

AFRICAN LITERATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT: A STUDY IN POSTCOLONIAL
ECOCRITICISM

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

English – Doctor of Philosophy

2015

ABSTRACT

AFRICAN LITERATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT: A STUDY IN POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM

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African Literature and the Environment: A Study in Postcolonial Ecocriticism, examines how African literary texts document, critique, and offer alternative visions on ecological crises such as the Niger-Delta oil pollution and the dumping of toxic wastes in African waters. The study challenges the anthropocentrism dominating African environmental literary scholarship and addresses a gap in mainstream ecocriticism which typically occludes Africa's environmental problems. While African literary criticism often focuses on impacts of environmental problems on humans, my dissertation, in contrast, explores the entanglements of humans and nonhumans. The study contributes to globalizing ecocriticism, expands the burgeoning corpus of ecological investigations in African literary criticism, and participates in efforts to foster interdisciplinary connections between the humanities and the sciences.

Following the lead of postcolonial ecocritics, like Rob Nixon, who have pressed the need for dialogue between ecocriticism and postcolonialism, Chapter One interprets Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture*, and Gayatri Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* as an archive for environmental inquiry. In Chapter Two, I track representations of ecological crisis in the Niger Delta novels of Gabriel Okara, Isidore Okpewho, and Tanure Ojaide to argue that these texts spotlight the progressive devastation of the Delta environment. While critics have celebrated the human agency implicit in bombing oil installations and oil bunkering as forms of resistance in the novels, I draw attention to its limits,

positing the ecological challenges posed by the resulting oil spill, flooding, etc., to the ecology, and argue on the need for alternative means of addressing the problem.

Chapter Three brings into view the environmental despoilment caused by the Somalian wars depicted in the novels of Nuruddin Farah. This chapter is informed by the recent materialist turn in ecocriticism. I show that the interplay of the human and nonhuman aspects of the Somalian ecology produces types of agency that move us away from African literary criticism's conventional anthropocentric assessment of the toll of war. By considering the capacities of the landscape, animals, and other nonhumans to produce agency in *Maps, Secrets, Links*, and *Crossbones*, the chapter argues that Farah's work enables us to rethink anthropocentric agency. Ultimately, I foreground the interactions of humans and nonhumans in a war scenario and highlight the shared suffering and agency that their interactions produce.

The final chapter extends my analysis of human-nonhuman interactions by attending to the contradictions that often characterize such relations. Informed by Karen Thornber's notion of ecoambiguity, the chapter asserts that Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*, and J.M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* portray the ambivalence characterizing the process of meeting the sometimes competing demands for agricultural progress and environmental sustainability in their Southern African contexts. My reading captures the ambiguities that emerge as Lessing's Dick, Head's Gilbert, and Coetzee's Michael pursue their agricultural ventures while trying to maintain an ecological balance.

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To Eve and Kamsi for being there and for the joys they bring to my life. Always

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First I thank God, my creator for his many graces, mercies, and favors. His sustenance saw me through my stay at Michigan State University. When the story of my doctoral program is told, it will be said that I completed a PhD in four years; however missing from that temporal overview is the labors of Kenneth Harrow, my dissertation chair and mentor, who took interest in my work since the first day I arrived East Lansing. Ken's turnaround of dissertation chapters (within a week for the most part!) and his thorough feedback have enriched the work in this dissertation. My other committee members: Rob Nixon, Justus Nieland, Salah Hassan, and Kiki Edozie, provided suggestions and mentorship for which I am grateful. Other professors at Michigan State University such as Nwando Achebe, Folu Ogundimu, Jyotsna Singh, and Steve Rachman have provided direction and support at various points of my journey. To them I say thank you. I thank my colleague, friend, and brother, Connor Ryan for reading most of the pages that follow and the excellent suggestions he provided at every stage.

It was Chima Korieh who saw the potential in an undergraduate at the Imo State University (IMSU) and encouraged me to undertake graduate education in the United States. I thank him for his consistent support and trust in the work I do. Apollos Nwauwa has also been a shining example since our paths crossed at an academic conference a couple of years ago. He has remained a mentor ever since and I thank him for that. Maureen Eke supervised my master's thesis at Central Michigan University. She has remained an advisor, mentor, and a mother to me ever since. I appreciate all you do, Mom. I have also benefitted from the friendship and mentorship of Evan Mwangi of Northwestern University. His insistence on focusing on what is

important guided my thinking on this project. Many thanks are also due to Carmela Garritano, Amatoritsero Ede, Akin Adesokan, Olabode Ibronke, Pius Adesanmi and Adeleke Adeeko whose encouragements were invaluable throughout the writing of this dissertation.

In Nigeria, Chris Onyema introduced me to the eco in literature and I have not looked back ever since. I thank him for his love and support. I also thank Isidore Diala for the inspiration he has provided since I first took his class as a freshman at IMSU. I cannot thank him enough for his exemplary scholarship and teaching.

Friends have supported me throughout the project. I thank Jack Taylor, Anna Feuerstein, Abdulhamit Arvas, Esra Genc, Hanan Aly, Yesomi Umolu, Jennifer Royston, Samuel Salvidar, Noble Onyema Ikeh, Emmanuel Akanwa, Tobi Omoyele, Kenneth Agbonwaneten, Dammy Agbonwaneten, Bala Saho, and Leonald Ndubueze Mbah for all their touch in my life.

I have also enjoyed the warmth, love, and prayers of my wonderful family. My parents, Clement and Justina have supported me with their prayers, love, and everything else they can afford. I will remain in their debt for everything they have done to bring me this far. I thank my siblings for being there and being a constant reminder of the Nigerian environment. I am grateful to my inlaws for the gift of my wife and for being part of my story even when it was unclear where I stood with their daughter. Evelyn Moromokeji's respect and appreciation of intellectual labor saw me through the writing of this project. Her greatest gift, however, is Kamsiyonna, whose arrival motivated the completion of the dissertation so I could spend time with him. My dedication of the dissertation to mother and child is a step towards acknowledging the ways they enrich my environment. Finally I thank Michigan State University for providing a conducive environment for developing this project.

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Introduction

There is an interesting moment in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964) when Oduche, Ezeulu's son, traps the royal python in his box as a defiance of tradition. The conflict surrounding the snake's "arrest" takes its significance from the native view of the snake as more than a mere animal. The snake, in the community's vision, is sacred to their deity, Idemili. As such, they believe that whoever kills the snake will have to appease Idemili by performing an elaborate funeral or risk divine excoriation. I invoke this story within Achebe's novel to foreground the interactions of people and their larger environment it suggests. The snake has a relationship with the community based on the respect of the snake's inviolability. On the other hand, the conflict arises because the community is threatened by the overzealous Oduche whose action seems to compromise the integrity of the relationship. In the economy of the novel, the snake is not subordinated to humans; in fact it is rather the humans who have a duty to ensure its survival. It is notable how the snake's fate is tied to the community's relation with their deity. That network of relationships is lost when environmental criticism focuses mainly or exclusively on humans, as has been the case in African literary scholarship.

While there is a growing body of studies invested in the intersection of African literature and environmental justice, there remains a dearth of literary scholarship that examines the ecological crises in African literature by paying attention to the interaction of humans and nonhumans in these spaces. In other words, the exciting work being done in African environmental scholarship by scholars such as Rob Nixon and Byron Caminero-Santagmelo brilliantly articulates the impacts of ecological degradation on humans in the narratives they

examine. However, their socio-environmental perspective does not take sufficient cognizance of the nonhumans in these environments even if the idea of ecology suggests the interplay of people and their environment.

I draw from and build on their existing work in this dissertation by emphasizing the interaction of humans and nonhumans in African ecologies. I argue that the prominence of human concerns and marginal status of the larger ecology in African literary criticism derive from the stress on human categories of being and existence in postcolonial theory which has shaped the ways we usually read African literature. An account of the ecology in African literature must consider the complex networks of relationships between human beings and their larger environment lest we run the risk of reifying the anthropocentric positioning of the environment that led to problems these African literary texts critique in the first place. To flesh out my claims, I examine the representations, in African literary texts, of ecological crises such as the oil pollution in the Niger-Delta, ecologies of war in Somalia and South Africa, as well as the aftermath of agricultural development in South Africa and Botswana.

I aim in this dissertation to intervene in the fields of African literature, ecocriticism, and postcolonial studies. Taking African literature as a starting point, it is easy to see the emphasis on human concerns and subjectivity in its scholarship. Olakunle George's book, *Relocating Agency: Modernity and African Letters* (2003), for instance, offers an analysis of the configuration of agency in African literature. For George, the "perspective on agency," which African literature offers resides in the "domain of language" and "concrete politics." Throughout his book, notions of agency are located in humans and the possibilities embedded in human character (x). George's

work is representative of the dominant mode of African literary criticism, which often emphasizes human characters, their language, and their actions in the narratives. George suggests that “positive agency [in African letters] can result from discursive or political acts that are otherwise conceptually limited” (x).

Given that African literature is largely a product of the colonial encounter, it is understandable how its critical scholarship have largely focused on questions of decolonization, the nation state, and more recently questions of transnationalism, sexualities, and complex gender troubles. The emphasis on liberation and decolonization implicated in these thematic contours explains somewhat the relegation of environmental concerns to the background of African literary criticism. In his well-known essay, “Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses,” William Slaymaker claims that the slow response to ecocritical concerns in African literary studies is a result of the green movement being considered another imperial design. In his words, “[t]his ecohesitation has been conditioned in part by black African suspicion of the green discourses emanating from metropolitan Western centers” (133). Nevertheless, the last decade has seen a rise in the number of environmental African literary texts and criticisms. Literature on the oil curse and its ecological aftermath, for example, have proliferated both on the continent and in the Western academy with the publication of works such as Kaine Agary’s *Yellow-Yellow* (2006), Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* (2011), Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist* (2006), among others. These narratives have also been subject of literary criticism as the essays in Ogaga Okuyade’s collection, *Eco-Critical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes* (2013) show. With the exception of three essays that focus on

Zimbabwe and Kenya, the remaining essays (fifteen of them) focus mostly on the Niger-Delta crisis as represented in literature.

What these essays share with the few other existing studies of the environment in African literature such as Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), and Byron Caminero-Santagmelo's *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology* (2014) is a treatment of the impacts of ecological crises on humans. Nixon's exemplary work of praxis scholarship is built around what he aptly terms "slow violence." Slow violence for Nixon is "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). Nixon's work addresses examples of slow violence in a reading of texts from the Global South, namely Nigeria, Kenya, Antigua, South Africa, and India. Slow violence, for him, ranges from the impacts of oil exploration in Nigeria and the Middle East, deforestation in Kenya, environmental consequences of war in Iraq, and of the tourism industry in Kincaid's Antigua and Ndebele's South Africa.

I return to the theoretical possibilities of Nixon's slow violence throughout the dissertation because of the opportunities it offers to read African literature in new ways. Yet Nixon's socio-environmental angle of vision leaves largely unaddressed the implications of slow violence for nonhumans or what Tim Morton describes as "Strange Strangers" in his *The Ecological Thought* (2010). In his chapter on The Niger-Delta problem where he discusses the work of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his son Ken Wiwa Jr, Nixon's critical lens is most robust and adept when he discusses oil exploration vis a vis the survival of the Ogoni and other ethnic minorities.

However, he leaves the reader yearning for a similar handling of the implications of his reading for the other minorities, the strange stranger, the environmental Others in the Niger-Delta. After all the Delta is one of the most biodiverse region in the world, and these other components of the ecology have as much to contribute to the explication and understanding of environmental problems as slow violence. My reading of Niger-Delta literature in the second chapter builds on the work of Rob Nixon by considering the stakes of including nonhumans in such analysis.

Nixon's ecocritical reading of Global literature finds its localized parallel in Caminero-Santagmelo's *Different Shades of Green*, which is in fact the first (and only) single-authored monograph on African literature. In it, the author draws on work in political ecology and socio-environmental justice to articulate readings of ecological issues such as deforestation, the Niger-Delta oil crisis, bioregionalism, among others. Caminero-Santagmelo "examines the relationships among African literary writing, anticolonial struggle, social justice, and environmentalism in Africa" (4). Caminero-Santagmelo's work offers a corrective to the narrow treatment of Africa in ecocritical scholarship such as that found in *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*, which he co-edited with Garth Myers. As the editors admit in their introduction, "Even with our scope narrowed to Africa, the volume's coverage is still inadequate. Authors who belong in such a volume—Chinua Achebe, Bessie Head, Nurrudin Farah, and Ayi Kwei Armah—are not included, and Francophone literature is

not represented. Western Africa is underrepresented, and there is somewhat a focus on white African writing” (13).¹

If African literary criticism, including the growing corpus of work dealing with environmentalism, predominantly focus on humans, their oppression, resistance, and agency, my project seeks to consider the imbrication of humans with their environment in those instances of oppression, resistance, and agency. In other words, I intend to address the incompleteness, the partiality of the predominantly human stories in African environmental literary criticism. My intention is not to eclipse humans in the analysis but to de-privilege them and attempt a reading of the texts with a dehierarchized vision of the relationship between humans and other life forms inhabiting African environments.

¹ The same gap is noticeable in *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives* edited by Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt, and *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literature of the Environment*, edited by Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Chandley. One of the two chapters on Africa in Roos and Hunt’s collection is on the white South African writer, J.M. Coetzee. In that essay, Sheng-Yen Yu “engage[s] in an ecocritical analysis of the significant implications of excess hunting, landscape depletion, and environmental apocalypticism” in Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* (86). Two essays touch on Africa in *Postcolonial Ecologies*. Allison Caruth’s “Compassion, Commodification, and The Lives of Animals: J. M. Coetzee’s Recent Fiction” argues that “Coetzee’s novels imply that compassion for animals—and, above all, for the globally traded bodies of livestock—depends on our ability not just to think about animals or just to codify their rights but also to imagine our bodies in terms of theirs” (202). The other, Jonathan Steinwand’s, “What the Whales Would Tell Us Cetacean Communication in Novels by Witi Ihimaera, Linda Hogan, Zakes Mda, and Amitav Ghosh” includes the work of another South African, Zakes Mda. Here too, the focus is on animals: “By characterizing these threatened animals as ancestors (Ihimaera and Hogan) and companion species (Mda and Ghosh), these novels provide guidance for thinking about nonhuman others in ways that resist domesticating or romanticizing the other by focusing attention on the lives, the knowledge, the arts, the values, and the beliefs of the people who dwell among these species” (185). Like Caminero-Santagmelo’s new book, my project builds on these studies by exploring a range of texts representing a broader African geography.

A study of literary texts from the ecological perspective I propose here is significant in many ways. The ecological worldview of different African societies negates the anthropocentric leaning of African literary criticism. Certain African cultures see the nonhuman world as sacred life forms deserving respect for ecological harmony. Frantz Fanon, in *Wretched of the Earth*, calls this worldview the “magical superstructure that permeates the indigenous society” (18). In these societies, Fanon writes, “the hillock which has been climbed as if to get closer to the moon, the river bank, which has been descended whenever the dance symbolizes ablution, washing, and purification, are sacred places” (20).² Fanon is writing of the significance of dance rituals in African colonial societies, but of concern to my purposes is the sacred status accorded the hillock and river bank. This is important because this perspective transforms the rock and river bank from mere “objects” to vital aspects of ecological composition.

While Africans, as James Ferguson has rightly pointed out, belong to a global society steeped in late capitalism, which continues to reorient and refashion cultural practices in Africa, the indigenous cultural values remain influential. I invoke this example of cultural valuation of nonhumans because conferring sacredness on these other life forms productively guards against abuse and destruction of African environments. More importantly, the dance ritual accompanied with the significance of the large environment in which it is performed, suggests the imbrication of the human and more-than-human world in ways for which African literary criticism has not sufficiently accounted.

² I am aware that Fanon is dismissive of these cultural practices. My goal is to recuperate such moments in Fanon’s text for postcolonial ecocriticism. I explore this issue more fully in Chapter One where I discuss his work in detail.

My project brings to the foreground nonhuman Others often relegated because of the premium placed on humans in ecological considerations. While paying attention to the nonhumans can be beneficial because of their instrumental value to humans, there is an intrinsic value to the protection of biodiversity that justifies this project. This project asks that we rethink the notions of environmental protection merely for the sake of humans. While the interests of people are not discounted in this project as deep ecology would, the challenge to which this study rises is the possibility of an African ecocriticism that extends its focus to both humans and Others in the ecosystems. In addition to recuperating and/or foregrounding the nonhuman Others, the more embracing view of the environment I propose here can transform and complicate our understanding of environmental challenges depicted in these narratives.

Of course the African continent is indeed an important site to explore environmental degradation given its treatment as savage and brutish in the colonial imaginary and as waste or dump site in the current neoliberal order. In colonial writing on Africa, the African environment was portrayed as being in a pure state of nature. In this configuration of the continent, the socio-historical conditions of the African people and their imbrication with their environment were neglected. This tendency is manifest in works like Eric Dutton's *The Basuto of Basutoland* (1923), and Theodore Roosevelt's *African Game Trails* (1910). A shared characteristic of these texts is the tendency to elide the humans in the African spaces, focusing instead on the nonhuman component of the environment as wild states to be tamed and controlled. When these texts include humans in the environment they describe, the portrayal is often about a savage people with little or no rational sensibility. Taken together, these depictions aim to justify the

colonial enterprise, that is, to provide a rationale for the exploitation of the human and nonhuman resources in the territories, albeit in the name of civilization and progress.

In more recent times, thanks to the impact of globalization, the African environment has not fared considerably better. Lawrence Summers' form of cold rationalized efficiency of dumping waste in Africa, where life is short anyhow is instructive here. The neoliberal logic guiding Summers' leaked World Bank memo is also the rule of resource extraction in Africa. The business of oil exploration, for example, has resulted in ecologically damaging practices in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. Although there is a reduction in the spate of violence in the Niger-Delta, the Delta environments remain in a state of destruction due to gas flaring, oil spills, and oil bunkering, all acts inimical to the people and biodiversity of the region. What is particularly remarkable about the practices of the oil companies and other multinational corporations operating on the continent is their continuation of the colonial disregard and contempt for the environment in the communities they operate. By disregarding best practices they adopt in their home countries and other western countries, the companies continue to treat these African environments as devoid of people or constituted by disposable people. Issues of environmental devastation and deforestation are recurring even as new Asiatic economic forces such as China are now replacing ex-colonizers in their search for natural minerals and other resources in exchange for transient development.

In addition, conflicts exacerbated by the quest for resource and political control have left certain parts of the continent currently embroiled in war or still reeling from the slow violence of past conflicts. Put differently, warfare is another fallout of colonialist ideology and the politics of

resource extraction that has ecological consequences for the continent. James Ferguson has noted that “the continent has been racked by a series of civil and interstate wars, with a number of countries having endured year after years of endemic instability and violence, and along with that, the killing, maiming, and masses of refugees that so often dominate the world’s imagination of “Africa” (9-10). South Sudan, the newest country on the continent, for instance, has been embroiled in a war about political and resource control between the Dinka and Nuer elites on and off. Significantly, this conflict threatens the ecology especially given the technological equipment used in modern warfare. In the earlier, tragic Darfur crisis, for instance, it was alleged that the Bashir led Khartoum government used chemical weapons against the South Sudan rebels. Whether the allegations are accurate or not, the possibility of using nuclear or chemical weapons raises an alarming question on the ecological consequences of such technologies. As critics including Nixon have shown, the impact of these chemicals and other weapons of war remain active long after the physical violence ends; they threaten biodiversity of the continent and might impact climate change.

On a more intellectual level, the project expands the field of African literature and ecocriticism. While African critics such as Caminero-Santagmelo and Anthony Vital have taken up environmental issues in African literature, they have not adequately engaged the broader field of ecocriticism, which focuses mainly on Western literature and examples.³ In her exemplary book on ecocriticism in East Asian literature, *Ecoambiguity: Environmental Crises and East*

³ See Anthony Vital’s “Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology and Life & Times of Michael K.”

Asian Literature (2012), Karen Thornber critiques the relegation of non-Western literature in mainstream ecocriticism (18). She also highlights the “anthropocentric or sociocentric standpoint” of the second wave of ecocriticism under which we can include most work being done in African environmentalism because of their social justice mission. Thornber’s solution to the environmental justice approach is not to embrace deep ecology and its romanticization of nature. Rather, her notion of ecoambiguity enables us to explore the ambiguities surrounding human and nonhuman interactions. Thornber’s work probes the “complex, contradictory interactions between people and environments with a significant human presence (1). Her work is indeed exemplary for concentrating on the shifting nature of the interactions between humans and their environment and for showing that we can be attentive to globalization’s ecological problems while being mindful of the complex interactions at work in the process.

As the following chapters attest, African literature can benefit from the insights of the work being done in the broader field of ecocriticism by such scholars as Karen Thornber, Tim Morton whose idea of the ecological thought shapes my reading of Niger Delta novels in Chapter Two, and Stacy Alaimo among other material ecocritics whose attentive investigations of the complex interrelationships of humans and nonhumans inspire my reading of Farah’s novels on Somalia’s war ecologies in Chapter Three. As I demonstrate in the ensuing chapters, engaging with ecocriticism provides innovative ways of understanding African literature. However, the relationship is not unidirectional. My work expands the field of ecocriticism where African literature maintains a marginal status. In addition to expanding the field’s scope, the pressures

put on ecocritical paradigms by the African textual examples and contexts make them more robust, rewrite them, and sharpen them as critical apparatuses.

A Note on Method

This project falls within the purview of postcolonial ecocriticism. According to Caminero-Santagmelo and Myers, postcolonial ecocriticism, draws “attention to both global imperial contexts and parts of the world often elided” by western ecocriticism’s focus on primarily American and British cultural productions (6). This elision is profoundly felt in the first collection of essays on ecocriticism, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. None of the essays focused on formerly colonized spaces. Even later interventions like Lawrence Buell’s are still largely focused on Euro-America even when they cursorily attend to a few postcolonial texts. Buell’s *The Future of Environmental Criticism* briefly examines the work of Derek Walcott, Wole Soyinka, and Mahasweta Devi, but the emphasis on the American environmental imagination is not disguised by the brevity of the exploration of the work of the mentioned postcolonial authors. A more recent example of this occlusion can be seen in the new collection of essays, *Material Ecocriticism* (2014), edited by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, where none of the essays focus on postcolonial environments.

While my work is primarily an excursion in postcolonial studies, I adopt what Adeleke Adeeko calls “theoretical ecumenism” in his description of Simon Gikandi’s methodology in *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (2). In other words, my work is enriched by an eclectic mix of approaches that speak to the relationality emphasized in this project and my interests in

interdisciplinarity. My close reading of the narratives is enhanced by the historical and sociopolitical contexts of the narratives. Throughout the dissertation, I am attentive to how the contexts of the narratives shape them and vice versa. Additionally, the rich work being done in the humanistic social sciences and the ecological sciences on the environment find their way into the readings that follow. For instance, my discussion of deforestation in the narratives is accompanied by the scientific positions on the significance of trees and how such knowledge can enrich the reading of African letters.

It should be noted that my theoretical choices are guided by the gap I intend to fill and not the rigidity of the critical positions. As such, Tim Morton's deconstructive sensibilities and Rob Nixon's more politically astute work sit side by side throughout the dissertation, especially in my reading of Niger-Delta literature in Chapter Two. Morton's deconstruction of the nature/culture binary and the idea of human superiority is critical for my approach to understanding Niger Delta ecologies as habitus for equal, interdependent beings. Morton's ecological paradigm is also useful for me to circumvent the privileging of humans in work on socio-environmental justice but his approach also has limitations that Nixon helps me to overcome. Nixon's work retains the sociopolitical implications of ecological challenges for the global poor in ways that resonate with the African environments in which I am invested. In fact, Nixon's bold analysis of the socio-political valences of slow violence inspires the readings I undertake in the chapters of this dissertation.

My engagement with material ecocriticism and Thornber's ecoambiguity is also motivated by the openings they provide for exploring human-nonhuman interactions and

relationships in ways that capture their complexities. It is possible that certain Africanists might object to my use of “Western theories” as did a member of the audience when I presented an excerpt of Chapter Two at the 2013 African Studies Association meeting in Baltimore Maryland. But the fact is that the nature of the work in this project blurs the divide that such reasoning is based on. In addition to accounting for the interactions of the different beings in the environments of the narratives I investigate, my project also pays attention to the interactions of transnational spaces. I am in agreement with Ursula Heise who posits in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008) that placeist thinking needs to come to terms with the overarching lesson of globalization, namely the imbrication of spaces, a sense of the planet. (55). A planetary approach to the ecology undermines the here versus there, Africa vs West dichotomy that critics of my approach base their opinion on. In the end, I have chosen the tools that allow me to do the work I set out to accomplish.

The primary texts under scrutiny here span a broad range of time and spaces. The oldest text I analyze is Dorris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* (1950) while the newest is Nuruddin Farah’s *Crossbones* (2011). In between are narratives such as Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice* (1964), Bessie Head’s *When the Rain Clouds Gather* (1969), J.M. Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), Isidore Okpewho’s *Tides* (1993), Farah’s *Secrets* (1998), and *Links* (2004), as well as Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist* (2006). All the texts serve as important sites for tracking the complexities of the ecological problems plaguing the continent and understanding the interrelationships of humans and nonhumans in these African ecologies. These narratives also permit me to cover the major geographical regions of Sub Saharan Africa. Chapter Two devoted

to Nigeria's Delta covers West Africa while the ecologies of war chapter on Farah's novels represents East Africa. The reading of the work of Lessing, Head, and Coetzee in the final chapter is an attempt to represent Southern Africa.

Chapter Breakdown

The project is divided into four chapters all connected by their attention to a complex examination of ecological issues cognizant of the interactions and relationships between human beings and their larger environment. If literary texts are the primary materials of the last three chapters of the dissertation, the first chapter is attentive to the theoretical writings of Frantz Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Homi Bhabha's, in *Location of Culture* (1994), as well as Gayatri Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) and *Death of a Discipline* (2003). That this chapter is steeped in postcolonial theory does not mean it lays out the theoretical framework of the project. In fact, the theoretical eclecticism of this project resists such unifying impulse. Rather this chapter reconsiders postcolonial theory because to rethink African environmental literary criticism from a less anthropocentric perspective means rethinking its basis in postcolonial studies. In other words, if concern for the human population of the formerly colonized peoples energizes postcolonial theory and consequently, African literary criticism, then it is important that a project as mine should begin with an analysis of the foundational postcolonial thinkers to uncover the ecological thinking they embody.

While ecocritics have critiqued these postcolonial theorists for not addressing environmental concerns, I read the work of Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak as an environmental archive. My analysis in this chapter captures the ways the postcolonial

theorists under study are thinking ecologically and/or how they anticipate postcolonial ecocriticism. In Fanon's case, for example, I submit that his discussion of raw materials taken from the colonies in *Wretched of the Earth* enable an understanding of the destruction of those ecologies, while his discussion of the spatial demarcation and uneven development in colonial Algeria anticipates what we call environmental racism today. My reading of Bhabha's work is attentive to the theoretical possibilities of his poststructural deconstruction of the "human" in postcolonial studies for the analysis of human-nonhuman entanglements I investigate throughout this dissertation. Finally, I discuss the parallels between what Spivak calls "silencing of woman" and the occlusion of the environment in early postcolonial theorizing. I argue that Spivak is thinking ecologically with her work on planetarity and the attention she pays to Aboriginal culture in India. The reading of these thinkers shed a new light on their work and open spaces for a new reading of African literature cognizant of the Others in the environment.

My rereading of Fanon, Bhabha, and Spivak clears the path for rethinking postcolonial resistance and agency in Niger-Delta literature in Chapter Two. If Fanon sanctions violence as a strategy of resistance in an era where the legibility of environmental violence was unclear, current understandings of such violence in relation to global warming and climate change authorize a revision of Fanonian violence and its contemporary manifestations in postcolonial resistance. Take the Niger-Delta case where the dominant forms of physical resistance against oil exploitation are represented in literature through bombing oil installations and oil bunkering, which involves sabotaging oil pipelines to gain access to oil. While critics have celebrated these forms of resistance, following the postcolonial tradition of resistance and agency, I ask that we

rethink such veneration considering the devastation they wreak on the ecology. Drawing on Tim Morton's idea of ecological thought in my reading of Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, Okpewho's *Tides* and Ojaide's *The Activist*, I claim that these forms of resistance hurt the larger ecology and do not take into account the rights and obligations towards nonhuman Others, those with whom we share the environment. In focusing on these narratives, I intend to move away from the centrality of Ken Saro-Wiwa's oeuvre in the consideration of Niger-Delta literature and highlight other texts in this rich literary archive. It is remarkable that Isidore Okpewho's novel, *Tides*, published in the midst of the Ogoni struggle in 1993 has not received considerable critical attention. Okpewho is more known for his scholarly work on oral literature and the African diaspora. My reading recuperates this novel, which is also remarkable for its epistolary form I interrogate in the chapter.

My attentiveness to the larger environment in this chapter also yields a new interpretation of Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*. If critics such as Arthur Ravenscroft and Bernth Lindfors have read this novel as depicting post-independent disillusionment and have also examined the peculiarities of its Ijaw-inflected style, I interpret the text as a Niger-Delta novel that presages the slow violence of oil pollution in the region. Put differently, Nixon's concept of slow violence allows me to consider Okara's novel as representing the incubation phase of environmental degradation in the Delta. Further, I claim that Okpewho's *Tides*, and Ojaide's *The Activist* manifest the intermediate and advanced phases of ecological degradation. I track how the evolution of environmental degradation in the Delta parallels its depiction in these literary texts.

Chapter Three focuses on the Somalian ecologies of Nuruddin Farah's war novels. The chapter examines the ecological impacts of the Somalian crisis as depicted in Farah's *Secrets*, *Links*, and *Crossbones* to demonstrate how his work exemplifies an ecological aesthetics that transcends the anthropocentrism I critique in the previous chapter. Clearly there is a boom in war narratives in African literature, a situation that has caused certain writers and critics including Helon Habila to lampoon African writers for feeding the West with stereotypes of a suffering Africa.⁴ The boom has also resulted in a rich critical harvest with articles and books devoted to the topic of war. *Remembering Biafra: Narrative, History, and Memory of the Nigeria-Biafra War* (2010), for instance, is a collection of essays on the Nigeria-Biafra civil war published after the international conference on the war convened by Chima Korieh at Marquette University in 2009. The essays on literature (except one) in the collection track the impacts of the war on the Igbos, the complicities of the Nigerian government and Britain, among other human-centered topics. We can make a similar claim for the articles in the special issue of *African Literature Today* on war published in 2008. The anthropocentric leaning of the essays is characteristic of the dominant mode of analyzing war literature in African studies.⁵

I am interested in Farah's novels here because of their relevance to a critique of war bearing on the interactions of people with their surroundings in a wartime scenario. The work of

⁴ Helon Habila terms this "Caine-prize aesthetic," after the prestigious Caine Prize for African writing which he also won in 2001. See his review of NoViolet Bulawayo's novel, *We Need New Names* for his critique: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/20/need-new-names-bulawayo-review>

⁵ See *War in African Literature Today* 26 (2008).

this chapter is aided by material ecocriticism elaborated by scholars such as Stacy Alaimo, Serenella Iovino, and Serpil Oppermann. Material ecocriticism is interested in the materiality of beings/things in the ecology. Material ecocritics trace the interactions of humans and their environments, paying attention to the networks of exchanges and distributed agency that mark such encounters. Material ecocriticism instantiates the idea of the agenticity of things, an idea Jane Bennett espouses in her *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2009). If agency is usually located in human beings and based on intentionality in postcolonial studies as evident in George's work mentioned earlier or even Fanon's call for individual and collective human agency in *The Wretched of the Earth*, material ecocriticism asks that we rethink this dominant interpretation of agency by emphasizing action or effect rather than intentionality. As Dana Phillips and Heather I. Sullivan aptly put it, "[a]bove all, material ecocriticism insists that human beings are 'actors' operating within material processes that include multitudes of other 'actors,' the majority of which are not human or, for that matter conscious" (446). To think of agency in terms of action or effect places humans alongside a network of other ecological actors. Material ecocriticism is thus valuable as a critical standpoint to explore the ways Farah's novels represent Somalia's ecologies. In fact, my argument is that Farah's work is attentive to the complex interactions between humans and nonhumans in their portrayal of a shared suffering. Farah's work enables us to rethink anthropocentric notions of agency if we consider the capacities of the landscape, animals, and other nonhumans to produce effects on humans and their environment as represented in *Secrets*, *Links*, and *Crossbones*.

One enduring lesson of Thornber's aforementioned work is her insistence that the interactions of humans and nonhumans do not produce clear-cut solutions to environmental problems; her thesis is that the interactions produce the kind of ambiguities that I seek to evoke in the chapters of the dissertation that follow. For example, while the sacred status conferred on certain animals and trees in certain African societies guarantees their sustainability, as seen in the discussion of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* in Chapter One, the killing of the "non-sacred" animals for meat and other purposes complicates a simple view of these communities as protective of the environment. Drawing from Thornber's work on ecoambiguity, I address these complications as they appear in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*, and J.M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*. All three texts focus on agriculture: commercial agriculture in the case of Charlie and Dick in Lessing's novel and Gilbert and Makhaya in Head's novels, as well as subsistence agriculture for Michael in Coetzee's text. My claim is that these narratives portray the contradictions characterizing the process of meeting the sometimes competing demands for development and environmental sustainability.

As indicated earlier, at the core of the project and its chapters is an effort to underscore an ecological perspective that decenters humans through an exploration of the representations of ecological issues in African cultural productions. In this way, my project departs from most ecocritical scholarship in African literary criticism. While these studies focus mainly, if not only on the effects of ecological problems on humans, this study hopes to recuperate the nonhuman components of the environment with a view to highlighting their agency and showing how a

more ecological view of the environment is critical for a thorough appraisal and tackling of ecological disasters on the continent. By examining the ways these primary texts explore Africa's ecological problems, I hope to show their contributions to ecological discourses on Africa and to advance the fields of African literary scholarship, postcolonial studies, and ecocriticism. It must be noted that I do not disparage or dismiss the import of the scholarship centered on socio-environmental justice in African literary criticism. I am in conversation with these scholars and readers will find their inspiration in the pages that follow. But it is important to ensure that the environmental Others are not sacrificed in our politics of human emancipation.

That said, to read African literature in ways permitting the consideration of the environmental Others will have to begin with a reconceptualization of postcolonial theory which has primarily shaped our reception of African letters. The first chapter, to which I now turn, offers a rereading of the work of Fanon, Bhabha, and Spivak that allows for the emergence of a new mode of reading, the kind that takes cognizance of the fact that people are always imbricated with their environment and that colonial and post-colonial problems have ecological consequences.

Chapter One

Postcolonial Theory and its Ecological (In)attention

In this chapter, I explore the postcolonial theorizings of Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak to demonstrate an ecocritical reading of their texts and to show the potential of such reading for furthering the dialogue that scholars like Rob Nixon have sought to establish between postcolonialism and ecocriticism. As the editors of *ARIEL*'s special issue on postcolonial ecocriticism in settler nations rightly pointed out, “[d]espite each discipline’s ostensibly divergent focus [they mean postcolonialism and ecocriticism], we cannot neglect one over the other, but must link—must think—the two together” (6). For Simon Estok, despite the many explanations for the slow integration of postcolonialism and ecocriticism, “there are many reasons why they should work in concert” (“Afterword” 222).

Following the lead of these scholars, I seek to decenter the human or anthropocentric in postcolonial configurations to pave way for an ecological understanding of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism. As Estok astutely suggests, “[c]olonialism has subsided considerably, but the social and environmental effects of colonialism . . . still urgently need attention” (226). First, I begin with an exploration of why postcolonial theory ignored environmental questions at its inception even when the African pre-colonial contexts, for instance, were comprised of societies attuned to ecological sustainability and the agency of nonhuman life forms in these environments. Then I examine the work of the above named theorists, which I read eclectically and subtextually for the spaces they open for an ecological critique and for the insights they contribute to ecocritical study in the postcolony. This mode of

reading offers a new perspective that enriches the texts' concerns with postcolonialism even as it furthers the dialogue mentioned above.

I focus on Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Bhabha's *Location of Culture*, and Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* and *Death of a Discipline* as well as her *Death of a Discipline*. I read these narratives as an environmental archive that is amenable to ecological considerations. These texts are chosen because they lend themselves to ecocritical inquiry relevant for bridging ecocriticism and postcolonialism. Fanon's interests in the spatial economy of the colony, the economics of resource plundering, and what he calls the "magical superstructure" of the African colonial societies open up spaces for theorizing environmental racism, critiquing the loss of biodiversity in Africa, and elaborating the basis of an African-centered ecocriticism. In Bhabha's case, I will argue that his deconstruction of the "human" by his insistence on the contingent, relational status of identity, and his theorization of a postcolonial perspective to postmodernism enable us to extend such a relational ethic to human/nonhuman relationship. In addition, his theorization of hybridity is important for analyzing the strategies of resistance against environmental problems and for reading African folktales as sites for decentering the human.

In the work of Spivak, I focus on how the elision of women in early postcolonial discourse is linked to the elision of environmental questions and evokes the relationship between the oppression of women and the environment to which ecofeminists have attended. Furthermore, Spivak's conceptualization of globalization is germane to ecological thinking. In other words, her critique of globalization and the processes of transnational corporations also raise the question of the ecological impacts of their operations. I illustrate this phenomenon with instances of toxic dumping in Africa and the environmental racism inherent in such violations.

Finally, I contend that Spivak's consideration of ecological justice in her later work lends emphasis to the need for drawing inspiration from indigenous notions of the environment to help achieve ecological sustainability.

In an essay published in 2002, Nixon attempts to provide the rationale for the so-called late environmental turn in postcolonial literary studies. According to Nixon,

Broadly speaking, there are four main schisms between the dominant concerns of postcolonialists and ecocritics. First, postcolonialists have tended to foreground hybridity and cross-cultivation. Ecocritics, on the other hand, have historically been drawn to discourses of purity: virgin wilderness and the preservation of "uncorrupted" last great places. Second, postcolonial writing and criticism largely concern themselves with displacement, while environmental literary studies tended to give priority to the literature of space. Third, and relatedly, postcolonial studies has tended to favor the cosmopolitan and the transnational.

Postcolonialists are typically critical of nationalism, whereas the canons of environmental literature and criticism have developed within a national (and often nationalist) American framework. Fourth, postcolonialism had devoted considerable attention to excavating or reimagining the marginalized past: history from below and border histories, often along transnational axes of migrant memory. By contrast, within much environmental literature and criticism, something different happens to history. It is often repressed or subordinated to the pursuit of timeless, solitary moments of communion with nature. There is a durable tradition within American natural history writing of erasing the history of

colonized peoples through the myth of the empty lands. Postcolonialist critics are wary of the role that this strain of environmental writing (especially wilderness writing) has played in burying the very histories that they themselves have sought to unearth. (“Environmentalism and Postcolonialism” 235)

Nixon is quoted at length here to show the emphasis that the first wave of ecocriticism in America places on deep ecology, as against the social ecology that Lawrence Buell has described as the second wave of ecocriticism. Since William Rueckert first used the term, ecocriticism, in 1978, the concept has been used to articulate different shades of environmentalisms. The earliest manifestation was in deep ecology, which maintained a strict distinction between nature and culture. According to Ursula K. Heise, deep ecology “foregrounds the value of nature in and of itself, the equal rights of other species, and the importance of small communities” (“The Hitchhiker’s” 507). Heise’s conceptualization of deep ecology suggests attentiveness to nature writing and/or wilderness preservation characteristic of the work of the American writer, Henry Thoreau. Greg Garrard includes pastoral and wilderness writings as examples of deep ecology (67). The deep ecology approach to ecocriticism was popular in American nature writing but critiqued in postcolonial studies for its neglect of the environment’s social dimensions. Postcolonial critics in particular found deep ecology complicit in the project of western imperialism because it upholds the tropical Edenic and wild portrayals of Africa and the new world in colonialist discourse.⁶

⁶ Apart from Nixon, other critics like Byron Caminero-Santagmelo and Garth Myers have critiqued the pastoral or wilderness conservation ethic of first wave ecocriticism. See their introduction to the collection, *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies*

However, the strict nature-culture dichotomy has become a minority position in ecocriticism, as most criticisms are now socially inflected. Heise describes social ecology as that which “tends to value nature primarily in its human uses and has affinities with political philosophies ranging from anarchism and socialism to feminism” (The Hitchhiker’s” 507). Heise’s description foregrounds the inextricability of the human from nature. In fact, this approach, representing the poststructural phase of ecocriticism, considers nature/culture dichotomy a social construct. As such, recent ecocritical scholarship shows their imbrication as in Lawrence Buell’s definition of the environmental: “I refer both to ‘natural’ and ‘human-built’ dimensions of the palpable world. Though I shall also insist on the distinction, one must also blur it by recourse to the more comprehensive term. Human transformations of physical nature have made the two realms increasingly indistinguishable” (3). Buell’s definition is consistent with a poststructural deconstruction of an untouched nature distinguishable from culture, as seen, for instance, in Timothy Morton’s *Ecology Without Nature* where he “argues that the very idea of ‘nature’ which so many hold dear will have to wither away in an ‘ecological’ state of human society. Strange as it may sound, the idea of nature is getting in the way of properly ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics, and art” (1).

Although Nixon does a good job explaining the late entrance of postcolonial ecocriticism into the critical terrain, the passage above raises a question concerning the indigenous

in Africa, for their contribution. It must be said, however, that not only postcolonial ecocritics took exception to wilderness portrayals. Michael Dash, for example, illuminated the portrayal of the New World as Edenic or devoid of history in his analysis of the tropics in his book, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 1998).

environmental knowledge that characterized pre-colonial African societies. Traditional African societies, despite their complexities and differences, seem joined by an attentiveness to the idea of an ethics of the earth. In this mode of seeing, certain nonhuman life forms in the environment including animals, plants, etc. are considered sacred and important. As we will see when I discuss the ecological value of Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, later in this chapter, these societies maintained a relation to their environment that differs from the global commodification of life in the hyper capitalist economy. The environmentalism being discussed here was local, a characteristic shared with the first wave ecocriticism; it was a kind that emphasized the interplay of the human and nonhuman for ecological sustainability. Why then did the theoretical response to the intractable problem of colonialism not give serious consideration to the environment?

There are at least two reasons why postcolonial theory paid less attention to the indigenous environmental economy that characterized pre-colonial societies, like the African ones.⁷ The first is that postcolonial theory retained the anthropocentric leaning of the Western epistemology it critiqued. While postcolonial criticism has played an important role in the assertion of the cultures and subjectivities of formerly colonized people and in the deconstruction of the unified subject of the Enlightenment, it did little to overturn the anthropocentric leaning of the Enlightenment subject. Dipesh Chakrabarty's work is useful in delineating the different strands of the human that are being explored here. In his article addressing the question of the human in a time of climate change, the Marxist historian contends that:

⁷ I understand the risk of essentializing African societies here. However, several cultures in Africa demonstrate the ecological vision being described. Other non-western cultures too share this vision. Spivak, for instance, gives an example of an Aboriginal group in India as we will see when I discuss her work later in the chapter.

