JELLiC

Journal of English Language, Literature, and Culture

ISSN: **2304-6120 (Print)** / ISSN **2304-6163 (E-Version)**

Volume 7, No. 01

March 2024

International Peer Reviewed Journal of the *Cameroon English Language and Literature Association*

www.cellacameroon.org

JELLiC: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Culture

ISSN: 2304-6120 (Print) / ISSN 2304-6163 (E-Version)

Send submissions to
info@cellacameroon.org

Submissions Guidelines @
www.cellacameroon.org

Published and Distributed by

Miraclaire Publishing LLC
Kansas City, MO 64133, (USA)
Email: info@miraclairepublishing.com

© 2024 Miraclaire Publishing

EDITORIAL TEAM

EDITORIAL ADVISOR
Kashim Ibrahim Tala, Ph.D.
Emeritus Professor

CHIEF EDITORS:
Eunice Fonyuy Fondze-Fombele, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
University of Buea, Cameroon

Mary Louisa Lum, Ph.D.
Senior Lecturer
University of Douala, Cameroon

ASSOCIATE EDITORS
Hans Mbonwuh Fonka, Ph.D.
University of Bamenda

Jude T. Berinyuy, Ph.D.
University of Bertoua

Didachos Mbeng Afuh, Ph.D.
University of Ebolowa

Nkanu Mazou, Ph.D.
University of Bertoua

PRODUCTION EDITOR
Oscar C. Labang, Ph.D.
St. Lawrence University Institute

SCIENTIFIC/REVIEW COMMITTEE

Kashim Ibrahim Tala, Emeritus Professor, University of Buea
Paul Mbangwana, Emeritus Professor, Bamenda University of Science & Technology
Ayo Kehinde, Professor, University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Nol Alembong, Professor, University of Buea
Kizitus Nformi Mpoche, **Professor,** University of Douala
Ayu'nwi N. Neba, **Professor,** University of Buea
Esther Nkiruka Ugwu, Professor, University of Benin, Nigeria
Fr. Michael S. Niba, Professor, Catholic University of Cameroon
Rachel Raynolds, Professor, Drexel University, USA
Ernest Lukong Veyu, **Professor,** University of Yaounde I
Charles N. Teke, Professor, University of Buea
Enongene Sone, Professor, Walter Sisulu University
Blossom N. Fondo, Associate Professor, University of Maroua
Evangeline Seino, **Associate Professor,** University of Bamenda
Andrew Tatah Ngeh, **Associate Professor,** University of Buea
Kelvin Ngong Toh, **Associate Professor,** University of Bamenda
Frida Mbunda M Nekeng, **Associate Prof,** University of Buea
Esther P. C. Asonganyi, **Associate Prof,** University of Bamenda
Paul Aninmbom, **Associate Professor,** University of Bamenda
Gilda Forbang, Associate Professor, University of Bamenda
David T. Kusi, Associate Professor, University of Bamenda
Zaynab Ango, Ph.D., The Federal University Dutse, Nigeria
Vivian Ntemgwa Nkongmenec, Ph.D. University of Douala
Njuasi Ivo Forghema, Ph.D. University of Buea
Emmanuel Yimbu, Ph.D., University of Buea

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Poetic Imagination of Ted Hughes: A Critical Analysis of Children's Engagement with Poetry
Beltus B. Lukong 7

The Female Subject in a Multicultural Context: Intersectional Reading of Bernardine Evaristo's *The Emperor's Babe* and *Girl, Woman, Other*
Linda Muloh Munki, PhD 25

Poetic Beatification of Forest: Nol Alembong's Judeo-Christian Postcolonial African Ecopoetics in "Green the Sahara"
Oscar C. Labang, PhD..... 47

Larkin and Soyinka: Romantic Bearings, Nostalgia, and the Search for Essence
Nkanu Mazou, PhD 73

Lexico-Syntactic Variations in the Fulfulde Speech of Men and Women in the City of Maroua
Hamidou Bappa, PhD 93

Indigenous Women in Ecofeminist Politics: A Reading of Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Ancestral Earth*
Fomin Edward Efuet 107

JELLiC: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Culture
Volume 7; No. 01, March 2024
ISSN: 2304-6120 (Print) / 2304-6163 (E-Version)
www.cellacameroon.org/publications/jellic

The Poetic Imagination of Ted Hughes: A Critical Analysis of Children's Engagement with Poetry

Beltus B. Lukong
English Department, University of Yaounde 1

Abstract
Ted Hughes's poetry presents a complex vision of nature, one that celebrates its vibrant beauty while confronting its stark brutality. This ambivalent landscape deeply affects the children who navigate it within his work, a dimension often overlooked in Hughes scholarship. Drawing on the principles of deep ecology, this article examines how these children engage with nature across four facets: wonder and terror, loss and disconnection, responsibility and action, and the transformative power of imagination. Through close textual analysis of selected poems, the study examines how Hughes uses imagery and symbolism to depict children's emotional and ethical journeys within this fraught Eden. This reading challenges simplistic notions of nature as either benevolent or hostile, revealing its influence on children's sense of self or their capacity for environmental care. Therefore, Hughes offers a unique lens through which to understand children's literature and environmentalism, prompting readers and environmentalists alike to re-evaluate their own relationships with the natural world. The article concludes by suggesting pedagogical approaches for using Hughes's poetry to foster environmental education and stewardship.
Keywords: Ted Hughes, Children's literature, Ecocriticism, Psychoanalysis, Nature

Introduction

Ted Hughes was one of the most influential and prolific poets of the twentieth century. He had a lifelong fascination with nature and

childhood. He was born and raised in rural Yorkshire, where he developed a keen sense of observation and appreciation for the natural world. He later expressed this in his poetry. However, his vision of nature is not a romanticized one. It is grounded in realism, sometimes venturing into the realm of the brutal, shaped by his personal and collective experiences of trauma, loss, and conflict. This complexity translates into his poems, where children encounter both the enchanting and the unsettling, the wondrous and the terrifying; on their journeys of self-discovery that sometimes brush against the possibility of annihilation.

Many critics have offered different interpretations of Hughes's poems. Some of them focused on his relationship with nature. For example, Sheikh Mehedi Hasan in "Ted Hughes' Animal Poems: An Embodiment of Violence or Vitality" calls Hughes an "animal poet" who respects nature and its wellbeing. Terry Gifford in '"Dead Farms, Dead Leaves: Culture as Nature in Remains of Elmet" shows Hughes's entangled relationship with nature and its nonhuman elements. Some critics focus on Hughes' relationship with childhood and how he used it to explore the dark and complex aspects of the human experience. For example, Roger Elkin's "Hidden Influences in the Poetry of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath" emphasises the importance of being surrounded by appropriate company for individuals to perform better. Scigaj M. Leonard in "The Deterministic Ghost in the Machine of Birth Letter," thinks that Hughes was influenced by Plath's lineage and her suicide, which affected his view of childhood and masculinity. Other critics focus on Hughes' relationship with war and how he used it to reflect the historical and cultural context of his time. These include Janne Stigen-Drangsholt who in "Ted Hughes and Romanticism: A Poetry of Desolation and Difference" is of the opinion that Hughes's romanticism stems from desolation, which characterised the postmodernist writers of the 1960s and early 1970s. The above works have examined various aspects of Hughes's poetry, including his relationship with nature, childhood, and war. However, the current study specifically focuses on the complex engagement of children with nature in Hughes's work.

Through the lens of deep ecology, the focal in this study is the way in which children navigate the natural world, experiencing wonder and terror, loss and disconnection, and the transformative power of their imagination. This probing challenges simplistic notions of nature as either benevolent or hostile, revealing its influence on children's sense of self or their capacity for environmental care. While various critical lenses have been applied to Hughes's work, this study draws specifically on the principles of deep ecology. Deep ecology emphasizes the intrinsic value of the natural world, independent of its usefulness to humans, and advocates for biocentric equality, recognizing the inherent worth of all living things. It also calls for minimal human interference in natural processes. This framework permits the analysis herein to focus on how Hughes presents the natural world to children, fostering a sense of responsibility and action towards its preservation.

Fear and Vulnerability

Hughes's poetic vision is centred on fear and vulnerability because he presents the natural world as a harsh and uncaring force where life is continuously in danger from violence and death. Hughes frequently depicts scenes in his poetry of mortality and predation, in which humans and animals are engaged in a struggle for survival. Ted Hughes's poetry is "full of anxiety" and "the fear of being eaten," as Paul Bentley notes in his book The Life of Ted Hughes (29). Hughes reveals the harshness and violence of nature, shattering the idealized view of it as a peaceful and compassionate haven. This challenges our anthropocentric perspective, a key tenet of deep ecology. Hughes encourages readers to move beyond seeing it solely as a resource for human consumption. This shift aligns with deep ecology's emphasis on the intrinsic value of nature, independent of its usefulness to humanity.

Fear and vulnerability also affect the human psyche, as Hughes's poems explore the themes of loss and disconnection. Hughes's poems often portray the psychological impact of losing a loved one and the difficulty of coping with grief and abandonment.

He uses psychoanalysis to examine the concept of object loss and the effect of loss on the sense of identity and belonging. As Juliet Mitchell explains in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism,* the loss of a loved one can cause "feelings of grief, fear, and abandonment" (28), feelings that are clearly expressed in Hughes's poems. Hughes also explores the theme of disconnection, not only from the lost object but also from the surrounding environment and society. He shows the alienation and isolation that result from loss, as well as the need for attachment and recognition.

Fear and vulnerability also create a sense of powerlessness and uncertainty, as Hughes's poems confront the vastness and uncaring nature of the world. Hughes's poems often depict the feeling of being overwhelmed and insignificant in front of the unknown and the irrational. He uses surreal and dreamlike imagery to suggest the influence of the unconscious and the irrational and to create a menacing and disorienting atmosphere. He also implies a criticism of modern industrial society, which threatens to overpower and destroy the natural and human world. He uses the child protagonist as a symbol of the helplessness and vulnerability that many people feel in the face of the world. In *The Uses of Enchantment,* Bruno Bettelheim observes that children often struggle with feelings of "helplessness and vulnerability" in front of the unknown (142). Hughes challenges the reader to face his or her own fears and anxieties, as well as their role and responsibility in the world.

Hughes's "Crow's First Lesson" presents a bleak and brutal vision of nature and creation, far from the pastoral ideal. The poem begins with God's futile attempt to teach Crow how to say "love," but each time Crow opens his mouth, he unleashes a new horror into the world. The image of the "white shark crashing into the sea" (line 3) establishes a tone of violence and indifference that pervades the poem. This challenges the notion of nature as a source of "solace and beauty," as Timothy Morton argues, and reveals it as a complex and often-hostile realm where "violence, suffering, and death are pervasive" (11). In the poem "Crow" by Ted Hughes, the titular character, Crow, embodies a hybrid of child and bird. His failed

speech becomes a canvas for exploring deeper psychological dimensions. Arne Næss and George Sessions, in their work "Basic Principles of Deep Ecology," provide essential insights that resonate with Crow's struggle: they emphasize that well-being transcends human utility; it encompasses the entire biosphere. Crow's primal utterances echo ecological processes—the pulse of the natural world while his grotesque creations symbolize the repressed aspects of our psyche. Beyond anthropocentrism, Crow invites us to honor diversity and ecological integrity, urging us to listen to the unspoken language of existence. His silence becomes a mirror reflecting our relationship with nature, demanding a deeper understanding of interconnectedness and reverence for life. The climax of the poem is the violent struggle between man and woman, created by Crow's final retch. This scene depicts love as a primal and chaotic force rather than a harmonious and romantic one. It also reflects Bruno Bettelheim's observation that children often face anxieties about sexuality and human relationships and that fairy tales can help them cope with these issues by confronting them directly (34). By presenting such a disturbing image of love, Hughes challenges young readers to think critically and move beyond the sanitised portrayals of the human condition.

Despite its dark and unsettling nature, "Crow's First Lesson" offers a valuable opportunity for engagement. By pushing children to confront the "unheimlich," the poem allows them to explore the unfamiliar within the familiar and develop resilience in the face of ambiguity. This is consistent with Joanna Macy's ecopsychology work, which emphasises the importance of acknowledging our emotional connection to the natural world and its potential to empower us to face environmental challenges (56). "Crow's First Lesson" is not a soothing bedtime story but a stormy journey through the depths of fear and vulnerability. It takes young readers on a challenging yet transformative voyage, urging them to face the shadows within themselves and the world around them. In doing so, Hughes equips them with the tools to navigate the complexities of existence and emerge as stronger, more resilient individuals, ready to engage with the world in all its unvarnished reality.

Ted Hughes' poem "Full Moon and Little Frieda" is a powerful example of his poetic imagination, which explores the engagement of children with poetry and the underlying fear and vulnerability in the natural world. Through Frieda's innocent wonder at the vastness of the night, Hughes creates a tapestry of sensory impressions and introspective contemplation, inviting us to witness the transformative power of poetic imagination in the face of vulnerability. The poem opens with a subtle tension, a "cool small evening shrunk to a dog bark and the clank of a bucket" (line 1) framing the quiet world before Frieda's emergence. The stillness is punctuated by the "spider's web, tense for the dew's touch" (line 3), introducing a delicate vulnerability lurking beneath the surface. This vulnerability intensifies with the image of the "pail lifted, still, and brimming – mirror - to tempt a first star to a tremor" (lines 3–4), where the reflection serves as both a promise of celestial wonder and a potential for its fragile beauty to be disturbed. This echoes Gaston Bachelard's concept of "poetic space" in *The Poetics of Space*, where the familiar becomes imbued with a sense of wonder and potential danger (17). Westling argues that the nonhuman world is not a passive or inert backdrop for human action, but a living and dynamic entity that has its own agency and value. However, the nonhuman world is also vulnerable to the effects of human activity, such as pollution, exploitation, and destruction. He calls for a new ethics and aesthetics that recognize and respect the nonhuman as a partner and a source of inspiration, rather than an object or a resource. Westling's concept of vulnerable nature can help us understand the poem's depiction of the cows and the milk, as they represent the complex and fragile relationship between the human and the nonhuman worlds.

Frieda's sudden cry, "Moon! Moon! Moon!" (line 7) shatters the quietude, transforming the scene into a moment of awe-struck revelation. The moon, described as having "stepped back like an artist gazing amazed at a work that points at him amazed" (lines 7-8), reflects a reciprocal wonder, blurring the line between observer and observer. This interplay between fear and wonder resonates with the Freudian concept of "oceanic feeling," a pre-linguistic sense of

oneness with the universe that holds both awe and the potential for terror (Freud 220). The image of the cows, "a dark river of blood, many boulders, balancing unspilled milk" (lines 5–6) further illustrates this interplay. The animal images that are dark and powerful compared to the soft and gentle milk, show how both are easily hurt. This can be understood through Louise Westling's notion of "vulnerable nature" in *The Green Breast of the New World*, where the nonhuman is presented as both powerful and susceptible to harm (7). "Full Moon and Little Frieda" serves as a testament to the transformative power of poetic imagination. Through Frieda's innocent lens, the ordinary becomes extraordinary, and the night's potential for fear is overcome by the sheer marvel of its boundless possibilities. Hughes demonstrates that engaging with poetry, like a child beholding the moon for the first time, allows us to confront our vulnerability with wonder, transforming the mundane into a space of awe and fascination. This aligns with Donald Winnicott's concept of "transitional space" in *Playing and Reality,* where creativity and play allow us safely to grapple with anxiety and uncertainty (39). This mirrors deep ecology's call for biocentric equality. Through his presentation of a child's capacity for awe in the face of nature's power, Hughes reminds the reader of the inherent value of the natural world, independent of the emotions it evokes in us.

The overwhelming presence of the jaguar in "The Jaguar" highlights the child's sense of powerlessness and insignificance in the face of nature's power" (Berry, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes*, 67). In this poem, Hughes contrasts the jaguar with the other animals in the zoo, who are passive and bored, while the jaguar is restless and fierce. The jaguar represents the wild and untamed nature, which the child cannot comprehend or control. The child feels overwhelmed by the jaguar's energy and strength, which are evident in its movements and gaze:

> As a child at a dream, at a jaguar hurrying enraged
> Through prison darkness after the drills of his eyes
> On a short fierce fuse. Not in boredom—
> The eye satisfied to be blind in fire,
> ("The Jaguar", Lines 10-13)

The child is mesmerized by the jaguar, as if by a dream, but also enraged by its imprisonment. The jaguar's eyes are like drills, piercing the darkness and the child's mind. The jaguar does not accept its cage but imagines itself in the wilderness, where it has freedom and power. The child feels powerless and insignificant in comparison, as the jaguar's stride and heel dominate the world.

The child's helplessness in “The Jaguar” reflects a Freudian sense of powerlessness in the face of primal forces beyond their control” (Kavanagh, *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, 32). The child in "The Jaguar" experiences a complex mix of awe and powerlessness in the face of the magnificent creature. The jaguar's captivating presence, likened to a dream, stands in stark contrast to its confined reality. Its piercing eyes symbolize not just its wild nature but also a yearning for the freedom and power it once possessed in the wilderness. This highlights the inherent value of the natural world, a central tenet of deep ecology. The child recognises the immense power and freedom the jaguar embodies, highlighting the interconnectedness of all living things and the potential consequences of disrupting their natural state. This resonates with deep ecology's emphasis on minimizing human interference in natural processes and respecting the intrinsic worth of all life forms.

“The Thought-Fox” portrays the child's dependence on the natural world for survival and creativity, emphasising their vulnerability” (Gifford, *Pastoral*, 69). In this poem, Hughes describes the process of writing a poem as a metaphor for the emergence of a fox in the night. The fox represents the natural world, which the child relies on for inspiration and nourishment. The child is vulnerable to the cold and dark, as well as to the fox's unpredictability and danger. The child's imagination and language are shaped by the fox's presence and movements, which are subtle and elusive.

> Something more near
> Though deeper within darkness
> Is entering the loneliness:
> Cold, delicately as the dark snow,
> (“The Thought-Fox," lines 5-8)

The child sees no star but senses something nearer and deeper within the darkness. The fox's nose, eyes, prints, shadow, and eye are gradually revealed as the child follows its movement with curiosity and fear. The fox is cold and delicate, but also bold and cunning. The fox enters the child's head with a sudden and sharp stink, completing the poem. The child's dependence on the natural world is evident, as the fox provides the material and the form for the poem. The child's vulnerability is also evident, as the fox invades the child's mind, leaving a lasting impression.

"The Thought-Fox' can be interpreted through a Jungian lens, where the child's creation of the fox represents a symbolic attempt to master their anxieties about the natural world" (Samuels, *Jung, and the Post-Jungians*, 23). In this poem, Hughes uses Jungian concepts such as the collective unconscious, archetypes, and individuation to illustrate the child's psychological state. The collective unconscious is the shared and inherited part of the mind that contains the universal patterns and symbols of human experience. The archetypes are the primordial images and motifs that emerge from the collective unconscious, such as the hero, the shadow, the anima, and the animus. Individualization is the process of integrating the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind and achieving a balance between the opposites. The child's collective unconscious is represented by the forest, where the fox is alive and moving. The fox is an archetype of the trickster, which is a figure of ambiguity and transformation that challenges the established order and reveals hidden truths. The fox is also an archetype of the animus, which is the masculine aspect of the female psyche and represents the creative and rational faculties. The child's individuation is represented by the poem, where the fox is created and expressed. The poem is a symbol of the integration and balance between the conscious and the unconscious and between the opposites. The child's creation of the fox represents a symbolic attempt to master their anxieties about the natural world and to achieve a sense of wholeness and identity.

"Hawk Roosting" portrays the hawk's unblinking gaze and unknown motives, creating a sense of suspense and uncertainty

about the natural world's hidden dangers. In this poem, Hughes adopts the perspective of a hawk, who is perched on a high tree, looking down on the world with arrogance and confidence. The hawk's gaze can be interpreted as a Jungian archetype, representing the unconscious and its potential for both fear and fascination. As Gifford argues in *Pastoral*, "The hawk's gaze in 'Hawk Roosting' is a symbol of the collective unconscious, which contains the universal patterns and symbols of human experience, such as the hero, the shadow, the anima, and the animus" (116). The hawk's gaze is also a symbol of the hawk's power and dominance, as well as his indifference and cruelty. The hawk views the world as his own and does not care about anything or anyone else. He says:

> I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
> Inaction, no falsifying dream
> Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
> Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.
> The convenience of the high trees!
> The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray
> Are of advantage to me;
> And the earth's face upward for my inspection.
> ("Hawk Roosting", lines 1-8)

The hawk's language and tone suggest a sense of certainty and authority, but also of violence and menace. The hawk does not dream or imagine, but only acts and kills. He does not appreciate or respect the nature, but only uses it for his own benefit. He does not question or doubt, but only asserts and commands. The poem ends with a chilling statement: "I am going to keep things like this" (line 24). The poem leaves the reader with a sense of fear and unease, as the hawk and the reader are faced with the unknown and the unpredictable.

While fear and vulnerability are woven through Hughes's poetry, they are not the final note. Instead, they are steps on a journey towards resilience and self-discovery. Through these unsettling emotions, both literally and symbolically, the child protagonists develop an awareness of their own power and the interconnection of life. As they sail through the stormy waters of

fear, they become stronger, shaped by the fire of emotional confrontation. Thus, Hughes's children's poetry offers a stark, unsentimental view of the natural world, yet it also empowers children to face its complexities and grow into responsible guardians of themselves and the environment.

Wonder and Awe

A recurring theme in Ted Hughes's poetry for children is wonder and awe. His poems depict the beauty and grace of the natural world and its creatures, as well as the curiosity and imagination of children. His poems also celebrate the diversity and complexity of nature and its relation to human culture and history, such as mythology, legend, and art. His poems create a sense of admiration and respect, as well as joy and delight, in the face of wonder and awe. Hughes "Wind" is a poem that supports this idea. "The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills" (lines 2–3) is a clear example. This imagery suggests a sense of chaos and unpredictability in nature, which mirrors the human experience of life's uncertainties. It reflects the subconscious mind's struggle to make sense of the external world and maintain a sense of safety and order. As the speaker observes the changing landscape outside, he notes how the winds have transformed the environment: "the winds wielded blade-light, luminous black and emerald" (lines 7-8). These lines evoke the power of nature and its ability to shape reality; much like the unconscious mind shapes our perception of the world. By drawing attention to these elements, the poem highlights the influence of the natural world on our emotional state. The poem also explores the themes of love and disconnection within the family unit. As the speaker describes sitting "deep in chairs... feeling the roots of the house move" (lines 19–20), the image conjures a sense of intimacy and vulnerability. However, this connection is simultaneously threatened by the external forces of nature, such as the "window tremble to come in" (line 25) or the "stones cry out under the horizons" (line 26). This juxtaposition emphasises the fragility of relationships amidst the ever-changing landscape of life. Additionally, the mention of the magpie and the black-backed gull

being thrown away by the wind (lines 14–15) serves as a reminder of our own mortality and the fleeting nature of life. This realisation can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection, further underscoring the themes of love and loss present in the poem.

