Nigerian Cityscapes: Reading Socio-Ecological Concerns in Anglophone Novels Since 1954

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ABSTRACT

Some early Nigerian authors, such as Cyprian Ekwensi and Flora Nwapa, are well known for writing the city in the first decades after independence. Moreover, since the 1970s, Anglophone Nigerian urban literature has been experiencing an important growth (Griswold 2000). However, urban literature by Nigerian authors has not been sufficiently, nor consistently, studied; let alone in its ecological dimensions. The identified gap in ecocritical research on Nigerian urban fiction is consistent with a historical lack of attention to the city by both ecocritical and postcolonial studies, as well as with a marginalisation of postcolonial African cities within urban studies. Existing criticism is representative of the main trends in urban literary analysis conducted on Nigerian literature: studies that understand the city as opposed to nature and virtue; studies carried out from a political ecology and environmental justice framework; and those that focus on urban space, mobility, and identity in the city.

The present project thus constitutes an attempt to address this gap by proposing a sustained comparative urban ecocritical examination of Anglophone Nigerian novels. Grounded in the environmental humanities, the study draws mainly on insights from Marxist and postcolonial ecologies, in conversation with *urban ecocriticism* (Bennett and Teague 1999), or *cultural urban ecologies* (Schliephake 2014). Through the interrogation of an extensive set of novels, the main aim is to analyse how nature and the environment are construed in the city, and what links are established, if any, between the social and environmental predicaments portrayed in the fictional urban landscapes. Close comparative readings of the selected primary texts are here organised thematically, allowing for the establishment of dialogical relationships between the selected works.

This thesis contends that, as Nigerian cultural products, the selected novels represent, to varying degrees, the interpenetration of human and nonhuman nature in the city. Instead of constructing the urban as a Human product opposed to and distinct from Nature, the works both expose the very real consequences of this distinction for human and nonhuman nature, and blur the boundaries between them, as well as sometimes exploring alternative solutions and/or (re)imagining relations beyond the divide. The texts thus undermine the conceptual separation of Society and Nature, which has historically justified the commodification of nature and the development of (neo)colonial capitalism. A thorough examination of these works demonstrates the sustained presence of environmental issues in Nigerian urban literature. Crucially, such an analysis can also influence the way cities are conceived of and understood, offering new insights into and alternative solutions to long-standing urban socio-ecological issues.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

Unless otherwise stated, all work contained in this thesis is my own. Citations are included for all quoted material.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following is a list of abbreviations of the primary texts examined in this thesis, whose references are provided in between brackets in the text after their first mention. Full bibliographic details of these abbreviations are given in the Bibliography at the end of the thesis.

CC: The Carnivorous City

EDT: Every Day Is for the Thief

EMT: Easy Motion Tourist

LG: Lagoon

MP: A Man of the People

NLE: No Longer at Ease

NP: Naira Power

PC: People of the City

WL: Welcome to Lagos

INTRODUCTION

In 1961, in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*, the main character refers to a drain that goes through a '"cut-price" market' in Lagos as 'a shameful smelly thing' during her speech for Uncle Taiwo's electoral campaign, and promises her female audience 'a bigger and cleaner market'. Three years later, Gabriel Okara's Okolo mourns the loss of shadows of men and trees to the 'shadow-devouring trinity of gold, iron, concrete'; an insatiable hunger for capital gain. In Festus Iyayi's *Violence*, first published in 1979, a frustrated and '[helpless]' doctor wonders 'why in the midst of so much disease, the government [concentrates] on building hotels instead of hospitals'. In 1986, after the horrors of a civil war that devastated the landscape and its human and nonhuman inhabitants alike, Elechi Amadi's *Estrangement* describes how, during the second oil boom of the 1970s in Port Harcourt, '[f]oreign [construction] firms [are] particularly active' and, consequently, '[t]he Trans Amadi industrial layout [comes] alive with the noise, dust and smoke of industrial machines persuaded to function again by expatriate technicians'. In 2002, Helon Habila homes in on the 1980s and 90s, addressing ruthless military regimes and Ken Saro-Wiwa's execution, which is being discussed by a group of young men in a small room in Poverty Street, 'one of the many decrepit, disease-ridden quarters that [dot] the city of Lagos like ringworm on a beggar's body'. Fifteen years later, Chibundu Onuzo paints an Abuja reminiscent of the graveyard-like Ikoyi portrayed by Chinua Achebe in *No Longer at Ease*, a city of 'sterile parks and lit-up avenues, wide freeways that [lead] nowhere', behind whose 'ordered, meticulous cleanliness, [hide] the most unjust, most grotesque, most perverse of transactions'. In Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* and Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World*, trees provide both physical and spiritual comfort in the middle of chaos and pain. Across a range of Nigerian urban novels, markets, motor parks and slums are multivalent spaces of strength and vulnerability, creativity, and violence.[1]

These are only a handful of examples, extracted from eight Nigerian novels published over a sixty-year period, showcasing the presence of nature and environmental concerns in urban milieus: pollution, corruption, infrastructural shortfalls, abject poverty, colonial urban planning and its heritage, trees, the ocean, spatial (re)configurations. These

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[1] Cyprian Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, [1961] 1987), p. 147; Gabriel Okara, *The Voice* (London: Panther Books, [1964] 1969), pp. 70-71, emphasis in the original; Festus Iyayi, *Violence* (Suffolk: Longman Drumbeat, 1979), p. 63; Elechi Amadi, *Estrangement* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1986), p. 123; Helon Habila, *Waiting for an Angel* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 120; Chibundu Onuzo, *Welcome to Lagos* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017), p. 63; Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* (Hawthorne, CA: BN Publishing, [1960] 2009), pp. 18-9; Ifeoma Okoye, *The Fourth World* (London: Amazon, 2013), Kindle e-book.

and other similar issues constitute and/or relate to what Michael Bennett and David W. Teague term 'the nature of cities'; a nature that has been consistently portrayed by Nigerian novels since Cyprian Ekwensi's first Nigerian urban work, *People of the City*.[2] Indeed, some early authors, such as Ekwensi and Flora Nwapa, are well known for writing the city in the first decades after independence, and creating their 'own canon of urban references and experiences', thus '[participating] in the elaboration of urban culture'.[3] Since the 1970s, moreover, the decade that marks the beginning of what is usually considered the second generation of Nigerian literature, Anglophone novels have been experiencing a considerable growth in urban fiction. According to Wendy Griswold, 'in the 1970s over half of Nigerian novels were city-based', and the number kept rising during the 1980s. That is, if village settings were predominant during the 1950s and 60s, urban settings have been increasingly gaining ground since the 1970s. While Griswold observes a stall during the 1990s, it is possible to say that Nigerian fiction, especially novels, has entered a second period of growth with the new millennium, also marked by a significant diversification of genres and styles.[4]

However, despite this prevalence of the city in Nigerian novels, and of a predominant focus on Nigerian novels within 21st-century African ecocriticism signalled by Cajetan Iheka and Stephanie Newell, urban literature by Nigerian authors has not been consistently studied, let alone in its ecological dimensions.[5] This is not to say that there are no studies of Nigerian urban literature that address environmental issues to varying degrees. Examples of these critical approaches include, but are not limited to, Chris Dunton's study of entropy and energy in contemporary Lagos literature; Louise Green's examination of Lagos as 'background' in Suyi Davies Okungbowa's *David Mogo, Godhunter*; Douglas Kaze's consideration of flood as narratorial device, and Sule Emmanuel Egya's urban ecocritical explorations of Nigerian poetry. Among those included in this thesis's discussions are Elain Savory's brief analysis of Chinua Achebe's 'ecocritical awareness', and Danica Savonick's paper, focused on automobility, together with a great number of studies on specific works that are also consulted throughout the analytical chapters.

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[2] Michael Bennett and David W. Teague, 'Urban Ecocriticism: An Introduction', in *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1999), pp. 3-14 (p. 4); Cyprian Ekwensi, *People of the City* (London: Heineman Educational Books, [1954] 1963).
[3] Seth Graebner, 'Colonial Cities', in *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, ed. Kevin R. McNamara (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 188-199 (p. 198).
[4] Wendy Griswold, *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 151; Maximilian Feldner, *Narrating the New African Diaspora: 21st Century Nigerian Literature in Context* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 1-2.
[5] Cajetan Iheka and Stephanie Newell, 'Introduction: Itineraries of African Ecocriticism and Environmental Transformations in African Literature, in *Environmental Transformations*, African Literature Today 38, guest eds. Cajetan Iheka and Stephanie Newell (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2020), pp. 1-10 (p. 3).

Certainly, analyses of urban representation in novels like Ekwensi's *People of the City*, Chris Abani's *GraceLand*, and Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief* and *Open City* abound, due both to the popularity of these works and the centrality of the city in them. However, these are only three examples within an incredibly varied and ever-growing number of Nigerian urban novels.[6]

Moreover, as is demonstrated throughout this thesis, critical work on these three texts is in fact representative of the established conventions of, or main trends in, urban literary analysis conducted on Nigerian, and African, novels: studies that understand the city as opposed to nature and virtue, in fact, an enemy that thwarts the characters' success and/or happiness; studies carried out from a political ecology and environmental justice framework, which, as Astrid Bracke says, make up the 'majority of ecocritical explorations of the city' in general, and usually concentrate solely on representations of poverty and slum areas; and those that focus on urban space, mobility and identity in the city. These are somewhat restrictive approaches to isolated or small groups of novels, where a considerable number of environmental concerns are only superficially or partially explored. The present project thus constitutes an attempt to address this gap by proposing a sustained comparative urban ecocritical examination of Anglophone Nigerian novels, in which at least some of these different previous studies are also put in conversation with each other.[7]

The identified gap in ecocritical research on Nigerian urban fiction is consistent with a historical lack of environmentally-oriented studies of both cities and urban literatures, as well as of attention to the city in postcolonial studies and literatures on the part of Euro-American mainstream literary analysis. Already in 1999 Bennett and Teague point to the 'slow' integration of 'urban environments' into the burgeoning field of ecocriticism, while also highlighting the 'lack […] [of] *cultural* analysis' in existing 'sociological and philosophical approaches to urban ecology'. In his own essay, Bennett again claims that

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[6] Chris Dunton, 'Entropy and Energy: Lagos as City of Words', *Research in African Literatures*, 39:2 (2008), 68-78; Louise Green, 'Reading for Background: Suyi Davies Okungbowa's *David Mogo, Godhunter* and "the end of the world as we know it"', in *Environmental Transformations*, pp. 24-36; Douglas Kaze, 'Inundations, Boundaries and Intersections: Flood as Narration in Nigerian Literature', *Green Letters*, 24:1 (2020), 23-35; Sule Emmanuel Egya, 'Poetics of Landscape: Representations of Lagos as a "Modernizing" City in Nigerian Poetry', in *Environmental Transformations*, pp. 37-49, and '"Sea-salt rides its currents to the city": Lagos and the Poetics of Flooding', *Postcolonial Studies*, 24:3 (2021), 384-398; Elaine Savory, 'Chinua Achebe's Ecocritical Awareness', *PMLA*, 129:2 (2014), 253-256; Danica Savonick, '"The problem of locomotion": Infrastructure and Automobility in Three Postcolonial Urban Nigerian Novels', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 61:4 (2015), 669-689.

[7] Chris Abani, *GraceLand* (New York: Picador, 2004); Teju Cole, *Every Day Is for the Thief* (London: Faber & Faber, [2007, 2014] 2015); Astrid Bracke, 'Wastelands, Shrubs and Parks: Ecocriticism and the Challenge of the Urban', *Frame*, 26:2 (2013), 7-22 (p. 8).

both literary ecocriticism *and* 'environmentalism in general' have 'not been quick to address urban issues'. Seven years later, Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw still support this latter point when they highlight the key importance of both '[r]e-naturing urban theory' and redressing the absence of focus on 'the urbanization process' on the part of 'environmental theory'. In other words, the urban, whether fictional or not, was not readily addressed by the environmental humanities until the beginning of the 21ˢᵗ century. On the other hand, something similar has happened with the city in postcolonial literary studies, at least in the Global North. According to Caroline Herbert, 'postcolonial literary studies has been relatively slow to recognize the significance of urban space to configurations of colonial power and to negotiations of postcolonial subjectivity and citizenship'. When combined with the marginalisation of African literatures by ecocritical studies observed by Byron Caminero-Santangelo, as opposed to 'other regions of the postcolonial world', the result is a sustained lack of critical attention to the nature of cities in African literatures in general, and Nigerian works in particular.[8]

If, as stated earlier, the urban has been relatively excluded from both environmental and postcolonial literary studies until the beginning of the 21ˢᵗ century, so has the African city been routinely marginalised in urban studies. According to Garth Myers, even if 'African societies urbanize […] in ways that challenge prevailing theories and models of urban' development, the majority of 'urban social studies are still […] measuring cities in non-Western settings by the models and metrics of the West'. Frequently, 'African cities come up short' against this Western framework. Similarly, Charlie M. Shackleton *et al.* identify a gap regarding the development of an urban ecology of the Global South; there is a lack of studies both focusing on and coming from the region. However, as anticipated, Myers highlights the beginning of the 21ˢᵗ century as signalling a reversal of this trend, and provides an array of studies on which his work expands.[9]

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[8] Bennett and Teague, 'Urban Ecocriticism', pp. 3-4, emphasis in the original; Michael Bennett, 'Manufacturing the Ghetto: Anti-urbanism and the Spatialization of Race', in *The Nature of Cities*, pp. 169-188 (p. 169); Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw, 'Urban Political Ecology: Politicizing the Production of Urban Natures', in *In the Nature of Cities: Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism*, ed. Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1-20 (p. 2); Caroline Herbert, 'Postcolonial Cities', in *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, pp. 200-215 (p. 200); Byron Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice and Political Ecology* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2014), pp. 8-9. Studies like Latin American Angel Rama's seminal work, *The Lettered City*, ed and trans. John Charles Chasteen (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), however, suggest different trajectories for this field in other parts of the world.

[9] Garth Myers, *African Cities: Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2011), pp. 1-2; Charlie M. Shackleton, Sarel S. Cilliers, Marié J. du Toit and Elandrie Davoren, 'The Need for an Urban Ecology of the Global South', in *Urban Ecology in the Global South*, ed. Charlie M. Shackleton, Sarel S. Cilliers, Elandrie Davoren and Marié J. du Toit (Cham: Springer Nature, 2021), pp. 1-26

Since the early 21st century, sociological and cultural studies on spatial, infrastructural, and political ecological issues have certainly developed, and included postcolonial or world literatures as well. Indeed, several interdisciplinary critical works have been devoted to the study of one or more of the above-mentioned urban predicaments in literary cities and other cultural objects across the Global South, including both Nigeria and Africa in general, and drawing on both the ecological and sociological fields. Here, I follow Anne Garland Mahler's definition of this term as both 'deterritorialized geography' and 'political subjectivity'. On the one hand, the Global South refers to those countries and regions 'negatively impacted by contemporary capitalist globalization'. These include but are not limited to former colonies, so that 'the Global South captures a *deterritorialized geography* of capitalism's externalities' that also includes 'subjugated peoples' within the Global North. It is in this sense that it is used in this paragraph. On the other hand, the Global South is also used here to refer to 'the resistant imaginary of a *transnational political subject*' that emerges from an acknowledgement of 'a shared experience of subjugation under contemporary global capitalism', which draws on 'lateral solidarities' and 'networked theories of power'. This definition that refers to a transnational resisting subject is mostly applied throughout the analytical chapters and the conclusion.[10]

Some of the more recent and comprehensive examples of critical works of this kind are Pablo Mukherjee's *Postcolonial Environments*, Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone's *Postcolonial Spaces*, Rashimi Varma's *The Postcolonial City and its Subjects*, Caminero-Santangelo's *Different Shades of Green*, John Thieme's *Postcolonial Literary Geographies*, Sarah Harrison's *Waste Matters*, Lindsey B. Green-Simms's *Postcolonial Automobility*, Elleke Boehmer and Dominic Davies' *Planned Violence*, Lola Akande's *The City in the African Novel*, Stephanie Newell's *Histories of Dirt*, and Iheka's *African Ecomedia*. While I draw on some of these works throughout my analysis, these and other more limited, or narrower, studies usually focus either on a specific issue across a large geographical area, or select a circumscribed location, such as a city or a small group of them, generally Bombay, Johannesburg and/or Lagos, where a number of these problems are analysed. Moreover, while most previous works of this kind avail themselves of ecological concepts and approaches, their readings do not necessarily foreground environmental questions or issues, except for Mukherjee's, Thieme's, Harrison's, and Iheka's studies. What seems to be missing, then, is a comprehensive comparative study

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(pp. 9-11). See also, Edgar Pieterse, 'Cityness and African Urban Development', Urban Forum, 21 (2010), 205–219 (p. 207).

[10] Anne Garland Mahler, 'Global South', *Oxford Bibliographies*, 25 October 2017, DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780190221911-0055 [Accessed: 17 June 2024], emphasis added.

that focuses exclusively on Nigerian city-texts, and examines the diverse forms of (literary) urban nature.[11]

The term 'literary cities', used interchangeably with 'fictional cityscapes', is employed here to refer to all cities that exist in narrativized form, that is, as written constructions of literary texts. This concept includes those cities that have an actual, physical existence in Nigeria, such as Lagos, Port Harcourt or Abuja, but which are also the setting in place of a number of literary texts, and those cities that only belong to the realm of the imaginary, such as Okara's Sologa in *The Voice*, and the unnamed settings of Ben Okri's 'In the City of Red Dust' and *The Famished Road*, which may or may not be inspired by actual Nigerian cities. The purpose of this distinction between 'literary' and 'physical' cities is to avoid a simplistic conflation of the literary representations with the actual places, in the cases of literary cities with a physical counterpart, and, in general terms, to remind us that the object of study of this research is not sociological works but artistic literary texts and their urban representations. It can indeed be argued that physical cities are always represented in writing, whether this is in an urbanisation plan, or a historical or sociological study. However, 'literary cities' and 'fictional cityscapes' here refer to urban centres represented in literary works of art that, as Eric Prieto explains, lack the rigour of scientific research but which, nonetheless, have the power to influence the way we engage with the real world through literary mechanisms.[12]

Belonging to different genres and historical periods, and set in various times and places, these Nigerian urban works usually 'offer a critical purchase on', that is, reflect on as well as, sometimes, explore means of redressing a number of urban predicaments, which affect both human and nonhuman nature, in actually existing, or imaginary cities.[13] In fact,

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[11] Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone (eds.), *Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Rashimi Varma, *The Postcolonial City and its Subjects: London, Nairobi, Bombay* (New York; Oxon: Routledge, 2012); John Thieme, *Postcolonial Literary Geographies: Out of Place* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Sarah Harrison, *Waste Matters: Urban Margins in Contemporary Literature* (London; New York: Routledge, 2017); Lindsey B. Green-Simms, *Postcolonial Automobility: Car Culture in West Africa* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Elleke Boehmer and Dominic Davies (eds.), *Planned Violence: Post/Colonial Urban Infrastructure, Literature and Culture* (Cham: Springer Nature for Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Lola Akande, *The City in the African Novel: A Thematic Rendering of Urban Spaces* (Lagos: Tunmike Pages, 2019); Stephanie Newell, *Histories of Dirt: Media and Urban Life in Colonial and Postcolonial Lagos* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2020); Cajetan Iheka, *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

[12] Ben Okri, 'In the City of Red Dust', in *Stars of the New Curfew* (London: Vintage, [1988] 1999), pp. 37-79; Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* (London: Vintage, [1991] 2003); Eric Prieto, *Literature, Geography and the Postmodern Poetics of Place* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 2.

[13] Boehmer and Davies, 'Planned Violence: Post/Colonial Urban Infrastructures, Literature and Culture', in *Planned Violence*, pp. 1-25 (p. 5).

one of the main premises of this study is that Nigerian urban literature needs to be understood as part of the country's own brand of environmentally-aware writing, shaped by its precolonial, colonial and postcolonial history: what Achebe terms its 'inbuilt power struggle among the [major] ethnic groups', both fuelled and over-determined by the country's suffering from the 'social malaise' of corruption; and, connected to that, Nigeria's being, in Rob Nixon's words, under the 'resource curse' of the 'petro-state', since oil was found in commercial quantities in 1956. In other words, the issues of ethnicity, corruption, and an oil political economy are not just key interrelated elements of Nigeria's socio-ecological configuration, but are also strongly present in both its physical and fictional cityscapes.[14]

Consequently, this thesis carries out a sustained comparative urban ecocritical examination of Anglophone Nigerian novels from 1954 to the present. Grounded in the environmental humanities, the project draws mainly on insights from Marxist and postcolonial ecologies, applied to or in conversation with Bennett and Teague's 'urban ecocriticism', which is here understood to coincide with Christopher Schliephake's 'cultural urban ecologies'. The analysis also avails itself of sociological criticism in the fields of urban studies and human geography, among others. The thesis interrogates an extensive set of urban novels that, like Schliephake's objects of study, 'offer themselves as portrayals of the dense networks and dynamic interactions between urban societies, city spaces, and the larger environment'. The project's main aim is to analyse how nature and the environment are construed in the city, what their relationship is with social, political, and economic forces, and what links, if any, are established between the social and environmental predicaments portrayed in the fictional urban landscapes.[15]

The broad terms of this thesis allow for an examination of a range of issues within the proposed topic that vary in character, scale, cause, and effect. Indeed, this general interrogation can be further divided into more specific enquiries pertaining to different aspects of the selected topic: How do these urban milieus differ from each other in terms of the aesthetic codes and representational strategies deployed by the authors to address urban nature, and how are they related to rural or village settings? What do the selected texts tell us about the evolution of prevalent preoccupations with the city in Nigeria? What do these literary cities, and their human and nonhuman agents, have to say about waste, resource

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[14] Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 51; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 70 and 106.

[15] Bennett and Teague, 'Urban Ecocriticism'; Christopher Schliephake, *Urban Ecologies: City Space, Material Agency, and Environmental Politics in Contemporary Culture* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), p. 10.

accessibility, mobility, infrastructure, poverty and pollution, among other issues? What solutions, if any, are (re)imagined? How do these agents relate to the built environment, and how is this built environment itself portrayed? What social and material relations can be identified in the selected texts? How are these relations determined by (post)colonial contexts?

Whereas the adoption of an urban ecocritical perspective is of course to be expected when dealing with the nature of Nigerian cities, a Marxist and postcolonial approach is justified by Nigeria's (post)colonial history and oil economy, mentioned above and further developed in the first chapter. In other words, both Nigeria in general and Nigerian cities in particular should be understood as *postcolonial environments* as per Mukherjee's definition. Firstly, the critic defines '"environment" as an integrated network of human and non-human agents acting historically', that is, 'defin[ing] the history' of a given place or landscape. This history is of course not just human but also nonhuman, where these may sometimes converge and at other times take different paths. Cities are encompassed by this definition, and Mukherjee in fact adds that 'urban spaces and their various relationships with the rural, or even "waste" lands and areas not inhabited by humans, are also major environmental components'.[16]

Secondly, Mukherjee explains that he understands 'postcolonial' not as a mere temporal marker, 'but rather as a historical condition of intensified and sustained exploitation of the majority of humans and non-humans of the former colonies by a cartel composed of their own and "core" metropolitan European/north American elites'. According to this author, then, postcolonialism is 'another stage' of colonialism, and this is what 'the "post" […] marks'. Crucially, the critic claims that the new 'globalized ruling classes' have been identified by 'theories of neo-colonialism' since the 1950s. That is, colonialism and neocolonialism are not identical formations because the latter includes the exploitation carried out by the former colonial ruling elite now assisted or enabled by the ruling elite of the new postcolonial nations. Mukherjee thus defines 'postcolonial' as 'the entire matrix of [neo-colonialism's] material-cultural conditions'. However, he says, 'at the heart of both colonialism and neo-colonialism lies the historical fact of unfolding, expanding, capital'. This is why, while aware of these differences, I sometimes use the terms neocolonial and postcolonial as interchangeable, and usually use (neo)colonial capitalism to refer to both the colonial and postcolonial stages of capitalist exploitation in order to emphasise their continuities as portrayed in the analysed novels.[17]

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[16] Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, p. 5.
[17] Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, pp. 5-7.