In all these moves, we are left with 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. And 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. (1-2)

The first notion of the human is the one that postcolonialism has tried to deconstruct and the work of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, especially in their deconstructive mode, is very influential in this regard. The result of this critique is the second view of the human in Chakrabarty’s work; it is the product of the interaction and negotiation, characterized by hybridity. I will explore hybridity and the work of these theorists in greater detail later in this chapter when I attend to the implication of their work for postcolonial ecocriticism, but for now, it will suffice to note that while the idea of a decentered subject predicated on difference marks the defining characteristic of the critique of the Enlightenment, postcolonial theory inherited the silence on nonhuman life forms implied in the deconstructed idea of a universal, rational, unified subject. This second view of the human considered the colonial struggle best approached from the angle of the *anthropos*. In other words, the quest for decolonization and national liberation trumped other considerations including questions of patriarchy, sexual orientation, and of the environment. In other words, “postcolonial scholarship,” to borrow the words of Elizabeth

DeLoughrey “has been more concerned with an anthropocentric recovery of a subaltern subject that is metonymically linked to land than with examining a wider biotic community” (“Quantum Landscapes” 63)

The other reason for the occlusion of the environment is perhaps the need for postcolonial theory to distance itself from those “natural” attributes of the colonies that made them amenable to the colonial framing of their landscapes and the local inhabitants as being in the state of nature. This ideology was particularly prevalent in the description of African societies in the late 19th and early 20th century, as Frantz Fanon and Carrie Rohman have clearly shown. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon states:

Sometimes this Manicheanism reaches its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the colonized subject. In plain talk, he is reduced to the state of an animal. And consequently, when the colonist speaks of the colonized he uses zoological terms. Allusion is made to the slithery movements of the yellow race, the odors from the “native” quarters, to the hordes, the stink, the swarming, the seething, and the gesticulations. In his endeavors at description and finding the right word, the colonist refers constantly to the bestiary. (7)

In its animalization of the colonized subject, the colonial discourse enables the colonist to disavow any relation or connection to the colonized. The connection established by this discourse is to animals posited to be existing in a debased state, thereby nullifying their alterity. In her book, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal*, Rohman argues that “displacing animality onto marginalized groups, whether they be Jews, blacks, women, or the poor, is a common feature of modernist literature. This displacement—this scapegoating—enacts an

anxious disavowal of Darwin's incriminating suggestion that even Western subjectivity has animal roots" (29-30). Focusing on the imperial design on Africa through a reading of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Rohman contends that, "in fact, Africans are imagined as so many animals in Conrad's classic literary masterpiece. Indeed, the racial ideologies of the text turn centrally on the discourse of species because Kurtz's devolution depends upon his identification with the African as *animal* [emphasis in original]" (42). Despite the time difference between the appearance of Conrad's text and Fanon's, both show the hierarchical arrangement of life forms in the imperial design and the way such framework is used to denigrate Africans as bestial and therefore inferior. Unfortunately, the debasement was not restricted to conjuring up animality as several colonialist writings positioned the continent as being in a wild state and devoid of history.

This tendency is manifest in colonialist works like Eric Dutton's *The Basuto of Basutoland* (1923), and Theodore Roosevelt's *African Game Trails* (1910). Pro-apartheid literature is also notorious for positing wild landscapes as the material condition of South Africa to justify the racial travesty that was apartheid. A shared characteristic of these texts is the penchant to elide the humans in the African spaces, focusing instead on the nonhuman as wild states to be tamed and controlled. When these texts include humans in the environment they describe, it is a savage humanity with little or no rational sensibility that is portrayed. As Dirk Klopper puts it in an essay on 19th century travel writings on the South African Cape, "the colonial subject was seen as not fully differentiated from the natural world and therefore less than human" (17). As such, Mary Louise Pratt is right when she observes in *Imperial Eyes* that these depictions aim to justify the colonial enterprise, that is, to provide rationale for the

exploitation of the human and nonhuman resources in the territories, albeit in the name of civilization and progress (27-28).

Read side by side, these colonial portrayals perhaps account for postcolonial theory's seeming elision of the nonhuman others at least in the African context. By focusing on anthropocentric concerns including questions of political economy, and decolonization, formerly colonized people assert their humanity and attempt to shake off the naturalist sensibilities implied in the above portrayals of the African as animals or closer to nature. The point is that the silence of early postcolonial theory on the environment is remarkable considering the premium placed on certain nonhuman others in several of the pre-colonial economies that colonialism replaced. Of course, these societies also engaged in environmental abusive practices such as killing the "non-sacred" animals, and sometimes in their use of forest resources. However, the ethic characterizing their relation to the animals, waters, and forests they considered sacred and respectable is a remarkable omission in postcolonial theory as is the missed opportunity to critique the environmental excesses that sometimes feature in the relationship of the humans to the nonhumans around them.

Yet the seeming neglect of ecological concerns in postcolonial theorizings does not render them invalid as sites for drawing out issues relevant for ecocritical work. In fact, I contend that one way of "doing the difficult work of creating a dialogue between ecocritical and postcolonial theory" is to revisit the canonical postcolonial theorizings of Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak (Roos and Hunt 5). The rest of the chapter, therefore, examines Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture*, and Gayatri Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. This is by no means a comprehensive analysis of their work

since that has been done in the abundant literature existing on their oeuvre.⁸ My approach focuses on the insights their work provide for ecocriticism, the space they open up for an ecological critique, and ultimately for their potential as contributors to the important dialogue between postcolonial theory and ecocriticism.

Fanon and the Wretched African Environment

Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, finished just before his death in 1961 is an important exploration of the colonial edifice, drawing particularly from the author's participation in the colonial administration in Algeria as a psychiatrist and his later involvement in the Algerian War of Independence as a revolutionary on the Algerian side. It is to Fanon's credit that *The Wretched* is able to provide a psychoanalytic analysis of what he calls colonial disorders while being attentive to the material conditions of the colonies. This represents a departure from his earlier *Black Skin White Masks* in which he examines the psychological implications of colonial violence for the Antillean. In the latter text, Fanon contends the men and women of color have internalized their so-called inferiority and employ different tactics to surmount them. Fanon also has a reason for the condescending attitudes of the colonized: "The black man who arrives in

⁸ For a critical analysis of Fanon's work, see especially the essays in the collection *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives* edited by Anthony Alessandrini (London: Routledge, 1999), and the edited volume, *Fanon: A Critical Reader* by Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Renee T. White (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996). Bhabha's work especially as it concerns his reading of Fanon has been explored in some of the essays in the above collections on Fanon's work. One can also see Eleanor Bryne's book, *Homi Bhabha* for an explication of the key tropes of Bhabha's oeuvre (UK: Macmillan, 2009). Stephen Morton's *Gayatri Spivak: Ethics, Subalternity, and the Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007) is an important contribution to scholarship devoted to Spivak's work.

France changes because to him the country represents the Tabernacle; he changes not only because it is from France that he received his knowledge of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Voltaire, but also because France gave him his physicians, his department heads, his innumerable little functionaries” (13).

To return to *The Wretched of the Earth* is to see the material conditions of the violence of colonialism and Fanon’s insistence that the colonized must resort to violence in combating the colonizer. Not surprisingly, this recommendation, placed in the first chapter of the text, “On Violence,” had found popularity among Leftists and revolutionaries. It also became the basis of certain criticisms of Fanon, the most influential being of Hannah Arendt who decried Fanon’s endorsement of violence because it debased humanity and left little or no room for politics (69). Other critics, including Homi Bhabha, Michael Azar, and Ato-Sekyi-Out, have, however, defended Fanon, arguing that his endorsement of violence be read in the context of the colonial regime of oppression he witnesses in Algeria. In his preface to the English edition translated by Richard Philcox, Bhabha posits that:

Fanon forged his thinking on violence and counterviolence in these conditions of dire extremity, when everyday interactions were turned into exigent events of life and death—incendiary relations between colonizer and colonized, internecine feuds between revolutionary brotherhoods, terrorist attacks in Paris and Algiers by the ultra right-wing OAS (Organisation Armee Secrete) and their *pieds noirs* supporters (European settlers in Algeria). (xxxiv-xxxv)

Bhabha adds that “Fanonian violence, in my view, is part of a struggle for psycho-affective survival and a search for human agency in the midst of the agony of oppression” (xxxvi).

Similarly, Michael Azar has argued that: “Choosing violence is from this perspective nothing less than choosing an existence that transcends mere life, to risk death for the foundation of a subjectivity and freedom (*etre-pour-soi*) of one’s own” (27). What these critics underscore is that the problem of violence in Fanon’s oeuvre should not be read in isolation of the context in which it was made and without a consideration of its potential for demonstrating the agency of the colonized.

Fanon’s most insightful contribution in *The Wretched of the Earth* is his work on the national bourgeoisie. He recognizes not only the importance of the elite in the task of enlisting the peasants for nation building but also foreshadows the failure of these elite to galvanize the human and nonhuman resources for nation-building at the end of colonialism. He contended: “But the unpreparedness of the elite, the lack of practical ties between them and the masses, their apathy and, yes, their cowardice at the crucial moment in the struggle, are the cause of tragic trials and tribulations” (97). A survey of post-independent African societies reveals the failure of leadership and disillusionment following the inability of the people in these countries to benefit from the promises of independence.

Interestingly, Fanon ends this book by returning to the psychological implications of colonialism. He discusses, in the last chapter, his work with patients suffering from psychological problems due to colonialism. For instance, Fanon narrates the experience of a male patient who witnesses different forms of colonial violence in Algeria, and whose experiences reach a climax when the French military massacred the inhabitants of his town. S—, as Fanon describes him, escapes from the ambush with bullet wounds, but is unable to escape the effect of that experience which killed twenty-nine men. Fanon adds that “S— is not anxious, but

overexcited with violent mood swings and shoutings” (191). In her reading of the inclusion of this chapter in *The Wretched*, Gwen Bergner suggests that “Fanon’s return to the psyche toward the end of *The Wretched of the Earth* signals his continuing demand that we explore the interdependence of nation and subject” (220). This inclusion can also be read as an affirmation by Fanon that the material and psychological realms are intertwined in the colonial realm.

Yet Fanon’s analysis of the materialist and psychological dimensions of colonialism is ostensibly anthropocentric, leaving out the nonhumans in those colonial spaces. In what follows, I am interested in recuperating the nonhuman Others buried in Fanon’s work to demonstrate an interplay between the oppression of the people and of the larger colonial environment. I argue that Fanon’s interest in the spatial economy of the colony, the economics of resource plundering, and what he calls the “magical superstructure” of the African colonial societies open up spaces for theorizing environmental racism, critiquing the loss of biodiversity in Africa, and elaborating an African-centred ecocriticism.

Writing in the early pages of “On Violence,” Fanon comments that “[t]he colonial world is a compartmentalized world,” and that “the colonial world is divided into two” (3). This background sets up the actual description of the colonizer’s quarter and its opposite, the slums of the colonized. I will quote Fanon at length here because the elaborate description he provides is pivotal for thinking of what we know as environmental racism today and the uneven development that characterizes urbanization in Africa. On the settler’s domain, Fanon states:

The colonist’s sector is a sector built to last, all stone and steel. It’s a sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of leftovers. The colonist’s feet can never be

glimpsed, except perhaps in the sea, but then you can never get close enough. They are protected by solid shoes in a sector where the streets are clean and smooth, without a pothole, without a stone. The colonist's sector is a sated, sluggish sector, its belly is permanently full of good things. The colonist's sector is a white folks sector, a sector of foreigners. (4)

If anything, Fanon's description depicts a world of affluence and his emphasis on the "paved roads" which returns as "streets" that "are clean and smooth" evokes image of order and all the positive attributes of a modern city: constant electricity, good road networks, cleanliness, well-manicured lawns, and world of waste as evident in the left overs. Remove this quote from its context and it could be read as a project description of the mega Eko Atlantic City under construction in the ocean in Lagos. What makes Fanon's description very troubling is that this geographical space is not in Paris or Lyons. Thus the occupation of these choice quarters in Algeria suggests the displacement of the local inhabitants who become squatters or tenants in their own land. Their displacement is more so significant when we consider that: "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" (Fanon *The Wretched* 9). Fanon also provides an overview of the colonized world:

The colonized's sector, or at least the "native" quarters, the shanty town, the Medina, the reservation, is a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people. You are born anywhere, anyhow. You die anywhere, from anything. It's a world with no space, people are piled one on top of the other, the shacks squeezed tightly together. The colonized's sector is a famished sector hungry for bread,

meat, shoes, coal, and light. The colonized's sector is a sector that crouches and cowers, a sector on its knees, a sector that is prostrate. It's a sector of niggers, a sector of towelheads. The gaze that the colonized subject casts at the colonists sector is a look of lust, a look of envy. Dreams of possession. Every type of possession: of sitting at the colonist's table and sleeping in his bed, preferably with his wife. The colonized man is an envious man. The colonist is aware of this as he catches the furtive glance, and constantly on his guard, realizes bitterly that: "They want to take our place." And it's true there is not one colonized subject who at least once a day does not dream of taking the place of the colonist. (4-5)

Already the opening sentence of the passage is indicative of a departure from the world of paved roads and clean streets that the settlers live in. There is no town or urban planning here; there is no order. It is a world of hunger and a hotspot for crime. For our purposes, however, the distinction here raises the question of environmental racism. According to Bunyan Bryant:

It [environmental racism] is an extension of racism. It refers to those institutional rules, regulations, and policies or government or corporate decisions that deliberately target certain communities for least desirable land uses, resulting in the disproportionate exposure of toxic and hazardous waste on communities based upon certain prescribed biological characteristics. Environmental racism is the unequal protection against toxic and hazardous waste exposure and the systematic exclusion of people of color from environmental decisions affecting their communities. (5)

Although we have no evidence of toxic wastes in Fanon's text, the spatialization of the Algerian environment follows a racist logic. It is not enough that the landowners are deprived of their land; they also have to contend with living in shanties while witnessing the affluence of the settlers in the quarters. As Fanon indicates, their movement is definitely restricted in their land as the example of Meka in Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal* attests to. In this novel set in colonial Cameroun, Meka, the protagonist, is arrested for trespassing in the European quarters even though he can be considered a prominent native on whose land the community church is built, and one who has just received a medal of commendation for his contributions to empire. The colonial irony that pervades Oyono's novel should not detain us but of concern here is the consequences of trespassing—read as imprisonment, humiliation—in the colony.⁹ What is at stake is segregated space and the exploitation it suggests.

It is safe to indicate that there is geographical violence implicated in the distinction between the world of the settler and that of the people on whose land the alluring European quarters sit. Fanon states this in the sentence: "It's a world with no space, people are piled one on top of the other, the shacks squeezed tightly together." This descriptive sentence is important because it repeats the same point in three ways for the purposes of emphasis. The absence of no space is marked by a visual rhetoric of people being piled on top of another. This appeal to the visual sense is continued in the final part of the sentence where we are forced to visualize shacks huddled together. In this tight space or what can be called a null space, we can expect a sustained dose of airborne communicable diseases and other forms of illness. This case is more pathetic

⁹ See Ken Harrow's *Thresholds of Change in African Literature* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994) for a close analysis of Oyono's novel

because the squalor that Fanon powerfully captures suggests that these people cannot afford to see a doctor, assuming one is available.

Thus while modern day toxic waste is absent from the colonial Algeria setting that Fanon paints, the African quartier is not free from the deleterious consequences of toxicity—sickness and death. As Fanon tells us, it is a place where: “You die anywhere, from anything” (4). This also explains the no-man’s land erected between the settler and native quarters to protect the whites from an exposure to the diseases of the natives.

The geographical violence that Fanon explores here is also significant for thinking through the uneven development of African cities or perhaps what Mike Davis describes in a global sense as the “planet of slums” in his book of the same title. According to Davis, the segregation of cities in Africa is traceable to colonialism: “Despite their antipathy to large native urban settlements, the British were arguably the greatest slum-builders of all time. Their policies in Africa forced the local labor force to live in precarious shantytowns on the fringes of segregated and restricted cities” (52). If Fanon’s description is accurate, then we can add the French to the list to the colonial powers whose policies influence the divide between African cities in terms of development. Davis’s thinking is complex enough to include the post-colonial national governments as well for perpetuating the spatial apartheid of colonialism: “Throughout the Third World, postcolonial elites have inherited and greedily reproduced the physical footprints of segregated colonial cities. Despite rhetorics of national liberation and social justice,

they have aggressively adapted the racial zoning of the colonial period to defend their own class privileges and spatial exclusivity (96).¹⁰

Davis's attentiveness to the role of the colonial powers and their neocolonial stooges in the problem of uneven development helps to see the relevance of Fanon's schema for contemporary discussion of urbanism in Africa. In Nigeria, for instance, the Eko Atlantic City, being built for 250,000 wealthy people and businesses is located only eleven kilometers away from the poverty-stricken Makoko known as the floating city. In South Africa, Achille Mbembe has analyzed Johannesburg as a modern, superfluous city, with its attendant vestiges of global capitalism in his essay, "The Aesthetics of Superfluity." According to him, "In the central business district, blocks of dilapidated and worn-out structures are competing with government-sponsored building projects. Elsewhere, growth is fueled by private capital for middle- and upper-income residents, insurance companies, banks, and corporations" (393). Mbembe particularly looks at what he calls "two examples of these new public theaters of late capitalism: Melrose Arch and Montecasino" (394).¹¹ Mbembe's description of these sites of leisure and fantasy echoes Fredric Jameson's analysis of California's Bonaventure Hotel first in his influential essay, "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," and the later book of that same title. But of relevance to this study is the sharp contrast between these late capitalist

¹⁰ In *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads*, Abdoumalig Simone similarly argues that the "spatial segmentation and highly particularized interests" that characterized colonial societies is an enduring feature of postcolonial cities (London: Routledge, 9).

¹¹ For a detailed description of these sites of consumption, see Mbembe's "Aesthetics of Superfluity," *Public Culture* 16.3 (2004): 373-405

havens and the dilapidated Johannesburg's Central Business District or of Soweto. We can trace this across Africa and beyond to underscore the "segregation and segmentation of the urban landscape" inherited from the environmental racism of colonialism (Myers 53). Yet where race primarily colored colonial segregation, class is primarily at play in contemporary visions of segregation that Eko Atlantic City/Makoko represent in Lagos Nigeria, and the Montecasino/Johannesburg CBD or Soweto in South Africa.

Fanon's investment in the economic plundering of colonial societies also offers an opening for an ecological critique. According to the author of *The Wretched of the Earth*: "the colonial system, in fact, was only interested in certain riches, certain natural resources, to be exact those that fueled its industries" (56). Two pages later, he asserts that:

Today Europe's tower of opulence faces these continents for centuries of departure of their shipments of diamonds, oil, silk, and cotton, timber, and exotic produce to this same very same Europe. Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The riches which are choking it are those plundered from the underdeveloped peoples. (58)

Simon Gikandi's argument in *Slavery and the Cultivation of the Culture of Taste* (2013) that we cannot separate slavery from the cultivation of taste is relevant here. It is true that Gikandi's work focuses on slavery but the emphasis on how commodities produced in the plantations enriched Britain is applicable to the analysis of how raw materials sourced from former colonies boosted the British economy. Following Gikandi, one can argue that these raw materials not only fueled the industry but facilitated the cultivation of the culture of taste after slavery. These raw

materials replaced the plantation as technology for maintaining the high taste of “civilization” and the notion of superiority accompanying it.

Furthermore, the idea of natural resources and the specific names of the shipped products hide the actual life forms being decimated in the colonies. The signifier, timber, for instance, obscures the fact that it is a trace for trees. In other words, calling it timber as Fanon did moves it from the realm of a life form to that of an instrumental object. According to Raymond E Dummet in his work on timber in colonial Ghana: “The first stage of labor involved the felling of the large Khaya trees, entirely by manual labor, using double-handed cross-cut saws and axes” (56). While highlighting the physical labor implicated in the timber-making business, this quote adumbrates the destruction that results in timber and asks us to interpret it differently. This destruction is even more substantial when we consider the scarcity of the trees: “Khaya ivoriensis, like most of the richest tropical woods tended to grow in small clumps of two or three trees scattered amidst many other varieties. All contemporary authorities state that the large Khaya trees were scarce and difficult to get” (57). To this quote we can add that these trees take a considerable amount of time to grow. Their destruction for profit purposes therefore represents a loss to the biodiversity of the continent and a waste of the nutrients the trees gained from the soil throughout its life cycle.¹² As Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin point out, such “cash cropping and other European agricultural practices usually replaced hunting and subsistence farming, thereby damaging established ecosystems, reducing soil fertility, or even, as in the case of the Sahara, resulting in

¹² For a documentary detailing the felling of trees for timber purposes in colonial Southwestern Nigeria, see Sam Zebba’s *Fincho*. For an overview of the motivation and background to producing and directing the documentary, see Zebba’s “Fincho: An Adventure in Nigeria 1955”: <http://esra-magazine.com/blog/post/fincho-nigeria>

desertification” (“Green Postcolonialism” 1). It also prepared the ground for contemporary decimation of forests, as we can see, for example, in Kenya.

Besides the foregoing, the loss of trees is also detrimental to the larger ecological sustainability as the work of the late Kenyan Nobel Laureate, Wangari Maathai demonstrates. According to her,

The trees would provide a supply of wood that would enable women to cook nutritious foods. They would also have wood for fencing and fodder for cattle and goats. The trees would offer shade for humans and animals, protect watersheds and bind the soil, and if they were fruit trees, provide food. They would also heal the land by bringing back birds and small animals and regenerate the vitality of the earth. (125)

Maathai’s work explains her involvement with the Green Belt Movement, an NGO devoted to ecological concerns in Kenya, but this particular quote is an attempt to justify her insistence on planting trees as against the government’s sanctioning of deforestation for profit purposes. This quote particularly illustrates the larger role of trees in the environment. Primarily, they are helpful for maintaining the soil’s moisture, which is important for the soil vitality. Moreover, the passage shows that trees are useful for both the human and nonhuman components of the environment.

One can argue that “the supply of wood” in the first sentence of Maathai’s passage is similar to the cutting of trees. In fact, scholars have written on the role of locals in the destruction of forest resources during colonialism and afterwards. However, this does not excuse the ecological colonialism implicit in the cutting of trees and their shipment to Europe. Jeremy Rich

illustrates the economic value of timber for the colonial economy when he writes that Gabonese forests “made the colony [Gabon] the most profitable of all the colonies in French Equatorial Africa, and French entrepreneurs rushed to Libreville and Port-Gentil to make their fortunes” (153-154). Rich’s work shows the economic importance of timber for colonial Gabon and although he does not address the ecological impacts, we can argue that the toll on the environment was high given the quantity necessary for the economic viability he emphasizes. Rich’s study also reveals that the locals were involved in the timber trade as well but he is also sensitive to the scale of difference in the quantities they can trade in comparison to the Europeans. While the Africans “could purchase up to 500 hectares,” the “Europeans could purchase up to 10,000 hectare concessions” (153). The natives are also sensitive to sacred groves which they avoid destroying unlike the Europeans who often times demonstrate little or no regard for traditions they consider superstitious. Clearly, in no way is this a suggestion that all the blame for deforestation be put on the colonialists; conflicts between government and business corporations on one hand, and the local people and environmental activists on another, shows the more than lingering problem that deforestation is on the continent long after the “colonialists” have left. This analysis is also not suggesting that the activities of the local population are not detrimental to forest resources. My goal is to highlight the significant contribution of colonial timber production to deforestation in Africa.

The presence of cotton in Fanon’s list of resources is also indicative of the displacement of food crop agriculture for cash crop production. As Walter Rodney explains in his brief treatise, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, “African peasants in French territories were forced to join so-called co-operative societies which made them grow certain crops like cotton and

made them accept whatever price was offered” (189). There is a deprivation of agency implicit in Rodney’s remark but that is beside the point. Rather, this shift in agriculture raises a question concerning the impact on the environment at the time. First, as David Barkin, Rosemary L. Batt, and Billie R. Dewalt have shown in *Food Crops vs. Feed Crops: Global Substitution of Grains in Production* (1990), this kind of shift induced hunger as the local population at the time mainly depended on food crop production for their nutritional needs. Allen Isaacman also supports this when he writes: “In a confidential report to the president of the Cotton Board six years later, a senior agronomist concluded that ‘it is becoming increasingly more appropriate to attribute food shortages to cotton’” (159).¹³ Yet the paltry money made from the sale of the cash crops was inadequate for purchasing the now exorbitant food products in the market economy in which the people were plunged into. Studies have also shown that cash crop production make more demand on the soil thereby eroding its vitality. Their higher demand for water in comparison to food crops also affects the environment in negative ways.¹⁴

The forced agricultural shift also qualifies as a form of “displacement without moving,” to use Nixon’s term for “a more radical notion of displacement, one that, instead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging, refers rather to the loss of the

¹³ For a discussion of how the emphasis on timber negatively affected food production in colonial Gabon, see Rich, “Forging Permits and Failing Hopes: African Participation in the Gabonese Timber Industry, ca. 1920-1940,” *African Economic History* 33 (2005):149-173.

¹⁴ See Kutting, “Globalization, Poverty and the Environment in West Africa: Too Poor to Pollute,” for a discussion of the environmental problems associated with cotton production in West Africa. Although the study is specific to cotton, its conclusions are applicable to other cash crops, because as the author of the said article contends, “environmental problems in the cotton farmer sector are the typical problems of intensive agriculture rather than specific problems unique to cotton” (51-52).

land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it habitable” (19). The inability of the people to cultivate what they wanted and whenever amounted to some loss of their land and called for some adjustment to the new dispensation. Ultimately, the fact that agriculture was the mainstay of the traditional economies make this change more of an upheaval and warrants its treatment as a form of displacement, even if they are not physically removed like the black South Africans during the apartheid regime and the Gikuyus from Kenya’s White Highlands in colonial times.

On Sunday, 16 February 2014, the British newspaper, *The Independent*, among other media outlets, published a story concerning Prince Williams’ suggestion that Buckingham palace destroy its ivory collection (Morrison n.p.). The Prince’s suggestion, the newspaper reports, came after he attended a conference on the illegal wildlife trade. Critics have since then been commenting on the efficacy or otherwise of Prince William’s suggestion, which I evoke here as an entry into a discussion of the exotic products shipped to the metropole in colonial times. The ivory collection in the Royal Palace is symbolic of similar resources carted from the colonies, especially in Africa. It is important to call the ivory, by its proper name—elephants, e.tc. Proper designation emphasizes the cruelty involved in the decimation of other life forms for human profits and further underscores the robbery that was colonialism.

As Rohman puts it in her reading of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: “Whether Conrad intended ivory to symbolize aesthetic commodification or imperialist invasion, the embodied correlative of ‘ivory’ must not be overlooked in this case: the elephants’ bodies from which the tusks issue are completely elided from the economics of the narrative” (52). In his analysis of Roosevelt’s autobiographical writing on his expedition to Africa, Roderick Neumann explains

that “[i]n describing and photographically documenting the different places of the expedition, Roosevelt presents a visual representation and spatial and corporeal ordering of race, nature, and national identity” (53). The colonialist outlook of Roosevelt’s expedition is well captured in this passage but the wildlife tourism trip—with its attendant sport killing of big game animals—also shows a hierarchical human/animal ordering, with the American, elite, white male at the top of the hierarchy. By staging his killing of animals, a nonhuman other, Roosevelt and other colonial wildlife tourists not only contribute to the loss of the African biodiversity in the same way that some of the ivory in the Buckingham Palace collection and elsewhere in Euro-America do; they also demonstrate disrespect for the life of the animals they destroy.¹⁵

Finally the transportation of these resources to Europe also requires their conveyance from the hinterland to the port. This is the main rationale for railway construction in Africa, as Rodney indicates: “They were built to make business possible for the timber companies, trading companies, and agricultural concession firms, and for white settlers. Any catering to African interests was purely coincidental (251-52). Rodney buttresses the point that these developmental projects were necessary technologies for carting away resources from the colonies to the metropolises. They could also be seen as functioning as what Brian Larkin has described elsewhere as “colonial sublime.” According to this scholar: “Railways, roads, and radio broadcasts were erected to bring into being a technologically mediated subject proud of his past but exposed to new ideas, open to the education, knowledge, and ideas traveling along the

¹⁵ See Hochschild’s *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999) for an account of the devastation of the ivory trade in colonial Congo.

architecture of communication” (21). Larkin adds that “[t]he colonial sublime was an effort, by colonialists, to use technology as part of political rule as evidence of the supremacy of European technological civilization” (39). Whether we read them as colonial sublime as Larkin recommends, or as technologies facilitating the plundering of the colonies, of interest here is that the railways and roads were instruments in the work of empire, even if they were of benefit to the colonized.

But the reason they are of concern is that the construction of railways and roads were done without regards to the African environment. According to Laura Wright in a reading of Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood*, “Ngugi’s novel provides an environmental critique of this transformation in its exploration of the railroad and its role in destroying the forests during the colonial period” (35). Similarly, Neumann writes that: “The railway itself had direct transformative effects, as forests were cut to produce ties and fuel” (49). Both Wright and Neumann are quoted here to suggest that not only are the resources discussed above traces of some destruction to the African environment but also that the means of transporting them to the ports for onward shipment to Europe was equally destructive in that everything in its way—houses, forests, empty land, etc.—are destroyed to erect roads and railways. As the analysis suggests, the “certain natural resources” Fanon writes about leaves a significant environmental footprint on Africa. In addition to the life forms destroyed or displaced to produce the “natural resources,” we also see how the seeming innocuous transportation of these resources to Europe adds to the environmental footprint.

To conclude with Fanon, we shall examine his explication of what he calls the “magical superstructure” of African societies, because it sheds light on an African-centered ecocriticism.

According to Fanon:

In the meantime, however, life goes on and the colonized subject draws on the terrifying myths that are so prolific in underdeveloped societies as inhibitions for his aggressiveness: malevolent spirits who emerge every time you put one foot wrong, leopard men, snake men, six-legged dogs, zombies, a whole never-ending gamut of animalcules or giants that encircle the colonized with a realm of taboos, barriers, and inhibitions far more terrifying than the colonialist world. This magical superstructure that permeates the indigenous society has a very precise function in the way the libido works. (18)

Further, he writes that “the hillock which has been climbed as if to get closer to the moon, the river bank, which has been descended whenever the dance symbolizes ablution, washing, and purification, are sacred places” (20). Fanon is dismissive of these practices, which he considered diversions from the aggressiveness important for the kind of anticolonial revolutions he was advocating. Although he differs from the colonialists on matters of race, his perspective on these practices is like that of the Europeans who view Africans as superstitious natives. The problem with Fanon is his inability to reconcile his Marxist leanings with what Harry Garuba has described as “animist materialism” practiced in these societies. As Garuba explains, “animism is often regarded as a reactionary, metaphysical mystification opposed to the spirit of historical materialism and scientific socialism” (276). Garuba is quick to point to the coalescence of the seeming contradictions, with the example of the Nigerian poet, Niyi

Osundare. For Garuba, “[r]ather than a contradiction between the secular vision of Marxism and the metaphysical nature of the animist inheritance, Osundare’s poetry can be seen as an example of how both can be creatively deployed” (277). Despite Fanon’s dismissal, the fact that these practices endure, structure the lives of those in those communities who hold such worldviews, and have implications for ecocriticism merit paying attention to them.

Writing on what he calls the “traditional African ethical view,” Chuka Albert Okoye comments that

this ethical view connotes that nature has its respect which must be accorded it lest man is bound to suffer for it. Thus, despite the fact that man is at the center of the ethical system, he does not have a monopoly of it. Man seeks to preserve his environment according to the traditional African system not just for himself but for the future generation and in honor of the tradition (reference to ancestors and worship). The African traditional system is replete with this weak anthropocentrism following their belief that man is a keeper of nature not a master to it. (143-144)

Okoye’s work makes reference to the anthropocentrism of this worldview but he insists, however, that humans are not masters of the environment in that economy. He argues that the “traditional African cares for his environment basically for the human good either to avoid punishment from the gods or for the future generation” (144). Nevertheless, the magical superstructure that Fanon dismisses, and Okoye’s work, are instrumental for seeing that these societies not only derive their impetus from the rational but also consider the possibility of extra-rational and extra-forces being at work in their lives. Of course, the participation of Africans in

Christianity, global modernity and late capitalism, have seen the erosion of some of these practices but they remain crucial because of the sacred status they confer on aspects of the environment. The sacred status of the hillocks and river bank mentioned by Fanon certainly protect these places from indiscriminate exploitation. As sacred sites, these environmental spaces attain agency with power to retain blessings for those who respect them and punishment for defaulters. Literature on African spirituality is replete with these traditional beliefs and a few are worth citing to underscore the prevalence of the practices that Fanon dismisses.

Writing on the spiritual significance of trees in African cultures, for instance, Charles Anyinam contends that

the iroko tree is held to be sacred in most places. Among the Yoruba, the iroko tree is believed to be inhabited by very powerful spirit. People fear having the tree near their dwelling place or to use it for furniture. The tree cannot be felled unless special rites are performed. Important meetings are believed to be held by witches at the foot or top of the iroko tree. Other trees believed to be abodes of certain spirits include the silkcotton tree and African satinwood. Baobab trees are regarded as sacred and are often believed to be the abode of spirits or the ‘meeting place of witches.’ There are, as well numerous animal spirits and sacred snakes. Many forest animals are considered sacred by different ethnic groups. There exists taboos with regard to the killing [of; sic] such animals as leopard, python, duiker, crocodile, and elephant in some societies. Certain animals symbolize the vitality of their ancestors. (134)

Anyinam mentions Yoruba beliefs in the significance of trees in this passage and gestures towards other practices concerning animals. His work also takes on the connotation of water as well: There are spirits of rivers, streams, and lakes. Wells, springs, rivers, lakes, and the sea are believed to have spirits dwelling in them and in some places great cults are made of these naiads” (134). Meanwhile, mountains and rocks are not left out: Spirits may also have their abode in mountains and other physical landscapes. Hills and outstanding rocks are likely haunts of powerful spiritual forces and many villages which nestle under these hills take the hill spirit as their principal deity” (135). Citing these passages is meant to show a deep investment in the valuable spiritual life forms that these elements take in these societies and to highlight how such practices can challenge the instrumental view of the environment which undergirds the current globalization era. This is no advocacy for some return to an uncritical form of animism or tradition but to highlight the way that such value system can transform our understanding of the environment and engender a more sustainable relationship between the human and nonhuman components of the ecology in an era of globalization. In *Global Shadows: African in the Neoliberal World Order*, James Ferguson consistently shows the desires of Africans to become critical and equal partners in modernity and globalization that disqualifies any call for a return to some sense of uncritical “tradition.”

Rather invoking Fanon and Anyinam provides a grounding for understanding my interest in what Anthony Carrigan has described as “multivalent sacredness” in his study of postcolonial tourism. Carrigan states:

I use this term to suggest an interface between contrasting ideologies of development where the distribution of power is not stable but operates in a

condition of flux as the interests of different empowered actors oscillate between conflict and coalition. Embracing the nexus of past, present, and future genealogical claims (cultural sacredness), notions of nationality, significant areas that safeguard nature's sanctity (environmental sacredness), and tourism-related economic concerns (the sacred principle of capital accumulation), it allows the extrinsic value of sacred spaces to become negotiable by multiple parties without collapsing the terms of discussion into a purely economic idiom. (91)

I find Carrigan's interesting phrase productive since it encourages a dialogue between the sacred and the mundane without collapsing the importance of either. It has the advantage of taking cognizance of the need for protection of the environment while also being attuned to the need for economic survival and development. The idea of pure conservation of sacred spaces without economic consideration is not a viable option today while recent trends are clear indicators that market driven economic reasoning without respect for the environment will not engender a sustainable future. It is to Carrigan's credit that his description above does not anticipate or suggest a utopian conflict-free negotiation between the logic of late capitalism, to borrow Jameson's phrase and that of protecting the environment. Rather the attention here is to a productive coalition emerging from the chaos of the contesting logics. I illustrate the concept of "multivalent sacredness" towards the end of chapter 2 where I discuss Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*.

Bhabha, the Human, and Ecological Possibilities

Homi Bhabha's work has tremendously shaped postcolonial studies especially because of his brilliant explication of the notion of shifting identity, drawing from a poststructuralist framework, as well as his articulation of the term, hybridity, with its characteristic ambivalence. Stephane Robolin captures the thrust of Bhabha's oeuvre when she notes that "Bhabha's distaste for theories of totalizing power, humanist discourses, and simple models of diametrical opposition all drive a colonial discourse analysis that seeks the productive possibilities that populate the discursive space between conflicting cultures" (80).

In the introduction to *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha asserts that,

what is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (2)

He avers that "the representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition" (2). Bhabha is responding to the dualisms in the work of many postcolonial thinkers as seen in the colonizer/colonized in Fanon's work or African/European in Soyinka's *Myth and the African World*. A similar dualism also structures the East/West dichotomy in *Orientalism* where Edward Said traces the construction of

the orient in western writings, the power configurations that enable such discourses, and how they are complicit in the project of imperialism.

Bhabha's way forward therefore, is an acknowledgement of tradition as susceptible to totalizing discourses:

The recognition that tradition bestows is a partial form of identification. In restaging the past it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition. This process estranges any immediate access to an originary identity or a 'received' tradition. The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress. (2)

This borderline, the interstitial space or the third space is where hybridity takes place. Interestingly, Bhabha returns us to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, in his effort to illustrate the shifting nature of identity. In his reading of Fanon's title and the text, the Indian critic notes that "Black skin, white masks' is not a neat division; it is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once that makes it impossible for the devalued, insatiable evolute (an abandonment neurotic, Fanon claims) to accept the colonizer's invitation to identity. . ." (64). Bhabha recognizes the important point about identity missed by his predecessors in the business of postcolonialism. He is aware that "It is not the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness—the white man's

artifice inscribed on the black man's body" (64). In this case, the transaction and negotiation that happens in that third space produces hybridity and is marked by subversion and ambivalence.

Simply put, Bhabha's contention is that the transactional exchange between the colonizer and colonizer undermines a rigid fixed identity. Instead, the hybrid that emerges from this encounter in the third space marks the subversion of colonial power. For Bhabha, "[t]he interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (4), in the same way that it is the site of the "unhomely," that is "the condition of extraterrestrial and cross-cultural initiations" (9). The hybrid locale is a subversive space where both the colonialist authority and so-called traditional knowledge are both challenged and disfigured.

Bhabha cites the example of a group of Indians who received the Bible and are enthralled by the "book." When accosted by the Christian catechist who takes their enthusiasm to mean genuine conversion, the people respond they will consider being baptized the next year since they only plan on meeting just once a year and have to return to their work immediately. While they do not mind baptism, they disavow the Eucharist since that would be a native taboo. For Bhabha, "by taking their stand [against the Eucharist] on the grounds of dietary law, the natives resist the miraculous equivalence of God and the English. They introduce the practice of colonial cultural differentiation as an indispensable enunciative function in the discourse of authority" (168).

Like Fanon above, Bhabha's work focuses on human identity but it can be productive for ecocriticism. In the following pages, I suggest that Bhabha's deconstruction of the notion of fixed identity, his postulation of a dynamic fabrication of identity predicated on the Other, and

his theorization of a postcolonial perspective on postmodernism enable us to propose a relational ethic between human and the nonhumans. Furthermore, I suggest that his theorization of hybridity is important for analyzing the strategies of resistance against environmental problems and for reading African folktales as sites for decentering the human. Turning to folktales is important for their usefulness for displacing the human-focused workings of Bhabha's hybridity.

Rosi Braidotti has traced the trajectory of the human in critical discourse that is worth considering for understanding Bhabha's work. According to her,

This Eurocentric paradigm implies the dialectics of self and other, and the binary logic of identity and otherness as respectively the motor for and the cultural logic of universal Humanism. Central to this universalistic posture and its binary logic is the notion of "difference" as pejoration. Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behavior, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as 'others'. These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies. (15)

Braidotti's work provides an overview of the colonialist myth of the Enlightenment subject.

Bhabha's insistence that "Black skin, white masks" is not a neat division" between two fixed identities is very powerful in its repudiation of that age-old idea of the unitary, rational, white male subject. In his chapter on identity, Bhabha contends that: "[t]hree conditions that underlie

an understanding of the process of identification in the analytic of desire emerge.” Bhabha avers that

to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, its look or locus. It is a demand that reaches outward to an external object . . . This process is visible in the exchange of looks between native and settler that structures their psychic relation in the paranoid fantasy of boundless possession and its familiar language of reversal. (63)

The second condition for Bhabha, is that

the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting. The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master’s place while keeping his place in the slave’s avenging power. ‘Black skin, white masks’ is not a neat division; it is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once that makes it impossible for the devalued, insatiable evolve (an abandonment neurotic, Fanon claims) to accept the colonizer’s invitation to identity. (63-64)

Bhabha continues, “Finally the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image” (64). Bhabha is quoted at length here because of his careful psychoanalytic elucidation of the split subject and the emphasis he puts on the relational ethic of identity. More importantly, this last quote is telling for its deconstruction of the presuppositions of the Enlightenment and betraying the constructedness of that claim.

The work of Michel Foucault, most especially in *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality*, has been consistent in portraying how power shapes the construction of discourses, therefore making these narratives look natural; indeed, history bears witness to the pervasive nature of these discourses. The discourses that justified slavery and colonialism, for example, powerfully evoked animalistic and much more disparaging characteristics to characterize the Other in relation to the European self and the long duration of these tragic phenomena is testament to the power that drives and naturalizes these discourses. The patriarchal construction of the female other, also excluded from the idea of the Enlightenment subject is another fine example of the way discourses tended to naturalize certain ways of seeing.

In his deconstruction of this fixed nature of identity, Bhabha opens up a space for thinking of the well-constructed and pervasive idea of anthropocentrism or human superiority over other species. In this regard, he shares the views of other major deconstructionists like Derrida. Like the examples of slavery, colonialism, and patriarchy cited above, the anthropocentric ideology is equally constructed and Bhabha's insistence on the relational notion of identity is useful for thinking of other life forms in the environment as relational to humans. Bhabha's notion of cultural and ontological difference thus becomes applicable to nonhumans. As Heise asserts, "The question of difference in ecocriticism, in other words, is never purely human" ("Globality, Difference" 638). Braidotti extends Bhabha's emphasis on the pertinence of relation and negotiation in human identity formation by applying it to a posthuman context: "A posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others by removing the obstacle of

self-centred individualism (49-50). Braidotti hits the crux of the matter with her attentiveness to the possibility of relations not only among humans but across to other life forms on earth.

Again Bhabha's concept of the Third space is useful for the actualization of the new ethic of relation and subjectivity been suggested here. In a review of *Location of Culture*, Juniper Ellis asserts that "Bhabha emphasizes what he describes as culture's "in-between," for instance, the interstitial spaces within and among individuals and cultures, which do not maintain a single position but form identities in an on-going process (197). The process of identity formation is at stake in this posthuman way of seeing. What occurs in this space is the deconstruction of what Braidotti calls "species supremacy" and a recognition of nonhumans and their difference. We see this reflected in Anyinam's passage cited earlier, where he discusses the status of the Iroko tree among the Yoruba people of South Western Nigeria. The belief is that the iroko tree is an abode for a powerful spirit, and therefore deserving of respect. In Eziali Mgbidi in Eastern Nigeria where I come from, the python is considered an ancestor which should not be killed. Violating this rule is considered a taboo which is redeemable by performing the same funeral right due to humans in this community. We can go on but these examples emphasize the life worth respecting in these nonhuman aspects of the environment. In this economy of seeing, these nonhuman others are moved away from the instrumental status they occupy in the anthropocentric mode towards some form of position grounded on some form of agency. They occupy a third space that moves us away from the conventional way of associating self-consciousness and identity with subjectivity. To invest the iroko, a choice tree for timber, with sacred status and agency, is to deter humans from exploiting it. Not killing pythons and other

animals given ancestral stature in different cultures is also useful for placing them in an ethical relation with humans and for their preservation.