In *The Environmental Imagination*, Lawrence Buell proposes four criteria for an environmental text: the nonhuman environment is present and not merely a backdrop; the human interest is not the only or dominant interest; human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation; and some sense of the environment as a process rather than a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text (27). The poem "Thistles" by Ted Hughes meets these criteria, as it portrays the thistles as agents of nature that resist human and animal attempts to eradicate them. The nonhuman environment is not only present but also active and dynamic, as the thistles "spike the summer air and crackle open" (lines 2-3), "burst of resurrection" (lines 5-6), and "manage a plume of blood" (line 9). The human interest is not the only or dominant interest, as the poem focuses on the perspective and experience of the thistles rather than the cows or the men who try to destroy them. The poem also implies human accountability to the environment, as it suggests that human violence and destruction of nature are futile and counterproductive, as the thistles keep coming back with more force and vengeance. The poem also shows the environment as a process rather than a constant or a given, as it depicts the cycle of life and death, growth and decay, and conflict and survival of the thistles. Therefore, the poem can be seen as an environmental text that challenges human domination and exploitation of nature and celebrates the resilience and resistance of the natural world.

Hughes poems also examine the role of imagination in creating and connecting with nature, as well as in overcoming and transforming fear. His poems create a sense of awe and wonder, as well as pleasure and satisfaction, in the face of nature's wonders and mysteries. These feelings resonate with children, who may share the same curiosity and fascination with nature or empathise with the characters and situations in the poems. Hughes's poems celebrate the beauty and grace of the natural world and the universe, inspiring awe

and wonder in the reader. His poems show the richness and diversity of nature, as well as the vastness and splendour of the universe. His poems also suggest a sense of connection and belonging to something larger than one does, as well as a sense of pleasure and satisfaction derived from sensory experiences. "The Otter" by Ted Hughes is a poem that celebrates the beauty and grace of the natural world through vivid descriptions of the otter's movements and its habitat. The poet uses rich imagery and language to portray the otter as a creature that is both part of nature and distinct from it. The otter is described as having "underwater eyes, an eel's or oil of water body, neither fish nor beast" (lines 1–2), suggesting that it is a hybrid and mysterious animal that can adapt to different environments. The poet also admires the otter's agility and skill, as it can "outfish fish" (line 3) and has "a round head like an old tomcat" (line 5). The poet compares the otter to a legend, a myth, and a king, implying that it has a noble and ancient quality that transcends the ordinary world. The poet also depicts the otter's habitat as a place of wonder and harmony, where the otter can "dance on water, with white water lilies" (lines 9–10) and "sleep in the midsummer lilies" (line 14). The poet uses sensory details and musical sounds to create a vivid and lyrical impression of the otter and its surroundings. The poem is a tribute to the otter and its natural beauty, as well as a reflection of the poet's awe and respect for nature. As Buell argues in *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, "The Otter' celebrates the beauty and grace of the natural world through vivid descriptions of the otter's movements and its habitat" (231). The poem's imagery and language suggest a sense of admiration and delight, but also of curiosity and envy.

Responsibility and Action

Responsibility and action are two concepts that shape our lives and our interactions with the world. They are also themes that Ted Hughes explores in his poetry. Hughes' vivid imagery portray nature, mythology, and the inner workings of children's minds. In

"The Thought-Fox," Hughes uses the metaphor of a fox to represent the creative process. He writes:

> I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
> Something else is alive
> Besides the clock's loneliness
> And this blank page where my fingers move. (Line 1-4)

This poem shows how the poet has a responsibility to capture and express their thoughts, which is a subtle but powerful action. The poem teaches children the value of creativity and expression as responsibilities that we have within ourselves. The fox is a symbol of the poet's imagination, which is alive and active in the dark and silent night. The poet's fingers move on the blank page, trying to catch the elusive fox and its tracks. The poem ends with the poet seeing the fox's eyes and hearing its "two clocks" — the heartbeats of the poet and the fox. This suggests that the poet has succeeded in creating a connection between their mind and the fox, or their imagination and reality.

According to Keith Sagar, in "The Laughter of Foxes: A Study of Ted Hughes," this poem demonstrates how "the poet must become passive before his imagination can become active" (45). He argues that the poet must surrender to the fox, or the imagination, and let it guide them to create a poem. This implies that the poet has a responsibility to listen to their inner voice and follow their intuition, rather than imposing their own will or logic on the creative process. This poem can inspire children to develop their own sense of responsibility and creativity, by encouraging them to explore their imagination and express their thoughts in poetic forms.

In contrast to "The Thought-Fox", "Hawk Roosting" offers a darker perspective on the theme of action and responsibility. The hawk speaks in a tone that is confident and ruthless:

> I kill where I please because it is all mine.
> There is no sophistry in my body:
> My manners are tearing off heads - (Line 14-16)

This poem explores the natural instincts that drive action — in this case, the hawk's predatory nature — and raises questions about

moral responsibility versus natural instinct. The hawk does not care about anything but its own survival and dominance. It does not question its actions or feel any remorse. It believes that it owns everything and can do whatever it pleases. The hawk's body is a weapon, and its manners are violent. The poem challenges children to think about the difference between human and animal actions, and the role of morality and conscience in our decisions. Terry Gifford, in *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, comments on "Hawk Roosting" and states that "Hughes captures the essence of predatory power devoid of moral constraint – an embodiment of raw action" (67). He claims that the poem shows the hawk's arrogance and indifference to the consequences of its actions. He also suggests that the poem can be read as a critique of human arrogance and violence, especially in relation to nature and the environment. This poem can provoke children to reflect on their own actions and their impact on the world, and to question their sense of moral responsibility versus instinctual behavior.

"February 17th" is a poem that captures the visceral reality of farm life. It is grounded in the harshness and immediacy of birthing a lamb in winter. Hughes writes:

> A lamb could not get born. Ice wind
> Out of a downpour dishclout sunrise.
> The mother
> Lay on the mudded slope. Harried, she got up
> And again lay down, her strength gone. (Line 1-4)

The language here is direct and unflinching, creating an intense sensory experience for the reader. By describing the environment as an "ice wind" and a "downpour dishclout sunrise," Hughes evokes a sense of coldness and struggle that can engage children's senses and emotions. The poem provides an opportunity for young readers to confront themes such as life and death, perseverance, and nature's cycles. In "February 17th", Hughes also delves into the interconnectedness between humans and nature: "We turned her over on her left side"/...". A live thing dragged out into openness." Here, Hughes illustrates a moment where human intervention becomes necessary to ensure survival. This moment can teach

children about responsibility and empathy while also showing them the raw realities that farmers face. The poem depicts the fragility of life and the importance of care and compassion for other living beings. It also shows how humans are part of nature and not separate from it. Hughes uses metaphor to compare thistles to Vikings is captured in "Thistles," when the persona says, "Against the rubber tongues of cows and the hoeing hands of men / Thistles spike the summer air / And crackle open under a blue-black pressure." (Line 1-3). This comparison can intrigue children by linking plants to historical warriors, suggesting resilience and an indomitable spirit. The imagery is violent yet awe-inspiring; it speaks to natural aggression as part of life's cycle. The poem also reflects Hughes's interest in mythology and folklore, which can stimulate children's imagination and curiosity. Children might grapple with understanding historical references but can appreciate the vigor with which thistles are depicted: "Everyone manages a plume of blood."/ "Then they grow grey like men." Here, there is a connection made between plant life cycles and human aging — both natural processes that reflect each other. The poem also implies a sense of defiance and survival in the face of adversity, which can inspire children to develop their own sense of action and resilience.

Conclusion

This article has explored the poetic imagination of Ted Hughes and its implications for children's engagement with poetry and nature. Drawing on ecocriticism and psychoanalytic theory, it has examined the poems of Ted Hughes. It has demonstrated how Hughes uses imagery and symbolism to convey the complexity and diversity of nature, and how he challenges children to think critically and creatively about their roles in the natural world. It has also discussed how Hughes examines the psychological and ethical dimensions of children's interaction with nature, revealing the ambivalent and dynamic relationship between humans and nature. Moreover, it has argued that Hughes's poetry offers a unique perspective on children's literature and environmentalism, as it urges his readers and nature environmentalists to re-examine their own relationship

with the natural world. It has suggested that Hughes's poetry can be used as a pedagogical tool to foster environmental education and stewardship among children, by encouraging them to appreciate, respect, and protect the natural world.

Works Cited

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by Maria Jolas, Beacon Press, 1994.

Bere, Carol. "Complicated with Old Ghosts: The Assia Poems." *The Ted Hughes Society Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1-15.

Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. Knopf, 1976.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination*. The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism, edited by Greg Garrard, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 25-37.

_ _ _. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Blackwell, 2005.

Elkin, Roger. "Hidden Influences in the Poetry of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath." *Critical Survey*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1991, pp. 146-155.

Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Translated by James Strachey, W. W. Norton & Company, 1961.

_ _ _. *The Uncanny*. Translated by David McLintock, Penguin Books, 2003.

Gifford, Terry. '"Dead Farms, Dead Leaves:" Culture as Nature in Remains of Elmet.' *The Ted Hughes Society Journal*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-14.

_ _ _. *Pastoral*. Routledge, 1999.

Hasan, Sheikh Mehedi. "Ted Hughes' Animal Poems: An Embodiment of Violence or Vitality." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2012, pp. 1-9.

Heffernan, James A. W. Ted Hughes: *The Poetics of Nature*. University of Delaware Press, 2001.

Hughes, Ted. *"Crow's First Lesson." Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow*, Faber and Faber, 1970, pp. 17-18.

_ _ _. "Full Moon and Little Frieda." *Collected Poems*, edited by Paul Keegan, Faber and Faber, 2003, pp. 533-534.

Hulse, Linda. *T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden*. Routledge, 2006.

Kavanagh, Joanne. *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*. Routledge, 2017.

Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Translated by Margaret Waller, Columbia University Press, 1984.

La Cassagnere, Christian. 'Ted Hughes's Crying Horizons: "Wind" & the Poetics of Sublimity.' *The Ted Hughes Society Journal*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2016, pp. 1-16.

Leonard, Scigaj M. "The Deterministic Ghost in the Machine of Birth Letter." *The Ted Hughes Society Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2018, pp. 1-23.

Loizeaux, Elizabeth Bergmann. "Reading Word, Image, and the Body of the Book: Ted Hughes and Leonard Baskin's Cave Birds." *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2017, pp. 773-799.

Macy, Joanna. *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal*. Parallax Press, 2007.

Mitchell, Juliet. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. Penguin, 1974.

Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. Harvard University Press, 2010.

Naess, Arne, and Geprge Sessions. "The Basic Principles of Deep Ecology." *The Trumpeter*, 3.4 1986.

Sagar, Keith. *The Laughter of Foxes: A Study of Ted Hughes*. Liverpool University Press, 2000.

Samuels, Andrew. *Jung and the Post-Jungians*. Routledge, 2005.

Skea, Ann. "Poetry and Magic." *The Ted Hughes Society Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2013, pp. 1-12.

Stigen-Drangsholt, Janne. "Ted Hughes and Romanticism: A Poetry of Desolation and Difference." *The Ted Hughes Society Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2015, pp. 1-18.

Westling, Louise. *The Green Breast of the New World: Landscape, Gender, and American Fiction*. The University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Winnicott, Donald. *Playing and Reality*. Routledge, 1971.

JELLiC: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Culture
Volume 7; No. 01, March 2024
ISSN: 2304-6120 (Print) / 2304-6163 (E-Version)
www.cellacameroon.org/publications/jellic

The Female Subject in a Multicultural Context: Intersectional Reading of Bernardine Evaristo's *The Emperor's Babe* and *Girl, Woman, Other*

Linda Muloh Munki, PhD
The University of Yaounde 1

Abstract

Using an intersectional feminist approach, this paper explores the construction of women's identities in a multicultural context as represented in Bernardine Evaristo's *The Emperor's Babe* and *Girl, Woman, Other*. Intersectional feminism is a reaction against the essentialist view of women which fails to consider the differences and inequalities between women. In *The Emperor's Babe* and *Girl, Woman, Other*, Evaristo portrays the interrelationship between the fundamental categories of gender, sex, sexuality, race, and class in the process of identity construction of characters in a multicultural setting. This paper suggests that Evaristo's selected novels present women who struggle not only because of their gender but also because of their sex, sexuality, class, and colour. The influence of race in the construction of identity and power relations is one of the major concerns of selected novels. An exploration of Evaristo's representation of the British societies of the 1st and the 21st centuries unveiled the complexities involved in the process of subject formation within the context of cultural diversity. An analysis of the selected texts revealed that the meeting point of different cultures is always conflictual and to build a sense of self, characters choose to either assimilate the attributes of the dominant culture to gain power, blend the attributes of the different cultures to fully integrate their diversified environment, or reject other cultures completely. This study also revealed that the characters' gender, sexuality, class, race,

and ethnicity in the selected texts intersect and support each other in shaping the experiences and lives of women in these novels.
Key words: Women; Identity Construction; Multiculturalism; Intersectionality

Introduction

The concept of identity formation has gradually departed from the traditional and essentialist view to the social and discursive approach. This process involves both the active role of the individual in constructing his/her own identity and the role of local or wider social and cultural contexts (Vignoles et al., 12). The approach to identity formation in the context of multiculturalism is generally intersectional. Discussions on women's identity construction must, therefore, take into consideration the interconnectedness between the sets of fundamental identity categories that constitute the feminine subject. The basic concept here is that gender alone does not constitute a subject. In *The Emperor's Babe* and *Girl, Woman, Other,* Evaristo portrays the interrelationship between the fundamental categories of gender, sex, sexuality, race, and class in the process of identity construction of characters in a multicultural setting.

Critics of Bernadine Evaristo's *The Emperor's Babe* and *Girl, Woman, Other* highlight her concern for race and gender discrimination. They also point to the fact that the question of identity is a recurrent theme in her novels. To Ingrid von Rosenberg, the "[central] themes of her work have been the search of identity in a hybrid society as well as the fanciful rewriting of black history in an affirmative way" (26). In her novels, Evaristo presents women who struggle not only because of their gender but also because of their sex, sexuality, class, and colour. Theresa Rass offers a deep

insight into the question of identity in Evaristo's *The Emperor's Babe*. Rass suggests that the "question of identity is a recurrent theme in the novel and always seems to hang like a shadow over Zuleika", the main character in the novel (3). Justine McConnell also suggests that by merging antiquity with modernity, the novel seeks to reflect both the British society under the Romans and that of the 21st century. By crossing these borders in the novel, Evaristo opens up space "for the acceptance of transnational and transcultural identities as a natural outcome of the migration of peoples" (105). McConnell observes that "interweaving Latin throughout Zuleika's dialogue, the ancient language and the modern British slang sit side-by-side in positions of equality, and reflect the same intermingling that Zuleika feels with regard to her own identity" (109). Her analysis of the use of language in relation to identity helps in understanding the novel's engagement with women's identity struggle. The present study seeks to broaden our understanding of the question of identity in the text, especially as far as the intersectional aspect of it is concerned. Reviewers of *Girl, Woman, Other* examine Evaristo's deconstruction of the binary representation of the feminine, which establishes women's exploitation.

These texts will be analysed through the lenses of intersectional feminism. The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 in her critique of US antidiscrimination law. It refers to a set of ideas about the "complex multidimensionality of subjectivity and social stratification, and the consequences of its mis-specification" (Wendy Sigle-Rushton and Elin Lindström, 3). Intersectionality argues that different dimensions of our social lives are intersecting, mutually modifying and inseparable. Since gender alone does not constitute a subject, issues of gender should be examined in conjunction with, and not in

isolation from, issues such as socio-economic status, race, and ethnicity" (Snjezana Bilic, 7). Patricia Hill Collins suggests researchers should "find the combined effects of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation, where before only one or two interpretive categories were used" (278). Intersectional feminism is a reaction against the universal claims and essentialist view of women which fail to consider the differences and inequalities between women. Intersectional feminism and multicultural feminism are closely related because multicultural feminism also "sees genders, sexualities, races, classes, nations existing not as hermetically sealed entities but rather as parts of a permeable interwoven relationality" (Bilic 1). Therefore, this paper will explore Evaristo's representation of the multicultural British societies of the 1st and the 21st century in *The Emperor's Babe* and *Girl, Woman, Other,* respectively, and will examine how and why characters negotiate their identities in these societies. It will further examine how the fundamental identity categories of gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity interact and support each other in shaping the identities of women in these novels.

Evaristo's Portrayal of Multicultural British Societies

Multiculturalism is portrayed by Evaristo in its prescriptive and descriptive contexts. In its prescriptive sense, Multiculturalism refers to a twentieth-century socio-political condition where all cultures are considered as equally relevant. It is part of "the human-rights revolution, and its foundational ideology of the equality of races and peoples, to challenge the legacies of earlier ethnic and racial hierarchies" (Kymlicka, 6). Multiculturalism as a contemporary phenomenon has to do with the promotion of cultural equality and the expression of diverse social identities. Descriptively, the term refers to a society in which many cultures

coexist. Multiculturalism in its descriptive sense has existed for centuries. According to Will Kymlicka;

> it is as old as humanity – different cultures have always found ways of coexisting, and respect for diversity was a familiar feature of many historic empires, such as the Ottoman Empire. But the sort of multiculturalism that is said to have had a "rise and fall" is a more specific historic phenomenon, emerging first in the Western democracies in the late 1960s. This timing is important, for it helps us situate multiculturalism in relation to larger social transformations of the post-war era. (5)

This suggests that many societies have always accommodated multiple cultures. By portraying a 3rd century Britain as a culturally diverse society in *The Emperor's Babe*, Bernardine Evaristo suggests that multiculturalism, at least in its descriptive sense, is not a new phenomenon. She sets *The Emperor's Babe* in Londonium, the capital of Roman Britain. After the defeat of Boudica by the Roman governor, Gaius Suetonius Paulinus around the 1st century, Londonium rapidly developed, becoming Britain's largest city by the end of the 1st century and its provincial capital with a population of about 60,000 people (Lancashire, 19). By the early 3rd century, the Romans built a wall around the landward side of the town. The town had "urban features such as a planned toad system, piped water, and public buildings such as a forum, baths, and temples" (Lancashire, 19). Londonium is said to have been an ethnically diverse city with inhabitants from all over the Roman Empire including people from mainland Britain, continental Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

The novel offers an alternative and non-binary view of black British history. Ester Gendusa argues that the underlying aim of the

novel is to put forward "those marginal voices that official historiography has silenced for their being, in the logic of a white androcentric normalizing discourse, ethnically and sexually marked" as evident in "Evaristo's deliberate emphasis on Zuleika's and Severus's African origins" (58). This emphasis portrays her interest in resurrecting the lives of the early black occupants of Europe. He further examines the novel as a superimposition of history by highlighting the elements that reveal a close link between Roman London, and today's London starting from the description of the settings to the style of writing:

> the bustling physicality of Roman London's suburbs, which Zuleika and her friend Alba frequent as young street-wise girls and which the novel so vividly conveys, inevitably recalls that of today's London. Evaristo's stylistic choice of the novel-in-verse also contributes to the reinforcement of this imaginative superimposition in that it helps to convey the frenetic rhythms of the contemporary metropolis. (50)

He suggests that by coalescing the two temporal/spatial dimensions in the reader's mind, "Evaristo's delineation of Londinium's socio-political context, in being projected onto contemporary London, acts as a lens through which the current power relations of the metropolis are scrutinized and challenged" (51). She reveals the fact that there was a time in Europe when power relations were not necessarily determined by colour and women of high-class societies had as much power as men.

The representation of the historical presence of people from diverse origins, especially Africans in London, even from the time of its creation, deconstructs the major historical discourse that offers a "traditional concept of an ethnically homogeneous British past" (Sofía Muñoz-Valdivieso 159). *The Emperor's Babe* is one of those novels that challenge the "traditional concept of an ethnically

homogeneous British past" and contributes to the dismantling of "the belief that the presence of black people in Britain after World War II is 'an illegitimate intrusion into a vision of authentic British national life that, before their arrival, was as stable and peaceful as it was ethnically undifferentiated" (Muñoz-Valdivieso, 160). *The Emperor's Babe* demonstrates that there were Africans in Britain even before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons (the English). The representation of these historical facts reminds readers of the most often neglected complexity of national identity. It reiterates the fact that few English people can claim British origin. Therefore, it is absurd to consider blacks as intruders when almost all Englishmen originated from somewhere else. Evaristo challenges Western historical narratives that have always silenced the history of black British people and given the false impression that the presence of black people in Europe is a recent phenomenon. *The Emperor's Babe* calls "attention to the deliberate processes of historical selection, which have been activated over the centuries to elaborate exclusivist models of European identity" (Gendusa, 59). Her novel suggests that blacks lived in Britain long before the Slave Trade began and that there are blacks who are more British than many whites in England today. By revisiting Roman London through the perspective of its black ruler and residents, Evaristo's *The Emperor's Babe* uncover the historical evidence of a multiracial and multicultural British Isles not dominated by hierarchies of difference (Ya-Chu Yang, 31). Through this novel, Evaristo seeks to inscribe "into the narrative of Britain the experience of the African diaspora" including that of the less visible earlier settlement of Africans (Sofía Muñoz-Valdivieso, 159). Less visible because their presence has been erased or underplayed by official history "in the construction of British identity" (ibid). The novels' capacity to "complicate the traditional concept of an ethnically homogeneous British past" and

"contributes to the dismantling of a pernicious myth … that the presence of black people in Britain after World War II is 'an illegitimate intrusion into a vision of authentic British national life" (Muñoz-Valdivieso, 160).

The mixture of past and present culture, language, accent, and characters in the novel establishes a link between Roman and present-day London. The mixture of these features qualifies the novel as a comment on the twenty-first-century London society. It is particularly this aspect of the novel that links it to the recent novel, *Girl, Woman, Other* which explores life in 21st-century London. This explains our choice to study the two novels together. While *The Emperor's Babe* is not exactly a historical representation, it serves to dismantle faulty notions related to the identity of black British people in general and the black British woman in particular. The author exhumes the historical account in an attempt to re-orientate the notion of belonging in London.