Moreover, following David Harvey, Mukherjee asserts that 'the economic dynamics of capital is etched onto the political, cultural, material and ecological fabric of our world'; which means that 'there is no way for us to understand it [the environment] without our engagement with the notion of the uneven unfolding of historical capital'. That is, for Mukherjee, contemporary environmental issues are indivisible from the development of capitalism and historically produced global inequality. This notion of 'uneven development', says Mukherjee, is especially relevant for 'colonial and postcolonial conditions' because, on the one hand, from the 15th century onwards, capitalist development has been inextricably linked with colonialism. On the other hand, the process of capitalist development 'occurs [in the colonies] in a more exaggerated form than in the Euro-north American zone', due to the extreme disenfranchisement of their peoples, who are usually unable to register and/or react against the destructiveness of capitalism contained in the 'extreme rate' of both extraction of 'raw materials' and insertion of 'foreign capital'.[18]

Mukherjee thus defines 'postcolonial environments' as 'the entire network of human and non-human material existence that is marked by the particular dynamics of historical capital at a specific stage and location.' Based on this definition we can say that all the literary cities examined in this project are mediations or representations of *postcolonial environments*, since they (re)imagine diverse networks of human and nonhuman actors defining history in the uneven materiality of urban centres. Moreover, if we follow Elleke Boehmer's definition of postcolonial literature as 'that which critically or subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship', and if by 'colonial' we also understand the neocolonial relationships of Mukherjee's postcolony and their consequences, then all the primary texts in this study can be said to be, at least to a certain extent, postcolonial.[19]

In other words, this project focuses on literary productions of urban environments that are ultimately shaped by the accelerated 'uneven unfolding of historical capital' that is the trademark of the postcolonial stage of capitalist exploitation. This is not to say that all capitalist social relations are necessarily postcolonial. However, as we shall see, Nigeria's oil political economy does mean that most of these capitalist relations are directly or indirectly related to a neocolonial system of exploitation of human and nonhuman nature. Consequently, even if, as anticipated, the selected urban novels belong to a variety of genres, adopt diverse forms, and employ an array of stylistic and representational

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[18] Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, pp. 13-14.
[19] Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, p. 15; Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 3.

strategies, they are still demonstrated to possess elements of postcolonial critique in the construction of their literary cityscapes. Eventually, what is foregrounded in this study is the elasticity of the Nigerian urban novel, which enables it to address a multiplicity of (postcolonial environmental) issues in countless ways.[20]

Close comparative readings of the selected primary texts are organised thematically, which allows for the establishment of dialogical relationships between the selected works, and the identification of urban socio-ecological concerns; or, as Boehmer and Davies observe regarding 'planned violence', a term defined later, how the texts '[interact] with and make sense' of the nature of cities. The rationale behind the project partly builds on Caminero-Santangelo's work on African literatures, and its justification of a comparative approach, which he claims can be a productive way to face 'the conceptual and imaginative challenge' of establishing links 'within and between global environmental justice struggles and political ecology' as a theoretical framework. Comparative literary analysis, he claims, 'both enriches discussion about [the texts] as interventions in activist and academic discourse about praxis', and 'enable' collective examination to shed light on issues not only 'across scale', but also across place and time. That is, comparative studies both contribute to theorisations regarding the *practical* aspects of the participation of individual literary works in multi- and interdisciplinary discussions, as well as outside academia –*how* they produce environmental and political meaning in themselves–, and allow for connections to be made across different scales: at the local, regional, national, and transnational levels. Even if I analyse here texts from a single country, these considerations still apply in that I carry out both individual and collective readings that also enable relations across scale, time, and place.[21]

Similarly, following Myers, it is possible to say that a 'comparative thematic approach enables us to address the different outcomes and processes', the diverse ways of treating, the city in nature 'across' the literature examined. Myers carries out a comparative study of selected African cities, whose main objective is to reappraise them, 'to point to the multifaceted urbanity in African contexts', within a 'global understanding of urbanism'. Interestingly, the critic claims that, because 'African cities are quite different form one another in patterns, processes, forms, and functions', a discussion of '"African" cities involves engagement with themes that hold somewhat constant as they manifest in different ways'. Because the same can be said about 'African' literary cities, even within a

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[20] Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, p. 13.
[21] Elleke Boehmer and Dominic Davies, 'Literature, Planning and Infrastructure: Investigating the Southern City Through Postcolonial Texts', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 51:4 (2015), 395-409, p. 396; Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades*, p. 34.

single country, Myers's thematic approach provides a double justification for its adoption in this project. On the one hand, the identification of recurrent thematic concerns allows for the inclusion of a wide range of urban Nigerian novels that vary greatly in diverse aspects. On the other, it lays the foundations for future comparative studies with urban texts from other African countries.[22]

The present thesis contends that, as Nigerian cultural products, the selected novels resist, to varying degrees, (neo)colonial capitalist exploitation through the representation of the interpenetration of human and nonhuman nature in the city. Instead of constructing the urban as something entirely artificial and unnatural, as a Human product, opposed to and distinct from Nature, the novels both expose the very real consequences of this distinction for human and nonhuman nature, and blur the boundaries between them, as well as sometimes exploring alternative solutions and/or (re)imagining relations beyond the divide. In other words, despite the late realisation of theoretical fields such as ecocriticism and postcolonial and/or urban studies, this project demonstrates that cities have always been diversely understood as part of nature in Nigerian novels, in the same way as, and partly because, nature and the environment have always been of essence in postcolonial literatures. The texts are thus shown to (re)construct alternative urban imaginaries that help us think productively about human and nonhuman connections and their consequences in the city.

Consciously or unconsciously, the project argues following Mukherjee, these works '[summon] [urban] life', and, through writing, make the city 'with and within nature', as Jason Moore says. A thorough examination of these works, then, organised around the three binary subsets of village/city, tradition/modernity, and mind/body, demonstrates the sustained presence of socio-ecological issues in Nigerian urban literature. Through different literary strategies and thematic concerns, the texts thus undermine the conceptual separation of Society and Nature that has historically simultaneously enabled and justified the commodification of nature and *uneven capitalist development*. Crucially, such an analysis can influence the way (Nigerian and postcolonial) cities are conceived of and understood, offering new insights on and alternative solutions to long-standing urban socio-ecological issues.[23]

The present project contributes methodologically, practically, and theoretically to the fields of cultural urban ecology, postcolonial ecocriticism, and Nigerian literature. Firstly,

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[22] Myers, *African Cities*, pp.15 and 7-8.
[23] Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, p. 72; Jason W. Moore, 'The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 44:3 (2017), 594-630 (p. 601-602).

the thesis belongs to a growing body of research focusing on a specific form of urban writing and, crucially, enhances efforts in multiple fields of action striving towards a recognition of the nature of literary cities; that is, like Schliephake's study, 'it […] tries to re-conceptualize the subject of urbanity within an ecocritical framework'. In this case, we should say a *postcolonial* ecocritical framework, instead of only ecocritical. Secondly, because of its comparative nature, the project can be easily put in dialogue with, or expanded to include, comparisons with other genres and/or countries or regions within the Global South, which is in fact often done throughout this thesis in the form of comments or footnotes. Thirdly, like Iheka's book-length study, my research adopts a multidisciplinary theoretical approach, one that privileges material but multi-layered, sometimes against-the-grain, readings of selected novels, which allow us to identify what the texts may not say about themselves. Moreover, it identifies a common concern or trait in Nigerian urban literature, which may sometimes be hidden or disguised as multiple oppositional views. This also enables us to reread seminal works to uncover a consistent treatment of the nature of cities since the beginning of what we call Nigerian literature.[24]

0.1. Thesis Structure and Research Design

The thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter One provides the theoretical and sociohistorical framework for the analysis. It contains the project's literature review and theoretical framework, where it briefly outlines the implications of both working within the environmental humanities in general, and adopting a combination of postcolonial and Marxist ecological perspectives. It then examines how these two approaches can be applied within or intersect with the field of cultural urban ecologies. Finally, the first chapter considers the issues of ethnicity and an oil political economy in relation to Nigeria's urbanisation processes. Within this final section, the chapter looks at the origins and critical significance of each of the binary subsets addressed by the literary analysis chapters, as well as at how these can be challenged or overcome. These considerations are in turn examined within the context of Nigeria's historical, economic, and socio-ecological characteristics, drawing on specific issues to exemplify the implications of each binary.

The remaining three chapters contain the literary analysis of the selected novels. As anticipated, each of the three analytical chapters considers a specific theme or aspect of urban life in two or more novels, and, through it, addresses what is here understood as a different expression of the all-encompassing Nature/Society binary, which is in turn

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[24] Schliephake, *Urban Ecologies*, p. 10; Cajetan Iheka, *Naturalizing Africa: Ecological Violence, Agency, and Postcolonial Resistance in African Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

utilised to look at the socio-ecological issues encountered in the texts. Chapter Two, divided into two sections, analyses the conspicuous consumption enabled by systemic corruption in two of Chinua Achebe's novels, published in the 1960s: *No Longer at Ease*, and *A Man of the People*. The analysis focuses mainly on the evolution of the two main characters, and, through an examination of the events that lead to their respective demises, it addresses the village/city binary, and how this is challenged in the novels. Building on Raymond Williams's seminal theorisations on the historical separation of the rural and the urban, the chapter argues that a consideration of the nature of corruption and conspicuous consumption as portrayed in the novels allows us to identify the material and socio-economic 'flows', to use Maria Kaika's term, that take place between and within village and city. The texts thus not only expose the deep imbrication of the two kinds of settlements, as well as the socio-ecological consequences of conspicuous consumption in the village and the city, but also question the image of the city as inherently corrupt and decadent, the source of all evil doings.[25]

Chapter Three explores issues related to urban physical infrastructures and space as (re)constructed in three contemporary Lagos novels of the Nigerian diaspora: Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief*, Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos*, and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*. Through this infrastructural approach, which focuses specifically on the representation of 'planned violence' and its effects on the unequal experience and access to physical urban space, the chapter addresses the tradition/modernity binary. Within the term *planned violence* Boehmer and Davies include the 'various forms of violence' exerted or 'facilitated' by 'urban planning', which impact how citizens interact with the urban landscape. This fourth chapter, divided into three sections, identifies in the texts a growing level of disruption and/or (re)appropriation of urban infrastructures, and a (re)construction of ambivalent urban spaces. In other words, the chapter argues that, to varying degrees, these novels expose and subvert the violence exerted by the modernisation narrative on human and nonhuman nature. This violence is contained in unfulfilled 'infrastructural promise[s]', to use Brian Larkin's words, and redressed through the creation of alternative cityscapes made up of Prieto's '*entre-deux*' or 'in-between spaces'. Nonetheless, despite the incremental contestatory forces identified in the novels, the chapter still finds the three endings quite problematic: all three authors fall into idealising or mystifying patterns

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[25] Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People* (London: Penguin Books, [1966] 2001); Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Vintage [1973] 2016); Maria Kaika, *City of Flows: Modernity, Nature, and the City* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

associated with the myth of modernity in general and with oil production and commerce in particular.[26]

Chapter Four examines the interconnected themes of poverty, crime, and care in four novels paired into two sections: Ekwensi's *People of the City* and Toni Kan's *The Carnivorous City*, on the one hand; and Buchi Emecheta's *Naira Power* and Leye Adenle's *Easy Motion Tourist*, on the other. By focusing on the objectification and commodification of the human body in these texts, the chapter addresses the mind/body binary, which at times also intersects with the human/animal one. Once again, a challenge to these binaries, and to bodily objectification, is read in the proposed pairs, together with (re)subjectifying strategies of caring resistance. The novels analysed in the fourth chapter undermine the separation of mind and body, and the commodification of certain humans' energy and matter, by emphasising the capitalist drive behind these processes. They also blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman animals, as well as (re)imagining relations between embodied minds.[27]

Before moving on to the following chapter, it is necessary to explain the object of study here; that is, why Nigerian literature, why novels, and why the nine texts that are analysed in the three thematic chapters. In the first place, the decision to focus on Nigerian literature has mainly to do with what Griswold, referring specifically to novels, describes as its 'newness and abundance'. According to this characterisation, the Nigerian literary tradition is both relatively manageable or surveyable, and extremely rich. Moreover, within this literary production, as exemplified throughout this thesis, a considerable part is published in English and accessible outside of Nigeria and the African continent, especially when it comes to novels. However, as stated earlier, this literature remains severely understudied, especially regarding its urban ecological elements. This choice thus provides the study with both depth, since it can thus focus on a defined and definable sociocultural context, and breadth, given the richness and history of the Nigerian literary tradition.[28]

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[26] Nnedi Okorafor, *Lagoon* (New York: Saga Press, [2014] 2016); Boehmer and Davies, 'Literature, Planning and Infrastructure', p. 396; Brian Larkin, 'Promising Forms: The Political Aesthetics of Infrastructure', in *The Promise of Infrastructure*, ed. Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta & Hannah Appel (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 175-202 (p. 193); Prieto, *Postmodern Poetics*.

[27] Toni Kan, *The Carnivorous City* (Abuja and London: Cassava Republic, 2016); Buchi Emecheta, *Naira Power* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1982); Leye Adenle, *Easy Motion Tourist* (Abuja and London: Cassava Republic, 2016).

[28] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, p. 21. While there is no space here to discuss these issues at large, the fact that Nigerian literature is published mostly in English mainly responds both to the authors' command of the English language, and their desire that their work reaches as wide an audience as possible. Moreover, publishing in Nigeria has usually implied high costs and low quality, although this might be changing now, as exemplified by Cassava Republic publications. Another issue to consider is the fact that many authors are

Secondly, faced with the need to limit the scope of the project, a decision was made to focus exclusively on novels, excluding nonfiction, short fiction, drama and poetry, which are nonetheless referenced throughout the study. This choice responds not only to personal preferences, but also to thematic content, form, and practicalities regarding access and availability. As explained above, since the 1970s, Nigerian novels have been mostly urban instead of rural, dealing with a variety of cities and issues within them. What is more, because of their length, novels tend to address more than one urban issue, and include multiple points of view throughout the narratives. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, most of these novels are originally written in the English language and can be easily accessed in the Global North, specifically the UK, where this research has been conducted.

Regarding the selection of the project's primary works, this responds mainly to thematic relationships identified between them that not only establish grounds for comparison, but also enrich individual readings and enable the formulation of an overarching argument. Many more works could have been included but have had to be left out due to time and space constraints. By Nigerian urban novels, the project refers both to novels partially or entirely set in actual or fictional Nigerian cities, and to those by Nigerian authors set in fictional cities in unspecified countries, such as Achebe's A *Man of the People*. This includes, but is not limited to, what Griswold calls 'the genre of "city novels", works that feature not just city settings but city plots'. Some of the novels surveyed and analysed in this study would in fact be classified as political or crime novels, for example. When it comes to authors, the thesis includes, like Griswold's book, those 'born or permanently resident in Nigeria', as well as those born in other countries who still identify as Nigerian.[29]

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and have been based in the Global North when publishing their work. For a detailed examination of the Nigerian literary market, see for example Griswold, *Bearing Witness*.

[29] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, pp. 157 and 22. All this being said, we must also consider the results of Griswold's study of Nigerian authors' backgrounds: 'Although these authors intend to represent their country in their writing, they are very unrepresentative themselves. Compared with the Nigerian people as a whole, 'they are more male, more southern, more Christian, more Igbo or Yoruba, and much more highly educated', *Bearing Witness*, p. 41. Although the present project includes later texts and authors, these tendencies can still be observed in the selected nine texts, which are by no means representative of the Nigerian population, or of Nigerian literature in general.

CHAPTER ONE. A MULTIDISCIPLINARY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONTEXTS, CONCEPTS AND METHODOLOGIES

> *All we need is a little imagination to discover that things are not as fixed or as impossible as we believe.*[30]

> *In the dominant environmental literature, the city is sick, monstruous, blighted, ecocidal, life-denying, parasitical, you name it. ... In the face of that tradition, it's easy to see why 'urban ecocriticism' is considered an oxymoron.*[31]

As mentioned earlier, this thesis belongs, in general terms, to the field of the environmental humanities, and, within it, to postcolonial and Marxist ecocriticism at their intersections with cultural urban ecologies. The project's multidisciplinary approach is both an asset and a disadvantage, but it has been adopted in response to the themes and issues identified in the selected primary novels. Taking as its model the example of Iheka, who in turn follows Byron Caminero-Santangelo's and Scott Slovic's suggestions, the present study '[welds] together different theoretical tools and orientations', with the aim of avoiding biased or restrictive interpretations, instead allowing the primary texts to guide the analysis towards their most salient or significant features. In other words, I draw from and build on specific insights or propositions within these fields, through which I read the selected novels and analyse the relevant issues in each chapter.[32]

This first chapter thus briefly defines the three main critical fields adopted by the study, which are already multidisciplinary, and, within them, contextualises key theories and concepts that are applied throughout the literary analysis. Even if postcolonial, Marxist, and urban ecological perspectives all belong to the 'social ecological' branch of ecocriticism, it must be acknowledged that there exist tensions and contradictions both between ecocritical and postcolonial positions, and between postcolonial and Marxist ones, as well as within each of the three critical fields. The differences between the first pair have been repeatedly addressed, most famously in Nixon's 2005 paper, and are usually considered at the beginning of any postcolonial ecocritical study, which is why they are not included here. On the other hand, some of the tensions in postcolonial and Marxist studies are considered in the following section.[33]

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[30] Habila, *Waiting*, p. 183.
[31] Andrew Ross, 'The Social Claim on Urban Ecology', in *The Nature of Cities*, pp. 15-30 (p. 16).
[32] Iheka, *Naturalizing Africa*, p. 15.
[33] The 'social ecological' stand within ecocriticism is differentiated from the 'deep ecological' one by the former's 'emphasis on the interpenetration of nature and culture'. Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, p. 44. Mukherjee defines the social ecological position and its relation to postcolonial studies in the second chapter of his book (pp. 39-58). Rob Nixon, 'Environmentalism and Postcolonialism', in *Postcolonial*

1.1. The Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial and Marxist Ecologies

Firstly, it is important to explain what it means to say this project belongs to the field of the environmental humanities. In essence, it entails adopting a multidisciplinary approach, based on a recognition of the interpenetration of human and nonhuman nature and focused on issues surrounding uneven power relations and diverse forms of being in and within nature. In 2012 Deborah Bird Rose *et al.* define the environmental humanities as an area that 'engages with fundamental questions of meaning, value, responsibility and purpose in a time of rapid, and escalating, change'. They claim that the environmental humanities provides an 'integrated and conceptually sensitive approach', at whose 'core […] is a focus on the underlying cultural and philosophical frameworks that are entangled with the ways in which diverse human cultures have made themselves at home in a more than human world'. According to these authors, 'the deepening environmental and social crises of our time' have precipitated the 'collapse' of the 'nature/culture divide'. That is, from its early years, working in the environmental humanities has meant being fundamentally aware of the inescapable imbrication that exists between human and nonhuman nature.[34]

Ursula K. Heise locates the emergence of the field of the environmental humanities at the beginning of the 21st century, as a combination of 'humanistic perspectives and methods that have already developed in half a dozen or so disciplines' since the 1970s. Heise also refers to the field's multidisciplinary nature and defines it as one that understands 'ecological crises fundamentally as questions of socioeconomic inequality, cultural difference, and divergent histories, values, and ethical frameworks'. Once again, environmental questions are closely linked with economic, cultural, and historical ones. Postcolonial literatures, and those of the Global South more generally, then, constitute a key object of study for the environmental humanities, since both 'inequality' and 'cultural difference' are usually crucial elements of inquiry within them.[35]

In fact, Heise highlights agency, which is usually veiled, unrecognised or thwarted, as a fundamental issue within the field, when she claims that the environmental humanities is 'defined by the productive conceptual tension between humans' agency as a species and the inequalities that shape and constrain the agencies of different kinds of humans, on the

Studies and Beyond, ed. Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton and Jed Esty (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 233-251.
[34] Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren, Matthew Chrulew, Stuart Cooke, Matthew Kearnes and Emily O'Gorman, 'Thinking Through the Environment, Unsettling the Humanities', *Environmental Humanities*, 1:1 (2012), 1-5 <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3609940> (pp. 1-2).
[35] Ursula K. Heise, 'Introduction: Planet, Species, Justice – and the Stories We Tell about Them', in *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, ed. Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 1-10 (pp.1-2).

one hand, and between human and nonhuman forms of agency, on the other.' The agency of exploited human and nonhuman nature thus becomes a key issue. Lastly, Heise sets 'rethinking time, memory, and narrative' as a 'defining challenge for the environmental humanities', in order to 'continue conversations with scientists, activists, policy makers, and urban and regional planners'. This common interest, says Heise, has been 'reinforced by the "material turn" in the humanities and social sciences that emphasizes the otherness and agency as well as the entanglement of nonhuman actants with human ones.' Chantelle Bayes defines 'entanglements' precisely as the product of 'relationships between various human and nonhuman entities that collectively work to impact the world around them'. Thus, Heise again points to an imbrication of human and nonhuman nature, one that is marked by the material relations of different forms of agency.[36]

Similar concerns characterise the work of scholars in postcolonial ecocriticism, as a branch of literary studies within the environmental humanities. It is to the definition of this field we now turn our attention. Crucially, Rose *et al.* describe the latter as 'an effort to inhabit a difficult space of simultaneous critique and action', which strives 'to productively rethink "the human" in more than human terms', and provide ecocriticism as a discipline that has been working towards this since its inception. This observation is particularly relevant here because this simultaneous struggle for 'critique and action' characterises both the present study *and* its object, postcolonial literatures. Caminero-Santangelo indeed poses that 'a critical dialogue among various *kinds* of African literary narratives […] can […] resist closure in the imagining of effective ways to move toward a more equitable, sustainable future'; while Anthony Carrigan highlights 'the importance of narrative in helping us to imagine foundations for environmental equity'. In fact, referring specifically to the postcolonial novel, Carrigan says that it 'continue[s] to confront the most heinous abuses of power while representing […] the creative negotiations needed to survive in the context of monumental economic disparity and ecological crisis'. There is, then, in postcolonial literatures, a concurrent (re)telling of the violence of (post)colonialism, and an imagining of the future, of a way forward and past these violent pasts and presents. A similar concurrent attention to these elements, then, characterises the environmental humanities in general, and postcolonial ecocriticism in particular. While this is further developed in the following section, if 'action' in the literatures themselves consists of this artistic imagination of alternative presents and futures, in the critical fields it takes the form

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[36] Heise, 'Introduction', pp. 5-7; Chantelle Bayes, *Reimagining Urban Nature: Literary Imaginaries for Posthuman Cities* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2023), p. 16.

of interpreting these artistic imaginings in the light of historical, economic, sociopolitical, and ecological theories and events.[37]

Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur and Anthony Carrigan put forward a similar claim when they speak of 'the legacies of rupture and the possibilities of imaginative recuperation and transformation' of 'postcolonial environmental representations'; where 'rupture' can be conceived as 'critique', and 'recuperation and transformation' as 'action', as the way forward. A very clear example of this double impulse in fiction is Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*. With an easily identifiable ecological conscience, and through the science fiction genre, the novel is both a critique of contemporary Lagos, with its (post)colonial heritage, and a wake-up call that explores an alternative near future where both human and nonhuman nature flourishes. However, this double effort can be equally present in less overtly ecological texts, and may not necessarily, although it most probably will, include an environmental element. In a way, this double past/future, challenge/response, dynamic can be said to be a trait of all interventionist, activist literature, and any study that engages with this aspect of the works must, by definition, adopt it too.[38]

DeLoughrey *et al.* define the environmental humanities 'as a field whose core role is to offer a culturally differentiated, historically nuanced understanding of human-environmental relations'. Moreover, they add that a postcolonial approach to the field 'means relating cultural and historical analyses to cross-disciplinary ecological concerns in ways that emphasize tensions between different forms of knowledge, and that focus attention on how power relations affect environmental decision making and practices'. Again, priority is given to multi-faceted, cross-disciplinary perspectives which incorporate the historicity of nature and the uneven power relations that intervene in its configurations.

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[37] Rose *et al.*, 'Thinking Through', p. 3; Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades*, p. 35, emphasis in the original; Anthony Carrigan, 'Nature, Ecocriticism and the Postcolonial Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. Ato Quayson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 81-98 (pp. 81 and 93).

[38] Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan, 'Introduction: A Postcolonial Environmental Humanities', in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches*, ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey *et al.* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-32 (p. 5). As postcolonial ecocriticism has demonstrated, the environment, geography, and landscape, including both built and nonhuman features, have always been especially relevant to postcolonial studies and literatures. Edward W. Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization', in Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis, MN; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 67-95 (p. 77). See also Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, 'Introduction: Towards an Aesthetics of the Earth', in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 3-40 (pp. 3-4); Herbert, 'Postcolonial Cities', p. 200; Carrigan, 'Nature', p. 81.

DeLoughrey *et al.* also point out the political character of 'the nature/human binary' from a postcolonial perspective, since it is understood as a product of European imperialism.[39]

We can thus define postcolonial ecocriticism as a discipline within the environmental humanities that focuses on the study of postcolonial environments in literature, which foregrounds both the materiality and the historicity of landscape. Besides pointing out the fact that environmental concerns have been present in literatures from the Global South since the 1950s, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley argue that 'material, discursive, and ontological relations with the land are mutually constitutive', and claim that to 'speak of postcolonial ecology is to foreground the historical process of nature's mobility, transplantation, and consumption', without reducing nature to history, or vice versa. Similarly, Caminero-Santangelo highlights postcolonial ecocriticism's aim 'to historicize nature (while putting nature back into history) in order to disrupt the naturalization of geographical identities and conditions that have been shaped by imperialism'. Last but not least, Carrigan states that 'postcolonial ecocriticism […] has drawn attention to how literary texts represent power relations as environmentally embedded.'[40] Like the environmental humanities, then, postcolonial ecocriticism rejects the 'facile nature/culture dualism' espoused by 'Western thought', which enabled this separation of nature and history in the first place, and reads postcolonial literatures for environmental representations of uneven development and asymmetrical power relations.[41]

In 2020, Cajetan Iheka and Stephanie Newell announce the 'arrival' of African ecocriticism, which started properly developing in the second decade of the 21st century within the field of postcolonial ecocriticism. As the critics state, Caminero-Santangelo is a 'pioneering' figure in the area, and the general trend in African ecocriticism during the 2010s has been to explore 'the interconnection of colonialism with resource extraction and ecological degradation'. More specifically, and in line with this project, African ecocriticism focuses, among other issues, on 'the continuous vulnerabilities of African environments following independence and the extractive logic of late capitalism and globalisation, while orienting their readers to sustainable environmental practices'. It is within this critical concern that an African urban ecocriticism has started to develop, although, as stated in the Introduction, there is still much work to be done in this area.[42]

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[39] DeLoughrey *et al.*, 'Introduction', pp. 9-11.
[40] DeLoughrey and Handley, 'Introduction', pp. 8, 13 and 4; Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades*, p. 10; Carrigan, 'Nature', p. 82.
[41] DeLoughrey and Handley, 'Introduction', pp. 5 and 26.
[42] Iheka and Newell, 'Introduction', pp. 2 and 4.