To say that the actual relation between the humans and nonhumans in these “traditional” societies was indeed posthuman in Braidotti’s sense of the term, or non-anthropocentric might be too simplistic but the worldview is, nevertheless, very relevant for transforming speciesism or the notion of human superiority. The third space provides a space for what Heise describes as “eco-cosmopolitanism” in her *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. This concept seems similar to cosmopolitanism but if the latter emphasizes ethics to human strangers as Kwame Anthony Appiah has suggested, the former calls for the extension of this relational act to nonhumans who are radically different but similar in that we share one quality—life; the concept also advocates for a deterritorialized, planetary sense of the environment. The point of such view of the environment is to emphasize interconnection of environments and life forms existing in them, while not returning to older notions of subjectivity that relegate the nonhuman to a secondary position.

I return to this ethic of relation in Chapter Three where I examine how the Somalian writer, Nurudeen Farah, posits human-nonhuman relationship in his novels, but suffice it to state that Bhabha’s view of postmodernism from a postcolonial prism enables us to deconstruct the grand narratives of human superiority. According to Bhabha, “[t]he wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological ‘limits’ of those ethnocentric ideas [grand narratives] are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices—women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities” (6). Although Bhabha deconstructs the idea of white male superiority, his

perspective remains anthropocentric as the “other” voices he includes are humans. As Cary Wolfe posits:

The problem with this mode of critique is that it often reinscribes the very humanism it appears to unsettle, so that the subject, while newly ‘marked’ by critique, is marked by means of a very familiar repertoire, one that constitutes its own repression—or what Derrida in ‘Eating Well’ will characterize as a ‘sacrifice’—of the question of the animal, and more broadly still, of the nonhuman. (“Introduction” xii-xiii)

Wolfe’s work shows the limit of an anthropocentric postmodernism, of which Bhabha’s is typical, and supports the need for uncovering the repressed nonhumans in the postmodern category which Bhabha sets up for his postcolonial context. In other words, we can complicate Bhabha’s category by adding the “histories” of the nonhumans. Bhabha’s “enunciative boundaries” allow for the inclusion of these other histories and their inclusion certainly challenges an anthropocentric view of histories, thereby enabling a deconstruction of the grand narrative of human superiority. In its attentiveness to the question of the nonhumans as well as humans, my project offers a corrective to the limitation of Bhabha’s work.

Bhabha is perhaps most known for his work on hybridity and ecocritics have found it useful in different ways, particularly in theorizing the interaction of tradition and modernity in their work. Although hybridity names an attempt to define the decentered subject arising from the colonial encounter, its critical acuity has made it useful for understanding the interaction of the local and global in postcolonial environmental texts. I will build on these uses of the concept

by showing its importance for understanding how the slippages of the human and nonhuman in African folktales is rich with possibilities for decentering the human.

As Roos and Hunt suggest in the introduction to their collection of essays on postcolonial ecocriticism, “the ambivalence that characterizes Bhabha’s subaltern identity is not a joyful unification of all the best parts of both worlds but involves a constant, often painful sense of self-contradiction, renegotiation, and critique” (8). One must not lose sight of the painful here which sometimes get lost in the celebration of hybridity. The painful here makes central the following question: what is lost in the process of hybridity?

Robolin’s work focuses on the violence implicit in hybridity in her reading of Bhabha’s theory against Buchi Emecheta’s *Joys of Motherhood*. For her, “this text renders visible the unambiguous pain intrinsic to life in the colonial interstices by dramatizing the conglomeration of hardships experienced by one woman and her community as a result of foreign British domination (in tandem with interconnected patriarchal customs” (83). While Robolin’s work provides an example of the negative potential of hybridity, Nixon has articulated how hybrid cultural elements facilitate the environmentalisms of the poor in the texts he analyzes. Writing on the hybrid form of the notion of environmental justice, Nixon asserts that “the discourse of environmental justice, borrowed largely from the West (and often through personal exposure to America), is frequently blended with local discursive traditions and, in these melded forms, adaptively redeployed as a strategic resource” (36). Nixon is not naïve to assume a simplistic or harmonious interaction of these disparate cultural forms. Rather he emphasizes the conflictual nature of the interaction without undermining the significance of the success of their intervention in the quest for environmental justice in the text he studies.

Nixon's is just an example of the deployment of hybridity in postcolonial ecocriticism. It is particularly instructive that he uses it, in particular, to discuss the work of two African environmentalists cum writers, Ken Saro Wiwa, and Wangari Maathai. This underscores the importance of the term for not only identity formation on the continent but also in appreciating the cultural flows and exchanges that permeate life therein. While purists may argue that the interactions involved in hybridity leads to the loss of African values, the fact that the so-called foreign or western value is corrupted and disfigured in the process undermines its authority; hybridity distorts the idea of a pure or superior culture as it always involves negotiation and flux.

It can be argued that the foregoing recuperation of hybridity for ecocriticism remains within the human realm, therefore necessitating the question of its potential as a tool for destabilizing the human. I contend that hybridity can serve that purpose if applied to certain African tales bordering on the human and nonhuman. In other words, these folktales, I suggest, are important sites for interrogating hybrid subjectivity that transcends the humanist use of the term in Bhabha's work. I illustrate this point with a close reading of tales of human-ape relations from Equatorial Africa, and Birago Diop's tale on M'Bile the Deer as recounted in his *Tales of Ahmadou Koumba*. Turning to tales here is apropos for the unique embodiment of their characters—straddling the human and nonhuman realm in ways that undercut human exceptionalism. After all these characters speak and engage in other so-called human activities without necessarily being human. In other words they are hybrids that do call attention to the question of the nonhuman occluded from Bhabha's schema. These tales are also crucial for their aesthetic value as one of the many literary forms that preceded and still shape the written literature in Africa as exemplified in the work of Farah examined in the third chapter, and for the

window they provide into the social contexts they emanate from. As Isidore Okpewho has observed, “[a] much wider service provided by oral literature is to give the society—whether isolated groups within it or the citizenry as a whole—a collective sense of who they are and to help them define or comprehend the world at large in terms both familiar and positive to them” (110).¹⁶ In their study of ape folktales, for instance, Tamara Giles-Vernick and Stephanie Karin Rupp have written that “[b]oth the symbolic and material come together in these great ape tales. People have told these tales to debate distinctions between diverse social groups and to comment on their differential access to forest resources” (67).

Giles-Vernick and Rupp’s reflection is contained in their essay, “Visions of Apes, Reflections on Change: Telling Tales of Great Apes in Equatorial Africa,” from which I draw the first tale examined here:

For example, across the Sangha River from Mpiemu settlements, in the forests of southern Cameroon, early twentieth-century Beti and Bulu peoples asserted that human beings and gorillas once lived in intimate contact with one another; they shared kin ties and domestic spaces, as well as obligations and rights. But hostility erupted between people and gorillas when the maternal uncle of a gorilla with a human mother killed an elephant. As the nephew of the hunter, the gorilla had rights to the elephant’s head, but on his way to claiming it, the gorilla slept with

¹⁶ For more discussion of the social relevance of oral literature and typologies, see Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) and Isidore Okpewho, *African Oral Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

one of his uncle's wives. Whereupon the uncle, hearing of the gorilla's act, refused to give him the elephant head. (56-57)

Analyzing this interesting tale, Giles-Vernick and Rupp aver that “[t]he gorilla’s crime was his voracious appetite; claiming both the elephant meat and access to the wife represented an overstepping of his social and moral entitlement and thus relegated him to the periphery of the social world” (57). This folktale challenges “the distinction between people and animals” (Giles-Vernick and Rupp 56).¹⁷ It is difficult to determine which is the gorilla and human in this folktale. The gorilla is certainly endowed with capacity to reason, claim an inheritance, and to copulate with humans. The gorilla also submits to a penal system of exile outside the community. By its inherent human characteristics, the gorilla posits itself as transcending its animality in some ways but the transcendence does not make it human. Bhabha’s “not quite” is apropos here. The human subject is also transformed by sexual relations with the gorilla. The idea of the maternal uncle of a gorilla with a “human mother” is striking because it raises the question of how a human can beget a gorilla, or more importantly, that in the space of the folktale those distinctions between human and nonhuman are negotiated or understood differently. Moreover, the mother transgresses the bounds of the human not only because of her sexual relation with a gorilla but also due to her offspring. How does she nurture and care for her gorilla child? Does she breastfeed him? These are some of the questions that this narrative elicits. Yet what is crucial is the way this passage lends support to Bhabha’s claim that the hybrid

¹⁷ For other ape tales in Equatorial Africa and the analysis of their social significance, see Giles-Vernick and Rupp, “Visions of Apes, Reflections on Change: Telling Tales of Great Apes in Equatorial Africa,” *African Studies Review* 49.1 (2006): 51-73.

“displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination” (159). As the analysis suggests, not only is the human-animal boundary blurred, the narrative makes it difficult to even characterize either categories sufficiently.

Birago Diop’s tale on M’Bile-the-Deer is also relevant for discussing the emergence of the hybrid subject that is not quite human. In this tale, M’Bile, the Deer passed by a road already taken by Serigne, the marabout. M’Bile “grazed from the grass on which he [Serigne] had spat. Thus she acquired, at one fell swoop, all his knowledge” (35). The narrator continues: “So M’Bile became not the marabout, nor the witch-doctor of the forest and the savannah, but She-who-knows. For she knew things hidden from other creatures, things that even men did not know, unless they were marabouts or witch-doctors” (35). Although M’Bile and the marabout did not encounter each other, it is interesting that the grass becomes an important space for thinking about the transformation of M’Bile from a mere deer to a kind of animal imbued with the wisdom of men and the divine. In this narrative, the deer transcends her animal identity as evident in her subsequent encounter with Koli, the hunter. On trying to shoot M’Bile, the transformed animal says, “Don’t kill me. I’ll tell you where you can find elephant and wild-boar” (35). Koli, in response, states: “That’s all the same to me” and that “it’s you I’m after today” before he shot the animal. (35).

Of pertinence is not only the transformation of the animal but also the visibility of that change as evident in the negotiation that the deer attempts to conduct with Koli. Although the latter flattens out the differences among the animal species when he says they are the same, M’Bile produces a kind of slippage, an excess of the animal in engaging the human character in a conversation legible to both interlocutors. Yet what further complicates the slippage is M’Bile’s

prophetic repetition of “Sotegoul” meaning “it’s not finished yet!” Eventually, the reader learns that the hunter’s son has fallen down the well and that his wife has become “partially blind” after a spark of fire from cooking the deer entered her eyes. M’Bile’s accurate prophecy positions her as also occupying a supernatural space where she can divine what is to come. Thus, whether we consider M’Bile’s linguistic performance or her prophecy, or both, the point these characteristics foreground is her hybridity. She is not containable within the categories of the human or animal. In fact, she confirms Bhabha’s claim about hybridity that “the difference of cultures can no longer be identified or evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation: cultural differences are not simply there to be seen or appropriated” (163). In bestriding these realms, M’Bile propels forward as a hybrid subject that complicates any of the categories; she comes across as one who “lives on the hyphen of existence,” as Henry John Drewal has described the Mami Wata in another context (Drewal 2). What is foregrounded in both tales is the contamination of purity—human or animal, and the enthronement of the hybrid subject that does not take the human as a focal point as Bhabha’s.

Spivak, Women, the Environment, and the Global

Gayatri Spivak’s *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* is an appropriate text to conclude this chapter with because her work builds on that of Fanon and Bhabha and somewhat offers correctives to their seeming oversights. She calls for vigilance and “for the recognition of the agency of the local resistance, as it is connected with the peoples’ movements that girdle the globe” (*A Critique* 415). Spivak laments the inability of a western-oriented theoretical enterprise

to recognize and decipher the theoretical sophistication of the work of the subaltern groups in the South, and argues for the same vigilance for the metropolitan based postcolonial critics so they do not efface the local resistances of the subaltern or become complicit in the project of imperialism.

Spivak's awareness of her subject-position and call for vigilance are salutary, especially given the charge by critics like Aijaz Ahmed in *In Theory* about postcolonialism being a western construct. Her insistence that class and gender be considered in the treatment of the postcolonial is also important and help to complicate the cultural dominant in the works of the theorists we have encountered so far. While she does not disregard Bhabha's hybridity or the other theoretical postulations on postcolonialism, Spivak nevertheless insists that these issues should not be romanticized but that we must open up a space for recognizing the local resistances to speak for themselves. Spivak advocates for a "transnational literacy" and "ethical singularity" that could enable an appreciable understanding and relationship with the other.

Spivak underscores a feminist approach to postcolonialism in her privileging of women. But she nevertheless deconstructs the idea of global feminism and/or global sisterhood. She draws attention to the tendency to universalize women or women of color as if they are homogenous. Spivak insists on differences among women based on location and class as well. For her, problems faced by US women are different from those of the women in the Global South. As such, she advocates for a feminist practice that exercises vigilance to avoid being complicit in the patriarchal knowledge they critique. We see such complicity, for instance in Western feminists' condemnation of polygamy in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. Obioma Nnaemeka responds to the ahistorical and acultural understanding of polygamy in *The Politics of*

(M)Othering: Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature. According to her, “It is troubling, but understandable, that feminism which has made the issue of choice the centerpiece of its theorizing and activism is reluctant to factor the same issue in its analysis of African women’s lives” (167). Such a reading, for Obioma, is colonialist and does not recognize the agency and social contexts of these African women.

Spivak departs from her male counterparts whose attentiveness to female concerns seem secondary or entirely absent. Rey Chow, for instance, has taken Fanon for task for both his elision and poor representation of women in *The Wretched of the Earth*. In her view, Fanon denies the woman of color “the kind of emotional ambivalence” that he attributed to the men. She concludes that “what Fanon accomplishes is a representation—representations both in the sense of portraying and in the sense of speaking for . . . the woman of color as potentially if not always a whore, a sell-out, and hence a traitor to her own ethnic community” (42). Bhabha fares better when compared to Fanon in his portrayal of women but his articulations of feminist concerns tend to gloss over the postcolony with the emphasis he places on the work of Adrienne Rich and Toni Morrison in his explication of minoritarian discourse and the productive potential of postmodernism. There is no problem with such selection as the work of these writers fits Bhabha’s larger project. However, the non-representation or underrepresentation of women from the former colonies or so called Third World in the postcolonial theorizings of the men is what makes Spivak’s contribution very cogent. Jenny Sharpe captures the weight of Spivak’s work for the “subaltern” woman when she writes that: “Whether addressing the language of feminist individualism or the surreptitious subject of power and desire, she has never lost sight of the

women on the other side of the international division of labor, while at the same time refusing an all-too-easy recuperation of their subjectivities” (609).

In this brief space, however, what I focus on is how the elision of women in early postcolonial discourse somewhat brings to mind the elision of the environment and evokes the relationship between the oppression of women and the environment that ecofeminists have paid attention to. Spivak’s critique of globalization and the practices of transnational corporations also raises the question of the ecological impacts of their operations. I illustrate this point with two instances of toxic dumping in Africa and the environmental racism inherent in such violations. Finally, I contend that the attunement of Spivak’s later work to ecological justice emphasizes the need for drawing inspiration from indigenous notions of the environment for ecological sustainability, while not endorsing an essentialist return to nature.

It is to Indian historical archival sources that Spivak turns to exemplify the lived conditions of the subaltern woman. Spivak recuperates the history of two Indian women, Rani Gulari and Bhubaneswari Bhaduri to show their double exploitation and denial of subjectivity by both patriarchy and imperialism. According to Spivak, Rani was a queen who enters history only because her anti-imperial king husband was deposed and replaced with her young son. Rani thus features in the historical narrative as a guardian of the young king and the imperialism that he ultimately serves. But while the son is prominent in history, Spivak laments the little trace of Rani in the archive and elaborates on her search and seeming ethnographic journey into the Indian community to excavate her.

Bhubaneswari, according to Spivak, commits suicide because she is unable to execute the political assassination she has been assigned by her nationalist revolutionary group. Although the

suicide note that she leaves reflects the political undertone of her death, Spivak is disturbed by the perception, even in her family, that her suicide was a result of heartbreak. Spivak contends that the silencing of these women was responsible for her conclusion that the subaltern cannot speak. However, she concedes that “it was an inadvisable remark” (*A Critique* 310). She insists, though, that “today’s program of global financialization carries on that relay [of subaltern silencing]. Bhubaneswari had fought for national liberation,” but “[h]er great-grandniece works for the New Empire. This too is a historical silencing of the subaltern” (*A Critique* 311). For Spivak, “[b]etween patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling that is the displaced figuration of the ‘third world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development (304).

In fact, the disappearance of the woman in the discourses of colonialism and anticolonialism is somewhat linked to the elision of the environment in such discourses, while Spivak’s reinstatement of the subaltern female category enables a productive space for recuperating the environment in similar discourses as ecofeminists have tried to do. In their definition of ecofeminism in a collection of essays on the subject they edited, Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy defines the term:

Ecofeminism is a practical movement for social change arising out of the struggles of women to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities. These struggles are waged against the ‘maldevelopment and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism. They are waged for environmental balance, heterarchical and

matrifocal societies, the continuance of indigenous cultures, and economic values and programs based on subsistence and sustainability. (2)

Ecofeminism is remarkable for foregrounding both the concerns of women and the exploitation of the environment by the same patriarchal and late capitalist structures. However, this parallel must not be reduced to a simple equivalence as third wave poststructural feminists tended to do. As Gaard has remarked elsewhere, “poststructuralist and other third-wave feminisms portrayed all ecofeminisms as an exclusively essentialist equation of women with nature, discrediting ecofeminism’s diversity of arguments and standpoints” (“Ecofeminism Revisited” 31). As Karla Armbuster has noted, “the limited view of identity reinforced when women and nature are even subtly conflated by antidualistic ecofeminists can undermine ecofeminism’s potential for subverting dominant ideologies” (103). Armbuster holds this view “because the erasure of difference within the category ‘women and nature’ simply displaces difference elsewhere, where it often serves to reinforce dualism and hierarchy” (103). She insists on the importance of a more complex, nuanced, analysis of the relationship between the exploitation of women and the environment. Armbuster’s careful deconstruction of ecofeminist essentialism echoes Spivak’s critique of the idea of homogenous women, women of color, or third world women and her insistence on difference based on complicated notions of race, class as well as gender.

Interestingly, some scholars who work at the intersection of environmentalism and feminism have avoided ecofeminism for the essentialist risk cited above. Bina Agarwal, for

example, prefers “feminist environmentalism” to describe her framework (119).¹⁸ Agarwal’s work, however, is sensitive to the locational dynamics and the need for specificity that Spivak is concerned about. For her, “the processes of environmental degradation and appropriation of natural resources by a few have specific class-gender as well as locational differences . . . ‘Women’ therefore cannot be posited . . . as a unitary category, even within a country, let alone across the Third World or globally” (150). This passage is remarkably Spivakian in its deconstruction of the idea of women and insistence on specificity. Where it departs from Spivak’s work, however, is its recuperation of the question of environmental degradation and how that intersects with the issues of class and gender that Spivak’s oeuvre has carefully paid attention to.

The specificity and standpoint perspective these scholars are concerned about is a significant quality of the work of the late Kenyan activist, Wangari Maathai. In her memoir, *Unbowed*, which was earlier cited in the discussion of Fanon’s work, she writes, “For me, the destruction of Karura forest, like the malnourished women in the 1970s, the Times complex in Uhuru Park, and the political prisoners detained without trial, were problems that needed to be solved, and the authorities were stopping me from finding a solution” (272). Maathai’s passage is a departure from the patriarchal primary concern with political issues emanating from the post-independent African state as if those nationalist, political concerns can be divorced from feminist

¹⁸ Ecological Feminism, Social Ecofeminism, and Critical Feminist Eco-Socialism are some terms that have been used by scholars trying to avoid the criticisms of ecofeminism. For a trajectory of ecofeminism and its offshoots,

see Gaard, “Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism.” *Feminist Formations* 23.2 (2011): 26-53.

or environmental problems in that societies. It is a remarkable characteristic of this passage in which Wangari sets out the conflict she devoted her life-work to, that she considered the destruction of the environment, the poverty of the women, and the repression of the Jomo Kenyatta regime as all-important and deserving attention. There is no seeming prioritization of any of these problems; rather she demonstrates the link between the oppression of the people and their environment in somewhat, nuanced and specific manner.

Maathai's contribution to the solution of this crisis is also based on an ecological vision, aimed at the sustainability of the larger environment. As her passage on trees cited earlier in the chapter shows, the activist's choice of planting trees is strategic. Maathai recognizes the potential of afforestation for nonviolent demonstration, as vehicle for empowering the women, and a veritable means for nourishing the nonhuman components of the environment, including animals, plants, water, etc. In no way does Maathai flatten out the differences between women and nature, even when she is attentive to a similar pattern of exploitation by patriarchal structures. In a move that suggests heeding Spivak's warning that the intellectual do not muzzle the voice or agency of the subaltern, Maathai encourages the visibility of the group of women whose work led to the success of the Green Belt Movement. And although her memoir, foregrounds, the first person "I," as the genre often demands, the book creates the space to see the ways the rural women demonstrated their agency. One such instance is at the conference marking the conclusion of the Women Decade, in Nairobi, in 1985. Maathai "arranged for rural women to talk about their experiences with the Green Belt Movement, and organized seminars to seminars to share with conference delegates what we were doing and why" (176). Maathai's

influence on the activities of the rural women is clear but it does not seem that her mediation obstructs the women to express their positions. By giving them access to discuss their work, Maathai demonstrates one way that the subaltern could speak and be heard.

Like Bhabha, Spivak draws sources from across genres and across time, which explains the leap from Indian history to the historical postmodern moment of late capitalism. Again, she puts pressure on Fredric Jameson's postmodernism, showing how it occludes global inequalities. She underscores the unevenness of Jameson's postmodernism when she writes that: "The actual postcolonial areas have a class-specific and internationally controlled limited access to a telematics society of information command, which is often also the indigenous contact-point or source of the discourse of cultural specificity and difference" (*A Critique* 361). Spivak gestures towards inequality that is masked in the celebration of globalization. This inequality is what James Ferguson describes as "globe hopping" in the African context. By this, Ferguson means that "the 'movement of capital' here does not cover the globe; it connects discrete points on it. Capital is *globe-hopping*, not *globe-covering*" (38).

The last chapter of Spivak's book is particularly instructive for its attention to the historical present of globalization and the pivotal role of transnational corporations therein. Spivak, understandably, does not share the enthusiasm of the proponents of globalization. On transnational corporations, Spivak declares that: "The relations of production in a TNC [transnational corporation] is FDI—foreign direct investment—which is finessed as the occasion for the transfer of a package of resources—technology or management skills—over national boundaries and, thus, once again provides support for the global hyperreal" (*A Critique* 413).

The movement of resources—both human and material to Africa sometimes blights the celebratory positioning of global flows, especially because of the toxicity of some of the resources ferried to the continent and the precarity to which they expose life. As Spivak remarks elsewhere, “the developing national states are not only linked by the common thread of profound ecological loss, the loss of forest and river as foundation of life, but also plagued by the complicity, however apparently remote, of the power lines of local developers with the forces of global capital” (“Cultural Talks” 338).

Here, Spivak directly connects globalization to environmental devastation as imbricated in her notion of ecological loss in developing countries. Although she does not elaborate the ecological loss in detail, we can draw out her thesis in two particular incidents that occurred in Africa within the parameters of global capital. The first is the dumping of toxic material in what is today Delta state in Nigeria in 1988, while the second is the well-known dumping of toxic waste in Ivory Coast in 2006. Despite their differences, both incidents fit into the economic and rational model that Lawrence Summers based his justification for his idea of dumping waste in Africa on.¹⁹

In the Nigerian case reported in *West Africa* in May 1988, a German ship denied entry access at a Romanian port was rerouted to the Niger-Delta of Nigeria. According to the report, “the reason behind Romania’s abrupt refusal to allow the vessel into Sulina was the realization that the Line was carrying highly toxic chemical waste.” It is not surprising that the next port of

¹⁹ Summers’ view was contained in a leaked internal memo of the World Bank where he was the chief economic officer. The full content can be found here:
<http://www.whirledbank.org/ourwords/summers.html>

call for the ship was not another European country but an African one. On hand to assist in Nigeria was Gianfranco Raffaelli, an Italian involved with an Italian construction company registered in Nigeria. Raffaelli obtained a land from a Nigerian unaware of the purpose of the lease. Interestingly, it was Nigerian students studying in Italy who drew attention of the government and Nigerians to the issue. As Segun Gbadegesin has noted, “the dumping sites of toxic waste from Western nations can be found throughout Africa, from Senegal to Nigeria, to Zimbabwe, Congo, and even South Africa” (189). Gbadegesin points to the prevalence of the problem in Africa and contends that “it is also a tale of environmental racism” (188). Indeed, it is no coincidence that the dumping sites are in Africa. Even when they happen say in America, minority communities of blacks and Latinos are often the sites for such environmental transgression.²⁰ The choice of Romania can also be read in similar light and elicits the question of why the ship did not try to dump the wastes in the home country of Germany or elsewhere in Western Europe. The argument is that there is a racist coloration to the choice of both the botched dumping site and where the consignment was finally delivered.

Of interest in this narrative is also the transnational character of the whole business. The ship is German owned, attempts a delivery in Romania, but eventually succeeds in disembarking in an African country with Italian connections as well. And the whistle blowers were Nigerians, resident in Italy. This transaction is illustrative of what global capital means for people in the

²⁰ For the discussion of environmental racism in black and Latino/a communities in America, see *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: NYU Press, 2001) by Luke W. Cole & Sheila R. Foster, and the essays in Bunyan Bryant’s (edited) *Environmental Justice: Issues, Policies, and Solutions* (Washington DC: Island Press, 1995).

periphery and demonstrates Spivak's point that the "logic of microelectronic capitalism is [not] universal" (*A Critique* 334). Poverty and then the ecological devastation of the environment that sometimes take decades or generations to recover from are significant outcomes of globalization for African societies, while the gains of such transactions remain in the global capital cities and the hands of the tiny elite of the countries in Africa. I explore the impact of globalization a bit more in chapter 2 where I examine the "oil curse" in the Niger-Delta.

Similarly, there is a clear transnationalism at work in the 2006 well reported case of the dumping of toxic wastes in and around Abidjan Ivory Coast. Amnesty International's report of the disaster estimates that about hundred thousand people were affected in varying degrees. This assessment of the impact of the disaster only gives a partial picture, since toxic waste falls within what Nixon describes as "slow violence." Given that the environmental devastation such disasters cause is slow in physical manifestation and less spectral than the visible, conventional forms of violence, they are usually less accounted for. Yet the fact that their effects sometimes extend to even those unborn during the disaster as the Bhopal scenario in India indicates makes it important to consider the ecological impacts of these disasters more seriously. Marietta Harjono, the toxic campaigner for Greenpeace International in Amsterdam, highlights the role of transnational corporations in the disaster: "After a long journey, they decided to bring it to Cote d'Ivoire. It is truly an international story, because it all started with low quality gasoline brought from Mexico and the U-S, traveled through Europe, then to the Mediterranean where it was processed. But it ended up at the doorsteps of the people of Abidjan who had nothing to do with it" (qtd. In Lewis n.p.).

This particular incident is similar to the Nigerian incident if we look at the transnational journeys of the waste and the fact that the waste ended up in Ivory Coast, another West African country. The multinational corporation, Trafigura, had the option of treating the waste in the Netherlands but considered the cost prohibitive. The alternative destination was Ivory Coast, a country with disposable people and those with “bare life” to borrow Agamben’s term. Following Agamben, it can be argued that the Africans who become victims of the toxic material do not have the political or legal rights that made it impossible for the ship to berth in Europe or America. What is pertinent is the expendability of the lives of the Africans as is evident even in the settlement of the case. None of the parties involved accepted responsibility for the disaster. Trafigura only accepted to pay some settlement fee in order to close the case and continue its business. It is clear that environmental racism guides the choice of Ivory Coast here. But more importantly, what these two examples suggest is the link between environmental racism and the operations of transnational corporations in Africa. As Spivak’s work suggests and these examples demonstrate, an account of globalization cannot be complete without attending to the ecological effect of their workings in Africa and other parts of the world outside the main circuit of global capital. These examples also show the continuation of colonialism by other means; they also complicate those definitional attempts to temporally locate the postcolonial as something that happened after colonialism.²¹

Given globalization’s exploitative thrust, Spivak advocates for what she calls “planetary,” and a recourse to what she terms “non-Eurocentric ecological justice” (*A Critique*

²¹ See Robert Young’s *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003) for a robust explication of postcolonialism.

380). Interestingly, both strategies of resistance manifest ecological thinking that justify their analysis here. Spivak's planetarity involves a departure from globalization, which she describes as "the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere" (*Death of 72*). Rather the planetary evokes the Earth as a non-hierarchical "bigger concept-metaphor than bounded nations" (*Death of 93*). This earth, for Spivak, is a paranational image that can substitute for international and can perhaps provide, today, a displaced site for the imagination of planetarity" (*Death of 95*). Indeed, the concept of the earth moves away from the artificial, political divisions of the world/globe into nations while reinstating the connections of peoples and the earth across space and time. Absent from Spivak's planetarity is the inequality that gives force to globalization and its commodification of humans and the larger environment. In other words, the planetary can be read as a form of ecological thinking that finds echoes in Morton's ecological thought and Heise's eco-cosmopolitanism which I return to in Chapter 2 and the conclusion of Chapter 3, respectively.

Spivak is also attentive to non-Western forms of environmental knowledge and the insight they shed for a sustainable future. She gestures towards what she calls "animist liberation theologies to girdle the perhaps impossible vision of an ecologically just world" (*A Critique* 382). Spivak continues: For Nature, the sacred other of the human community, is in this thinking also bound by the structure of ethical responsibility" (*A Critique* 382). We can see that Spivak is positioning the nonhuman others—animals, plants, etc., in an ethical relation with humans. In particular, Spivak insists that ethical responsibility extends to nonhuman aspects of the environment—read as nature in Spivak's oeuvre.

Spivak asserts: “I have no doubt that we must learn to learn from the original practical ecological philosophies of the world . . . We are talking about using the strongest mobilizing discourse in the world in a certain way, for the globe, not merely for Fourth World uplift” (383).

She continues:

Among Indian Aboriginals, I know a very small percentage of a small percentage that was ‘denotified’ in 1952. These forest-dwelling tribals, defined by the British as ‘criminal tribes,’ had been left alone not just by the British, but also by the Hindu and Muslim civilizations of India. They are not ‘radicals.’ But because they (unlike the larger ethnic groups) were left alone, they conform to certain cultural norms, thinking, like us, that culture is nature, and instantiate certain attitudes that can be extremely useful for us, who have lost them, in our global predicament. (*A Critique* 384-85)

Although Spivak uses nature here; it is clear she is not essentializing the term nor the Indian Aboriginals. Her evocative phrase, “very small percentage of a small percentage” is quite revealing of the difference and heterogeneity among the Aboriginals. Spivak should not be read as calling for the return to nature. In fact, she tells us the Aboriginals “are themselves interested in changing their life pattern” but quickly asks “must that part of their cultural habit that internalizes the techniques of their pre-national ecological sanity be irretrievably lost to planetary justice in the needed process of integration, as a minority, into the modern state?” (*A Critique* 385). Spivak underscores the dynamism of the group she is writing about but also recognizes the ecological value of their practices worth emulating by the rest of us already co-opted into a global modernity and its discontents. Her contention is similar to mine, that we can learn from

the ecologically sustainable practices of traditional African societies exemplified earlier even when I recognize that certain practices of theirs were not environmentally sound. The fact that Spivak returns to the ecological vision of an Aboriginal group in a chapter steeped in globalization talk—late capitalism, multinational corporations, women in development, etc. — is a reminder that this “traditional” vision of the environment does not seek to eclipse the modern or postmodern. Spivak’s inclusion of this ecological vision also suggests that it coheres with late capitalism in some fashion and that its lessons are admirable necessities for the historical present. It is the logic that generates what Carrigan calls multivalent sacredness; this ecological vision is important for the attainability of a sustainable future not only in Africa but across the “planetary” as Spivak would prefer to call an imagined more equitable globe. Tim Morton’s conceptualization of a version of this ecological vision, which he describes as “the ecological thought” is the framework for my interpretation of Niger-Delta literature in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

The Ecological (In)attention of Niger-Delta Literature: Rereading Okara, Okpewho, and

Ojaide

What is climate change if not a consequence of failing to respect or even to notice the elemental medium in which we are immersed? Is not global warming, or global weirding, a simple consequence of taking the air for granted?

— David Abram “The Commonwealth of Breath”

When Ken Saro-Wiwa gave his address before the Justice Auta led tribunal shortly before he was hanged by the Abacha regime in Nigeria on 10 November 1995, he reminded the Nigerian state that the injustices against the Ogoni and other ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta would be met with more radical measures if the oil companies and the government continued to suppress peaceful means of agitation that non-violent groups like MOSOP were using.²² It only took a few years before the actualization of that prophecy as various militant groups sprang up in the Delta, bombing oil installations, participating in oil bunkering, and kidnapping oil workers. Both strategies of resistance—peaceful and violent—were responses to the degradation of the Delta environment through decades of oil exploration. Writers have responded to the oil war in different ways and it is the aim of this chapter to examine how literary texts depict the environmental degradation of the Delta and the strategies of resistance adopted to challenge the problems.

Specifically, I focus on Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice* (1964), Isidore Okpewho’s *Tides* (1993), and Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist* (2006). While critics following the postcolonial

²² For Saro-Wiwa’s full statement, see Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day & Letters* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 173-174.

tradition of exploring agency and resistance have often celebrated violent acts of resistance in texts on the Delta for their implied agency, it is my contention that the destructive nature of these violent acts invites a reassessment of the seemingly hasty veneration.²³ There is a distinction to be made between what I consider an anthropocentric environmentalism and an ecological environmentalism, where the latter can be seen as critical to environmental sustainability in the region. By anthropocentric environmentalism, I refer to those environmental practices and rhetorics intended for the benefit of humans without consideration of other life forms in the ecosystem. The latter, on the other hand, tends to be in the interests of the sustainability of not only the humans but nonhumans as well. Implicit in ecological environmentalism is an understanding that humans share the planet with other life forms deserving consideration in accounts of resistance and agency.

The chapter is organized into four sections. I begin with an historical overview of the Delta; here, I highlight the involvement of the region in global trade and the overall development of the Delta in order to provide a context for the texts under study. In the second section, I show how exploring the representation of the Niger-Delta environment in the three novels reveals the evolution of the degradation of that environment in literature. While Okara's novel has been mostly read as a novel depicting post-independence disillusionment and critics have honed their critical lens on the peculiar language of the novel, I propose we situate the novel as a Niger Delta text portraying the incubation stage of the environmental crisis even if it does not overtly portray

²³ See Nwanyanwu; Feghabo; and Ahwefeada

ecological issues.²⁴ If Okara's novel depicts the incubation phase, Okpewho's and Ojaide's novels show the intermediate and advanced phases of the destruction of the Delta environment in its literature, respectively. In the third section, I re-examine the celebratory readings of the violent resistance in both Okpewho and Ojaide's novels.²⁵ I argue that the ferocious resistance in *Tides* is destructive to the larger ecology it is meant to safeguard and calls for a reassessment of the acts of resistance in the region. I also contend that the positive reading of the Activist's resistance via oil bunkering would now appear simplistic and that it is important to put pressure on the idea of bunkering to reveal that its liberatory potential in the novel does not mitigate its adverse ecological consequences.²⁶ It is no coincidence that the protagonists of all three novels' are intellectuals. Rather, it testifies to the prominent role of the intellectual in the Delta struggle. Therefore, the final section draws upon Edward Said's work on the intellectual to explore the role of the intellectual in these novels.

Guiding the work in this chapter is Timothy Morton's idea of ecological thought. Morton's idea is articulated in *The Ecological Thought* (2010). The underlying premise of the ecological thought is that there is no external nature out there, separate from culture, because both nature and culture interact and are transformed by these ecological exchanges. Morton explains that the ecological thought is "a practice and a process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are concerned with other beings—animal, vegetable, or mineral. Ultimately, this

²⁴ For a discussion of *The Voice* as a novel depicting postcolonial corruption and disillusionment, see Webb; Ravenscroft; and Palmer.

²⁵ For an example of the positive reading of the violent acts of resistance in the novel, see Feghabo, and Ojaide.

²⁶ See Ahwefeada for an instance of the celebration of oil bunkering as a strategy of resistance in the novel.

includes thinking about democracy. What would a truly democratic encounter between truly equal beings look like, what would it be—can we even imagine it?” (7). The seductiveness of Morton’s work lies in its recognition of the relation between humans and nonhumans alongside its insistence that we redefine our notion of personhood to include other beings we won’t normally ascribe the category to. In his view, it is important to “treat many more beings as people while deconstructing our ideas of what counts as people” (8).

The main point, for Morton, is “thinking big” which contrasts with the notion of “thinking small” in terms of the locale/place, and/or thinking in terms of human interests. For Morton, thinking big allows for a recognition of the interdependence of humans and the nonhumans, an idea he describes as the mesh. For Morton, “All life forms are the mesh, and so are all dead ones, as are their habitat which are also made up of living and nonliving beings” (29). Morton enjoins humans to consider animals and other environmental elements as “strange strangers” to enable a recognition of the familiarity and intimacy we share with them. According to Morton: “we should instead explore the paradoxes and fissures of identity within ‘human’ and ‘animal.’ Instead of ‘animal,’ I use strange stranger. This stranger isn’t just strange. She, or her, or it—can we tell? How?—is strangely strange. Their strangeness itself is strange. We can never absolutely figure them out. . . . They are intrinsically strange. Do we know for sure whether they are sentient or not? Do we know whether they are alive or not?” (41). Morton’s idea of strange strangers is striking for departing from the common expressions used to capture similar sentiments—Other, etc. Morton’s choice is meant to emphasize the radical alterity of the Other and our impossibility of knowing them. Stranger, generally, denotes unfamiliarity; therefore,

qualifying the term with “strange” seems a rhetorical gesture Morton employs to emphasize the unknowability of Others in the mesh and the futility of hoping/acting otherwise. As he puts it, “we can’t predict or anticipate just who or what—and can we tell between ‘who’ and ‘what,’ and how can we tell?” (38).

Morton is not so naïve as not to recognize the uncertainty that characterizes ecological thought. He draws attention to debates concerning the rationality and capacity for suffering of nonhumans and asks if these really matter: “We can’t be sure whether sentient beings are machines or not. And it would be dangerous if we thought we could. . . . However much we try, we can’t explain the strange stranger away. We’re are stuck with the paradoxes of pure appearance” (79). He is also against the tendency to use the idea of consciousness to demonstrate human superiority over other species. He writes, “[t]he ecological thought should not set consciousness up as yet another defining trait of superiority over nonhumans. Our minds are hugely quantitatively different from other terrestrial minds but perhaps not qualitatively” (72). In other words, the crux for Morton is that there is uncertainty around nonhuman beings who we cannot really know, hence the term strange strangers, and that the inconclusive debates on their capacities should not be the basis for denying them equality. This way of thinking is critical, for Morton, if we are to surmount today’s ecological crisis.

Morton’s theorization of the ecological thought decenters humans, since “[e]ach point of the mesh is both the center and edge of a system of points, so there is no absolute center or edge (29). Rather, he contends that “all beings are related to each other negatively and differentially, in an open system without center or edge. In a language, a word means what it means because of

its difference with other words. There is nothing intrinsic to the word that makes it mean what it means” (39). In fact, the central goal of the ecological thought is “[h]ow to care for the neighbor, the strange stranger, and the hyper-object” (135).

Two of the several instances of the ecological thought provided by Morton stand out for this project. One is his reading of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. For Morton, “Raphael offers a negative image of human location, suggesting that humans shouldn’t think their planet is the only important one. . . . If they refrain from thinking that they are too important, humans will resist Satan’s setting up of humans at the center of a universe, that like the apple, is there for the taking” (22). Morton adds that the text insists “humans must not act from a sense of irrational spontaneous connectedness. Instead, Raphael suggests, they must reflect rationally on their decentered place in the Universe” (22). At least two threads can be identified from Morton’s reading. The first is a universal view of the world that recognizes interconnections with other places while the other is a perspective that recognizes the coexistence of humans with other beings deserving of respect. Morton shows how Milton’s text rewrites human relation to the world and the things in it. Thus, if the Garden of Eden was at the mercy of Adam and Eve, Angel Raphael, in Milton’s work, suggests an alternative where the apple is not there for human’s sake. This reading confirms the ecological thought as consisting of a planetary view of the world and a sense that humans coexist with nonhumans.

Milton’s other striking example is his recourse to what he calls an “upgraded version of animism” to illustrate his ecological thought. In Morton’s view, “[t]he ethics of the ecological thought is to regard beings as people even when they aren’t people. Ancient animisms treat

beings as people, without a concept of nature. Perhaps I'm aiming for an upgraded version of animism" (8). It is to Tibetan culture that Morton turns to demonstrate how animism fits into the logic of the ecological thought: "Tibetans transcend a limited view of place and are concerned about outer space." For Morton, however, "Their view of outer space doesn't prevent the Tibetans from having developed ideas about compassion and nonviolence and a remarkable system of restorative justice" (27). The Tibetans, like Raphael in Milton's text, upholds an expansive view of the world that transcends their immediate environment. They are attuned to their connection to other places, even as they imbibe qualities of the ecological thought like compassion, nonviolence, and justice. Morton contrasts the Tibetan worldview with the West's which emphasizes place. The problem, with a placeist sense of the world, according to Morton, is that it "impedes a true ecological view" (22-23). Morton's use of the Tibetan example is striking and similar to the Aboriginal culture discussed in Chapter One. Morton's example demonstrates the presence of ecological responsibility from which we can draw inspiration for the ecological thought in certain non-western cultures.

Although Morton's work can be critiqued for not addressing the power structures and inequalities that characterize the neoliberal era, I find his work useful for this chapter because of the redefinition of personhood he envisages, the obliteration of a center in the ecological thought, and his insistence on recognizing nonhumans as strange strangers regardless of whether they have rational and emotional capabilities or not. The strength of Morton's work for this chapter is his decentering of the human and the fact that he does not consider reason or sentience the key parameters for recognizing the nonhumans. That their existence is enough to compel our

intimacy and respect for them is pivotal for the ecological interventions I make in discussing the Niger-Delta environment throughout the chapter. For instance, my re-examination of the violent resistance in the novels under investigation is borne out of the fact that it serves human interests to the detriment of the nonhumans and by implication the larger ecology. And so is my critique of the idea of the river as a dump site in Okara's *The Voice*. While it certainly fits the interest of the Chief, it is problematic not only because it hurts Okolo and Tuere, other humans, but also because it is devoid of any evidence of ecological considerations of the Others—the river, the creatures living in it, etc. What Morton's ecological thought holds us to is a bigger conception of the environment that caters not only to our interests as humans. That would fall under anthropocentric environmentalism; rather, he compels us to conceive of a broader ecological ethic that serves the larger interests of the different beings inhabiting the environment.