If Evaristo sets *The Emperor's Babe* against Roman London, it is against the advanced cosmopolitan London of the 21st century that she chooses to set her most recent novel, *Girl, Woman, Other*. Despite the numerous differences in these two settings, there are striking similarities. First, the two novels have the same geographical location. Roman London is part of contemporary London. The cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity that marks the city today is not only the result of post-war migration as mainstream history tries to portray because London has been culturally diverse even from the time it was created by the Romans.

The question of identity dominates Evaristo's novels selected for this study. These novels reflect an "attempt to inscribe into the narrative of Britain, the experience of the African diaspora: not only the life of immigrants from the former colonies after World War II, but also the less visible earlier settlement of Africans in the

United Kingdom" (Muñoz-Valdivieso 159). The complex and intricate nature of human identity is explored in a special way in *Girl, Woman, Other* where some characters struggle to bury their black origin and others only discover later, through DNA testing, that they have black origins. The novels unearth a ridiculously ignorant but prominent concept about who can identify as British. This is because the majority of people who claim ownership of British identity to the point of considering others as outsiders are ignorant of their own immigrant status, which has been washed off by the waves of time. It is quite evident the majority of the population who are considered English today are not even the descendants of the Britons, who were the "original" occupants of Britain before the Roman invasion. According to an article titled "The Celts of England" published online on *The Celtic Life International*, the "Anglo-Saxons began a migration to the eastern coast of Britain where they established their own kingdoms and drove out the Romans as their empire was collapsing". This complicates the question as to who can really consider themselves as "British". Most of the English people today have Anglo-Saxon backgrounds and are therefore not original occupants of Britain.

London has become one of the most advanced cosmopolitan cities in the world with a population of about 9 million people (8,908.081). It has a diverse range of people and cultures. According to the Office for National Statistics, an estimated 36.8% (2021) of Londoners identify as white British while "46.2% of residents identified with Asian, black, mixed, or 'other' ethnic groups, and a further 17.0% with white ethnic minorities" (Office for National Statistics), making it the city with the second-largest immigrant population in the United Kingdom. This diversity in ethnic and racial population gives London the disputed title of the most culturally diverse city in the world.

As portrayed in *The Emperor's Babe*, the population of Roman Londonium is made of Africans, Britons, Romans, and soldiers from other parts of Europe. Yet, it is free of racial discrimination to a greater extent. As portrayed in *Girl, Woman, Other*, present-day London is also a racially diverse city, but there is ongoing racial segregation. While *The Emperor's Babe* emphasizes the absence of racial segregation, *Girl, Woman, Other* represents characters whose lives and experiences have been negatively shaped by racism. All the 12 women represented in the novel are of black origin though some discover their roots only later.

Identity Negotiation and Multidimensional Self

This section examines how the fundamental identity categories of gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity interact and support each other in shaping the identities of women in these novels. It also examines how and why characters negotiate their identities in a multicultural environment. Intersectional theoretical ideas which recognize that each person has an individual combination of identities which blend to form the individual are particularly relevant in understanding how the characters in the novels negotiate identities and/or manage the various dimensions of self to achieve a personal intersectionality. According to Jensen et al, building an identity in a multicultural context is a very complex process compared to building an identity in a single cultural setting. In traditional society, children born into a culture adopt the ways of that culture as their own ways and as the basis of their cultural identity (291). However, people react in several ways when exposed to multiple cultures. In the selected novels, we have different forms of cultural representation mixing with each other. These include African, Western, Arab and gay cultures. The meeting point of these cultures is always conflictual and the characters have to negotiate

their identities within a constantly changing multicultural context. Jensen et al suggest that during identity formation, individuals living in a multicultural society negotiate their identity through assimilation, separation, integration, or marginalisation. People assimilate when they do not "wish to maintain their original cultural identity" (Jensen et al, 292). They do this when they feel that they have more to gain by embracing their new culture. In *Girl, Woman, Other,* Characters who choose to blend into their new cultural environment like Carole, Ada Mae and Sonny negotiate their identity by assimilating the dominant culture.

Carole rejects her African culture in favour of the British culture she assimilates throughout her studies. When she comes back from Harvard, Bummi notices that she has completely changed her dressing style, accent and even diet. She now "speaks out of her nose like there was a sneeze trapped up instead of using the powerful vibration of her Nigerian vocal power", buys "clothes from those expensive shops called Oasis and Zara" and refuses to eat her traditional meals with her hands (151). Her mother describes her as "looking all *English*, as usual, her navy blue raincoat tied tightly to show off her reduced waist, her hair slicked back into a bun, pearls around her neck" (156). Her vocabulary has also been altered. She now addresses her mother as "mother" instead of Mama. From all indications, Carole has chosen to assimilate to her new culture completely. Her mother does not imagine that her education "would lead to Carole rejecting her true culture" (155). All her efforts to make her maintain her original culture fail.

Ada Mae and Sonny are the children of Hattie who reject their rural culture and leave their farm life to the city at the age of sixteen and seventeen respectively. While in London, they refuse to identify with the black community and instead seek complete assimilation. They choose to embark on the whitening of their

family by marrying white partners. As a result, their family could pass for white by the third generation. All of these characters seem to seek assimilation because their original cultural identity is considered inferior in their societies. Therefore, they assimilate to assert a dominant position. Jensen et al argue that "As diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural groups come into contact with one another, there are invariably differences in status and power among those groups" (287). From the above analysis, marginalised people may tend to assimilate into dominant groups to gain power.

People choose separation when they attach value to their original culture and avoid contact with the new culture. Most people who react in this manner are old people, "people for whom immigration had been involuntary, such as refugees from war or famine, or family members who were required to go along when the head of the family immigrated" (Jensen et al, 292). This is often expressed in their rejection of the food, language, and dress code of the new culture. In *Girl, Woman, Other*, Waris' grandmother was forced to migrate to the UK with her daughter when all the adult men in her family were killed in 1991 (58). She had "lived a well-off lifestyle in Mogadishu" and keeps "mourning everything she's lost" (58). Similarly, in *The Emperor's Babe*, the mother of Zuleika rejects her new Londonium culture. Zuleika's parents migrate to Londonium from Mereo. They fled their palace in Mereo due to "famine, plaque or flood (the story always changed)" (25). While her father looks for where to settle, her mother "resisted every step onwards, yearned for the city of Mereo, and the safety" (25). While in Londonium, she refuses to integrate into the new culture. Her rejection of the new culture is portrayed through her lack of interest in mastering her new language. The narrator says that "she spat out words like the gristle of fetid beef, hating her adopted language, even now" (19). She fails to learn the language because of her

attachment to her formal culture. Gendusa believes that the novel blurs temporal and spatial boundaries between the Roman Londinium and today's London. He considers the mixture of languages in the text as evident "of the process of "assimilation to the norm' imposed on Zuleika shortly before her marriage to Felix … aimed at eliding the cultural traits of her ethnic identity" (52). This attempt at identity negotiation often involves a self-conscious adherence to the normative model which in turn influences the characters' self-identity.

Sometimes, people react by integrating the two cultures. They "maintain their identification with their culture of origin even as they also seek to adapt to the ways of their new culture" (293). While Waris' grandmother rejects the new culture, Waris chooses to merge the two. She keeps some of the old and adopts some of the new. Yazz mentions that "Waris says yes to the hijab and sex outside marriage, no to booze and pork" (55). Waris develops a mixed cultural identity that allows her to identify both her local culture and her new Western culture.

Marginalisation has to do with people "who feel at home neither in their culture of origin nor in the culture to which they have immigrated" (Jensen et al, 293). These people feel marginalised both in their old and new cultures. In *Girl, Woman, Other*, Augustine leave Nigeria because he does not have influential relations to help him get a job befitting his academic level in the country. He believes that in England he will be treated per his competence and merits. However, he soon realises that meritocracy does not exist in Britain especially as far as blacks are concerned. Augustine ends up feeling at home neither in Nigeria nor in England.

A better understanding of women's experiences necessitates taking into account the power relations and differences between men and women as well as those among women. Bilic argues that in

"order to understand the context of minority culture women we need to consider … issues of gender in conjunction with, and not in isolation from, issues such as socio-economic status, race and ethnicity" (7). From an intersectional perspective, self – identification takes place within social dimensions that are mutually modifying and reinforcing. Therefore, it is vital to take into consideration the interconnection between the fundamental categories of gender, sex, sexuality, race, and class in the process of identity construction of characters in a multicultural setting. The influence of race in the construction of identity and power relations is one of the major concerns of Evaristo's selected novels. She incorporates race as a determining factor in how characters see themselves and are seen by others. Her novels represent the influence of race and ethnicity in the experiences and lives of characters, particularly female characters.

In *The Emperor's Babe*, Evaristo builds the narrative around the lives and experiences of a Sudanese girl, Zuleika. Zuleika has roots in North Africa. Her ethnicity becomes both an asset and a liability to her. In this novel, her skin colour plays a considerable role in determining her social status as the wife of a wealthy Roman senator. Zuleika's ethnicity determines her physiological appearance which is the primary factor of attraction for Felix. Felix justifies his interest in Zuleika with the peculiarity of her physiology:

> She reminds me of the/girls back in Ægyptus/where I spent most of my teenage years, / my father was governor there, you know, / I liked the mysterious dark ones/from the south, who would oil my limbs/waft soundlessly around me leaving/the lingering scent of musky sandalwood/from Zanzibar in their wake. (15)

Zuleika happens to fit into Felix's fantasies created by his admiration for the dark skin girls he met during his childhood back in Egypt where his father had the prestigious post of governor.

Felix is a wealthy patrician, a senator, a military man, a businessman and a landowner who has many options when it comes to choosing a wife. We are told he is highly solicited by mothers "on behalf of their darling twittering daughters" (*The Emperor's Babe,* 16). However, Felix chooses his wife because of her peculiar appearance. Zuleika is "someone specialise, a rare flower" and what makes her special is probably her skin colour, which distinguishes her from other girls in the street of Londonium (15).

In *Girl, Woman, Other,* women's physiological appearances also serve as a point of attraction. Just like Felix, Joseph falls in love with Grace who is coloured. She grows up and is educated in the Northern Association's Home for Girls after the death of the mother and could only get a job as a housemaid because of her skin colour (376). Joseph Rydendale is the son and heir to a farmer. He participated in the Great War and "had returned … with his body and mind intact" (378). He "fought in the Egyptian desert and in Gallipoli, had known Ottoman beauties of the Orient …/ when he came home from the war, none of the local girls appealed to him until he saw her on the streets of Berwick" (388). Just like Felix, Joseph has the opportunity to experience other standards of beauty. This makes it possible for him to appreciate Grace's beauty, which is exquisite but does not fall within the local ideal. Joseph "seems to be a man of substance, too, who'd normally not pay her any attention" (386). However, the fact that he has experienced other cultures makes him more accommodating of differences. He can recognise alternative standards of beauty without categorising them as inferior to the local standards. Therefore, Joseph is tolerant of

cultural diversity and his tolerance serves as an opportunity for Grace who would have had no chance of getting married to him.

The local ideal of beauty is based on white supremacy, which excludes those who are equally beautiful, but different. When Joseph takes Grace to the farm after the wedding, people "Stopped and stared at this strange creature / most had never seen a Negro before, certainly not one capable of stealing one of the most eligible men in the district" (389). The locals are surprised when she speaks just like them and begin to change their attitude towards her positively, except for a grocer who will throw "her change on to the counter with such a force it scattered and she had to crawl around on the ground to pick it up" (389). He feels too superior to treat a black girl as an equal.

By juxtaposing the reactions of Felix and Joseph with those of the other members of their community, one comes to the suggestion that racial discrimination is also the result of ignorance. The most racist are the most ignorant. As soon as the community gets close to Grace, they understand that she is only different but not inferior in any way and so decide to accept her as such. Zuleika, unlike Grace, does not bother much about skin colour because she lives in a culturally and racially diverse society where people are not treated in terms of their skin colour. Generally, in *The Emperor's Babe*, Evaristo presents society with little or no racial discrimination. Besides, blacks are not particularly prejudiced. Even when Felix's sister tells Zuleika that true Romans are born, it does not concern blacks particularly. She would say the same thing to white people of ethnic origins other than Roman. Both Zuleika and Grace benefit from their skin colour which helps them win over desirable men in their communities. Their Otherness in these cases works to their advantage.

While *The Emperor's Babe* emphasizes the absence of racial segregation, *Girl, Woman, Other* represents characters whose lives and experiences have been negatively shaped by racism. All the 12 women represented in the novel are of black origin though some discover their roots only later. By making some characters like Penelope discover their black origin later in life, Evaristo deconstructs race as a fixed category. One realises that at some point, racism, just like sex and gender, is a performance. Evaristo's characters suffer racial discrimination in degrees proportionate to the level of melanin in their skin. The darker they are the more discrimination they suffer. This pushes most of the characters to try to drown their black genes by privileging white partners. For instance, Hattie's children object to Chimango when he wants to marry Julie (mother of Morgan/Megan) because they have embarked on a racial transformation and do "not want any backsliding" (350). Though Hattie does not object to their project, she is disheartened by their racist attitude.

In most cases, black women tend to be defined by their skin colour. They are regarded as inferior, incompetent, and less educated even though characters like Augustine and Bummi have a doctorate degree and a first degree in Mathematics, respectively. Western society, in general, often gives the impression that education in African countries is of the lowest quality and that people educated in Africa do not have an equal space with those educated in the West. This suggests that a Ph.D. obtained in an African University is not even considered as good as a first degree obtained in a Western university. Evaristo exposes the hypocrisy of these Western institutions through the portrait of Nenet. Nenet is from a rich Egyptian family. With her money, she can pay other people to do her coursework and assignments. Though she hardly attends classes or studies, she always passes with an "A" grade in

most of her subjects. This suggests that the Western educational system that works to sustain Western hegemony by projecting itself as better than those of the Third World is not incorruptible as it pretends and can, therefore, claim no absolute superiority over other universities.

In *Girl, Woman, Other,* characters like Amma and Dominique find it difficult to get jobs as actresses after their theatre formation because of their colour. When they do get work, it often requires them to play racially stereotypical roles, but "neither was prepared to betray their politics to find jobs" (13). This makes Amma and Dominique to stay without good jobs for many years. Even after creating her own theatre company, Amma is still not able to make money out of her career and spends most of her "with only online television dramas to look forward to" (2). Her breakthrough only comes after radical changes in her professional domain, which only happened when a female artistic director assumed the helm of the National" (2). That is the National Theatre in London. Amma's success only comes after a long struggle. This struggle affects her economic status. Her experiences would be very different if she were white.

Gender is one of the determining factors regarding the social class of characters in the novels. In *The Emperor's Babe*, female characters are generally on the margin of economic power except those of noble birth. Before getting married to Felix, Zuleika has no financial power. More to that, she marries as a housewife and has no income-generating activity. She has been given no chance for education and has no right to inheritance because of her gender. Likewise, Alba, Zuleika's best friend is also a housewife who depends on her husband for everything. In *Girl, Woman, Other*, characters like Hattie, Winsome, and Grace have little access to financial independence because of their gender. Gender and racial

identities can influence an individual's social class. The economic conditions of characters in the selected novels reveal a discrepancy between white and black women and between men and women in general. Some characters bear the double oppression of race and gender discrimination. The question of social class in the postmodern capitalist society is more an economic question than a social one because social stratification is mostly based on economic power.

Conclusion

In *The Emperor's Babe* and *Girl, Woman, Other,* Evaristo portrays the interrelationship between the fundamental categories of gender, sex, sexuality, race, and class in the process of identity construction of characters in a multicultural setting. The influence of race in the construction of identity and power relations is one of the major concerns of selected novels. An exploration of Evaristo's representation of British societies unveiled the complexities involved in the process of subject formation within the context of cultural diversity. An analysis of the selected texts revealed that the meeting point of different cultures is always conflictual and to build a sense of self, characters negotiate their identities through assimilation, separation, and integration. This attempt at identity negotiation often involves a self-conscious adherence to the normative model which in turn influences the characters' self-identity.

The analysis has demonstrated that characters assimilate into dominant groups to gain power. Characters choose separation when they attach value to their original culture and avoid contact with the new culture. Most characters who react in this manner are old which suggests a lack of malleability in their already established sense of self. Sometimes, people react by integrating different cultures

thereby developing a mixed cultural identity that allows them to identify to both their local and new culture. A diverse cultural context makes fluidity of identity easy and necessary. This study also revealed that the characters' gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity in the selected texts intersect and support each other in shaping the experiences and lives of women in these novels.

References

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Danaher, Katie. "Mapping and re-mapping the city: representations of London in black British women's writing". Diss. University of Sussex, 2018.

Gendusa, Ester. "Bernardine Evaristo's *The Emperor's Babe*: Re-narrating Roman Britannia, De-essentialising European History". *Synthesis: An Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies*, Vol. 10. No.8. (2015): 47-62.

Jensen, Lene Arnett Et Al**.** "Globalization and Cultural Identity". *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*. Seth J. Schwartz et al. Eds. New York: Springer, 2011. 1-30

Kymlicka, Will**.** *Multiculturalism: Success, Failure, and the Future.* Washington: Migration Policy Institute, 2012.

Lancashire, Anne**.** *London Civic Theatre: City Drama and Pageantry from Roman Times to 1558.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Muñoz-Valdivieso, Sofía**.** "Africa in Europe: narrating black British history in contemporary fiction". *Journal of European Studies*. Vol.40. No.2 (2010):159-174.

Office for National Statistics. "Regional ethnic diversity" 22 December 2022. https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-

ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest/

Rass, Theresa. "A Poetic Journey: The Emperor's Babe in Search of Identity in Virtual Places of Ancient Londinium". 2010. 26 Dec. 2018. www.grin.com/document/181515.

Reingold, Roni And Lea Baratz. "Feminism and Multiculturalism: Two Common Foundations for a Vision and a Practice of Transformative Social Activities and Education in Israel". *Journal of International Female Studies*. Vol. 1. No. 4. (2009). 53-64

Sigle-Rushton, Wendy and Elin Lindström. "Intersectionality". *Gender: The Key Concepts* In: (eds.). Evans et al. Abingdon: Routledge, 2013.

Vervondel, Kelly. "'Who Are They?' Feminism in the Early Novels of Bernardine Evaristo". MA thesis. Vrije Univeriteit Brussel, 2015-2016.

Vignoles, Vivian L et al. "Introduction: Toward an Integrative View of Identity". *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*. Ed. Seth J. Schwartz et al. New York: Springer, 2011. 1-30

Von Rosenberg, Ingrid. "Interview with Bernardine Evaristo on Gender, Sexuality, Feminism, Masculinity and Race". *Hard Times Magazine* Vol. 102 No. 2 (2018), pp- 26-31.

Yang, Ya-Chu. "Multicultural Matters of Love in Contemporary Historical Fiction". *The Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture*. Vol 12.1 (December 2018). 31-55

JELLiC: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Culture
Volume 7; No. 01, March 2024
ISSN: 2304-6120 (Print) / 2304-6163 (E-Version)
www.cellacameroon.org/publications/jellic

Poetic Beatification of Forest: Nol Alembong's Judeo-Christian Postcolonial African Ecopoetics in "Green the Sahara"

Oscar C. Labang, PhD
St. Lawrence University Institute

Abstract
This paper analyzes Nol Alembong's "Green the Sahara" from the perspective of intertextual connectivity and postcolonial African ecopoetics. Alembong is a poet for whom the texts, co-texts and contexts of Judeo-Christian religious philosophy provide an axis for the poetic projection, discussion and invariable promotion of his African/personal philosophy and culture with particular emphasis on forest. The interpretation of African ecological ideas within the praxis of Christian religious philosophy provides a platform for the understanding of African eco-culture within the context of larger or more universal customs. Using concepts of intertextuality from Gerard Genette and Ziva Ben-Porat, the paper examines copresence of texts between a biblical passage from the Gospel of Matthew and a poem by analysing how Alembong adopts and adapts the structural pattern, thematic motif, and linguistic features of the biblical text in the conveyance of a personal and cultural perspective about forest and the role it plays in the greening of desert spaces. The presence of the text from the Sermon on the Mount in Alembong's poem activates both the text of Matthew 5 and its theological implications in the context of environmental consciousness within the postcolonial milieu.

Keywords: Ecopoetics, Intertextuality, Beatitudes, Nol Alembong, Postcolonial poetics

Introduction

Nol Alembong is a poet for whom the texts, co-texts and contexts of Judeo-Christian philosophy/religion provide an axis for the projection, discussion and invariable promotion of his African/personal philosophy and culture with particular emphasis on forest. He seems to think that one of the best methods of making his African philosophical and/or poetic worldview more available and accessible to the world is by packaging it in the frame of a better known and widely accepted philosophy. Alembong's interpretation of forest and postcolonial African existence in general through the lens of Christian ideology has strategic advantages for a reader who understands the dynamics of textual dialogue. The engagement with religious texts is an expression of the poet's hybrid cultural and religious identity. As an African Chief and a university Professor, Alembong has not gone untouched by the influence of Christianity. Christian influence in this case does not necessarily involve participation; rather it is a product of his intellectual exercises and the overbearing presence of religious institutions in contemporary Cameroon. The interpretation of African ideas within the praxis of Christian religious philosophy provides a platform for the understanding of African culture within the context of larger or more universal customs. In this regard, Alembong uses sameness as a means to dispel the myth of primitivism associated with African way of life. At another level, Alembong deliberately disrupts or questions the hegemonic power of biblical texts. His poetic texts become little metanarratives that contradict and wrestle with canonical biblical narratives that continue to shape perceptions in postcolonial societies.

Through a biblicalized or a Judeo-Christian version, Alembong infiltrates the minds of both Christians and Africanist as

both cultural identities intermingle within the same textual space. Even more interestingly, the text finds greater appeal with cultural hybrid readers who find value and essence both in the colonial religious culture and the cultural heritage of their African ancestry. Reading Alembong's poetry therefore requires the critic to bestride two worlds which are at some length incompatible and irreconcilable. For example, while the act, purpose and function of ritual sacrifice are the same in the killing of Jesus Christ and the killing of a sacrificial chicken in African ritual in the poem "Christmas Chicken", it is difficult to reconcile such comparison. Christians, especially, will find it difficult to accept such correspondence between what is considered supreme human sacrifice and animal death. This is also an example of the idea of disruption because Alembong seems to use Christ only to call attention to the centrality of animal sacrifice in African ritual/spiritual practices.