As previously stated, this thesis looks at the nature of Nigerian literary cities from a postcolonial and Marxist approach, in accordance with an understanding of these fictional cityscapes as representations of *postcolonial environments* as theorised by Pablo Mukherjee. Now that postcolonial ecocriticism has been defined, and before moving on to a characterisation of cultural urban ecologies in the next section, it is important to consider why a Marxist perspective is necessary here, and what it entails. As Mukherjee explains, a Marxist ecology understands 'labour as a force linking earth's humans and non-humans'. Consequently, the 'downgrading or devaluing of nature is not just some side effect of the capitalist system', since the 'alienation of the labourer from her or his environmental condition generates the motor of demand that animates the capitalist system'. Put simply, Mukherjee's claim demonstrates that a separation of humans from nature has been central to the development not only of colonial capitalism, but of the capitalist system in general. We will now focus on two important points for this thesis: capitalism's historical and sustained subjugation and commodification of nature through the colonial project; and the relationships between capitalism, and cultural production and analysis in postcolonial countries.[43]

Of key importance regarding the first point is also the conception of imperialism and (neo)colonialism as phases in the development of capitalism, an idea initially expressed in *The Communist Manifesto*, which, in the first place, asserts: 'The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoise'. Later, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels explain, '[t]he need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere'. This expansion of the market across the globe is achieved, Marx and Engels say, by forcing the colonised peoples 'to adopt the bourgeoise mode of production'; by '[creating] a world after its [the bourgeoise's] own image'.[44]

Next, Marx and Engels refer to the colonisation and commodification of nature carried out by the colonial capitalist project:

> The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more
> massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding

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[43] Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, pp. 65-6.

[44] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, [1888] 2020), pp. 7 and 9. Also relevant here is Vladimir Lenin's 1916 pamphlet, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, available here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/> [Accessed 13 January 2023].

generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery,
application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation,
railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation,
canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground […].

Understanding the colonial project, starting in the 15th century, and including
contemporary neocolonial relations, as a phase in the development of global capitalism
enabled by the total control of human and nonhuman nature makes it impossible to
examine postcolonial (literary) cities without at least considering these colonial capitalist
forces. Indeed, cities are simultaneously product and producer of capitalist relations across
the globe. This being said, it is important to acknowledge here the claims of some
postcolonial critics regarding Marx's failure to engage meaningfully with colonialism.
Such is Gurminder K. Bhambra and John Holmwood's contention when they analyse
Marx's 'argument' and 'concept of class' after the publication of *The Communist
Manifesto*. Put simply, Bhambra and Holmwood claim that Marx's development of the
category of class, and his ensuing critique of the capitalist bourgeoisie, relegate and/or
exclude colonised peoples and societies, by privileging the 'European' poor and 'European
capitalism'.[45]

Conversely, other critics point to failures within postcolonial studies to properly
understand the relationship of colonialism and imperialism with capitalism. Neil Lazarus,
for example, argues that 'scholars in the field [of postcolonialism] have tended to pay
insufficient attention to the fact that colonialism is part and parcel of a larger, enfolding
historical dynamic, which is that of capitalism in its global trajectory'. The point here is
certainly not to claim that Bhambra and Holmwood fall prey to this mistake, but to
illustrate both sides of the tensions between postcolonial and Marxist criticism mentioned
earlier. In any case, key to Lazarus's claim is the idea that colonialism is more than 'an
exercise […] in *political* domination'. Colonialism for Lazarus is, above all, an *economic*
'historical process [that] involved the forced integration of hitherto uncapitalised societies,
or societies in which the capitalist mode of production was not hegemonic, into a capitalist
world system'. Crucially, then, a Marxist postcolonial approach foregrounds capitalist
development and expansion as the main motive behind colonial domination and
exploitation. Moreover, this is an idea that Lazarus sees as repeatedly presented in
'"postcolonial" literature'; a claim that justifies both the adoption of a Marxist approach

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[45] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 10; Gurminder K. Bhambra and John Holmwood,
Colonialism and Modern Social Theory (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021), pp. 52-54 and 57.

for this project, *and* my overarching argument regarding the novels' critique of capitalist exploitation of human and nonhuman nature in the city.[46]

Despite the tensions and contradictions addressed above, several critics have theorised on the relationships between capitalism, colonialism, and ecology, and, consequently, the intersections between Marxist and postcolonial studies within the environmental humanities. A key, albeit not uncontested, figure in this respect is Jason Moore, who goes as far as to propose the replacement of the concept of the Anthropocene, 'the "age of man"', by that of '*Capitalocene*', 'the "age of capital"'. Moore defines the *Capitalocene* as 'capitalism' beyond 'economics': 'as a system of power, profit, and re/production in the web of life', whose origins the author locates 'between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries', coinciding with the development of imperial and colonial projects all around the globe. Central to the origins and growth of the *Capitalocene*, and to its 'way of organizing nature', explains Moore in his book, is 'the problem of Cartesian dualism': an understanding of the world that sees 'society and nature as ontologically discrete', where abstract 'Nature with a capital "N"—external, controllable, reducible', can be studied and controlled. This dualist thinking, in other words, is part of what Moore calls 'a Cartesian revolution' on which the 'capitalist revolution' located 'in the long sixteenth century' partly depended.[47]

Although this two-way relationship is not as clearly stated in Moore's 2017 paper, in *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, the critic highlights the 'close' connection between Cartesian philosophy and 'Dutch capitalism', arguing that Descartes's 'systematizing' logic 'can be viewed as both symptomatic of, and contributing to, the seventeenth century's massive reorganization of power, capital, and nature'. The present thesis thus adopts this more reciprocal understanding of the relationship between dualist thinking and capitalism, where the former both emerged in the context of an already initiated 'world-ecological revolution', and provided the rational and epistemological basis for further and ever more fast-paced development of 'the Age of Capital'.[48]

Specifically, in his book-length study, Moore identifies during the long sixteenth century a 'shift from land to labor productivity as the decisive metric of wealth', which

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[46] Neil Lazarus, 'What Postcolonial Theory Doesn't Say', *Race & Class*, 53:1 (2011), 3-27 (pp. 7 and 11), emphasis in the original.

[47] Moore, 'Capitalocene, Part I', pp. 596, 605-606 and 609; Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London; New York: Verso, 2015), pp. 2 and 19-20, emphasis in the original. Nancy Fraser similarly speaks of capitalism as more than an 'economic system', and defines it as 'a societal order that empowers a profit-driven economy to prey on the extra-economic supports it needs to function'. Nancy Fraser, *Cannibal Capitalism: How Our System Is Devouring Democracy, Care, and the Planet – and What We Can Do about It* (London; New York: Verso, 2022), p. xiv.

[48] Moore, *Capitalism*, p. 20; Moore, 'Capitalocene, Part I', p. 610.

meant that Nature was put at the service of Human productivity. Moore calls this new 'law of value' the '"law" of Cheap Nature', and highlights what he terms the '"Four Cheaps"' that are '[appropriated]' from Nature and '[channelled] […] into the circuit of capital': 'labor-power, food, energy, and raw materials'. In sum, it was the combination of early modern ways of understanding the world and the capitalist shift in wealth measures that enabled the unprecedented development of the capitalist project as 'world-ecology'. It is thus that, Moore argues in his paper, 'capitalism is premised on the separation of Humanity and Nature', an 'absurdity [that] is especially powerful'.[49]

What is most relevant about Moore's theory is his clear and productive articulation of the Nature/Society binary in relation to the *Capitalocene* and capitalism's appropriation of *Cheap Nature*, which can only exist as separate and distinct from controlling Humanity. As mentioned earlier and explained in the following section, this binary is also responsible for the conception of the city as a purely human, and thus unnatural, settlement; an enemy of Nature. Whereas environmental humanists and postcolonial ecocritics in general all oppose the Nature/Society binary on principle, Moore, following Alberto Toscano, considers these categories to be '*real abstractions* that work in the world because we see and act [as] if Humanity/Nature are given conditions of reality rather than historically constructed': 'Treated as real by capitalists and empires, they are implicated in modernity's violence, and in planetary crisis today'. Modernity's violence is indeed the violence of the modernisation narrative, which is looked at in more detail later, in relation to its alleged opposite, tradition.[50]

That is, Moore demonstrates that the Nature/Society binary is not purely a theoretical construct; nor is it a thing of the past, since it underpins contemporary neocolonial relations across the world, as well as the current climate crisis. A similar point is made earlier by Maria Kaika, who claims that, despite academic critique of 'modernity's Promethean project', 'the nature/society dualism has not been produced and reproduced only at a theoretical and conceptual/ideological level. Since this separation inevitably permeated social and spatial practices, these ideas often became politicized and were translated into spatial practices'. A rejection of the Nature/Society binary, then, is central to the environmental humanities in general and postcolonial and Marxist ecologies in particular, because Nature and Humanity are also defined along racial and class lines, as is further explained later. What this thesis demonstrates is that this rejection can be found to be articulated also within Nigerian urban literature, in the construction of literary urban

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[49] Moore, *Capitalism*, pp. 14 and 17; Moore, 'Capitalocene, Part I', pp. 609-610 and 600.
[50] Moore, 'Capitalocene, Part I', pp. 601 and 604, emphasis in the original.

imaginaries that both expose and transcend dualist thinking. The examination of this rejection can thus help us understand the ways in which literature denounces the dangers of these abstractions and/or (re)creates, following Garth Myers, 'alternative visions' of cities in nature.[51]

Admittedly, a contradiction can be observed when analytically applying the Nature/Society dualism, which simultaneously and consistently decries real abstract separation, and foregrounds entwinement. This contradiction is explained by the difference between what Moore in his paper calls 'capitalism *as a project*', and capitalism as a 'historical *process*'. While the former, as has just been described, '"operationalizes" through this ontological rift of Nature/Society', in the latter's 'messier' 'reality' society and nature are indeed deeply imbricated. In other words, explains Moore in his book, the 'abstractions of Nature/Society separate symbolically what is unified practically in the history of capitalism: the life activity of the human species in the web of life'. This echoes Neil Smith's claim that, while capitalism 'externalize[s] nature to an unprecedented extent', it 'internalize[s] it in the commodity form'. That is, the more capitalism *as a project* externalises and controls Nature, the more entangled capitalism as a historical *process* becomes with nature. Consequently, an analysis that examines and challenges the abstract character of the Nature/Society binary and its cognates, such as this thesis, must first deal with the symbolic separation and then with the practical entanglement.[52]

In essence, this externalisation of Nature as separate from Society is the mechanism through which nature is subjugated, and Mukherjee's historically uneven *postcolonial environments*, Nigeria among them, are created. In fact, Mukherjee's characterisation of *postcolonial environments* examined in the Introduction is crucial here, because it explicitly links this Marxist approach to the environmental humanities, and postcolonial studies with postcolonial ecocriticism. Mukherjee's other key point for this project is that this human and nonhuman material existence of the postcolony, which he later refers to as 'the material bases of culture', also influences social, political and cultural spheres, and thus needs to be taken into account when examining postcolonial literatures. This point is indeed in accordance with, and provides an explanation for, Lazarus's observation regarding postcolonial literatures. There are, of course, numerous examples that could be cited of both *postcolonial environments* and their cultural products. Two very different literary works that have been born out of and deal with neocolonial oil economies are John

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[51] Kaika, *City of Flows*, p. 13; Myers, *African Cities*, p. 8.
[52] Moore, 'Capitalocene, Part I', p. 601, emphasis in the original; Moore, *Capitalism*, p. 20; Neil Smith, 'Foreword', in *In the Nature of Cities*, pp. xi-xv (p. xii).

McGrath's postmodernist play, *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, mainly set in the Scottish Highlands, and Imbolo Mbue's contemporary novel, *How Beautiful We Were*, primarily set in the fictional village of Kosawa.[53]

Following Georg M. Gugelberger's and Omafume F. Onoge's propositions, moreover, this thesis thus analyses the selected novels bearing in mind the 'inherent Fanonian nature' of 'Third World literature', where the latter is understood not geographically, but as the one written by 'authors who made the fight against all forms of oppression their main theme'. In other words, the selected primary texts have been read in terms of their potentially being '[tools] for consciousness-raising' regarding the socio-ecological concerns that characterise the nature of cities. This does not mean, then, that this project understands all Nigerian or African literatures to be radical or contestatory. Indeed, as much as we would like to agree with Achebe when he claims that 'it is impossible to write anything […] without some kind of commitment, some kind of message, some kind of protest', literature in and outside the postcolony may also fulfil a more conservative role, that of reproducing existing explanatory frameworks and rejecting disruptive, innovative or experimental forces; that is, it can also have a *stabilizing* power over existing realities.[54]

What this thesis does agree with is Onoge's understanding of the close relationship between politics, and one might add economics, and African cultures and literatures: the struggle between the 'politics of oppression versus the politics of liberation'. This struggle is clearly identifiable in all the selected primary works, both in their thematic concerns, and formal and generic characteristics. In other words, all the selected works have been analysed taking into account their political message as expressed in the nature of their literary cities. As a result, different, and sometimes conflicting, views have been identified within the different levels of analysis of a single text; as is the case with Achebe's *NLE*, Cole's *EDT*, and Ekwensi's *PC*. Consequently, following Gugelberger, the present project essays 'a criticism which discovers the causal complexes of African society and which unmasks the prevailing view of things as the view of those in power who are the functionaries of superpowers', a view that may sometimes be the one espoused by the analysed text.[55] Moreover, says Onoge, this criticism is 'necessarily sociological' and

[53] Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, p. 69; John McGrath, *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, [1974, 1981] 2015); Imbolo Mbue, *How Beautiful We Were* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2021).

[54] Georg M. Gugelberger, 'Introduction', in *Marxism and African Literature*, ed. Georg M. Gugelberger (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1986), pp. v-xiv (pp. v and xiv); Achebe, *There Was a Country*, p. 58.

[55] Omafume F. Onoge, 'Towards a Marxist Sociology of African Literature', in *Marxism and African Literature*, pp. 50-63 (p. 50); Georg M. Gugelberger, 'Marxist Literary Debates and their Continuity in African Literary Criticism', in *Marxism and African Literature*, pp. 1-20 (p. 18).

'rooted in [a] materialist understanding of cultural consciousness'. That is, because of its Marxist approach, the thesis pays special attention to the 'sociality' of the selected texts as works of Nigerian urban literature. This 'sociality' is here understood to be expressive of what Mukherjee calls the 'radical unevenness' that characterises (neo)colonial environments, and is thus examined regarding Nigeria's oil political economy, in this chapter's third section.[56]

1.2. Cityscapes and City-Texts: Cultural Urban Ecologies

After considering the main propositions and focus of a Marxist postcolonial criticism, it becomes clear why the city is a key space to examine from this perspective. While urban environments are those where the *radical unevenness* generated by historical capital's subjugation of human and nonhuman nature becomes more patent, as stated in the Introduction, the city was mostly ignored by both the environmental humanities and postcolonial studies up until the 21st century. It is now thus time to consider in more detail the field of (cultural) urban ecologies, what this approach may mean for African (literary) cityscapes, and how it is actualised in the present project through an examination of the three main binaries mentioned earlier.

The 21st century has indeed witnessed a call on the part of urban ecologists to rethink the relationship between nature and the city, or the place of the former in the latter. Christopher Schliephake defines the field as one that 'seeks to view cities as spatial phenomena that have manifold and complex material interrelations with their respective natural environments'; that is, urban ecologies is an area of research that focuses on city space as constituted by natural human-nonhuman *entanglements*, as defined by Bayes in the previous section. Nonetheless, it is possible to say that one of the main consequences of the *real abstractions* of Humanity and Nature has been to understand the urban as purely Human, a place where Nature is displaced and destroyed until it is no more. In his 'Foreword' to *In the Nature of Cities*, Smith emphasises, as does Moore years later, capitalism's tendency to externalise Nature. He then briefly outlines the Marxist ecological concept of 'the metabolism of nature', which accounts for 'the circulation of matter, value and representations': 'Society is forged in the crucible of nature's metabolism, for sure, but nature is equally the amalgam of simmering social change'. That is, the notion of metabolism here explains the co- and (re)production, as well as the indivisibility of, nature and society through the flow and transformation of social and material elements.[57]

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[56] Onoge, 'Towards', pp. 59 and 62; Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, p. 15.
[57] Schliephake, *Urban Ecologies*, p. 9; Smith, 'Foreword', pp. xi and xiii.

It could be said, then, that these metabolic processes enable the (re)creation of *entanglements*. Like the metabolic processes in which they are both producer and product, entanglements are dynamic and ever-changing. The city can thus be understood as being made through and of what Bayes terms 'sociocultural and environmental entanglements'. However, Smith points out, these theorisations only started being applied to the city, 'the most produced nature of all', within the field of urban (political) ecology, at the beginning of the 21st century, twenty years after their initial development. Crucially, for Smith, this lack of attention to the 'production of urban nature' is a consequence of the *real abstractions* of Humanity and Nature, whereby the city is conceived as completely opposed, and a menace, to external Nature.[58]

As stated in the Introduction, in the first chapter of their book, Nik Heynen *et al.* emphasise the critical gap that exists regarding this conception of the city within nature. They acknowledge the efforts of several disciplines 'to transcend the dualist nature/culture logic and the moral codes inscribed therein', but claim that there is still much room for examination–notably, Raymon Williams was already thinking in these terms, mainly in the field of cultural studies, in the 1970s. The authors explore the main ideas surrounding 'the production of urban natures', and the need to understand cities as part of, and not opposed to, the natural. Cities are here defined as 'dense networks of interwoven socio-spatial processes that are simultaneously local and global, *human and physical*, *cultural and organic*.' That is, Heynen *et al.* understand 'the urban condition as fundamentally a *socio-environmental* process', by which human and nonhuman nature is continually transformed. Consequently, with a focus on 'the metabolization of urban nature' and following David Harvey, the critics contend that 'there is nothing unnatural about produced environments like cities, dammed rivers, or irrigated fields'; i.e., 'cities are built out of natural resources, through socially mediated natural processes'. In other words, cityscapes result from the imbrication of human and nonhuman nature that takes place through these metabolic processes, by which the latter is simultaneously transformed by and shapes the former. The metabolism of nature that occurs through social and material circulation and produces the built environment is, by necessity, a natural process.[59]

However, Heynen *et al.* argue, the 'commodity relation' that characterises produced nature in 'capitalist cities' 'veils and hides the multiple socio-ecological processes of domination/subordination and exploitation/repression that feed the capitalist urbanization process'. In other words, 'the commodification of nature', enabled and justified by the

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[58] Bayes, *Reimagining*, p. 9; Smith, 'Foreword', p. xiv.
[59] Heynen *et al.*, 'Urban Political Ecology', pp. 1-2 and 5, emphasis added.

artificial separation of Humanity and Nature, both eclipses its inherent 'power' relations, and allows for a conceptual 'disconnection of' the material 'flows' needed for the *production of urban natures*. If Humanity is separate from and in control of Nature, then both the questions of who is included in that Humanity, and what socio-material processes result from that domination, are occluded, or mystified. From the theoretical and critical perspective of political ecology, Heynen *et al.* thus emphasise the need to consider the 'economic, political and social relations' that produce or determine 'urban environmental change', which is in turn 'intimately related to the socio-ecological processes that operate over a much larger, often global, space'. This is a point made again later by Kaika and Swyngedouw, when they claim that 'by transcending the binary division between nature and society the urban metabolism perspective has shown that socio-ecological processes are intensely political, and confirmed that urban theory without nature cannot be but incomplete'. The capitalist city as metabolised nature needs to be understood as the product of socio-material flows that are determined by economic and political forces. This does not make the city any less natural, not only because humans exist within nature, but also because these power-laden metabolic processes both shape and are shaped by nonhuman nature.[60]

It is now time to consider the meaning of these ideas surrounding urban nature within the field of literary studies. At the turn of the 20th century, Michael Bennett and David Teague edit a seminal work whose aim is to contribute to the field of urban ecology, or the study of 'the nature of cities', by incorporating a cultural perspective and developing what they term 'urban ecocriticism'. Bennett and Teague highlight both the lack of focus on the city on the part of ecocritical literary studies, and the absence of ecological dimensions in examinations of 'the city in literature'. On the other hand, they point out the importance of 'Marxist environmental theory' for this kind of cross-disciplinary study, while emphasising its need for 'thoroughgoing *cultural* analysis of urban environments'. Through an exploration of English and American literature, the authors' main goal is to (re)focus the naturalness of the city and demonstrate its relevance 'for understanding urban life and culture'.[61]

Crucially, Bennett and Teague highlight 'the sociopolitical construction of all environments', both rural and urban. Critiquing the deep ecology branch of ecocriticism, Bennett later argues: 'Wilderness areas, as much as cityscapes, are shaped by complex

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[60] Heynen *et al.*, 'Urban Political Ecology', pp. 5-7; Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw, 'The Urbanization of Nature: Great Promises, Impasse, and New Beginnings', in *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 96-107 (p. 98).
[61] Bennett and Teague, 'Urban Ecocriticism', pp. 3-4, emphasis in the original.

socio-political, economic, and philosophical discourses,' which means there 'is no unmediated way of existing in harmony with Nature'. Both these claims reject the separation of Humanity and Nature and, like the urban political ecology espoused by Heynen *et al.*, point to the socio-ecological processes through which environments are made and transformed. Moreover, in an interview by Bennett to Andrew Ross, the latter refers to the commodity status of produced nature under capitalism, when he explains that he does not 'deny' the existence of 'natural scarcity', but claims that it cannot 'ever be divorced from attention to the manipulation of social scarcity for human gain'. In other words, Ross reminds us of the power dynamics that characterise relations between human and nonhuman nature.[62]

Since Bennett and Teague's collection, however, the field of urban ecocriticism has not developed significantly, or as expected. Only two other books have been published in English: Schliephake's *Urban Ecologies*, and Bayes's *Reimagining Urban Nature*. Moreover, as Bayes explains, despite 'an increase in research from urban political ecology and urban geography […], an examination of *culturally produced narratives* that form urban imaginaries and contribute to our understanding of […] complex urban entanglements […] is distinctly missing from urban studies scholarship'. That is, still much can be said about the nature of literary cities and the relationship between these fictional cityscapes and socio-environmental issues.[63]

Astrid Bracke identifies this gap in ecocriticism yet again, and provides some explanations for it, including 'a bias' against 'urban nature' on the part of various 'ecocritical works', which deny or ignore 'the existence of urban nature'. Crucially, although Bracke does not explicitly attribute this bias to the Nature/Society binary, she does highlight an undermining of 'the traditionally antithetical relationship between nature and cities' that necessarily takes place within 'urban studies research'. However, Bracke later refers to urban environments as 'non-traditional natural environments', and speaks of '*human-nature connection and reconnection*', thus still reinforcing the separation of Humanity and Nature while acknowledging both the presence of natural elements in the city and the need to incorporate them into ecocritical studies.[64]

Key to this project's goals and overarching argument are Schliephake's theorisations in the introduction to his book, where he essays a definition of what he terms 'cultural

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[62] Bennett and Teague, 'Urban Ecocriticism', p. 9; Michael Bennett, 'From Wide Open Spaces to Metropolitan Places: The Urban Challenge to Ecocriticism', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 8:1 (2001), 31-52 (p. 35); Ross, 'Social Claim', p. 27.
[63] Bayes, *Reimagining*, p. 5, emphasis added.
[64] Bracke, 'Wastelands, Shrubs and Parks', pp. 10 and 11, emphasis added.

urban ecology', and the link between literature and cityscapes. Following Lewis Mumford, Schliephake first identifies the city 'as both a natural phenomenon as well as a cultural artifact'. For Schliephake, 'manifestations of the cultural imagination' are intrinsic to 'the "environment"'. That is, beyond challenging the Nature/Society binary and acknowledging the imbrication of human and nonhuman nature through 'material processes', this author focuses on the sociocultural element in these 'interactions'. In essence, Schliephake argues that:

> It is on the cultural-discursive level that […] interrelations are reflected and imbued with meaning. It is in and through culture that urbanity emerges as an ecological system. And it is here that new forms of dealing with the environment—in every sense of that complex term—can be sought.

While this argument may seem anthropocentric, it is a very productive one when understood properly. Because cities are 'human-dominated ecosystems', Schliephake claims, it is through cultural artifacts that humans both analyse the socio-ecological relations that result from the metabolization of nature, and conceive alternative ones. This sociocultural incorporation thus seeks not to centre human nature in urban metabolic processes, although there is an acknowledgement of its predominance, but to point to the media and mechanisms through which these processes are comprehended.[65]

Schliephake contends that 'because urban forms and city life are intrinsically connected to the imaginary and to forms of cultural creativity', ecocriticism and 'the environmental humanities can themselves contribute significantly' to urban ecology studies. Consequently, 'a cultural urban ecology' is defined by the critic as a field 'concerned with re-enforcing the imaginative quality of our urban worlds and functions'; as one that explores and analyses the 'intricate connections' that 'are reflected and creatively negotiated' 'in the cultural imagination'. Schliephake's definition of cultural urban ecologies is key in so far as it hones in on both the power and function of city literatures for urban ecology –that of reflecting on and (re)imagining urban entanglements, relations between human and nonhuman nature– and the importance of analysing these through an environmental humanities lens that is attentive to questions of human and nonhuman agency, representation, and power.[66]

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[65] Schliephake, *Urban Ecologies*, pp. 8-10 and 12.
[66] Schliephake, *Urban Ecologies*, pp. 18-19.