The Niger-Delta Unveiled

The Niger-Delta is an important site from which to consider the effects of globalization and resource extraction in Africa.²⁷ The Delta's proximity to the Atlantic Ocean has made it accessible to foreigners and promoted the region's trade with outsiders since the sixteenth century.²⁸ It is considered one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world, and is home to over forty ethnic groups, including the Ogonis, Ijaws, the Urhobos, and the Itsekiris (Orogun 460). Despite the variations in these communities, they share certain similarities including the

²⁷ Ushie, "The Niger Delta Crisis," 2-3.

²⁸ Okonta and Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 5-6.

fact that fishing and farming are the mainstays of the traditional economy. Fishing and farming activities are mainly for subsistence but surplus produce are usually sold in the local markets or transported to bigger cities like Port Harcourt to maximize profit. J.S. Oboreh reports that “prior to oil exploitation and exploration, the Niger Delta region had been a peaceful place with fishing and farming as the main means of livelihood of its denizens” (18). Oboreh adds that the region, however, “has suffered from environmental degradation and deprivation” since the commencement of oil exploration” (18).

Although Christianity has permeated the region, belief in traditional gods and the reverence of ancestors are still commonplace. One of the most influential deity for the Ijaw is Egbesu considered to be the god of justice, who punishes injustice when invoked. The spread of Christianity in the region has not obliterated the relevance of Egbesu for individuals and groups like the Egbesu boys who invoke the god in their fight against the Nigerian state for environmental and economic injustices against the people of the Delta. It is reported that the Egbesu boys and any person fortified with the Egbesu charm are invulnerable to bullets, a feat they attribute to divine powers gained from the god (Tamuno 193).

One cannot discuss the spirituality of the Delta communities without mentioning the significance of rivers in the region. According to Ken Saro-Wiwa, “To the Ogoni, rivers and streams do not only provide water for life—for bathing, drinking, etc.; they do not only provide fish for food, they are also sacred and are bound up intricately with the life of the community, of the entire Ogoni nation” (12-13). Similarly, James Agbogun notes that “it is believed that the waters of these area are cities populated by not only fishes but also a community of deities and water spirits.” Saro-Wiwa and Agbogun gesture to the significance of the more than human

world for these African communities. More pointedly, their astute observations suggest a relationship between the people and the rivers and streams that not only nourish them physically but constitute a source of spiritual replenishment as well. Many Deltan communities believe in the existence of water gods/goddesses managing the affairs of humans in the rivers and streams. Like the Egbesu example cited above, these rivers and streams, as well as the deity attributed to them are the subjects of songs and other rituals too. They have inspired the modern poetry of artists like Tanure Ojaide whose novel is studied here.²⁹ Understanding the spiritual dimension of the environment is also useful for analyzing the impact of oil exploration for the region.

In terms of economics, the contacts between the people of the Delta and outsiders can be positioned in three phases: the slave trade, the trade in oil palm, and the crude oil business following Shell's discovery of oil in Oloibiri in present day Bayelsa State in 1956. With the abolition of slavery, the trade in oil palm became a prominent exchange activity between the Deltans and the foreigners in the 19th century, mostly the British because the commodity was essential for industries in Britain and for lubricating railways for transportation. The trade engagements were initially spearheaded by the Royal Niger Company.³⁰ Like the slave trade that preceded it and the crude oil megabusiness that followed, the trade in oil palm demonstrates the

²⁹ For a treatment of Ojaide's use of Mami water imagery and other deities in his poetry, see Nester A Alu and Vashti Yusuf Suwa, "Tanure Ojaide: The Poet-Priest of the Niger-Delta and the Land Saga,"

AFRREV LALIGENS 1.1 (2012): 132-44.

³⁰ Aghalino, *Crude Oil Business in the Western Niger Delta Nigeria 1956-1995* (Enugu: Rhyce Kerex, 2009), 36-37.

inequality of trade between Africa and the West and shows the insertion of the region into the global economic order.

While oil palm can be considered the commodity of the 19th century, crude oil replaced it in the 20th. In fact, the earliest exploration for oil in Nigeria started in 1908 and this was conducted by the Nigerian Bitumen Corporation. The First World War stopped their exploration activities in 1914.³¹ 1914 was the same year Britain's Lord Lugard amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates to forge what is known as Nigeria today. Britain promulgated the Colonial Mineral Ordinance in 1914 while Shell was given their exploration license in 1915.³² Shell achieved a major breakthrough in their exploration activity in 1956 when they discovered oil in commercial quantities.³³ But it will be misleading to conclude that the environmental problems caused by oil started in 1956. According to the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP),

Oil exploration activities started to have an impact on the Niger Delta vegetation even before a well was drilled or oil produced, and the footprint left by seismic surveys over 50 years can still be seen. . . . Seismic lines may make the interior of

³¹ See Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation's "Development of Nigeria's Oil Industry," <http://www.nnpcgroup.com/NNPCBusiness/BusinessInformation/OilGasInNigeria/DevelopmentoftheIndustry.aspx>

³² Okonta and Douglas, 23.

³³ Moro, *Socio-Political Crisis in the Niger Delta*, xii.

some wetland areas more accessible, potentially leading to further degradation (155-56)³⁴

I will explore the details of the seismic surveys when I discuss them in relation to Okara's novel in the next section but the cited passage is useful for considering the activities of the oil companies before the discovery of oil in large quantity and the fact that we can still see the evidence of the impact on the vegetation over five decades after. The beginning of oil exploration also marked the transformation of the Delta environment from a region rich with biodiversity to one encumbered by devastating exploitation.

It must be pointed out that Shell had a monopoly for oil exploration until independence in 1960. The 1960s witnessed the entrance of other oil corporations like Mobil, Gulf Oil, Agip, e.t.c.³⁵ The first oil tanker left Oloibiri in 1958, but as Nixon asks: "Who could have dreamed in 1958 that four decades and \$600 billion of oil revenues later, some 90 million Nigerians would be surviving on less than a dollar a day?" (106). The poverty underscored in Nixon's rhetorical question is entrenched in the Niger Delta where the operations of the oil companies have polluted the lands and the rivers as the subsequent reading of the novels indicates. The despoliation of the environment is significant because farming and fishing are the mainstays of the riverine communities of the Delta.³⁶

³⁴ For the complete report, see United Nations Environmental Program, "Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland." http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/OEA/UNEP_OEA.pdf

³⁵ Schatzel, *Petroleum in Nigeria*, 4; Onoh, *The Nigerian Oil Economy*, 22.

³⁶ Obi and Rustad, "Introduction: Petro-violence in the Niger Delta-the complex politics of an insurgency," *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta*, 3-4.

Not surprisingly, the people of the Delta have taken up what Ramachandra Guha and Martinez-Alier describe as the “environmentalism of the poor” (12). The people’s grouse, as represented in *Tides* and *The Activist* in particular, is the destruction of their environment and means of livelihood caused by oil exploration activities. This is so because successive Nigerian governments have placed mineral reserves, including oil, under the administration of the federal government. With oil on the exclusive list of the federal government, the states in the region are entitled to only a meagre percentage of the oil proceeds. Since 1999, thirteen percent of the oil proceeds is allocated to the oil producing states for development projects. Unfortunately, a substantial portion of the allocation goes to service the greed of the corrupt political class.³⁷

The corruption of the Nigerian state in league with the oil multinationals, including Shell has not gone unchallenged by the people. Under Ibrahim Babangida’s watch as head of state (1985-1993), for instance, the people of Iko and Umuechem, both oil communities in the Delta, staged protests against the assault on their environment and means of livelihood in 1987 and 1989, respectively. But these demonstrations were brutally suppressed by Babangida’s military force.³⁸ In 1990, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) was formed by Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni leaders. Later that year, they produced the Ogoni Bill of Rights which emphasized the rights of the Ogoni to a livable and healthy environment. MOSOP mounted peaceful and non-violent struggles and attracted the support of the majority of the

³⁷ See Ebiede, “Conflict Drivers: Environmental Degradation and Corruption in The Niger Delta Region,” 145; Ukiwo, “The Nigerian state, oil and the Niger Delta crisis,” 26.

³⁸ Okonta and Douglas, 32.

Ogoni people. The governments of Babangida and the subsequent one of General Sani Abacha, who toppled the interim government imposed after the annulment of the 1993 presidential election did not take kindly to the Ogoni agitation for self-determination.³⁹ With pressures from the oil companies who felt threatened by MOSOP under the leadership of Ken-Saro Wiwa, the government arrested and detained MOSOP leaders including Saro-Wiwa. Ultimately, he and eight others were found guilty for murder and killed by hanging by the Abacha junta on 10 November 1995.⁴⁰ The charge was the murder of four Ogoni leaders who had fallen out with MOSOP. The military tribunal headed by Justice Auta was declared a charade by both the local and international observers of the process. Saro-Wiwa's legal team headed by the human rights lawyer, Gani Fahwehmi, resigned in protest against the tribunal's procedures.⁴¹ Key witnesses in the trial have since recounted how they were induced by agents of the state to testify against Saro-Wiwa and the other accused.⁴² Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth after the death of the environmental martyr, writer, and activist.

³⁹ Ibid., 116-117.

⁴⁰ For an overview of the militarization of the Delta region, see Charles Ukeje, "Changing the paradigm of pacification in Nigeria's Delta region"

⁴¹ Okonta and Douglas, 128-134; Amnesty International, "Nigeria: The Ogoni Trials and Detentions," 6; French, Nigeria Executes Critic of Regime; Nations Protest," *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/11/11/world/nigeria-executes-critic-of-regime-nations-protest.html?pagewanted=2>

⁴² Ibid., 134; Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Amnesty International Condemns Death Sentences Imposed On Ken Saro-Wiwa and Other Ogoni Detainees after Blatantly Unfair Trials," <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR44/026/1995/en/0a910fab-eb2c-11dd-92ac-295bdf97101f/afr440261995en.pdf>

Significantly, it did not take long before Saro-Wiwa's prophecy was realized, namely that the inability of the government to give peaceful change a chance would result in violent political ones. Since the late 1990s, violent activities including kidnapping of oil workers and the bombing of oil installations in the Delta have been carried out by different groups, of which the most notable is the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).⁴³ MEND has claimed responsibility for several militant activities since 2005 and was one of the groups that accepted the amnesty program of the late President Yar Adua in 2009.⁴⁴ Although the spate of militancy and unrest has significantly diminished since the beginning of the amnesty program, the people in the oil producing communities continue to claim that there is no substantial development of their region or change in the operational procedures of the oil companies for environmental sustainability. Gas continues to flare day and night, nonstop, oil continues to spill, and the environment continues to suffer.⁴⁵

The UNEP report on the state of the region provides ample evidence of the extent of the damage to the environment. According to the executive summary of the report, "UNEP's field observations and scientific investigations found that oil contamination in Ogoniland is widespread and severely impacting many components of the environment. Even though the oil

⁴³ For a discussion of the kinds of militancy in the Delta, see Ebienfa, "Militancy in the Niger Delta and the Emergent Categories;" Ikelegbe, "Popular and criminal violence as instruments of struggle in the Niger Delta;" For an overview of MEND and their kidnappings, in particular, see Oriola, *Criminal Resistance*

⁴⁴ Likar, 179.

⁴⁵ About five thousand spillage incidents occurred between 1976 and 1996 in the Delta. A total of 2,369,470 oil barrels were spilled into the environment from these occurrences. See Orogun, 480.

industry is no longer active in Ogoniland, oil spills continue to occur with alarming regularity. The Ogoni people live with this pollution every day” (2). The report focused on Saro-Wiwa’s Ogoniland and chronicles the devastation of the Ogoni land, waters, and vegetation: “At one site, Ejama-Ebubu in Eleme local government area (LGA), the study found heavy contamination present 40 years after an oil spill occurred, despite repeated clean-up attempts. (9). The fact that this site remains polluted long after the spill and despite cleaning attempts speak to the extent of the devastation.

The foregoing shows the Delta as a site of exploitation and unequal exchange. The UNEP report, in particular, shows how the area has deteriorated since oil exploration started in the region. The pollution, according to the report, has chased the fish farther into the sea, thereby necessitating the catching of young, immature fish by the fishermen. This situation shows evidence of overfishing and threat to the aquatic creatures. Additionally, the people are deprived of access to the mainstay of their economy. The report actually noted that the locals consistently mentioned going deepwater to fish because the oil has either killed or chased the remaining fish downstream. It is no wonder the area is often cited for the illustration of the resource curse in Africa and is the setting of a corpus of literary works including those analyzed in the following sections.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ See Freedom C. Onuoha and Gerald E. Ezirim, “The Resource Curse and National Development in Nigeria,” for an interesting analysis of how the Delta fits the resource curse paradigm.

The Niger-Delta Environment in Three Novels: Okara's *The Voice*

Okara's *The Voice* is a novel exploring post-independence disillusionment while positing a society in transition from a traditional economy to modernity; thus, it can be read as belonging to Ken Harrow's "literatures of the oxymoron," that is, African "literatures expressive of postindependence contradictions and frustrations" (x). The novel, through its protagonist, Okolo, interrogates the bankruptcy of moral values in his society. Throughout the narrative, the educated Okolo is in search of what he calls "it." Although he does not define the "it," readers can conclude that "it" refers to moral values and social conscience. According to Hugh Webb, "Okolo's search, then, is seen as a challenge to those whose interests are in a conservative retention of power. *It* implies an inner search, an end to corruption and selfishness" (69). Interestingly, Okolo's search for "it" somewhat evokes the search for oil as seen earlier and to which I return to later in the chapter. Okolo is disturbed by the loss of moral values by the community leaders and their followers. He challenges Chief Izongo and the elders by asking them if they have got "it." They, in turn, ask him to stop looking for "it" or face the consequences. Okolo is tortured and banished from the town on the orders of Chief Izongo for refusing to discontinue his search.

Okolo relocates to Sologa and notices that the city does not have "it" as well. On his arrival in this town, he finds himself in a house with human bones. He later finds a policeman and reports the bones to him. The policeman notes that the house belongs to a "bigman" who cannot get into trouble. The naïve Okolo insists on the policeman doing something and the latter excuses himself to investigate Okolo's charge. He hides in a telephone booth after walking for a distance and sneaks into a bar afterwards. Okolo waits in vain for the policeman and continues to

wander through the city. But everywhere he goes, they tell him to forget his quest for “it.” Okolo decides to return to Amatu and finds the people celebrating his departure with food and drinks. Chief Izongo is infuriated about Okolo’s return and orders that he be tied to a canoe and drowned in the river.

In his introduction to the African Writers Series edition of *The Voice*, Arthur Ravenscroft states that the novel is “a political parable that applies equally to the political state of the Federation of Nigeria in the early 1960s (before the first military coup), as to any political situation in any country where government is incompetent and corrupt” (10). Several times in the novel, the characters point to the coming of the white man and the quest for money and material goods. An example is when one of the elders, Tembeowei visits Okolo to persuade him to stop searching for it and ignore the moral convulsion around it. Tembeowei attributes the quest for materialism to the emphasis on wealth and the commodities it can obtain. What is being mourned here is the loss of the moral values that guided the worldview of Umuofia and Umuaro in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.

The quest for money and wealth, as presented in the novel, is traceable to modernity’s capitalist drive and its de-emphasis on morality. Chief Izongo and his ilk function as the postcolonial elite who have tasted power and decided to keep it at all costs. They have the money and cannot stand the voice of Okolo on their conscience. Repression, thus, becomes a way of making people tow the party line as one of the elders described it. The ordinary people too are not left out of the craze for money. The messengers of Chief Izongo who inflict pain on Okolo are his erstwhile friends. When we eavesdrop on their conversation through Ukule, the cripple,

we understand that one of them is disturbed by the fact that they betrayed a friend for money. The other reproaches him and emphasizes the monetary reward of the transaction.

While Webb and Ravenscroft are correct concerning the post-independence setting of the novel and its critique of corruption as exemplified above, I suggest we consider the text as a novel depicting the incubation phase of the Niger-Delta environmental crisis. Although the novel does not describe itself in this way, the language of the novel, the naming of its characters, and its riverine setting betray its Niger Delta setting. Criticism on the novel has quite focused on the ingenious use of Ijaw English in the rendering of the text. According to Bernth Lindfors, “Okara appears to have made an attempt to render into English the expressive idiom of his native tongue, Ijaw. He takes liberties with English syntax, reduplicates nouns, adjectives, and adverbs (‘smile smile,’ ‘black black,’ ‘softly softly’), and uses concrete metaphorical language to express abstract concepts . . .” (411).⁴⁷

While the critical responses to the language experiment have been largely positive, it must be understood within the context of the debate of what constituted an authentic language for African literary productions. Writers like Gabriel Okara and Chinua Achebe felt that English could be retained as language of literary expression but it has to be a new English inflected with the nuances of the indigenous African languages.⁴⁸ In Okara’s case, his native Ijaw language

⁴⁷ Apart from Lindfors, Patrick Scott and Emeka Okeke-Ezigbo have also interrogated Okara’s use of language in “‘The Voice’: The Non-Ijo Reader and the Pragmatics of Translingualism,” and “J.M. Synge and Gabriel Okara: The Heideggerian Search for a Quintessential Language,” respectively.

⁴⁸ The question of the language of African literature dominated debates in the field in the 1960s and 1970s. It was the focus of the famous 1962 Makerere Conference. While scholars like Ngugi wa Thiongo and Obi Wali believe that the indigenous African languages should be the

provided the structure on which he imposed the English language, giving rise to expressions like “‘If you are coming in people be, then come in.’ The people opened not their mouths. ‘Who are you?’ Okolo again asked, walking to the men. As Okolo closer to the men walked, the men quickly turned and ran out” (27). This sentence can be recasted as “Come in if you want. But the people remained silent. He asked again who they wanted but as he walked towards them, the people turned and fled.” The passage demonstrates an example of Okara’s subversion of English’s syntax, Subject-Verb-Object (SVO), in favor of the structure of his native Ijaw.⁴⁹ The use of words like “inside” to refer to soul or essence is an example of the direct translation from Ijaw into English in *The Voice*.

The naming of the characters and their gods also demonstrates the Delta setting of the novel. Okolo, for example, means the voice or spokesperson in Ijaw. Izongo, Abadi, Tuere, and Ukele—all names of characters in the novel are also Ijaw names with various meanings. The names of the gods invoked in the novel are undoubtedly drawn from the Delta. Tuere, for example, asks Woyengi, an Ijaw goddess of creation, to intervene in the crisis between Okolo and the community.⁵⁰ We also find other gods invoked during the storm that rocked the boat conveying Okolo and the other passengers to Sologa. The passengers beseeched Amadasu and

appropriate medium of African literary writing, others like Chinua Achebe and Gabriel Okara contend that the English language is adjustable to reflect the African experience. See Ngugi wa Thiongo, *Decolonizing the Mind* for an overview of the debate.

⁴⁹ See Scott’s detailed analysis of Okara’s linguistic experiment in *The Voice* for more on the interplay of Ijaw and English in the novel.

⁵⁰ See <http://www.godchecker.com/pantheon/african-mythology.php?deity=WOYENGI> for further description of this god.

Egbesu, and it is no coincidence that these too are Ijaw gods. Clearly, the invocation of the deities also reinforces the importance of the supernatural in the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta people, in particular, are reputed to hold to beliefs in the power of the gods to manage the affairs of humans. A fine example would be the belief in the Egbesu and the ancestors discussed in the previous section.

The other pointer to the Delta setting of the novel is the emphasis on the river. Recall that I mentioned earlier that the Delta is filled with riverine communities.⁵¹ Rivers stand out in the novel as technologies for transport and movement as well as a space for dumping wastes. As Okolo travels to Sologa after his banishment by Chief Izongo, the river is the means of transportation. Earlier in the novel, we also see villagers returning to the community via the river in the evening: “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 the half-ripe mango breasts, paddled, driving her paddle into the river with a sweet inside” (26). The weariness of the paddlers suggest they are returning from the day’s labor. More precisely, the use of “bent backs” and “tired hands” to describe the returnees suggest they are non-mechanized farmers. Such farmers definitely rely on their hands and their backs which have to be closer to the ground while working. The choice of metaphor to describe the growing breasts is also agricultural. Breasts are mango-like and as are other objects. The narrator’s choice of mangoes suggests he is operating in an economy where mango has some significance. Earlier I pointed to the peculiar language use in the novel; the choice of “sweet inside” derived from translating Ijaw directly into English

⁵¹ For a description of the region’s geography, see Orogun, 477.

instead of the more English appropriate “happy heart” or mind also shows how the passage is implicated in its Ijaw social milieu.

But of utmost concern here is that the river is fundamental to transportation in the village of Amatu. Although the narrator mentions that the elders were acquiring cars, the automobiles are not put in use by the characters. The preponderance of the river in the novel manifests itself in the last scene of the novel where both Okolo and Tuere are floating on the river:

When day broke the following day it broke on a canoe aimlessly floating down the river. And in the canoe tied together back to back with their feet tied to the seats of the canoe, were Okolo and Tuere. Down they floated from one bank of the river to the other like debris, carried by the current. Then the canoe was drawn into a whirlpool. It spun round and round and was slowly drawn into the core and finally disappeared. And the water rolled over the top and the river flowed smoothly over as if nothing had happened. (127)

This moment occurs after Okolo’s return to Amatu and crashes Chief Izongo’s celebration. It is remarkable that this party was invoked in the first place to celebrate Chief Izongo’s success in banishing Okolo. But as it turns out, the courageous Okolo decides to return and challenge the elders and the people for not having “it.” Chief Izongo is angered by Okolo’s stubborn return and decides to drown him and his foremost supporter, Tuere.

This last scene of the novel is another aspect of the text that has attracted the interest of critics, besides its peculiar linguistic characteristic. These critics, including Webb, agree that “[a]lthough Okolo is hastily plucked off, there is evidence that the spiritual reawakening he

initiated will burgeon in strength with time” (326).⁵² The evidence includes the fact that Ukule, the cripple is a strong critic of the elders’ ways. One of the messengers detailed to arrest Okolo is also seen reassessing his actions towards the end of the novel. Ukule who eavesdrops on the messengers’ conversation reports to Tuere: ’He says the money paid them by Izongo is bad money and that he, too, like Okolo will speak. Only he says the time is not correct yet” (96). It is expected that Ukule and the seemingly repentant messenger will constitute the new voice at the death of Okolo, hence, the enthusiasm of the scholars who have paid attention to this passage.

This reading is valid to the point that we are concerned about the human beings in this environment without considering Morton’s point that the ecological thought presumes that there is more than the human point of view. An ecological reading of the passage blights the hopeful rendering of the scene. The method chosen by Chief Izongo to murder Okolo and Tuere is worth re-examining because of the idea of the water as dump site that it promotes. Readers of the novel will recall that Chief Izongo initially exiled Okolo to ward off the nuisance that the young intellectual poses to the former’s corrupt practices. When that move fails and Okolo returns to the community in the midst of the Chief’s party, he orders that Okolo and Tuere, his sympathizer, be drowned to again get rid of them. Chief Izongo’s decision to drown his critics

⁵² Bernth Lindfors and Eustace Palmer also agree that the ending of the novel offers a hopeful future for Amatu. Lindfors, for example asserts that, “[a]lthough the story ends with Okolo’s death, it ends affirmatively and optimistically. One is made to feel that the powers of darkness have triumphed only temporarily over the powers of enlightenment, that goodness will eventually rise up and vanquish evil” (411).

suggests his failure to exhibit an ethical responsibility towards fellow humans but more so, he does not consider the interest of the living beings in the water in such considerations. To fully appreciate the scenario, we ought to remember Morton's thesis that, "the ecological thought has to do with warmth and tenderness; hospitality, wonder, and love; vulnerability and responsibility" (77). Of course, the fellow feeling that Morton advocates here should not only be extended to humans but also to nonhumans as the idea of ecological democracy suggests. Unfortunately, Chief Izongo fails this test in the novel. Not only does he kill his fellow humans but there is no evidence that he considers the interest of the strange strangers in the water before deciding to dump the bodies in the water. Self-interest certainly plays a role here as against the interest of the larger ecology which Morton hints at when he writes that the ecological thought "forces us to invent ways of being together that don't depend on self-interest" (135).

Writing in "Waste Aesthetics: Form as Restitution," Susan Signe Morrison rightly points out that: "[o]nce something has lost its usefulness and becomes trash, it is convenient to send it to poor parts of the world and then those parts of the world become trash" (467). Although the context of Morrison's work is the dumping of wastes by Western nations in developing countries as discussed in the previous chapter, the insight of her work has implications here. More specifically, her conclusion that the dump site becomes trash as well is relevant for understanding the river following Chief Izongo's decision to dump the human waste in the water. Along with the humans canceled as trash, so too are the water and those beings with a home in it.

But another reason this dumping is significant is because it somewhat presages the dumping of waste material from oil exploration in the waters as we shall see when I discuss the

novels of Okpewho and Ojaide later in the subsequent sections. There is a striking similarity between Chief Izongo's decision to drown his adversaries and the dumping of wastes from oil production in these waters in the other novels being studied. Besides the pollution that both activities constitute, it is remarkable that Chief Izongo's "waste" are those humans that are impediments to his penchant for wealth accumulation. In fact, the passage above tells the reader that "they floated like debris." The choice of simile is telling. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines debris as "[t]he remains of anything broken down or destroyed; ruins, wreck," suggesting that the comparison is meant to highlight the fact that the bodies are ruins from Chief Izongo's adventures. Similarly, the toxic waste from oil exploration is irrelevant for the companies' profit maximization as we will see in the novels. The fact that the companies choose to dump the wastes in the water instead of finding more environmentally sustainable methods of disposal that would be more effective but expensive, is also indicative of an unbridled quest for wealth. Put differently, the drowning of Okolo and Tuere prepares us for the impact of oil exploration on the waters as seen in contemporary novels of the Delta including Okpewho's *Tides* and Ojaide's *The Activist*, discussed later in this chapter.

If the above analysis situates *The Voice* in a Niger-Delta setting, in what follows, I examine the Niger-Delta environment depicted in the text. In other words, in what way is the flora and fauna of the Delta represented in the novel? Of course, the environment is not the central focus of Okara's novel; this represents a departure from his poetry where the environment is foregrounded. His "The Call of the River Nun," for instance, is focused on the River Nun in the Delta. In reading Okara's poem, Obi Maduakor claims that "the poet expresses his desire to

escape from the complexities of urban life and to settle by the banks of his village river, the Nun” (43). In the novel, however, there is no romantic attachment to nature as the river becomes a site for movement and waste disposal as already discussed. It seems that the quest for wealth and cars has dwarfed the possibilities of connecting to the nonhuman components of the environment.

Yet the physical landscape of the novel is described a few times in the novel. The first and only elaborate description occurs early in the novel when Okolo looks out the window:

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 trees 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 the half-ripe mango breasts, paddled, driving her paddle into the river with a sweet inside. (26)⁵³

Given the portrayal of the destroyed environment in more recent novels in the Delta, one cannot miss the characteristics of the terrestrial and aquatic components of the ecosystem depicted here.

⁵³ Reading this passage, Okeke-Ezeigbo points out that “at work is the craving for that subliminal communion between man and nature, the same romantic impulse which carried Synge, in his own words, ‘beyond the dwelling place of man’ and into a ‘world of inarticulate power’” (335).

The river, “reflecting the finishing sun” seems to capture an evening view, with sunset. The choice of “possessed” to describe the trees’ dance suggest a vigorous sway to the wind. Aquatic creatures like egrets are also resplendent in their whiteness, without blots in this description. We also see tired bodies returning from the farm. The passage certainly portrays the human and nonhumans inhabiting this environment. And except for the fatigue caused by the day’s work, everything looks good. A clearer picture of the significance of such a portrayal in this passage will become clearer by the time the more recent *Tides* and *The Activist* are discussed but suffice it to state that in the other moments where the environment is mentioned as well, it is positive except in that last river scene already analyzed. During the boat ride to Sologa, the narrator indicates that: “The engine canoe against the strong water pushed and slowly, slowly it walked along the wide river with the tall iroko trees, kapok trees, palm trees, standing on its banks, the sky’s eye reaching” (61).

Since texts are products of a time and place, we can surmise that the description of the environment here suggests the absence of ecological problems in the post-independent Nigeria (early 1960s) when the novel was set. In other words, the environment is healthy and clean because oil pollution has not affected it. After all, oil was only discovered in commercial quantity in 1956 and as noted earlier, the first tanker of oil did not leave until 1958, just six years before the publication of *The Voice*. Moreover, the novel did not discuss the oil business.

However, it is possible to complicate such a conclusion if the history of oil prospecting and the slow violence that the oil project represents are considered in relation to Okara's novel.⁵⁴ What the seeming convincing position that oil pollution was not a problem at the time the novel was published misses is that Shell began prospecting for oil in the Delta in 1937. Moreover, the process of initial exploration, as the UNEP report cited above and scholars have noted, has negative implications for the environment. According to Okonta and Douglas, in their well-written history of the Niger-Delta encounter with Shell, "Royal Dutch Shell has been in the country since 1937, when it began to explore for crude oil under the name Shell-D'Arcy" (49). The authors indicate that oil prospecting was stopped in 1941 due to the Second World War but resumed soon after the war. By then, the company had become Shell-BP Development Company. (49). L.H. Schatzel's findings support Okonta and Douglas' claims because he writes that "[f]rom 1948 onward geophysical investigations were carried out whereby, according to the geological structure of Nigeria, gravimetric and seismic surveys predominated" (10). Schatzel notes that the result of the initial surveys restricted further exploration to Southern Nigeria, while drilling further delimited the exploration area to the Delta region. He adds that "[i]n the period from 1951—the beginning of drilling activity—to July 1966, 627 wells were drilled" in the South (14).

⁵⁴ Here, I follow the lead of Jennifer Wenzel who argues in "Petro-magic realism: toward a political ecology of Nigerian literature," that "[p]erhaps petroleum must be read retrospectively into *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, but the pressures of the centuries-long international trade in palm products must also be read into the novel" (452).

This historical overview is pertinent because the processes of exploration, especially at the initial stage of seismic activities and drilling, are destructive to the environment too. As Alexander Jebiminih Moro has noted in a study on the social and ecological outcome of oil exploration in the Delta, the “explosives used in seismic operations, irrespective of killing the flora and fauna within the immediate environment they are being used, have the effect of driving away these animals from their natural habitat” (55). In the view of Okonta and Douglas:

During the oil company’s seismic activities, forests are invaded and cleared, and animal species endemic to that particular habitat are either expelled or killed. Bush clearing during the line-cutting stage also makes the forests accessible to humankind, a process that further accelerates the destruction of rare animal species. It is in the mangrove swamps of the Niger Delta that the ravages of Shell’s seismic activities are most noticeable. Here the aerial roots of tall mangrove trees are mauled and ravaged, and it takes them over three decades to regenerate—that is, if the area is not disturbed by renewed oil exploration activities. (69)⁵⁵

At the drilling stage, the authors contend that just like “seismic surveys, trees and other vegetation cut down in the process of site preparation for drilling result in serious damage to the Niger Delta ecosystem” (71). They add that:

Dredging is particularly harmful to the Delta ecology. Apart from land that is lost in the process of the dredging proper, dredged material is dumped on either side

⁵⁵ For further discussion of seismic surveys, see Aghalino, 79

of the canals, and because this waste is usually high in organic content and turns acidic in the process of oxidation, it destroys the ecology of the surrounding area where it is dumped. (70)

Taken together, both the seismic surveys and drilling are harmful to the land, the forest which are cut down, the wildlife either killed or chased away by the noise of the high-capacity machinery employed by these companies, and the rivers and lakes where the chemicals and dredged materials end up. But the salient point to underscore is the fact that this destructive process be traced back to Shell's exploration activities in the 1940s and 1950s, not the later 1956 or 1958 when oil was discovered in commercial quantity or when the first tanker left. The foregoing indicates that oil exploration already poses environmental challenges long before Okara's novel appeared.

That said, a celebratory attitude towards the healthy environment portrayed in Okara's novel needs to be reassessed because oil exploration aptly fits into Nixon's slow violence. It is to Nixon's credit that he asks us to transcend the view of violence "as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility" (2). Instead, he urges his readers to consider the idea of slow violence, that is, those violence that are not spontaneous as the unfortunate September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States or the reign of terror of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria. Nixon's critical lens is rather on those forms of violence that "that are slow moving and long in the making" (3). The destruction of the Delta falls within Nixon's notion of slow violence. In fact, the ecocritic devotes a chapter to the work of Ken Saro-Wiwa, and his son, Ken Wiwa Jr, in his book on slow violence

But the main reason I invoke Nixon here is to suggest that rather than view the flora and fauna in *The Voice* as evidence of an unpolluted environment, we should consider the violence of oil exploration as “slow in the making” and an accretive process. The bodies “floating like debris,” in the novel, is worth recalling here as an instance of slow violence. It is remarkable that the narrator cannot decipher the violence to the river that these bodies constitute. In fact, the narrator states that the canoe “spun round and round and was slowly drawn into the core and finally disappeared. And the water rolled over the top and the river flowed smoothly over as if nothing had happened. (127). The passage tells us the canoes with the bodies “disappeared,” which means it is out of sight, as the violence Nixon alludes to. The disappearance is further buttressed by the water which covered it. Again, the narrator tells us that “river flowed smoothly over” the canoes. The passage suggests the representational challenge of portraying violence that is not spontaneous. Given that there is no immediate, spectacular, outcome from the drowning and the fact that the bodies are out of sight within a short time, it is easy to dismiss the drowning as inconsequential, limit the violence it constitutes, and discourage the interrogation of the near and future ecological aftermaths.

If oil pollution, like the drowning of Okolo and Tuere, can be considered a slow violence, the destroyed environment we will encounter in the subsequent reading of *Tides* and *The Activist* can be seen as a culmination of a violence that began with Shell’s activities during their seismic surveys and drilling activities. We can thus argue that the environment in Okara’s novel is at what Sigmund Freud calls an “incubation stage” in his work on trauma.

In the words of Freud:

It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking incident, for instance a train collision. In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave psychical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident. He has developed a “traumatic neurosis.” This appears quite incomprehensible and is therefore a novel fact. The time that elapsed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is called the “incubation period,” a transparent allusion to the pathology of infectious disease.

(84)

Although Freud uses the incubation period to designate a time lag between a traumatic event and the appearance of the symptoms of its reliving, the term is useful in denoting that the absence of symptom does not mean the problem is nonexistent. It only means that there is a latency which can give way for the appearance of the symptoms anytime.

In relation to the environment in Okara’s novel, the notion of incubation period is productive because it suggests that the absence of the symptom of the despoiled environment in *The Voice* does not mean, for instance, that the river that dots the novel is not contaminated by pollutants from oil drilling or that the drowning of Okolo and Tuere would not constitute any ecological problem over time. Rather, Freud’s term provides a vocabulary for understanding the slowness of environmental violence and the unpredictable time lag between the destructive events and their reactive manifestation in the landscape. The term enables this reading which suggests that the environment in *The Voice* is suspended between the occurrence of acts

destructive to the environment and the period it takes for the effects of oil exploration on the environment to become visible in later novels, including *Tides* and *The Activist*.

The Niger Delta in Three Novels: Okpewho's *Tides*

If *The Voice* depicts the incubation stage, Okpewho's *Tides* is crucial for seeing the early manifestation of the violence of oil exploration at the intermediate stage of environmental devastation in the Delta. Okpewho's epistolary novel, set between 25 August 1976 and 28 February 1978, follows a literary tradition popularized by Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1981) in African literature. The novel records letter exchanges between two friends, Piriye and Tonwe. Both are from the Niger Delta and were prematurely retired from the state-owned *Chronicle* newspaper in what they perceive as an ethnic-oriented retrenchment. Tonwe retires to his village in the Delta soon afterwards until Piriye's letter detailing the need for an investigative project on oil pollution and the Kwarafa Dam. Although Tonwe initially refuses to participate in the project, he changes his position after the visit of some fishermen to enlist his support in reporting Atlantic Fuels to the appropriate authorities concerning their lighting on the waters and the impacts on their fishing occupation.

Tonwe tries to dialogue with the commissioner of health and the army commander in Benin to address the challenges of the fishermen. Both interventions do not yield positive results but he insists that peaceful negotiation is key to the impasse. Meanwhile Piriye soon associates with a radical activist, Bickerbug, who launches tirades against the government and oil companies for the exploitation of the Deltan communities. He is arrested and released soon after Piriye who was arrested for associating with him regains his freedom. At the end of the novel,

Bickerbug is rearrested after he bombs a bridge in Lagos, several oil installations in the Delta, and the Kwarafa Dam. Tonwe is arrested as well for receiving Bickerbug in his home without reporting him to the police while Piriye's fate is undecided. His pregnant wife, Lati, is yet to return from her journalistic trip to cover the impending destruction of the Kwarafa Dam and he does not know what interrogating Bickerbug and Tonwe will turn up against him.

Both Piriye and Tonwe bring their journalistic experience to bear in resisting the destruction of their environment. Despite his retirement, Piriye does freelance writing for different newspapers and magazine. His journalistic practice also gives him access to Bickerbug, who helps to deepen Piriye's knowledge of the Delta and the government in general. Tonwe's participation in the project is also significant as he bears witness to the ongoing in the Delta based on his habitation there. While Piriye handles the Lagos front, it is through Tonwe that we learn of the spillages and other forms of destruction as they affect the farms, rivers, and the people. In fact, he tells us of the kerosene taste from the drinking water and uses his connections to try to ameliorate the tragedy in the Delta as we will see when the role of the intellectuals in these novels is taken up in the final section.

Introducing the investigative project to Tonwe, Piriye not only identifies the central conflict of the novel; he also gives us a sense of the environment in the narrative:

You know very well how badly the traditional economy of the Delta communities has been faring as a result of two modern industrial projects which purport to enhance the economy of this country. First there is the Kwarafa Dam, which has severely reduced the volume of water flowing down the Niger and so curtailed the fishing activity in the Delta—and our people are nothing if not fishermen.

Secondly, the spillage of crude petroleum from the oil rigs down there—one of which is in fact located near your own village—has proved an absolute menace to agricultural life, for many farms are practically buried in thick layers of crude, which kills off many fishes and other forms of life. (2)

This passage is a sharp contrast to the image of the Delta environment seen earlier in Okara's text. The flowing rivers in *The Voice* have given way to rivers with less volume of water because of the construction of Kwarafa Dam. Similarly, if we see trees swaying to the wind and egrets returning home at sunset in *The Voice*, the nonhuman world here is endangered. The spillage from the oil rigs has also severely affected not only the rivers but the lands in the Delta of the novel also. The choice of "buried" to describe the condition of the farms is instructive because it suggests at least three things: being lifeless, occupying space underneath the ground, and being out of sight. These three denotations are relevant for understanding the adverse consequence of the crude on the farms, the fish and other life forms. The idea of "thick crude" itself is telling; it stresses a high quantity unlike if the passage had merely said "crude" without qualification.

Tonwe underscores the impact of the oil business on the people when he recounts Opene's visit to enlist his help in reporting Atlantic Fuels, the oil company, to the government authorities in Benin: "Apparently these search-lights were trained on the waters from dawn to dusk, and the delegation was asking if the lights could be switched off during those hours of daylight when the fishermen were engaged in fishing" (12). Instead of listening and negotiating with the fishermen, the company representative treats them contemptuously; the company did not stop there as they radioed the military that descended on the poor fisherman and harassed

them. Not only do the spills destroy the land and the fish; their search light also scares away the surviving fish thereby further eroding the survival of these life forms. This is significant because the decimation of the fish from oil activities coupled with the fishing by the local populations for fishing exact a harmful toll on the population and undermine their sustainability.

One way to understand the emphasis on loss of fishing opportunities in the narrative is to read it conventionally as pertaining to the needs of the human population. In other words, the novel can be read as demonstrating an anthropocentric understanding of ecological damage in the Niger Delta. To do so however is to ignore the ecological enmeshment the novel foregrounds. Put in other words, the novel problematizes such interpretation, especially if we consider the moments it asserts the interconnection and interdependence of the different beings in the environment. The passage cited above, for instance, shows how “agricultural life,” “and other forms of life” are susceptible to devastation brought by oil spillage. Clearly, the passage undercuts the emphasis on human by paying attention other forms of life in the environment. By foregrounding a shared vulnerability as a consequence of oil exploration, Okpewho’s novel underscores an ecological position that moves away from a human-centered perspective.

Bickerbug further highlights this interconnection when he educates Piriye on the dangers of oil pollution:

Okay. Now, the dangers of all this oil pollution to the environment are sufficiently well known to you. The fishes die because the floating oil blocks the oxygen from the water or because their respiratory membranes are clogged by the oil. Even the birds that dip in the water to catch fish and other foods suffer—their wings are matted by the oil and they cannot fly so they sink and drown or die on dry land

from asphyxiation, having taken in so much grease. The farms, too, are ruined – the crops won't grow because the oil floating on the irrigation chokes the soil.

Even the drinking water is affected. (146)

Again this passage confirms Morton's position that "the best environmental thinking is thinking big" (20). It is to Bickerbug's credit that he expands consideration beyond the fishing and farming needs of the people in the passage. The passage shows how oil spillage affects the land (farms), the aquatic life (fish, water) and even air creatures (birds). Such broader consideration gives a more comprehensive assessment of the impacts of oil pollution. Moreover, at the heart of the passage is interconnection which is central to the ecological thought. The oxygen from the water is critical for the fish's survival while the bird needs the fish and other water creatures to survive. Humans of course need the crop for the land and fish for survival and in certain circumstances bird activity is important for crop success. The intermingling evident in the excerpt and throughout the novel supports Morton's position that the ecological thought is a "process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are concerned with other beings"(7). In all, these explorations leave us with the impression that while the human costs of the Delta problem is a prominent issue in Okpewho's novel, the novel deconstructs any attempt to separate human from nonhuman questions by articulating a shared vulnerability; the novel rises to Morton's challenge by dramatizing the imbrication of humans with other life forms in the Delta and how questions of the impact of oil pollution cannot be restricted to a partial consideration of specific aspects of the ecology.

The Niger Delta Environment in Three Novels: Ojaide's *The Activist*

Like Okpewho's text, Ojaide's *The Activist* explores the destruction of the Niger-Delta environment and its people by the agglomeration of oil companies and the federal military government. The narrative begins with the return of the Activist, a Nigerian born academic, who has resided in the US for twenty-five years to Nigeria. On his return, he joins the staff of the Niger Delta State University where he meets his future wife, Ebi, another academic. With Ebi, the Activist teams up with student groups, the community members, and Egba boys to protest against the activities of the oil companies. In the novel, we see men, women, and youth work together to protect their environment from the unsustainable practices of the oil companies. The government responds to the protests with arrests and other forms of brutalization including the use of tear gas on old women who embarked on a nude protest. The environmental efforts of local people to protect their ecology in *The Activist*, take the forms of kidnapping by the Egba boys, oil bunkering by the Activist and Pere, the sending of a delegation to international conferences organized by the UN, student protests, and the floating of a newspaper, *The Patriot* which dissects environmental exploitation and includes photographs to foreground the devastation. At the novel's end, the Activist campaigns and wins the governorship of the Niger Delta State and establishes a ministry to oversee the environment.