This paper analyzes Alembong's "Green the Sahara" from the perspective of intertextual connectivity and postcolonial African ecopoetics which according to Oscar Labang shows "how African writers reconcile their personal/subjective environmental experiences with ontological ecological philosophies and culture environment norms as well as a history of environmental violence in a language that is strange but culturally rich and dense" (14). In this paper, intertextuality, which Graham Allen considers to be "one of the most commonly used and misused terms in the contemporary critical vocabulary" (2), does not focus on questions of influence; rather it deals more with nature of textuality. Gérard Genette's intertextuality which reads the "relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts" (*Palimpsests,* 1) as well as "the presence of one text within another" (2), and Ziva Ben-Porat's intertextuality which deals with the concurrent activation of the two

texts will be useful in understanding Alembong's poetic beatitudes in relation to Christ's beatitudes. The analysis examines how Alembong adopts and adapts the structural pattern, thematic motif, and linguistic features of a biblical text in the conveyance of a personal and cultural perspective about forest and the role it plays in the greening of desert spaces. As a poet who drives heavily from the wisdom of his cultural heritage "Alembong's intertextuality connectivity is evident in his ability to neatly connect his poetic texts to traditional wisdom derived from the communal repertoire or collective archive of his people" (Labang, 10). Understanding Alembong's cultural and forest/green philosophy in relation to his poetization of ecological crises constitute his postcolonial African ecopoetics which

> extrapolates the hermeneutics and poetics of the poetry of other cultures (mostly African/colonial) to show how writers from such cultures use language and form to create encounters that reveal the historical, cultural and personal realities which shape individual's environmental experiences. (Labang "Towards", 14)

The argument in this paper shows that Alembong depends on, borrows from as well as disrupts/corrupts the linguistic strategy, the structural pattern, and formal qualities of a Judeo-Christian cultural text to express a postcolonial worldview about the necessity of greening the desert-scapes with forest and its associative entities.

Alembong's Forest/Green Philosophy

The forest and associated motifs of greenness are recurrent in Alembong's poetry and has been analyzed from multiple perspectives. He has a deep-rooted sense of companionship with the forest as expressed in his continuous return to forest themes.

Amongst the critics who have examined different dimensions of forest in Alembong's poetics is Oscar C. Labang who analyzes the forest as a metaphor of the postcolonial nation. Charles N. Teke's eco-existentialist reading of the forest in Alembong's poetry also offers interesting perspectives from which one can understand Alembong's profound interest in forest. Teke's argument argues that Alembong "appropriates attributes of the forest to the pluralistic and enigmatic nature of human consciousness and culture" (35) and critically examines different shades of meaning associated with the forest. On his part, Gamal Muhammad A. Elgezeery argues that in Alembong's poetry draws attention to the cross referential value that the forest and culture shares but the depersonalization of the forest is disrupting the values. Andrew T. Ngeh and Mackeus Nguni use Ecocriticism and Afrocentricity to demonstrate that the poetics of Alembong and Kishani "reposition the ecological, cultural and spiritual links that have been distorted by the New World Order" with its capitalist and technological inclination.

Alembong's forest philosophy or green call as expressed in "Green the Sahara" is a continuation of a movement of thought profoundly and adequately captured in the collection of poem *Forest Echoes* and expounded in *Green Call.* He invariably agrees with scholars who argue that forests provide a variety of goods and services that create opportunities for development and improvement of human well-being in the communities (Shackleton et al. 2007; UNEP 2012). Although the collection is dominantly ecocultural and profoundly green, Alembong summarizes his green ideology in these lines:

Green
Rule
Ensures
Everlasting

Newness. (*Forest*, 74)

Simple, direct, and refreshing as the lines maybe, they encapsulate a philosophy that is deeply rooted in the poet's undying conviction that the freshness and aliveness of human civilization lies in the adoption of an existential consciousness that privileges green rule. The poet's perception of sustained and sustainable freshness hinges on an epistemological mindset derived from postcolonial cultural wisdom that places human existence and survival within the same cosmic wheel with the existence of forest. The forest is amongst other things a guarantor of the wealth and health of the household in the community and therefore must be preserved. The everlasting newness is suggestive of both human survival and the regenerative power of the forest. The horizontal and vertical emphasis on green,

G r e e n
R
E
E
N

provides a geometrical and trigonometrical perspective from which one can understand the angular connection between the essentiality of the forest in human life, and inevitability of the need for humans to preserve and maintain the forest. The perpendicular intersection formed through an emphatic prioritization of green at the top and at the start of the verse lines and connected by the "G" unequivocally highlight the link between human life and forest lives while emphasizing the place of a green philosophy in sustaining this connection.

In "Green the Sahara", as in other green poems by Alembong, there is emphatic significance on the colour of the forest conveyed through the morphological variation of the word "green". This variation could be a result of the phrasal economy required by

the art of poetry; but it achieves a fundamental function in that it gives the forest the potential to represent freshness and fertility. In this regard, "greens" is a verb which means to make green or to become green. The verb form of the phrase suggests a process of rejuvenation or revitalization of the Sahara. Placed in the postcolonial context and the troubling history of forest exploitation, it become plausible to see in the poet an effort to salvage the remnants of the exploited forest by blessing it and calling attention to the significant role it plays in human existence.

Another perspective from which "greens" can be understood is its representation of the presence of vegetation. Here, "greens" is a plural noun that refers to the leafy parts of plants used for food in which case it is a short form for green vegetables. This viewpoint brings out the functional value of the forest in that it provides a source of nutrition for the people of the Sahara and to the Saharan earth because leafy vegetables are also a source of manure. The forest therefore feeds both the people and the land thereby re-echoing the element of freshness and fertility mentioned earlier. Thus, whether as a verb or a plural noun, the word "greens" evokes a sense of greenery and/or nutrition and is relevant to understanding the dynamics of forest and existence in Africa. In the opening stanza, Alembong writes:

> Blessed is the forest
> That greens the Sahara
> For, like a stable stone, it shall always gather more moss. (*Green*, 37)

Alembong establishes a context for understanding his traditional view of the forest and its role in the existence of the people. In the cultural wisdom of his people, a forest is not something that is temporary; on the contrary, it is there as long as the people exist because they owe some aspect of their life to it, as myths and values

of the forest are passed down through the generations. The forest is shown to have the element of stability and permanency through its comparison to the "stable stone". More importantly, the promise of an incessant accumulation of "more moss" is suggestive of the ever-growing quality of the forest. The forest which is being destroyed in contemporary times represents the histories, memories, and cultures of the communities. Most of the trees have been part of the life of the community for several hundred years and have contributed to the development and growth of multiple species of forest life like birds, animals and humans. Alembong espouses this cultural philosophy at a time when the forests of Africa are facing serious threats from the incursions of merchant activities. He calls the attention of his postcolonial African people to the ideological and cultural wisdom that protects forests because the life of the forest is linked to that of the community. As if in a struggle to justify this philosophy, Alembong shifts the focus from stability and permanency to the elegance and beauty of the forest when he says:

> Blessed is the forest
> That greens the Sahara with apple groves
> For, like a swan, it shall always be filled with
> grace. (*Green*, 37)

The elegance of the forest is conveyed in the promise that the forest will forever have the gracefulness of a swan. The "apple groves" exist in the same space with the "swans" and the swans contribute to the beauty of the forest. The forest is generally associated with a sense of mysticism and terror. Alembong's contradiction of this view of the forest results from the fact that he is writing like one who is in the forest because, as he argues in "Forest Echoes", those who see the forest from outside understand it differently from the insider's view.

The poetic representation of Africa through a synecdoche is strategic to the understanding of the value of forest to the African. In the first stanza the first two lines offer a verse structure that is simpler than the rest "Blessed is the forest / That greens the Sahara". The focus in this first instance is on the forest and its direct link to Africa/Sahara. In succeeding stanzas, there is a slight shift in focus as new parenthetical phrases are added to the second lines. The first stanza does not specify because the poet probably wants to signify the fact that apart from what will be mentioned later the forest in itself is a blessing to Africa. Alembong is not simply addressing the green concern in a desert scape of the Sahara; rather he is concerned with the forest and deforestation crisis in Africa. The Sahara as a synecdoche for Africa is appropriate because of the contextual relation of the landscape and the need for forest or the promotion of an ecoculture which Alembong advocates.

The flip side of the synecdoche is just as effective. While the Sahara could be understood as a part of Africa used to represent the whole continent, it could also serve as a larger landscape used to represent the miniature deserts created in different parts of Cameroon by wanton deforestation. Literarily, Sahara refers to the desert but from the perspective of Postcolonial African Ecopoetics it represents the "spatial location which the poet has inhabited and/or experienced, and of which he/she has sensual images of the textures, sounds, and smells" (Labang, "Towards", 16). The process of making or textualizing a local(ity) involves the imagining of a landscape that has regained its green through the effective management of forest. By choosing the Sahara, Alembong reveals the idea that he is concerned with desert spaces, especially those created by unchecked exploitation of forest and forest resources. He hopes for the rejuvenation and regeneration of forest as expressed in the images of the expectant mother, and the hen:

> Blessed is the forest
> That greens the Sahara with cornfields
> For, like a mum, it shall always see promises on the flat chest of a girl.
>
> Blessed is the forest
> That greens the Sahara with mango trees
> For, like a hen that lays eggs, it shall always see the harvest sun. (*Green*, 37)

The forest is symbolic of hope to the African because his life is closely linked to it. The promise of breasts on the young girl's chest and the hope of seeing the harvest sun are forward looking symbols which bear positive outlooks. Alembong is more concerned with the transformation that the future brings than with the challenges of the current ecological crisis. The futuristic look embodied in "shall", coupled with the variableness and frequency of changing such future expressed in "always", expresses a passionate intention for an African ecoscape that is continually lush, and rich in vegetation. The promise expressed in "shall" announces the expectation and the determination about what will happen in the future if the forest continues to make the Sahara green. The regenerative potential of the forest is conveyed in the use of feminine images. The mother, the girl, and the hen are symbols of procreation and multiplicity whish suggest Alembong's vision of the rejuvenation of African forests.

Alembong's poetics perceives the forest not simply as an aesthetic function; rather it is a source of livelihood for the people of the Sahara/Africa. He seems not to pay significant interest on wood and wood-based products but rather on non-timber forest products which according to Folaranmi Dapo Babalola are "all non-wood products extracted from forest ecosystem and utilised within

the household or marketed, and which have social, cultural or religious significance" (25). These products, which are generally not cultivated though some are domesticated in recent times, serve as significant supplements to household food especially when regular food has been exhausted (Babalolo, 25). Non-wood forest products include amongst other medicines, fruits, bushmeat, thatch grasses, honey, insects vegetables and edible mushrooms, (Makhado and Saidi 2011; DWAF 2005; FAO 2009). The focus on non-timber forest products is expressed in the idea of greening, and the dominant association of the forest with food items.

> Blessed is the forest
> That greens the Sahara with plum trees
> For, like the peacock, it shall always attract the rainbow.
>
> Blessed is the forest
> That greens the Sahara with pumpkins
> For, like a good dog, it shall always deserve a good bone. (*Green*, 37)

By placing emphasis on the various food sources that the forest provides, Alembong agrees with forest experts who argue that "Forest resources are … essential in the sense that they supply basic needs and act as safety-net" (Makhado and Saidi, 19) for rural communities in Africa and other poor postcolonial areas. The images of the "pear trees", "coconut trees", "plum trees", "mango trees", "cornfields", "pumpkin", and "apple" convey the idea that the forest is rich in various tree types that provide fruits and food for other forest lives like the "bee", "swan", "peacock", "hen", "dog" and humans. Alembong's choice of trees is unique in that almost all the tree types have nutritional values. This can be contrasted with Emmanuel Fru Doh's tree types in "These Cadavres" (6) where he

makes mention of the ebony, obache and iroko. While both poets are concerned with the fate of African forest and the increasing rate of depletion, they have different trajectories. On the one hand, Alembong ties the function of the forest to the health and nutrition of the people while Doh on the other hand projects the functionality of the forest in terms of the habitat it provides for other species. The nutritional relevance of the forest makes it indispensable to postcolonial communities:

> Blessed is the forest
> That greens the Sahara with coconut trees
> For, like a cock, it shall always drink water while raising its head.
>
> Blessed is the forest
> That greens the Sahara with pear trees
> For, like a wasp, it shall never be stung by a bee.
> Blessed is the forest
> That irrigates the Sahara with vapours of green
> For, like a spring source, it shall never lose its ferns.
> (*Green*, 37)

Images like that of the cock drinking water with its head raised or the wasp and the bee are indications of the poet's careful observation of and knowledge of the natural order around him. They provide a context for the reader to understand that he/she is not dealing with abstractions but with concrete realities about forest and forest life. The image of "fern" at the source of a spring inspires a sense of the simple and the natural, and creates in the poem a final moment where the Alembong goes back to the source of the greenness of the forest.

Alembong's forest is one that is teaming with forest lives, that is a variety of animals, birds, insects and humans. Although

captured through similes, the animate and inanimate elements contribute to the general sense of greenness evident from the beginning to the end of the poem. The simile technique used serves its traditional function of comparing the forest to the different life forms and natural elements. It also transcends this traditional dimension in that it makes these life forms present in both the poem and the forest. The presence of various species of living things in the forest confirms the poet's knowledge of and interaction with the forest. Far from being aesthetic presences, the bird and animal imagery create a vivid picture of a realistic forest with chirping birds, animals, streams and insects as well as humans. By infusing these natural entities in the fabric of the poem, Alembong makes the poem an emblematic postcolonial ecopoetic text because "the typical rhythm and imagery of African languages keep the natural - birds, animals, plants and the earth – always present in the human and the human always present in the natural" (Labang, "Towards", 21). It is important to note that the animal and bird images are introduced as parenthetical phrases "For, like a swan, it shall always be filled with grace." or "For, like a good dog, it shall always deserve a good bone." or "For, like a spring source, it shall never lose its ferns." (*Green*, 37). Alembong carefully uses punctuation to control the presence of these forest entities without taking way the focus of the poetic text from the forest. This means that the greenness of forest maintains its priority position as the subject of the poem, but also allows room for other forest entities to be present. The impression the reader gets is that without these parenthetical phrases "like a swan", "like a good dog", or "like a spring source", the poem will still have its structure, texture and meaning though an aspect of its aesthetics and texture will be missing. The imagery therefore brings out the realistic quality of the forest and the poem. In Alembong's philosophy, there is no forest without echoes.

Understood from the above point of view, both the poem and the forest become green and alive and reflect a particular worldview. The poem speaks of the greenness of the forest while at the same time reflecting the qualities itself. The forest is, thus, not an outside object about which the poem speaks. The forest is in the poem and the poem in the forest. This overwhelming feeling of greenness shared by the forest and the poem is kept viable and feasible through the repetition of "greens" in all the stanzas. This poetic unity between the text and the object it describes reflects Alembong's postcolonial worldview that the forest shares unison with everything in it and everything that images it (including the poet). The poetic text is therefore what Juri M. Lotman describes as a "type of worldview" (341) or what Umberto Eco refers to as a "cultural model" (222) that builds on images of reality to communicate. To understand such a cultural model or worldview, it is imperative for the reader to take a cognitive posture that places him/er within a context from which he can use different textual frames to interpret the text or form meaning. The cognitive stance must take cognizance of the fact that "[t]he aesthetics of postcolonial ecopoetry conceive of the environment not as an Other but as an integral part of the being of every postcolonial human" (Labang, "Towards", 26). In this regard, the greenness of the forest and the text is inevitably a reflection of the inner greenness of the poet's soul and by extension the cultural wisdom that feeds that soul.

Judeo-Christian African Ecopoetics

As noted earlier, Ben-Porat's intertextuality which examines a synchronized activation of the two texts will be useful in examining Alembong's idea of the postcolonial green in a Judeo-Christian context. According to Ben-Porat, elements in a text that activate intertextual connections may express significations or acquire

meanings that are different, independent or sometimes incompatible with the texts and context of "the evoked text" (108-9). In this process, even "A distorted quotation or a unique noun in a new declension are examples of markers that are recognizable as belonging to a certain system in spite of a new form" (Ben-Porat 110). Using Ben-Porat's ideas, one can identify textual markers in Alembong's poetic text which point to Matthew's biblical texts though the markers belong to an independent context and cultural text. Intertextual connection is analyzed through the process of actualization which Ben Porat describes in four stages. The first stage deals with the recognition of a marker belonging to another text (referent text). The second stage is the identification of the evoked text; this involves the recollection of an earlier text. The third stage is the modification of the initial interpretation which results from the interaction between the two texts and the difference in context. The fourth stage is the activation of the evoked text as a whole in a bid to create or identify the maximum intertextual connections. Here, the markers and the marked items can be used to form "[a]dditional thematic patterns in the text" (113).

Judeo-Christian intertextuality refers to the borrowing or adaptation of troops from Christian religion and/or philosophy in the expression of a worldview that is other-than-Christian either for the purpose of corroborating an argument, or reinforcing a philosophy, or debunking Christian worldview, or rewriting biblical narrative from other cultural standpoints, or destabilizing the canonical status of Christian narrative. It invites the reader to establish a basis of comparison between the understanding of biblical text outside of the book, and its use within a new cultural context and co-text. Judeo-Christian African ecopoetics refers to the use of troops borrowed from Christian religion and philosophy in the conveyance of an African worldview about the ecosystem or environment. It involves

the identification of textual markers, in Alembong's ecoculturally influenced texts, which suggests a connection to Christian religious texts thereby evoking the necessity to activate such Christian text in the process of reading/interpreting Alembong's poetic texts. To understand how this function, the paradigms of intertextuality will be used to examine possibilities of connecting the poetic text (beatitudes) to the biblical source text from the Gospel of Matthew. It is important to underscore the fact that the textual markers in the poem points to two possible biblical texts – one from the Gospel of Matthew and the other from the Gospel of Luke. However, analytical preference is given to the Matthean beatitudes because it provides a better option for intertextual connectivity. Here below are both texts in full length (though the poetic text has been restructured to give it a more prosaic outlook)

The source or evoked text is the biblical passage from the Gospel of Matthew

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice

and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (5:1-12)

The slightly restructured poetic text in its entirety reads:
Blessed is the forest / That greens the Sahara / For, like a stable stone, it shall always gather more moss.
Blessed is the forest / That greens the Sahara with apple groves
For, like a swan, it shall always be filled with grace.
Blessed is the forest / That greens the Sahara with cornfields / For, like a mum, it shall always see promises on the flat chest of a girl.
Blessed is the forest / That greens the Sahara with mango trees / For, like a hen that lays eggs, it shall always see the harvest sun.
Blessed is the forest / That greens the Sahara with plum trees / For, like the peacock, it shall always attract the rainbow.
Blessed is the forest / That greens the Sahara with pumpkins / For, like a good dog, it shall always deserve a good bone.
Blessed is the forest / That greens the Sahara with coconut trees / For, like a cock, it shall always drink water while raising its head.
Blessed is the forest / That greens the Sahara with pear trees / For, like a wasp, it shall never be stung by a bee.
Blessed is the forest / That irrigates the Sahara with vapours of green / For, like a spring source, it shall never lose its ferns.
(*Green*, 37-38)

From the presentation of both beatitudes, it is evident that Alembong adapts both the narrative structure and the thematic motif of the biblical beatitude. The first motif that is noticeable in both texts is what Timothy Dale Howell calls "the blessing motif" (v). The central image in the poetic beatitudes is the forest and the greening function which it plays in the Sahara. However, the association of the forest with "blessed" makes blessing an important aspect. The act of blessing gives both Alembong and the forest

divine dimensions as the poet assumes a Christ-like disposition and speaks favour and happiness unto the forest that greens the desert landscape of his poetic imagination. The metaphorical connection between the biblical beatitudes and the poetic beatitudes creates parallels between Christ and Alembong on one side, and the congregation and the forest on the other. The forest thus shares the same semantic context with the congregation – they are receptors of divine benediction. Alembong suggests through this metaphor that there is an inextricable link between humanity and the forest. He seems to think that, like the tired and worn-out crowd in the biblical beatitude, African forest is weary and exhausted from exploitation and is therefore in need of blessing. The poetic text therefore is very similar to the source text; yet it also has a clearly distinguished identity from the biblical text with which it engages a dialogue. This is probably why Labang has argued that "to understand Alembong's poetry, it is inevitable for the critic to engage a comprehensive hermeneutical process while maintaining a perceptual view of the poetics of the text" ("Artistic Synergism", 10). The parallel between the crowd and the forest is a typical example because despite their expansive difference one aspect that the two share is the idea of great numbers – a crowd is a multitude of human beings and a forest is a multitude of trees.

Blessed could also be suggestive of the pleasure that the poet derives from forest, reason for which he advocates for the continuous greening or afforestation of Africa. This pleasure is related to the idea of nourishment and sustenance. Blessed therefore refers to a thing that is conducive to happiness or welfare; that is something that brings pleasure, contentment, or good fortune. Alembong is of the opinion that the forest is not just an integral part of human existence but has major usefulness and deserves recognition. Blessedness therefore is an expression of his admiration

of the potential of the forest to bring about happiness, pleasure and good fortune to its dwellers or the community where it is found. This opinion is expressed in earlier poems through the localization of the forest in the very beginning of human existence as seen in the poem "The Beginning", wherein, adapting another biblical narrative, Alembong contextualizes the origin of the postcolonial universe in the forest and interprets Africa's postcolonial dilemma in terms of the European destructive fire that consumes the forest.

The act of blessing the forest is a form of humanization of the forest. The process of appropriation of human values or attributes is fundamental to the idea of humanization. The appropriation in the context of the present poem is achieved through an intertextual transfer of an action – blessing – performed on humans to forest. By blessing the forest, Alembong creatively attributes human agencies to the forest thereby equating the forest of the Sahara to the crowds addressed in the biblical beatitudes. The act of blessing the forest, and making it analogous to divine blessing pronounced by Christ elevates forest to a celestial realm. This reveals the ontology of Alembong's forest philosophy as grounded on the supreme nature, presence, and role of forest in the lives of postcolonial peoples.