Bayes's *Reimagining Urban Nature* is the latest book-length study in English on urban ecocriticism. With a posthumanist perspective and through creative practice, Bayes builds on Shliephake's work and focuses on Australasian urbanity. Expanding on Shliephake's ideas about the importance of cultural artifacts for urban ecological studies, Bayes claims that: 'Those who wish to enact new cultural and political imaginaries might […] find narratives to be a valuable starting point', precisely because of the analytical and explicatory power of storytelling. Bayes defines imaginaries 'as social constructs through which we' understand and order 'the world'. For Bayes, imaginaries 'underlie urban structures and work to determine which aspects of the city are valued, who is welcomed into the city and who is excluded from participation in urban systems and processes'; who is considered an active participant in city-making processes. That is, it is through these imaginaries that we understand and can alter socio-ecological relations. If, following Shliephake, it is through language and literature that these agents and processes are in fact made sense of, then the artistic and creative nature of literary representation and storytelling makes them an ideal medium through which to (re)create meaning-making 'social constructs'.[67]

However, like Bracke, Bayes seems also to reinforce the nature/culture binary when she urges the reader to '[reconsider] the city as *a negotiated process between nature and culture* rather than a colonisation of nature by culture'. In other words, the field of cultural urban ecologies remains critically and theoretically productive, as long as we remember two key ideas. Firstly, that the *entanglements* that result from urban metabolic processes are always already natural, always taking place *within* nature, and not as a combination of human and natural elements. Secondly, that as a product of human nature, culture exists *in* nature. So, while it is an anthropocentric domain, culture is part of and, shaped by, both human and nonhuman nature.[68]

Several literary critics before Schliephake and Bayes have focused on the link between literature and (urban) space or environment, and speak of the reciprocal influence exerted between actual and fictional cityscapes, so that a cultural urban ecological approach can be inserted within these broader considerations. Richard Lehan, for example, argues that 'literature [gives] imaginative reality to the city', at the same time that urban development produces a reconceptualization of literary elements. Consequently, the city and literature have a 'shared textuality', a mutually constitutive relationship or 'symbiosis'. This does not mean that fictional cityscapes can serve as sociological or environmental

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[67] Bayes, *Reimagining*, pp. 8, 12 and 33.
[68] Bayes, *Reimagining*, p. 29.

studies whose findings might then have a direct practical application in existing physical cities. While, as Kevin McNamara says, urban literature 'is […] part of the documentary record of urban thought throughout history', it also has creative and aesthetic value and is no more and no less than a *representation* of urban life. McNamara asserts that 'literary city-texts […] *selectively compos[e]* – they may also deform and thereby defamiliarize – the known in order to stage the process of making sense of the city'. Elleke Boehmer and Dominic Davies, on their part, refer to the 'investigative and diagnostic power' of 'literary and cultural texts' regarding the influence of 'infrastructures' on 'urban spaces', and speak of 'literature as a mode of conceptualizing the world *and* as a cultural material practice'. In other words, Lehan, McNamara, and Boehmer and Davies refer to literature as a way of understanding and reconceptualising the city in its diverse aspects, and it is within this function that Schliephake's and Bayes's propositions regarding the nature of cities sit.[69]

DeLoughrey *et al.* suggest that, because 'understandings of the environment are embedded in language, narrative, history, and the cultural imagination,' the focus on 'narrative in the environmental humanities might be concerned […] with the strategic use of *fiction* as a mobilizing idiom', as a means to change existing paradigms and ideas. Similarly, Schliephake explains why cultural artifacts can participate in this symbiotic relationship with the material environment: 'cultural media […] can, in ever-changing ways, imagine [the] manifold and complex interrelations' of socio-ecological processes, 'in ways that are not possible in scientific' contexts. This echoes Eric Prieto's claim that 'fictional and metaphorical language' enjoys a certain 'freedom from documentary concerns and from the *scientific test of falsifiability* [that] enhances its ability to generate new spatial concepts and attitudes'. It is this 'imaginative dimension', argues Prieto, that invests fictional representation with 'its peculiar form of power over the real, making it more sensitive to those qualities of emergent spatial and geographical formations that' develop outside existing (dominant) 'explanatory frameworks'.[70]

Thus, explains Prieto, 'the task of the critic is to help mediate between these two registers [literary and scientific] in order to test, expand, and amend received wisdom and common knowledge'. This is, indeed, the task of a cultural urban ecology developed within the environmental humanities: to examine and interpret cultural environmental imaginaries construed in the freedom of creativity so that they can then be put into dialogue with

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[69] Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. xv; Kevin R. McNamara, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, pp. 1-16 (p. 6), emphasis added; Boehmer and Davies, 'Literature, Planning and Infrastructure', p. 397, emphasis in the original.
[70] DeLoughrey *et al.*, pp. 13-14, emphasis in the original; Schliephake, *Urban Ecologies*, pp. 16-17; Prieto, *Postmodern Poetics*, pp. 2 and 9-10, emphasis added.

scientific discourse and shed light on how the urban is and can be envisioned. There is another, more direct impact that literature may have on the reader. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to make claims regarding the effect of the selected novels on an actual Nigerian and/or Euromerican audience, since this intersects with questions of access and literacy, among others. What this project focuses on, and what this theoretical framework delineates, is how these works may be interpreted to explicate and/or subvert urban environmental imaginaries, and contribute to cultural urban ecological studies. That is, what is emphasised is the meaning-making potential of literature and how this can be critically analysed.[71]

When dealing with postcolonial literary cities, *postcolonial environments* that are products and producers of *extreme capitalist development*, the transformative power of fictional cityscapes needs to be examined within the double impulse of 'rupture' and 'recuperation' identified earlier in both postcolonial environmental representations and postcolonial ecocriticism. In fact, Myers mentions 'literary criticism' as one of the sources for his work, recognising cultural artifacts as participative elements in postcolonial urbanism. He then identifies 'the arts' as a fruitful space for these 'counter-discourses': 'Artistic and discursive postcolonialism is far from a hopeless cause, and it remains an important means for reconceptualizing the representation of colonial subjects or colonized cities'. Here, Myers is emphasising the vital transformative function of urban literature discussed earlier, within a sociological study. This reminds us once again of both Mukherjee's and Lazarus's claim that *uneven development* has been repeatedly dealt with by postcolonial literatures.[72]

Mukherjee offers a compelling examination of the relationship between environment and representation by referring to cultural geography's 'anti-mimetic or "non-representational" philosophical and aesthetic theory', which highlights 'the transformative capacity of matter and language, the human mind and body's ability to make them become each other'. He utilises this concept as a starting point to urge literary critics 'to look anew at the specific material environments of the texts, and the specific representational or performative strategies that this enables or compels these texts to adopt'. Mukherjee consequently argues that 'we need to find a way to read how or to what extent texts register this summoning of life by the human mind'; in other words, we 'must be able to account for the specificities of the literary or cultural modes that enable this act of summoning'. Here, the critic points once again to the importance of an examination of the

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[71] Prieto, *Postmodern Poetics*, pp. 2 and 9-10.
[72] Myers, *African Cities*, pp. 17 and 58.

material conditions of cultural production, in line with a Marxist approach. However, he also links this need with the idea of literature as more than mere imitation; as a reflection on, and participant in, the 'summoning of life by the human mind', the process of making sense of the same environment that conditions cultural production.[73]

In essence, within a postcolonial environmental humanities, Mukherjee's contention reinforces both Schliephake's argument in favour of an urban ecology that attends to the role of language and culture in the (re)making of cityscapes, and Lehan's concept of a 'shared textuality', a mutual influence, between the physical and the literary worlds, due to 'the human mind and body's ability to make [language and matter] become each other'. Precisely because of the transformative relationship between materiality and representation, *and* because of the inextricable link between empire and environment, the focus is twofold. On the one hand, and as explained in the previous section, a postcolonial urban ecocriticism must by necessity attend to the specific historical and material conditions that determine urbanities and cultural production in postcolonial nations. On the other, it must examine 'the specific representational or performative strategies', enabled or shaped by these historical and material conditions, that are used by writers to perform life in the construed literary cityscapes.

It is thus that the literary cityscapes analysed here are more than mere reflections of Nigerian cities. Instead, they are mediated constitutive elements of Nigerian urbanity. They dwell on, as well as are conditioned by, its colonial history and postcolonial issues, its participants and its agents, its political and socio-material problems. As *cultural artifacts* of urban Nigeria, the selected novels are explorations of actual and potential *human-nonhuman natural entanglements*. Enabled by the artistic creativity of literary language, they have the power to expose and reject violent or damaging elements of existing urban imaginaries through emotive and affective linguistic constructs that are co-constituted with social ones. At the same time, through the same artistic means, these urban novels can point towards the creation of new, more sustainable, less uneven cities. And herein lies the double activist potential of postcolonial and environmental literatures in general, and of postcolonial urban literature in particular: in the power of language and literature to (re)conceive (urban) environments. Specifically, I suggest that the novels analysed here resist the *radical unevenness* of *postcolonial environments* by addressing different aspects or consequences of the (post)colonial *production of urban natures*, (re)presenting them through thematic, formal, and linguistic strategies that challenge the clear demarcation of Society and Nature and its cognate binaries. The following chapters thus carry out a

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[73] Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, p. 72.

literary analysis of these strategies in order to examine 'how or to what extent', to use Mukherjee's words cited earlier, the selected novels (re)imagine postcolonial urban nature.

1.3. Oil, Ethnicity, and Urbanisation in Nigeria

As just explained, the present project's Marxist and postcolonial approach calls for a brief overview of Nigeria's oil political economy and its socio-ecological consequences, which have of course shaped, and still shape, both the country's urban development and Nigerian literary cities. The main object of the remaining sections is thus to describe Nigeria's *radical unevenness*, mainly defined, as stated earlier, by the superimposition of an oil political economy onto a sociopolitical scene dominated by corruption and ethnic rivalries. This description accounts for the selected novels' *sociality*, as well as providing the contextual sociohistorical analysis necessary to better understand the actors and forces at play in Nigerian urban fiction.

Oil exploration in Nigeria dates back to the very beginning of the twentieth century, even before the territory became the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Phia Steyn provides detailed research on these early years, from 1903 to 1958. She shows how, during the first two phases (1903-1914 and 1918-1923, respectively), exploration was carried out by 'small, speculative ventures', with little promotion or support from the British government. Because these companies lacked the appropriate technology, 'the early exploration work was plagued by failure'.[74] The third phase (1937-1941 and 1946-1958), on the other hand, interrupted by the Second World War, was dominated by large joint ventures, which had the necessary capital to defeat 'the challenging Nigerian environment'. In 1936, D'Arcy Exploration Company joined in partnership with Royal Dutch/Shell, and in 1937 Shell/D'Arcy was issued by the Colonial Office 'an exclusive exploration licence covering the whole mainland Nigeria'.[75]

After years of 'seismic exploration', aerial photography and 'exploratory drilling', in January 1956, oil was successfully discovered in commercial quantities at Oloibiri, in Ogbia, present-day Bayelsa State.[76] February 1958 saw the first shipment of oil exported from Nigeria, and it was thus that oil production and commerce made their entrance into what Michael Watts calls 'the weak federal system' and 'fragmented political economy' that characterised Nigeria's early years as an independent nation, discussed in the

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[74] Phia Steyn, 'Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria, c. 1903-58', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37:2 (2009), 249-274 (pp. 251 and 267).
[75] Steyn, 'Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria', pp. 258 and 260.
[76] J. N. C. Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence: Forever Fragile?* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 76. See also Iheka, *Naturalizing* Africa, p. 90.

following paragraphs. After that first export, says J. N. C. Hill, 'production rose rapidly over the next decade', until the start of civil war in 1967. In fact, Kairn Klieman argues that there is enough evidence to support the claim that Nigeria's first oil boom occurred 'between 1964 and 1965', and not in the 1970s, as '[s]tandard histories of Nigeria' suggest. This becomes an important contention when considering the January 1966 military coup and the ensuing civil war.[77]

After the war was over, from 1970 onwards, explains Hill, 'the rate of growth increased dramatically'. The decade of the 1970s marked Nigeria's second and biggest oil boom, the only one commonly recognised as such, which responded to both national and international events. The concurrent increase of both demand and the price of oil 'meant that as the decade came to a close annual production was more than twice what it had been at the start'. As Watts states, 'oil revenues flowed directly to the state via the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC), which both centralized and expanded central (federal) power'. In Wendy Griswold's words, the oil boom thus 'brought Nigeria immense but unevenly distributed affluence and triggered extravagant public expenditures', sealing Nigeria's fate as a *postcolonial environment* dependant on oil production and export.[78]

The year 1979, which seemed to hold great promise for Nigeria, heralded a return to democracy, the beginning of the Second Republic and, according to Hill, 'a new production record' of 842.4 million barrels of oil. However, a slump in oil production rates combined with 'a dramatic drop in global oil prices' meant that, during the 1980s, Nigeria experienced an oil bust, with 'its attendant austerity and World Bank adjustment programmes', to use Watts's words. The devastating effects of this bust, explains Hill, 'were exacerbated by [Nigeria's] massive dependence on its oil revenue'.[79] Last but not least, Watts adds that 'the spasm of fraud and rent-seeking in which the state was mercilessly pillaged' during the Second Republic also led to a coup and the start of a new military government in December 1983. Nigeria would not have another democratic government until 1999.[80]

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[77] Michael J. Watts, 'Oil as Money: The Devil's Excrement and the Spectacle of Black Gold', in *Money, Power and Space*, ed. Stuart Corbridge, Ron Martin and Nigel Thrift (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 406-445 (p. 421); Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, p. 76; Kairn A. Klieman, 'U.S. Oil Companies, the Nigerian Civil War, and the Origins of Opacity in the Nigerian Oil Industry', *The Journal of American History*, 99:1 (2012), 155-165 (p. 157). See also Michael Watts, 'Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria', *Geopolitics*, 9:1 (2004), 50-80 (p. 59).
[78] Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, p. 77; Watts, 'Oil as Money', p. 421; Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, p. 10.
[79] Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, pp. 77-8; Watts, 'Resource Curse?', p. 60.
[80] Watts, 'Oil as Money', p. 433.

During the 1990s and 2000s, both Nigeria's oil production and global oil prices increased again. This did not necessarily mean, however, the end of Nigeria's troubles. On the contrary, and as has been the case in many other oil-producing nations, this recovery has led to an even heavier dependency of the country's economy on oil production and commerce, which not only makes it vulnerable in the face of external or uncontrollable forces, but also carries with it a whole array of negative consequences for Nigerian society itself.[81] Indeed, one of Watts's main contentions is that 'Nigerian […] petro-capitalism, contains a double movement, a contradictory unity of capitalism and modernity'. In other words, Watts claims that oil capitalism has enabled both the development of a modern Nigerian state and, simultaneously, due to petro-capitalism's insertion into an inherently faulty federal system deeply divided along regional and ethnic lines, the demise of the national project through fragmentation and corruption.[82]

While oil's 'centralizing force' is considered later in this chapter, it is important to analyse here Watts's use of the phrases 'weak institutions' and 'volatile federal system', both of which are closely linked with the question of ethnicity in Nigeria. In the brief introduction to his memoir, Achebe eloquently asserts: 'Great Britain was handed the area of West Africa that would later become Nigeria, like a piece of chocolate cake at a birthday party.' He is referring, of course, to the Berlin Conference of 1885 and the so-called 'Scramble for Africa', in which 'the world's leading European powers' divided the African continent into portions to distribute among themselves. One of the consequences of this distribution was the creation of 'new boundaries that did violence to Africa's ancient societies and resulted in tension-prone modern states'.[83] For some years, Britain managed its portion as a 'shifting series of colonial administrative regions'. However, competition among colonial powers eventually 'prodded the British to a more active colonialism' and, in 1914, the regions were unified to become the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.[84]

The newly created colony of Nigeria 'was one of the most populous regions on the African continent' and comprised 'over 250 ethnic groups and distinct languages'.[85] As Griswold explains, the rivers Niger and Benue divided the colony into three regions, each of which roughly corresponded with one of the three main ethnic groups: the 'highly

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[81] Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, p. 79. See also Hannah Appel, Arthur Mason and Michael Watts, 'Introduction: Oil Talk', in *Subterranean Estates: Life Worlds of Oil and Gas*, ed. Hannah Appel, Arthur Mason and Michael Watts (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), pp. 1-26.
[82] Watts, 'Resource Curse?', p. 61.
[83] Achebe, *There Was a Country*, p. 1.
[84] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, p. 8.
[85] Achebe, *There Was a Country*, p. 1.

centralized', predominantly Muslim, Hausa/Fulani in the North; the Yoruba in the West, containing what became the 'commercial behemoth' of Lagos; and the Igbo in the East, who proved to be extremely receptive to 'Christian missionaries and other Westernizing influences'. By 1951, these three regions were ruled separately and in different ways by the British and, consequently, in Griswold's words, 'their development differed sharply'. This sowed the seeds of future conflict: 'While it is an oversimplification to interpret Nigerian politics and culture only on the basis of differences among these three regions, they constitute the indispensable starting point for understanding'.[86]

In fact, the key issue resides, first and foremost, not in ethnic cultural and linguistic differences per se, which, according to Achebe, can indeed be desirable and enriching, but in the system of British colonial rule.[87] This system had two important consequences that would continue to be reproduced, through different mechanisms, after independence. Firstly, by never administering them jointly or even in a similar manner, colonial rule exacerbated the already existing divisions and political, cultural and religious differences between the three different regions. Moreover, '[r]egional political rivalries were institutionalized by the constitutions of the late colonial period', during the transition to independence.[88] In other words, according to Hill, not only was there no sense of national or political unity between the regions during colonial times but also, in the run-up to independence, an 'intense competition was played out, among other ways, through party politics', and each major ethnic group came to have its own political party. As a result, each ethnic majority feared that another party's political victory would mean that ethnic group ruling solely for their own benefit and according to their own values and culture. Particularly worrying for the Southern regions was the North's bigger size, both in territory and population, which meant that its leading party would most certainly become, in Achebe's words, 'Nigeria's ruling party'. These tensions eventually resulted in the Nigerian Civil War, an armed conflict that took place only seven years after independence, from July 1967 to January 1970, and left the country deeply scarred and divided.[89]

Secondly, and consequently, this regional division that gave prominence to the three major ethnic groups ignored and obliterated the great number of ethnic minorities existing in each region, whose cultural, political, and economic needs were bluntly marginalised in favour of the Igbo, Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba majorities. According to Watts: 'The

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[86] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, pp. 8-9.
[87] Achebe, 'The Trouble with Nigeria', p. 28.
[88] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, p. 10. See also Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, pp. 29-32 and Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, pp. 47-9.
[89] Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, p. 48; Achebe, *There Was a Country*, pp. 46-47. See also Anber, 'Modernisation and Political Disintegration', pp. 173-176 and Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, pp. 47-48

establishment of the Nigerian colony and the imposition of Indirect Rule in the early 1900s […] economically marginalised the multi-ethnic communities of the Delta'. As Griswold puts it, in each region there were 'dozens of minority groups jealously guarding their cultures and their political influence', already feeling overpowered by external forces that had no regard whatsoever for their interests and development. If the Igbo and Yoruba feared a Hausa/Fulani victory and consequent domination, they at least had political representation and expression. On the contrary, says Achebe, the 'minorities of the Niger Delta, Mid-West, and the Middle Belt regions of Nigeria were always uncomfortable with the notion that they had to fit into the tripod of the largest ethnic groups', but had no other way of accessing political participation.[90]

These consequences of British colonial rule persisted after independence; affecting not only Nigeria's political stability but also many other facets of everyday life, including the provision of basic services like health and education, and the exercise of civic rights. On the one hand, state and ethnic origin are still used by governments to determine in great measure a citizen's rights and access to public services and opportunities.[91] On the other hand, the federal system established after independence, and the confluence of political and ethnic forces that had been brewing as early as the 1940s, perpetuated the obliteration and marginalisation already experienced by the numerous ethnic minorities. The identification of political parties with specific regions and their major ethnic groups that was consolidated, so to speak, by the 1960 constitution, says Hill, 'all but ignored the smaller ethnic groups whose combined members numbered millions'. As Watts observes: 'Once law enshrines cultural identity as the basis for political identity, it necessarily converts ethnicity into a political force', and this is the process that took place during the country's transition to independence.[92]

Indeed, Ukoha Ukiwo explains that an ethnic group is 'categorized as having a common identity that distinguishes it from others', and that '[i]t is this classification by powerful agencies […] that objectifies the ethnic group as it sets in motion processes of

[90] Watts, 'Resource Curse?', p. 58; Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, p. 10; Achebe, *There Was a Country*, p. 47.

[91] Watts, 'Resource Curse?', p. 73; Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, p. 57. Elnathan John humorously illustrates how the constitutional conception of state belonging operates in contemporary Nigerian society. According to his list of common Nigerian phrases and expressions, asking someone 'Where are you from/What tribe are you?' is equal to saying 'There is no time to waste. I need to know quickly if I should trust or hate you.' In this satirical example, we can see not only the central role that ethnic origin plays in Nigerian daily life, but also, and more tellingly, the simultaneous presence of what could in fact be two different questions deserving different answers: 'where are you from' and 'what tribe are you'. Elnathan John, *Be(com)ing Nigerian: A Guide* (Abuja; London: Cassava Republic, 2019), p. 148.

[92] Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, pp. 47-48; Watts, 'Resource Curse?', p. 73.

self-identification or affirmation and recognition by others'.[93] Thus, while inter-ethnic relations and common cultural and religious traits shared by certain groups already existed in precolonial times, the phenomenon of ethnicity in Nigeria is a consequence of the deliberate politicisation of these shared aspects. Moreover, these processes become patent or intensify in the face of hardship. So, when citizens are deprived from participation in the political sphere, have their civil liberties severely restricted, or feel unsafe in any fundamental way, they inevitably 'retreat into cultural identities', the first association.[94] Of crucial importance here is the fact that this artificial construction of ethnic rivalries that started during the colonial administration can be cited as the main reason behind Watts's aforementioned fragmented state and its doomed modernisation project. That is, inter-ethnic divisions and competition, and the ensuing marginalisation of ethnic minorities, in combination with Nigeria's oil political economy, has mostly resulted in the destruction of the nation that oil is purported to build.

In sum, the question of ethnicity is the main reason behind both Nigeria's fragmented national project, which goes against oil's *centralizing force*, and a divisive social process that is in turn aggravated by the socio-ecological consequences of the oil industry. For the sake of clarity, these consequences can be classified into direct and indirect. Regarding what we may term direct consequences, if '[o]il money [breeds] more money', it is possible to argue that oil pollution breeds more pollution.[95] Both activist writing and academic research have shown how oil extraction has absolutely destroyed the livelihoods of both nonhumans and human ethnic minorities that inhabit the Niger Delta. From gas flaring to oil spills that poison water, soil, and human and nonhuman animals, through lack of adequate compensation on the part of either the state or the oil companies, and virtually no active participation in the process of oil extraction, these communities haven been robbed of their health, homes and means of living due to 'a failure [on the part of international oil companies] to rigorously interpret and enforce' the regulations in place. In Nigerian fiction, this is marvellously represented in Habila's novel, *Oil on Water*. While this direct damage is, of course, a key socio-ecological issue, and, in fact, provides the backdrop or starting point for some of the works analysed here, such as *Lagoon* and

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[93] Ukoha Ukiwo, 'The Study of Ethnicity in Nigeria', *Oxford Development Studies*, 33:1 (2005), 7-23 (p. 8). A very telling example of ethnicity in action in politics can be found in Soyinka's account of the annulment of the Nigerian election of 12 June, 1993, which ultimately gave way to the last and most violent of Nigeria's military governments. Wole Soyinka, *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 39-50.

[94] See Soyinka, *The Open Sore*, pp. 139 and 129 and Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, [1973] 2000), p. 259-261.

[95] Watts, 'Oil as Money', p. 427.

Welcome to Lagos, the Niger Delta is not the focus of this thesis, and any further consideration of this takes place within the specific literary analyses.[96]

The focus of this study is instead placed on what we might understand as indirect socio-ecological consequences, which result from the socio-material processes and exchanges that occur within a postcolonial oil political economy. These have shaped both physical and fictional urban centres in Nigeria, their ecologies, and the lives of their human and nonhuman inhabitants. In other words, these processes and exchanges do not simply physically alter cityscapes; they actually constitute or, at the very least, influence city-making practices. They intervene in the making and unmaking of Nigeria as a *postcolonial environment*, shaping both urban metabolic processes and entanglements, as well as responses to them. The following subsections consider how oil and ethnicity shape Nigeria in general and the city in particular through the cognate binaries around which the analytical chapters are organised. However, it is important to analyse first a characteristic of oil production and commerce that in turn translates into specific economic, political, and socio-ecological issues: the oil industry's enclave character.

According to Watts, 'within oil producing states', oil's enclave character is determined by 'an absence of linkage effects to non-oil sectors', which means that the former's development does not necessarily imply a consequential growth in other industrial and commercial activities. There is no trickledown or spread-out wealth; rather, 'its impact on the national economy will be determined by the landed property relation (the social relations by which oil is exploited) and the realization of oil rents.'[97] Indeed, if Watts explains the oil paradox as a 'central contradiction' at the national level and focuses

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[96] Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, p. 82; Helon Habila, *Oil on Water* (London: Penguin Books, 2011). See also, for example, Watts, 'Resource Curse?'; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Scott Pegg and Nenibarini Zabbey, 'Oil and Water: The Bodo Spills and the Destruction of Traditional Livelihood Structures in the Niger Delta', *Community Development Journal*, 48:3 (2013), 391-405; Byron Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice and Political Ecology* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2014), and Michael Watts, 'The Political Ecology of Oil and Gas in West Africa's Gulf of Guinea: State, Petroleum, and Conflict in Nigeria', in *The Palgrave Handbook of the International Political Economy of Energy*, ed. Thijs Van de Graaf, Benjamin K. Sovacool, Arunabha Ghosh, Florian Kern and Michael T. Klare (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 559-584; Sandra Laville, 'Nearly 14,000 Nigerians Take Shell to Court over Devastating Impact of Pollution', *Guardian*, 2 February 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/02/nearly-14000-nigerians-take-shell-to-court-over-devastating-impact-of-pollution> [Accessed 4 May 2023] (18 paragraphs). Perhaps the most well-know and representative work on this issue is writer-activist Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1992), in which he narrates the plight of the Ogoni people and exposes Shell BP as the company responsible for their complete annihilation. Incidentally, it is with Saro-Wiwa's fight and hanging in 1995 that Soyinka chooses to open and close his *Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*.