The novel begins with the relocation of the Activist to the Delta from the United States. As he surveys his surroundings, the Activist reflects on the toll of the oil curse on his ancestral land. The narrator describes the environment in the following words:

The Niger Delta that the Activist returned to had changed as much from what it used to be, even as it remained the same landmass. It had been seriously scarred

by Bell Oil Company whose emblem of a red-rimmed shell of yellow flames was seen all over the area. In the company's inordinate hunger for more barrels of oil to ship out to increase yearly record profits, the landscape was gradually turning into a wasteland. (53)

The novel is sensitive to these changes in detailing the pollution of the rivers, the threat to fish and other life forms. In fact, there is already a progression of the devastation described in Okpewho's novel in this passage, especially with the description of the land as a "wasteland." While the land portrayed in Okpewho's novel is scarred as well by oil pollution, the reader does not get a sense it is a wasteland which suggests its unredeemability or total destruction. The narrator outlines the devastation more clearly as we follow Pere, the leader of the Egba boys who will later become the Activist's business associate:

His people needed the fish that had sustained them from the beginning of time. So also did they need the farmlands to cultivate cassava, yams, and other subsistence crops to live on! They also had to grow much needed vegetables. And of course, they had to live a healthy life. The air used to be cool because of constant rain and the luxuriant forest, but oil slicks, blowouts, and gas flares had destroyed that life. Even the rain that fell was so soot-black that no more did anybody drink rainwater, which of all waters, used to be described as God-given water. The people had lost their green refuge as well. Their forests used to have deep green and lush foliage, the pride of the tropics, but that had changed, since fires often followed oil and gas accidents. (82)

The language of the passage alternates between a glorious past and a sorry present: the constant rain, normally seen as the best water source has turned “soot-black” from oil pollution. The once “luxuriant forest” has also lost its greenness. Technical registers from oil exploration: oil slicks, blow outs, and gas flares are deployed to foreground the devastation. In all, one gets a nostalgic longing for the past from the narrator. Again, the latter passage is a radical departure from *Tides* where we are only told of the effect of the dam on the volume of water and that oil floats on the creek after Bickerbug’s acts of resistance. In this novel, however, the air, the rain, and the rivers have been contaminated. Clearly, the narrator’s perception is that oil pollution accounts for the ecological damages being experienced. One can also notice the interdependence of the different creatures depicted in the passage. The forest needs the rain to thrive while humans need the forest and other components of the environment to survive. No environmental component is an island here, which buttresses Morton’s claim about the interconnection of the mesh.

Scholars have established the connection between oil spill and acid rain that is relevant for understanding the contaminated rainfall in the Delta-world of the novel. Temitope Oriola has listed acid rain as one of the consequence of the frequent oil spillage in the Delta (66-67). Contributing to the debate in his work on the ecological impact of oil exploration on the Isoko-Urhobo people of the Niger Delta, Aghalino equally writes that “[a]tmospheric pollution caused by flared gases which dissolve in rain water, fall back as acid rain. The acid rain corrodes not only the roofing sheets of houses and other metals in the sub-region, but also contaminates rain water which the people drink” (125). The work of these scholars shows a cause and effect

relationship between oil spill and gas flaring on one hand, and acid rain on the other, and helps to contextualize the representation of spillage, flaring, and acid rain in the novel.

To return to the novel from an ecological perspective, we can see that humans are not the only victims humans; the toxins in the rain are equally destructive to the nonhumans including the land and the animals. Even the forest is not spared in the devastation the passage depicts. The greenness is lost to the oil spill and the fire that usually accompany them. The importance of forest to the ecosystem has been explored in the first chapter, so it will suffice to state that the carbon emissions which trees normally absorb are released into the atmosphere in their absence. The wildlife that make the forests their home also become casualties as they are either killed directly or driven away.

It may seem that the passage above focuses on people, Pere's people, which suggests an anthropocentric conception of environmental problems. After all the subject of most of the sentences that make up the excerpt is the people. Following Morton who claims that "In an age of ecology without Nature, we would treat many more beings as people while deconstructing our ideas of what counts as people," I posit that we read people differently here. In the spirit of the ecological thought, I would like to stretch the semantic possibilities of the term as much as reasonably possible. Earlier in my reading of Okpewho's *Tides*, we see how the birds get affected by oil spill as they perch on the water in search of fish to eat. Recalling that earlier analysis is necessary to show how the people in the first sentence of the passage above, who depend on fish are not necessarily humans. In fact, the birds as Okpewho's novel reminds us and other sea creatures need fish for sustenance. The point is to show how the sentence supports Morton's ecological idea of deconstructing the limited understanding of people and arguing for a

more encompassing definition. The last two sentences deserve attention as well: “The people had lost their green refuge as well. Their forests used to have deep green and lush foliage, the pride of the tropics, but that had changed, since fires often followed oil and gas accidents. (82)

Again while it is easy to read Pere’s people here as humans; I would like to consider nonhumans in this category. The idea of refuge evokes protection, a shelter and it seems to me that nonhumans such as animals depend on green refuge. Many wild animals live directly in these forests and suffer directly from these acts of environmental degradation; hence they can be included among Pere’s people. In short, it is my goal to problematize a singular reading of Pere’s people that includes only members of his human community. The passage is expansive enough to accommodate a larger conception of person or people that Morton suggests. In fact, an ecological reading of “people” intertwines the human (Pere) with the birds, fish, wild animals, etc. From the passage, it is clear how the different beings depend on one another thereby buttressing the interconnections of components of the ecological thought.

Yet the most important evidence that the slow violence of oil practices that appear first in Okara’s novel has come full cycle in *The Activist* is when the women narrate the impacts of the oil problems. One woman from Umutor says, “I don’t know what is happening elsewhere, but in the Oginibo area the women are finding it difficult to conceive” (239). Another named Titi agrees: “What our sister from Umutor has said is very true. But there is much more happening to us women in recent years. Our pregnant women are delivering so many malformed babies. What used to be a rarity is now commonplace” (239). Their leader also adds her voice: “Our mothers did not complain of any burning inside their bodies. I don’t know whether those of you that are past childbearing like me feel it, but I live it daily with this new condition. It is as if a fire is

blazing inside it me. I have heard others complain of the same burning that our educated sisters call hot flushes” (240-241). As the narrator concludes: “All their problems centered on the oil that was discovered in the area. The older women narrated what life was before Bell Oil Company arrived” (241).

In performing a nostalgia for the past, the women underscore the difference between the time before oil exploration and since the arrival of Bell Oil Company in the novel. The passages clearly demonstrate the vulnerabilities oil production exposes the women to in the world of the narrative. While some cannot get pregnant, the luckier ones beget malformed babies which shows that the effects of oil exploration can occur internally, out of sight as well. Overall, what is being critiqued is the threat to generational continuity of the Delta communities depicted in the novel. Whether it is the women who cannot procreate or the extinction of the other life forms in the biodiverse region, the strength of *The Activist* reveals itself in the dramatization of the height of the environmental crisis. Hence my suggestion that of the three novels examined so far, *The Activist* portrays the climax of the Delta crisis. From a seeming innocuous, healthy environment seen in Okara’s *The Voice*, to the early manifestation of the impact of environmental pollution in *Tides*, we arrive at the heightened violence against the environment explored in *The Activist*. The image of the frequent blowouts from oil spills that dot the village adds to the equally gory sight that the earlier passages present to the reader and further illuminates the heightened environmental degradation that the characters respond to in the narrative.

Let's Blow Things Up and/or the Possibilities of Ecological Collectivities

If the previous section examines the progressive deterioration of the Delta environment in the novels under study, this section takes as its central preoccupation the strategies of resistance employed in these novels to combat the environmental degradation. Using the lens of ecological thought, I particularly put pressure on those acts of resistance in the novels of Okpewho and Ojaide, (blowing up oil installations, bunkering, etc), that are inimical to the ecology even when they serve human interests.

In reading Okpewho's novel, I reassess the violent revolution of Bickerbug as against the collaborative, non-violent forms of resistance endorsed which novelist's use of the epistolary form suggests. Of particular interest in this novel are the violent acts of resistance Bickerbug unleashes at the end of the novel because his activities ironically endangers the environment he is fighting to protect.

The scant criticism on this text has focused on the resistance towards the end of the novel, where Bickberbug bombs some oil installations, the Kwarafa Dam, and Lugard Bridge Feghabo, for instance, compares Bickerbug to Ken Saro-Wiwa, arguing that Bickerbug's portrayal as a "non-materialistic and non-ideological activist truly devoted to the salvation of his people matches Saro-Wiwa's personality. Like Bickerbug, he was a graduate of English, not known for materialism, or as a Marxist" (59). Although there are similarities between both characters, Bickerbug's adoption of violence radically sets him apart from Saro-Wiwa whose principle of non-violence is known to have influenced environmental movements across the

world.⁵⁶ Feghabo celebrates Bickerbug's violent activities because: "[t]hrough this act [blowing up oil rig and kwarafa dam], Okpewho's vision of the triumph of the oppressed people of the Niger Delta through a revolution becomes glaring" (60).

Bickerbug's violence is significant for drawing attention to the plight of the Delta in the novel but it is problematic. These acts are actually inimical to the environment they purportedly seek to safeguard. In other words, the fact that Bickerbug's actions are dangerous to the "persons" in the environment of the novel calls for a reassessment of the celebratory readings by critics like Feghabo. I use persons here in the way Morton would approve of. That is to cover both the human and nonhuman beings in the environment. I argue in this section that while these violent activities draw attention to the problems, showcase the agency of the participants, and can be read as a legible assertion of a right to a better life, they are limited because they are injurious not only to fellow humans but to the strange strangers in the environment as well.

In blowing up these structures, Bickerbug registers a strong protest against the government and the oil company for the despoliation of the environment and frustrating peaceful means of resolving the crisis. But more importantly, he seems to want to return the land and water to a "natural" state. This return fits into what Grant Hamilton has described elsewhere as a "double process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization" (95). Hamilton is writing of the natives' destruction of the state's irrigation system in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. For Hamilton: "By cutting away part of an engineered embankment, the nomad restores the natural flow of the town's lake, which subsequently consumes the irrigation works" (94-95). Hamilton

⁵⁶ See Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor* for an interesting analysis of Saro-Wiwa's life and work.

adds that as “the nomad interrupts the State striation of space by cutting away the embankment, he commits a forced act of deterritorialization that results in the lake’s reterritorializing of State’s land. It is a reterritorialization driven by the elemental force of the lake’s assuming its natural character” (95).

Hamilton’s Deleuzian analysis of Coetzee’s novel is relevant for understanding Bickerbug’s attempt to return the environment to an original state. But as the novel suggests, such return to nature is impossible. As the novel ends, Bickerbug tells Piriye after his arrest: “Our people have won, . . . The water is flowing again, full stream. The tides are here again. Soon there’ll be plenty of fishes swimming again, eh?” (198). Bickerbug’s celebratory tone ignores the extent of the ecological damage to the environment as seen below. In fact, rather than return us to an original state, his action compounds the ecological problems he is invested in. His actions seems typical of what Morton calls “‘one at a time’ sequencing” (38). Morton uses this term to describe the tendency in environmentalism to fixate on which component of the mesh is more important and deserving of preference. Morton, insists however, that such questions become useless if we consider the mesh and the interconnections of its constituents. To return to the novel, we see Bickerbug fixated on ensuring the flowing of the river, while ignoring the ecological issues it raises about the Others in this environment.

In his last letter to Piriye, Tonwe describes the devastation of the Delta environment by the blowing up of the installations:

By now you must have heard the terrible news. No less than five oil installations in the Delta have been destroyed by bomb explosions. These include three offshore rigs like the one at Ebrima near my village where, you will recall my

telling you about a year ago Opene and his companions had been assaulted by men of the naval patrol. The huge storage tanks at Apelebiri near Angiama, Harrison's village, and at Ogbodobiri have also been blown up. You cannot imagine how much oil is floating about now in these creeks. It is better seen than described. (178)

In the last sentence of the quote, Tonwe registers the representational challenge of using writing to convey the enormity of the pollution of the Delta. Tonwe's insistence on physical witnessing shows the limit of language to convey the enormity of the tragedy. Blowing up one installation is already detrimental to the environment but blowing up five located in different villages suggests the pollution of a vast expanse of landscape and waterscape by the spillage. If we ask Morton, he will remind us that "Thinking big means realizing that there is always more than our point of view. There is indeed an environment, yet when we examine it, we find it is made of strange strangers" (57-8). One question that the ecological thought raises here is: how does the explosions impact the strange strangers in this ecology? Even if the novel does not directly address them, the ecological thought demands we examine those components of the environment since it assumes the interconnections of beings.

The land will become inhabitable for humans and animals, while the water will be polluted and become poisonous for the water creatures. The image presented in this passage surely undermines Bickerbug's claim that the water is flowing and that plenty fish are swimming again. If at all, it will be water contaminated by oil spills and rendered useless as habitat for aquatic beings and a source of replenishment. Worth recalling also is that Lati, the journalist wife

of Piriye, who rushed to cover the destruction of the Kwarafa Dam is still missing as the novel ends. As the hospital search remains futile, so does hope of her being found alive. Lati can be read as symbolic of the human toll of the explosions but we should not stop there. If oil spillage is an example of slow violence as Nixon's work tells us, the passage invites us to transcend the spectacular and arresting image portrayed by Tonwe and to reflect on the long-term consequence of such explosion for the different beings in that environment.

That said, this passage also detains me because of its irony. While Bickerbug will argue that his actions are in the interest of the environment; he is excited the river is flowing again and the fish will be plentiful but it is noteworthy that the larger picture of the damage inflicted on the environment by his acts seems more devastating than other forms of environmental damage portrayed in the novel.

In their work where they contest the appropriateness of ecoterrorism for describing the destruction of property by environmental activists, the ecocritics, David Thomas Sumner and Lisa M. Wiedman contend that while terrorists do not care about life, for "environmental activists, however, the sacredness of life is the motivating idea for their actions" (870). Sumner and Wiedman's work is relevant for insisting on respect for life as an important factor for environmental activism just like Morton's is for urging his readers to respect the importance of all lives and the interconnection of beings inhabiting the environment. Obviously, Bickerbug's environmentalism fails because his actions do not bear witness to the sanctity of lives in the environment. Whether it is the humans killed from the explosions or the strange strangers in the land and rivers, what is at stake is the violation of lives. In fact, one can add following, Morton, that Bickerbug fails to think big. Bickerbug's actions demonstrate that violence can be more

destructive to the environment it purports to be saving, even when it tends to be an enabling violation or a “strategy of bargaining for ‘material benefits’ from the Nigerian state and transnational oil corporations” as in *The Activist* which is discussed next. (Ugor 12).⁵⁷

More specifically, I focus on the Activist’s involvement in oil bunkering business and his ultimate entry into the political scene as a gubernatorial candidate of the Niger-Delta state governorship election.⁵⁸ In justifying his involvement in the illegal bunkering business,

He thought of the philosophy of ATTACK and assured himself that hurting destroyers of the natural environment was a good thing to do. His thoughts went to Ebi sleeping in the other bedroom. Would she approve of this? From her concern about the rivers, forests, and the ocean, she would like whatever would scale down the activities of the oil companies. (155)

The Activist is excited about the possibility of hurting the oil companies and the government, both of whom he describes as “the two principal outsiders that were robbing and destroying the people of the Niger Delta (155). He also believes his wife will support him because his action is in the interest of the strange strangers she is concerned about.

Critics like Sunny Ahwefada and Augustine Uka Nwanyanwu have hailed the Activist’s action as subversive in that it is disruptive of the activities of the oil companies. There is value in

⁵⁷ “Enabling violation” is Spivak’s term for a form of violation producing a positive outcome that does not validate the initial damage. In Spivak’s illustration, it is “a rape that produces a healthy child, whose existence cannot be advanced as a justification for the rape” (*A Critique* 371)

⁵⁸ For a description of the bunkering process, see Paul Ugor, “The Niger-Delta Wetland, Illegal Oil Bunkering and Youth Identity Politics in Nigeria,” *Postcolonial Text* 8.3 (2013): 8-10.

that position but such perspective does not seem attentive to the larger ecological problems posed by oil bunkering. One can put pressure on that perspective by positing the following questions: Does oil bunkering significantly affect the oil company and the government? Does bunkering affect the people positively or negatively? And what is the environmental implication of bunkering? In other words, what is the implication of bunkering on the beings in the environment?

While it is true that oil companies and the government lose revenue if they are unable to meet their production quota due to bunkering, the loss is negligible in comparison to the problem it poses to the “people” in the ecology. In other words, sabotaging the operations of the companies via bunkering is not an antidote to ecological devastation. Instead, it gives the oil companies reasons not to curtail oil spills which eventually result in fires. The novel provides examples where the multinational Bell Oil deflected responsibility of oil spill arguing instead that the villagers broke the pipeline to extort compensation from the company. Taking the analysis away from the novel into the real Delta also provides instances where the oil companies have blamed the locals for bunkering and refused to take responsibility for compensation and cleaning. The problem is so prevalent that Amnesty International commissioned an investigation into the spill problem. The report notes that “Shell now claims that 75 percent or more of the oil spilt from its activities in the Niger Delta is due to sabotage and theft” (11). In the summary of its findings, Amnesty International notes that “Sabotage and theft of oil are serious problems in the

Niger Delta. However, international oil companies are overstating the case in an effort to deflect attention away from the oil spills that are due to corrosion and equipment failure” (6).⁵⁹

The Jesse fire incident that resulted from oil spill and scooping of fuel by the people of Jesse in 1998 comes to mind. This tragedy which claimed over 1000 lives in 1998 resulted from broken pipelines from which the residents were scooping petroleum before the explosion. It took firefighters from the United States to put out the fire that raged for days but not before some serious devastation was wrought on the environment. The UNEP report cited earlier also contained the devastation caused by several spills, including one witnessed by their team:

The UNEP team witnessed one such incident in 2006 during aerial reconnaissance of Ogoniland. A massive fire was raging at the Yorla 13 oil well and apparently continued burning for over a month. Such fires cause damage to the vegetation immediately around the well site and can produce partly burned hydrocarbons that may be carried for considerable distances before falling on farmland or housing.

(100)

As both examples suggest, the aftermaths of oil spill is dangerous to both humans and nonhumans alike.⁶⁰ The bunkered oil seeps into the land eroding it for plant and animal use. As

⁵⁹ For the complete report, see Amnesty International, *Bad Information: Oil Spill Investigations in the Niger Delta*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR44/028/2013/en/b0a9e2c9-9a4a-4e77-8f8c-8af41cb53102/afr440282013en.pdf>

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the accusations and counter-accusations about oil spills, see Ebiede, 142; Orogun, 464, 494-502; For more on Jesse, see Gillis, <http://www.counterspill.org/article/nigerias-oil-brief-history>

Ngozi Chuma-Udeh remarks in a reading of oil spills in Kaine Agary's novel, *Yellow Yellow*: "The resultant oil spill wrought heavy contamination of land and underground water courses, sometimes more than 40 years after oil spilled" (119). Patrick Bond shares a similar view in his foreword to Oriola's *Criminal Resistance? The Politics of Kidnapping Oil Workers*. For him, "Oil bunkering and pipeline sabotage, for example—are similarly fraught given the collateral damage including explosions and ecological devastation" (x). The UNEP report cited earlier also warn of the environmental consequences of bunkering and the artisanal refining of the stolen oil: "There is a high risk of self-harm from artisanal refining – a large number of accidents, fires and explosions on refining sites claim dozens of lives every year, quite apart from the longer-term health effects of ingestion, absorption and inhalation of hydrocarbons" (104).

My point is that these adverse effects of bunkering need to be considered to complicate the celebration of the Activist's bunkering by critics. As the novel portrays it, bunkering is helpful to the Activist and his business partner, Pere. They not only become rich but are able to provide employment opportunities for others. The wealth from the bunkering business is also what enables the Activist to fund his gubernatorial ambition that I discuss next. It, therefore, functions as what Spivak would describe as an "enabling violation." Without it, the jobs created by the Delta Cartel and the possibility of change brought about by the election of the Activist as governor would be impossible. But one cannot lose sight of its destructive effect on the larger environment.

Having said that, it should be noted that the novels explore alternative possibilities for environmental change worth considering. In other words, the novels allow us to ponder alternatives to the forms of violence discussed above. I present these alternatives as ways of

operationalizing the ecological thought in the Niger Delta. Morton appropriately titled his final chapter, “Forward Thinking,” which suggests a step in the future. In the final analysis, he contends that the ecological thought “compel[s] us to imagine collectivity rather than community— groups formed by choice rather than by necessity” (135), and that the “ecological thought must imagine economic change” (19). However, Morton’s work falls short of the programmatic course of action for the formation of the ecological collectivity or even ways of bringing about the economic change. In other words, how do we operationalize the ecological thought especially in the postcolony? For Okpewho’s *Tides*, I suggest that the novel’s insistence on collaboration through its epistolary form and the open forum I discuss shortly constitute its mode of ecological collectivities. Ojaide’s *The Activist*, on the other hand, operationalizes the ecological thought through the collectivities formed by the women who protested against the oil companies as well as the electorates who supported the Activist’s political ambition and voted for him.

Beyond providing a space for critiquing Bickberbug’s problematic environmentalism, the insistence of *Tides* on collaboration through the epistolary form of the novel buttresses a form of collectivity critical for addressing the problems of the region. First the idea of letters implicates an addresser and an addressee thereby suggesting a form of collective and collaboration. This collaboration is necessary for communication to take place as the interlocutors must use code decipherable by the Other. The grim, inconclusive ending of the novel makes the collaboration more germane. As the novel ends, Bickberbug and Tonwe are arrested while Priboye, the letter carrier is on the run from the state security operatives. Meanwhile, the pregnant Lati is yet to be found while the fate of her husband, Piriye, hangs on what the interrogation of Bickerbug and

Tonwe would reveal about his complicity. This pessimistic ending of the novel leaves unsolved the Niger-Delta challenges and undermines the celebratory reading of Bickerbug's revolutionary actions. In other words, the narrative's ending suggests we look elsewhere in the narrative for viable alternatives to the grim condition imposed by Bickerbug's violence.

To look elsewhere is to ponder more seriously the collaboration between Tonwe and Piriye vis-a-vis the form that enables it. It is remarkable that the two major characters denounce violence at various points in the narrative. Tonwe, for instance, warns Piriye to be careful about associating with Bickerbug because he is "against violent confrontation in any form and at any level" (24). Similarly, Piriye asserts that "I am not a violent man. I do not enjoy doing harm to people's feelings or to things" (62). Their position is situated against Bickerbug's violent disposition. The use of the epistolary form has been described as feminine by Deborah Kaplan among others.⁶¹ It is no coincidence that a female writer, Mariama Ba, popularized this form in African letters. Okpewho's use of a form associated with women writing suggests a gendered approach to the Niger Delta question. Put differently, even if the novel does not foreground female voices in relation to the question of the ecology as Ojaide's novel did, the form suggests a gendered solution to the problem.

61 For a discussion of epistolarity as a predominantly female genre, see Deborah Kaplan, "Female Friendship and Epistolary Form: 'Lady Susan' and the Development of Jane Austen's Fiction," *Criticism* 29.2 (1987): 163-178; Linda Kauffman. *Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 103. See also Chapter 6 of Christopher Miller's *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). Miller's chapter discusses Mariama Ba's use of the epistolary form for *So Long a Letter* and the way she adapted the European form for her purposes in the African context.

Additionally, the form is critical to access to the narrative given the repressive bent of the State in the text. We see how Piriye is harassed by Security for publishing his views on the Delta and Nigeria in different news outlets. Bickberbug is also incarcerated earlier in the narrative for staging rallies where he denounces the government and oil companies. Given these scenarios, the confidentiality of the letter form allows the interlocutors to continue their investigation and provide the narrative as a testament against the devastation of the Delta ecologies.⁶² Through the collaboration made possible by the form, we are able to witness the drama as they unfold not only in the Delta but in the seat of power in Lagos. In a pre-internet and social media era, the epistolary form allows for the major characters to give us first-person accounts of their respective locations in ways that a first-person narrative written differently would not permit. Of course, until Bickerbug's violence warrants the search of Tonwe's residence. Jane Gurkin Altman has noted that "as a tangible document the confidential letter is subject to being 'overheard' by anyone at any time, with all of the resulting consequences" (51). Altman's point is instructive for reading the ending of Okpewho's narrative where their letters have been "overheard" by the operatives of the State who search Tonwe's house. As Tonwe is arrested and Priboye goes into hiding, the reader is left wondering what will be the fate of Piriye who is yet to be arrested in Lagos.

⁶² Janet Gurkin Altman includes "Confidence and Confidants" as a characteristic of the epistolary novel in *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1982). She notes that "[t]he confidential role, letter, tone, and relationship are necessary components of epistolary narrative" (83). It should be clear that Piriye's confidence in Tonwe precipitates his decision to involve his retired colleague in his investigation. Tonwe, on the other hand, worries about Priboye who carries their letters until Piriye reassures him of his trust for Priboye.

In addition to providing the narrative, the letters between the two interlocutors help to see the negotiation, sometimes fractious, that characterizes the exchange between the two. In a passage cited earlier, Piriye introduces the investigative project to Tonwe and asks for the latter's participation. In his response, Tonwe declines to participate because he retired to the village to rest and for the reason that he is uncomfortable with the ethnic coloration of Piriye's proposal.

Piriye is piqued by Tonwe's response as evident in the opening lines of his subsequent letter to his former colleague: "For Christ's sake please drop that formal tone of yours—'Mr Dokumo'! I know the matter of our correspondence is a serious one, but there's absolutely no reason for you to adopt such a stern approach to it nor to remind me how much older you are than I am" (7). I cite this passage because it demonstrates the confrontational start of the collaboration. Despite the rocky start and their differences, the two partners are able to work together. They cooperate in the interest of the ecology even when Tonwe prophetically insists that Bickerbug is dangerous and should be avoided, against Piriye's interest in the radical activist. Their cooperation must also be seen in the light of Tonwe's suspicion of ethnicity, when Piriye believes that the Delta crisis should be interpreted in ethnic terms. The other difference they had to overcome to work together is that while Tonwe believes that their investigation should be the immediate focus, Piriye is prematurely interested in considering the book's title, chapters, and style.

What the negotiation underscore is that collaboration is not the absence of disagreements or acrimony but the willingness of all parties to negotiate and make compromises in the interest of the larger goal, which is the interest of the Delta ecologies in their case.

Beyond its form, the novel adumbrates collectivities in other ways, most notably through the “open forum” convened by Bickerbug in prison. It is remarkable that the prison becomes a site for Jurgen Habermas’s notion of a public sphere in the absence of such opportunities outside the prison wall of the novel. According to Habermas, the public sphere is a space for debate and interactions independent of the state. Habermas contends that the primary criterion for this sphere was that “they preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether” (36). In Habermas’s view, the public sphere was a space where the quality of the argument rather than status won the day. The public sphere, according to Habermas, evolved in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but became fully developed in the nineteenth century, and could be seen in salons, coffee houses, and in the pages of texts like novels, newspapers, etc. In sum, the primary characteristic of this European notion of the public sphere was freedom of expression even when the discourse was oppositional to the state. As Joseph Slaughter describes it in *Human Rights, Inc: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (2007), “the liberal public sphere maintains a healthy democratic suspicion of the state, which is constitutionally Janus-faced, both the administrator and violator of human rights (151-152).

Discussing the value of the public sphere, John Michael Roberts and Nick Crossley, in their introduction to their edited collection, *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, argue that for Habermas, the public spheres “created a pressure and a force for change, approximately an ideal to which Habermas appears to have subscribed in much of his later work; namely a situation in which the critical reasoning of the public constitutes an effective steering force in both society and polity” (4). Habermas’ conception of the public sphere has been

elaborated and critiqued by scholars but it remains useful for my purposes because its insight on freedom of expression and the irrelevance of social status to the acceptability of one's viewpoints are critical components of Bickerbug's open forum.⁶³

Describing the discussions of the open forum to Tonwe in a letter, Piriye indicates that “[t]he session was also thoroughly democratic—everything was conducted in pidgin so that both the educated and the not so educated could deliberate on equal terms and hold a true dialogue” (105). Readers of the novel will remember the attempts by state agents to stifle dissent when they clamped down on Bickerbug's public campaigns against corruption; as such, it is significant that the space of confinement becomes a productive space for the unhindered discussion of socio-political issues denied expression by the autocratic military leaders outside the prison walls in the text.

The open forum not only gave expression to these important issues but allowed the inmates to freely participate without restrictions. All the inmates including the political prisoners who are university professors, diplomats, and military officers, as well as the miscreants are able to articulate their positions without barrier. Another leveler is the use of pidgin English to enable the participation of those without Standard English abilities. Bickerbug even “made one of the bigwigs—the officer from the NYSV, a soldier for that matter!—apologize to some small fellow whose language he had referred to as ‘street talk’” (105).

⁶³ One remarkable critique of Habermas's work is Houston Baker's. For Baker the so-called ideal public sphere which Habermas outlines was also a site of exclusion, since women and blacks were left out of these European spaces. For more on Baker's critique and his theorization of alternative public spheres, see “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere.” *Public Culture* 7.1 (Fall 1994): 3-33.

Besides being a public sphere, Bickerbug's open forum is also ecological, if we consider Morton's position that "[h]uman beings need each other as much as they need an environment. Human beings are each others' environment. Thinking ecologically isn't simply about nonhuman things. Ecology has to do with you and me" (4). Morton's position here shows that the ecological is not restricted to the nonhuman other but also involves the way we relate to human Others. Bickerbug's open forum typifies a non-hierarchical ecological set of interactions between humans that fit Morton's schema. In prison, the inmates depend on each other for support and for articulating a collective position on matters affecting the nation. The non-hierarchical nature of this public sphere is also indicative of a transformative space where the rights and obligations to nonhumans, to the larger environment, can be given serious consideration. Worthy of mention is that the open forum discussed women rights, a marginal subject in the novel. The novel indicates that it is in such space of equality that our superior attitude to marginal subjects—women, the larger environment— can be challenged and transformed towards a realization of the principles of the ecological thought.

If "epistolary writing," according to Altman "refracts events through not one but two prisms—that of reader as well as that of writer," the third person or omniscient narrative point of view of Ojaide's *The Activist* showcases multiple prisms (92). Although the novel's title suggests that the novel will be delivered in the first person's voice of the protagonist, the Activist, the novel comes to us in the third person voice. The narrative point of view is significant because it helps to reduce the emphasis on the Activist and allow us to focus on the different collectivities galvanized for the ecology. As we follow the protagonist throughout the novel, we see that his

notable actions in the novel happen in collaboration with others. For instance he gets fully involved in the community after he marries Ebi. Also his bunkering business is in collaboration with Pere. Furthermore, his governorship ambition is realized after the masses overwhelmingly vote for him. Put differently, the third person narrative voice shows that the Activist's potential is mainly realized in conjunction with others. As the narrative voice follows the characters, we appreciate the vantage point of the narrator and the stress the voice puts on different collectivities in the novel especially the political coalition that guaranteed the Activist's election victory.

A discussion of the Activist's foray into politics and the ecological collectivities in *The Activist* would have to begin with the process that opened up the electoral space. Before then, the military was in charge but the resolve of the women to effect change became a catalyst for regime change. By this, Ojaide's novel introduces a gendered response to the Delta problems. In response to the oil problems, the women formed the Women of the Delta Forum (WODEFOR). The omniscient narrator explains that "The women primed themselves for action. They would look for ways to talk to the oil companies to persuade them to arrest the deteriorating environmental situation in the Niger Delta. They would also address the military government about their concerns" (243). The women group indicates a recognition of the need for a collective response, perhaps a variant of what Morton calls an ecological collectivity. It is remarkable that the women chose a nude protest to demonstrate against the oil companies. Older women were selected for the exercise but the protesters were dispersed by the oil companies, even before they started to the chagrin of the foreign journalists already positioned to capture the photos of topless black women. This protest drew from a traditional belief system that considers

nude protest of elderly women to be a taboo punishable by the gods. As Peter Okadike, an employee at Bell Oil explains to his white superior, “Women’s nude protest is the worst curse possible in the traditional society. It’s a curse invoked when all measures to seek redress or justice have failed. And those cursed always died within days” (267). This protest generated a palpable anxiety in the oil community which necessitated its disruption by the Navy.

Although the women’s right to peaceful protests was denied, the consequence of their action is not mitigated. Both Bell Oil’s boss, Mr Van Hoort and the leader of the Federal military government, General Mustapha Ali Dongo died soon after (275). Their deaths come soon after Ebi releases a press statement on behalf of the women: “Only those who ordered and carried out our violation know what they deserve. God and our ancestors are not sleeping, they were witnesses! Let those who assaulted us know the crime they have committed” (273). This protest and the overall activities of the women’s civil group showcase the active role of women in the Delta struggle unlike the setting in Okpewho’s *Tides* where the men drive the narrative action.⁶⁴

Although the nude protest incident and the accompanying death seem trivial, the women’s collective effort on behalf of their ecology generates the possibility of social change that elections portend in the novel. In other words, the death of General Dogon, which echoes General Abacha’s death in the real Nigeria, paves the way for transition to democracy. Dogon’s

⁶⁴ The nude protest calls to mind a 2002 incident where women seized Chevron’s oil facilities. For a discussion of that incident and the role of women in the Delta struggle, see Anugwom, and Anugwom, “The Other Side of Civil Society Story: Women, Oil, and the Niger Delta Environmental Struggle in Nigeria,” *GeoJournal* 74.4 (2009): 333-46.

continuous reign as head of state would have blighted the hope we see at the novel's end when the Activist becomes Governor and Dennis Ishaka is appointed the commissioner of the Ministry of the Environment.

The Activist's brand of political campaign is different from that of the other politicians whose practices are structured by self-interests. The Activist, instead, takes his political train to the rural areas where he personally canvasses for vote. On the other hand, *The Patriot*, the newspaper he established from the proceeds of oil bunkering, is targeted at the urban voters. The rural mobilization differentiates the Activist from the others and underscores the agency of the people. Here, the text complicates Spivak's claim that "[a]ccess to 'citizenship' (civil society) by becoming a voter (in the nation) is indeed the symbolic circuit of the mobilizing of subalternity into hegemony" (*A Critique* 309). While her fears about cooption are understandable, the restriction Spivak places on the subaltern forecloses the possibility of his/her participation in processes capable of producing social change. In *The Activist*, the protagonist recognizes the agency of the local population by campaigning directly in their communities. His local campaigns can be seen as what Pheng Cheah describes as "counter-official popular nationalism and electoral education of the masses that proceeds from below" in *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights*. (43). Consequently, we see the coming together of the country and the city to borrow the title of Raymond Williams' book.⁶⁵ The collectivity produced by the Activist's mobilization of the public spheres ensures his victory at the polls.

⁶⁵ Raymond Williams's well-known text is titled *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973).

His ascension to power sees the creation of the Ministry of the Environment headed by Dennis whose redundancy in Bell Oil the novel explores. Dennis, a first class graduate of petroleum engineering is employed by Bell Oil but left out of actual drilling practices because as the oil boss thought, “[a]llowing him to acquire technical drilling experience would be suicidal for the expatriate staff and business” (299). Although the novel ends before the reader gets an opportunity to assess the new leaders and to compare their performance to their predecessors, one expects that Dennis will use his knowledge of petroleum engineering to pressure the oil companies to adopt sustainable oil exploration practices in his new position. One also expects Dennis to bring an understanding and care of his birthplace environment to bear in his new responsibility.

In fact his father encouraged him to study Petroleum Engineering for this reason:

Would the situation not be better if an indigene that knew the environment as an engineer drilled for oil in a way that would save the land from the negative excesses of the foreign drillers? Who would empathize more with the fate of crops than the sons and daughters of farmers? Who would protect the creeks, streams, and rivers more than the children of fishermen and women? (178)

Chief Ishaka’s rationale for educating his son draws from his belief in the influence of a local sense of place on decisions concerning the environment. Chief Ishaka produces evidence of the ecological thought here by his interest in the plight of the larger environment. He is optimistic that a Delta indigene would share his concern for the other beings in the environment.

Taken together, the election of the Activist and the subsequent appointment of Dennis signal a paradigm shift from upholding the sacredness of neoliberal resource extraction—

detrimental to the environment—towards what Carrigan sees as “multivalent sacredness.”⁶⁶ In the first model, the oil companies and the military government are only concerned about the production quota and the associated revenues. The ecological issues emanating from oil production and the fact that the oil practices sometimes infringe on the people’s sacred and mundane spaces are discounted by the oil drillers and their government collaborators. That is why the oil companies and government worry less about the complaints of the people except when their moves threaten oil production and/or have the capacity to paint their image in poor light in the international media.

But with the ushering in of a new dispensation at the end of the novel, the Activist’s pedigree suggests his mission will be to reconcile the competing demands for foreign exchange earnings from oil production and ensuring that sustainable environmental practices are not sacrificed in the quest for maximum earnings. Carrigan’s description of multivalent sacredness anticipates the conflict and flux that will characterize this process, with the oil companies only interested in profit maximization while the government is interested in foreign exchange earnings for state development and ensuring the sustainability of the different life forms in the region.

⁶⁶ This term is explained in Chapter One. Carrigan “use[s] this term to suggest an interface between contrasting ideologies of development where the distribution of power is not stable but operates in a condition of flux as the interests of different empowered actors oscillate between conflict and coalition. Embracing the nexus of past, present, and future genealogical claims (cultural sacredness), notions of nationality, significant areas that safeguard nature’s sanctity (environmental sacredness), and tourism-related economic concerns (the sacred principle of capital accumulation), it allows the extrinsic value of sacred spaces to become negotiable by multiple parties without collapsing the terms of discussion into a purely economic idiom” (91).

This is why the Activist's placard at the protest he attended when he visited Washington DC immediately after becoming governor is instructive. It reads, "EVERY LIFE MATTERS" (349).

This quote reads like something literally taken out of Morton's *The Ecological Thought* and deserves to be read in that light. For Morton, [i]f we think the ecological thought, two things happen. Our perspective becomes very vast. More and more aspects of the Universe become included in the ecological thought (38). The words on the Activist's placard definitely demonstrates a vast perspective, both formally, and in terms of content. That it is written in upper case not only places emphasis on the subject it conveys; the boldness of the lettering certainly conveys some sense of vastness. And even more so is the content. The qualifier, "every" portends an all-inclusive category that embraces Morton's "more and more aspects of the Universe." No life in the universe is discounted in the passage unlike the anthropocentric view which would restrict the focus to certain human lives.

The Activist's participation in the rally in the United States also speaks to his ecological consciousness. Morton concedes that the ecological thought transcends national boundaries and that the "ecological thought permits no distance. Thinking interdependence involves dissolving the barrier between "over here" and "over there," (39). Although the novel's protagonist is an elected official in Nigeria, he considers it necessary to participate in a protest against global capital in the United States where he is visiting. By doing so, the Activist shows the interconnection of his local Delta in Nigeria with other parts of the world, including the United States. By participating in the protest, he recognizes the artificiality of national boundaries and that what happens in one place has ramifications for other places if one is thinking ecologically.

In other words, the governor's outlook seems typical of what Morton calls a "progressive ecology that was big, not small; spacious, not place-ist; global, not local" (28).

The Activist's electoral promise during his political campaign earlier in the novel also buttresses his ecological predisposition: "If you give me your vote, I will ask the oil companies to clean our creeks, streams, and rivers so that the fish population can return to our waters. My government will provide boats to travel about in the riverine area. We have the resources to help ourselves live better than we now live in the area" (341). The passage suggests that the government's responsibility transcends human beings. In fact, the promise confirms Morton's point that "The ecological thought is about considering others, in their interest, in how we should act toward them, and in their very being" (135). The Activist focuses attention on the interest of nonhumans: The rivers and creek as well as the fish population. We can also see the workings of the mesh in the passage which indicates that the fish population thrives with clean water sources. Clean water guarantees the health of the humans and also makes possible the thriving of the aquatic creatures in the water. Clearly, there is an interconnection of humans, rivers, streams, and the fish population here.

Yet the idea of an intellectual turned politician embodied in the character of the Activist is worth pondering. The idea of the intellectual is a feature Ojaide's novel shares with the other novels discussed earlier in the chapter, thereby suggesting the pertinent role these narratives assign to the intellectual in the Delta struggle. I conclude the chapter by examining the place of intellectual labor in the struggle for a sustainable Delta environment in these texts.

The Niger Delta, the Environment, and the Intellectual.

The parody of Edward Said's title, *The World, The Text, and the Critic*, to arrive at the heading of this section is testament to the influence of his work on the following exploratory reading of the intellectual in the novels under study. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said postulates that:

In the end, it is the intellectual as a representative figure that matters—someone who visibly represents a standpoint of some kind, and someone who makes articulate representations to his or public despite all sorts of barriers. My argument is that intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for the art of representing, whether that is talking, writing, teaching, appearing, on television. And that vocation is important to the extent that it is publicly recognizable and involves both commitment and risk, boldness and vulnerability. (12-13)

Said's vision of the public intellectual, one who is not cloistered in an institution, one who avails their society of their talent is essential to a reading of Okolo in *The Voice*, Piriye, Bickerbug, and Tonwe in *Tides*, as well as the Activist in *The Activist*.⁶⁷ Except in the case of Okolo, the rest of the characters are discussed in relation to their environmentalism.

⁶⁷ On this issue, Neil Lazarus observes that: "Particularly brilliant in Said's representation of the intellectual, in my view, is his clear sighted awareness of what might be specific to intellectual work, that is, his grasp of what it is that intellectuals do that might be both socially valuable and also not within the remit of any other group of social agents—not because intellectuals are cleverer than other people, still less because they are [sic] morally better than other people but because they have been socially endowed with the resources, the status, and social capital, to do this particular kind of work" (117). It is therefore imperative to privilege Said, among the different theorists of intellection.

Okolo is positioned as a counterpoint to Abadi, another educated character in Okara's novel. While Abadi, a PhD holder, aligns with the establishment of the corrupt Chief Izongo and can be seen as a traditional intellectual in the Gramscian sense, Okolo refuses to join ranks with the establishment. Instead, his educational exposure influences his quest for "it." He courageously challenges the chiefs and exhorts them to get "it." It is his courage that enables him to return from exile to face the elders. Although his return costs him his life, we cannot lose sight of the seed that he has planted. As Ukule tells Okolo, "Your spoken words will not die" before the latter's death, we come to believe that the seed will bear productive fruits that will permeate Amatu. Okolo confidently undertakes the task even when he is aware of Chief Izongo's desperation to destroy him. The risk underlined in Okolo's task speaks to Said's emphasis on the vulnerability of the intellectual and demonstrates the former's commitment towards the moral rejuvenation of his society.

The intellectualism demonstrated in *Tides* is more complex. While Okara's novel features only one character that we can consider a public intellectual, there are three major intellectual characters in Okpewho's novel. In fact, the intellectual dimension of the struggle is introduced on the first page of Piriye's first letter to Tonwe, asking for the latter's participation in the project. In Piriye's words: "Between us we should be able to follow the events to their logical conclusion and eventually produce a book that will remain long an authoritative testimony to the plight of our people, the Beniotu people, in these times" (3). Piriye's commitment to the Delta cause is outstanding including risking his freedom and life when he visits the incarcerated

Bickerbug. His relationship to Bickerbug is marked by his fascination at the contributions of the young man to the struggle. After listening to Bickerbug's lecture on oil pollution, he writes to Tonwe:

All those academic details about oil exploration and oil pollution were thoroughly enlightening. I must read up on them to supplement the information given by Bickerbug, for certainly they will come in handy when we come to do our book on this whole problem. I know we are going to have to talk to the oil companies and various officials to get their sides of the story. But I must confess that Bickerbug's revelations opened up my eyes more than a little. (155)

Piriye's relationship with Bickerbug, despite Tonwe's warning of the possible risks, is insightful for understanding his commitment to the cause of his people. This relationship shows what Judith Butler describes as "mobilization of bodily exposure," in her analysis of vulnerability as a form of agency. For Butler, "in such practices of nonviolent resistance, we can come to understand bodily vulnerability as something that is actually marshaled or mobilized for the purpose of resistance."⁶⁸ By fraternizing with Bickerbug, a security risk, and visiting him in prison because of his relevance to his resistance against environmental exploitation, Piriye exposes himself to police brutality. Not surprisingly, he was detained and it took the intervention of Justice Ekundayo Benson, Lati's uncle, to effect his release. Even after his release, Piriye is placed under surveillance as evident with the bug planted at his residence. As already indicated,

⁶⁸ Butler explores this in a lecture at the 2014 MLA Conference in Chicago. A version of the paper can be found here: <http://profession.common.mla.org/2014/03/19/vulnerability-and-resistance/>

he is aware of the vulnerability implied in his decision to find Bickerbug in detention but his understanding of Bickerbug's critical role in the resistance against the despoliation in the Delta trumps his concern for his well-being.