Another feature which Alembong's beatitudes shares with those of Christ is a structural pattern based on rhetorical syllogism which according to Vernon Robbins deals with the presentation of a proposition and a rationale or reason for the proposition (39). Robbins's "criteria of pragmatic relations" (40) analysis of the Beatitudes emphasizes the role of the "propositional nature" (40) as a basis for understanding the sayings. Alembong's poetic beatitudes follow a similar structure as there is the proposition, the rational and the promise. The proposition constitutes the act of blessing; the rationale is the reasons for which he blesses the forest: "greens the

Sahara". As noted earlier, the reason changes from stanza to stanza depending on what the forest provides to the Sahara. The third part of the poetic beatitude is the promise, which is a traditional cognitive association of the forest with something that the forest already seems to possess.

In terms of the adoption of the form and structure of the biblical narrative, the first observable feature is the fact that both the biblical and poetic beatitudes are made of nine line or stanzas. In the poetic beatitudes, Alembong maintains the stanza pattern, and repetitive techniques which according to Timothy Howell are distinct features of the biblical beatitudes. Howell states that "[t]he Beatitudes demonstrate intentionality in both its structure and content. The structure exhibits a tool for mnemonic practice. The carefully balanced strophes combined with alliteration and assonance conveys a text pragmatically and paradigmatically created". (267). Alembong is careful enough to notice that in the source text the last stanza is different from the preceding stanza, a technique which he also uses in the poem. In the biblical text, the ninth beatitude alters the structural pattern and even extends its message into two sentences. Similarly, in the poetic text, the ninth stanza changes the alliterative pattern. Instead of the forest that greens, the last stanza talks about the forest "That irrigates the Sahara with vapours of green" (*Green*, 37). This change shifts the meaning and function of the forest and gives it a more contextual perspective especially in relation to the desert of the Sahara. For a poem that talks about the desert, irrigation, which deals with the watering of land by artificial means to foster plant growth, evokes a more profound sense of connection between the setting and the activity. Interestingly, the forest irrigates the Sahara with "vapours of green" not ordinary water. Water only comes up in the

comparison that connects the forest to a "spring source" with the promise that fern will continually be part of the forest scape.

Both beatitudes share similar rhetorical features. As Howell notes "Matthew composed the Beatitudes from a literary structure (repetition, parallelism, alliteration, allusion). (288-89). Evidently, these are literary devices that abound in the poetic beatitudes and some of them occur in similar sequence. For example, the repetition of "blessed" in an anaphoric pattern (at the beginning of each verse) occurs in both the biblical and the poetic beatitudes and gives the idea of sanctity and exaltation a predominant position. Also, parallelism in both texts occur in analogous succession as Matthew and Alembong depend on structural correspondence and repeated syntactical similarities to achieve a rhetorical effect. With the exception of the last verse, all the verses in the biblical beatitudes follow this pattern: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Verse 1). In similar vein, all the stanzas in the poetic beatitudes, with the exception of stanza nine, maintain this pattern: "Blessed is the forest / That greens the Sahara / For, like a stable stone, it shall always gather more moss." (Stanza 1). Both texts also make profuse use of images that are appropriate to their thematic trajectories, contexts, and cultures.

Conclusion

Using the Matthean beatitude as a referent text, the analyses has demonstrated that Alembong's poetics relies on the adaptation of structural, thematic, and stylistic troops to express a worldview that is other-than-Christian. The identification of textual markers from Matthean beatitude necessitates the activation of Christian biblical text in the process of reading/interpreting Alembong's poetic texts. Such activation reveals that through intertextual connection Alembong rewrites biblical narrative from other cultural standpoints

thereby inviting the reader to establish a basis of comparison and interpretation of biblical text, and other cultural context and co-texts. By activating the text of Matthew 5 in a poem that is distant from the theological context of the original text, Alembong ascribes to himself the apostolic authority of the disciples to evangelise the world not about Christ but about the need to revive and revitalize desert landscapes like the Sahara.

As an African Chief, Alembong is an embodiment of the cultural philosophy of the people; and as a poet he uses the knowledge from the cultural wisdom to craft poetic works that reflect in profound ways the beliefs and values of the society. In relation to forest, he employs a poetics that capture the usefulness of forest to the community while encouraging a value-system within which forest preservation and propagation are central. Alembong understand not just the social and nutritional value of forest but also its spiritual value and its connection to the life of human being and the community. This is probably the reason he projects the necessity for greening desert spaces through a stylistic connection to biblical texts. As mentioned earlier, such a connection places the forest on the same pedestal with the multitude of followers that Christ addresses in his sermon on the mount. Alembong therefore engages in the humanization of forest as a means of calling the reader's consciousness to the centrality of forest in the life of the postcolonial individual. Unlike Christ who blesses different categories of people and promise them different rewards, Alembong focuses on the forest and its various uses. Christ blesses human and define their existence here and in the hereafter in relation to their existential nexus with heaven and God. Contrary to this, Alembong blesses forest and establishes its function to human nourishment and sustenance. He thinks of a future in which the Sahara, a symbol of Africa and an expression of possibility for all desert spaces, is green in all

dimensions. The centrality of the present is not compromised in this futuristic outlook because the speaker contrasts the present green state with one that embodies greenness in more profound ways.

Works Cited

Alembong, Nol. *Green Call*. Chennai: Notion Press, 2017.

_ _ _. *The Passing Wind*. Missouri: Miraclaire Publishing, 2013.

_ _ _. *Forest Echoes*. Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2010.

Allen, Graham. *lntertextuality.* London: Routledge, 2000.

Babalola, Folaranmi Dapo. "A Review of the Significance of Non-Timber Forest Products to Rural Livelihoods in Nigeria". *Nature & Faune*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2011, pp. 25-29.

Ben-Porat, Ziva. "The Poetics of Literary Allusion". *PLT A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature,* vol 1, no. 1, 1976, pp. 105-128.

Chapman, Colin A. and Lauren J. Chapman. "Deforestation in Tropical Africa: Impacts on Aquatic Ecosystems". *Conservation, Ecology and Management of African Fresh Waters*, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003, pp. 229-246.

DWAF. *Pilot State of Forest Report: A Pilot Report to Test the National Criteria and Indicators*, Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF), Pretoria, 2005.

Eco, Umbeto. *The Role of the Reader*, Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1979.

Elgezeery, Gamal Muhammad A. "Cross-referencing Nature and Culture in Nol Alembong's *Forest Echoes". International Journal of English and Literature,* vol. 3, no. 2, June 2013, pp. 27-40.

FAO. *State of the World's Forests*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy. 2009.

Genette, Gérard. *Palimpsests: Literature in Second Degree*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1997.

Howell, Timothy Dale. "Examining the Jewish Origins Employed in the Matthean Beatitudes Through Literary Analysis and Speech Act Theory", Diss. South African Theological Seminary, January 2001.

Labang, Oscar C. "Towards a Postcolonial African Echopoetics". *Ecocultural Perspectives*, eds. N. Alembong, O. C. Labang, & E. F. Fombele. Missouri: Ken Scholars Publishing, 2015, pp. 13-32.

_ _ _. "Artistic Synergism and Disruptive Continuity: Narrative Intertextuality in Nol Alembong's "The Beginning"". *Epasa Moto: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Arts, Letters and the Humanities of the University of Buea*, vol. 2, no. 1, June 2015, pp 9-28.

Lotman, Juri M. "Point of View in a Text". *New Literary History,* vol. 6, no. 2, 1975, pp. 339-352.

Makhado, Rudzani and Amani Saidi. "Socio-Economic and Environmental Significance of Plantation Forests in South Africa". *Nature & Faune,* vol. 25, no. 2, 2011, pp. 19-24.

Ngeh, Andrew T. & Mackeus Nguni. "Ecoculture and Spirituality in the Poetry of Nol Alembong and Bongasu Tanla-Kishani". *Social Science, Humanities and Sustainability Research*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2023, pp. 68-80. www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/sshsr

Robbins, Vernon "Pragmatic Relations as a Criterion for Authentic Saying". *Foundations and Facets Forum*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1985, pp. 36-63.

Shackleton, Charlie M.; Sheona E. Shackleton; Erik Buiten; and Neil Bird. "The Importance of Dry Woodlands and Forests in Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Alleviation in South

Africa". *Forest Policy and Economics*, vol. 9, no. 5, 2007, pp. 558–577.

Teke, Charles N. "The Eco-Existential(ist) Dimension of Nol Alembong's *Forest Echoes". Ecocultural Perspectives*, eds. N. Alembong, O. C. Labang, & E. F. Fombele. Missouri: Ken Scholars Publishing, 2015, pp. 35-62.

UNEP. "Forests and Woodlands". *Africa Environment Outlook 2*, United Nations Environment Programme, 2012, pp. 196-225.

JELLiC: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Culture
Volume 7; No. 01, March 2024
ISSN: 2304-6120 (Print) / 2304-6163 (E-Version)
www.cellacameroon.org/publications/jellic

Larkin and Soyinka: Romantic Bearings, Nostalgia, and the Search for Essence

Nkanu Mazou, PhD
University of Bertoua, Cameroon

Abstract
Philip Larkin and Wole Soyinka are culturally and politically distant literary figures; their voices are shaped by vastly different historical landscapes, yet they share a common susceptibility with the romantic and nostalgic. This paper seeks to examine how both poets engage in a universal human search for meaning and understanding using romantic and nostalgic connections. Larkin, often characterized as a cynic, reveals a profound yearning for connection amidst disillusionment. His poems navigate the tension between idealized notions of love and the harsh realities of human relationships, which causes him to use nostalgia both as a source of comfort and a reminder of transience. Soyinka, on the other hand, infuses his poetry with a vibrant sensuality and a deep engagement with his Yoruba heritage. His exploration of romantic connections is often infused with political and social commentary while nostalgia becomes a tool for critiquing colonialism, exposing the callousness of man, and celebrating cultural identity. This paper uses concepts of Romanticism to interpret and analyse Larkin's and Soyinka's poetry. Also, concepts from existentialism and postmodernism will be used as trends in the discussion especially on the issue of the search for essence. By examining these shared themes and contrasting approaches, this paper argues that Larkin and Soyinka offer valuable insights into the universals of human experience that transcend cultural and historical boundaries. Their disparate voices create a richer tapestry of understanding, demonstrating the power of poetry to connect people across vast distances. They offer valuable insights that transcend cultural boundaries, reminding humans that despite the differences, they

share a common yearning for connection and a sense of belonging in a world that is often both beautiful and heartbreaking.
Keywords: Philip Larkin, Wole Soyinka, romanticism, nostalgia, essence, memory

Introduction

The human desire for connection, belonging, and a sense of self often manifests in our relationship with the past. Literature, as a powerful tool for exploring the complexities of the human experience, frequently grapples with themes of memory, nostalgia, and the search for essence. This essay delves into the works of two seemingly disparate poets, Philip Larkin and Wole Soyinka, to uncover how they utilize romantic bearings and nostalgia to navigate the profound desire for some sort of fulfilment. Despite their contrasting cultural backgrounds – Larkin, a British poet writing in the mid-20th century, and Soyinka, a Nigerian playwright and poet wrestling with the legacy of colonialism – both engage with romantic ideals and nostalgic longing in ways that challenge easy categorization. While Larkin's poetry often evokes a sense of cynicism and disillusionment with idealized visions of the past, this paper argues that his engagement with romantic themes is more geared towards his search for an accommodating space. On the other hand, Soyinka, writing from the context of a nation grappling with the legacy of colonialism, utilizes nostalgia as a tool for critique and identity exploration. The Romantic approach will be used as the main analytical tool in this paper. Romanticism, a 19th-century artistic and literary movement, emphasized the power of imagination and emotion over reason, valuing nature, individual expression, and a yearning for a perceived lost ideal. This "golden age" often reflected a connection to the natural world and a search for meaning beyond the limitations of the rational and the industrial. To existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre, Søren Kierkegaard, and Albert Camus, making meaning out of life is the responsibility of the individual. Kierkegaard, for instance, believes that man is a creature imbued with an innate need to find meaning in himself and

the world around him. He talks about the need for the individual "to find that which offers him some assurance that he is accommodated, that he is accepted, that there is some place for him; …" (qtd in Scott 11). Similarly, Camus in the preface to *The Myth of Sisyphus* says, "Even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism". The search for essence therefore is the attempt to find some form of meaning in an otherwise meaningless existence. The poets are engaged in a search for accommodating space. In the poetry of Larkin and Soyinka, this quest for essence is seen either through their poetic personae, the characters in the poems, or the poets themselves.

Critics have divergent views concerning Larkin's Romantic stance, while Leman Demirbaş sees in his poetry "anti-romantic" and "anti-modernist" tendencies, Tijana Stojkovic interprets his poetry in the light of his literary beliefs and allegiances to Romanticism. For Soyinka, critics like Emmanuel Ngara opine that Soyinka is a poet and a mythmaker and his search for a myth places him in the tradition of modernist Romantic poets like Yeats and Eliot. Also, Chimdi Maduagwu believes that Soyinka's use of myth also reflects the Romantic impulse; the pantheon of gods conceived of as eternal reality by the Yoruba people is revisited by Soyinka's Romantic mythic imagination. Though critics of both Larkin and Soyinka have identified Romantic trends in their poetry, this has not often been linked to the poets' attempt to grapple with complex questions of meaning. Also, juxtaposing these two poets who are culturally and politically distant literary figures with common inclination for the romantic and nostalgic is another innovation this paper offers. This paper therefore aims to examine how both poets engage in a universal human search for meaning and understanding using romantic and nostalgic connections. The paper is based on the premise that despite their contrasting cultural contexts, both Larkin and Soyinka utilize romantic connections and nostalgia in their poetry to celebrate idealized pasts, grapple with complex questions of identity, and search for meaning in their respective societies.

Romantic Bearings and Nostalgia

In the earliest phase of Larkin's career, he wrote nature poems on seasons, days and nights. His early volume, *The North Ship,* can easily be viewed as a remake of the fin de siècle for Nature poetry. In this collection, a major influence was Yeats, from whom he borrowed the beauty of the musicality of his poetry. It is also worth noting that besides being a modernist poet, Yeats was also a romantic poet. In the most mature phase of Larkin's career, he again seems to have returned to nature. Feelings of nostalgia are equally expressed in some of his poems wherein the speakers long for the traditional era or the bygone days. Nostalgia is a cultural phenomenon that became prominent in the postmodern period. In "Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern: A Dialogue", Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdes postulate that nostalgia within the postmodern context is a "recalling of the past" and an "escape to an idealized, simpler era of "real" community values" (18). In the poems of Larkin and Soyinka, such past is constructed in conjunction with the present. O'Neill and Callaghan hold that Movement poets are full of nostalgia and longing for an age preceding the war (170). The Romantic period constitutes part of these traditional worlds in which Larkin's and Soyinka's speakers seek to find essence, or in which they celebrate. An outstanding romantic element that cuts across Larkin's and Soyinka's poetry is the concept of unity of being. In both Larkin and Soyinka romantics, there is an effort to achieve a new state of being, a new self-understanding in which the quester craves unity in a world that is faced with disunity and disintegration at all levels. The object of the quest is the union between man and other elements of nature; much like the Wordsworthian ideal of a spiritual marriage between nature and the human mind. For Soyinka, Romanticism does not only seem to serve as a template to measure his poems that celebrate nature, aesthetic beauty, emotion, artistic creativity, and imagination, but the object of his quest for spiritual and supernatural reunion aligns with the Romantic ideal. His use of Romantic tenets in his poetry is also foregrounded with a strong consciousness of African reality, especially Yoruba oral literature and realities. Geoffrey Hunt claims

that Soyinka is a romanticist with "nostalgia for the security of traditional values" (qtd in Lunga 32). Hunt goes on to quote Peter Nazareth to prove the claim that Soyinka wants traditional ways of life to be retained (ibid). Besides the celebration of nature and birth, the search for essence is seen in his employment of the other Romantic canons. His search for essence also takes him to myth-making. Like Larkin, a good number of Soyinka's poems are autobiographical in nature.

In the poem "All catches alight", Larkin depicts concrete pictures of a romantic world full of energy and excitement in which man is induced by the "spread of Spring". In the poem, birds are "crazed" with the joy of boundless flight; branches "fling/Leaves up to the light;" all living things: birds, beasts, plants, trees, and man join in the process of enjoyment in their respective milieus. The ploughman tills the land as if in ecstasy. The speaker wishes that the wheel of life may continue to spin till all living things cast away their memories and all dead are made to live again: The ambiance that characterizes a cross-section of the poem is reminiscent of the Wordsworthian world or those of his contemporaries. In Wordsworth's "Daffodils", for example, this kind of ebullient atmosphere is perceived where the romantic sentiment of unrestrained jubilation is expressed or where elements of nature respond to each other harmoniously. It is always worth reiterating here that "All catches alight" equally shows Larkin indebtedness to Yeats. His "wheel" is just another version of the Yeatsian "gyre" used in Yeats's "The Second Coming".

Also, in "Coming", Larkin portrays the coming of spring and rekindles childhood memories. The title of the poem suggests the arrival of spring. With the coming of spring, the speaker's heart is filled with exhilaration. The first part of the poem presents the dawn of the spring through its various sights and sounds. The yellow light bathing the serene foreheads of houses indicates that winter has gone away:

> On longer evenings,
> Light, chill and yellow,
> Bathes the serene

Foreheads of houses.
A thrush sings,
Laurel-surrounded
In the deep bare garden,
Its fresh-peeled voice (*Collected Poems* 47)

The speaker says that spring has arrived. The tranquil house-fronts are bathed in light which is chilly and yellow. He uses the image of "thrush sings" remarks that spring is coming. A thrush is heard chirping and singing in the midst of nature with a "fresh-peeled voice". Indeed, spring is the symbol of a new life and vitality. The chirping of the thrush seems to surprise the brick work of the houses. His chirping also seems to be saying that soon the spring would come and take the place of winter. The speaker feels greatly cheered by the prospect of the arrival of spring. So, he repeats these two lines: "It will be spring soon, /It will be spring soon" (*ibid*). To emphasize this idea, Janice Rossen says that although Larkin is to some extent a suburban poet, he remains something of a romantic, especially in poems such as "Coming", where "the serene foreheads of houses" and the song of a thrush awaken a child-like perspective almost amounting to joy (113).

The second part of this poem deals with the speaker's reminiscences of his childhood:

And I, whose childhood
Is a forgotten boredom,
Feel like a child
Who comes on a scene
Of adult reconciling,
And can understand nothing
But the unusual laughter,
And starts to be happy. (*Collected Poems* 47)

There is an autobiographical element which the poem conveys and through which the speaker meditates on his childhood as a period of boredom, which he has forgotten. There is no memory of his childhood to gladden his heart or to cheer him up, but the singing of the thrush announcing the arrival of spring which brings joy to him and erases this sad memory of his childhood. The thrush is described

as singing in its "fresh-peeled voice" and its song is conveying the message that spring would come soon. In the closing lines, the speaker begins to feel happy like a child who can understand nothing except the laughter of the adult world. One tends to agree with G. S. Fraser that "poems of pure happiness are rare in Larkin's poetry. But this is a happy poem, not merely a beautiful one." (247).

Unlike in "Coming" wherein the poet seems not to remember his childhood memories, in "To the Sea", the speaker awakens and contrasts his childhood memories with his present day thereby creating a sense of nostalgia and longing. His idealized scene in the first two stanzas and part of the third stanza contrasts significantly with the beach of the present day. His tone throughout the poem is that of cynicism and an ongoing disapproval of change which characterizes the present. The perfect seaside scene is described using primary colours and images giving a picture postcard view:

> The miniature gaiety of seasides.
> Everything crowds under the low horizon:
> Steep beach, blue water, towels, red bathing caps,
> The small hushed waves' repeated fresh collapse
> Up the warm yellow sand, and further off
> A white steamer stuck in the afternoon – *(Collected Poems 121)*

The use of primary colours evokes the vibrance and "gaiety of seasides". The vivid descriptions give an authentic viewpoint and make imagining of the beach very easy. Also, the juxtaposition of the young and the old at the seaside represents the sense of tradition which the Larkin attempts to rekindle. The perception changes to show that the speaker ages; the beach loses its value now. Larkins seems to contrast the vibrance of the beach of his childhood with the current beach which is typified by decay as symbolized by "chocolate-papers", "cheap cigars", and "rusting soup-tins". Here Larkin uses negative words in subsequent stanzas such as "weak", "cheap" and "rusting" to show how the beach has deteriorated as the speaker has aged. Now the beach is visited by few people, and it has degraded in value from "Famous Cricketers" to now "cheap cigars".

The "white steamer" which was an integral part of the merriment of the beach is no longer there.

In parallel, Soyinka's poem "Tower Clock: Ake Revisited" seems to capture Larkin's feelings in "To the Sea". Like Larkin, Soyinka seems to remember his childhood memories in "Tower Clock: Ake Revisited". He also awakens and contrasts his childhood memories with the present day thereby creating a sense of nostalgia and longing. His idealized image of Ake's tower clock of his childhood contrasts significantly with the tower clock of the present day. His tone throughout the poem is that of disapproval of change which characterizes the present and a longing of the glorious past of the Ake's tower clock.

In the poem, the poet recognises a proud part of his youth whose present situation causes pain and displeasure. The lost time of innocence, a lost sense of duty and beauty constitute Soyinka's concerns in "Tower Clock: Ake Revisited". The tower clock, due to people's lack of a sense of maintenance and care has, in its present cannibalised "beauty" or ugliness, lost its essence and functions as landmark of the poet's youth. Rather than registering births, wedding, or waking up people or welcoming people to the beginning of a New Year and festival season, it is now reduced to an ineffectual ornament:

> Because the weary eyes hold no more light
> Hands gouged them out, from all four faces
> Of Ake's tower clock. The sockets' shame
> Is sealed in slabs of bronze. These were once
> Eyes of equity, hands that nudged
> Sonorities from the belfry to embrace
> All faiths, from hill to valley of Abeokuta
> Keeping eternal vigil on the land of rocks. (*Samarkand*, 65)

The tone of lamentation in the poem is both personal and collective; it touches on a collective sense of pain in everyone who does not know why things have gone so bad that none of them bother that what gave them pleasure or what told their history is suddenly consigned to the dustbin of useless jewellery. Throughout the poem

Soyinka contrasts the Aké of the period the poem was written with the old Aké of his youth, there is a sense of loss; as if all that made the town dear to him, in his childhood and in his memory, has disappeared and been replaced by things new and somehow false. In this light, Phoebe Koch states that there is always distortion in the romantic return to places of one's past. Memory becomes clouded and partial to what was positive, while omitting or recasting that which was negative. In Soyinka's description of the present in the poem, he often becomes a grandfather figure, reflecting upon his childhood. He is nostalgic for the "good old days" (38). In memory studies, Owojecho Omoha puts it out that once perception traces history, no matter whatever direction it takes, it ends at the merciful hands of nostalgia (52). Nostalgia, according to Jeremy Davies, "is an emotion that arises from precisely that kind of encounter: one that makes us feel that our past is something necessarily different to what we've become, or out of reach of what exists in the present" (qtd in Owojecho Omoha 52). Soyinka in the poem laments and craves for the past glory of the tower clock in Ake, his birth place. He also acknowledges how the clock played host to "All faiths, from hill to valley of Abeokuta" at the Ake Cathedral and other activities including weddings, funerals, and festive anthems. Yet, the fact that the passage of time has left the clock less functional in the present and it has to be cast in bronze drew greater feelings in the poet.