[97] Watts, 'Oil as Money', p. 414.

on state centralisation and fragmentation mainly during the 1970s and 80s, Hill mirrors the essence of this argument when he includes oil as one of the three elements that constitute simultaneously a reason behind Nigeria's state failure and its still-existing unity. Hill offers both a historical and a contemporary analysis of Nigeria's oil political economy, and mentions 'Damage to the economy' as one of oil's negative consequences. Linking oil's enclave character with Nigeria's heavy dependence on it, mentioned earlier, the author explains how, as a result of the 1970s boom, there was 'a decrease in demand for local agricultural and manufactured products', which initiated the decline of the non-oil sectors. Moreover, these have experienced further regressions for the sake of oil, since the latter has received 'the largest share of all public and private investment in the country's economy'.[98] Last but not least, there is the fact that, since colonial times the oil industry in Nigeria has generally been dominated by large international companies. This is a tendency also identified by Steyn as having been established during the third phase of oil exploration in colonial Nigeria, and Klieman goes as far as to identify this as a 'problem that remains central to the oil curse in Nigeria today: an inability or lack of desire on the part of the Nigerian state to assume full operational control'. Essentially, the oil industry's enclave character can be cited as the main reason behind Nigeria's *radical unevenness*, since it contributes to both the underdevelopment of other economic sectors, and the disenfranchisement of a big part of the population that is left outside the lucrative sector.[99]

1.3.1. The Village and the City

In *The Country and the City*, Williams unpicks the various preconceptions behind what Tristram Hunt calls 'the historically binary demarcation […] between the urban and the rural', as represented in English literature. Despite historical variety and fluidity, says Williams, certain associations have persisted: of the rural with 'peace, innocence, and simple virtue', as well as with 'backwardness, ignorance, limitation'; of the urban with 'learning, communication, light', but also with 'noise, worldliness and ambition'. Above

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[98] Watts, 'Resource Curse?', p. 54; Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, pp. 80-82.

[99] Steyn, 'Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria', p. 267; Klieman, 'Origins of Opacity', p. 164. It is worth noting here that, because it perpetuates and intensifies a (neo)colonial economic system based on the extraction of raw materials, this heavy dependency on an oil economy, dictated by foreign companies and a compliant ruling elite, also reproduces the colonial mechanisms by which, according to Walter Rodney, Europe prevented technological development in African countries. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London and New York: Verso, [1972] 2018), pp. 119-124. See also Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 27.

all, as Williams shows throughout his book, there has been a persistent idea of the country and the city as two separate and radically different types of settlement.[100]

Firstly, as stated earlier, the country/city binary is a natural product of the 'separation of society and nature' already discussed, challenged by the environmental humanities in general, and by Marxist, postcolonial and urban ecologies in particular. If society is separate from nature, and the city is the epitome of the social, this logic argues, then the city is not 'produced nature', as Smith claims, but the *opposite* of nature, which is in turn epitomised by the rural. In Kaika's words, 'despite the intense study of the nature/society separation in recent academic literature, a systematic analysis of the spatial implications of this separation is yet to be undertaken'. One of these spatial implications, she proposes, is 'the nature/city dualism as one of the spatial expressions of the nature/society dualism'. In contrast, she contends 'that urbanization is a process of perpetual socio-ecological change, and [considers] ways of reconceptualizing both nature and the city, […] as processes and flows that embody a dialectics between good and evil'. In other words, one way to undermine the Nature/Society binary is to explore, theorise and (re)imagine these socio-ecological 'processes and flows' that in fact link the urban to the rural. Based on Williams's work and on the previous considerations, it is possible to say that literature has the means and the power to do this.[101]

The country/city binary is of course a widespread cultural construction that pervades ideas of the rural and the urban all around the globe. However, the pace and character of urban development in postcolonial African settings means that this dichotomic relationship acquires specific valences in these contexts. Indeed, Williams demonstrates the continuity and pervasiveness of the 'conventional contrast of town and country ways of life', until he arrives at the period of the Second British Empire, during the second half of the 19th century and the first of the 20th. Following Myers, it is possible to say that, while Africa already had urban centres before colonialism, and cities were not simply introduced to purely rural communities , 'the most significant investments in the creation of urbanism on African soil coincided with the era of formal colonial rule, roughly from the 1880s to the 1960s', and even pre-colonial cities were transformed in the process.[102]

Williams makes two crucial claims regarding colonialism and colonial cities. On the one hand, he highlights the expansion of the country/city binary from a national into a transnational phenomenon: the 'traditional relationship between city and country was […]

[100] Tristram Hunt, 'Introduction', in Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. xiii-xxiv (p. xiv); Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 1.
[101] Smith, 'Foreword', pp. xi and xiv; Kaika, *City of Flows*, p. 13.
[102] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 67; Myers, *African Cities*, p. 51.

thoroughly rebuilt on an international scale. Distant lands became the rural areas of industrial Britain'. The exploitation characteristic of these international relations, says Williams, is hidden behind 'a modern version of the old idea of "improvement"', now called 'development'. On the other hand, Williams refers to a (post)colonial replication of country/city binary patterns: an 'internal history of country and city occurs, often very dramatically, within the colonial and neo-colonial societies', so that '[f]amiliar problems of the chaotically expanding city recur, across the world'.[103]

Following Griswold, I would like to point now to the product of the two claims made by Williams: a uniquely (post)colonial village/city dichotomy still very much in force in the popular imagination, both within and outside the postcolonial world. In other words, the British country/city binary, combined with the tradition/modernity one installed by modernisation theory during the 1950s and 60s, produced a village/city dichotomy that poses the village as 'the seat of traditional life' and the city as the 'crucible of economic, political, technological, and social development'.[104] While modernisation theory started being discredited in the late 1960s and was later 'replaced by dependency theory and world-systems theory', these dualities have remained operative in popular conceptions of both urban and village settlements in and of the postcolonial world; not just within it, as Griswold suggests, but also in global perceptions of what these countries are and/or should be like. These global perceptions in turn derive from Williams's first claim regarding the colonies becoming Britain's new rural lands, and still affect not only our understanding of country and city, but of North and South as geopolitical categories.[105]

It is also helpful at this point to link Williams's claims regarding colonialism and the country/city binary with Myers's study on African cities. I am specifically interested here in Myers's analysis of 'the impacts and legacies of colonialism on the continent's cities'. For the present project, we can mention two main consequences of this colonial urban development. Firstly, there is the growth of cities as 'warehouse towns' and/or 'bureaucratic capitals', instead of 'organically grown industrial manufacturing engines of value added'. This process was essential for an extractivist colonial capitalism, where 'major cities' grew 'along the coast or in close proximity to sites of resource extraction' to

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[103] Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 403, 408 and 412. This development that masks the extractivist exploitation of (neo)colonial capitalist relations ultimately becomes the Eurocentric narrative of modernity famously critiqued by Gurminder K. Bhambra; which provides the logic behind the concept of urban modernity and the conflation of nation building and industrial development in newly independent countries. These issues are further discussed in the following subsection. Gurminder K. Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, [2007] 2009).

[104] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, pp. 133 and 163-4.

[105] Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity*, p. 64; Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, p. 164.

facilitate the trade in raw materials. These urban formations indeed speak to Williams's first assertion, since this type of towns thus became linkage points between the new urban, 'industrial Britain', and the new rural, the 'distant lands' of the empire. Secondly, and directly connected with the first consequence, there is 'rapid [urban] growth' that was not usually accompanied by, or 'attributable to', 'economic growth and industrialization'. This issue must be considered along Williams's second assertion about the replication of country/city dynamics in (post)colonial contexts. Crucially, rapid and unregulated urban growth coupled with ubiquitous segregation and inequality can only increase the inherited chasm between the rural and the urban, explaining Williams's use of the word 'dramatically'. That is, the apparent differences between rural and urban settlements in (post)colonial Africa become ever more patent with the latter's expansion.[106]

Although the critic does not adopt a Marxist nor an environmental approach, thinking about African cities through the theme of postcolonialism means for Myers focusing on 'material problems' that 'include the gross inequalities, social and spatial, which African cities inherited from European colonialism'. These 'material problems', I want to suggest, can be understood as consequences of the colonial country/city dynamics observed by Williams, as well as, following Mukherjee, as symptoms of the *radical unevenness* mentioned earlier, which results, directly or indirectly, from 'a predatory transnational capitalism', and acquires a specific valence in urban environments. In other words, these 'colonial legacies' have had, and still have, a big impact on both Africa's cities and village/city dynamics. To conclude this section, I would like to focus on two concrete examples of the influence of the oil political economy described earlier on Nigerian urban ecologies, imaginaries, and village/city relations.[107]

In the first place, the colonial pattern of urban growth without industrialisation has been reproduced after independence, especially as a direct consequence of the second oil boom. As already explained, this exacerbates the alleged differences between village and city. An oil economy, explains Watts, is characterised by 'a nationalized oil company […] that operates through joint ventures […] with oil majors who are granted territorial concessions (blocs)', and 'an institutional mechanism […] by which federal oil revenues are distributed to the states and producing communities'. It is thus the Nigerian state, says Karin Barber, that 'awards the big construction contracts […], and […] controls imports,

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[106] Myers, *African Cities*, p. 50-53.
[107] Myers, *African Cities*, pp. 15 and 49. Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, pp. 13-5; Pablo Mukherjee, 'Ivan Vladislavić: Traversing the Uneven City', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 48:5 (2012), 472-484 (p. 476). It must be noted, however, that, precisely because of his Marxist lens, Mukherjee does not subscribe to the optimism that usually surrounds examinations of African urban 'adaptability and creative energy'. This issue is further explored in Chapter Three of the thesis. See also, Harrison, *Waste Matters*, p. 3.

awards licenses, and imposes tariffs and restrictions'.[108] Watts describes what happened during the 1970s:

> expanded state activity unleashed a torrent of imports […] and urban
> construction (the construction industry grew at over 20 per cent annum in the
> mid-1970s). […] Cities such as Warri, Port Harcourt and Lagos doubled (and
> in some cases tripled) in size during the boom.[109]

In other words, in what can partly be understood as an example of what David Harvey calls capitalism's 'spatial fix', the second oil boom fed the machinery of urban growth to unmanageable levels. This, explains Barber, became a centralised, but partly privatised, form of distribution and expenditure of unprecedented petro-revenues, based on a 'competitive triangular relationship' involving 'state officials', 'middlemen from the private sector' and 'foreign exporters'. A mechanism, however, whose cogwheels were invariably greased by 'bribes and kick-backs'.[110]

Both Amadi's *Estrangement* and Iyayi's *Violence* provide fictional insights into this well-established system characterised by inadmissible acceptability, by bribes and illegal activity that are widely known to exist but never spoken of out loud. Moreover, the narrator in Abani's *GraceLand* says of 1983 Lagos that it 'was littered with [construction sites], because new high-rise apartment complexes and office blocks were going up seemingly overnight', simultaneously noting this prolific urban construction and casting it in a negative light, associating it with rubbish and/or untidiness through the use of the verb 'littered'. This urban construction, moreover, together with abandoned and unfinished buildings, constitute a characteristic feature of Lagos's landscape, as shown throughout the following chapters.[111]

Another case in point is formulated by Wole Soyinka, who very effectively shows how notions of government, corruption and social improvement are translated into urban environments. When considering the Buhari-Idiagbon military government that followed the Second Republic and was in power from 1983 to 1985, Soyinka explains that this duo's '"War against Indis'plin"', was ironically 'waged with […] consistent virulence against the disciplined and progressive'. Discipline, moreover, 'was to be manifested in all sorts of

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[108] Watts, 'Resource Curse?', p. 60; Karin Barber, 'Popular Reactions to the Petro-Naira', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 20:3 (1982), 432-450 (p. 436).
[109] Watts, 'Oil as Money', p. 421.
[110] David Harvey, quoted in Giovanni Arrighi, 'Spatial and Other "Fixes" of Historical Capitalism', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, X:2 (2004), 527-539 (p. 529); Barber, 'Popular Reactions', p. 436.
[111] Abani, *GraceLand*, p. 27.

public motions', including 'sanitation' and 'cleaning up the environment'. In Soyinka's account, the previous democratic government of Shehu Shagari exhibited inordinate levels of 'moral, political, and environmental squalor', a result of the 1970s oil boom, while General Buhari's successor, Ibrahim Babangida, 'was quite comfortable with external decay that was, after all, an outer reflection of the inner condition of his person and of his régime'.[112]

Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon, on their part, albeit for 'patently impure' reasons and through a 'selectively regional application' of humiliating punishments, ruled a Nigeria where 'mounds of garbage did not substitute for city landscaping and there was actually a competitive pride in a hygienic environment'. Even Soyinka, after identifying himself as an 'enthusiastic enforcer of road safety culture in Nigeria', confesses to have taken 'particular satisfaction in training [their] corps to crush the egos of that arrogant breed of drivers […] who felt that they were above the law and could kill and maim with impunity'. In sum, during these two years in the early 1980s, a clean Nigeria in every sense of the word was promoted by the state itself, at least theoretically, as a way of arresting the deterioration brought on the country by oil and its corollaries. This complex relationship between corruption and urban waste and pollution is further explored in the following chapter.[113]

1.3.2. Tradition and Modernity

Another popular cultural product of the intersection of the modernisation narrative with the separation of Nature and Humanity has been the installation of the tradition/modernity binary. Connected to the previous pair, tradition is here usually associated with the rural and close to nature, the artisanal, orality, and preservation of pre-colonial culture on the one hand, and, on the other, with the rough or rustic, instinct and savagery, the past, stagnation, and backwardness. Conversely, modernity tends to be associated with the city, speed, light and sound, progress and cosmopolitanism, industry, technology, infrastructure, and the future; as well as with the loss of pre-colonial values and culture, corruption, and consumerism. Both Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* and Mbue's *How Beautiful*, for example, explore, in very different ways, this binary and its consequences.[114]

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[112] Soyinka, *The Open Sore*, pp. 88, 75 and 77.
[113] Soyinka, *The Open Sore*, pp. 77-78.
[114] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* (London: Penguin Books, [1969] 2003). See also, Saree S. Makdisi, 'The Empire Renarrated: *Season of Migration to the North* and the Reinvention of the Present', *Critical Inquiry*, 18:4 (1992), 804-820.

As with the overarching binary of Nature/Society, the oppositional pair of tradition and modernity has been academically discredited. However, these ideas have had significant influence on and continue to pervade popular culture as well as environmental imaginaries, with socio-material consequences. Jean and John Comaroff refer to this modernity as 'profoundly ideological and profoundly historical', and point to the 'myriad transformations' of 'the cultures of industrial capitalism'. Moreover, like Williams, they accuse the binary of '[reducing] complex continuities and contradictions', masked by a 'story' of 'Progress'. Kaika, on her part, appeals to a 'dialectic between clear programmatic visions [*Modernity*] and complex historical geographical processes [*Modernization*] to analyze the materialization of modernity's Promethean project'. In other words, reminiscent of Moore's differentiation within capitalism, there is a fundamental difference between Euro-American modernity as a project and a narrative, which is pitched against tradition and backwardness, and modernisation as a process, with its multiple actual iterations and consequences around the world.[115]

Like Comaroff and Comaroff, I am interested in the 'specific properties and effects' of modernity's 'great transformations that have reshaped social and economic relations on a global scale'; transformations that 'have interacted in diverse ways with local conditions and contingencies, giving rise to a wide range of cultural practices, spatial arrangements, material circumstances'. That is, understanding modernity and progress as a means, and/or an excuse, through which colonisers integrated colonised territories into a global capitalist project, I want to focus now not on a critique of this idea of universal modernity, but on its socio-environmental and cultural ripples and repercussions. Specifically, I do this by examining the relationship between modernity and (post)colonial infrastructure, and the effects of this infrastructure on urban ecology and physical space.[116]

Brian Larkin defines infrastructure as the 'totality of both technical and cultural systems that create institutionalized structures whereby goods of all sorts circulate, connecting and binding people into collectivities'. According to Larkin, these circulatory systems 'have mediating capacities', as they 'shape the nature of economic and cultural flows and the fabric of urban life', and urban space. Similarly, Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta and Hannah Appel explain that '[m]aterial infrastructures […] are dense social, material, aesthetic, and political formations that are critical both to differentiated experiences of everyday life and to expectations of the future'. This mediation capacity refers not only to

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[115] Jean and John Comaroff, 'Introduction', in *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Jean Comaroff & John Comaroff (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. xi-xxxvii (pp. xi and xii); Kaika, *City of Flows*, p. 5.
[116] Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Introduction', p. xiii.

physical infrastructures, then, or simply to those regulating physical urban space, but also to cultural and social ones that shape other aspects of urban life. Through infrastructural 'failure', for example, 'populations' are discriminated and sometimes '[subjected] to premature death', but this can also affect literacy rates and access to cultural and artistic networks. The work of urban geographers has explored the impact of material infrastructure on 'the production and differentiation of space, often in direct relation to capital'.[117]

On the one hand, then, it could be said that infrastructures not only play an essential role in socio-ecological metabolic processes, both through their construction and circulatory function, but also intervene in our perception and experimentation of these processes and of urban space in its physical and abstract sense, thus contributing to environmental *unevenness*. On the other hand, 'in the colonial arena', 'infrastructure was just as important as a representation, evidence of the civilizing promise of colonial technical superiority'. That is, in colonial Nigeria, infrastructure served a double purpose: contributing to 'the Enlightenment project of rationally engineering the world', and representing the scientific and technical power needed to achieve that goal. In order to explain the latter, Larkin resorts to the concept of 'the colonial sublime', to which we now turn as the crucial link between infrastructure and the tradition/modernity binary.[118]

During colonial times, '[g]rand openings of infrastructural projects' were, among other things, 'about the spectacle of technology itself. They celebrated the completion of long, complex projects and focused attention on the existence of the object at hand'. The spectacular effect of these celebrations of technological infrastructures, says Larkin, were aimed at creating what the critic calls 'the colonial sublime'. Following Immanuel Kant's conception of 'the dynamically sublime', that whose sublimeness depends on the 'appreciation' of 'a judging subject', Larkin claims that 'colonial rule' utilised 'infrastructural technologies […] to provoke feelings of the sublime […] through the work of humankind'. Crucially, because the *colonial sublime* was a 'relational' category, it 'could only work by having *a comparative pole, tradition*—something to which it is greater.' In essence, explains Larkin, infrastructure became 'a necessary spectacle of colonial rule' through its 'terrifying ability to *remake landscapes and force the natural world to conform to these technological projects*'. In other words, infrastructure during

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[117] Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 6; Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand, and Akhil Gupta, 'Introduction: Temporality, Politics, and the Promise of Infrastructure', in *The Promise of Infrastructure*, pp. 1-38 (pp. 3, 5 and 10). On the unevenness of the city, see also Heynen *et al.*, 'Urban Political Ecology', p. 10.
[118] Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, p. 8.

colonial times both meant the control and subjugation of an external Nature in the name of Human civilisation, *and* constituted a spectacle of technological modernity whose power and superiority depended on the existence of an opposite category of tradition. The colonial sublime 'proffers technology as a mode of development', a sign of evolution and advancement that is hindered by tradition.[119]

Anand *et al.* state that infrastructures 'have long promised modernity, development, progress, and freedom to people all over the world'. Following Larkin, it is in fact possible to say that the sublimeness of technological infrastructure was inherited by postcolonial governments: 'The tie between the representational logic of infrastructure and the state was […] intensified, only now infrastructure came to represent the promise of independent rule rather than colonial supremacy.' Larkin interprets this as 'both a direct response to the colonial sublime, […] and also an internalization of its logic'. Indeed, in Giles Omezi's words, for post-independence Nigeria, modernisation and nation-building were, in a way, synonymous, 'with modernization viewed as a means of equalizing the colonized with the colonizer'. As for other 'newly independent nations of the global South', says Rob Nixon, modernisation and industrial development were the key to becoming a fully independent and self-sufficient nation-state, since they constituted 'highly visible, spectacular statements'; irrefutable proof that 'whatever [their] old colonial masters can do, [they] can do as well'.[120]

As has been repeatedly addressed by postcolonial literatures, this realisation of what we might term the postcolonial *sublime* is frequently fraught with sectarian interests and corruption that eventually curb or truncate it. In the case of Nigeria, modernisation projects are, as urbanisation itself, greatly shaped by oil and ethnicity. Infrastructural projects, urban and otherwise, constitute key playfields for the contesting forces that characterise the country's oil political economy. Due to the coincidence of independence with the start of intense oil extraction and commerce, 'oil became part of the nation-building process'. In this sense, says Watts, '[n]ature and nationalism became inextricably linked'. In essence, not only did Nigeria retain an extractive capitalist system, now based on oil commerce, which both preserved the existence of an external Nature and enabled the neocolonial

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[119] Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, pp. 19 and 35-36, emphasis added. Of special interest here could be Ayi Kwei Armah's description of the Railway & Harbour Administration Block, a ghost of the *colonial sublime*, now sitting 'with its squat massiveness', its 'gigantic opening', and 'broad cement stairs', *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (London: Heinemann, [1968] 1988), pp. 10-11.

[120] Anand *et al.*, 'Introduction', p. 3; Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, p. 8; Giles Omezi, 'Nigerian Modernity and the City: Lagos 1960-1980', in *The Arts of Citizenship in African Cities: Infrastructure and Spaces of Belonging*, ed. Mamadou Diouf and Rosalind Fredericks (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 277-295 (p. 278); Rob Nixon, 'Unimagined Communities: Developmental Refugees, Megadams and Monumental Modernity', *New Formations*, 69 (2010), 62-80 (p. 65).

exploitation of human and nonhuman nature. It also utilised petro-revenues to realise its internalisation of Larkin's *colonial sublime*.[121]

In fact, according to Steyn, in 1949, the nationalist leaders had already realised 'the potential of oil in securing financial viability for a future independent Nigeria'. Consequently, after this year, Shell/D'Arcy was allowed to continue its exploratory activities on its own terms. Steyn further argues that it was at this point that 'oil [was] permanently [elevated] to the level of national interest and, as the involvement of nationalist leaders in the governing of Nigeria grew in the course of the 1950s, local interests became even more subordinate when they clashed with national interests.' Moreover, Omezi demonstrates that it was the second oil boom that first enabled the implementation of large-scale modernising projects. It must be noted that oil did not give birth to these modernisation ideals, but made them possible. What oil did do, then, was to enable the materialisation of these aspirations towards modernisation, turning them into concrete, monumental spectacles of national power at a time when the development of a strong, unified Nigerian state was crucial, just in the aftermath the civil war. In Andrew Apter's words, 'Nigeria's newly found "God-given" wealth reunited the nation with unprecedented prosperity, portending a state-directed industrial revolution that would be lubricated by oil.' In this sense, Nigeria is one more example of the process described by Hannah Appel, Arthur Mason and Michael Watts, through which the value of oil 'is produced in intimate relationship with state practices', of how 'companies and states hail certain material qualities of oil, enrolling them in broader semiotic shifts intended to produce the affects of national patrimony and belonging.'[122]

However, as mentioned earlier, the execution of these plans, and of the modernisation project in general, was fraught with sectarian interests and an 'intense competition for public resources along regional and class lines', which resulted in the 'unthinkable corruption and administrative chaos' that ultimately sabotaged the development project.[123] Two examples illustrate Nigeria's attempts at constructing a postcolonial *sublime*, which differs from the *colonial sublime* not only chronologically, but also in the sense that, many times, the former also constitutes instances of neocolonialism which, because of corruption and ethnic tensions, result in unfinished or inefficient projects. Firstly, we can briefly mention gigantic projects of industrial infrastructure. The Ajaokuta Steel Complex (ASC), for example, is called by Watts 'a pathetic monument to

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[121] Watts, 'Resource Curse?', p. 72.
[122] Steyn, 'Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria', pp. 264-265; Omezi, 'Nigerian Modernity', p. 284; Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, p. 22; Appel, Mason and Watts, 'Oil Talk', pp. 19-20.
[123] Watts, 'Oil as Money', p. 421.

oil, to oil politics and to oil money'. Like the megadam projects discussed by Nixon, the ASC was, at least according to initial plans, a spectacle of industrial prowess, what Kaika calls a 'revered [shrine] of technology', behind which hid utter inefficiency and lack of productivity.[124] Boasting of 'Soviet and Czech technologies, platoons of French, German, East European and British workers', and heavily funded by an 'increasingly reluctant' World Bank, construction of the plant started in 1979. In 2020, the plant still had not been put into operation. What is more, in 1994, when Watts wrote about it, he claimed that, if the plant was completed, 'Nigerian steel [would] cost somewhere between six and seven times the prevailing world price'. Today, more than forty years later, the plant is still not open but 'gulping billions of dollars'.[125]

Similarly, Watts also mentions 'three steel rolling mills bizarrely located in other remote parts of the country'. Apart from pointing out the fall in 'prices and substantial overcapacity in the global steel industry' concurrent with these steel production plans in 1970s Nigeria, and 'the extraordinary corruption and inefficiency associated with their construction and operation', Watts interestingly calls the reader's attention to the location of the steel mills, which he attributes to 'regional politics'. Apter also adds to this mix 'two petroleum refineries in Warri and Kaduna' and 'the spectacular if misguided construction of [the government's] own crude-oil supertanker', the *M. V. Oloibiri*. Built to solve fuel shortages associated with problems in the distribution of oil within the country, 'the scheme only replaced one form of dependency with another, relying upon overseas industry rather than foreign oil'. Once again, a project designed to increase state control over the country's industrial production only resulted in higher costs and lower profits.[126]

Secondly, and directly connected to urban ecology and the novels analysed here, there is the road network and, more specifically, the Lagos expressways, which, as we shall see, are simultaneously a symbol of infrastructural development and a site of danger and untimely death. Omezi describes how, even though '[t]he genesis of the ubiquitous network of expressways of Lagos can […] be traced back to the modernizing aspirations of the First National Plan', it was only in the 1970s that the 'increase in revenue receipts from oil production […] lent real substance to the modernizing rhetoric as it provided the means to actualize the projects in the Second Plan' (1970-4). On the one hand, then, during the post-war period, 'the image of the modern road network […] begins to crystallize in the

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[124] Watts, 'Oil as Money', p. 430; Nixon, 'Unimagined Communities', pp. 65-66; Kaika, *City of Flows*, p. 3.
[125] Watts, 'Oil as Money', pp. 427-428. See also Femi Adekoya, 'Ajaokuta Steel Plant: Like Refineries, a Story Retold, Promises Unkept', *Guardian*, 13 January 2023, Industry Section <https://guardian.ng/business-services/ajaokuta-steel-plant-like-refineries-a-story-retold-promises-unkept/> [Accessed 4 May 2023] (epigraph, 61 paragraphs).
[126] Watts, 'Oil as Money', p. 428; Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, pp. 25 and 35.

mind of the state and its citizens as the tangible benchmark of progress', a road network that links 'sites of production, raw material sources, markets, and extraction nodes'.[127]

On the other, the road network also feeds the illusion of 'self-propulsion', an illusion that is then crushed by the same inadequate infrastructure. This is indeed Danica Savonick's main contention. Savonick claims that her study evidences the close imbrication of 'mobility, modernity, urbanism, and colonial violence' in postcolonial Nigeria, since 'the haunted infrastructures […] repeatedly foreclose the fantasy of urban automobility'.[128] Constructions designed to enable mobility and progress simultaneously prevent urban residents from moving forward. While the 'oil-fuelled fantasy of automobility' in Nigeria 'must be understood […] as a desire for automotive self-determination, a break from colonial domination', it is the infrastructure built by the colonial government and expanded with neocolonial capital that does not allow the characters in these novels to succeed. This crushing of illusions is exemplified by Nkem Nwankwo's Onuma, who, in a matter of days, goes from driving a 'golden coloured Jaguar' to walking along the Lagos Monday morning traffic jam queue.[129]

What these examples show, says Apter, is how oil both provided the means through which to symbolise and materialise a strong, unified, and modern Nigeria, and exacerbated the 'ethnic patronage and political clientelism' that emerged and intensified after independence. The result was 'a self-consuming state—a rapidly expanding public sector that was simultaneously privatized by kickbacks and subsidies'. It was this self-consumption that 'threw the wheels of progress off track' and ultimately sabotaged every development scheme implemented during the 1970s. In other words, the examples provided show how ethnicity and Nigeria's oil political economy can also be inscribed within the tradition/modernity binary, since they are closely linked with Nigerian postcolonial infrastructural *promise* and *failure*, and its consequent *planned violence*. As Chapter Three examines, postcolonial infrastructure and modernisation projects, whether spectacular or not, are repeatedly exposed in Nigerian urban novels as deeply uneven and dangerous for both human and nonhuman nature.[130]

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[127] Omezi, 'Nigerian Modernity', pp. 281 and 284-285.
[128] Savonick, '"The problem of locomotion"', pp. 670 and 686.
[129] Savonick, '"The problem of locomotion"', pp. 681 and 671; Nkem Nwankwo, *My Mercedes Is Bigger Than Yours* (Glasgow: Fontana Books, [1975] 1976), pp. 13 and 59.
[130] Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, pp. 30 and 51.