Significantly, Piriye does not content himself with researching the book but does freelance pieces for local and international outlets. The publication of these pieces rattles the government as seen when excerpts from his writings are presented as evidence by the State operatives who detain him. By internationalizing the Delta struggle through foreign media outlets, Piriye seems to be demonstrating the point made by Said that "you [the intellectual] want to speak your piece where it can be heard best; and also you want it represented in such a way as to influence with an ongoing and actual process, for instance, the cause of peace and justice" (*Representations* 101). Drawing the attention of the international community embarrasses the government and the multinational corporations very concerned about their image; such publications also have the potential to move the actors to action; it is through writing that Piriye gives expression to his people's struggle. Put differently, his journalistic profession is indispensable for creating an international awareness to their plight.

Despite his initial reluctance to participate in the book project, Tonwe forgoes his quiet retirement to take up the case of the fishermen and to work with Piriye. His educational experiences and work as a former journalist give him access to the military commander, permanent secretary and the commissioner of health in Benin to complain on behalf of the fishermen. It is instructive that the fishermen chose him to speak for them; his selection in no way suggests he is better than them but as Lazarus has argued in his reading of Said's work, the

intellectual is “socially endowed with the resources, the status, and social capital, to do this particular kind of work” (117). Although the interventions in Benin did not yield any positive development for the fishermen, Tonwe is included in a stakeholders meeting of oil companies, government, and representatives of the affected oil communities. At least this meeting enables Tonwe to ask tough questions about processes of oil spills. The oil company representative was visibly shaken and even if the questions were not answered satisfactorily, the meeting provided an opportunity to register a voice of protest and to further understand the workings of the collaboration between the oil companies and the government officials. These would be useful for the book project, at the very least.

By his actions on the committee, Tonwe presents himself as an “amateur” in the Saidian sense. For Said, the amateur is “someone who is entitled to raise moral issues at the heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity as it involves one’s country, its power, its mode of interacting with its citizens as well as with other societies” (*Representations* 82-83). Despite Frank’s effort to confuse the committee and Tonwe with the technicalities and jargons of oil cleaning and other aspects of oil exploration, Tonwe insists on raising the moral questions implied in the oil companies’ activities in the interest of his “people” on whose behalf he traveled to Benin in the first place. Unlike the corrupt local chief or the politicians, Tonwe’s behavior “is fueled by care and affection rather than by profit and selfish, narrow specialization” (Said *Representations* 82)

Although Bickerbug’s violent actions have been analyzed earlier in the chapter, those do not detract from the intellectualism that characterizes the non-violent phase of his

environmentalism. He is a graduate of English who is well read as both the books in his room and speeches brought to us through Piriye reveal. Early in the novel, he recognizes the role of the media in raising public awareness and releases press statement against the ecological problems of the Delta. He also demonstrates the speaking aspect of the job of the intellectual during the public awareness campaign on Campos Square. Bickerbug sensitizes the people on the problems of the Delta. In fact, Piriye tells us that Bickerbug's rhetoric at this event won him over. Piriye also notes that several others were wooed by Bickerbug's presentation that they resisted the attempt to arrest him.

In the long lecture he gave Piriye, for instance, Bickerbug uncovers the intricacies of oil exploration and pollution and we know that such knowledge certainly expanded Piriye's horizon. In fact, the latter tells us that "[h]e [Bickerbug] fished among the books in the corner and brought out about four or five volumes. One was a Civil Engineering book I'd seen about in the room, but the others were on other subjects, petroleum engineering, a book on dams and bridges, another on environmental pollution and another on petroleum law. I was a little perplexed" (141). The interdisciplinary breadth of Bickerbug's reading and knowledge repertoire is telling of his commitment to understanding the workings of the oil business and his interest in the ecological welfare of the Delta. His training in the humanities did not stop him from educating himself in the science of petroleum engineering and drawing from the knowledge to educate the masses gathered at his rallies and co-travelers in the Delta struggle like Piriye. As the novel ends, the reader is left imagining the contributions Bickerbug could have made to the movement if he

had not deviated from the peaceful means of addressing the ecological devastation of the Delta in the novel.

The Activist we encounter in Ojaide's novel brings his transnational experiences to bear on his intellectualism. Early in *The Activist*, the narrator notes that:

The Activist was one of those people described by American armchair psychologists as protest bugs that showed up whenever there was a big protest to attract media attention. He always tried to make time to join what he considered a necessary cause, and many causes were necessary in his view. He was on the mailing list of many organizations and more often than not responded to calls for major protests. To him answering such calls was not a civic but a human duty. He had flown to Europe several times on chartered flights to carry placards against Bell Oil International and the Group of Seven over debt relief for Third World Countries. (22)

This passage is notable because it betrays an image of the influence of US environmentalism on the Activist's strategy of resistance on his return to the Delta. On his return, he refuses to align with the oil company or the government. Rather he seeks to understand his surroundings by associating with Pere and other members of his community. That he chose Pere, an uneducated former tout, to befriend, shows his desire to bridge the gap between the educated and uneducated classes. It is not a coincidence that the community decided to send a lobby team abroad shortly after the Activist's arrival. Of course, he draws from his understanding of the American system to assist the delegation in preparing their documents. Knowing the value of photographs as evidence in the West, he encourages the people to find a photographer and take colored

photographs that will be useful in the presentation of their case. Stacy Alaimo's comment that "photography has been employed in environmental justice campaigns, most potently perhaps as a form of evidence" is instrumental for understanding the use of images here (70-71).

Al Gedicks justifies the kind of international lobby planned by the Activist's community when he writes in *Resource Rebels: Native Challenges to Mining and Oil Corporations* that:

In many states where these movements faced state-sponsored terror and repression, they have tried to avoid a direct confrontation with the state by shifting the conflict to the international arena. They formed alliances with international environmental and human rights groups, exchanged information, shared resources, used the international media and exerted political leverage over multinational corporations, development-oriented states and multilateral development. (197)

Moreover, the international lobby supported by the Activist demonstrates Said's point about universalizing the experience the intellectual is grappling with, without losing the historical specificity. In Said's view, "For the intellectual the task, I believe, is explicitly to universalize the crisis, to give greater human scope to what a particular race or nation suffered" (43-44).⁶⁹ Following Said, then, the efforts of the delegation can be read as an effort to give a greater scope to sufferings in the Delta and to include the Delta crisis among cases of

⁶⁹ Said's position is shared by Pierre Bourdieu, who in "Are Intellectuals Out of Play" writes that "[t]he spokesman's problem is to offer a language that enables the individuals concerned to universalize their experiences without thereby effectively excluding them from the expression of their own experience" (38).

environmental exploitation being pursued at the United Nations and Euro-America, in general. Moreover, the Activist and the Delta delegation can be considered as “rooted cosmopolitans,” defined by Shalini Randeria, as those activists that often transcend their locality and nation state for alliances against the oppression of local communities. In her words, “these rooted cosmopolitans often forge issue-based transnational alliances” to address the concerns of their constituencies (23).

Similarly, the Activist’s establishment of *The Patriot* proves his recognition of the critical role of the media in social activism. With the help of his wife, Ebi, who resigns her position as an art lecturer to edit the newspaper, the Activist uses the outlet to push issues of interest in the Delta, a move similar to Piriye’s use of his articles to highlight the environmental challenges of the Delta. In a military regime where press freedom is stifled, the newspaper’s entry into the media fray is remarkable especially for its critical and objective attention to issues of environmental exploitation and other important issues. In other words, the newspaper becomes a public sphere for sensitizing people to the problems surrounding them; the newspaper also becomes a technology for ecological thought even as it foreshadows the Activist’s gubernatorial campaigns and victory. As the narrator describes it, “The newspaper was patriotic, pro-people, and for justice and fairness. As the readership increased, it became a daily without Saturday and Sunday editions” (292). One page later, the reader is informed that: “The paper did not mind being called the champion of resource control. It showed in coloured and black-and-white photographs the damage done to the environment” (293).

To be sure, Said’s reflection on the alienation of the exiled intellectual is pertinent to my reading of the Activist. For Said, “it is also very important to stress that the condition [of

alienation] carries with it certain reward and, yes, even privileges” (59). The recollection of the Activist’s sojourn in America qualifies as “alienated.” He remains in the margin of that society and did not find fulfillment in both his teaching position at an ill-funded college and a relationship with a violent, psychologically disturbed American. But the experiences gathered from participating in environmental movements and following the democratic process in exile gave him a vantage position on his return. The initial skepticism as to why someone would leave the United States to return to work in a troubled Delta soon gives way for respect and an eagerness to work with the Activist in the interest of environmental justice. Like Okolo, Tonwe, Piriye, and Bickerbug, he did not refuse his people his talent.

Interestingly, he transcends the role of the public intellectual when he contests and wins the gubernatorial elections. While the intellectuals seen above in the other novels remain outside the political circuit as Said suggests, the Activist’s entrance into the electoral space shows one way he complicates Said’ notion of the outsider role of the intellectual:

In underlining the intellectual’s role as outsider I have had in mind how powerless one often feels in the face of an overwhelmingly powerful network of social authorities—the media, the government and corporations, etc.—who crowd out the possibilities for achieving any change. To deliberately not belong to these authorities is in many ways not to be able to effect direct change and, alas, even at times to be relegated to the role of witness who testifies to a horror otherwise unrecorded. (xvi-xvii)

Like Said, it seems the Activist recognizes the little opportunity for direct change available to him outside elected office and the limited role of being a witness or mere critic of the status quo. Seeking an elective position thus becomes a means of effecting direct change in the Delta while remaining true to his ideals. As the novel ends, the signs are positive that the government of the “former intellectual” is headed in the right direction towards ecological sustainability, especially if we consider his claim at the end of the novel that every life matters.

Conclusion

So far, this chapter has explored the questions of environmental degradation and the resistances against such in three novels on the Delta by Okara, Okpewho, and Ojaide. Underlining the work in this chapter is Tim Morton’s notion of ecological thought because of its usefulness as a template for assessing the responses to environmental degradation in the Delta of the novels. Thus while blowing up oil installations and bunkering are subversive acts pointing to the agency of the people as existing scholarship on these novels indicate, the challenge that this chapter rises to with Morton’s inspiration is to put pressure on these otherwise salutary acts of resistance by asking how they fit with the need for ecological sustainability. These texts invite a conversation about the impacts of acts of sabotage in the environment while not losing sight of their critical role in a country where the government tends to understand mainly (if not only) the language of force. But the question of the larger ecology and the sacredness of all life it entails needs to be at the forefront of all struggles.

While postcolonial studies' emphasis on agency and resistance is important, the ecocritical perspective emphasized in this space illuminates the need for ecological appraisal of such strategies and seeking sustainable alternatives. Given contemporary concerns over global warming and climate change, postcolonial studies ought to rise to Morton's challenge by reassessing those actions hitherto applauded for demonstrating the agency of the oppressed to accommodate the interests of nonhumans as well. This study has implications for not only the Delta but wherever people mount opposition to neoliberal development paradigms and other forms of exploitation.

As this chapter shows, the novels under study are not short of possible alternatives. In *Tides*, we see an emphasis on collaboration and the need for a public sphere where every voice matters. *The Activist*, on the other hand, suggests that the role of the intellectual transcends championing dialogue and overseeing the public sphere like Bickerbug did in prison; the Activist's gubernatorial ambition and his eventual election as governor demonstrate the need for the intellectual to run for office to steer positive change. Unlike *Tides* which ends on a less optimistic note, *The Activist* ends on a more promising note with the intellectual turned governor creating a special ministry of the environment to address the environmental challenges facing the region. These novels also suggest that the intellectual has a critical role to play in the social restructuring of the Delta environment and cannot afford to be missing in the public spheres of progressive conversation about the future of the region. This is important if the scenario in the region will not degenerate into the kind of full-blown war that we saw in Somalia; the representation of the ecologies of the Somalian crises in Farah's novels is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Ecologies of War, Farah's Somalia, and Material Ecocriticism

I want to note here that acknowledging nonhuman agency as an active player in shaping the world does not mean backgrounding the moral accountability of the human agent

— **Serpil Oppermann**

“Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism”

The African continent has had its fair share of conflicts including the Nigeria-Biafra War, the Algerian War of Independence, the wars in Liberia and Sierra-Leone, as well as the Darfur crisis. In fact, African literature has witnessed a boom in war narratives such as Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), a novel on the Biafran War which has just been adapted to screen, Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoir of a Boy Soldier* (2007) devoted to the war in Sierra-Leone, Mia Couto's *Sleepwalking Land* (2006) on the war in Mozambique, and Chris Abani's *Song for Night* (2007), a novella whose hesitance to specify a geographical locale allows it to speak to any war featuring child soldiers. The child soldier phenomenon and the authors' portrayal of the brutalities of war are thematic threads that connect each of the foregoing texts.

But the choice of Somalia for this chapter is not only apropos because it enables me to reflect on a crisis threatening the stability of East Africa. More importantly, the complex, enduring conflicts in Somalia—beginning with the colonial invasion through the country's violent struggles with Ethiopia and the civil war— make the country a fertile ground for a discussion of the ecologies of war relevant for a larger African extrapolation and its global implications. In focusing on the ecologies of war in this space, I wish to mediate the gap in

scholarship on wars in African literary criticism, which has mainly focused on the human dimensions and costs of conflicts. By this, I mean the tendency to explore issues relevant to the men, women, and children affected by these crises.⁷⁰ Such a focus is crucial, but unfortunately leaves out the nonhuman world, which is either elided, glossed over, or discussed only for its relevance to the human population.

Nuruddin Farah's acute attention to both the nonhuman and human world in his representation of the Somalian crises in *Secrets* (1998), *Links* (2003), and *Crossbones* (2011) makes these texts relevant for analysis here.⁷¹ In this space, I show how Farah's work is attentive to the complex interactions between humans and nonhumans in wartime Somalian ecology and how the interactions portray a shared suffering between humans and nonhumans. I also suggest that Farah's work enables us to rethink an anthropocentric notion of agency if we

⁷⁰ See the essays in *Remembering Biafra: Narrative, History, and Memory of the Nigeria-Biafra War*, Eds. Chima Korieh and Ifeanyi Ezeonu (New Jersey: Goldline and Jacobs, 2010); John Masterson, *The Disorder of Things: A Foucauldian Approach to the Work of Nuruddin Farah* (Johannesburg: Wits UP, 2013); Derek Wright, *The Novels of Nuruddin Farah* (Bayreuth: Pia Thielmann & Eckhard Breiting, 1994); Clement Okafor, "Sacrifice & the Contestation of Identity in Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn*," *War in African Literature Today* 26 (2008): 33-48; Grace Okereke, "The Nigerian Civil War and the Female Imagination: Buchi Emecheta's Destination Biafra," *Feminism in African Literature: Essays on Criticism*. Ed. Helen Chukwuma, Enugu: New Generation Books, 1994. 144-58.

⁷¹ Scholars have commented specifically on the animal imagery in Farah's oeuvre. Ousseina D. Alidou and Alamin M. Mazrui, for instance, argue that Farah uses animal imagery to foreground the human exploitation of nonhuman life (126). Also, Minna Niemi contends that the tale of an eagle and chickens that plays a central role in *Knots* (a novel not analyzed here) is "a subtext and . . . metaphor for hope that the novel strongly underlines" (339). Similarly, Byron Caminero-Santagmelo claims that Farah critiques the view of "nonhuman 'others' as only having value to the degree to which they can be manipulated and used to satiate desire" (58).

consider the capacities of the land, animals, and other nonhumans to produce agency in *Secrets*, *Links*, and *Crossbones*. This reading is an “attempt to dehierarchize our conceptual categories that structure dualisms and determine our oppressive, social, cultural, and political practices” towards those we classify as others—nonhumans in particular (Oppermann “Material Ecocriticism and the Creativity” 67). It will have served its purpose if it contributes, however modestly, towards the search “for places in which creatures, ecological systems, and other nondiscrete life forms can flourish” (Alaimo 158).

This chapter is informed by materialist ecocriticism.⁷² As Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman have compellingly explained in “Material Ecocriticism: Materiality, Agency, and Models of Narrativity,” material ecocriticism is primarily concerned with “the interplay between the human and the nonhuman in a field of distributed effectuality and of inbuilt material-discursive dynamics” (79). Central to material ecocriticism is the idea of distributed agency, which Iovino and Opperman explain as a “material-semiotic network of human and nonhuman agents incessantly generating the world’s embodiments and events” (*Material Ecocriticism* 3). Ultimately, the notion of distributed agency revises the Enlightenment notion of subjectivity. Material ecocriticism moves away from the notions of intentionality, autonomy, reason, and language in its account of agency.⁷³ Iovino and Opperman further explain that:

⁷² The influences of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s work on rhizome, and Bruno Latour’s actants are clearly inscribed in material ecocriticism. See Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minnesota UP, 1985), and Latour’s *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. (Oxford UP, 2005)

⁷³ Emmanuel Levinas’s notion of ethical relation to the face of the other, for instance, is implicated in the Enlightenment notion of subjectivity. For him, animals are incapable of ethics

Agency, therefore, is not to be necessarily and exclusively associated with human beings and with human intentionality, but it is a pervasive and inbuilt property of matter, as part and parcel of its generative dynamism. From this dynamism, reality emerges as an intertwined flux of material and discursive forces, rather than as complex of hierarchically organized individual players. (3)

It can be said that this account of agency builds on Morton's work on the mesh as it concerns the interdependence and connections of the ecological components. The account of agency here shows how the different aspects of the mesh, various components of the ecology interact and affect each other. By placing emphasis on the ways the different components shape each other, Iovino and Oppermann, among other material ecocritics, ask that our reading practices be attentive to the agenticity of matter, therefore displacing human as the locus of agency. Work in material ecocriticism further undermines the dualistic thinking that structures the human/nonhuman dichotomy and encourages us to invest in the imbrications, in the networks of exchanges among humans and nonhumans that perceptively expose how so-called inert aspects

because they lack language which is the governing trope of the possibility of an ethical relation: "It is the face; its revelation is speech. The relation with the Other alone introduces a dimension of transcendence, and leads us to a relation totally different from experience in the sensible sense of the term, relative and egoist (*Totality and Infinity* 193). A page later, Levinas writes that the "Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our nature and developed by our existence. Speech proceeds from absolute difference" (*Totality and Infinity* 194). Levinas's acceptance of difference as a condition for the ethical relations is remarkable, but as Carrie Rohman has pointed out elsewhere, he anchors his ethics on the ability of the other to speak, thereby eliminating those who are radically different from us.

of the ecology can actually be influencing or affecting the way humans, animals, and other living beings act and vice versa.

As Iovino and Opperman suggest: “Humans share this horizon [the environment] with countless other actors, whose agency—regardless of being endowed with degrees of intentionality—forms the fabric of events and causal chains” (“Theorizing Material” 451). It does not matter if the agent is capable of speech and reason or not. Material ecocriticism can be considered a “posthumanist materialist account of performativity that challenges the positioning of materiality as either a given or a mere effect of human agency” (Barad 145).

Stacy Alaimo’s work on what she describes as “transcorporeality” is an often-cited study in material ecocriticism. According to Alaimo, “Transcorporeality denies the human subject the sovereign, central position. Instead, ethical consideration and practices must emerge from a more uncomfortable and perplexing place where the ‘human’ is always already part of an active, often unpredictable material world” (16-17). At least two insights can be drawn from Alaimo’s explanation of transcorporeality: first, it dethrones the human as the center of the environment; second, it emphasizes the imbrication of the human in a network of exchanges with others.

Alaimo provides an illustration of transcorporeality in her book, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010). Alaimo offers a reading of Muriel Ruckseyer’s work on the toxic poisoning of African Americans building a dam to power a plant owned by Union Carbide in West Virginia, in 1930. In reading the lengthy poem, *The Book of the Dead*, Alaimo is attentive to what she describes as a “transcorporeal landscape,” that is, the way Ruckseyer “traces the movement of silica dust from the rock to the body of the worker and even throughout

the wider environment” (48). Alaimo emphasizes the agency of the rock to pollute the human body and engender sickness and even death for the African American laborers. Ultimately, she focuses on how “vast networks of power, knowledge, and substance intersect in the bodies of the workers who dug the Gauley tunnel” (50). “The fact of silica invading the lungs,” for Alaimo, “highlights the substantial interconnection between worker and environment” (52). Alaimo’s reading of Ruckseyer’s poem presents an example of the agential capacity of a nonhuman other that supports Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s point in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010) that “[i]f we define agency less by the essentialist capacities apparently required to effect change than by the effecting of change itself, we have not only a less anthropocentric but also a less circular definition of agency (191).

To be sure, there is an ethical component to material ecocriticism which makes it compelling for an analysis of war. Reflecting on the dangers of treating nonhuman life forms and so called inanimate things as “passive, inert, unable to convey any independent expression of meaning,” Iovino and Oppermann worry that such treatment limits “the latitude of ethics to our species,” that is to fellow human beings (*Material Ecocriticism* 2-3). At stake in a materialist account of agency is a rethinking of the way we relate to these Others. A fundamental assumption energizing material ecocritics is that treating the Others with whom we share the earth better can contribute to the quest for a better world. This structure of thought affirms the epigraph with which I started this chapter. Considering nonhumans as players or actors in the environment does not make humans less culpable in the degradation of the environment. Rather

such consideration raises the ethical stake by forcing us to reimagine them as not objects for which we are masters but as co-travelers shaping one another in an ecological network.

The work of the ecocritics explored above coalesce in their emphasis on relationality, the dismantling of a center, and a reconfigured sense of agency, all productive for the analysis of an ecology of war that is not centered on the human. Put differently, the work of these thinkers is productive for an ecocritical analysis of war that focuses on not just the humans but also on the agential capacities of the nonhuman others in the Somalian environment I interrogate through a reading of Farah's novels. The insights they shed deftly show that agency must be understood in relation to the motivating other, be it human or nonhuman and is not attributable to an autonomous subject.

In the next section, I provide a brief overview of the history of Somalia and its interrelationships with the rest of the world, to provide a context to the narratives. In the third section, I attempt a brief overview at the risk of doing violence to Farah's texts given their narrative complexities. I proceed to a reading of the novels in the fourth section where I show how the novels demonstrate the interactions between the human and animals in the Somalian environment. The fifth section is devoted to exploring the ways humans and animals interact with their territory in a time of crises, alongside the expression of the agency of the humans and more-than-human world involved. Their agency, I argue, helps to see the materialization of the interaction among the different species in the Somalian ecology. My interest in the following section is the commodification of bodies—humans and animals in the novels and how the underpinning economic order does not foreclose the possibility of agency. I show that the

commodification enacts forms of agency instrumental for tracking the movements within and across bodies and spaces as well as for spurring environmental thinking. In the final section which doubles as the conclusion, I demonstrate how Farah's novels gesture towards a planetary network of exchanges. I note that material ecocriticism has not paid much attention to the global implications of its main principles and show how Farah's oeuvre indicates the inseparability of network of exchanges from its transnational dimensions. Ursula Heise's work in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* inspires the vision of the transnational I explore in this concluding segment.

The Context of the Texts

The history of modern Somalia is traceable to the 19th century colonial invasion of the area by both Britain and Italy after the colonizing nations put down the resistance of the existing Islamic sultanates. Italy retained control of the northeastern and Southern parts of the country until 1941 when their defeat led to the British takeover of these territories as well. While Northern Somalia remained a British protectorate, the Southern part came under United Nations protectorate in 1949.⁷⁴ Both parts were reunited as the Federal Republic of Somalia at independence in 1960, the same year that Nigeria, discussed in the previous chapter attained independence from Britain. Somalia remained under civilian rule until the Siad Barre's led

⁷⁴ Farah's *Close Sesame*, the third novel of his first trilogy on the theme of an African Dictatorship, has dealt with the historical realities of colonial Somalia and how it informs the country's post-colonial condition. See Raymond Ntalindwa's "Linkages of History in the Narrative of Close Sesame," for an exploration of the historical dynamics of the text.

military coup of 1969. Barre's regime was initially hailed as progressive due to the infrastructural projects he embarked upon but disillusionment soon followed as a result of corruption and his autocratic policies. Farah was interestingly a victim of this dictatorship as he was unable to return to Somalia after a visit to Rome in 1976 because one of his earlier works, *A Naked Needle*, was considered subversive by the government. The writer was threatened with a 30 year jail term for this novel critical of the regime (Farah "The Family" 9).

In 1977, Barre's regime attempted to annex the disputed Ogaden region which Britain had arbitrarily conceded to Ethiopia in 1948 in return for Ethiopian support to stop French incursion. (Niemi 340). Somalia's initial success was soon reversed with Russia's support for the Ethiopians; the latter won the war in 1978 to the pain and traumas of the Somalians, which Farah depicts in *Maps* (Brown 126). This defeat is remarkable especially because Russia initially backed Barre in the early years of his administration "when he played the Soviets against the United States and its allies," but the emergence of the Mengistu's government in Ethiopia made Russia switch allegiance (Farah "The Family 9").⁷⁵ In the end, Somalia was defeated but civil unrest at home continued until 1990 when the state under Barre's regime became very dysfunctional. A clan-based opposition group chased Barre out of office in 1991, following which the nation erupted into the civil war literarily represented in *Links*. Describing the ubiquitous clan at the heart of Somalian politics, Farah explains it as "an extended patrilineal network that owes its existence to a political construction whose aim was to provide the blood

⁷⁵ For further discussion of the history of Ethiopia-Somalia relations, see Alexander De Waal, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991).

community with an imagined identity” (“The Family” 10). The collapse of Barre’s government was followed by the creation of an autonomous Somaliland state in Northern Somalia, even though the government was not recognized by the international community. In the South, two military commanders, Mohammed Farah Aideed and Ali Mahdi Mohamed struggled to retain control until an international conference on Somalia in Djibouti recognized the latter as the legitimate president of Somalia. Despite the international recognition, Mohamed was unable to maintain control outside Mogadiscio. Fighting and civil strife continued despite the unsuccessful United Nations’ peacekeeping operation and the later failed United States’ intervention (Operation Restore Hope), which is central to the preoccupations of *Links*.

The absence of a central government in Somali was reversed in 2004 when a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was established in Kenya (Mzali 85). The TFG’s hold on the nation was slippery as militants and warlords held sway in their enclaves until it was ousted in 2006 by the Islamic Courts, an Islamic power bloc from which Al Shabaab emanated from. The Transitional Federal Government managed to regain control a few months later with the assistance of Ethiopia, African Union peacekeepers, and the United States (Schofield 103). Successive governments in Somalia including that of the incumbent President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud continue to be challenged by Al Shabaab’s attacks as seen in Farah’s *Crossbones*. Somalia is bordered by Kenya in the Southwest, Djibouti in the Northwest, the Indian Ocean in the East, and Ethiopia to the West. These borders are its links to the outside world that have contributed to the country’s shape over time. They symbolize the network of exchanges that influence events in Somalia, including those depicted in the novels to which I turn next.

Secrets, Links, and Crossbones: An Overview

It is a nation on the verge of a war that *Secrets* presents to us. The novel presents Kalamán as its main protagonist and through his interactions with his family members—Nonno, Damac, and Yaqut, as well as his relationship with the powerful Sholongoo, we see an intricate web of relationships that is as complex as the clannish based allegiances of the Somali nation where killing and maiming on the basis of clan identity dominate. According to Ngaboh-Smart, “beyond the family support still rages the horror and disorder of the political community, with its murders, its violence, and clan-cleansing from which we are forced to conclude that only one’s close family can be worthy of loyalty” (“Secrets” 133). But the novel does more than present the national struggles and its human dimensions. Farah points to the relationship between humans and nonhumans in a time of crisis. We see the charred landscapes and the decimation of animals by Fidow, the animal catcher. In turn, we see the effects of nonhumans on humans as well: While Fidow is killed by an elephant therefore ending his animal cruelty, the scorched land causes famine and hunger for the human population. In short, the novel’s inclusion here speaks to its relevance for exploring the interactions of humans and nonhumans in a time of strife and how their actions produce different effects in that society.

Farah’s *Links* is set in war torn Mogadiscio immediately after the withdrawal of US troops and offers a complex account of that intervention and its aftermaths. In an essay exploring metonymy and the representation of the war in the novel, Ines Mzali contends that it can be read “as a counter-representation to the mainstream US media’s sensationalist, therefore, reductive, coverage of the Somali war” (84-85). For Mzali, the “novel constitutes a pertinent and alternative

approach to the representations of war, which illustrates the importance of literature's contribution to the contextualization and understanding of international intervention in current or recent conflicts" (85). Similarly, John Masterson, in *The Disorder of Things: A Foucauldian Approach to the Work to the Work of Nuruddin Farah*, argues "that, by offering a fictional retrospective on America's military misadventure in Somalia in the early 90s, Farah poses some rather more searching questions about the entangled genealogies that define the contemporary (dis)order of things" (247)

At the novel's beginning, its protagonist, A Somalian-American has just arrived from the US to "disorient death," and "to know the answers. I also wanted to visit these heat-flattened, sunburned landscapes, and see these shantytowns, witness what's become of our city" (36). He has been away for twenty years and this return shows him that the Somalian crisis is more complex than the simple narrative CNN and other international media outlets beam to the world. As he traverses the war-destroyed terrain, Jeebleh is saddened by the devastation wrought by clannish politics. For this, he spurns a plea for financial support from his clan members to enable them institute their own militia. He meets his childhood friend, Bile, who now runs a refuge and learns of the tragedy of the war in Mogadiscio and betrayals even by one's family members. There are weapons in the hands of the young, including Dajaal's grandson, Qassir, and the militia boys in the vehicle Jeebeh boarded to the hotel. The landscapes are also riddled with mines waiting to explode, without discrimination for combatant or civilian. The novel leaves space for the environmental implication of the crisis which I explore later in the chapter. As we traverse the novel's landscape with the characters, and narrator, we are confronted with

destruction—bodies, razed buildings, scavengers, etc., that evoke the ugliness of wars. The future is not bright for the Mogadiscio of *Links*.

As Mzali, among other critics, rightly point out, the novel suggests a nuanced version of the Somali crisis which it traces to the history of occupation briefly alluded to in the preceding section. In this way, *Links* departs from those accounts of the tragedy that reduces the war and the killing of the American peacekeepers to one of the barbaric Africans' propensity for violence. The novel buttresses Nicholas Hildyard's argument that those "violence that is increasingly 'explained' by labels such as 'population wars' or 'inter-tribal conflict' is generally not the product of 'ingrained' hatreds or 'too many babies' but of 'a complex web of politics, economics, history, psychology and a struggle for identity'" (21).

Farah's *Crossbones* is the last in a trilogy that includes *Links*, and *Knots*; it continues the story of the failures of the nation as embodied in Somaliland. While the American invasion takes center-stage in *Links*, *Crossbones* is concerned with the question of piracy alongside the impacts of the long conflicts on the Somali landscape. The novel records the instability orchestrated by Al Shaabab, the Islamic Courts, and the Transitional Federal Government in conjunction with their Ethiopian backers and western interests. *Crossbones* is indeed a lesson in globalization as different interest groups mobilize and fight for their interests. Al Shabaab is keen on inflicting violence on the government and citizenry to impose a so-called Islamic state; its members are not only drawn from Somalia but from the diaspora in the United States. Ahl's stepson, Taxiil is a fine example of a youth lured from Minnesota to fight for Al Shaabab. His stepfather, Ahl, returns to Somalia to find him and a significant portion of the novel is dedicated to that quest.

But as Ahl and Malik, his journalist brother, traverse the Somalian landscape, they learn of the threat to the Somalian sea due to the absence of a functional state. Their interlocutors inform them of foreign vessels that dump toxic waste and illegal fishing in Somalia's territorial waters. They even learn that the so-called pirates are local movements for protecting Somalia's aquatic territories from abuse. Like in the other novels, the contending groups fight over territory. These struggles are made possible by the proliferation of weapons—guns, mines, bombs, etc. As Dajaaal reflects on a particular war he fought in and the decimation of humans, animals, and landscape, he intertwines the fate of humans and nonhumans exposing their interactions and shared vulnerability.

Despite the differences in the texts, they are joined by an attentiveness to the impacts of the crises on the larger Somali environment, the distribution of agency among humans and nonhumans in that ecosystem, and by the international dimensions and implications of the crises. As Wright indicates elsewhere, "Somalia—before, under and after Barre—is the subject to which he [Farah] has returned in novel after novel" (*The Novels* 5). As already noted by Garth Myers in an innovative study of Farah's work in the context of urban geography and development, *African Cities: Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice*, "Farah does not shy away from criticisms of Somalis, nor does he prettify Mogadishu in his work" (152). Yet Myers' chapter analyzes Farah's most recent fiction for its possibilities for African urban theory, by which even the most wounded cities might produce alternative modes of interpreting urban spaces (140). In his reading of Farah's *Links*, Myers claims that: "[t]hrough consideration of Farah's re-creation of Mogadishu as a lived space, and of *The Refuge* as a 'new form of urban life,' though, we see

how the author seeks to breathe life back into Mogadishu.” He adds that [i]n Farah’s vision, Mogadishu is no longer the ‘world capital-of-things-gone-completely-to-hell’ whose people get what’s coming to them” (160). Farah is also careful to challenge the construct of the nation in his novels and refuses to privilege any aspect of society or exonerate anybody; hence Ngaboh-Smart’s assertion that his “texts undermine Somali nationalist rhetoric, especially Said Barre’s emphasis on local interests and cultural polemic” (*Beyond Empire* xv). Farah, rather, stresses linkages that cross borders—linguistic, ethnic, national, regional, and even human, and nonhuman. His novels foreground the hybrid, intermixings, and coevalness that make it impossible to posit a simple response to the questions the novels raise, including the question of human-nonhuman relations which is addressed next.

Meeting the Animal Other

Farah’s *Secrets* is indeed a fine starting point for exploring the interactions of the different beings in the ecology because it offers “possible ways to analyze language and reality, human and nonhuman life, mind and matter, without falling into dichotomous patterns of thinking” (Iovino and Opperman *Material Ecocriticism* 2). The novel is also instructive for understanding the portrayal of the agential capabilities of the nonhuman other (a lioness in this case) in Farah’s work. One narrative strategy of the novel which Patricia Alden and Louis Tremaine highlight is that “[a]lthough Kalamán is the principal narrator in *Secrets*, he cannot control, as Askar does, the other voices in his story” (763). “These others,” according to these critics, “participate in the novel not merely as voices woven into Kalamán’s story . . . but as

narrators of chapters in their right, narrators intent on sharing their secrets in their own ways” (763). Nonno, Kalaman’s grandfather, is one such character in the novel but another character who is intertwined with the others is Sholoongo who not only activates Kalaman’s sexuality but also engages in sexual relation with his father, Yaqut and grandfather, Nonno. From Nonno’s account at the novel’s beginning, we learn that Sholoongo was thrown into the forest by her mother because she was born a *duugan* child. Such children, according to tradition, are meant to be buried alive. Alidou and Mazrui suggest that Farah is making “allusion to pre-Islamic Arabia where baby girls were supposedly buried alive as a direct consequence of its jahiliya tradition” (125). But instead of devouring her, a lioness raised her and “abandoned” her at a “crossroad.”

It is possible to read the circumstances of Sholoongo’s birth and survival in at least two ways. It is interesting that a member of the lion specie, normally considered a ferocious animal, extended sympathy to Sholoongo, cared for her, and raised her. In fact, the relationship here indeed suggests that the animal can indeed extend sympathy to the human Other, thereby showing how Farah’s fiction reinstates the ethics that Levinas denies Bobby, the dog that encounters him and the other inmates in the Nazi refugee camp. For Levinas, “This dog was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany, without the brain needed to universalize maxims and drives” (*Difficult Freedom* 153). The dog’s relation to the refugees was quite different from that of the so-called humans who “stripped us of our human skin” (*Difficult Freedom* 152-53). For these humans, according to Levinas, the refugees “were subhuman, a gang of apes” (*Difficult Freedom* 153). However, Levinas could not extend ethics to the dog who reinstates their humanity: “He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down

and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt we were men” (*Difficult Freedom* 153). Instead he denies the dog the “brain” crucial for a universal ethics. As Matthew Calarco puts it, “two dominant theses in Levinas’s writings concerning animals are: no nonhuman animal is capable of a genuine ethical response to the Other; and nonhuman animals are not the kind of beings that elicit an ethical response in human beings—which is to say, the Other is always and only the human Other” (55).

To return to the novel, it is remarkable that the lioness demonstrates the fellow feeling that the human community fails to extend to Sholoongo in the name of tradition. For Alidou and Mazrui, Farah uses the lioness and other animals—locusts, and the elephant I discuss in the next section to show, “the animals that we are wont to describe as ‘wild’ are, in fact, endowed with a greater moral conscience than humans would like to acknowledge” (125). The lioness thus features as the “last Kantian” in its Somali community, to rephrase Levinas’ characterization of Bobby as “the last Kantian in Nazi Germany” (153).

An alternative reading, more consistent with the logic of this chapter, is to focus on the agentic possibilities of the lioness’ encounter with Sholoongo. This approach moves us away from the question of intentionality which the reading above might raise. It enables us to concentrate instead on the agential possibilities in that story recounted by Nonno: “I cannot vouch for its truth, but in the version I heard, a lioness adopted, and raised her together with her cubs, then abandoned her at a crossroads, where some travelers found her. These took her to the nearest settlement, which happened to be her mother’s hamlet” (2). One must add that neither Sholoongo nor any other character in the novel contradicts this version of the source of her

animal powers and instinct. It is remarkable that three active verbs—“adopted,” “raised,” and “abandoned” are used to describe the lioness’ relation to the baby. These verbs demonstrate the lioness’ action and buttress the fact that Sholoongo’s survival is made possible by the actions of the lioness. In other words, the acts of adopting, raising her among her offspring, and abandoning her indicate the lioness’s role in Sholoongo’s process of becoming. Of course the choice of “abandoned” is bound to elicit concern but again the choice of location—a crossroads—where the possibility of human contact is high given the traffic such places attract introduces a significant twist. Not surprising, human travelers find her and take her to the nearest settlement which happens to be Sholoongo’s mother’s. The abandonment can thus be read, following Deleuze and Guattari, as a process of reterritorialization. Hitherto, Sholoongo’s presence among a pack of lions shows a sign of deterritorialization instituted when her mother dumped her in the bush. By “abandoning” the little girl at a crossroads near where she originated from, the lioness knowingly or unknowingly (it does not matter which!) initiates a process of returning her to where she belongs; a process completed by the travelers. Additionally, we can identify a distribution of agency in this network of movement/activities. A network that begins with her mother dumping her, Sholoongo’s survival due to the lioness’s agency, and completed by the travelers. Clearly, we see the interaction at the heart of material ecocriticism clearly here. More specifically, a lioness, a baby child, human travelers, and the land interact to find a home for Sholoongo. Agency is attributable to the humans who picked her up, the lioness who raised her, and the intersection which attracts the traffic that makes it possible for her to be seen.

Jacqueline Bardolph, writing in “Brothers and Sisters in Nuruddin Farah’s Two Trilogies,” has pointed to the incestuous relationship between Sholoongo and her brother, Timir, in *Secrets*. For Bardolph, the “violence and the satiric gusto of the narrative in the depiction of the brother-sister couple express the rejection of a system that puts family and blood lineage on the father’s side—that is, clan—before all other allegiances” (731). Bardolph’s reading is consistent with the concerns of the novel and the disorder her reading suggests echoes the chaos in the larger world of the text. However, I would like to propose an alternative reading. While the reader may cringe at these acts, the incestuous relationship, as well as their father’s (Madoobe’s) copulation with a heifer in the novel, another abnormal behavior, can be read as deconstructing the notion of the autonomous human subject. Raw/wild instinct is normally considered an animal characteristic as Alidou and Mazrui rightly pointed out, whereas humans are located in culture which forbids incest and miscegenation. Therefore, the destabilization of distinct categories in the novel not only undermines blood kinship; it undoes the stability of the human/animal dualism in the context of the text. In other words, the reversal of the animal-human, nature-culture position by placing the lioness in an ethical/agentive position, while Sholoongo and her family exhibit instinctual behavior expected of the animal exemplifies the novel’s attentiveness to dismantling the human center. We should bear in mind Sholoongo’s response when Kalaman confronts her concerning Madoobe’s bestiality: “‘It was a cow,’ Sholoongo said, ‘whom my father has decided to domesticate, that’s to say, take as his wife’” (17). The domestication of the cow is consistent with practices in a patriarchal order where men domesticate women as wives. As Caminero-Santagmelo understands this passage, “[b]oth women and animals are positioned here as objects for male, human gratification. . . .” (64). After all, the gay Timir returns from the

United States to buy a wife in this same novel. Similarly, the man with the alias, YMI, concocts a marriage ceremony, with Damac, without her consent or even her presence. But what is remarkable is the blurring of the boundaries between the human and animal that brings to mind the folktale about the ape in the first chapter where the boundaries between the human and gorilla are obfuscated as well. The sexual encounters here compromise human exceptionalism and seems to show a sense of relationality not only in the human-human sense (Sholoongo and Timir); the encounter between the heifer and Madoobe suggests the relation transcends such arrangement and shows some form of entanglement (however ridiculous) with the Other.

The interaction and distributed agency characterizing Sholoongo's encounter with the lioness also manifests in the relationship between Jeebleh and the dog being hurt by a young boy in *Links*. That the war-time scenario promotes violence even among the young is clear from a reading of the novel. On encountering the scene, Jeebleh chases the boy away and ultimately assists the pregnant dog in delivering its offspring. In deterring the boy, Jeebleh makes a poignant remark: "When you hurt the dog, I hurt" (130). Jeebleh's statement suggests the dog's capacity to act on him and elicit empathy. It is interesting that he did not just ask the boy to stop hurting the dog. Connecting the dog's pain to his is one way Jeebleh shows their relation and very importantly, the dog's ability to elicit his compassion. It must be noted that Jeebleh's action is not without risk to his life. Not only is the boy a member of an influential family. Jeebleh's intimacy with the animal is a taboo in the Islamic moral economy he finds himself: "Someone else said that what he had done was un-Islamic; as a Muslim, he was supposed to avoid coming into physical contact with dogs" (130). In a society characterized by violence and lawlessness,

Jeebleh's performance shows an ethical consideration of the Other. In contrast to the cultural expectation, he shows concern for the dog even when this is at the risk to his life. Jeebleh thought that the "fact that many people had missed out on love because of the continued strife, . . ., did not mean that one should stand by and do nothing or allow further cruelty to be meted out to animals or humans" (131). But focusing mainly on Jeebleh leaves out the fact that his action did not occur autonomously. It is equally important to attend to the fact that implicated in Jeebleh's action is the dog's ability to affect him in some ways. The dog's affect thus marks a form of interaction. It should be clear that she moved Jeebleh to act.