The effect of time passing and change, and the evil of urbanisation and industrialisation is further problematized in Larkin's poem "The Explosion". The playfulness of the miners bitterly calls up their untimely sacrifice of childhood: "One chased after rabbits, lost them;/Came back with a nest of lark's eggs;/Showed them; lodges them in the grasses." (*Collected Poems* 154). This can also be seen as a temporary escape from the suffocation of both the mine and the metropolitan life. The reference to the unbroken eggs in the concluding line conveys regeneration which is a powerful romantic phenomenon. Also, the playful nature of the miners shows their attempt to re-enact their childhood experiences, and commune with nature.

Also, Soyinka's poem "Dawn" mirrors Larkin's poems: "All catches alight" and "The horns of the morning" analysed above where a concrete atmosphere of a romantic world full of energy and excitement in which man is induced is captured. The atmosphere in Soyinka's "Dawn" is reminiscent of the Wordsworthian world or those of his contemporaries. Soyinka celebrates nature. It is worth noting that nature, in all its unbound glory, plays a huge role in Romantic literature. Romantic poets and writers give personal, deep descriptions of nature and its wild and powerful qualities. In "Dawn", Soyinka celebrates daybreak which is a period of the day often characterised by hope. He attempts to capture the essence and the spirit of the dawn:

> Breaking earth upon
> A spring haired elbow, lone
> A palm beyond head-grain, spikes
> A guard of palm fronds, piercing
> High hairs of the wind (*Idanre* 9)

The palm tree visible at the break of the day is endowed with a conspicuous pride in its position. It spikes and pierces the air, and "appears almost like an athlete glorying in his achievement" (Jones Durosimi 147). Also, the vivid picture of the coming glory and impact of dawn is described in an emblematic manner to highlight its symbolic importance to man, especially its relationship with growth and fertility. The predominant use of sexual imagery like "A guard of palm fronds, piercing", "The even belt of tassels, above coarse", "leaf teasing at the waist", "lone intruder, tearing wide" etc. reinforces the idea of fertility and reproduction. In essence, the coming of the dawn in its grandeur also calls for celebration because of the benefits that it brings. It gives light to the world and enhances productivity among plants which in turn gives continuity or rejuvenation to existence. Likewise, the celebrative and panegyric mode of the last stanza of the poem is captured through Soyinka's choice and use of words. Words like "palm-fronds", "blood", "celebration", "rites", "god", "flame" and "kernel" enable the readers to feel that the daybreak is greeted with a kind of worship and an apt sacrificial offering to an aflame god. There is cosmos

harmony between all the elements of nature as even the gods are excited with the sacrifice offered to them, thus productivity and continuity are assured.

A similar atmosphere is also captured in Soyinka's "Death in the Dawn". Like in the poem "Dawn", dawn is represented as a time of hope, in "Death in the Dawn". It presents a world of men who rise from their beds, quench their lamps, take up their cargoes, and make for the markets through the early morning fog; believing that through sacrifices and prayers to the gods they might avoid adversity:

> Let sunrise quench your lamps, and watch
> Faint brush pricklings in the sky light
> Cottoned feet to break the early earthworm
> On the hoe. […]
>
> This soft kindling, soft receding breeds
> Racing joys and apprehensions for
> A naked day, burdened hulks retract,
> Stoop to the mist in faceless throng
> To wake the silent markets - swift, mute
> Processions on grey byways ... (*Idanre* 10)

The natural and human events of morning become slowly visible: the sun rising, the colouring of the sky, farmers heading for fields, the gradually "receding" shadows of trees, market people in "swift, mute/ Processions" making their way to towns highlight the element of hope that is occasioned by the natural environment.

Also, Soyinka's "Dedication" bears romantic propensity. The poem is the celebration of a child; it is an incantation during a ritual performed in honour of a young girl called Moremi. The initiator invokes the gods to protect her and also state to her the challenges of life. The invocation of blessing to the newly born infant is done in language which is mostly used by elders in ceremonies like naming ceremony or baby shower where the child is formally recognized as having been born and is introduced to the world. The poem blooms with images from the surrounding

environment, all made to yield significance in particular wishes for the child:

> Earth will not share the rafter's envy: dung floors
> Break, not the gecko's slight skin, but its fall
> Taste this soil for death and plumb her deep for life
>
> As this yam, wholly earthed, yet a living tuber
> To the warmth of waters, earthed as springs
> As roots of baobab, as the hearth.
>
> The air will not deny you. Like a top
> Spin you on the navel of the storm, for the hoe
> That roots the forests ploughs a path for squirrels. (*Idanre* 24)

The fall of the gecko from the dangerous height of the hut's rafters to the hard floor indicates the inevitable fall and the challenges or difficulties in life the child is bound to encounter. The yams, the springs, the baobab, the earth, all combine in a wish for a secure, productive, and continuing life, for the child. Like "peat", a symbol of a natural growth and long life, the child is to grow free under the benevolent influences of nature - rain, the sun's shadow and the night's protection. So, the poet calls on the rain, sun, and night to give Moremi long life, bless and protect her as well. She will, thus, be protected by natural elements. Also, the speaker presents the earth as a generous element. Life comes from the earth and like a falling gecko, one shall return to it. As the earth gives life to yams and baobab trees, so shall it give life to Moremi. The poet adds that even the air will support her. Despite the challenges of life that she may face, the air will be her canopy and show her the right path to follow just as a squirrel makes its way through the forest. Symbolic items like pepper, palm wine, and the various preparations used in the child's toilet combine to invoke a full, healthy, productive life, all leading to the final wish that the child's life may leave a permanent influence.

The young girl's body is also fortified against any evil or danger. Green pepper is used to make her tongue as sharp as the tail of a scorpion to overcome all threats. Despite this fortification,

Moremi is called upon to be as soft as the voice of pigeons and as tender as the stems of plants. The poet invokes rain-water which will make her fecund or fruitful. The baby she will give birth to, will be to "repay the debt of birth" because each and every one is supposed to reproduce. These children will make Moremi leave her footprints in the sands of her time; meaning that before her death, the children will be a testimony of her meaningful life on earth. The notion of rebirth, a powerful romantic phenomenon is a recurrent theme in most of Soyinka's poem. "Dedication" like "Dawn" shows that the endowment of nature only pushes people towards one main goal which is procreation. Africans believe more in reproduction because it is only through it that the survival of the next generation is assured.

Another romantic element that is characteristic of Soyinka's poetry is the power of imagination and artistic creativity. Poets of the Romantic Movement explored the importance of imagination and the creative impulse. They celebrated the power of imagination and the creative process, as well as the artistic viewpoint. The Romantics believe that the imagination is the only means by which one can attain transcendental reality; that is the realm beyond ordinary human apprehension, where the beauty absent in the real world is present in the imaginary world (Nkengasong, "Realms of the Imagination" 13). Nkengasong also holds that "the imagination is a state in which one involuntarily finds oneself, dictated by the sufferings in real; … the imagination becomes a means of emancipating oneself from any form of life that is not gratifying (Nkengasong, 13). They believed that artists and writers looked at the world differently, and they celebrated that vision in their work. Through the imagination, the artist is in search of an ideal life far away from reality. Maduagwu believes that Soyinka's use of myth also reflects the Romantic impulse. The pantheon of gods conceived of as eternal reality by the Yoruba people is revisited by Soyinka's Romantic mythic imagination, resulting in new structures. Soyinka has absorbed Yoruba incantatory rhythms. In place of the supreme God, he institutes an Ogun superstructure that constitutes a new pantheon. Other gods like Obatala, Sango, Esu and Atunda, are made subordinates to the new great Ogun. The new emanations are

regarded as products of the imagination and not necessarily incontestable truths. For Soyinka and his counterparts, the "tough minded reformers," the gods of the pantheon are artistic tools and are commended particularly by Soyinka for "their self-sacrifice on the alter of literature…and possibly … further service on behalf of human society, and its quest for the explication of being" (*Soyinka, Myth, Literature* 9). To Maduagwu, these gods are used to enhance the writer's aesthetic realizations. Sango, the god of thunder in *Idanre* and *The Interpreters*, is a creation of the Romantic imagination (106). Historically, he (Sango) was the third Alafin of Oyo who was forced to commit suicide, but Soyinka (drawing upon this particular tale) artistically absolves him of the unjust act of suicide and "raises him to a truly superhuman, super demonic level". (Soyinka, *Myth, Literature* 9). Sango's admission into the pantheon enriches the comity of gods in Idanre hills. As a functional deity, Sango is in charge of thunder, lightning, and electrical power, "the cosmic instrument of swift retributive justice" (ibid). Sango also holds Obatala in prison. Soyinka incorporates him (Sango) into a mythic framework of creative expressiveness, thus using Sango to expand a new aesthetically designed world view. "Swift retributive justice" needs to be addressed; hence it is assigned to a force elevated far above the ordinary.

In "Idanre", Soyinka explores the importance of the imagination and the creative impulse to the fullest. He uses the Ogun myth as his primary source and exhibits powerful artistry and creative mastering of his source. The power of his imagination is equally exploited at its highest level. Jones states that while the rest of the community waits in passive piety and hope for the blessings of the harvest, the poet dares to undertake a lonely and hazardous journey into Ogun's lair, to witness the god's pre-harvest agony (182). The poet appears here as the lone seeker in search of truth, meaning, and human essence:

> I walked upon a deserted night before
> The gathering of Harvest, companion at a god's
> Pre-banquet. The hills of Idanre beckoned me
> As who would yield her secrets, locked

In sepulchral granite. (*Idanre* 81)

It is to those only who dare to look alone on the naked truth that the hills "yield their secrets". The poem "Idanre" is a record of Soyinka's pilgrimage and of the secrets which he seeks to know. Section I of the poem, "deluge", sets the scene at the start of the pilgrimage. The presence of the gods is invoked through the storm that comes before the walk; Sango the god of lightening and electricity – "the axe-handed one" - and Ogun, the god of iron whose metallic cables bear Sango's electricity to earth. According to the poet, the storming rain is welcomed by men as well as the land without question and only him dares further into "secrets hidden from him":

And no one speaks of secrets in this land
Only, that the skin be bared to welcome rain
And earth prepare, that seeds may swell
And roots take flesh within her, and men
Wake naked into harvest-tide. (*Idanre* 62)

The actual pilgrimage starts in the second stanza of Section II of the poem titled "… After", with the arrival of Ogun. The pilgrimage proper in the company of a god - Ogun is forecasted by a communion with another human, "the wine-girl". This brief contact with the wine-girl is the last link the poet has with another human of his kind. Worth noting is the fact that in Soyinka's notes to the poem he endows the wine-girl with three personalities. Apart from her primary personality as the wine-girl, she is "Also Oya, once the wife of Ogun, latterly of Sango ... Also, a dead girl killed in a motor accident" (86). In the poem itself she represents womanhood and motherhood. She provides an anchor for the poet in his lonely and perilous walk among gods and spirits and even sits with them to drink before the start of the voyage.

The poet's mind returns twice to the wine-girl during his walk with the god. She cannot understand why the poet would seek the hills at such a time. Her question reflects the thought of the society from which the poet comes which may not understand the venture a writer may take at certain times: ". . . what then are you? At such hour/ Why seek what on the hills?" (ibid 62). Through her

question, the poet's isolation and the lack of understanding by the society he tries to save is made evident. His separation from the wine-girl is symbolic of his disconnectedness from the society he wants to save. But like the "wine-girl" he keeps remembering in his journey, he is still "earthed" to his society. His relationship with the society of the wine-girl is ambiguous. The ambiguity of this relationship makes the loneliness of poet more poignant as he is the victim of his own society which he seeks to save.

The poet's journey into the underworld accompanied by the god is captured in the following lines:

> […] We walked
> Silently across a haze of corn, and Ogun
> Teased his ears with tassels, his footprints
> Future furrows for the giant root.
>
> […]
>
> We walked through broken braids of steel
> And fallen acrobats. …
> The road waits, famished
>
> […]
>
> Ogun, godfather of all souls who by road
> Made the voyage home, made his being welcome
> Suffused in new powers of night, my skin
> Grew light with eyes; I watched them drift away
> To join the gathering presences (*Idanre* 63-65)

Through the journey with the god, the poet understands so many things; like the landscape which bears the marks of man's inventiveness; high tension cables symbolizing the union of Sango and Ogun, and motor roads strewn with the wrecks of motor vehicles, offerings to the demanding god Ogun. Men have mined the earth, refined the minerals, harnessed electricity, and created marvellous artifacts which in turn destroy them. This paradox of life intrigues poet. The paradox reflects an ambiguity in the nature of the god Ogun who is both a creator and a destroyer. It is he who inspires

the worker in metals; it is also he who demands the sacrifice of the road. Men are Ogun's protégés as well as his victims. The poet exposes the paradox of the artifacts of man as they are reduced to "Playthings for children/For browsing goats" (*Idanre* 65), but as man is also reduced to a mere ingredient in the cycle of growth, and his brain, the powerhouse of his inventiveness, is equated with sheep's excrement after his own invention has claimed him as a victim in a car crash. The poet says:

> . . . growth is greener where
> Rich blood has spilt; brain and marrow make
> Fat manure with sheep's excrement (ibid).

Here, Soyinka understands and underscores the cyclical nature of existence; the dead, humiliated in body, rise in essence and join the ranks of the departed ancestors to protect the living and receive their tributes. Soyinka's journey into the underworld ends with the purgation of grief and the departure of Ogun. With Ogun's departure, the poet returns to earth. He returns to the symbolic wine-girl who is there keeping her lone vigil, and like all of her human kind, looking forward for a fruitful harvest. The harvest was fruitful and natural. The fruitful harvest resonates Soyinka's philosophical ideology. Here, Soyinka shows that in the cycle of being there is new growth out of death and decay. As he says, "growth is greener where/ Rich blood has spilt" (ibid 65). Also, the poem goes beyond a mere account of a god's feats and rituals of his celebration. In the poem, Soyinka attempts to make a valid judgement about the essence of being. His presentation of Ogun as a contradictory god reflects the contradictory nature of man.

Conclusion

The analysis has demonstrated that the Romantic period constitutes part of the traditional world in which Larkin's and Soyinka's speakers seek to find essence, or in which they celebrate. Despite their contrasting styles and contexts, Larkin and Soyinka transcend the boundaries of their individual worlds. Larkin's introspective meditations on personal anxieties resonate with the broader human experience, while Soyinka's searing critiques of societal issues find

echoes in the struggles of individuals across cultures. This paper has examined the nuanced ways in which Larkin and Soyinka employ romantic sensibility and nostalgia by analyzing their individual poetic styles as well as their universal human yearning for connection, meaning, and solace in a world fraught with complexities and contradictions. This paper has explored how each poet utilizes form and language to evoke specific emotions and memories associated with romanticism and nostalgia. By contrasting Larkin's melancholic introspection with Soyinka's energetic engagement, the paper sheds light on the multifaceted nature of poetic experience across cultures and individual perspectives.

Also, while their approaches differ, both poets acknowledge the dual nature of nostalgia, its power to comfort and its potential to distort. They utilize landscape as a potent tool, their contrasting settings mirroring the internal landscapes of their characters navigating love and loss. Also, their landscape equally shapes their explorations. Larkin's evocative imagery of the English countryside mirrors the internal landscapes of his characters, reflecting their anxieties and desires. Soyinka's vibrant African landscapes serve as both backdrops for personal encounters and potent symbols of cultural identity and historical memory. Despite their diverse contexts, Larkin and Soyinka resonate on a deeper level. Their poems transcend geographic and cultural boundaries, reminding us of the universal human yearning for connection, meaning, and solace in a world filled with joy and sorrow, hope and disappointment.

Works Cited

Camus, Albert. "The Myth of Sisyphus". *Basic Writings of Existentialism*. Ed. Gordon Marino. New York: The Modern Library, 2004. 448-508

Chatterjee, Sisir Kumar. *Philip Larkin: Poetry that Builds Bridges.* Delhi: Atlantic, 2006.

Demirbaş, Leman. "The Art of An Anti-Romantic and An Anti-Modernist: Larkin About Modern Reality." *SEFAD*, 2017 (37): 239-246

Fraser G. Sutherland. *Essays on Twentieth Century Poets*. Leicester University Press, 1977.

Hutcheon, Linda & Mario J. Valdés. "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern: A Dialogue" *Poligrafías 3 (1998-2000). Revista de Literatura Comparada*, División de Estudios de Posgrado, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. 18-41

Jones, Eldred Durosimi. *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*. *3rd Ed*. London: James Currey, 1988.

Koch, Phoebe. "Back in The Day: Past and Present in Soyinka's Aké" '98, English 27, Postcolonial Studies, 1997. http://www.postcolonialweb.org/soyinka/ake/koch1.html

Larkin, Philip. *Collected Poems*. Ed. Anthony Thwaite. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2004.

Lunga, Majahana John Chonsi. "A Critical Analysis of Wole Soyinka as a Dramatist, with Special Reference to his Engagement in Contemporary Issues." MA Diss. University of South Africa, 1994.

Maduagwu, Chimdi. "The Mythic Imagination and Literary Creativity of William Blake and Wole Soyinka." *The Journal of International Social Research*. 17 Volume: 4, Issue: 17 (Spring 2011) 99-109.

Ngara, Emmanuel. "Myth, Pan-Africanism and the Liberation Struggle in Wole Soyinka". *Ideology and Form in African Poetry*. London: James Currey, 1990. 94-102

Nkengasong, John Nkemngong. W.B. *Yeats Realms of the Romantic Imagination*. Gottingen Germany: Cuvillier, 2011.

__ __ __. "Realms of the Imagination in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats". Doctorat de Troisieme Cycle, University of Yaounde I, 1993.

__ __ __. *W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot: Myths and the Poetics of Modernism*. Yaoundé: Yaoundé University Press, 2005.

O'Neill, Michael and Madeleine Callaghan. *Twentieth-Century British and Irish Poetry: Hardy to Mahon*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell M., 2011.

Owojecho, Omoha**.** "Wole Soyinka: Poetry and Emotion". *Imbizo* 2 (3) 2011. 48–57

Rossen, Janice. *Philip Larkin, His Life' Work.* New York, Harvester and Wheat sheaf, 1989.

Scott, A. Nathan Jr. *Mirrors of Man in Existentialism*. Cleveland, 1978.

Soyinka, Wole. *Idanre and Other Poems.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1969.

__ __ __. *Myth, Literature and the African World.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

__ __ __. *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known*. London: Methuen, 2002.

Stojkovic, Tijana. "Post-Romantic Beauty and Truth: The Poetry of Philip Larkin." MA Diss., Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia September, 1999.

Ugwuanyi, Lawrence Ogbo. "I am Therefore You Are: An Existentialist Perspective on Wole Soyinka's Writings" UJAH*: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol 12 No 2, 2011. 65-91.

JELLiC: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Culture
Volume 7; No. 01, March 2024
ISSN: 2304-6120 (Print) / 2304-6163 (E-Version)
www.cellacameroon.org/publications/jellic

Lexico-Syntactic Variations in the Fulfulde Speech of Men and Women in the City of Maroua

Hamidou Bappa, PhD
University of Maroua

Abstract
The aim of this paper is to identify the differences between men and women's use of Fulfulde. Focus is laid on uniqueness of male and female speech in the lexico-syntactic domain. Interviews conducted with male and female speakers of Fulfulde and observation of daily casual or informal conversations were used as devices for data collection. The study is based on Lakoff's (1975) frame, which formulates ten features of women's language style. Following investigation, findings indicate that there are differences between male's and female's speech, though similarities also abound. It was found that women used more emotionally-charged expressions or words, euphemisms and interjections than men to convey a message of condolences, express divorce and praise children. Unlike men, women also had a high tendency to use periphrases or indirect forms to announce childbirth or pregnancy, a reality which is still considered a taboo in Fulani communities. Female speakers used more polite or deferential expressions to call men and answer men's call than the latter. Lastly, men were found to be more assertive, direct, rude or impolite in their daily interaction. This study therefore contributes to shed more light on the fact that men and women have distinct language use in different contexts in Fulfulde.
Key words: emotionally-charged, periphrases, interjection, euphemism, assertive

Introduction

It is axiomatic that man and woman differ biologically and in terms of the roles they play in society. This difference has given rise to

gender variation in language use in many speech communities. Although there are a lot of similarities between male and female speeches in Fulfulde, a lingua franca spoken in the city of Maroua and in the northern part of Cameroon at large, differences also abound in phonological, lexical and syntactic dimensions. Women are subordinate to men (Kunsmann, 1998) and such a subordination result in a language style different from that of men, a claim made by the *Dominance Approach.* Jesperson (1992) on his part, points to the issue of taboo as a source of linguistic differences, a view that subscribes to the *Taboo theory*, which associates more euphemistic, tentative, and indirect style of language use with women, as a result of their socialization (Lakoff, 1975), as opposed to men's language which rather tends to be direct, assertive, authoritative or even arrogant (Boudersa, 2018; Crawford, 1997).

The need for clarification of the nature of language use differences between men and women has pushed scholars to investigate and publish several works on the issue. Wahyuningsih (2018) investigates linguistic gender differences among the students of Syaria department at Stain Kudus, Indonesia. Findings reveal that women prefer using more adjectives and vivid words (such as soft, wonderful, extraordinary, good…) that men seldom use; they also make use of more expressive gestures and politeness in their utterances, while men tend to be more directive and use simple words. In a similar study, Lakoff (1975) observes that women's style is characterized by expressions of tentativeness (like *sort of, kind of, perhaps*, etc.) which she refers to as 'hedges', also reflected in Holmes' (1984) and O'Barr & Atkins' (1980) works, and powerlessness in their daily interaction, instead of direct statements. In the same vein, Bonvillian (2000) finds that, following his investigation, men are prone to use curse words with greater frequency and greater profane force than women, who tend to use milder expletives instead; the latter also tend to make use of more intensifiers and modifiers like adjectives and adverbs than the former because society allows women to express their emotions. Akin to the afore-mentioned scholars' findings, are Thu's (2010) results indicating that, in addition to polite forms, women utilize

more compliments than men in order to develop solidarity and maintain social relationship with others.