1.3.3. Mind and Body

Central to the fourth chapter's argument are the mechanisms at play behind the commodification of the body, and the attendant devaluation of unprofitable ones. The mind/body dualism is traced back to the philosopher Descartes and to Enlightenment thinking more generally, although, according to David Hillman and Ulrika Maude, Cartesian dualism is not 'as absolute as some have described it', and 'continuities' can be observed between Cartesian and early modern 'somatic worlds'. Regardless of the strictness of Cartesian dualism itself, as explained in the previous section, dualist thinking has constituted a key principle for the capitalist colonial appropriation and exploitation of both human and nonhuman nature that started in the 16th century.[131]

Referring to capitalist bodily commodification in general, Lesley A. Sharp states that 'dehumanization' is one form of objectification which 'is intrinsic to enslavement', both colonial and pre-colonial, and colonial domination. This dehumanisation, claims Sharp, is itself enabled by 'the dualistic separation of body and self', through 'the depersonalization […] of persons-as-bodies'. Because mind and body are perceived as two distinct elements, the mind element in some persons, such as racialised others, but also women and the abject poor, can be construed as non-existent, or less advanced, underdeveloped, so that these persons become only disposable bodies. The mind/body binary is then deeply imbricated in a complex causal relationship with the origins of the objectification and commodification of the human body.[132]

This dehumanisation acquires a specific valence in histories of empire, where it intersects with race and externalised Nature. In Rebecca Duncan and Rebekah Cumpsty's words, 'underpinning hierarchies of race in the context of Western European imperialism, there is a dualism of mind and body, which opens out to become a dualism of rational humanity and brute nature'. As Duncan and Cumpsty point out, Moore helpfully inserts the exploitation of the body within the capitalist colonial exploitation of nonhuman nature and its early modern origins. It is within the dualistic conception of Humanity and Nature, says Moore, that 'the expulsion of many humans from […] Humanity' takes place, thus rendering them, too, passive objects of domination and appropriation, natural bodies to be exploited. Dehumanised humanity is assigned to the realm of Nature and is thus '[cheapened]', its labour appropriated in the service of capitalism '*as a project*'. The body thus becomes, as Moore says, an even more important '[site] of environmental history',

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[131] David Hillman and Ulrika Maude, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, ed. David Hillman and Ulrika Maude (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1-9 (p. 6).

[132] Lesley A. Sharp, 'The Commodification of the Body and Its Parts', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29 (2000), 287-328 (pp. 293 and 290).

since both labour as energy and body parts as raw materials become themselves commodities. The mind/body dualism can be understood as a third expression of the larger binary of abstract Society vs abstract Nature, which to this day still justifies extractive capitalism as *world-ecology*.[133]

Specifically, this binary dehumanises, objectifies, everything that falls outside the category of the Human, including racialised others: 'If it is the presumed object-status of non-human nature that authorizes its appropriation by "properly" human society […] then it is the same status, ascribed to certain human populations, that makes these legible to capitalist exploitation, and thus expendable'. In Smith's words, 'it is much easier to rationalize the profit-driven rape of *earth and body alike* if that nature is objectified'. Achille Mbembe exposes this exploitative dehumanisation with respect to the Black body, when he says: 'To produce Blackness is to produce a social link of subjection and *a body of extraction*, that is, […] a body from which great effort is made to extract maximum profit.' Mbembe thus foregrounds the extractive nature of this dehumanising process, that transforms the Black body into an 'exploitable object'. Society, Humanity, the city, modernity, the mind – all are separate from, on a higher level than, and thus able to control Nature, the nonhuman, the village, tradition, the body. The mind/body binary then justifies the dehumanising objectification of certain persons that is a preclusion for the commodification of the body and its parts.[134]

Importantly, when these commodified, and often fragmented, persons lose their status as 'objects of economic desire', they also lose any other sort of value they may have had as human beings, because they have already been rendered things. Unprofitable humans, their bodies and body parts are useless, valueless, and can thus be discarded, abandoned, mistreated however the alleged owner pleases. The dehumanisation of racialised persons is clearly explained by Mbembe:

> The truth of individuals who are assigned a race is at once elsewhere and
> within the appearances assigned to them. […] But they are also constituted by
> the very act of assigning, the process through which certain forms of infralife
> are produced and institutionalized, indifference and abandonment justified, the

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[133] Rebecca Duncan & Rebekah Cumpsty, 'The Body in Postcolonial Fiction after the Millennium', *Interventions*, 22:5 (2020), 587-605 (p. 588-9); Moore, 'Capitalocene, Part I', p. 600-1, emphasis in the original; Moore, *Capitalism*, p. 26.

[134] Duncan and Cumpsty, 'The Body in Postcolonial Fiction', p. 589; Smith, 'Foreword', p. xii, emphasis added; Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 18, emphasis in the original.

part that is human in the other violated or occulted through forms of
internment, even murder, that have been made acceptable.

Rendering a person as only a body, or a body with a lesser mind, enables the understanding of this person not as a human but an object, and thus not worthy of humane treatment.[135]

While, as Mbembe argues, racialised bodies continue to be dehumanised in the 21st century, along Sharp's line of argument, this project considers dehumanisation as key to understanding the body 'as a site of production', since bodily commodification is a feature of capitalist development in general, and not just (neo)colonial capitalism. Examples given by the author include '[s]lavery', and the commodification of the 'suffering' and 'desires of colonial subjects'; but also forms of commodification that are not necessarily race-based, such as 'other exploitative labor practices', 'body trafficking', commodification of women and '[p]rostitution', commodification of 'male virility', and of 'body fragments'. This analysis thus traces a line of continuity, from colonial capitalism's dehumanisation of racialised bodies in the service of empire, to later non-race-based forms of body objectification and commodification that develop within neocolonial Nigeria, mostly along gender and class lines. That said, it must be pointed out that the racial component is again foregrounded when considering, for example, international organ trafficking.[136]

I suggest that both energy and raw materials are resources that can be extracted from the human body. Following Saree Makdisi, I understand human labour, including but not limited to slavery, as a form of energy, specifically, 'human energy'. While Makdisi also theorises this concept within the context of empire, all forms of (social) (re)productive labour involve in fact human energy being translated into 'human power' in order to carry out a certain task. If labour equals human energy, the commodification of human matter, on the other hand, is that of body parts or fragments, which I classify here as a form of raw

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[135] Sharp, 'The Commodification of the Body', p. 293; Mbembe, *Critique*, p. 32. Another example of the damaging consequences of the mind/body dualism can be observed in Maya Angelou's narration of her eighth-grade graduation ceremony in the American South of 1940. All the excitement and expectation of the moment is crushed by Mr. Edward Donleavy's commencement address. In a fleeting appearance before another event, the white politician only refers to famous Black sportsmen, indirectly reminding the students that physical, manual labour is all they can do: '[they are] maids and farmers, handymen and washerwomen, and anything higher that [they aspire] to [is] farcical and presumptuous'. Moreover, when the 'valedictory address' references Shakespeare's 'To Be or Not to Be', the narrator reflects: 'We couldn't *be*, so the question was a waste of time. […] There was no 'nobler in the mind' for Negroes because the world didn't think we had minds, and they let us know it.' As bodies devoid of minds, the graduating classes of Lafayette County Training School have no real choice. Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (London: Virago Press, [1969] 1984), pp. 174-177.
[136] Sharp, 'The Commodification of the Body', pp. 292 and 293-294.

material, either utilised for rituals and 'black magic', or to be sold in the international illegal organ market.[137]

Once again, I want to conclude this subsection by inserting bodily commodification within Nigeria's oil political economy, or, rather, in this case, 'occult economy'. Coined by Jean and John Comaroff, this economy, 'itself an integral feature of millennial capitalism', is characterised by both 'the perception' that instant and incalculable riches can be attained by discovering a secret key to them, and the feeling of anxiety produced by being left out of the realm of luxury and power. While Comaroff and Comaroff's study is on postcolonial South Africa, the concept of *occult economy* is also applicable to the Nigerian context, where the oil economy produces what Barber calls 'gigantic, baseless fortunes'. In such an economy, 'arcane forces […] intervening in the production of value' are popularly utilised to justify the 'not-quite-fathomable mechanisms' through which certain individuals suddenly acquire incalculable fortunes. Comaroff and Comaroff restate an earlier contention that 'the practice of mystical arts in postcolonial Africa, witchcraft among them, […] is often a mode of producing new forms of consciousness; of expressing discontent with modernity and dealing with its deformities'. Dehumanisation and bodily commodification in Nigerian cities, then, must be understood within a political economy in which most people will do whatever they need not to be left out.[138]

The most immediate and damaging consequence of oil's enclave character combined with the sector's foreign dominance, described earlier, is the exclusion of the majority of the population from profits generated by the industry from which has derived the largest revenue in the country for fifty years: 'Most Nigerians work not in the sector which has proven to be the most dynamic and economically important', but in those that have been gravely affected by it.[139] In fact, according to Apter, the shares that were to be 'proportionally "indigenized"' as from 1972 were actually 'privately distributed to connected partners who would tow management's line with their dividends. The result was less the active involvement of Nigerians in management and more the rise of a new connected elite, known as "the Mr. 40 percenters"'. Therefore, contends Barber, '[o]il wealth […] is not seen to be produced by work'. Because the 'population has had little to do with the actual production of oil', and the numbers of Nigerian skilled, semi-skilled and

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[137] Laurie Shannon, Vin Nardizzi, Ken Hiltner, Saree Makdisi, Michael Ziser, Imre Szeman and Patricia Yaeger, 'Editor's Column: Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power, and Other Energy Sources', *PMLA*, 126:2 (2011), 305-326 (p. 318).

[138] Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, 'Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony', *American Ethnologist*, 26:2 (1999), 279-303 (pp. 283-284); Barber, 'Popular Reactions', p. 438.

[139] Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, p. 82. See also Steyn, 'Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria', p. 267.

even unskilled workers in oil companies 'have remained minute', these enormous amounts of money 'seem to have appeared as if from nowhere, being appropriated by those who contributed virtually nothing to its production, and in the process personally enriching a few Nigerians on a colossal scale'.[140]

The previous statement applies not only to money that is a direct result of oil production and commerce, but to all wealth whose origin resides in some form of centralised distribution of oil revenues through 'a variety of methods, none fully admissible but all in varying degrees condoned by the élite'. Barber later explains how, because this money seems to have been mysteriously conjured up, in the popular imagination, this process is translated 'into a set of terms which makes further questions about the nature and origins of this wealth pointless and, indeed, unaskable. Magical processes are by definition inexplicable', and it is through secret and mysterious 'medicine' that these sudden and 'baseless fortunes' are both accounted for and declared supernatural, and, therefore, inscrutable.[141]

While Barber focuses specifically on familiar images that represent these issues in Yoruba popular theatre, such as 'the child-stealer who uses his victims to conjure up boundless riches', Watts refers to the '[t]heft of bodies and body parts [that] is a recurrent theme in Nigerian popular culture'. Watts points out how this 'trade in body parts is part of a larger cultural terrain […], in which juju or money magic refers to personal gain (money wealth) without apparent effort'. For this author, 'money magic' manifests the popular concern with the origins of this wealth that is only seen being consumed and displayed but never produced, as well as with the 'sorts of practices [that] can be monetized or commodified, that is to say the morality of monetary practice'. This *money magic* can embrace all sorts of elements and procedures that are combined or carried out through the adaptation or application of traditional knowledge to the specific sociocultural conditions that have been described in this chapter. One such example of this can be observed in the actions of Nwankwo's character, Magic, the 'occult doctor' and politician, who is first appointed as Onuma's 'spiritual consultant', and eventually facilitates the latter's involvement in politics as a desperate way of making some quick cash.[142]

It is indeed possible to suggest that Nigeria's *occult economy* is the 'larger cultural terrain' to which Watts claims the 'trade in body parts' belongs. These body parts are traded to be used in *money magic*, which, according to Watts, explains and is a way of

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[140] Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, p. 37; Barber, 'Popular Reactions', p. 435.
[141] Barber, 'Popular Reactions', pp. 436 and 438.
[142] Barber, 'Popular Reactions', p. 438; Watts, 'Oil as Money', pp. 424-425 and 427; Nwankwo, *Mercedes*, pp. 7, 73 and 79.

achieving 'personal gain (money wealth) without apparent effort'. In fact, following Comaroff and Comaroff, ritual killings and body part commodification for ritualistic use can be understood as a 'symptom' of this *occult economy*. Moreover, *money magic* popular practices may be interpreted more broadly as ways of dealing with or responding to abrupt and otherwise unexplainable change, here contained in Nigeria's transformation after the 1970s oil boom. According to these critics, 'ritual', and magic, have usually been conceived in opposition to modernity, as belonging to the realm of 'tradition'. However, they contend instead that ritual is 'a fecund medium for making new meanings, new ways of knowing the world and its workings'.[143]

Comaroff and Comaroff thus understand ritual and magic as 'an especially likely response to contradictions created and (literally) engendered by processes of social, material, and cultural transformation, processes re-presented, rationalized, and authorized in the name of modernity and its various alibis'. Returning to the apparently instant riches generated by oil, magic sometimes seems to be the only way to participate in them: 'It is in the fissure between assertive rationalities and perceived magicalities that malcontent gathers, giving rise to ritual efforts to penetrate the impenetrable, […], to recapture the forces suspected of redirecting the flow of power in the world'. The commodification of body parts for ritual and *money magic* is a specific, extreme, form of bodily commodification that takes places within Nigeria's *occult economy*. However, that sense of desperation caused by being left out of the system, of missing out on those incalculable riches, motivates diverse forms of dehumanisation and bodily commodification that make up Nigerian urban ecologies. Chapter Four thus considers these processes within different urban imaginaries.[144]

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[143] Watts, 'Oil as Money', pp. 424-427; Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Occult Economies', p. 284; Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Introduction', pp. xv and xxi.
[144] Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Introduction', pp. xxx-xxxi.

CHAPTER TWO. 'OURS IS OURS, BUT MINE IS MINE': CORRUPTION AND

CONSUMERISM IN THE VILLAGE AND THE CITY

> *'It is money, not work,' said the man. 'We left plenty of work at home. … Anyone who likes work can return home, take up his matchet and go into that bad bush between Umuofia and Mbaino. It will keep him occupied to his last days.' The meeting agreed that it was money, not work, that brought them to Lagos.*[145]

The village/city subsection in Chapter One explains the origins of this specifically postcolonial binary as a combination of the more widespread country/city duality, and the modernisation narrative, while also recognising the oppositional pair as a product or expression of the *violent abstractions* of Nature and Society. The previous chapter also considers the colonial urbanisation processes that differentiate the (post)colonial binary from the metropolitan one, and looks at two Nigerian examples of the construction and/or reinforcement of the village and the city as two distinct and opposite sites. This first analytical chapter focuses on two literary representations of the village and the city, and suggests that Achebe's works ultimately challenge this demarcation by portraying the socio-environmental flows and entanglements that occur between the two kinds of settlements, and their consequences, as products of a neocolonial capitalist system. The chapter's epigraph indeed shows how the members of the Umuofia Progressive Union agree that it is not lack of work, but lack of money, what makes them move from their native village, Umuofia, to the city, Lagos. This quote is thus key because, as we shall see, it encapsulates one of *No Longer at Ease*'s main theme, village-city relations, while phrasing it not only in social, but also in economic and ecological terms.

Achebe's early postcolonial urban works exemplify the fact that African writers and thinkers have had to come to terms with the oftentimes rapid (re)birth and development of their cities as administrative, economic, and cultural centres during the (post)colonial period. According to Wendy Griswold, the village/city binary is reflected in Nigerian literature, and 'Nigerians like those involved with novels as writers, publishers, and/or readers […] have a sense of living in two worlds' that 'involve a separation of time and space'. Even if both worlds are constantly changing and mutually shaping each other, argues Griswold, 'the village persists as separate and distinct in the minds of Nigerians'. As with the more general country/city oppositional pair, within this postcolonial duality emerge diverse negative and positive images associated with each settlement. However, as explained in the previous chapter, unregulated, uneven, and segregated urban development

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[145] Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, p. 91.

has resulted in the prevalence of negative associations with the city in both cultural representations, and the popular imagination. Lola Akande, for example, claims that, for the African writer, 'the city is the legacy of the degraded form of living to which colonialism has callously subjected the African'. As the centre of colonial and postcolonial Western modernity, the urban is usually seen a space of 'erosion of personal and communal identities'.[146] In fact, Griswold explains that, because 'the Nigerian novel developed as the country was undergoing rapid, highly visible urbanization', this unfavourable image is definitely dominant in works belonging to the so-called first generation of Nigerian literature, extending from the 1950s to the beginning of the civil war in 1967; and the second, which runs from the end of the war in 1970 to the late 1980s, when the consequences of the oil bust finally impacted 'on the output of fiction'. Similarly, following Joshua D. Esty, Sarah Harrison points out that 'early postcolonial literature […] expresses notable urban disillusionment', contained in the trope of filth and waste in the city.[147]

Within this framework, and through processes like the ones described in Chapter One, the city becomes the engine of moral, social, and environmental decay. It is there that corruption and consumerism, whose most widespread symbols are cars and multi-storey buildings, seem to have their permanent home. In the city, showing one's wealth seems to be as important as acquiring it, and lack of it can take one to the lowest, filthiest of places, both literally and metaphorically. That is, for example, the general sentiment behind most of the stories in Flora Nwapa's *This Is Lagos and Other Stories*, and at times even that of Ekwensi's *People of the City*, analysed in the fourth chapter. In other words, despite coexisting positive associations of the city with 'learning, communication' and cultural achievement –cities have always been, and indeed still are, literary centres par excellence–, many of the cultural urban imaginaries of the time have reproduced the tensions and preoccupations with which colonial and early postcolonial urban development was met. Although far from idyllic, the village thus appears widely as the opposite of the chaotic city: quiet, stable, safe, and virtuous. This could perhaps be explained as yet another way in which British patterns are replicated in the (post)colonial world; since, says Raymond Williams, 'English attitudes to the country, and to ideas of rural life, persisted with

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[146] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, p. 165; Lola Akande, 'Chinua Achebe's Engagement with City Life in *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*', *Lagos Notes and Records*, 21:1 (2015), 1-18 (p. 4).
[147] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, p. 154 and pp. 36-37; Harrison, *Waste Matters*, p. 4.

extraordinary power, so that even after the society was predominantly urban its literature […] was still predominantly rural'.[148]

However, not all literary works fall into this pattern; some resist the simple village-vs-city trope and thus reject the idea of the city as an evil force that corrupts and pollutes humans and nonhumans alike, instead recognising other larger forces at work behind Nigeria's fast-paced urbanisation and its consequences. Set both in the city and the village, during the period that Rogers Orock calls 'the *early* postcolony', Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *A Man of the People* (1966) are two such novels. Published during the first decade after Nigerian independence in 1960, these novels follow the fall, moral and otherwise, of a series of urban or semi-urban characters with strong ties to their native villages, during two different periods of Nigerian history: the transition to independence and the early years of the postcolony. Through these individual stories, the works both expose and try to explain the origins of the culture of corruption and consumerism characteristic of Nigeria at the time they were written.[149]

Because they belong to the first generation of Nigerian literature, the texts could be characterised as pioneering works in the inclusion of an urban setting, since, according to Griswold, and in line with Williams's observation cited above, this is quite rare in 'novels published during the 1950s and 1960s'. Both *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* have been widely studied since they were first published more than fifty years ago, especially around the themes of corruption, and tradition vs modernity. While much of this earlier criticism is included here, the present chapter carries out a comparative analysis of the novels focusing on how Achebe construes material flows and socio-ecological relations between and within village and urban centre. The analysis claims that, in these novels, it is not the city that is responsible for the ruin of the main characters, but rather (neo)colonial capitalist structures and the subsequent culture of corruption and conspicuous consumption. These are not just ubiquitous in both kinds of settlements, but in fact greatly determine the dynamics and interrelations between village and city.[150]

While the individual main characters, Obi and Odili, follow different paths, the novels examined in this second chapter can in fact be said to trace the spread and growing pervasiveness of (neo)colonial capitalist attitudes and values. In other words, there is a recognition of 'man' as 'the roots of the problem', to use Georg M. Gugelberger's words.

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[148] Flora Nwapa, *This Is Lagos and Other Stories* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, [1971] 1992); Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 1 and 3.

[149] Rogers Orock, 'Chinua Achebe's Postcolony: A Literary Anthropology of Postcolonial Decadence', *Africa*, 92:1 (2022), 71-92 (p. 72).

[150] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, p. 151.

This 'man', however, is actually 'certain humans', acting according to capitalist interests and participating in specific socio-ecological metabolic processes. In these texts' deeper layers, behind or despite certain characters' views, there is thus a recognition of the interpenetration of village and city that rejects a facile and artificial understanding of an unnatural, dirty, and morally lacking urbanity opposed to an innocent and pure rurality. Instead of blaming the city for everything that is wrong with Nigeria, the novels see beyond the artificial duality to identify (neo)colonial capitalism as the true driver of inequality and injustice.[151]

2.1. Fallen: *No Longer at Ease*

No Longer at Ease, Achebe's second novel, narrates the moral, social, and financial fall of Obi Okonkwo, grandson of the proud and fearless Okonkwo whose suicide brings *Things Fall Apart*, Acebe's first novel, to an end. Set both in Lagos and in Obi's native village, Umuofia, during the period of transition from British colonial rule to Nigerian independence, *NLE* could very well belong to Griswold's 'city novels', although she considers it within her discussion of intellectual and war novels and, specifically, as the first example of what she calls 'the culture of disappointment'. The novel starts on the last day of a trial at the High Court of Lagos and the Southern Cameroons, where Obi is being tried for, and is eventually found guilty of, bribery. The events narrated after that are in fact an answer to the indirect question with which the story opens and closes; in the judge's words: 'how a young man of [his] education and brilliant promise could have done [that]' (*NLE* 2). Obi, a man with an English education and a post in the senior civil service of a nascent nation, who starts his career with a seemingly very clear idea of why corruption happens and how to avoid it (22-3), has descended to the lowest levels of the practice he abhors, and no one understands why.[152]

Several critics have focused on this question since *NLE*'s initial publication more than sixty years ago, offering diverse interpretations of what Achebe appears to present as 'a series of unfortunate events' that lead to Obi's demise.[153] While Russell MacDougall associates the circular structure of the novel with 'the inevitability of succumbing to the system of bribery', and characterises Obi's struggle as taking place between 'two incompatible sets of obligations: change and tradition', Adina Câmpu explains the inescapable corruption as 'only one manifestation of the decadence that is tied to the

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[151] Gugelberger, 'Introduction', p. vi. See also Orock, 'Chinua Achebe's Postcolony', p. 72.
[152] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, pp. 222-223.
[153] Adina Câmpu, 'Tradition Versus Modernity in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*', *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov, Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies*, 6:2 (2013), 1-6 (p.2).

modern urban environment'. For Câmpu, the struggle between tradition and modernity in *NLE* is expressed as 'the conflict between rural values and urban ones', which is precisely the idea that I argue against here. Similarly, Akande claims to find in Achebe's novels the 'unwholesome influence' of the city 'on the individual', and, perhaps conflating the author's representation with his own views, argues that Achebe has 'an almost unfriendly attitude towards the city' because it 'symbolises the legacy' of British colonialism.[154]

Kevin Frank suggests that 'Obi's alienation […] does not result strictly from going to England', but also stems from the fact that Umuofians see themselves as foreigners outside their own region in Nigeria, and from the importance they thus place on having one of their own educated in England and occupying a senior government post; which means that Obi 'will become physically separated from [his] people' as a sign of his new status. This double alienation means that 'Obi cannot return home' and is unable to find his place in the new nation. Focusing on different forms of cosmopolitanism, James Ogude complements Frank's argument when he claims that, because of his time abroad and his resulting 'idealistic' and 'universalist' cosmopolitanism, Obi 'wants to participate in both tradition and modernity selectively', and this is his main problem. Whereas 'Obi struggles to discover his place in the new Nigeria', the Union members as 'local cosmopolitans are adept at exploiting symbols of modernity to fuel their own local projects', and it is this adaptive local cosmopolitanism that dictates the rules of how Obi should dress, speak and behave; rules that he fails to abide by time and again.[155]

While these studies make valid points that are incorporated into the present analysis, essentially, they all understand Obi's fall in terms of a distinction between tradition and modernity, either as an inevitable consequence of Obi's English education and his subsequent urban lifestyle at a particular time in history, or as his failure to adapt to the new circumstances and find an adequate balance between the two systems. There certainly is an element of culture clash that Obi, characterised by a high degree of idealism and stubbornness, deals with more or less successfully throughout the novel. However, the main character's predicament cannot be reduced to his embracing of a modern urban lifestyle and European values. In fact, his problems are, in no small amount, financial, as noted by Roderick Wilson, James Booth, and Adebisi Ademakinwa.[156]

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[154] Russell MacDougall, 'The "problem of locomotion" in *No Longer at Ease*', *World Literature Written in English*, 29:1 (1989), 19-25 (p. 23); Câmpu, 'Tradition Versus Modernity', pp. 2-3; Akande, 'City Life', p. 6.
[155] Kevin Frank, 'Censuring the Praise of Alienation: Interstices of Ante-Alienation in *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God*', *Callaloo*, 34:4 (2011), 1088-1100 (pp. 1096-1097); James Ogude, '*No Longer at Ease* as a Text that Performs Local Cosmopolitanism', *PMLA*, 129:2 (2014), 251-253 (pp. 251-252).
[156] Roderick Wilson, 'Eliot and Achebe: An Analysis of some Formal and Philosophical Qualities of *No Longer at Ease*', *English Studies in Africa*, 14:2 (1971), 215-223 (pp. 218-219); James Booth, *Writers &*

In other words, yes, Obi's fall is quite inevitable, but it is mainly the result of a colonial capitalism designed for failure, of both the individual and the nation. This main character is a member of Frantz Fanon's 'underdeveloped bourgeoisie', as Booth points out. By the time of independence, the colonial capitalism that starts in *Things Fall Apart* is fully developed. If Obi fails to find a balance between his life in the city and his obligations in the village, it is because he returns from England to an environment that is already *uneven*, which both retains an Igbo cosmology and has been transformed by a capitalist *world-ecology* that goes directly against it. In this first section, I suggest that it is the colonial capitalist system which is behind the conspicuous consumption that drives Obi to ruin, while simultaneously accentuating the differences and intensifying socio-material flows between and within Umuofia and Lagos.[157]

This is not to say that Achebe is a Marxist author himself, unlike, for example, Ayi Kwei Armah or Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, or even that he intended *NLE* to be a Marxist critique of early postcolonial Nigeria. What this reading proposes is that there is an aspect of Achebe's astute fictional representation which, of necessity, sheds light on the economic imperatives that shape Obi's situation. This economic aspect, which is arguably more self-evident in his other novel examined here, *A Man of the People*, seems to have been mostly ignored by previous literary criticism of *NLE*, along with its environmental ramifications. The present analysis addresses this gap by adopting a cultural urban ecological approach that focuses on Achebe's representation urban-rural relations through Obi's story. Focusing on Achebe's construction of both urban and rural settlements, the next paragraphs follow Obi's trajectory from promising youth to disgraced criminal, and understands it as a consequence of a flawed system which redeems the city from its infamous reputation.