Can the Landscape Act?

The focus of the foregoing has been to show the way Farah's novels attend to relationality and the way these interactions undermine the possibility of human exceptionalism by pointing rather to forms of distributed agency. In what follows, I enlarge the scope of interrogation to include the land which is often the bone of contention during the war. By this I mean that the ensuing inquiry pays attention to how the humans and nonhumans alike interact with their geography in a wartime context.

Farah's *Crossbones* provides an important moment to consider for the above objective. This is a moment when Dajaal reflects on the three wars he has participated as an army officer:

Dajaal walks away, in truth because he wants to be alone with his thoughts for a few minutes. He is revisiting the three wars in which he served as an army officer, but what he pictures just now is not scenes of death in battle. The image in the

forefront of his mind is of cattle running amok, chased by unseen lions; of goats driven by powers invisible from a place where peace reigns to a scrubland where nothing, absolutely nothing, not even cacti grow—a scrubland so barren and so waterless that the goats feed on stones that they dig from the drought-dry land. Close by, within a short distance from where the cattle have now gathered to graze in the fenced off brushwood, there are mines buried in the ground everywhere, mines planted by the various factions fighting for control of the scrubland. Now and then the goats unearth the mines and they blow up, slaughtering the goats that unearth them, as well as stray cattle; now and again, the mines blow up in the faces of humans, too. (158)

Dajjal's reflection is rich with relational possibilities that merit my quoting the text in full. The "scrubland" attracts the interest of the factions fighting to control it. They, in turn, plant mines in the ground. But the mines cannot detonate themselves. The mines need the goats to "unearth" them before they can inflict death on the goats, cattle, and humans. There is no one center in this interactive cycle. Land, goats, cattle, humans, and mines interact to bring about effects. Animals and humans are all subjected to the impact of the mines and the distribution of agency among humans and nonhumans is clear from the passage.

One can also argue, following, Derrida's position in "The Animal That Therefore I am" that the interaction in the passage demonstrates a shared finitude between humans and nonhumans. Derrida's essay refutes the work of Levinas, Heidegger, and others who have sought to diminish the capacities of animals. But he privileges, like Bentham, the question of whether

animals can suffer. By so doing, Derrida seems to de-emphasize the question of rationality or language, focusing instead on what he calls the passion of the animal: “Mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion” (396). In fact, Farah’s work on the Somalian crises, be it the Somalia-Ethiopian War over the Ogaden in *Maps*, the pre-civil war problems in *Secrets*, or the American invasion and post-war tensions in *Links* and *Crossbones*, respectively, demonstrates the shared suffering Derrida highlights above. What the notion of a shared suffering helps us to see, in other words, is a larger ecological vision of war.

Also evident in the above passage is Dajjal’s attention to the different species of animals. Earlier, he remembers cattle, goats, and lions, and by the end, he returns to goats and cattle alongside humans. Dajjal avoids the violence which Derrida believes characterizes the use of “animal” to designate the multiplicity of species inhabiting the nonhuman world. For Derrida, “[t]he animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to another living creature” (392). He further adds that describing “the Animal in the general singular is perhaps one of the greatest, and most sympathetic idiocies . . . of those who call themselves human” (409).

In refusing to lump the different species into the category of animal or its plural, animals, Dajjal respects their heterogeneity. It is also significant that he does not make a clear-cut distinction between the suffering of humans and animals: “Now and then the goats unearth the mines and they blow up, slaughtering the goats that unearth them, as well as stray cattle; now and again, the mines blow up in the faces of humans, too” (158). Dajjal’s description suggests a shared vulnerability of the different creatures subjected to death. As the passage unfolds,

humans, goats, and cattle perish with no distinction. It is poignant, too, that “humans” come last in his classification. I read this move, and the entire passage, as a deconstruction of the exceptionalism that makes human the barometer for gauging the casualties or impacts of wars. By casting his reflection the way he did, Dajjal not only asks us to complicate our understanding of wars’ scenarios of violence and subjection; he also gestures towards the need to recognize a shared animality between humans and animals and to ultimately rethink our conception of human exceptionalism.

Derrida not only points to the violence of the animal designation. He suggests the label, *animot*, to capture the heterogeneity of the species: “*Ecce animot*. Neither species nor a gender nor an individual, it is an irreducible living multiplicity of mortals, and rather than a double clone or a portmanteau word, a sort of monstrous hybrid, a chimera waiting to be put to death by its Bellerophon” (409). Explaining Derrida’s choice of word, Mathew Calarco contends that “*animot* sounds like *animaux*, animals in the plural. Derrida wants us to hear in the term *animot* animals in their plural singularity rather than their generality (i.e., The Animal)” (144). In Derrida’s words, “[t]he confusion of all nonhuman living creatures within the general and common category of the animal is not simply a sin against rigorous thinking, vigilance, lucidity, or empirical authority; it is also a crime” (416). Dajjal seems to have Derrida’s essay in mind when he distinguishes the different animals and identifies their suffering without privileging the human. His reflection does not lump the animals together with terms like animal or beast. The specificity he attaches to them helps to indicate their difference and heterogeneity.

The land is not left out of Dajjal’s meditation on war-time vulnerabilities. The first half of the passage mentions scrubland, which the *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines as a “diverse

assortment of vegetation types sharing the common physical characteristic of dominance by shrubs. A shrub is defined as a woody plant not exceeding 5 metres (16.4 feet) in height if it has a single main stem, or 8 metres if it is multistemmed” (n.p.). The definition of scrubland is invoked to buttress the vitality it is imbued with. However, a look at the passage above shows that nothing is growing here. Rather, words like “barren,” “dry,” “drought,” and “waterless” are employed to emphasize the sterility of this space. Although the passage does not tell us this space is afflicted by war, the reference to the fact that the goats are chased from a peaceful place suggests that the scrubland, their destination, is a space affected by the strife. The sterility can therefore be read as a fallout of the war. In other words, the sterile land, a departure from the condition in the peaceful area, shows a landscape diminished by the war. The same diminishment characterizes the landscape portrayed in the second half of the passage. This time, the land is assaulted with mines and its agentic possibilities in relation to mortality are highlighted. Although the scrubland does not literally die like the humans and the different *animot* (apologies to Derrida) in the passage, its diminishment is an indicator of the mortality it shares with the vulnerable humans and animals portrayed in the passage.

Dajaal’s reflection also shows the toxicity that mines introduce to the landscape. Somalia is characterized by a semi-arid landscape, which means that only a portion of the land is fertile for plant growth. In this geographical economy, one can thus appreciate the impact of mines buried in the limited fertile area. The mines render the space unsuitable for both humans and animals. Hence, the waste that such developments exhibit is significant in a nomadic society like Somalia where pasturage is crucial. Nixon’s work on the lasting environmental consequences of mines in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* is instructive here:

The scale of landmine pollution remains forbidding: 100 million unexploded mines lie inches beneath our planet's skin. Each year they kill 24,000 civilians and maim many times that number. They kill and maim on behalf of wars that ended long ago; they kill and maim as if in afterthought, spreading social and environmental havoc. In neither space nor time can mine-terrorized communities draw a clear line separating war from peace. (222)

Although Nixon's work is not specific to Somalia, which he only mentions in passing, this passage helps us to understand the continuous risks that mines portend long after the conflicts have ended as well as their lasting agency. Whether in *Crossbones*, *Links*, or *Secrets* before them, we see that mines do not discriminate: they kill anyone who tramples on them regardless of affiliation in the war. They spare neither humans nor nonhumans.

In addition to mines, the land is charred by bombs and other weapons used in war. Throughout the novels, we see the land strafed with such weapons. Not only are the people vulnerable but the animals and land itself are threatened. Nonno, the grandfather-character, observes in *Secrets* that:

Ever present in our thoughts and preoccupations, the odor of death overwhelmed us. I wish I had a way of linking the pungent smell to the country's slow march towards collapse. Item: the bombing of cities, like Hargeisa, which was razed to the ground; its residents massacred, their corpses lying unburied where they fell, the survivors reduced to refugees. Item: Mogadiscio's current daily civilian casualties, their bodies hacked to death with machetes. Item: the environment. Item: Fidow and his trampled-on body. Deaths everywhere I looked. (108)

This excerpt gives a sense of the impact of the war on the landscape. Nonno points to the bombs and bodies lying around, which contribute to the pungent smell and endanger those living beings lucky enough to survive. But what motivates the inventory, the conspicuous list of “items”? The word “Item” usually denotes a tangible object. More importantly, it tends to be part of a collection, suggesting its dependence on the whole. Therefore, itemizing the human and nonhuman casualties of war in the passage dehierarchizes and places them in a set of relation. The item idea emphasizes the inventory’s shared materiality and subsequent ruin as a result of the crisis. It is clear that Nonno captures the dynamic interrelation in the war-ravaged spaces. Humans directly destroy their fellow humans and the more-than-human-world, which can also hurt humans, as in the case of Fidow who was killed by an elephant. The network of exchange in the above passage continues in Nonno’s subsequent remark: “What had been once a fertile land had now turned to fine dust, an earth as lifeless as a cut wire. Trees and forests devastated, wildlife decimated, we had a generation of farmers dead from starvation. Many former farmers were as of now, dependent on meager handouts from their immediate families or reliant on Oxfam and the like” (123).

This passage sets up a contrast between what existed and the status quo, a consequence of war. Therefore, it is predominantly written in the past tense: had, turned, devastated, decimated, etc. These past-tense markers suggest a shift from the fertile land, critical for farming, while a lifeless earth suggest that it once had life. The diction indicating vitality (“fertile” and “lifeless”) indicate the agentic possibilities of the land which once made feeding, dignity, and independence possible for humans and animals. But even in its lifeless phase, we can still decipher the action of a land that has brought about hunger and starvation to those it once nourished. Ultimately,

these passages from *Secrets* point to the way the different actors in the landscape—both human and nonhuman— affect each other in ways that show a complex network of relations and distributed agency.

Like those in *Crossbones* and *Secrets*, the landscapes in *Links* are clearly marked with destruction. As Farah discloses in an interview with Anthony Appiah, “My new novel, *Links*, is about the Somali civil war between 1992 and 1996, including the period when Admiral Howe was fighting it out with General Aideed. In the novel, I try to view the city as the principal character, and the people living in it or visiting it become secondary characters” (Appiah 58). To return to the novel, let us examine a few passages focusing on the land. In the narrator’s words:

Mogadiscio had known centuries of attrition: one army leaving death and destruction in its wake, only to be replaced by another and yet another, all equally destructive: the Arabs arrived and got some purchase on the peninsula, and after they pushed their commerce and along with it the Islamic faith, they were replaced by the Italians, then the Russians, and more recently the Americans, nervous, trigger-happy, shooting before they were shot at. The city became awash with guns, and the presence of the gun-crazy Americans escalated the conflict to greater heights. Would Mogadiscio ever know peace? Would the city’s inhabitants enjoy this commodity ever again? (14-15)

The long duration of the city’s suffering is traced not simply to the recent wars but to the series of occupations of the region. From the passage, we recognize that the city enabled Arab commercial activity and their propagation of the Islamic faith. We also see that the city later

attracted Italians, Russians, and the Americans. The use of words associated with business like—“purchase,” and “commodity”—with relation to the landscape shows that the city has been profitable to the humans who have interacted with it over time. Put differently, the success of these occupiers cannot be fully accounted for without considering the role of the city. However, it is clear that the humans have not reciprocated the city’s kindness. The continuing “attrition” wrought by the occupiers shows an exploitative relationship devoid of concern for the more-than-human world. These occupations, the narrator suggests, leave in their wake violence wrought not only by guns but by mines as well:

The driver jumped into the opportunity the silence had afforded him to change the subject, telling Jeebleh, “Our young warrior in the back stepped on an antipersonnel mine buried by StrongmanSouth’s militiamen in a corridor of the territory we control. In the opinion of the surgeon in Nairobi, he was lucky to get away with injuries only to his leg—he could ‘ve been blown sky high.” (*Links* 31)

The boy stepping on a mine buried in the ground evokes transcorporeality, Alaimo’s term for the way “in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human-world” (Alaimo 2). The fact that the boy’s disability is brought about by the agency of others—fellow humans who planted the mines, the mine itself, and the ground where it was planted—“underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from the environment” (Alaimo 2). And while the bombing and mine planting seems indiscriminate thus far, we also find targeted bombing in *Crossbones*:

Of late, however, roadside bombing has become the insurgents’ favorite mode of operation. They study the movements of their victims and plant custom-made,

pre-designed explosive devices accordingly, to pick off by remote control a government official traveling by car or an Ethiopian battalion decamping from one base to another, or journalists covering a momentous event. (337)

Furthermore, Bile “tells Malik about a report on the BBC Somali service, that a Tomahawk cruise missile launched from a U.S. submarine off the coast of Somalia has killed several innocent civilians in addition to their target, a killer and one of the desecrators of the Italian burial sites in Mogadiscio” (359). Whether it is StrongmanSouth or his Northern counterpart, the Americans or Russians, the point is that the different weapons affect the novel’s spaces in negative ways.

The interplay in these landscapes falls within the purview of what Karen Barad calls “agential realism.” For this materialist scholar, “[a]gency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. Agency cannot be designated as an attribute of “subjects” or “objects” (since they do not preexist as such)” (144). The process of becoming, which lies at the heart of Barad’s concept, is underlined by the way the different materialities in the Somalian environment are transformed as a consequence of the actions of others in wartime ecologies. Even the wars are triggered by the contested land. The civil war depicted in the novels under consideration involves a struggle over territory. Change is the only constant thing as humans and nonhumans interact in the Somalian ecology. Everything seems vulnerable even as the technological sophistication advances from simple weapons in the earlier novel, *Secrets* to the “custom-made, pre-designed explosive devices” detonated with remote controls in *Links*, and the cruise missile of *Crossbones*.

Commodification of Bodies and the Production of Agency

To be sure, one disturbing image in both *Links* and *Secrets* is the preponderance of scavengers in the landscape. As Af-Laawe, who arranges a ride for Jeebleh from the airport in *Links* explains, “Vultures, crows, and marabouts have been our constant companions these past few years,’ . . . ‘There’ve been so many corpses abandoned, unburied. You will see that crows are no longer afraid if you try to shoo them away” (65). The abandoned corpses found here resonate with those lying in *Secrets*. The fact that the scavengers are unafraid is remarkable because it shows they are accustomed to the spate of death in a city that the protagonist, Jeebleh, describes as “these heat-flattened, sunburned landscapes, . . . these shantytowns” (36). The city has lost the allure that made it attractive to the occupiers and has become a place to die. The presence of the scavengers denotes the more-than-human world and shows one way the ecosystem rejuvenates itself. By this, I mean the ability of the vultures to rid the landscape of decomposed bodies and the possibility of nourishment these bodies constitute for the scavengers. Af-Laawe succinctly describes it in a dialogue with Jeebleh: “‘A cynic I know says that thanks to the vultures, the marabouts, and the hawks, we have no fear of diseases spreading’” (*Links* 68).

Af-Laawe underscores a symbiotic relationship between the landscape and the scavengers, which enables them to rid the landscape of the bodies and diseases, while being nourished by dead bodily matter. Af Laawe’s business of burying the dead bodies is also a practice that can be read as an effort aimed at restoring the dignity of the dead and preventing diseases but this position is undercut when Jeebleh learns from Shanta, Bile’s sister, that Af Laawe’s business is a front for his dealing in body organs:

Initially established by Af-Laawe as an NGO to help with ferrying and burying the city's unclaimed dead, it's recently branched out into other nefarious activities. . . . What bothers me is what happens before the corpses are buried. Terrible things are done to the bodies between the time they are collected in Af-Laawe's van and the time they are taken to the cemetery. A detour is made to a safe house, where surgeons on retainer are on twenty-four-hour call. These surgeons remove the kidneys and hearts of the recently dead. Once these internal organs are tested and found to be in a good working order, they are flown to hospitals in the Middle East, where they are sold and transplanted. (208-09)

Of pertinence here is the manifestation of dead body matter as a commodity. Clearly, the waste here is transformed by the scavengers for whom it becomes food. Moreover, the waste mutates into commodities for export like the elephant bodies in *Secrets*. As commodity and matter, the organs embark on a transnational journey to places where their agency is critical for the animation of their recipients. To adapt Alaimo's transcorporeality for our purposes here, one can argue that the organs make possible a form of what I describe as transnational transcorporeality. While Alaimo's example of silica being transported from rocks to the human bodies they poison cited earlier shows an instance of transcorporeality within a defined national space, the movements across bodies is transnational in this instance. The interaction of bodies (the dead and the potentially living recipient), with the organ (which has taken a new life after its excision from the dead), and places (which includes where the deceased lived, the death space, the organ's transit points, and its final destination) confirm Alaimo's claim that "the bodies of all living creatures intra-act with place—with the perpetual flows of water, nutrients, toxicants and

other substances” (157-158). The transnational flow here also buttresses Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman’s claim in the introduction to their edited collection, *Material Feminisms*, that the “space-time of trans-corporeality is a site of both pleasure and danger— the pleasures of desire, surprise, and lively emergence, as well as the dangers of pain, toxicity, and death” (14). While the recipients of these organs are able to achieve their desires of having their lives reanimated, the unwilling donors occupy the opposite end of the spectrum, both as victims of a war and a mini-capitalist practice.

The demand for the organ is remarkable because it confirms the individual’s dependence on it for survival and functioning. In other words, the transported organ animates the recipient. To think of the recipient of the exported organ is to find instantiation of one of the ways we are connected with organs, nutrients, and toxics within us, and furthermore, to other places and things—means of transport of the organs to the beneficiary, the money that changed hands, and even the environment of war that allows the thriving of the macabre business. Such interaction certainly complicates any account of autonomous individual agency and encourages an appreciation of the roles and impact of a network of actors in this process.

Commodification of bodies and the network of agencies implicated in the process link Farah’s *Links* with *Secrets*. If human body parts constitute commodities in *Links*, exotic animal skins are the exchange objects in *Secrets*. We are introduced to Fidow, the animal catcher, early in the novel:

Fidow used to kill crocodiles, hippopotami, and rhinoceroses on commission, and doubled as a collector of wild honey. I also knew that he would sell all the items

found in the killed animals' second chambers, silver bracelet, gold earrings, watches, belt buckles and suchlike, which the crocodile's digestive systems could not handle, to my father. (58-59)

Fidow is implicated as a destroyer of *animot* in the novel and his choice of animals is remarkable for their exotic nature. What holds the materialities in the passage together, however, is their position as commodities functioning to satisfy Fidow's economic desires. Like the dead bodies commodified as organs in *Links*, the animals in their specificity, in addition to the jewelries and wild honey are joined together in their market value. Human, animal, and jewelry all derive impetus from their commodity value. If regulatory practices make it difficult or impossible for Fidow's business partners (the Chinese) to exploit the nonhumans in their native countries, a lawless Somalia provides a conducive atmosphere for such business. Fidow's business thrives until an incident when an elephant comes to his house and tramples him to death. I explore the elephant incident in detail here because it illustrates the issues undergirding this chapter namely the network of actors comprising of humans and nonhumans in a war context.

The novel depicts the elephant's sudden appearance in the town and how it advances to Fidow's residence:

Finally, those following him in stealthy curiosity report how the elephant comes to a decisive halt, right in front of a compound belonging to a villager named Fidow. He stands his ground for a long while, the elephant does, momentarily huge and yet so aware of his surroundings that at one point he steps aside to let

the women and children run past him and out of Fidow's compound. . . . It is at this point that Fidow comes out of his compound. He retreats, fast, only to reemerge, armed with a stout gun. The elephant goes berserk, and as quick as death, thrusts his tusk into Fidow, whom he throws to the side before trampling the corpse into a pulp. He steps over Fidow's dead body, the crowd, aghast, still watching him, and enters the room out of which Fidow emerged earlier. By the time, the villagers see him again, the elephant is carrying with him dozens of tusks. (93)

One way to interpret the elephant's action is to consider it as a revenge against Fidow's indiscriminate killing of its kin, as Alidou and Mazrui have suggested. The critics insist that the killing should not be seen as the irrational reaction of an animal, but as an instance where the elephant acts out the traumas of the violence inflicted on its species by Fidow (126). The passage lends itself to such a reading especially if we consider that the elephant did not hurt anyone else. We see that it is aware of its surroundings and avoids trampling on women and children. That the elephant left with the tusks found in Fidow's residence also reinforces Alidou and Mazrui's reading.

However, the revenge reading raises the question of anthropomorphism. As Huggan and Tiffin note, "[t]o speak of 'non-human agency', however, immediately invites the allegation of anthropomorphism, potentially imputing to non-humans a capacity for choice, decision-making and conscious planning often considered by human beings to be unique to themselves" (*Postcolonial Ecocriticism* 191). Huggan and Tiffin point to the problem of analyzing the

subjectivity of nonhuman others. But Jane Bennett thinks differently when she challenges the uniqueness of humans implicit in Huggan and Tiffin's submission. Writing in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, she suggests the "need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism--the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature--to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world" (xvi). For Bennett, anthropomorphism can actually bridge the gap between humans and nonhumans by showing that those traits we consider exclusive to humans are shared by the others as well (99). Applied to our context, it can be argued, following Bennett, that the elephant's action discloses that revenge is not a unique human attribute but a trait shared with nonhumans.

As seductive as the above position seems, I will not go as far as Alidou and Mazrui to suggest the intentionality of the elephant's act. It is perhaps more useful to focus on the agential capacities exhibited in this incident. Following the logic of material ecocriticism outlined earlier, interrogating the intentionality of the elephant is irrelevant. Rather, my focus is on the fact that the elephant's action kills Fidow, thereby halting his exploitation of the more-than-human world, and consequently producing environmental subjects in the process. Put differently, at least two claims can be made about the elephant's agency. The first is that it is responsible for the death of Fidow. Throughout the novel, Fidow is portrayed as a destroyer of animals. Fidow's death, therefore, marks the end of his enterprise.

Furthermore, restricting attention to the actions or effects produced by the elephant in the spirit of material ecocriticism shows that the elephant produces environmental subjects, those

whose thinking is structured by the environment.⁷⁶ As Kalamán drives to his grandfather's after the incident, he reflects on the import of the unusual event: "I surveyed the scene around us and saw nothing but the signs of successive droughts. I concluded that the elephant's anger had a lot to do with man's indifference to nature, humankind's exploitative greed" (98). Kalamán's newfound awareness is significant because before now he did not spare thought for his environment. His preoccupations were his family, the women in his life, the civil strife, and his business. But on this trip, he "surveyed" his surroundings, taking cognizance of the drought. But it is the conclusion of his reflection that is more poignant. He attributes the elephant's anger to human greed and "indifference" to the more-than-human world. From a focus on the people in his life and those ruining the country, Kalamán moves to a reflection that highlights the imbrication of the human and nonhuman world. For the first time, he indicts Fidow and others like him who take advantage of the environment. Kalamán's critical awareness also marks a departure from his earlier recollection of Fidow's hunting trip, as depicted earlier in the narrative:

It was all happening right before us: Fidow holding a short dagger, sheath unremoved, in his left hand. In his right hand he had a long spear. Years ago Fidow had earned the mellifluous nickname King of the River of Leopards. Now he moved royally toward the confused crocodile, with its diffuse stare on the

⁷⁶ According to Arun Agrawal, "the term environmental subjects to nominate those who thus care about the environment. More precisely, the environment constitutes for them a conceptual category that organizes some of their thinking: it is also a domain in conscious relation to which they perform some of their actions" (Durham: Duke UP, 2005), 164-65.

hunter's laurels for bravery, immense scars now healed, which he displayed as one did medals acquired in battle. (60)

Kalaman's recollection depicts Fidow's expedition without any trace of indignation or condemnation of the cruelty toward the animals. He even gives a musical spin to Fidow's nickname, which he complements by describing Fidow's movement towards his prey in royal terms. Kalaman's flashback suggests that he endorses Fidow's kingship or dominion over the river and his prey. In short, this endorsement sharply contrasts with the judgmental attitude he evinces in his reflection on greed and indifference towards the environment after Fidow's death. We conclude that as a result of the elephant's attack on Fidow, Kalaman has "come to think and act in new ways in relation to the environmental domain being governed" (Agrawal 7). As Caminero-Santagmelo understands it, "Kalaman seems to be moving toward a kind of awareness that decenters the human, [and] encourages humility" (70). We cannot separate his new found awareness from the performativity of the elephant's act. Put differently, it is the elephant's action that prods Kalaman's environmental thought in new ways.

But Kalaman is not unique in thinking of the environment after the elephant's incident; the radio broadcasts and commentaries following the incident indicate a broader response:

The world's wirelasses are broadcasting the news in as many languages as there are. To a radio, they are repeating the amazing feat, the wherefores and mystery of an elephant avenging his kin. They are speaking of an elephant stalking a man who had shot dead half the members of his immediate family, taken their tusks,

and hidden from his house. Not only, they say, has the elephant killed the hunter, but he has reclaimed their tusks. Some of the journalists speculate that the elephant means to give his massacred kin a decent burial. Many of the radio commentators sound triumphant. One of the local radio reporters boastfully predicts that from this day on we will have a green movement in Somalia, the first genuine one of its kind in the world. (93)

The first point to note is that the elephant's action is what structured the decision of the radio broadcasters and their editors to devote airtime to the incident. While some broadcasters focus on the actual killing itself, others provide an interpretation of the significance of the tusks carried away by the elephant. The final thought of one specific reporter is particularly germane: that the elephant's action will produce a green movement in Somalia. This view demonstrates the reporter's recognition of the elephant's effect not only on himself but on a sufficiently significant group of persons to constitute a movement. The fact that the radio, an ideological apparatus, is the instrument for communicating these environmental views suggests the potential of a larger audience to reflect on the event and the reporters' analyses. Without the radio, the information would be restricted to the witnesses and those they inform. And such hear-says do not have the authoritative validity and reach that radio broadcasts boast of. It is from this larger audience that the green movement will draw its audience. What is at stake here is the fact that regardless of the elephant's intentionality, its action evokes thoughts on the environment (Kalamani's; the reporters') and action (the dissemination of the information via the radio, and the potential green movement). To understand the incident more fully is to pay attention to Fidow's work as a

hunter, the elephant's attack, the public nature of the attack, and the amplification of the incident through the radio. Together, humans (Fidow and broadcasters), nonhuman life forms (surviving elephant and the dead ones represented by the tusks the elephant retrieves from Fidow's home), the public space of the attack, and the radio itself all work together to impact Kalamán and others who reflect on the incident. Simply put, living and nonliving things collaborate here.

Nevertheless, the foregoing raises a concern of the significance of the elephant's tale in the novel. In other words, why is the incident important for the larger narrative? Farah's insertion of the elephant's act within the narrative is consistent with his habit of pushing the boundaries of classical realism. Said Samatar, who takes the novel to task for what he calls, "certain concerns of context and credibility," claims that Farah gestures towards magical realism to rescue a collapsing novel (137).⁷⁷ For him, "[t]he elephant in *Secrets* that crosses 'international boundaries' to avenge himself on the poacher Fidow is every bit as fantastical as the 'Jews of Amsterdam' invading García Márquez's mythical South American forest republic" (141). Samatar's criticism about credibility raises the question of what constitutes realism or the real in a war scenario. I propose to read the elephant's scene differently. It seems that Farah's novel pushes the boundaries of the real to highlight the instabilities of war and to create a different world attentive to human-nonhuman relationship. If we expect the realist African novel to be true to believable scenes and episodes, Farah's novel problematizes the notion of real in an unstable, violent period of conflict by destabilizing our notion of reality. I will add that the insertion of the

⁷⁷ See Said Samatar's "Are There Secrets in Secrets?" for a full analysis of the concerns he raised about the novel.

elephant's narrative into the larger one is meant to warrant in the reader the kind of environmental thinking the novel's characters engage in after the incident. In other words, the elephant scene provides a counterpoint to the "real" exploitation of animals by Fidow and the other characters. In fact, a more pertinent question is why Farah chose to let the elephant kill Fidow at home in the full glare of people instead of during one of his hunting trips? It seems that Farah is concerned about the witnesses that would have been absent had Fidow been attacked in the bush.

Therefore, the novel suggests Farah was interested in public spectacle aimed to generate reflection among witnesses, those who heard about the incident on the radio, and ultimately his readers. As Kalamán and the broadcasters reflect on the significance of the elephant's action vis-a-vis Fidow's indiscriminate killing of exotic animals, the reader is invited to join these characters to reflect on their attitude to the environment as well. The other point to reiterate is that Farah's technique can be seen in the context of the weak state structure in the novel where different militia groups struggle to retain control in its chaotic world. In such a scenario, concern for nonhuman others is definitely relegated to the background. Caminero-Santagmelo provides insight into the novel's context when he writes that "corrupt government officials, businessmen, and clan warlords, taking advantage of growing anarchy and the disintegration of the nation cut the forests and sold the wood" to Middle East businesses "during the unrest of the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s" (59). Further, he adds that the period also witnessed "selling off prized pieces of protected animals to Asian middle men" (59). But it is to Farah's credit that he positions the elephant to enable the reader to consider the effects of the war on nonhumans. He

clearly seems invested in showing us the larger ecology and exploitative relationship characters like Fidow have towards the larger environment. As we read the characters' moral judgment over Fidow's actions and their reflection concerning the suffering of the elephant, we are invited to partake in the same moral conversation about our own relationship with the more-than human-world, perhaps, with a view towards constituting the green movement the local reporter mentioned.

In other words, there is an agentic angle to the storied matter that is Farah's narrative. As the reader interacts with the elephant's story and the responses to it, he/she is interpellated like the audience who are captivated by the act. Focusing on the vulnerability shared by Fidow and the elephant pushes the reader to reflect on their own attitudes to the environment like Kalaman did as he drove to Nonno's. In fact, the narrative blurs the distinction between the audience of the elephant's spectacle and the readers who are invited to reflect on the story. It seems that there is no better way to underscore the agency of things and our connection to them than the example of being captivated by a book to reflect one's attitude to the environment and perhaps take steps towards addressing it. Being captivated from the act of reading—which is an interaction of human being with a nonhuman, a book— bears witness to the claim of material ecocriticism: we are enmeshed with other beings and things and their actions shape us and vice versa.

Conclusion: National War, Planetary Implications

Throughout the chapter I focused on providing a reading of Farah's novel that respects the integrity of the human-nonhuman interactions at the heart of his style. To make a compelling argument, I adopted the principles of material ecocriticism namely the network of exchanges among human and nonhuman aspects of the ecology and how paying attention to these exchanges showcase the distribution of agency among human and nonhumans. Material ecocriticism as theorized by Stacy Alaimo, Serenella Iovino, Serpil Oppermann, among others, produce an alternative account of agency not grounded in humans and predicated on intentionality. They suggest that the network of exchanges is characterized by the different components affecting and shaping each other, thereby asking us to focus on effect or action produced in interpreting agency. My reading of Farah's novels indeed shows how people interact with the more-than-human world in ways that undermine human exceptionalism or superiority. The interaction of characters and their environments show how they shape each other and vice versa. My analysis departs from and extends the conventional assessment of humans as casualties of war which is the dominant mode of reading war literature in African literary scholarship.

Farah's oeuvre also stresses the transnational, rootless, exchanges of issues, people and ideas in ways that material ecocriticism has not paid sufficient attention till date. Perhaps this is because its focus has been Euro-American contexts and examples. Doing justice to the network of exchanges and interactions in Farah's novels also means to address the idea of globalization embedded in the narratives. While it is tempting to locate the Somalian crisis within the African

economy of wars, Farah's work buttresses Ursula Heise's claim that "the average daily life, in the context, of globality, is shaped by structures, processes, and products that originate elsewhere" (*Sense of Place* 54).

Heise argues in her book, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, that

ecologically oriented thinking has yet to come to terms with one of the central insights of current theories of globalization: namely, that the increasing connectedness of societies around the globe entails the emergence of new forms of culture that are no longer anchored in place, in a process that many theorists have referred to as "deterritorialization." (10)

For her, the central "challenge that deterritorialization poses for the environmental imagination, therefore, is to envision how ecologically based advocacy on behalf of the nonhuman world as well as on behalf of greater socioenvironmental justice might be formulated in terms that are premised no longer primarily on ties to local places but on ties to territories and systems that are understood to encompass the planet as a whole" (*Sense of Place* 10). In these passages, Heise insists that ecological work in an era of globalization needs to be attuned to broader networks and exchanges that transcends the local and conceives of the planet as whole. In other words, she insists on transcending the limits of parochial attachment to place and broadening our view of ecological thought to encompass the whole earth. Heise's work is positioned against the tendency in US environmentalism to celebrate what she calls "an excessive investment in the local" (*Sense of Place* 9-10). Some of the local strains in US environmentalism that she

challenges are “‘dwelling,’ ‘rehabitation,’ ‘bioregionalism,’ an ‘erotics of place,’ or a ‘land ethic’” (*Sense of Place* 10). While she is not dismissive of a certain appreciation of the local, Heise nevertheless warns that such might come in the way of an ecological thinking that recognizes that the local is embedded in larger structures that emanate elsewhere (*Sense of Place* 10).⁷⁸

I evoke Heise’s planetary musings because of their pertinence for understanding the transnational, transatlantic movements and exchanges in Farah’s novels. Although they are set in Somalia, one of Farah’s greatest achievement, I believe, lies in his ability to foreground the local without losing sight of the broader networks that Somalia is part of. Several countries including Italy, Yemen, Kenya, Ethiopia, the United States, and Russia, are all implicated in the happenings in the novels: some are implicated in Somalia’s colonial history, others are complicit in the sourcing of its weapons, others are involved in the humanitarian intervention, and some others in the exploitation of Somalia’s territorial waters in the absence of the state. Many of these countries are also implicated in the granting of asylum and refugee status to Somalians fleeing the conflict as well as the recruitment of some of these refugees for terrorist purposes. Taxiil, in *Crossbones*, for instance, was recruited from Minnesota, from where he travelled through Abu Dhabi and Kenya to Somalia to join Al Shabaab.

Indeed, Farah’s international gestures open a space for thinking the global dimensions of the Somalian crisis and the ecological implications for the planet as well. In the public display of

⁷⁸ Of course, central to Heise’s argument is Deleuze’s notion of deterritorialization, which she develops to formulate her notion of eco-cosmopolitanism

the American dead soldier in the Somalia of *Links*, we see an internationalization of the Somalian tragedy. As the media brought the gruesome image to the world, and as the world joined America in mourning the traumas of the violence, we see a manifestation of the international dimension of the Somalian problem. Outside the world of the novel, in September, 2013, the globe was shocked to learn of the bombing of the Westgate mall in Kenya. The tragedy which claimed the life of the African writer and scholar, Kofi Awoonor, was orchestrated by Al Shabaab from Somalia and of course, not only Kenyans were affected. Many foreigners, including Europeans and Americans, were among the casualties. I bring up these instances to buttress Ursula Heise's point that we need to rethink our sense of the local or place given the globalization of the world and Ulrich Beck's contention that the advances in modernity carry with it the development of a "risk society" (Beck 2). Beck formulated the theory of risk society in the 1980s as a counterpoint to the celebration of technological rationalism and advancements. Beck rejects the concept of postmodernism, preferring instead the idea of a "World risk society," which "opens public discourse and social science to the challenges of ecological crisis, . . . [that] are global, local, and personal at one and the same time" (5)

For Heise, "what is crucial for ecological awareness and environmental ethics is arguably not so much a sense of place as a sense of planet—a sense of how political, economic, technological, social, cultural, and ecological networks shape daily routines" (*Sense of Place* 55). The destruction wrought by war in Farah's novels is not containable within the nation-state. The novels suggest the residues from the weapons will find their way into the atmosphere where they can contribute to the warming of the globe. This is even more the case given the loss of

biodiversity that the destruction of trees and other components of the nonhuman world represents. The ecological fallout from the Somalian crisis can thus be included in the environmental dangers from the South that Wolfgang Sachs has articulated elsewhere: “environmental dangers are also building up in the South—dangers that threaten in the long run to engulf and to destabilize even the countries of the North” (60). Sach’s essay argues that “[a]fter all, the rainforests in the tropics act as the lungs of the global . . . climate,” and therefore, threats to these rainforests in the South is detrimental to the globe (60). Sach’s essay which calls for “ecological adjustment” in the wealthy countries to mitigate climate change is perceptive in thinking of the dangers from the Global South and the porosity of national boundaries.

Moreover, the violence perpetrated by/against the boys that dot Farah’s novels suggests an uncertain future including the possibility of violence focused not only inward but across the world also; we cannot discount the ecological consequences that such uncertain future portends as well especially if we consider the interconnections that Heise foregrounds in her work on ecocosmopolitanism. Frederic Jameson gestures towards the same point in “War and Representation,” where he writes that modern warfare “abolishes or suspends the distinction between the enemy’s landscape and our own, the latter no less fraught with peril than some unknown, hostile terrain” (1537). It is not only humans that are at risk in this uncertain future economy; the nonhuman world across the globe also share in this vulnerability.

Chapter Four

Southern Africa's Agricultural Economy and the Hauntings of Environmental Ambivalence

Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to foreground the interactions of humans and nonhumans in various African literary texts with a view to transcend the anthropocentrism dominating the study of the environment in African literary criticism. One outcome of the investigation is the palpable contradictions that characterize the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. For instance, while the sacred status conferred on certain animals and trees in certain African societies guarantees their sustainability, as seen in the discussion of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* in Chapter One, the killing of the "non-sacred" animals for meat and other purposes complicates a simple view of these communities as protective of the environment. Similarly, as seen in Chapter Two, while bombing oil installations can register the protest of the people and attract the attention of oil companies and a Nigerian government that is less concerned about its citizens and the environment, such actions contribute to the destruction of the ecologies they want to protect. Evident in these two examples is a clear case of environmental ambivalence which I explore more fully in this concluding chapter.

This chapter argues that Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*, and J.M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*, portray the contradictions characterizing the process of meeting the sometimes competing demands for agricultural progress and environmental sustainability. All three texts focus on agricultural development in Southern Africa. Lessing's and Head's novels are concerned with commercial agriculture in

Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and Botswana respectively, while Coetzee's novel focuses on a gardener and his subsistence farming in the midst of war in Apartheid South Africa. My reading captures the ambiguities that emerge as Lessing's Dick, Head's Gilbert, and Coetzee's Michael pursue their subsistence and commercial agricultural ventures, while trying to maintain an ecological balance.

While the few studies of Lessing's Dick have categorized him as a character who exhibits an ecological perspective, I argue that his feeling towards the natives and his participation in animal trade problematize his environmental ethic and illuminates a degree of ambivalence. My analysis of Head's novel explores the ambivalence surrounding the developmental projects in the novel. While Gilbert's developmental agenda portend solutions to the problems faced by the Golema Mmidi community, I pay attention to the environmental challenges posed by his commodification of animals and the violence done to the land in the process of constructing irrigation dams. Finally, I intervene in the debate concerning whether Michael K in Coetzee's novel is a political character or an ecological one. Rather than locate him in either camps, I show how he subscribes to and confounds the categories of the ecological and political. Together, my explorations in this chapter insists on the need for ecological considerations in postcolonial studies and in the analysis of development, especially in Africa.

Informing this chapter is Karen Thornber's notion of ecoambiguity, which she explains as the "complex, contradictory interactions between people and environments with a significant human presence (1). Further, Thornber explains that

Environmental ambiguity manifests in multiple, intertwined ways, including ambivalent attitudes toward nature; confusion about the actual condition of the nonhuman, often a consequence of ambiguous information; contradictory human behaviors toward ecosystems; and discrepancies among attitudes, conditions, and behaviors that lead to actively downplaying and acquiescing to nonhuman degradation, as well as to inadvertently harming the very environments one is attempting to protect. (6)

Thornber's work is useful here because it highlights the complexity of environmental thoughts and actions. She somewhat builds on Tim Morton's notion of ecological thought elaborated in Chapter Two. While Morton insists on the interconnections of beings and understands the ecological thought as that which upholds the interconnection and equality of beings, Thornber's work rightly point us to the contradictions that characterize the process of moving from ecological thought to action. Thornber's rich work includes copious examples from East Asian literature to illustrate her point about ecoambiguity. In her reading of Ishimure's *Sea of Suffering*, for instance, Thornber highlights the contradictions characterizing the relationship between humans and nonhumans. She indicates how "on the one hand, the narrator and most Minamata patients idealize symbiotic, mutually beneficial contacts between people and environments" (110). However, Thornber also points to the belief of these people that the environment exists for their benefit and for intergenerational transfer to their offspring (110). As this example indicates, a contradictory pull seems to exist between a conception of human relations with the nonhuman (the ideal), and the actual praxis which often lapses into instrumental or utilitarian purposes. Her

detailed study suggests we examine more closely the nuances of characters and narrators in relation to the environment. Although Thornber claims that “ecoambiguity appears more prevalent in literature from East Asia than in other textual corpuses (3), the phenomenon is prevalent in African literature as well.

Lessing’s Dick and Environmental Contradictions

Lessing’s first book, *Grass is Singing* captures the color bar experience in Rhodesia. The novel begins with a newspaper cutting detailing the murder of a white woman, Mary Turner, by her black servant, Moses. In the white imaginary of the novel and of the time, the blacks are violent and bestial, especially towards white women. As such, the murder and rape of a white woman by a black man come to be expected. In short, the novel foregrounds the racism against blacks and the fear that accompanies it. With Mary’s death, the police launch an investigation which reaches the expected conclusion: Black and violent Moses kills her white boss. Nevertheless, the rest of the novel complicates and undermines the ahistorical reading of the murder.

On one occasion when she is supervising the blacks on the farm, Mary whips a worker across the face for stopping work to get water. She becomes afraid of the black worker after this incident but he does not attack her as she envisages. When her house servants resign and nobody accepts the job due to Mary’s racist cruelty, Dick decides to train the same man as a houseboy. Initially, Mary is afraid of Moses due to their earlier encounter but she soon overcomes the fear

and resumes her maltreatment. She finds fault where there is none and exacts undue punishment on Moses. Despite Mary's cruelty, Moses tries to help her. He notices her ill health on one occasion and leads her to the room to rest. The forbidden touch of the black man causes anxiety for Mary.

The climax of the novel is reached just before Dick and Mary take a vacation towards the novel's end. Tony, the newly arrived British male who is to manage the farm in their absence sees Moses helping Mary get dressed. Tony is shocked at the intimacy and asks Moses to leave but the latter will not budge until Madam Mary gives the order. Mary disappoints Moses by approving Tony's order and the servant leaves. Mary is disturbed throughout this last night on the farm and comes out early in the morning to meet a waiting Moses. Moses murders her and waits to turn himself in. The police arrest him and as the narrator informs us, "[t]hrough what thoughts of regret, or pity, or perhaps even wounded human affection were compounded with the satisfaction of his completed revenge, it is impossible to say" (245).

