate evidence that demonstrate the environmental impact China has had on Africa. Claude Kabemba, in “The Dragon Is Not Green Enough: the Potential Environmental Impact of Chinese Investment in the DRC” (2010), writes of China’s mining efforts:

As in the case of infrastructure, massive areas of forest and indigenous plants can also be destroyed when mines are established. It is not clear if

studies have been undertaken to calculate the cost the massive destruction will have. Without a serious assessment of these ‘mega projects’, it is the Congolese people in the long run who will have to bear the costs of the destructive nature of mining. (147)

Echoing Kabemba’s concerns, Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), explains the difficulties and challenges of detecting environmental degradation in the postcolonial worlds:

I have sought to address our inattention to calamities that are slow and long lasting, calamities that patiently dispense their devastation while remaining outside our flickering attention spans—and outside the purview of a spectacle-driven corporate media. The insidious workings of slow violence derive largely from the unequal attention given to spectacular and unspectacular time. In an age that venerates instant spectacle, slow violence is deficient in the recognizable special effects that fill movie theaters and boost ratings on TV. (6)

Whereas the more than 400 years of Western colonial and neo-colonial exploitations of African resources have brought some of that particular “slow violence” to public attention, more recent Chinese exploitation of Africa is of too short a duration to measure the effect. Arthur P.J. Mol’s essay “China’s Ascent and Africa’s Environment” suggests positively that in contrast to earlier ascending economies like European imperial powers in the 19th century, contemporary ascending economies like China will have to undergo more strict scrutiny concerning their environmental policies:

Today, globally ascending economies cannot fully escape from and ignore environmental scrutiny and demands. Hence, Chinese companies still impact heavily on the planet, but if we interpret Chinese foreign operations through a conventional World-Systems theory model as developed for earlier ascending economies, we would fail to notice the environmental normality that is also ‘guiding’ contemporary ascending economies. (792)

In contrast to Mol who suggests that current Chinese investment in Africa cannot escape the scrutiny of international environmental regulations, I believe that in addition to top-down critiques made by international institutions regarding how to regulate both the Chinese and the African governments in environmental policies, we should also pay attention to bottom-up critiques—critiques from Africans, especially from the grassroots level, and their responses to Chinese impact on the local environments. An Africa-focused ecocriticism will thus need to pay attention to both the macro and the micro levels of Chinese impact on African environments. While it is possible to demand transparency of Chinese environmental policies on Africa, gathering information about African responses to Chinese impact on African environments, specifically on the grassroots level, will take planning, effort, and imagination. Some of those efforts will come from African writers and Africanist critics who challenge Chinese impact on African environments.

Concerns regarding Chinese impact on African environments have attracted

plenty of scholarly attention from various disciplines.¹⁰ However, there are few works done in literary studies that target the issue. The absence of postcolonial and ecocritical scholarships on questions of China in Africa also reminds us of the dearth of literary production in African literature regarding Chinese issues. Although the Chinese presence in African novels can be detected here and there, it usually has little to do with the main plot, let alone attracts any critical attention. For example, in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010), Chinese restaurants and Chinese dishes like "kung bao chicken" appear in the protagonist's narrative. The author's critique of the Niger Delta's oil crisis, though, has nothing to do with Chinese participation in the Nigerian oil economy. If, under globalization, Chinese presence — Chinese businesses, products, food — has been part of African experience, how would this be recorded in African literary production? Would Chinese participation in the global economy change and/or create new themes, politics, and aesthetics in African literary production? I do not have answers to these questions, but they predict new thematic developments in African environmental literature and new critical challenges for an Africa-focused ecocriticism.

Contemporary African literature has developed alongside of postcolonial theory and other dominant Western disciplines like Marxism, Feminism, and Gender studies, to name a few. African literary production has also been influenced by the demands of the

¹⁰ Several scholarly publications have raised environmental questions regarding Chinese investment in Africa, including Ian Taylor's "China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa" (2006); Arthur P.J. Mol's "China's Ascent and Africa's Environment" (2011); and Adrian Hadland's "If the Hat Fits" (2012). Axel Harneit-Sievers, Stephen Marks, and Sanusha Naidu's edited volume *Chinese and African Perspectives on China in Africa* (2010) is another example of the relevant scholarship. In this volume, there are a few essays that focus on the ecological impacts Chinese has brought to Africa, including Claude Kabemba's "The Dragon is Not Green Enough: the Potential Environmental Impact of Chinese investment in the DRC"; Daniel Ribeiro's "Disappearing Forests, Disappearing Hope: Mozambique"; and Zhi Yingbiao and Bai Jei's "The Global Environmental Institute: Regulating the Ecological Impact of Chinese Overseas Enterprises."

global market dominated by Western readership. In his keynote speech at the Association of Nigerian Authors' Convention in 2000, Tanure Ojaide addressed the dilemma African authors had faced with regard to catering to the Western market:

Nigerian authors should avoid the opportunism of jumping to write on what Western critics look for and do not see from our writings. There have been Nigerian authors who have played extreme negativism and pessimism about Nigeria to please outsiders. Others have jumped to write on gays and lesbians or female circumcision because they form part of the discourse on Africa in Western academies. We should integrate into our works the Nigerian reality and fiction, pessimism and hope, but *let it be from within*, not from a desire to please foreign readers and critics to hear strange things about us. (Ojaide 86, italics mine)

Ojaide's advice is commensurate with "the role of environmental writer-activists" that Rob Nixon advocates for, and African literature, in this context will reflect on "slow violence" caused by continued Western neocolonialism as well as recent Chinese exploitation of African natural resources under the banner of neoliberalism. As Nixon says,

Writer-activists can help us apprehend threats imaginatively that remain imperceptible to the senses, either because they are geographically remote, too vast or too minute in scale, or are played out across a time span that exceeds the instance of observation or even the physiological life of the

human observer. In a world permeated by insidious, yet unseen or imperceptible violence, imaginative writing can help make the unapparent appear, making it accessible and tangible by humanizing drawn-out threats inaccessible to the immediate senses. (15)

This dissertation has shown this is a tradition that is already developing. Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri, Cyprian Ekwensi, Gabriel Okara, Ken Saro-Wiwa and Helon Habila have written novels that target various forms of violence brought by colonialism, neocolonialism, and more recent globalization to African local communities and environments. While Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* foregrounds the Igbo forest threatened by cultural hybridization in order to indicate an inevitable ecological crisis in future Nigeria, Okri's *The Famished Road* uses the Yoruba forest to imagine a global environmental crisis that would affect all human beings. While Ekwensi's *Burning Grass* foregrounds the tension between the countryside and the city in Fulaniland in order to reassert values of indigenous Fulani practices threatened by colonial environmentalism, Okara's *The Voice* blurs the tension in order to remind us of the danger of globalized values like capitalism and materialism to the mental and social life of postcolonial Africans. While Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* criticizes how Nigerian nationalism/resource control and the Nigerian Civil War displaced minorities of the Niger Delta and turned them into refugees, Habila's *Oil on Water* targets various forms of petro-violence that are occurring in oil communities of the Niger Delta. African authors can be a mouthpiece for Africans from the grassroots level. Through imaginative writing, African authors can bring to light to global readers the unseen, yet insidious damages of African

environments caused by Chinese engagement in Africa.

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