Firstly, it is important to establish Obi's social position and function before and immediately after returning from Europe, as well as his relationship with the Umuofia Progressive Union. When Obi arrives in Nigeria after his years abroad, the UPU, Lagos branch, organises for him a grand reception, with 'press reporters and photographers' (*NLE* 35). They have also raised the money for Obi's studies in England and have now used their funds to pay for Obi's lawyer. Five years earlier, Obi is the first recipient of a repayable scholarship of eight hundred pounds that would enable him to become a lawyer and, on his

Politics in Nigeria (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1981), pp. 95-99; Adebisi Ademakinwa, '"Acquisitive Culture" and its Impact on Nigeria's Socio-Economic Development', *Matatu: Journal of African Culture and Society*, 40:1 (2012), 285-300 (p. 292). See also Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, pp. 222-223.

[157] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 155; Booth, *Writers & Politics*, p. 97.

return, 'handle all their land cases against their neighbors' (8). Even though Obi disappoints the Union by deciding to study Literature instead, they eventually let go of their anger because he can still 'get a "European post" in the civil service' of the newly independent nation (Ibid.).[158]

The UPU is a fictional example of the kind of Igbo ethnic cooperation identified by Paul Anber. Another, contemporary, case can be found in Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World*, when young Chira cannot afford a proper funeral for her father and is told to resort to his town union. Anber explains that, after their first urban migrations, during the 1930s and 40s, the Igbo 'formed mutual benefit associations, credit societies, and "improvement" organisations, which had ties with their rural homelands'. Referring to ethnic unions in general, Ukoha Ukiwo similarly claims that their origin has been traced 'to migrants who conglomerated in the colonial urban environment, which was unfamiliar, unfriendly and insecure'. Earlier in his study, Ukiwo indeed highlights the fact that ethnicity can be identified not only 'in conflictive or competitive relations', but also 'in the context of co-operation'. In other words, it is interesting to see how, despite popular disassociations of the city with tradition, it is the perceived isolation and hostility of urban environments that can foster and/or strengthen ethnic ties usually located in the village.[159]

Achebe, however, points out that the Igbo town unions 'did not concern themselves with pan-Igbo unity nor were they geared to securing an advantage over non-Igbo Nigerians', but were 'an extension of the Igbo individualistic ethic' and *communal* organisation, since '[t]he Igbo have no compelling traditional loyalty beyond town or village.' In this sense, it is not entirely inaccurate to suggest, as Simon Gikandi does, that the UPU is 'an important synecdoche' of 'the Igbo community' in *NLE*; a community whose 'values of "tribe" […] run counter to [a] Pan-Nigerian vision'. In fact, it is evident that what concerns the Union, and the reason why Obi is given the Umuofia Scholarship in the first place, is to have a son of their own village 'in the vanguard of [that] march of progress', 'at [that] momentous epoch' of the transition to independence (*NLE* 36). The reception thus demonstrates what the young man means for the Union and the people of Umuofia in general: 'an investment which must yield heavy dividends' (*NLE* 36), as Booth observes. Even if the Secretary's welcome address speaks of 'gratitude' and 'honor', the language is one of ownership and describes an economic transaction. Through Obi,

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[158] Interestingly, Achebe himself switches from medicine to Arts after his first year at university, because 'the realm of stories' would not forsake him. See Chinua Achebe, 'My Home Under Imperial Fire', in *Home and Exile* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books [2000] 2003), pp. 1-35 (p. 21).

[159] Paul Anber, 'Modernisation and Political Disintegration: Nigeria and the Ibos', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 5:2 (1967), 163-179 (p. 171). See also Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Notes on Grief* (London: 4th Estate, 2021), pp. 59-60. Ukiwo, 'The Study of Ethnicity', pp. 15 and 8.

Umuofia can 'now join' the 'march towards political irredentism, social equality, *and* economic emancipation' (*NLE* 36, my emphasis). Obi is 'an invaluable possession' of the village of Umuofia. In fact, the President quotes the saying 'Ours is ours, but mine is mine'(Ibid.): Obi is an asset to his village community, although it is in the city that he must play his role and generate capital.[160]

The UPU provides an essential link between village and city, between Obi and Umuofia, while also playing a key role in Obi's alienation from his family and community, as both Frank and Ogude, cited above, note. Andrew Kalaidjian rightly points out that, in the first chapter, 'the UPU is juxtaposed to Mr Green and the country club' in their attitudes towards Obi's conviction. Compared to Joseph Conrad's Kurtz later in the novel (*NLE* 121), Obi's boss, Mr Green, stands for the colonial administration of the time, perhaps even Achebe's own version of Joyce Cary's Rudbeck in *Mister Johnson*: in Jago Morrison's words, a '[model] of selfless service', patronising, racist, and utterly convinced that the whole experiment of independence can only be a failure. However, Morrison interestingly claims that, through Mr Green and the UPU, 'Achebe suggests a potential commonality between the elder of "tradition" and the bureaucrat of "modernity" in the ethos of disinterested public service they are supposed to share'. Following this comparison of their similar characteristics in different systems, Mr Green and the UPU can be understood as the rock and the hard place between which Obi finds himself towards the end of the novel, as Booth explains. Not so much because they represent the British and Igbo cultural systems respectively, but because they both stand for, more or less literally, the financial obligations that eventually lead Obi to take the first bribe, as is shown later in this section.[161]

While I foreground here the importance of the economic aspect of Obi's relationship with his Union, this central conflict is explained by Gikandi as 'a struggle between individual and group fantasy'. Similarly, Ogude claims that, at his reception, Obi again 'fails to live up to the fantasies the people have about him, fantasies grounded on lived colonial mimicry', when he wears the wrong clothes and speaks the wrong kind of English (*NLE* 35-7). In essence, both Gikandi and Ogude identify a sort of liminality in the text, contained in 'the marginal spaces symbolized by the nation and the city', which Obi fails

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[160] Achebe, *There Was a Country*, p. 75; Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language & Ideology in Fiction* (London: James Currey, 1991), p. 95; Booth, *Writers & Politics*, p. 96.

[161] Andrew Kalaidjian, *Exhausted Ecologies: Modernism and Environmental Recovery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 183; Joyce Cary, *Mister Johnson* (London: Everyman [1939] 1995); Jago Morrison, 'Tradition and Modernity in Chinua Achebe's *African Trilogy*', *Research in African Literatures*, 49:4 (2018), 14-26 (p. 25); Booth, *Writers & Politics*, p. 95. For Achebe's thoughts on Cary's novel, see Achebe, 'My Home Under Imperial Fire'.

to traverse as expected by those who have 'invent[ed]' him, to use Gikandi's terms.[162] While Gikandi focuses mostly on the temporal liminality presented by 'the period of transition from colonialism to national independence', Ogude refers mainly to the spatial liminality that exists 'in the trafficking between Umuofia and Lagos'. In either case, the UPU members are the 'sojourners' (*NLE* 5) who seem better equipped to inhabit this 'hiatus' between tradition and modernity, because they do not hold onto what Gikandi calls 'collapsing' 'binary oppositions'.[163]

As *local cosmopolitans*, says Ogude, the UPU members 'are bound to local power structures and loyalties', and, unlike Obi, they 'carry their traditions with them' when they travel from the village to the city. It is thus that they 'can look at both cultures at once, celebrating certain forms of cosmopolitanism while displaying an awareness of local values they are still indebted to'. Their sense 'of modernity is anchored in' familiar and controllable 'signs', and in the ease with which they move between 'the so-called modern and traditional spaces'. Crucially, 'the sojourners return to a known place called Umuofia', whereas 'Obi returns to a vague construct called Nigeria'. Indeed, according to Ogude, the UPU members' *local cosmopolitanism* provides a form of 'contestation' to or appropriation of the colonial narrative of modernity. However, as this analysis demonstrates, there are two key issues that explain Obi's failure as a *local cosmopolitan*, his inability to return home and inhabit tradition and modernity simultaneously: the international character of his travels, as opposed to his kinsmen's movement from village to city, and the very specific role he is assigned in the postcolonial nation.[164]

Gikandi tellingly claims that 'Achebe strives to create specific social spaces (such as the city, the country, and the club)', and 'that space (rather than time) is the key to representation' in *NLE*. This is because in this novel, unlike what happens in *Things Fall Apart*, 'history and transformation are not as important as their *consequences*'. It is through 'the descriptions of such spaces', says Gikandi, that Achebe can 'portray the different, and sometimes contradictory, social spaces that make up Nigeria'. These spaces may be defined by specific social practices, but are of course also characterised, and connected through, economic and ecological flows. What remains of this section first follows Obi to his native village and then moves to the urban socioeconomic centre where most of the plot develops.[165]

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[162] Gikandi, *Reading*, pp. 85 and 95; Ogude, 'Cosmopolitanism', p. 252.

[163] Gikandi, *Reading*, p. 82; Ogude, 'Cosmopolitanism', p. 253.

[164] Gikandi, *Reading*, p. 82; Ogude, 'Cosmopolitanism', pp. 252-253.

[165] Gikandi, *Reading*, p. 85, my emphasis.

After what appears to be a successful job interview with the Public Service Commission, Obi decides to visit his hometown Umuofia, in the Eastern Region. This is the first time he visits the place after being abroad, and this journey establishes key socio-material connections between village and city, both at the individual and communal level. The lorry leaves Obi at Onitsha, where a '"pleasure car" [is] waiting […] to convey him in proper state to Umuofia, some fifty miles away' (*NLE* 54). First, however, Obi looks around 'the great Onitsha market', where he discovers characteristically urban elements: a jeep 'blar[ing] out local music from a set of loudspeakers', two men selling fake medicine, a man begging for food from a group of women selling *garri* (Ibid.). Even if this is a big market, Onitsha is still a village, one which boasts of cars, scammers, and poverty, and is far from the popular image of rural calm and virtue. As a middle-stop between Lagos and Umuofia, Onitsha constitutes an example of one of the 'astonishingly varied' 'actual settlements […] in the real history', which do not conform to neatly defined categories.[166]

Moreover, to confirm that change and colonial capitalism are not circumscribed to urban settings, during Obi's homecoming celebration, an elder comments on the concept of greatness before and after colonialism: in the time of Obi's grandfather, greatness used to be measured by 'titles', 'barns' and 'large numbers of wives and children. Greatness is now in the things of the white man' (*NLE* 62). This is why, explains the elder, Obi has been sent 'to the white man's land' (Ibid.): to acquire a colonial education and, subsequently, a European post, which would in turn enable Obi to rise above the rest of his fellow countrymen. As Adebola Fawole argues, in pre-colonial Umuofia, 'collective glory' is 'a result of hard work that is evident to everyone, in line with a communal way of life. Sudden wealth without antecedent labour would have been an anomaly.' At the time of *NLE*, on the other hand, Obi is not only expected, but apparently able to start his luxurious life practically as soon as he returns from England; an immediacy that will become even more evident as the oil industry grows. However, as Gikandi insightfully asks, 'How can young men like Obi hope to escape from the prisonhouse of the colonizing structure if the ideology of colonialism determines the values by which they live and are judged by their elders?'[167]

What is more, claims Booth, 'Obi is expected to repay his debt to the village […] by keeping up a life of conspicuous expenditure' because, as the elder says, this is the new way to achieve greatness, and this is what Umuofians 'demand of […] their educated,

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[166] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 1.

[167] Adebola Fawole, 'Are Cultural Dimensions Indicators of Corrupt Practices? Insights from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Anthills of the Savannah*', *Journal of Literary Studies*, 34:2 (2018), 13-26 (p. 23); Gikandi, *Reading*, p. 88.

Europeanised son'. This conspicuous consumption is defined by Thomas J. Biersteker as 'consumption of imported consumer items, acquisition of a Mercedes, taking a new wife, or throwing a big party'. Other forms of consumption include the construction of 'a large home in the village or meeting expenses for extended family members'. In other words, greatness during this period equals what Ademakinwa calls 'keep[ing] up with the Joneses', an end to which 'any means [is] considered suitable', and whose benefits are reaped by rural and urban dwellers alike. According to Fawole, these expectations derive from the idea that the 'individualistic tools' used to acquire this material wealth, in this case Obi's salary, 'will work in collectivist societies' such as the Igbo. The elder's comment is thus key, since it registers a shift in the clan's *perception* and *measurement* of wealth: this is now signalled, as Ogude says, by 'money, a new instrument of commodity transaction'. All this means that Obi's new position in turn entails a closer imbrication of village and city.[168]

It is worth noting here that the initial intrusion of colonial capitalism is in fact briefly registered by Achebe towards the end of *Things Fall Apart* with the following words: 'The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia.' This new trade and money, the narrator explains, are the reasons why some people in Umuofia do not 'feel as strongly as Okonkwo about the new dispensation', as Williams notes. This quote shows the beginning of the commodification of nature in Umuofia, the arrival of capitalism '*as a project*', as '*a way of organizing nature*'. From this moment on, the nonhuman natural world, so vitally intertwined with pre-colonial Igbo life and culture, starts its transformation into abstract 'Nature with a capital "N". This passage then marks the start of a new relationship of separation and exploitation between nature and the Igbo, who, as Elaine Savory explains, were once 'centrally concerned with the complex and perpetually thoughtful relation between people and the environment'.[169]

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[168] Booth, *Writers & Politics*, pp. 95-96; Thomas J. Biersteker, quoted in Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, p. 37; Ademakinwa, '"Acquisitive Culture"', p. 290; Fawole, 'Cultural Dimensions', p. 24; Ogude, 'Cosmopolitanism', pp. 253. Pervasive consumerism and conspicuous consumption are still relevant issues in contemporary Nigeria. Discussing the responsibility of writers 'to serve society' by offering literature as a means 'of social improvement', novelist Dibia Humphrey is reported by Griswold as arguing that 'Nigeria could be and do anything […], if only its people could learn to forgo the excessive materialism and conspicuous consumption that the precolonial social hierarchy established for the elite and the oil-boom years encouraged in everyone else.' Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, pp. 58-59. Similarly, Adichie writes of her late father: 'He was not materialistic, and this would not be so remarkable if he were not a Nigerian living in Nigeria, with its hard-nosed grasping ethos, its untrammelled acquisitiveness from bottom to top.' *Notes on Grief*, p. 50.
[169] Achebe, *Things*, p. 168; Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 411; Moore, *Capitalism*, p. 2, emphasis in the original; Savory, 'Ecocritical Awareness', p. 254.

By the time of *NLE,* the process of separation is pretty much complete. As explained in the previous chapter and as noted by Jennifer Wenzel and Danica Savonick, by the time Achebe is writing his second novel, colonial trade in palm oil and kernel, brilliantly represented in John Munonye's *Oil Man of Obange*, has already been replaced by the newly-discovered petroleum. Although the first oil boom starts in 1964, it is still possible to trace the growing pervasiveness of this extractive colonial capitalism from *Things Fall Apart* to *NLE*. Consequently, if, as Savory claims, balance is 'a key principle in traditional Igbo culture, clearly beginning with self-regulation', the society depicted in *NLE* is far from it. Following Neil Lazarus, to the superimposition of an individualistic capitalist system onto a communal society, must be added a prioritisation of capital accumulation and luxury goods, achieved through a highly unequal, extractivist and consumerist relationship with the natural world.[170]

The village is now a place of poverty, and the new greatness is to be found in the city. The joyous and celebratory mood of Obi's homecoming quickly wears away after the guests leave and he has time to really see his parents. His mother is ill and has become 'old and frail' in the time Obi is away, and 'his father too [is] all bones' (*NLE* 63). In the first chapter we also learn that Umuofia is 'a village […] where men and women toil from year to year to wrest a meager living from an unwilling and exhausted soil' (13). Even if this hard rural life, comparable to that described in Ngũgĩ's *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*, as well as to the one endured by Munonye's oil man and Nwankwo's villagers, 'is contrasted with the bustling hub of Lagos', as Kalaidjian notes, this does not mean that village and city stand in binary opposition. As Lazarus points out, rural poverty is a result of the process described in the previous paragraph, as well as cause and consequence of the development of an urban workforce. Similarly, Garth Myers explains: 'Under colonialism, rural-to-urban migration seems to have been fueled as much by the pull factor of perception as by actual opportunity, and by the push factors of rural landlessness, herdlessness, involution [progressive subdivision of inherited land], poverty and lack of employment.' As is frequently represented in postcolonial urban literature, the main consequence of this movement 'was large numbers of the rural poor becoming the urban poor', a situation that 'only became more extreme in the independence era in many

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[170] Jennifer Wenzel, 'Petro-Magic-Realism: Toward a Political Ecology of Nigerian Literature', *Postcolonial Studies*, 9:4 (2006), 449-464 (p. 452); Savonick, '"The problem of locomotion"', p. 672; John Munonye, *Oil Man of Obange* (London: Heinemann, 1971); Savory, 'Ecocritical Awareness', p. 254; Lazarus, 'Postcolonial Theory', p. 12. See also Ademakinwa, '"Acquisitive Culture"', p. 289; Morrison, 'Tradition and Modernity', p. 17.

countries' and a consequence of the lack of industrialization to accompany this urban growth.[171]

Indeed, caused by the shift in wealth measures and acquiring methods, rural poverty is one of the issues that fosters the kind of internal migration that Ogude identifies in the UPU members and that Griswold claims accounts for 'two-thirds of the urban growth' that took place after independence. As the UPU members themselves acknowledge, 'it [is] money, not work, that [has] brough them to Lagos' (*NLE* 91). Moreover, part of this money inevitably returns to the village thanks to 'the African extended-family system' explained by Ademakinwa, where those in government are expected to cater for a large retinue of relatives even if it is detrimental to their positions and incomes'. As in Williams's discussion of town and country, village and city are linked by the flow of both people and capital. For the time being, however, Obi can only think about his responsibilities towards his immediate family and, even before securing the European post that will supposedly enable him to afford all this, he is already rightly worried about his finances (*NLE* 69-70).[172]

Socio-ecological imbrications can of course also be found within the city, contributing to Achebe's construction of an urban ecology that is far from simple, or, indeed, unnatural. The novel's second chapter offers a comparison of Lagos before and after Obi's stay in England, whose purpose seems to be to show how much Nigeria has changed in the almost four years that Obi has been away, although what it actually portrays is Obi's changing perception and knowledge of the city, and the kind of *planned violence* that is enacted there. This chapter is particularly interesting because it is the only one of the nineteen chapters, apart from the first (which is divided into the present of the trial and the beginning of Obi's story), that does not fit into the chronological order of the circular narrative. While discussing Achebe's 'plotting' strategy in *NLE*, Gikandi claims that it 'retards or confuses the temporal process'; that 'there is no logic in the way Achebe treats time', and that it 'seems to move to and fro, aimlessly, without a centre of significance', to signify the lack of 'an authentic logic to sustain' the world of the novel. While the narrative is not linear and there are certainly temporal jumps throughout the novel that might initially confuse the reader, there is definitely a sense of progression in that, as stated earlier, the story follows Obi's downfall. Even if the novel adopts, as Wilson says, 'the

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[171] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (London: Penguin Books, [1967] 2002), pp. 2 and 6; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood* (London: Penguin Random House, [1977] 2023); Munonye, *Oil Man*, pp. 141-142; Nwankwo, *Mercedes*, pp. 6, 16 and 24-25; Kalaidjian, *Exhausted Ecologies*, p. 174; Lazarus, 'Postcolonial Theory', p. 13; Myers, *African Cities*, p. 53.

[172] Ogude, 'Cosmopolitanism', p. 252; Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, p. 146; Ademakinwa, '"Acquisitive Culture"', p. 292; Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 64-76.

form of a flashback set within the frame of an existential present moment', events are generally narrated in chronological order from the second half of the first chapter onwards, until they return to the starting point, Obi's trial.[173]

The second chapter however, does seem to conform to Gikandi's observation that '[p]lotting disperses centres of meaning […] or juxtaposes opposed situations', since 'Achebe [moves] through several time frames within the space of a few pages'. This second chapter also differs in focus from the rest of the novel, precisely because of its detailed attention to different parts of the city, which cannot be found anywhere else. While Câmpu recognises here an exposure of the gap 'between the few rich people and the multitude of the poor', this juxtaposition goes beyond a mere demonstration of 'the dubious quality of urban hierarchy'. Obi's first experience of Lagos is an indirect one when he is still a boy in Umuofia, through a soldier's account, after which and for 'years afterwards, Lagos [is] always associated with electric lights and motorcars in Obi's mind'. His first visit to Lagos, before flying to England, does not change this view much; it only adds to it with a vision of one of the many women with whom Joseph Okeke, his childhood friend, spends his time (*NLE* 15-6). Before Obi's departure, then, Lagos seems to conform neatly to the idea of the big city as a place of 'lights and glamour', in Gikandi's words; the site of pleasure and sin.[174]

However, contrary to Akande's reading, I argue that, when Obi experiences the city for a second time, now as one of its inhabitants upon his return from England, he discovers another side of Lagos that presents a more complex picture of its socio-spatial unevenness: the slum areas, which he is surprised to find standing 'side by side with the cars, electric lights, and brightly dressed girls' (*NLE* 17). The description next moves to an open drain and 'a very strong smell of rotting flesh' from a dead dog run over by a car (Ibid.). Street-food sellers are then mentioned, right before the text alludes to 'the night-soilman' and his 'trailing clouds of putrefaction' (18). As Gikandi says, these are the 'harsh realities' that have hitherto been hidden from view; realities that result from 'the new postcolonial culture' and that Lagos, as a '[signifier]' of 'modernity', simultaneously 'reveals and conceals'. The city is certainly an uneven territory, and the gap between rich and poor will only widen with time. But it is not urbanisation as such that is responsible for these inequalities. Moreover, in these visual and olfactory images, we encounter diverse forms of

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[173] Wilson, 'Eliot and Achebe', p. 222; Gikandi, *Reading*, pp. 91-92.
[174] Gikandi, *Reading*, pp. 92 and 88; Câmpu, 'Tradition Versus Modernity', p. 3.

human-nonhuman entanglements: fuel, electricity, water, dead matter, waste, metal, and rubber combine in this description of a night in Lagos.[175]

On the other hand, this description contrasts markedly with what Kalaidjian calls 'a particularly pastoral poem' that Obi writes during his first year in England (*NLE* 19), which the critic understands to be a foreshadowing of 'the troubles' Obi will face later in the novel. Along these lines, and read together with Obi's other poem, 'Nigeria', also written in England (*NLE* 118), the main purpose of Obi's writing in the novel seems to be to show both how little he actually knows the country he has returned to, what Ogude calls his 'romantic idea of Nigerian nationhood', and the level of colonial rural idealisation he holds on to while abroad, which in turn greatly differs from the image we get during his first visit to Umuofia. In fact, Gikandi interprets Obi's poetry, and his quest to '[create] a new, purer world, out of language and the imagination', as an indication of the main character's 'quixotic' nature: Obi's Nigeria can only exist in his poems because his 'ideals are based on "books" in the sense that they are never shown to derive from the realities of the country, but are rather conceived in his imagination as moral codes which can be imposed on reality'. Both Lagos and Umuofia '[are] part of the Nigeria he had in mind' while living in England (*NLE* 18), and both actual spaces challenge Obi's poetic constructs from the moment he returns.[176]

Even if Obi acknowledges his ignorance of the place and calls this 'the real Lagos' (*NLE* 18), he is happy to get away from it, and the narrative then glides into the 'noisy and crowded' streets of the Lagos mainland on a Saturday night, full of music and light (19). After almost running over a cyclist in the busy streets, Obi changes setting yet again, this time more abruptly, and readers find themselves going 'from the Lagos mainland to Ikoyi', in Lagos Island, 'from a bazaar to a funeral', with 'the vast Lagos cemetery' in between. Having once been 'a European reserve', Ikoyi now houses 'some Africans in "European posts"' (20), and constitutes an example of the spatial colonial legacy identified by Myers: regarding 'internal form and spatial structure', in African cities there is usually the 'related' presence of both 'segregation and segmentation of the urban landscape', and a 'high degree of inequality'.[177]

Indeed, Obi's impression of the two places as 'two cities in one' (*NLE* 20) is evocative of Fanon's famous description of the 'colonial world' as 'a world cut in two', where the 'two zones are opposed,' and 'follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity'. In

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[175] Akande, 'City Life', pp. 6-7; Gikandi, *Reading*, pp. 87-88.
[176] Kalaidjian, *Exhausted Ecologies*, pp. 174-175; Ogude, 'Cosmopolitanism', p. 251; Gikandi, *Reading*, pp. 98-99.
[177] Myers, *African Cities*, p. 53.