Critics of this novel have focused mostly on its portrayal of the psychology of Apartheid and how it conditions Mary's character in the novel. Focusing on Mary Turner's revulsion at the blacks (men and breastfeeding women in particular), Edith Frampton writes that "Lessing's first novel is thus a complex exploration of multiple, interrelated and psychological boundaries, as these are anxiously enforced and progressively transgressed" (23). To establish her case, Frampton engages with Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject to read the horrors posed by the black body for Mary. Exploring this psychological point further, Roberta Rubenstein claims that although "Mary Turner's breakdown is an essentially private one, the novel as a whole provides

the corresponding societal context within which it takes place, through its dramatization of the dehumanization imposed on both races by the color bar” (31). Other critics have also pointed to the bush/environment as the corollary of the black body in instigating Mary’s breakdown. An example is Mary Whittaker who argues that “[t]he bush symbolizes, like Moses, the wild, uncultivated side of her nature, and she is frightened by it” (27). For Eve Berterlsen, “Lessing gives us her own version of ‘savage nature’ in a typically paradoxical natural and African context with its full repertoire of regression, savagery, and derangement, and alternating commendation and awe, revulsion, and fear” (650). Rubenstein and Whittaker confirm what, following Simon Estok, could be described as Mary’s “ecophobia,” that is an aversion toward and fear of the natural environment. Not surprisingly, some critics have pointed to the ambivalence of Lessing’s portrayal of the African and the Southern African environment. For Anias Mutekwa and Terrence Musanga, “the narrative, its omniscience and Lessing’s liberalism notwithstanding gives a voice and an identity to the whites while denying the same to the blacks who, together with the natural environment, are constructed as the threatening Other against which white civilization is ranged” (242).

For the most part, the above criticisms of the novel indicate that Mary has no connection to her ecology. She dislikes the people around her and the nonhuman aspects of her environment. In short, they frighten her. Or rather, her white colonialist subject position is predicated on the abjection of the blacks and the surrounding environment. Therefore, she is not a worthy subject for discussing ecoambiguity. Rather, I will shift my critical attention to the other characters, especially her husband, Dick, and the capitalist, Slatter. These characters have not been given

sufficient treatment due to the emphasis on the novel's protagonist in scholarship on the novel. In their analysis of Dick and Slatter, Mutekwa and Musanga point to a binary opposition between them. In their words, "[s]o in this text, environmentally exploitative discourses are represented by the 'big man' (Slatter), whereas the environmentally friendly ones are represented by the 'small man' (Turner) (244). They add that Charles Slatter's "ecological philosophy is in tandem with the dominant Western world view and so it is quintessentially anthropocentric and instrumentalist" (243). On the other hand, these critics observe that "the text portrays him [Dick] as a site and fault line on, and along which, the silenced discourses of nature and the colonized blacks can use to find expression and subvert the dominant, racially mediated discourses of Empire" (248).

As I will show presently, while the reading of Charlie seems to the point, Dick's relation to his environment is more complicated. In short, I will argue that he demonstrates the ecoambiguity that Thornber elaborates. Charlie's investment in a capitalist orientation engenders environmental degradation in the novel. He has overused his land for tobacco farming and leases his lands for mining. These anti-environmental activities damage the environment but there is no attention to this fact by Charlie. Instead, he cuts down the remaining trees and sells them as firewood. In all these, he wonders why Dick is tending his farm differently and hopes to buy the land sometime. When Mary, Dick's wife turns down Mrs Slatter's invitation to dinner, Charlie says,

"Leave her," said Charlie Slatter. "She'll come off her high horse. Got ideas into her head, that's what's wrong with her. She'll come to her senses. Not that she's

much loss. The pair of them need some sense shaken into them. Turner is in for trouble. He is so up in the air that he doesn't even burn fireguards! And he is planting trees. Trees! He is wasting money planting trees while he is in debt." (88-89)

There is an angry tone to Charlie's outburst but what is of utmost interest is his condemnation of Turner for planting trees, a non-cash crop. As seen in the discussion of Wangari Maathai's work in Chapter One, trees are important for the ecosystem's functioning. The ecological value of trees Maathai highlights is necessary for understanding Charlie Slatter's attitude to trees. Like the capitalists against whom Maathai contends in Kenya, Charlie Slatter does not care about the sustenance of animals, the soil, and water bodies. Instead his capitalist bent restricts his views to profit making. As such, we are not surprised to learn he does not fertilize the land. In fact, he sells his remaining trees as firewood for profitmaking.

Not only does he not plant trees, he seriously discourages Dick from doing so:

Mr Slatter's farm had hardly any trees on it. It was a monument to farming malpractice, with great gullies cutting through it, and acres of good dark earth gone dead from misuse. But he made the money, that was the thing. It enraged him to think it was so easy to make money, and that damned fool Dick Turner played the fool with trees. . . .He spent three hours trying to persuade Dick to plant Tobacco, instead of millies and little crops. He was very sarcastic about those "little crops," the beans and cotton and sunhemp that Dick liked. (89)

Since deforestation precipitates flooding and erosion, we are not surprised at the gullies on Charlie's farm but he is unperturbed by such developments. The passage underscores his capitalist assimilation as the narrator states: "But he made the money, that was the thing." Here the novel clearly names what is responsible for Charlie's inattention to his farm and shows the impact of unchecked capitalism on environmental sustainability. He pressures Dick to plant tobacco, a cash crop that is destructive to the environment and does not support the people's subsistence. When he fails, he covets Dick's farm, "[h]e needed Dick's farm badly, because the farms that bounded his on the other sides were taken up. He knew exactly what he wanted to do with it. He had a hundred acres of that wonderful dark soil; and it was not played out, because he had looked after it (200). It is interesting that Charlie is interested in "wonderful dark soil," brought about by Dick's care for his land as we will see shortly. Yet Charlie does not advance similar care practices for his farm; we also know the same unsustainable treatment will be extended to Dick's land if he acquires it.

It is this care for the land seen above that motivates the classification of Dick as a counterpoint to Charlie. Of course there is a merit to that labeling. He plants trees and performs other environmentally-friendly actions for which Charlie despises him. He is reluctant to plant tobacco because of the harsh effects on the soil. Charlie's offer to buy his failing farm should be mouth-watering but he is reluctant to leave because of his attachment to his plants which he knows by their name and tends carefully. As the narrator informs us, "[h]e knew every tree on it. This is no figure of speech: he knew the veld he lived from as the natives know it. His was not the sentimental love of the townsman. His senses had been sharpened to the noise of the wind,

the song of the birds, the feel of the soil, changes in weather—but they had been dulled to everything else” (142).

Dick’s land ethic seems consistent with Morton’s “ecological thought” discussed in Chapter Two. Dick’s attachment to his environment shows an ecological thought transcending the property value of nonhumans. His knowledge of “every tree” seems to confer individuality on them. In other words, Dick’s differentiation of the trees personifies them and confers a higher attribute than the property value Charlie would ordinarily ascribe. Similarly, he does not perceive his environment as inert. The narrative voice suggests he recognizes the vitality of the wind and birds by using words such as “noise” and “song.” The foregoing also explains his reluctance to sell the land despite his indebtedness; he only agrees to go nurse his depressed wife and work on their relationship while the land is under the care of Tony Marston. Note here too that the problem with his marriage partly stems from his disagreements with his wife over the farm. Mary, like Charlie, conceives of the land as property in the capitalist sense, in contrast to Dick’s different sense of it as seen in the ongoing discussion. Mary cannot reach a full appreciation of her environment and therefore cannot understand why Dick’s business decisions are undergirded by care for the land.

The moment that perhaps best explains the characterization of Dick as antithesis to Charlie is when the narrator provides a history of his farm:

Years before he bought the farm, some mining company had cut out every tree on the place, leaving nothing but coarse scrub and wastes of grass. The trees were growing up again, but over the whole there was nothing to be seen but stunted

second growth: short, ugly trees from mutilated trunks. There wasn't a good tree left on the farm. It wasn't much, planting a hundred acres of good trees that would grow into straight white-stemmed giants; but it was a small retribution; and this was his favorite place on the farm. When he was particularly worried, or had quarreled with Mary, or wanted to think clearly, he stood and looked at his trees; or strolled down the long aisles between light swaying branches that glittered with small polished leaves like coins. (95-6)

We learn from this passage that the farm's past life had been in the hands of miners. Notice the distinction between the descriptions of the past and present: fallen trees, with "coarse scrub and wastes of grass." This ugly sight of decay is transformed by Dick and the place becomes inhabited by "trees," and "long aisles between light swaying branches." We should note also the glittering of the branches which suggests attractiveness and allure. In fact, the romantic vision of this transformed space is buttressed by the fact that it is Dick's escape. For him, it is a place free of the troubles of his wife and a space for healing. Yet the humble Dick considers the transformation a "small retribution," indicating his acknowledgement of the atrocities committed against the earth by the mining company and his willingness to correct it.

However, Dick's feeling towards the natives and his participation in animal trade problematize his environmental ethic and illuminates a degree of ambivalence. He considers the blacks as savages, only useful for their instrumental value. In his reaction to Mary's exasperation with the servant, he notes: "'If you want to get work out of them you have to know how to manage them. You shouldn't expect too much. They are nothing but savages afterall'" (86).

Later in the novel, the narrator informs us that: “Like most South Africans, Dick did not like mission boys, they 'knew too much.' And in any case they should not be taught to read and write: they should be taught the dignity of labour and general usefulness to the white man” (191).

Dick’s position highlights the constructedness of the savages to justify European superiority as both Valentin Mudimbe and Simon Gikandi have shown in *The Invention of Africa*, and *Maps of Englishness*, respectively. The notion of savages would qualify as a form of what Mudimbe refers to as “Africanisms,” that is, those discourses constructed to undermine the African claim’s to humanity and which facilitates the project of imperialism (9). “Savages” would also fit into the alterity needed to construct Englishness in Gikandi’s work.

Similarly, the narrator’s phrase, “like most South Africans,” brings Dick closer to Charlie and the majority of whites who value blacks for their “usefulness.” There seems to be a parallel between Charlie’s instrumentalization of the land, as machine, and Dick’s view of the natives. Thus while Dick is attuned to his farm and seems to manage his servants better than his wife did, he is unable to transcend the racism against the natives prevalent in his time. His racism also ignores the status of the blacks as rightful owners of the land on which they now toil for the whites. This, in the end, shows the limits of his connection to his environment even though he seems more environmentally progressive than Charlie and Mary.

Dick’s ambivalence provides an opportunity to reconcile the tension between the projects of ecocriticism and postcolonialism. While Dick’s attitude to his land is salutary from an environmental perspective, his project is complicit in the subjugation of human Others. In fact, he is a beneficiary of the status quo and only extends kindness to the blacks because he considers

it important to their maximum functioning on his farm. As such, the enthusiasm of Mutekwa and Musanga seem exaggerated considering Dick's inability to extend ethics to the African workers. Dick's attitude underscores the need for an ecocriticism that is not at the expense of the oppression of human Others. The challenge therefore is to envisage a postcolonial ecocriticism that is attentive to both the exploitation of humans and nonhumans. In other words, this critical practice must abjure Morton's "one at a time sequencing" discussed in Chapter Two. Morton's term describes the privileging of specific creatures in environmental considerations. This approach is the bane of postcolonial studies which has retained the anthropocentrism of the colonialist discourse it sought to eviscerate. We can locate a similar problem in certain strands of ecological studies such as deep ecology where the emphasis is on the idea of nature with little concern for social inequalities. What is needed, in other words, is a postcolonial ecocriticism that is attentive to different forms of racism and anthropomorphism.

To return to Dick, his ambivalence towards his environment is further amplified in his sale of pigs and rabbits. Dick learns of the profitability of pigs and rabbits and decides to diversify his business to increase profit. Although these ventures fail like his crops, Dick does not think of the animals as Others. Like the other farmers, he commodifies them and can only imagine the profits to be made from their sale. By so doing, he discounts the suffering of the caged animals and their impending death when sold as he envisages. Therefore, Dick confirms Thornber's point that "Individuals and groups can have at once positive, negative, uncertain, or apathetic emotions about different species" (104). Dick's relationship to his land is very positive as critics have pointed out. He plants trees, fertilizes his land, and dotes on them. However, there

is no concern about the Others in the environment: the blacks who toil for him on “their land,” and the animals commodified for profit purposes.

So far, I have been able to extend the characterization of Dick in scholarship on the novel. While most of these studies focus, as expected, on Mary, the protagonist, my reading recuperates the other characters largely ignored in studies of Lessing’s novel. I also complicate the either/or classification of scholars like Mutekwa and Musanga for whom there is a clear-cut distinction between Charles and Dick. While there are differences between them, I hope to have shown the ambivalence characterizing Dick’s relation to his environment and how it complicates the either/or classification. Dick’s failings suggest the need for vigilance so that our celebration of environmental-friendly acts does not entail ignoring other forms of oppression. In the next section, I examine how a similar ambivalence occurs in the cooperative agricultural developments depicted in Bessie Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather*.

Bessie Head and the Ambivalence of Agricultural Botswana

When Rain Clouds Gather begins with a man hiding in a hut by the South African/Botswana border. He sneaks into Botswana in the middle of night and later we find out that he has just been released from a South African prison for having in his pocket a paper declaring his intention to bomb certain installations. Makhaya flees into Botswana because “he could not marry and have children in a country where black men were called ‘boy’ and ‘dog’ and ‘kaffir’” (10). In Botswana, he meets Gilbert, a British agricultural volunteer, who has come to

apply his agricultural expertise to the arid land of Botswana. Through Dinorego, a respectable old man in the town of Golema Mmidi, Makhaya teams up with Gilbert to advance the livelihood of the people. The name of this community is significant to the novel's theme. As the narrator tells us, "Golema Mmidi acquired its name from the occupation the villagers followed, which was crop growing. It was one of the very few areas in the country where people were permanently settled on the land" (16). Thus this place would be appropriate for Gilbert's developmental projects. Through a people-oriented agricultural co-operative similar to that in Head's other novel, *A Question of Power*, Makhaya, Gilbert, Paulina, and Mma-Millipede develop a more progressive society.

In fact, the novel seems to uphold a cosmopolitan ethic in its transcending of race and nation in the fellow feeling shared by the characters. More specifically, Gilbert transcends the wicked white man stereotype to the surprise of Makhaya who is used to oppression back in South Africa. Gilbert, on the other hand, is shocked by African oppression as evident in the way Matenga treats his subjects. It seems, in fact, that the novel's recommendation is voiced in Mma-Millipede's exhortation to Makhaya to see everyone as their brother: "You must never, never put anyone away from you as not being your brother" (126).

Critics of the novel have focused on what Huma Ibrahim describes as its "exilic consciousness." For Ibrahim, Head's "notion of exilic consciousness includes an escape from systems of oppression that give rise to desires which encompass the sphere of belonging not to your own but to another people. These anxieties and desires are very important because they are the foreground for the enactment of Head's narratives" (2). Ibrahim emphasizes Head's interest

in freedom and progress over ideas of ethnicity and race. As such, exile becomes the available avenue given the stifling conditions of Apartheid against which the novel is set. Exploring Huma's exilic consciousness further, Correen Brown argues that "[i]t is only within the new freedom offered by the exile experience that past traumas can be rejected and a new society fashioned in which cultural and racial diversity holds the key to harmony and cohesion" (64). For Rob Nixon, the violence and exclusions associated with the nation state as she knows them in South Africa are responsible for Head's advocacy of a "rural transnationalism" ("Rural transnationalism" 243-245).

However, critics have also lamented Head's preference for the foreign or colonial in her depiction of progress in Golema Mmidi. Jonathan Highfield and Caminero-Santagmelo clearly articulate this position. For Highfield, "while Head provides a detailed and empathetic portrayal of women's roles in the growing of foodstuffs and the creation of food, her discussion of agriculture in her adopted country underemphasizes the extent to which colonialism and imported agricultural practice affected the foodways in Southern Africa" (103). He adds that with her preference for imported European knowledge as represented by Gilbert in *When Rain*, "Head misses the importance of local knowledge in the advancement of agriculture and the alleviation of poverty in the region (112). He attributes the problem to "Head's own status as an outsider" (117). Similarly, Byron-Caminero-Santagmelo in his book, *Different Shades of Green*, contends that "Head's depiction of Gilbert reinforces many of the assumptions underpinning hegemonic colonial conservation" (90). He notes that while Gilbert's scientific expertise and knowledge of the local geography are key for progress in the community, "local people, and

culture are represented as ecologically ignorant and destructive. Their consciousness is determined by custom and by the local environment to such an extent that they cannot, on their own, foster the proper objectivity and perspective that will enable sustainable development (90).

While there are some merits to these critiques of the novel, it is obvious that they lapse into the either/or category which we complicated in the analysis of Dick in Lessing's novel. The either/or manifests itself in the indigenous/imported; tradition/modernity paradigms within which these critics couch their reading. But as I will show in the following pages, the novel problematizes such dichotomies. Rather it points us to a mode of coexistence not grounded in race, nation, or ethnicity. More importantly, the novel's portrayal of modern development is not without ambivalence. While progress is obvious from the implementation of Gilbert's strategies, the novel also enables a critique of its commodification of animals and the blasting of rocks to create dams for irrigation purposes. Similarly, the devastation brought about by drought in the novel complicates the relationship between humans and nonhumans. While the earth has sustained the people and livestock of this community via their agricultural practice, the drought reverses the benevolent relationship and showcases a harsh environmental response. This reversal creates a productive tension between Thornber's articulation of ecoambiguity, which seems to locate contradictions only in humans and Head's novel which suggests that contradiction is a trait shared by both humans and nonhuman aspects of the ecology. It is to these ambivalences that I now turn.

Contrary to Highfield's position, the modern agricultural practices encouraged by Gilbert complement rather than displace the indigenous cattle rearing and farming methods. It is

significant to remark that Gilbert did not encourage jettisoning entirely cattle rearing and other traditional practices, unlike the capitalist Charlie in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*. As seen in the previous section, Charlie encourages his neighbor, Dick, to shun food crops and focus only on cash crops like tobacco. To the contrary, Gilbert promotes a more sustainable cattle rearing practice. The insight of his position is clear from the impact of the drought on the community. As their cattle, the community's mainstay, die off, a certain gloom pervades the community. The inclusion of modern technology rather boosts the yields, while cash crops are meant to diversify the economy of the novel. As the drought experience indicates, agricultural diversification enriches the community's food sources while the modern borehole not only guarantees water for farming all year round but can also mitigate the impact of droughts when they occur. Clearly, the introduction of modern technology to enhance efficiency and productivity is laudable from the developmental perspective.

However, Gilbert's wind of change is not without its environmental ambivalence. As the narrator says of Gilbert's plan, "[t]he plan was to keep no more than two hundred cattle at a time on a ranch of seven thousand acres. If fewer beasts were kept, they could be better fed, and this would bring an increase in their cash value" (34). In other words, Gilbert is proposing the enclosure of land and the animals for control.⁷⁹ Although the beginning of this passage suggests Gilbert's concern for the well-being of the cattle, the monetary phrase, "increase in their cash value," at the end commodifies them. Further illuminating the monetary intent is the emphasis on

⁷⁹ For a discussion of enclosure as a colonial and imperial practice, see Robert Marzec, *An Ecological and Postcolonial Study of Literature: From Daniel Defoe to Salman Rushdie* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

producing “high grade beef” repeated throughout the novel. The choice of “high grade beef” to describe the commodity obscures the fact that it is an end-product of killing the animals. Yet Gilbert’s reason for controlled cattle rearing needs pondering:

Gilbert travelled all over the eastern watershed area and in dismay often came upon abandoned villages that had been turned into sandy wastelands through the grazing of the cattle and the goats. In some of these wastelands even the carrot-seed grass has completely died out, and the only type of vegetation that held the soil together was the thornbush. These observations convinced him that only large-scale fencing of the land and controlled grazing would save the parts that had not yet become completely eroded and uninhabitable for man and animals.

(32)

The wastelands in these passages are brought about not by human actions but by cattle grazing, which has made the land unsuitable for humans and nonhumans. As such, Gilbert’s commodification of the cattle is not a clear-cut case of human exploitation of animals. As the passage suggests, uncontrolled cattle rearing threatens the environment. However, Gilbert’s solution—commodification of animals—poses its own problem for animal rights. How do we resolve such conundrum? What is the right amount of cattle to keep? And does the harm being done to the land justify killing the cattle? Is it even possible for “development” to happen in a “right” manner? The novel stages this ambivalence without providing a clear-cut solution, perhaps because there is none.

To get a fuller sense of Gilbert's relation to his environment, it is worth noting that he treats a lizard with respect. According to Maria, who later married him in the novel, "[f]or some time now he has kept a lizard in the house whom he treats as a person and which is now accustomed to being spoken to like a person. Its name is Skin" (85). Gilbert keeps a lizard at home, grants it personhood, but he cannot extend same courtesy to the cows because he considers them superfluous. In fact, he is happy about the drought which he sees as an opportunity to cash in on the villagers' fears to implement his policies.

Moreover, the construction of dams in the novel also evokes ambivalence. The narrator explains that "They were to be pits, blasted out with dynamite, to a depth of seven feet and a width of fifteen feet by fifteen feet. Their capacity would be eight thousand gallons of storm water. . . . Again the materials were simple and the costs kept low" (132-133). We also learn that Makhaya blasted the rocks: "Golema Mmidi rocked to the blast of dynamite charges, and huge quantities of earth and rock were hurled high in the air. Makhaya, who buried and set off the charges, was often near enough to be splattered by rock and earth" (133). Although we see the value of alternative water sources given the extreme drought in the novel, the dam process suggests violence to the environment. The imagery of "earth and rock" in the air from "blasting" has a cruel or violent tinge.

In the absence of narrative commentary on the ecological aftermath of the blasting, the reader is left to imagine the impact of these activities on the environment and to read them as instances of Nixon's slow violence which happens gradually and out of sight. Karen Thornber, perhaps, has such open-ended scenario in mind when she writes that "unlike many apocalyptic

writings that describe in great detail the future that awaits, not to mention those . . . that actually are set in such a future, the texts examined in this section [of her book] remain notably ambiguous about the conditions that follow disaster” (204). The narrative ambiguity Thornber is speaking of seems relevant to understanding the silence of Head’s novel on the aftermath of slaughtering cows and using dynamites to blast rocks. While we see benefits—cash from sale of beef and all year round water—for the humans, the narrative leaves upon the question of the ecological impacts of these actions.

While Thornber’s narrative focuses on human attitudes towards the environment, Head’s narrative complicates such view by positing the ambivalence of nature or the more-than-human world. As agriculturalists, the Golema Mmidi community depended on the land to sustain them and it did just that. However, the drought encountered towards the end of the novel contradicts nature’s care and support. As the drought mounts, the land becomes sterile and therefore cannot support the needs of the people and the cattle depending on it for grazing. A sense of the destruction caused by the drought is seen when Makhaya, Gilbert, and Paulina drive to the outpost in search of Paulina’s son tending the cattle there:

They were always after something, these lovely birds, and she [Paulina] had always kept corn seed in the pocket of her skirt to scatter along the pathway. Now, the vultures, full and gorged, adorned the bare trees, and beneath their resting places lay the white, picked bones of the dead cattle. Those in the trees stared arrogantly at the passing vehicle, and those on the ground merely waddled

out of the way. They were the kings of the bush and would remain so throughout this long year of no rain and no crops. (157)

The novel contrasts Paulina's previous visits to the outpost with the present. In the past, "lovely birds" don her paths and she drops corn seed on her way. The presence of vultures, similar to those in the Somalia landscapes of the previous chapter, foreshadows the dead cattle and the decomposing corpse of Paulina's son. Even the tree described as "bare" is not left out of the devastation. As they drive on, the land has become dry and littered with more carcasses, including Paulina's cattle:

Long before they reached Paulina's cattle post they saw the vultures circling above it in the sky. This marked it out right away as one of the death points. Once they drew close, they could see that not a living thing moved on the ground. All those eighty cattle lay scattered about, quite still, quite dead. It was like a final statement of all the terrible story of the bush. (157)

Ultimately, they find the skeleton of Paulina's son who died from what might be tuberculosis. The powerful description of the losses brought about by the drought shifts our perspective away from the environment as sustaining the people of Golema Mmidi. Here, it brings about destruction suggesting that ecoambiguity needs to account for the contradictions of nature as well. This example expands Thornber's claim that ecoambiguous "texts reveal attitudes toward the nonhuman as inconsistent both within and among individuals and groups" (104). The inconsistency of the elements suggests a rewriting of this passage to include the possibility that

the ambivalence can actually occur outside humans. In all, however, Head's novel positions itself as an ecoambiguous text by dismantling the insider/outsider dichotomy, by highlighting the complexity of Gilbert's vision of progress, and showing that nonhuman nature can offer contradictory responses to humans as well. On one hand, it nourishes them; on the other hand, it is destructive as the above instance suggests.

My discussion of Head's novel raises at least two central concerns, namely the ecological cost of development as well as question of nonhuman agency explored in the previous chapter. Head's novel is primarily concerned with postcolonial agricultural development; in it, we see a local community work with Gilbert to alleviate poverty and join a global modern community. Nevertheless, the developmental projects raise unanswered questions about their ecological impacts. Significantly, the novel does not directly speak to the ecological implications of the projects but the ambiguities leave open the space for raising them. If the conclusion from my reading of Lessing's novel is that ecocriticism must remain vigilant to ensure human discrimination is not sacrificed for the wellbeing of nonhumans, one significant lesson from Head's narrative is that our human developmental agenda needs to consider the rights and obligations to nonhumans. In other words, sustainable development cannot be at the expense of nonhuman Others who deserve to live as well. As the reader encounters the violent-like blasting of the earth for irrigation purposes, one is reminded of Nixon's salient observation that we pay attention to the violence that happens gradually and out of sight. To heed Nixon's call is not to pay attention only to the immediate gains of development—read here as all-year round water for

irrigation purposes. Rather, developmental gains need to be evaluated in relation to the larger environmental consequences that are slow in the making.

Yet, we can catch glimpses of nonhuman agency in the developmental story of *When Rain Clouds Gather*. It is important to recognize that most of the actions of the humans in the novel are direct responses to nature. For instance, Gilbert's project to control grazing is a consequence of overgrazing by the cattle. The dam project is also a response to drought. These two examples tell a story of nature's vitality and underscore the fact that human actions cannot be divorced from the effects of their environment. Read in this way, we can account for the way nature influences culture and vice versa, rethink human exceptionalism, and encourage humility in relation to others with whom we share the environment.

Michael's Ambiguity in Coetzee's *Life and Times*

Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* follows its protagonist, Michael, as he ekes out a vagrant existence in a wartime Apartheid context. More precisely, displacement and confinement are few of the problems confronting K and the other characters in the novel. K is born with disfigurement around his mouth and becomes a subject of scorn among his coevals. He is sent to a school for disabled kids until he later goes to live with his mother in a household where she serves as maid for an aristocratic family. She fell ill during the war and decides to leave the city for the countryside where she was born. K tries to obtain a pass to allow them leave the city but when this takes longer than he expected, he decides to leave without it. He is sent back on the

first attempt but he remains undeterred. The second time, he avoids the major roads and ends up in Stellenbosch where his mother dies in a hospital. Without K's consent, the hospital cremates Anna K and hands her remains to him. From then, K becomes an itinerant and lives in bushes, by the roadside, and in the mountains. He is arrested and thrown into confinement for social rejects like him but he soon finds himself on the street again as he refuses to be locked in. K cherishes his freedom and takes to gardening. In Prince Albert, for instance, he cultivates the Visagies' land and feels contented with the produce of his labor.

Critics of the novel can be broadly categorized into two, namely the political, as well as the ecological group. In the first camp are those who critique the novel for being escapist and not addressing headlong the tense social-political circumstances of apartheid South Africa in the 1980s. A well-cited proponent of this view is Nadine Gordimer who remarks that Michael's position outside history obliterates his agency and possibility of fighting the system that keeps his people down. However, others hold an opposing view. Derek Attridge, for instance, asserts that "K's relation to the earth and to cultivation implies a resistance to modernity's drive to exploit natural resources" (75). For Kelly Hewson, "Michael K's retreat from History to cultivate his own garden can thus be understood as a creative, radical attempt to maintain innocence and to assert his own history (151).

Dominating the ecological camp are those thinkers who see Michael's gardening as a recuperation of ecological thought in the novel. If Gordimer decries the seeming lack of resistance in the novel, she celebrates K's closeness to the land: "Under the noise of the cicadas, with delicacy and sureness, Coetzee has been drawing upon the strength of the earth to keep his

deceptively passive protagonist and the passionate vitality of the book alive” (143). Gordimer concludes that “[b]eyond all creeds and moralities, this work of art asserts, there is only one: to keep the earth alive, and only one salvation, the survival that comes from her” (144). Gordimer’s position has been corroborated by others including Michael Marais who is of the view that “K becomes similar to the environment. His behavior is mimetic in the sense that he makes himself like it. Indeed, the fact that he does not disturb the land . . . together with his aversion to fences . . . suggests his recognition that it exists for itself rather than for him” (238). While these views skirt around the idea of the ecological, Derek Wright specifically argues that “Michael K is, in fact, less a man than a spirit of ecological endurance” (“Black Earth” 439). Wright adds that “what Coetzee seems to have constructed—if only half-seriously—in the figure of Michael K is a hero for the white Ecological Eighties” (“Black Earth” 440).

Anthony Vital thinks differently, arguing instead that we need to look beyond Michael and the novel to find an inspiring ecological character. Vital bases his view on the fact that “[c]rucial to ecological discourse is the idea of relation” (92), but “[i]n its realist dimension, the narrative inscribes nature using a standard romantic trope, marking it with the sign of distance from the social (96). Vital dismisses Michael’s ecological credential because the latter refuses to build sustainable social relationships. Vital rather proposes that a social ecological perspective implicated in history is fundamental to a serious African ecological practice.

I highlight the contours of the arguments on Coetzee’s novel to show how they reinforce the either/or classification being critiqued in this chapter. Wright and Gordimer are correct concerning the ecological value of Michael’s position but their celebration of this vision ignores

the ambivalence that Vital has pointed out and Michael's attitude towards animals. On the other hand, the contradictions in Michael are inadequate to dismiss the ecological insights he generates in the novel as Vital tends to. My intervention is thus aimed at bridging the dichotomy in critical studies of the text and to argue for seeing Michael as an ecoambiguous character following Thornber's work.

On arrival at St Albert, Michael sets out to cultivate the garden. He fertilizes the earth with his mother's ashes and plants the pumpkin seeds on him:

This was the beginning of his life as a cultivator. . . . In the space of a week he cleared the land near the dam and restored the system of furrows that irrigated it. Then he planted a small patch of pumpkins and a small patch of mealies; and some distance away on the river bank, where he would have to carry water to it, he planted his bean, so that if it grew it could climb into the thortrees. (59)

Michael's choice negates the perception of him as an idiot due to a disfiguration around his mouth and consequent reticence. He demonstrates in this passage a knowledge of plant needs and techniques. He diversifies his crops and spaces them to allow for growth. Even the "small" quantity of the crops he planted suggests a need for prudence to avoid wastage. Overall he puts to use land that has been neglected as a consequence of war. Thus while other spaces are being destroyed by the war, Michael, like Dick in Lessing's novel, transforms this particular land into a productive space.

Even his use of water is guided by the same principle of prudence:

He pumped only as much as his garden needed, allowing the level in the dam to drop to a few inches and watching without emotion as the marsh dried up, the mud caked, the grass withered, the frogs turned on their backs and died. He did not know how underground waters replenished themselves but knew it was bad to be prodigal. (60)

Of pertinence is his emphasis on drawing only what he needed and recognition of the problems of being “prodigal.” In these passages, Michael comes across as a character aware of wastage around him and putting in conscious efforts to take only his needs from the land. We get a reason for his action later in the camp when he engages in a dialogue with Noel:

This garden you had, said Noel: “what did you grow there?”

“It was a vegetable garden.”

“Who were these vegetables for? Who did you give them to?”

“They weren’t mine. They came from the earth.”

“I asked, who did you give them to?”

“The soldiers took them.”

“Did you mind it that the soldiers took your vegetables?”

He shrugged. “What grows is for all of us. We are all the children of the earth.”

(139)

It is remarkable that Michael eschews the individualistic “I” in the passage. Even when “mine” was used, it is negatively deployed to distance himself from ownership of the vegetables even

when he planted them. Rather, he emphasizes the earth's ownership of the produce which "grows for all of us," who are "children of the earth." This passage in fact marks my departure from the critical views of Vital who writes that Michael's "imagining of a familiar relation with earth and crop do reveal sentimental attachments, but such affection, though, it forms in the novel the ground for reading K as gentle, caring, non-dominating, does need to be distinguished from a sense of ecological relation" (92-93). It seems to me that Michael positions himself in a double set of relations here. The first is to the earth which he relates to as child, and to others, captured in "We are all the children of the earth." The collective markers, "we," "us," and "all" point to a relation that expansively includes both humans and nonhumans. K adumbrates human subjection to the earth as he underscores the earth's resources as a commonwealth. Here K displaces the notion of the earth's resources for a select few practiced in Apartheid South Africa and reiterates redistribution of resources to benefit all.

Significantly, this passage is one of the few moments Michael speaks or meaningfully interacts with others. Writing on Michael's reticence, Gillian Dooley argues that, "Coetzee uses K as a figure of a nontranscendent, disruptive silence in order to stage the complexity of the relationship of ethical responsibility to political action" (316). Dooley's essay draws out the political and ethical implications of K's silence. I would add that the silence has ecological implications as well. The few times in the novel where K departs from his silence have connections to the ecology. Michael's fully realized speech therefore speaks to the centrality of the earth for him. K speaks again towards the novel's end: "It excited him, he found, to say, recklessly, *the truth, the truth about me. 'I am a gardener,'* he said again, aloud" (182). Here too,

he is excited to be affiliated with the land and expresses this sentiment loudly in the same way he articulates clearly an earthly philosophy in the passage above. Michael's identity seems synonymous with care for the earth. He is because he gardens. These two moments are part of the few instances in which he is able to express himself unlike in most cases when we learn about him from other characters or from his thoughts. That both moments of direct speech are about the land/earth speaks volume about Michael's ecological concern.

Michael maintains his relation to the earth even after harvesting his plants. For instance, he notes that "All that remains is to live here quietly for the rest of my life, eating the food that my own labour has made the earth to yield. All that remains is to be a tender of the soil" (113). I can see how the early part of the passage can signal a detachment from the social as Vital argues but this has to be seen in the larger context of the novel. One important point is that his disfiguration made him amenable to derision while growing up. Another point is that given the cooptive striated space outside the garden where people are conscripted to fight in wars or thrown in prison or the camp, his nomadic existence outside what Deleuze and Guattari would describe as the striated space of the state and its war machine can be read as a form of resistance, as Attridge among others have suggested.⁸⁰ By not relating with people in the camp, Michael

⁸⁰ For Deleuze and Guattari, a striated space is an ordered space, regulated by the State to make it amenable to control and regulation. It "is that which intertwines fixed and variable elements, produces an order and succession of distinct forms, and organizes horizontal melodic lines and vertical harmonic planes" (478). As Grant Hamilton puts it, "striated space is descriptive of the way in which the State seeks to code and decode space in order to render it knowable. It is the way in which the State marks not only the earth but also the bodies of the people who populate it" (74). A smooth or nomadic space, on the other hand, is such that is outside the confines of regulated space. It is a dynamic space devoid of the strictures of striated space.

maintains his need for freedom and therefore seizes the earliest opportunity to escape. Michael's alienation from the Doctor who tries to befriend him can also be interpreted as important for escaping confines. In tending the soil, he keeps alive what is being destroyed in the war being waged in the novel. Michael's imaginative wandering at the end of the novel is also important for highlighting his ecological vision.

Reading this ending, Dooley has pointed to its hopefulness. Dooley's reading is anchored on the possibility of Michael meeting "whoever it was who disregarded the curfew and came when it suited him to sleep in this smelly corner" (*Life and Times* 183), with whom he will cultivate many seeds. The idea of the man and seeds suggests this hopeful ending is ecological as well. Michael hopes for a man that will take him as he is, engendering a genuine human relation, while retaining the vision of expanding his connection to the land. He envisages planting more seeds. This vision is buttressed when he imagines an answer to his future partner's inquiry concerning water: "he, Michael K, would produce a teaspoon from his pocket, a teaspoon and a long roll of string. . . . he would lower it down the shaft deep into the earth, and when he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the spoon; and in that way, he would say, one can live" (183-84). With a partner, plenty of seeds to plant, and water from the earth, Michael K's continuous interaction with his fellow humans and his environment seems assured.

Michael's imaginative wandering also reconfigures a new form of politics based on ecology. In foregrounding the earth and its resources, alongside a new set of relation with a fellow human without care for color or national origin, Michael projects an alternative vision different from the oppressive, destructive Apartheid system he is escaping from. Readers should

recall that Michael flees from confinement and slavery in the hands of the young Visagie and the camp authorities throughout the novel. But at the novel's end, he conceives of a new relation with an Other, a relationship devoid of hierarchy. Note also that this Other is someone who disregards the curfew, that is an individual resistant to the strictures of the state. He also includes the earth in this new system by recognizing human dependence on the land and the latter's generative abilities. Michael's ecological vision can therefore be read as a nonviolent form of resistance without the ecological baggage accompanying violent resistance which the war permeating the novel evokes. In fact, his approach to resistance avoids the ecological problems posed by violence as seen in the discussion of Somalia in the previous chapter and the analysis of violent resistance in the Niger-Delta in Chapter Two.

Despite Michael's ecological credentials that I have shown, his attitude towards animals in the novel buttresses Thornber's claim about how a person can have "once positive, negative, uncertain, or apathetic emotions about different species" (103). While he respects the land and sees himself and all of us as children of the earth, his relationship towards animals is less consistent. First he kills a goat and regrets his decision, and refuses to eat it: "After two days the hot and cold fits ended; after another day he began to recover. The goat in the pantry was stinking. The lesson, if there was a lesson, if there were lessons embedded in events, seemed to be not to kill such large animals" (57). Michael's regret is perceptive; he categorizes animals into large and small. While he avoids "large animals," he "shows dexterity in dispatching (and cooking) lizards and birds, grasshoppers and termites" (Vital 97). Michael positions himself as an opposite of Gilbert in Head's novel who sees no problem in killing cows to produce "high-

grade beef,” but dotes on a lizard. Unlike Gilbert, Michael has no problem eating a lizard or any other small animal.

Therefore Michael complicates any simple categorization. He is not simply the ecological character that Wright and other scholars impute: [d]esiring only what his best for the earth, he builds his lairs and hovels out of biodegradable material blending with and returning to the earth” (Wright “Black Earth” 439). Michael may love the land but he loves eating his “small” animals too. If the ecological thought as Morton reminds us consists of interconnection and equality of all beings, we can conclude that K undermines his ecological vision when he classifies the animals into large and small and excludes the larger animals from food possibilities. K raises the question as to the rationale for eating smaller animals. The point I am drawing out here is the ambiguity surrounding K’s treatment of animals. Does his exclusion of larger animals from consumption not introduce a dichotomy, which the idea of the ecological thought tends to discourage? How does this dichotomy affect K’s ecological vision? And is it even possible to conceive of an environmental ethic within the context of war K lives in? These are questions that K raises without providing final answers.

In fact, Teresa Dovey is correct when she reads Michael as “a figure who can represent the possibility of eluding the meanings inherent in any system” (24). As the foregoing demonstrates he eludes not only the efforts of the institutions in the novel to mark him but also those of critics who have tried to pigeonhole him into ecological/non-ecological, and political/apolitical. He fits and confounds these categories at the same time, hence my argument that we see him as an ecoambiguous character. That way, we accommodate his complexities and

motivations while leaving open the possibility of celebrating (and perhaps emulating) his ecological insights. I believe we can say the same for Dick and Gilbert in Lessing's and Head's novels as well.

Coda: By Way of Conclusion

Clearly, the foregoing, in addition to the previous chapters, demonstrates the need to look out for the "environmental" in our conceptualizations of agency, resistance, and development. Together, this dissertation addresses the gap in African literary criticism which has not sufficiently treated environmental perspectives. I foreground the interactions of humans and nonhumans in narratives dealing with ecological crisis such as the Niger-Delta oil pollution and the ecological fallout of wars in Somalia. In the second chapter, for example, I draw on Tim Morton's ecological thought which places humans and nonhumans in a dehierarchized set of relations to undercut the privileging of humans and emphasize their shared vulnerability as a result of oil exploration in the Niger-Delta. Emphasizing the shared vulnerability enables a rethinking of a human-based conceptualization of oppression and postcolonial resistance.

Given the palpable realities of global warming and climate change, postcolonial studies need to take seriously the ecological effects of not only colonialism and imperialism but of postcolonial resistance as well. As seen in the Niger-Delta chapter, certain forms of postcolonial resistance retain elements of environmental degradation they purport to fight. The ecocritical challenge therefore is to envisage "green" resistance strategies that are effective and also take the

environment into serious consideration. This green postcolonial studies marks a departure from the status quo mainly invested in questions concerning humans. As I hope to have shown in Chapter One where I examined the work of Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, an ecological perspective to postcolonialism, one that is concerned with both humans and nonhumans, without exclusion is possible and in fact laudable.

Inspired by work done in material ecocriticism, which thinks of agency more in terms of effects produced, I ask that we complicate the dominant notion of agency based on intentionality by paying attention to the capacity of nonhumans to produce effects on humans and the larger environment. In Chapter Three where I considered the landmines used as weaponry in Farah's *Crossbones*, among other aspects of his war narratives, I suggest that it is not enough to consider the agency of the human planters. I argue that we need to consider the agentic abilities of the land on which it is planted and the mine itself which takes on its own life despite the intention of the planters. Ultimately, the project seeks to decenter humans and emphasize transactional exchanges with Others with whom we share the environment. However, it will be misleading to conceive of a straightforward ecological relation with the Others. As this concluding chapter suggests, ambivalence often characterizes human-nonhuman relations. As readers and critics, it behooves us to be attentive to those contradictions that debunk the myth of a harmonious relationship with the environment while being mindful of complacency in the face of ecological responsibility in our practices—be it as readers and citizens.

Although this project is about African ecologies as portrayed in its literature, all the chapters implicate Africa's place in the world and the compression of spaces in an era of

globalization. In other words, the explorations in this project show not only the connection of humans and nonhumans but also the interconnections of spaces. A prominent feature of the narratives considered in the dissertation is the way events in African spaces are shaped by other spaces and vice versa. In the discussion of Fanon's work in Chapter One, for example, the analysis reveals how the raw materials taken from the colonies bring about ecological damages in those spaces while enriching the metropole. The focus on notions of environmental racism in Spivak's work in the same chapter also reveals the importation of environmental risks to African societies from Europe. We can say the same for the Niger-Delta oil economy in Chapter Two and the connections to the headquarters of the multinational companies in Euro-America and the spaces where the oil is transported to beyond the continent.

The transatlantic transactions once again blur boundaries and reiterate global flows alongside the unequal exchange that is a feature of globalization. The transactions undermine the notion of here vs there by reinforcing the intermingling of environments and call for vigilance in our work as teachers, activists, and citizens. As teachers especially in the Western academy, we ought to orient our pedagogical practices to account for complicities in these environmental issues raised in the narratives. It is not enough to practice close reading of these texts or draw awareness to the problems they address. Students and their professors ought to reflect on the effects of say, their energy use on the Delta or that of their fashion choices on wildlife in Africa and elsewhere. Our work as activists and citizens need to be attentive to these connections also if our work is to be meaningful. The final word here is vigilance! Vigilance that our solutions do

not exacerbate the problems and vigilance so that we see the complicities in our indifference as well as in our innocent gestures.

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