Simaremare (2017) on his part examines language use of both male and female students in a boarding house in Universitas negeri Medan. He concludes that the most dominant male language feature is judgment adjectives, while question tag is the predominant female characteristic. Moreover, Cheshire (1982) observes that boys consistently used non-standard grammatical constructions more than girls.

The current research work identifies the differences between men and women's speech in Diamare Fulfulde, a variety spoken in the Far-North region of Cameroon, which has (slight) differences from Adamawa Fulfulde. Specifically, the study focuses on lexical and syntactic features used by men and women in their daily conversation.

1. Methodology

This subsection describes the subjects of the study, instruments and procedures of data collection and the analytical framework.

1.1 Subjects

Respondents of the study include male and female speakers of Fulfulde of various ages in the city of Maroua. Being from different ethnic backgrounds and educational levels, they consist of both native and non-native speakers of Fulfulde.

1.2 Instruments and procedures of data collection

Two instruments for data collection were used for the study, namely observation and interview. From observation of daily casual or informal conversation in Fulfulde, relevant data were gathered. Whenever the researcher, whose mother tongue is Fulfulde, captured people's natural conversation containing relevant data, the tokens were immediately jotted down on a paper. Interview, on the other hand, which was conducted with male and female speakers of Fulfulde in Maroua town, offered a second source for data collection. Respondents were interviewed individually, one after

another, according to their convenience; some of them were granted face-to-face interview during which the researcher jotted down relevant data from their speech, while others responded via online whatsapp message texting using smart phones.

1.3 Method of data analysis

Data for this study were analysed in accordance with Lakoff's (1975) ten habits of women's speech, namely lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation on declarative, empty adjectives, precise colour terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words and emphatic stress.

2. Findings

Results indicate that women's language use or style is different from that of men. While the latter's language use is generally characterised by such features as assertiveness, insults or directness, the former displays a rather different version, namely, super polite forms, lexical hedges and empty adjectives, which are three of Lakoff's (1975) ten theorised female language features, serving as analytical frame for the present study. By virtue of societal or religious norms, some expressions or phrases in Fulfulde are exclusively used by women, while others are mostly used by them, though men also use these expressions in some contexts. These features are elaborated below.

2.1 Super-polite forms

Super polite forms are described by Lakoff (1975) as leaving a decision open, not imposing your mind, or views or claims on anyone else. They refer to the deeply respectful linguistic forms women use in their speech, including indirect requests and euphemisms, especially when talking to men, who never or seldom use them. Those forms also refer to emotionally-charged reactions of women in various contexts. For example, a Fulani woman never answers *na'am,* meaning 'present' whenever a man, especially her husband, calls her by name, while the reverse is possible or the

norm. Further data pertaining to gender linguistic distinctions regarding politeness and emotions are shown in table 1 below:

Table 1: Super-polite forms used by women and their male equivalents

Context	Expressions used by women	(Literal) meaning	Expressions used by men
How to say 'a woman is pregnant'	- *o done teddy* → - *o done waawi* → -o done saawi →	She is heavy She is carrying She is wrapping	*O reedu* (a direct version of saying 'She is pregnant')
A woman's answer to a man's call (by name)	- *naiwu* →	- Present (this Fulfulde term *naiwu* is generally used only by women, though male slaves also utter it as an answer the Lamido's call - their master)	- *Na am* (present)
Terms used by a wife/woman to call her husband/a man	- *Baaba bikkoi* → - *Alhadji* → -*Jaumu suudu am* →	- Father of children - Honorific title of a man having performed pilgrimage in Mecca. -The owner of my room	- Men call their wives (or women) by their real names, though they may also similar emotional forms (e.g.haja)
To say 'woman has delivered a baby'	-*o saalake jam*→ - *O hepti kosde mako* → - *O jippini* →	- She has crossed/passed safely - She has recovered her feet - She has unloaded	*O dagni* or *o besni* (a more direct version)
To say 'a woman has divorced'	- be dali mo → - *be tchendiri be gorko maako* → - *Be yoofi mo* →	- she has been left - She is separated with her husband	*Be tcheeri mo* (Her husband has pronounced

		-She has been released	divorce with her). Power of divorce conferred to man is highlighted here.

As shown in table 1 above, women are prone to use euphemism, kind, indirect forms or polite expressions like *o done waawi*/*o done saawi* 'she is carrying'/'she is wrapping' to convey the idea of pregnancy, which is considered as a taboo word, as opposed to men who utter the reality directly, as in *o dagni* 'She has delivered a baby'. Again, men's directness of expression can also be seen in the way they express divorce, as in *be tcheeri mo* 'She has divorced/her husband has pronounced divorce against her', which sounds less mild or soft than *be dali mo* 'she has been left' or *be gorko maako yoofi mo* 'She has been released.' Again, women use the more polite and deferential term *naiwu* (present), when answering a man's call (by her name), while men, who never use it, except male slaves in deference to their traditional ruler's call (the Lamido), say *na'am* in this context. By answering *naiwu*, slaves perform a prayer for their master to be granted long life (by God). Moreover, women always use the more emotional/polite or deferential words *Alhaji* (a man who has performed pilgrimage to Mecca) or *baba bikkoi (am*) 'The father of my children', to call her husband (or a man), while a man can call her by her name, though he may also use equivalent emotional terms like *Hadja* (a woman who has performed a pilgrimage to Mecca) or *reeta yonki am* 'The half of my soul' to strengthen mutual love.

2.2 Lexical hedges

Lexical hedges are expressions or statements that reveal a speaker's uncertainty of an utterance (Lakoff, 1975), or a way of avoiding being too assertive or direct. Examples include maybe, *I mean*, *you know*, *may*, *might* (Coates, 1996, p. 152-173), *well*, *sort of*, *could*, etc. Such statements are shown in table 2 below:

Table 2: Lexical hedges in women's speech in Fulfulde

Context	Expressions used by women	meaning	male equivalents
A girl's answer to a man who asks her for marriage	- *Mi nani* - *woodi* → - *Haa mi numa* → *Allah wadu guedal*→ - *mi done janga* →	- I have understood - Great! Good - Let me think (before answering) - May God help fulfil it. - I am carrying on my studies (refusal)	Not used by men in this context
A woman expresses a feeling of disbelief in something or expresses doubt about something	- Hmm…. → - teema →	- interjection (doubt…) - perhaps	The same expressions may also be used by men

As shown in table 2 above, the Fulfulde expression *mi done janga* 'I am still carrying on my studies' uttered by a girl is an indirect and kind way of refusing a man's proposal for marriage. And the interjection *Hmm*… expressing doubt or indignation is more used by women than men.

2.3 Empty adjectives

They refer to words dealing only with emotional reactions rather than special information, restricted for female use. Such terms as adorable, charming, lovely fall under this category (Lakoff, 1975). Respondents used such words, displayed in table 2 below:

Table 3: Empty adjectives in women's speech in Fulfulde and men's potential equivalents

Context	**What women say**	**Meaning**	**What men say**
How to call a cousin	- *bi bappa am!*	My uncle's son	Mign'am (My cousin)
How to call a sister-in-law	*Goggo bi yam!*	My son's aunt	Eek'am
(Maternal) love: (a mother or a woman to a child)	- *Mbuula am!* → - *Ndanewa am!* →	my beautiful daughter my pretty brown daughter	Not used by men
	- *Babawa am!* → - *Mbodewa am* →	my son my brown son /daughter	
Love: Women praising a newborn baby	- *daadi naa!* (referring to a female baby) → - *abba naa!* (referring to male baby) → - *ndotti naa* →	a model mother a model father a wise man	
Mourning: condoling with a bereaved	- *aiyaa hai!* / *aiye* → (*juumdum*) -*a dagni ko maonoto*→ *da!* -*aiye nde jiuraama*→ *hore*	-Eh! What a pity! -You have delivered you what are older than (referring to the death of an eldest child) - It (death) starts by the head (referring to the death of an eldest child)	*Jurumdum* (what a pity!) - *masiibo wadi* (misfortune has befallen us).
A wife/woman to call her husband	- *Baaba bikkoi* → - *Alhadji* → - *Jaumu suudu am* →	- Father of children - Honorific title of a man having performed pilgrimage in Mecca. -The owner of my room	

As indicated in table 3 above, women had a higher tendency to discharge more feelings when condoling, via such interjection as *aiyaa hai!*/*aiye jurumdum* (Oh! what a pity*!),* as opposed to men who were more assertive and firm to express the same reality - *masiibo wadi*! (misfortune has befallen us!). Women also made use of linguistic devices like periphrasis (as in *a dagni ko maonoto da,* literally translated as 'You have delivered someone you are older than' and synecdoche, namely *aiye nde jiuraama hore,* literally meaning 'The death starts with the head', both forms uttered to a person who lost his/her eldest child. It is also unique for women to praise or laud their (new-born) children using highly emotional terms like *daadi naa!* (a model/good mother), *abba naa!* (a model father), *buula am!* (My beautiful daughter), a language style that men never use.

As demonstrated above, women's language is kinder, more polite and avoids swear or rude words, which are generally men's style, as illustrated below, in a dialogue between a waiter (restaurant owner) and a customer (who was eating) in a restaurant:

> Customer: *mi* ***rawaandu*** *naa a hokka mi soup be ih e do*? (Am I a **dog** for you to give me some soup full of bones?)
> Waiter: *ndikka* ***rawaandu*** *dwu ma*! (A **dog** is better than you!)
> Customer: *noy bana* ***dookoowo*** *soori ma kusel do*? (it seems as if it is a **beggar** who
> sold you this meat)

As shown from the dialogue above between two young men, the interlocutors spoke impolitely to each other, though it appears to be a joke-like conversation, because the waiter clearly stated that a dog (*rawaandu*) is more important than the customer, who was the first speaker to have introduced the very impolite word in the conversation. Another rude word is *dookoowo* (a beggar), which the customer used to devalue or undermine the quality of the waiter's cooked meat he was eating, by saying that it might have been bought from a beggar - not a butcher- which implies that meat or food got out of begging is not considered of good quality.

Additional circumstances where men and women's use of language differs are expressing joy in a wedding and expressing fear in front of a danger. In the former case, women say or even happily shout out *yirij yirij yirij*!, which is a joy-displaying interjection conveying an occurrence of a wedding that men never use, while in the latter, women shout *kiliwu liwu liwu*! against a thief to call people for help, whereas men use *yahoo! Yahoo!*, as equivalent interjection in the same context.

3. Discussion

The findings reveal that gender variation is highly attested in Fulfulde in various contexts in the city of Maroua. It has been noticed that women express strong feelings towards (their) children by praising or lauding them, as well as towards newborn babies, as in *dadi wa am* 'My loving daughter', *mbuula am* 'My beautiful daughter' *ndotti naa* 'A wise man', which is not found in men' s speech. This is indicative of the fact that women are naturally more emotional, loving and caring (towards children) than men. This also seems to testify to the fact that women's unique nature and socialization have an effect on their vocabulary choice.

To express the idea of pregnancy, child delivery and divorce, women have a higher tendency to use euphemism, periphrasis or indirect forms, while men are generally straightforward in their speech. The Fulani forms *o done saawi* 'she is carrying', *o done teddy* 'she is heavy' used by women are euphemistic usage intended to soften or mitigate the effect of the message tone, which could have been stronger if expressed directly in the words of men, as in *O reedu*, sounding somewhat taboo. One can therefore concur with Jesperson (1992) that taboo can be a source of linguistic gender difference. The same linguistic device plays a similar role when expressing the idea of divorce, as in *be dali mo* 'she has been left' or *be yoofi mo* 'She has been released' are female's milder and indirect versions of *bee tseeri mo* 'They have pronounced divorce with her', which is not only direct but will also yield a feeling of humiliation or shame, especially on the part of the divorcee and her family. Moreover, when expressing child delivery, women are also

more likely to use such periphrasal or euphemistic usage as *O hepti kosdee maako*, which literally means 'She has recovered her feet' or *O jippini* 'She has unloaded', being the equivalent versions of *O dagni* 'She has put to birth', which is the men's direct form. It is worth noting that such gender variation in Fulfulde can be ascribed to the established socio-religious transgenerational norms that maintain and promote Fulani values 'enshrined' into what is known as *pulaaku,* a sort of *Fulanitude,* an ideology characterized by three features, namely *semteende* 'abstention' *mugnal* 'patience'and *needaku* 'dignity', which each Fulani is expected to display.

When condoling with the bereaved, women's expressions are also more emotional than men's - including interjections *ai yaa*! 'Oh!' or *Hai! jurumdum* 'Oh! what a pity!'- which are (generally) directly coughed as *enne ngadi massibo* 'misfortune has befallen us'. Women's exaggerated emotions are an indication that they are biologically built up differently from men, which has an impact on their linguistic style. This therefore concurs with Yahya's (2010) observation that "females tend to use emotionally-charged supportive phrases…" (p. 64) to express condolences. For further condolence strategies in Fulfulde as used by men and women, see Hamidou Bappa (2001).

Coming to the circumstance of wooing a Fulani girl for marriage, she always uses euphemism or indirect forms to express refusal (e.g *mi don jangua* 'I am still schooling') or acceptance, as in *mi nani* 'I have understood/ I have got what you said'. Meanwhile, men also use specific language that women never use, directly or indirectly. This goes in line with Boudersa's (2018) observation that, unlike men, women are more inclined to use a more indirect way of speaking. What accounts for female's use of euphemism is the need, by virtue of Fulani value, to soften the tone, as some issues related to marital love are considered as taboo in Fulani communities.

Conclusion

In all, this paper has examined lexico-syntactic features of men and women's speech in Fulfulde spoken in the city of Maroua, the

capital of the Far-North region of Cameroon. Data analysis has revealed that, though men and women's use of the language is generally similar, there are a lot of differences when conveying issues pertaining to various contexts. Women are found to be more prone to use euphemism or indirect forms to express divorce, announce pregnancy and child delivery, than men who were more assertive or direct. Women also make use of some culturally-standardized female-specific (deferential) terms, to answer to a man's call, celebrate a wedding, and call for help against danger, which men never (or seldom) use, but resort to a different equivalent version. When condoling with a bereaved, women expressed more feelings than men, who sound more assertive and firmer. Women had also a higher tendency to use emotionally-specific phrases to praise children, which men never use, probably due to the different mode of socialization of men and women in Fulani communities, where a lot of words are still considered as taboo.

References

Bonvillian, N. (2000). Language, Culture and Communication: The Meaning of Messages. Prentice Hall.

Boudersa, N. (2018). A Theoretical Account of the Differences in Men's and Women's Language Use. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, *1*(1), 177-187.

Cheshire, J. (1982). Linguistic Variation and Social Function. In S. Romaine (Ed.), *Sociolinguistic Variation in Speech Communities.* Edward Arnold.

Coates, J. (1996). Women Talk. New York: Blackwell.

Crawford, M. (1997). Talking Difference on Gender and Language. New York: Sage Publications.

Greenberg, J. H. (1963). The language of Africa. Indiana: Indiana University press

Hamidou Bappa (2021). Condoling with the Bereaved in Fulfulde: What People Say at the Mourning Ceremonies in Maroua. in E. Fonyuy Fondze-Fombele and M. L. Lum (eds.). *Journal of English language, Literature and Culture*, Special Issue, 1, 46-58.

Holmes, J. (1984). Hedging Your Bets and Sitting on the Fence: Some Evidence of Hedges as Support Structures. *Te Reo*, 27, 291-304.

Jesperson, O. (1922). Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin. Allen & Unwin.

Kunsmann, P. (1998). Gender Status and Power in Discourse Behavior of Men and Women. University of Berlin.

Lakoff, R. (1975). Language and Women's Place. Harper Row.

O'Barr, W. M., & B. K. Atkins (1980). "Women's Language" or "Powerless Language"? In S. McConnell-Ginet, N. Borker & R. Thurman (eds.), *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, Praeger, 93-110.

Simaremare, H. T. (2017). Gender Language Characteristics Used by Students in Boarding House. *Jurnal Linguistik Terapan Pascasarjana Unimed*, *14*(1), 80-89.

Thu, T. H. (2010). Gender and language use in the ESL classroom, 1-19. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED509431.pdf

Wahyuningsih, S. (2018). Men and Women Differences in Using Language: A Case Study in Stain Kudus. *Journal of English education, Literature and Culture*, *3*(1), 79-90.

Yahya, E. M. (2010). A Study of Condolences in Iraqi Arabic Reference to English. *Adab AL Rafidayn*, 57, 619-642.

JELLiC: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Culture
Volume 7; No. 01, March 2024
ISSN: 2304-6120 (Print) / 2304-6163 (E-Version)
www.cellacameroon.org/publications/jellic

Indigenous Women in Ecofeminist Politics: A Reading of Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Ancestral Earth*

Fomin Edward Efuet
Faculty of Arts, University of Buea

Abstract
The study entitled "Indigenous Women in Eco-Feminist Politics: A Reading of Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Ancestral Earth*, investigates and analyses the text from an ecofeminist sensitive point of view. It examines the duality of logic seen through domination, discrimination and oppression with anthropocentric consciousness in the relationship between humanity and nature as well as androcentric sensitivities in the relationship between male and female as evident in *Ancestral Earth*. The study is predicated on the contention that the female and nature are victims of circumstances in the hands of male and humanity respectively; a situation which needs to be addressed in the 21st century as we preach species independence and sustainability. The research adopts ecocriticism as a critical tool in the analysis of the work. I argue that as we preach anthropocentrism as a way of life, we should also examine the place of the woman in this dispensation wherein her plight under her male counterpart is as bad as the vulnerability of natural species in the hands of humankind.
Key words: Indigenous Women, Ecofeminism, Nkengasong, anthropocentrists

Introduction

The duality of existence seen through the anthropocentric consciousness in the relationship between humanity and nature in environmental literature, as well as the androcentric sensitivity in the relationship between male and female in cultural studies is a cause for concern and this has provoked a lot of debates in

contemporary research. The female species on the one hand and nature on the other are victims of circumstances in their relationships with male species and humanity respectively. This paper examines the way Nkengasong treats this duality of existence in *Ancestral Earth.* The text examines the vulnerability of female species and nature in their union with male species and humanity as the latter desire for domination, discrimination, exploitation, oppression as well as other urges to reign superior. Such relationships of strange bed fellows are not void of resistance, the quest for identity, conflict of otherness and other methods through which the vulnerable continues to show discontent with the claimed superior other.

Coined in 1970 by a French feminist Francoise D'Eaubonne, ecofeminism, Lawrence Buell (2005) notes, is rooted in artifacts of patriarchal culture instituted in antiquity. Patriarchal violence against women and ecological destruction perpetrated by humanity is therefore going to be the crux of the matter in this study. D'Eaubonne further intimates that ecofeminism, from the context of the environment ranges from anthropocentric to anti-anthropocentric and equally from liberal to radical standpoints. Consequently, anthropocentrists decry the opinion that humanity is at the center of all creatures and has the power to use them the way he/she wants to satisfy his/her hungering needs. Other critics (anti-anthropocentrists or anthropomorphists) reject this notion, holding that even the non-human species have their own place by right in the cosmic space. On her part, Maria Mies (2014) posits that Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world as well as the subordination and oppression of women. Similarly, Louis Ann Lorentsen (2002) argues that Ecofeminism is an activist and an academic movement that sees critical connections between the domination of nature and the exploitation of women. These scholars all point to the parallel between the exploitation of both nature and women; parallels that are understood in the context of patriarchy. It is with this line of thought and logical standpoint that this research work is going to examine the text under study. The paper therefore

contends that in as much as we need to regulate the rate at which man exercises domination, traits of superiority and exploitation over his woman counterpart, we should in the same light also examine the way in which humanity exercises same, over non-human species in the environment. The paper is structured into parts: the introduction, review of Literature, the debate on male quest for dominance over female as well as the urges of human superiority over nature; then lastly the Conclusion.

Many scholars have written to address ecofeminist issues across the globe. Krishna (2014), Sangita (2016), Benabed (2020), Ambe and Ayuk Etang (2020), Gebreyohannes and Abiye (2022) have contributed to critiquing ecofeminist ideologies and the place of the woman in the ongoing environmental hazards. Writing in the context of India as is the case with any other developing or underdeveloped countries, Krishna posits that ecofeminism is vital to unveil the exploitations and invasions over our ecology and its resources by the developed countries in the names of globalization, urbanizations and development. Ecofeminism as an ideological movement argues that the oppression of women is interlinked to the oppression of nature with the same masculine centered attitude and practices relating to the patriarchal society. Gebreyohannes and Abiye in Chimamanda Ngozi's *Purple Hibiscus* corroborate this argument in their writing. Krishna, using the selected novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair, posits that the novels are enriched with the essence of ecofeminism, especially with its postcolonial lineage in the Indian socio-political and cultural milieu as a means of resistance to the invasion of land and life towards the hope for the possibility of eco-friendly and gender just world order. The paper is an analysis and an interpretation of the textual and conceptual essence of ecofeminism in the selected novels.

Sangita (2016) and Krishna are both Indian inspired critics. Sangita however takes a different niche from Krishna's debate. Revealing ecofeminism as a critical discourse, he establishes the relationship between literary texts and the problems relating to gender and ecological crisis through various literary genres. In this context, he studies the extent to which the concept of ecofeminism

which was originally postulated in the Western world is reflected in Indian writer, Kamala Markanday's novel *Nectar in the Sieve*. Sangita further investigates the extent to which the Indian English novel adds a new dimension to ecofeminism discourse, which consists of fundamental departure from the overall conceptualization of ecofeminism in the west. Within this frame of reference, the scholar probes into the intricacies of ecofeminism and then analyses the selected Indian English novels in light of Markanday's understanding of ecofeminism.

The debate on ecofeminist politics is also evident in the writing of Fella Benabed (2020) in the "Indigenous Ecofeminism and Literature of Matrilineage in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*. This scholar in his debate deviates from the mainstream patriarchal dominance evident in the works of Krishna, Sangita and even Gebreyohannes and Abiye. With Benabed, Indigenous women in *Solar Storm* tend to enjoy the benefits of gender equality and not gender discrimination as is the case with women in other texts. The indigenous ecofeminism and Literature of Matrilineage in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* analyses the ability of inter-female bonding in mending the protagonist's broken connections with her communal and natural environment. The study depicts a gynocratic community in which women enjoy a pivotal position as leaders, storytellers, and secret keepers of healing traditions. In the novel, indigenous feminism intersects with ecofeminism, highlighting women-nature symbolic connections as well as women's role in ecological conservation.

On their part, Gebreyohannes and Abiye argue further that not only patriarchy, but Christianity has led to unjustified domination of nature and humans. In their contribution to ecofeminist issues, they examine the connection between women and nature as well as how unjustified patriarchal domination and Christianity impact these groups as well as indigenous people. A close reading of the novel was conducted in order to select extracts that demonstrate ecofeminism issues. Textual analysis was then carried out to analyze selected extracts. Based on the analysis, the novel, Chimamanda Ngozi's *Purple Hibiscus* (2022) shows strong

interaction between women and the natural environment. It also illustrates the extent to which Patriarchal system and Christianity have led to an unjustified domination of nature and humans based on gender, religion, class and tradition. Chimamanda and Nkengasong are raising the same argument in different cultural backgrounds concerning the similarity between the plight of the woman and nature in their Eco spaces.

The contribution of Ambe and Ayuk-Etang (2020) in ecofeminism study is very vital in shaping the work under study. They treat ecofeminism as context dependent and not a universal construct. Like Fella Benabed, they examine women nature symbolic connections. They focus on what they call the political, economic, social, technological, ecological, cultural and historical (PESTECH) contexts of ecofeminism in Anglophone Cameroon, a polity with a unique pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial experience. Each of these dimensions is shown to impact women/nature relationship in its own unique way in the analyses of ecofeminism. To them therefore, the issue of one species dominating and exploiting the other is a cause for concern in this era of environmental challenges. Ambe and Ayuk Etang corroborate the existing oppression earlier raised here from Krishna, Songita as well as from Gebreyohannes and Abiye. It is an issue that needs to be addressed to ensure anthropomorphic consciousness amongst species.

This study departs from the works reviewed in that the text under study is different with different cultural background. Moreso, though treating the same environmental challenges with a focus on feminism and ecology, the topic of this study is different from those of the works reviewed in that it concentrates on indigenous women rooted in the Allehtendurir cultural peculiarities as depicted in Nkengasong's *Ancestral Earth*.

Male and Humanity Dominance Over Female and Nature

The quest for male dominance over female, which is culturally rooted in Allehtendurir, an imaginary community Nkengasong creates in *Ancestral Earth* to showcase a people who struggle to live

within the confines of their cultural practices is the focus in this section of the study. A number of interactions between the male and their female counterparts as well as between humanity and nature in the text, reveal the extent to which female and nature are suppressed in multifaceted forms by the male and humanity. This notwithstanding, the women continue, though without any great success, to resist these inhuman, nonchalant and unorthodox practices from their male counterparts.

Allehtendurir, built on the traditional and cultural practices of the people, has always ensured that the land undergoes a traditional blessing under the stewardship of the highest traditional authority in the land (the Fon) before the planting season starts; the raison d'etre being to ensure abundant yields. Under the reign of Akeumbin, however, this ritual has not been performed. Rather than comforting the women for the poor yields attributed to this irresponsible behavior of the Fon, and looking for a lasting solution to the problem, especially when the women honor him (father of their husbands) as seen in their action (almost prostrating) at his palace, the Fon surprisingly insults and threatens them: "go and till the soil you lazy women of Allehtendurir. Your husbands are kind else they should return you to your fathers…" (16). He further rebukes them with these words: "Stand there then and keep croaking like pregnant toads". (17). These kinds of slander words will not be used on women in an environment that has respect and dignity for them. Referring to them as "lazy women" because they ask for the right thing to be done and addressing them as "pregnant toads" simply show the worthlessness of women in the eyes of men in Allehtendurir. According to the Fon, the men have the prerogative to return their wives to their parents, especially if the women fail to listen and take instruction from their husbands. This depicts a typical patriarchal society and corroborates what Ania Loomba (1998) argues in "Can the Subaltern speak? (230). Loomba is examining the master servant relationship between the colonial masters and the colonized people and is wondering that if the subaltern must speak, "in what voice" (230) will he/she be speaking? "their own (voice) or in accents borrowed from their

masters?" (230) This is the same practice of enslavement, domination and suppression that the men want to perpetrate upon women in Allehtendurih. It is a society where the subaltern, represented in the text by women, are not given a voice to express themselves. Unlike the prosopopoeianess (voicelessness) of nature, women are humans and have the voice to resist their plight of domination, suppression, violence and other ills perpetrated on them by their male counterparts. Hence, through the mouthpiece of M'meka, the women retort to Fon Akeumbin thus: "Nyatemeh, we cannot move. Our feet are fastened to the root of this palace… to the root of the tree of life…" (17). In a sort of conflict situation between the women and the men, the women had to hit back, knowing however that their husbands have more authority and more grip to suppress them in the land. This action, however, shows the extent to which the women of Allehtendurih resisted patriarchal leadership or the concept of androcentric consciousness in their community.

Akeumbin demonstrates a similar intransigence and a pseudo environmental attitude when he reveals his ignorance to the extent of destroying nature perhaps for greedy and other selfish reasons. He claims: "I have with my foreign friends, cut down the forest and opened the land so that you can walk freely on the soil. And you come here complaining." (16). It becomes even more intriguing to note that the Fon (Akeumbin) receives a gun from his foreign friends in exchange for permission authorizing these foreign friends to exploit the forest of Allehtendurih with impunity. Hence Alabi rebukes him thus: "And so you have auctioned the earth to strangers, destroyed the tree of life and in compensation you were given a gun and ornaments to dress your young wife". (20) This action wherein Alabi goes into open confrontation with the Fon, shows the rate at which the Fon's attitude in the land has reduced his strength and respect from his people. His greed, self-centeredness, ignorance and his environmental skepticism has possibly caused him this. Such character traits are further revealed when the Fon notes that:

> I think I am doing Allehtendurih so much good. We had to put down the forest to make the land bright so that anyone can see where he puts his leg. The world is changing and Allehtendurih must change too. That is what the red people from far away land told me". (20)

Akeumbin's application of the Eurocentric mentality in the governance of Allehtendurih defeats the very purpose of environmental protection and consciousness that he preaches. He takes instructions from far away strangers (who have no mastery of Allehtendurir's cosmology) to govern his people. He refuses to listen to advice and ignorantly drives his community into a state of environmental conflagration especially as he, amongst other hazards committed, cuts down the forest ignorantly, simply to make the land bright. Annie Merrill Ingram et al (2007) argues in this connection that "ecofeminism is having a hard time undoing dualism in the intellectual and political realm". (24) According to these critics, relegating women and nature to the background in the 21st century is really a difficult issue to be addressed, being that it is interwoven in intellectual studies and in politics, areas of great concern in every community. Greg Garrard (2004) corroborates this point as he gives reasons to justify anthropocentric and androcentric duality in cultural studies. He argues that the human is distinct from nature on the ground of some alleged qualities such as possession of an immortal soul and rationality. These, to him, confer superiority upon humans. He presents the distinction between men and women on grounds of some alleged qualities such as larger brain size of the man, which, according to him, makes him superior to the woman.

Male dominance over women in Allehtendurih is also evident through male irresponsibility in connection with gender division of roles, what Davion (1994) calls "Masculinity and Femininity" (qtd. Garrard 2004, 24) Focusing on the worldview of Allehtendurih community, it is the responsibility of the men to work harder and give money to support their wives in running their homes; It is also the men's duty to spend time with their children and wives to ensure family unity. On the other hand, it is the

responsibility of the women to plant crops, harvest and ensure that there is food on the table for the husband and the children. Even with this, the men seem not to be respecting their own assigned tasks. M'meka decries such a carefree attitude and male negligence in these words:

> These men! They don't feel how much we suffer to feed our home. Even when the soil frowns at us! My own husband! You will find him now in a *matango* house drunk with the little money he made from selling a deer he shot yesterday, the only animal he has shot after hunting for so many weeks. He didn't leave any anini in the house for children to eat…. Yet he will complain of hunger, beat me and abuse my mother. (4)

Unable to execute their roles as husbands, the men of Allehtendurih tend to torture, batter, and give their wives psychological and physical stress. Through this, we find the men asserting their patriarchal position in Allehtendurih and the women resisting and questioning their female identity in that community. The women are the ones who struggle to provide food for their families, not without complaining. This, we hear from Mafua thus: "Men are all the same. We are dying, dying gradually with our children. But they don't care. They are in *Matango* house drinking and waiting for food". (4) This attitude of male irresponsibility reduces these women 'other' to sub-human beings in front of their husbands. Through this male forceful domination, exploitation, suppression and torture, androcentric consciousness is made evident in this community. Butake in *Lake God* presents women who suffer from the same treatment from the men**.** The women suffer from their crops being destroyed by cattle; meanwhile their husbands and the Fon stay mute to their plight. Yensi, one of the women and a victim of the crop destruction acknowledges patriarchal leadership in that land when she talks to her women counterparts thus: "We are now going to disperse and go back to our homes. And if your man should ask you what is going on, ask him if women ever know what is happening in this land of men". (25) Here, like the case in Allehtendurih, women are bent to resist male domination, though

marginalized under patriarchal leadership. This, Barbara Hallow (1987) corroborates as she writes: "Resistance Literature continues to wage a struggle for liberation on many levels and in many areas." (xviii) This means resistance from domination, exploitation, torture and other undesirable situations was evident at all levels of master/servant relationship such as the blacks resisting white domination, women resisting male domination, the proletariat resisting the bourgeoisies domination etc.

Moreso, Nkengasong captures the inseparable link between the indigenous women and mother Earth. Their actions on the environmental challenges reveal the fact that, if it comes to making a choice, it will be a better option for the women of Allehtendurih to separate with their husbands (as we find in the case of Afingong and her husband the Fon) than to separate with mother earth. The action, to an extent, helps in the restoration of mother earth from the destructive grip of pseudo environmentalists in the land.

Similar treatment is evident from the anthropocentric standpoint (perpetrated by humanity on natural species) in Allehtendurih. Hunting is the main occupation of most men in this land. This practice, which is indiscriminately done, is surely rendering some of the species to go extinct. Hence, M'meka notes that, her husband hunts for many weeks before he can even kill a deer. More so, the land of Allehtendurih, like the women therein has undergone serious negative transformation through unsustainable exploitation of natural species. Through the voice of Alabi for example we are informed that the land and its forest wither. The mountain stands like sore in the eye of the sun, the streams dry up, the air becomes unhealthy and as Alabi complains about the red strangers, they are there "digging up things which only the gods alone know and carting them away to their country, cutting down trees and destroying our totems…." (21-22) This human intransigence on natural environmental species reveals vividly the setting of the play and how it has disintegrated so fast within a short time due to unsustainable human activities therein. This, among other things, is the raison d'etre for intensification of education for sustainable development of species and to ensure that there is no

deforestation without afforestation, and many other similar precautions. Jones and Jones on their part argue that: "Deforestation has also been blamed for increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the air. It has been argued that by cutting down rainforests, there are fewer trees to photosynthesize and remove carbon dioxide from the air" (214) This quotation confirms Alabi's complain above being that when the strangers continue to cut down trees and transport them to their country without replanting new ones, such a practice attracts health hazards through climate change with its multiple negative effects in the Allehtendurih community.

The situation is further compounded especially when the men show no concern about the health hazards and the famine plaguing the land. Neither the husbands nor the Fon is moved by the numerous worries the women in the land bring to them. M'meka, talking as the mouthpiece of the dispossessed and the disinherited women of the land, complains that: "Our children are dying, and the Fon and our husbands are silent. The Fon and our husband! Men we thought we were safe under their protection". (2005, p. 8) Talking of being safe under male protection, M'meka acknowledges male overriding power or patriarchal leadership over them. It shows how the women of Allehtendurih have relegated themselves to the second position in their land, giving men the authority to take leadership. However, the irresponsibility of men in playing this role is made evident, and it keeps the women worried of what really, they represent in that land. The women, in this conflicting situation, end up playing most of the roles assigned to the men, while at the same time carrying out their own duties as gender division of roles require in that community. Greg Garrard corroborates this same thought when he argues that: "Like ecofeminism, the positions discussed here do not suggest that environmental problems are caused by anthropocentric attitudes alone but follows a system of domination or exploitation of humans by other humans". (22-23) Exploitation of women by men in this context is where the challenge lies. The presence of the men is made known only when their interest is at stake, and they want to attain their pleasure through satisfying their sexual and other desires. This

does not come as shared pleasure between man and woman, but is characterized by suppression, force, and even torture. Hence M'meka complains:

> Our men are absent. We only see them when they shout at us to serve them food or when at night they force our limbs apart and tear us into pieces. Even last night while our children were choking and dying, our men still shamelessly hung tight to our loin cloths pulling us… (9)

The above quotation epitomizes conflict which is evident in patriarchal leadership caused by the quest for male domination, exploitation and suppression of humans (women) by other humans (men). This could be explained among other things as Human right abuse. In fact, their (women) voices are not needed when men are taking decisions at home or in the community. The vulnerability of women in the presence of their husbands is made evident. Everything is men centered. Not even the health situation of the children completely abandoned to the women or the psychological and physical torture the women go through as the men tear them into pieces in their hungering need for sex has any impact in giving Allehtendurih women a voice or giving the men a listening ear to the plight of women.

The extent to which women have undergone torture, domination, exploitation and even suppression from their male counterparts is the very way natural species have suffered in the hands of humanity. Humanity, through greed, self-centeredness, and perhaps avarice, has rendered almost worthless what Allehtendurih had as its environmental pride. Alabi in a heated dialogue with a conflicting undertone, questions repeatedly why Fon Akeumbin could not maintain the same legacy in respecting the natural prowess of Allehtendurih as his predecessors had done. "Akeumbin, answer me straight. Is this Allehtendurih whose land was filled with the wealth of nations, and whose mountains the leopards snarled with pride and the lions roared with verve in the jungle"? (21) The pride of Allehtendurih has tremendously reduced, thereby contrasting it from a onetime environmental pride of the

people to the eyesore of today. Alabi, acting as the mouthpiece of the dispossessed Allehtendurih inhabitants, further blame Fon Akeumbin for the mishaps so far registered in the land. He regrets why the environment had to undergo such a debased situation because of the intransigence of a leader.

If the women of Allehtendurih have started to resist their exploitation, suppression, domination and torture from their husbands, it is because they can no longer continue to bear their plight. Afingong, the Fon's latest bride discovers that her husband is just like any other husband in Allehtendurir, with traits of irresponsible behavior, nonchalant attitude and careless life style with the spirit of domination. She feels uncomfortable especially when she comes in with her husband in the palace plaza "moves up towards the women who intensify their weeping". (15) Afingong feeling so depressed with the torturing and painful sounds of weeping from the women, decides to join her womenfolk in ascertaining their rightful position and their identity in Allehtendurih. Unable to resist the trauma of Allehtendurih women, Afingong declares to the Fon thus:

> Listen, Your Majesty. I feel a sharp pain in my womb. If for my sake, you shall leave my mothers and their children in pain and agony, then, I shall cut off these necklaces that saver me from my umbilical cord and join my mothers in their misery until you listen to their plea. I too have a child and will have many more, your Majesty. (Cuts off the necklaces, throws them on the ground and crosses over to join the women) (27-28)

This declaration, coupled with the action is the contribution of Afingong in resisting patriarchy and androcentric lapses which are deep rooted in Allehtendurih and through which the women have been trapped and manipulated upon by the men. Her resistant attempt is compounded by threats from the Fon, who, feels that he cannot be challenged by a woman. Akeumbin threatens thus: "Afingong, I shall slice you into pieces if you move another step" (28). The threats from Akeumbin show that however powerful a

woman may be in Allehtendurih, she cannot exercise authority in front of her male counterpart. This notwithstanding, the weeping of the women as well as Afingong abandoning her husband to join them as a way of seeking for their identity at Allehtendurih are all signs of conflict, showing the discontented nature of the woman and the poor treatment she receives from her male counterparts. The necklace which Afingong cuts and throws, further echoes women resistance from patriarchy, domination and marginalization; meanwhile the male continues to build more strategies to continuously dominate and suppress their female 'other' in that community. Lawrence Buell argues that:

> How then can ecofeminism avoid falling into the androcentric trap, especially when it tries to argue for an ethic of "care," based on women's conditioned or inherent advantage as caregivers which, in turn, result from a patriarchally mandated division of labor? (109-110)

Women therefore are trapped in the web of domination, suppression, exploitation, torture or violence, perpetrated by men under patriarchal leadership. Gynocentric or centering the feminine point of view has become a farce in a patriarchal society like the one of Allehtendurih in the text under study.

From the Anthropocentric or humanity centered point of view, humankind has also dominated, exploited and suppressed a good number of natural species that gave meaning to Allehtendurih. Mafua announces this when she notes that "The partridge that used to sing in the woods is heard no more" (22). M'meka confirms as she adds that:

> There is no life in the bushes…. The many coloured birds that twittered in the undergrowth, the young moles that raced through the earth, the deer that dreamt all day under a shade chewing the cud, the leopard that walked with majesty from jungle to jungle and the lizard nodded with adoration from a crack in a tree … and many more wonders on the bosom of the earth are seen no more. (22)

This quotation exhibits anthropocentrism, revealing human activities on the land built on unsustainable harvesting of the natural resources. The disappearance of some of the animal species mentioned above and perhaps plant species is blamed on humanity as he exploits the environmental natural species without any regard to sustainability. Its disappearance hinders the younger generation from feeding their eyes on some of those rare animals just like plant species. Ecocriticism therefore deconstructs this anthropocentric consciousness and encourages anthropomorphism wherein non-human natural species are given their rights to life and freedom. Ernest Dominic Cole (2018) corroborates this argument when he notes that "The question to be pursued is whether human superiority should comprise animal extinction even if, biblically, man is given domination over other animals." (292) This quotation has brought in a lot of arrogance in humanity's relationship vis a vis non-human species. Rather than being a steward and using the species judiciously so that they serve him sustainably, mankind has got into indiscriminate and unsustainable exploitation of these species, a thing which has been described by many as, the persona providing the knife for his/her own assassination. In the same vein, Nsahlai Athanasius (2008) arguing from the similar anthropocentric arrogance of humanity in his activities on other species, accuses man for:

> Rampant bush fires that devour all life, multiple farms all over the land, widespread settlements along animal tracks and transformation of animal tracks to motorways, excessive hunting, massive poisoning and deadly traps. These destructive mechanisms have given and are still giving wildlife uneasy days and nights. (134)

Humanity therefore needs environmental education to ensure that the species satisfies the present generation without compromising the rights of the younger growing generation to have the same satisfaction in the future from same species. Such a stance is shared by Val Plumwood when he writes that, "Overcoming the dualistic dynamic (between nature and culture) requires recognition of both

continuity and difference, this means recognizing the other as neither alien to and discontinue from self, nor assimilated to or an extension of self". (6) Human self-centeredness on the environment is tantamount to the man providing the knife for his own assassination. This is because the ongoing climate change with its adverse effect of human health hazards is as a result of human inability to understand the importance of the different environmental non-human species in his life.

Conclusion

The study set out to investigate the environmental and human challenges seen through humanity and male species as they exploit, oppress, dominate and even suppress natural and female species respectively. The study condemns such dualism whose practice, evident through anthropocentric and androcentric sensitivities, has no place in this dispensation with environmental challenges. In fact, environmental protection especially on plant, animal and other non-human species need to be given the pride of place it deserves. This is most importantly as it concerns the relationship between male and female species; a relationship often built on male domination, suppression, claimed male superiority, and more vices. These need to be checked as a strategy of managing environmental excesses of male and humanity and rendering them more responsible. Such are some of the issues Nkengasong decries in *Ancestral Earth*. The study has posited that both nature and female have a right to freedom and life; a right which must be observed amongst others by humanity and male species. Humanity and nature on the one hand, and male and female on the other must look for means to live in harmony. Such a stance will discard these societal ills built through domination, discrimination and oppression especially on grounds of race, sexual orientation, class, species and even gender. There is in fact the need for a decentralized global movement founded on common interest to celebrate diversity as well as oppose all forms of domination and violence.

Works Cited

Athanasius, Nsahlai. *The Buffalo Rider*. Cameroon: NNAMB's publishers, 2008.

Benabed, Fella. "Indigenous ecofeminism and Literature of Matrilineage in Linda Hogan's Solar Storms. Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie Sklodowska Philologiae, 2020. Vol. 38, No. 2

Buell, Lawrence. *The future of environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005.

Butake, Bole. *Lake God and other Plays*. Yaounde, Edition Cle, 1999.

Cole, Ernest Dominic. Decentering Anthropocentrism: Human Animal Relations in Aminata Forna's Happiness. Routledge, Journal of the African Literature Association; 2018. Vol.2 Issue 3.

Gebreyohannes, Michael Nigus and David, Abiye Daniel. Women and Nature: An Ecofeminist Reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus, Journal of Environmental Literature, Climate Crises and Pandemics, 2022. Vol2, Issue. 3

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. London and New york, Routledge, 2004.

Hallow, Barbara. *Resistance Literature*. New york,

Ingram, Merril Annie, Marshall Ian, Daniel J. Philippon and Adam W. Sweeting. Eds Coming into Contact: Exploration in Ecocritical Theory and Practice. Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2007.

Jones, Mary and Jones Geoff. *Biology*, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Krishna, Nigathi. Ecofeminism in the Novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair. *International Journals on studies in English Language and Literature* (IJSELL), 2014; Vol. 2, issue 7.

Lorentzen, Ann Lois. *Ecofeminism and Globalisation: Exploring Culture, Context, and Religion.* San Fraicisco, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2004.

Loomba, Ania. Colonialism and Postcolonialism. USA and Canada; Routledge, 1998.

Mies, Maria. *Introduction to Ecofeminism*. Germany, Vanelana Shiva, 1993.

Njoh, Ambe and Ayuk-etang NM Elizabeth. Determinants of Ecofeminism in Anglophone Cameroon: A PESTECH Analysis. Journal of Asian and African studies, 2020. Vol. 56, Issue 7.

Nkengasong, John Nkemngong. *Ancestral Earth*. Yaounde: Anucam, 2015.

Sharnappa, Sangita Patil. Reconstructing Ecofeminism: A study of Kamala Markanday's *Nectar in a Sieve*. Cogent Social Science, 2016. Vol.2, issue 1