Obi's comparison with the 'twin kernels separated by a thin wall in a palm-nut shell', however, 'the native town', to use Fanon's term, is 'shiny black and alive', whereas the 'settler's town', in this case Ikoyi, is 'powdery white and dead' (*NLE* 20). Despite its 'luxurious' accommodation and 'extensive greenery, Ikoyi [is] like a graveyard' (*NLE* 20). In sum, with its top-to-bottom colonial planning and its exclusionary character, Ikoyi, like Abuja later, participates in an act of structural, *planned violence* that affects human and nonhuman nature. At this point in the narrative, then, when Obi has just secured the things that most of his countrymen from the UPU can only dream about—the 'European post', the car, and the flat in Ikoyi—he nonetheless feels cold and lonely in his own house, where there is 'no corporate life' and which never becomes an actual home for him (*NLE* 20).[178]

This idea is reinforced by a further reference and more extensive description of Obi's estrangement from his neighbours much later in the novel, when he receives an unexpected visit. The reader then learns that Obi knows 'none of [his neighbours] by name, and only some by sight. They [are] all Europeans.' He speaks to one of them regularly, but only because this man is in charge of collecting money to pay the gardener (*NLE* 101-2). This is the kind of physical (and social) separation that Frank refers to, first exemplified, as this critic points out, by the fact that Joseph's room is no longer suitable accommodation for Obi on his return from England (*NLE* 40). Because of his English education and his senior civil service post, due to his participation in the new greatness, Obi is housed in an elite part of the city to which 'natives' have only recently gained access, like the country club where Mr Green plays tennis. However, this does not mean that Obi is fully integrated into these spaces; most probably, his presence in them is merely tolerated. This is in fact the other side of the new greatness discussed earlier. Like Fanon's 'underdeveloped middle class', which 'is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace', Obi is simultaneously alienated from his countrymen and excluded, both financially and socially, from the European circles in which he is now forced and/or expected to move.[179]

As explained earlier, Obi's value is directly related to his English education. On his return to Lagos after his first visit to Umuofia, Obi starts the job for which he has been interviewed, a post on the Scholarship Board. This is when he effectively becomes a member of Fanon's 'underdeveloped middle class', the 'national middle class which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime'. This group is mostly made up of the 'university and merchant classes'. It is identified by 'the profoundly cosmopolitan mold

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[178] Fanon, *Wretched*, pp. 38-39.
[179] Frank, 'Alienation', p. 1096; Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 149.

that its mind is set in', as well as by its being a considerably small number of members, 'concentrated in the capital'. Crucially, it 'has practically no economic power', and, as just noted, is in no way comparable to the group it strives to replace. In fact, after proudly rejecting his first offer of a bribe from a certain Mr Mark, who is looking to help his sister's application for a Federal Scholarship, Obi reflects on the importance of a university degree. He seems to have forgotten his speech at the UPU just some months earlier, where he refers to 'the value of education […] for service, not for […] comfortable salaries' (*NLE* 37). Now, he thinks about the material and social advantages of higher education: it is 'the philosopher's stone', it brings with it monetary rewards and 'amenities' facilitated by the '"European post"', which is 'second only to actually being a European. It [raises] a man from the masses to the élite' (105). By the middle of the novel, then, Obi seems to be losing his initial idealism and appreciating the physical and social separation that his status affords him, while simultaneously exonerating the city from instigating a consumerist behaviour. As mentioned before, the city, as opposed to the village, is where these transformations are played out; but Obi's reflection rightly identifies colonial capitalism as the engine of conspicuous consumption, and colonial education as the means to that end.[180]

Of crucial importance here is also Larkin's connection of the 'British use of infrastructure', the construction of a *colonial sublime*, with the creation 'of a particular sort of modern colonial subject':

> By the 1950s, there emerged the modern salaried office worker, an ideal of colonial development, well educated, speaking English, working in a modern technological office, and spending his leisure time at the cinema or in private clubs. In a sense, it is this *imagined subject* that is immanent in the building of new infrastructures, the *fantasy* to which those structures are addressed.

These *imagined subjects* will indeed later become the members of the *national middle class*, they key word being *imagined*: 'Under the colonial system,' says Fanon, 'a middle class which accumulates capital is an impossible phenomenon'; its existence has been predicated on a *fantasy*, as Larkin calls it, an ideal that is impossible to uphold in the neocolonial system that characterises Nigeria before and after independence. Obi's position as symbol and recipient of colonial modernity is untenable because it is impracticable. The problem is that the members of this class, and everyone around them, are led to believe otherwise by the colonial system itself. And this is one of Obi's main

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[180] Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 149.

predicaments, as Wilson, Booth, and Ademakinwa point out. It is this fundamental unfeasibility that Achebe's novel aims to portray.[181]

Like Obi's flat in Ikoyi, his acquisition of a car speaks directly to the young man's impossible situation. The automobile's symbolic value alienates him from his kinsmen, while he quickly becomes unable to fully enjoy the benefits of his newly achieved automobility. Obi's new Morris Oxford proves surprisingly easy to obtain, only 'a week after he received his letter of appointment' (*NLE* 76). He simply 'walk[s] into the shop and [gets] a brand-new car' by showing 'a letter to the dealers saying that he [is] a senior civil servant entitled to a car advance'; the key word being 'advance', which Obi completely ignores (Ibid.). In other words, Mr Green's letter says that Obi is entitled to a car, not that he can afford it. The car is here the epitome of the 'sudden wealth' discussed earlier, since Obi gets it before any real work is done, as well as an essential accessory of the *modern colonial subject*. The car's symbolic value, its bringing of 'collective glory' that consecrates Obi as a new member of the elite, is made clear in the following chapter, when he attends a UPU meeting for the first time. This is a special occasion for everyone present, especially Obi's friend Joseph, who arrives with him, and is 'going to share in the glory of the car' (*NLE* 89). Here, Obi once again disappoints with his 'casual appearance', which contrasts greatly with Joseph's carefully chosen outfit. The UPU members' reaction, nonetheless, surpasses Joseph's expectations and the car dutifully draws everyone's attention (Ibid.).[182]

The problems, however, do not take long to arrive. The initial cheerfulness quickly gives way to graveness after Obi asks for a four-month grace period before he starts paying back his loan to the UPU. While the president accepts, not everyone seems to agree with him and he warns Obi of the dangers of Lagos and 'its sweetness'. He knows how much Obi is paid and thus concludes: '"What the Government pays you is more than enough unless you go into bad ways"' (*NLE* 94). Even if the UPU members are 'pioneers' in some ways, as the President claims, Obi is Umuofia's first member of the national middle class (Ibid.). They may know how much he earns, but they seem to be unaware of how much he needs to spend in order to fulfil his role. Ironically, they blame the city and its sinful pleasures for Obi's alleged financial mismanagement. The President's warning also stems from the fact that the UPU has learned that Obi's soon-to-be wife, Clara, is an *osu*, an outcast. In the UPU members' worldview, Clara and the city are somehow connected and

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[181] Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, p. 21, emphasis added; Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 150; Wilson, 'Eliot and Achebe', pp. 218-219; Booth, *Writers & Politics*, p. 96; Ademakinwa, '"Acquisitive Culture"', p. 292.
[182] Fawole, 'Cultural Dimensions', p. 23.

both to blame for Obi's 'bad ways'; when, in fact, Clara and Obi meet in England, and it is his time abroad –which, as seen earlier, has resulted in 'a romantic idea of Nigerian nationhood'– that makes Obi disregard Igbo tradition and decide to marry her anyway (*NLE* 85-6). Indeed, for Ogude, 'marrying Clara' equals a '[performance]' of Obi's 'Nigerianness', since it leaves 'ethnic traditions' behind. However, says Gikandi, '[t]he idea of Nigeria is […] one of the central […] causes of tension between Obi and the Umuofians'. And it is Lagos that is made the scapegoat, urbanity that is used to explain these central differences.[183]

A year later, Obi is unable to pay the insurance renewal, an expense he is in fact warned of by Mr Green from the start (*NLE* 108). However, like the acquisition of the car that gets him in this situation in the first place, obtaining an overdraft to pay for the car insurance renewal is supposed to be 'fairly easy for a senior civil servant' (*NLE* 111). Here, Obi reflects on his untenable situation and his argument with the UPU: 'What they did not know was that, having labored in sweat and tears to enroll their kinsman among the shining élite, they had to keep him there'. Now that Obi belongs to 'an exclusive group whose members greet one another with "How's the car behaving?"', it is simply not acceptable for him to acknowledge that he cannot afford this lifestyle (113).

The fantasy of the *modern colonial subject* is likewise encapsulated in the tardiness incurred by a counsellor at Obi's trial, Mr Adeyemi (*NLE* 1-2). Following Savonick, it is possible to identify Adeyemi's plight as one akin to Obi's. In fact, the critic, who defines 'the problem of locomotion' as 'the fantasy of automobility foreclosed by infrastructural conditions of impossibility', claims that 'Obi's trajectory exemplifies' this: 'The novel introduces a narrative path that indicates an investment in colonial promises of progress and modernization'; however, '[i]n contrast to this colonial promise of education as the magical means to a glamorous urban lifestyle and wealth without work', Obi is left corrupt and bankrupt. In other words, Achebe utilises 'the problem of locomotion' as a synecdoche of the unfeasibility of the urban *national middle class*: both Mr Adeyemi and Obi are in possession of elements that signal and should lead to further success and advancement—an education, a well-paid job, a car—but are prevented from achieving this success by (infra)structural impossibilities. In Adeyemi's case, this earns him a humiliating public reprimand from the white judge. In Obi's, it translates into alienation from his kinsmen and society in general, as well as financial insolvency.[184]

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[183] Ogude, 'Cosmopolitanism', p. 251; Gikandi, *Reading*, p. 85.

[184] Savonick, '"The problem of locomotion"', pp. 670 and 672-673. See also Booth, *Writers & Politics*, p. 97; MacDougall, 'The "problem of locomotion"', p. 20; Ademakinwa, '"Acquisitive Culture"', p. 292. Ironically, when Obi forces his way into the doctor's office the day after Clara's abortion, an angry patient

At the national level, it is also important to consider Byron Caminero-Santangelo's observation that 'imported British-made cars like the Morris Oxford further entrenched colonial economic relations by diverting Nigerian wealth back to the colonial metropole'. In Booth's words, 'Europe has not only given Nigeria and Obi their new political ideals. It has also given them access to irresistible material goods.' Goods that are not produced in Nigeria. This is true not only of cars but also of all other luxury goods whose acquisition identifies the owner as a member of the *underdeveloped middle class*, as being great by the new standards. Ironically enough, it is this group, the one which is supposed to lead the country *into* independence, that is responsible for establishing and maintaining these neocolonial economic relationships with the former coloniser, as Fanon explains. Moreover, the conspicuous consumption of foreign goods, in this case cars, generates more and more waste and pollution, and is of course inextricably linked with energy production and consumption. This is further explored in the following section of the chapter.[185]

As Savonick notes, the second half of the novel registers Obi's free-fall from the pile of financial obligations he has had to assume and, on his return from local leave, more problems await. Obi hits rock bottom with his mother's death, when he cannot afford to give her the funeral she deserves and everyone expects of him. He decides not to waste money 'on petrol' going to Umuofia but 'to send all the money he [can]' instead (*NLE* 183-4). The UPU members accuse him of not caring and, ironically, some again blame the city and Clara for Obi's apparent disdain for 'his home and his people' (181-2). After the shock, his mother's death brings Obi 'peace' (187), and then a feeling of freedom: 'He, too, [has] died. Beyond death there are no ideals and no humbug, only reality' (190). In Gikandi's words, '[Obi's] spirit seems to have been released from the *moral fantasy* with which he had enshrouded himself' when, the next time he has the chance, he takes the bribe he is offered. With time, he is able to pay off all his debts, although he is never comfortable with the situation. On the day 'he [realizes] he [can] stand it no more', Obi is arrested (193).[186]

Yes, Obi is naïve, idealistic, and inexperienced. But his situation, as that of his nascent country, is socially, economically, and ecologically unsustainable. By the time Obi realises this, it is too late. In Booth's words, 'Obi's course if he is to continue as society demands is corruption or massive debt', a point also made by Fawole. Importantly,

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accuses him of thinking he has a right to do this just because he has a car, and calls him 'Beast of no nation' (*NLE* 173).

[185] Byron Caminero-Santangelo in Savonick, '"The problem of locomotion"', p. 673; Booth, *Writers & Politics*, p. 95; Fanon, *Wretched*, pp. 152-153.

[186] Savonick, '"The problem of locomotion"', p. 672; Gikandi, *Reading*, p. 100, emphasis added.

Achebe's focus on an individual character must not fool us into missing his wider point: his account of Obi's dilemma shows a much shrewder structural understanding that speaks to Nigeria's past and present concerns. Through an examination of Obi as a member of Fanon's *underdeveloped middle class* –as an example of the ideal *modern colonial subject* that will become the new ruling class and to which the illusion of the *colonial sublime* is addressed, as Larkin explains, –it is possible to say that Achebe's *NLE* shows how, just like opacity in the oil industry, this culture of bribery and corruption for social advancement also seems to have been established during colonial times, as a feature of capitalist relations. As Wilson signals, it is not just Obi but the entire clan, both in Umuofia and Lagos, that is no longer at ease; but it is Obi who, in this case, personally feels the impact of this uneasiness.[187]

Nonetheless, as this analysis shows, most critics interpret Obi's ruin as a moral failure caused by his urban lifestyle or the city's negative influences, because it is in the city where his fall takes place, thus only attending to one side of Achebe's complex rural-urban imaginary. This is illustrated once again in Savonick's claim that Obi's is a story of 'disenchantment' with the 'urban promise' of 'progress and modernization', despite the fact that the promise of modernity goes beyond, and was never made by, the city. Indeed, the present analysis registers a continuity and pervasive development of the extractive colonial capitalism introduced in *Things Fall Apart*, which redeems the city of its alleged corruptive influence on the young man, complicating and nuancing Achebe's critique. The unfeasibility of Obi's position has thus been examined with a specific focus on village-city links, as well as on socio-material relations within urban space, in order to suggest that Achebe's narrative not only exonerates the urban, but also, and consequently, challenges the village/city binary; what Williams calls the 'ideological separation' of rural and urban developments. In sum, because they are both affected by and enmeshed in (neo)colonial capitalism, the rural and the urban, human and nonhuman nature, are not opposed but deeply imbricated and mutually constituted in *NLE*. If this wider structural point is not so self-evident in Achebe's second novel, it becomes much clearer in his fourth one, *A Man of the People*.[188]

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[187] Booth, *Writers & Politics*, p. 96; Fawole, 'Cultural Dimensions', p. 24; Wilson, 'Eliot and Achebe', p. 218.
[188] Savonick, '"The problem of locomotion"', p. 672; Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 64.

2.2. Saved: *A Man of the People*

Whether Obi is in fact saved from disgrace is left to the reader's imagination. His clan, on the other hand, and the nascent Nigerian nation, still hold onto the promises and bright future of independence. In other words, according to Morrison, the novels that compose the so-called African trilogy 'are filled with disquiet, but not yet despair'. The opposite can be said to be the case in *A Man of the People*, Achebe's fourth novel, published in 1966. In fact, although not a 'scatological work' per se, unlike those examined by Joshua D. Esty, *MP* shares some features with this kind of text 'published between 1965 and 1971', since it also '[signals] a wide cultural reorientation in which questions about nationalist excess [begin] to mute the celebrations of independence'. Set in a fictional West African country in 1964, Achebe's second semi-urban novel tells the story of another young man, Odili Samalu, his descent into the land of politics and corruption, and his escape from it, while his country ends up plunged into the chaos of 'a minor reign of terror' and consequent military coup (*MP* 132-5), not unlike the one Nigeria would suffer days after the novel's publication.[189]

NLE and *MP* contain some parallel elements that invite comparative analysis. Relevant here are two groups of characters: on the one hand, Obi; Odili, a village school teacher; and, to a certain extent, Max Kulamo, Odili's socialist friend and lawyer, belonging to the younger generation. On the other, Sam Okoli, Minister of State in *NLE*; Chief M. A. Nanga, MP and Minister of Culture; and T. C. Kobino, Minister of Public Construction, belonging to the older one. This distinction is important because both novels '[explore] the theme of intergenerational struggle between the older and established elite', unashamed members of Fanon's *underdeveloped bourgeoisie*, and the younger characters.[190] The older generation is quite homogeneous. They belong to the group that Obi calls 'the old Africans at the top' (*NLE* 44), who have 'left school […] in Standard Six' and 'worked steadily to the top through bribery' (23); the group that, like Chief Koko, thinks they have been poisoned when unknowingly drinking OHMS ('locally processed') coffee, instead of the 'usual Nescafé' (*MP* 31). In fact, Chief Nanga is especially proud of his education, and claims that 'standard six in those days is more than Cambridge today' (10). According to both novels, Obi seems to be right about one thing: this older generation has no problem choosing corruption over massive debt, and, as shall be demonstrated, its members are essential cogwheels in the machinery of neocolonialism.

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[189] Morrison, 'Tradition and Modernity', p. 26; Joshua D. Esty, 'Excremental Postcolonialism', *Contemporary Literature*, 40:1 (1999), 22-59 (p. 24).
[190] Orock, 'Chinua Achebe's Postcolony', p. 84.

The situation is not so clear-cut with the younger group. Their only shared trait seems to be that they all belong 'to the hybrid class of Western-educated and snobbish intellectuals' which the Prime Minister decries during the scandal of 1960 that allows Nanga to climb to prominence (*MP* 5). However, even this indictment does not apply equally to Obi, Odili and Max. While they all have a university education, there are significant differences between them, and their treatment in the novels conveys 'Achebe's pessimism' regarding Nigeria's political future'. These three characters in fact illustrate Booth's claim that 'Achebe's educated Nigerian is portrayed with doubts and ironies', and that 'education' does not entail 'personal honesty', nor are these qualities located 'in any clearly identifiable social group or class'.[191]

Indeed, as this analysis shows, another characteristic that *MP* shares with 'excremental writing' is that it also 'tends towards complex models of systemic guilt, rather than toward the sharp absolutions and resolutions that attend moral or political binaries', while the previous section has attempted to demonstrate that this is also the case when analysing *NLE*'s deeper layers. As we have seen, Obi's English education in fact makes him a member of the elite but, although he lacks self-awareness and a knowledge 'of larger political issues', as Booth points out, he is never entirely comfortable in that role. He enjoys the material advantages of his position but does not embrace corruption as a way of life. Odili and Max, on the other hand, are intellectuals in the stricter sense of the word, following Griswold's definition. They have 'institutional affiliation' and 'rationalized practice' respectively. More importantly, they 'aspire to change the system'. However, they play by the system's rules and thus do not succeed.[192]

MP's plot unravels against these intergenerational differences, and they are in fact key to understanding the damaging presence of capitalism as presented in the novel. Even if Odili, unlike Obi, is spared, it is possible to see in this text the growing severity of the socio-ecological issues already identified in *NLE*. While the village-vs-city trope is not as present in *MP*, since the main character is based in his native village, the apparent contrast is still there, and so are socio-material flows. Moreover, the ecological consequences of colonial economic relations that start in *Things Fall Apart* are much more evident, now under the guise of neocolonial infrastructural projects. In essence, I argue, *MP* works like its predecessor, *NLE*: it lays bare the differences between village and city and exposes, to an even greater extent, the city's faults, while sprinkling the narrative with clues that point

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[191] Booth, *Writers & Politics*, pp. 109 and 94-95.
[192] Esty, 'Excremental Postcolonialism', p. 35; Booth, *Writers & Politics*, p. 99; Grsiwold, *Bearing Witness*, pp. 209 and 212.

to the real problem and the settlements' intertwinement. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the young men's stories, which lies precisely in the novels' general outlook: if Odili is saved from the claws of corruption and conspicuous consumption, it is to return to a village life outside politics, just like the characters of Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*; not to effect any meaningful change. For the sake of structure, the analysis focuses first on the city of Bori and then on the villages of Anata and Urua, with Max's socialist party acting as link.

Odili visits Bori as Nanga's guest, after the Minister's visit to Anata Grammar School, which both men attended and where Nanga was Odili's teacher around sixteen years earlier. In Bori, we discover Nanga's life as a member of the elite, while we read about the gap between rich and poor and learn about various neocolonial transactions. At the individual level, Nanga exhibits his conspicuous consumption of foreign luxury goods, which is closer to that of Sam Okoli's than Obi's. Both Nanga and Okoli ride American cars, a Cadillac and 'a long De Soto' respectively (*NLE* 42). Odili, a fierce critic of Nanga since the scandal of 1960 up until the Minister's recognition of him during the school visit (*MP* 7-8), is now 'simply hypnotized by the luxury of the great suite assigned to [him]' (33); just like Obi, in *NLE*, is impressed with Okoli's 'luxurious sitting room' and 'enormous radiogram' (77-8).

Interestingly, Odili characterises the national bourgeoisie as the 'handful of [them] – the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best – [that] scrambled for the one shelter [their] former rulers left'. In this image, says Odili, the next stage 'of the struggle' becomes 'the extension of [their] house', which requires unity and unanimity (*MP* 33). Given the level of luxury described and the importance these men place on surrounding themselves with as much comfort as possible, this comparison, which Booth calls 'the most memorable description in all literature of the post-colonial elite', is much more literal than it initially seems. Because this is how greatness is now measured, the bigger the man, the more luxury he needs. And, as explained earlier, this in turn strengthens neocolonial relations by playing into the *fantasy* of the *colonial sublime*: it 'stifles any attempt to develop a sound economic base on which to build national prosperity and an authentic political and cultural identity'; the new nation's capital goes straight back to the colonial metropole. Consequently, this allegedly extended metaphor becomes an excellent example of what Gikandi calls the 'double irony' that characterises the novel, of which Chief Koko's 'ostensible poisoning' is a 'more dramatic example'. The shelter metaphor is both made by Odili while lying on 'the double bed that [seems] to ride on a cushion of air' and has simultaneously figurative and literal meaning (*MP* 33). Crucially, Gikandi explains,

'ironic discourse is generated by the disjunctive rhetoric of postcolonialism:' by 'being told that there has been a radical transition from colonialism to independence', while 'the evidence on the ground seems to point to the continuity and consolidation of colonial institutions'.[193]

At the national level, as a politician, Nanga fulfils his 'historic mission […] of intermediary' between foreign companies that possess the 'material' and 'intellectual resources', and the state; he is 'the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism': Nanga is an agent of the new phase of colonialism whose main consequence is the *radical unevenness* discussed earlier.[194] This can be seen, for example, in the conversation Odili overhears between Nanga and the Minister of Public Construction, about the tarring of a new road between two villages in Nanga's constituency due to the coming elections. Besides declaring that he 'prefer[s] to deal with Europeans' rather than local experts and refusing to wait until the soil is tested, which probably influences the quality of the road, Nanga admits that 'he [has] ordered ten luxury buses to ply the route as soon as it [is] tarred'. These have a total cost of sixty thousand pounds, and are supplied by British Amalgamated, a fictional company whose name might be a pun on Nigeria's colonial origins, 'on never-never arrangement' (*MP* 38). This is an excellent example of the links between politics, neocolonialism and environment, or the neocolonial capitalist metabolic processes involved in infrastructural development. Because Nanga is doing this for his own personal gain, in a system where capital accumulation is always the main objective, the project's benefits for and socio-ecological impact on human and nonhuman nature are not even considered: the whole project is probably detrimental to everyone and everything involved except for Nanga and British Amalgamated. The new road and the buses also participate in the postcolonial *sublime* defined in Chapter One, while directing the flow of goods, people, and capital between and within the city and the village.

Another example of Nanga's neocolonial behaviour is his relationship with the 'young American couple', Jean and John. Nanga seems 'pleased' to be called by them by 'his now almost forgotten Christian name', and Odili attributes this to their being white (*MP* 39). John is supposed to be part 'of a team of experts […] advising [the] government on how to improve its public image in America' (40), but we then learn that he has 'to fly to Abaka at short notice to be present at the opening of a new cement factory built with American capital' (43). This information becomes even more relevant after Jean shows

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[193] Booth, *Writers & Politics*, pp. 100 and 17; Gikandi, *Reading*, pp. 114-115.
[194] Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 152.

Odili the ten houses that the Minister of Construction owns and lets 'to different embassies at three thousand a year each' (49). Later in the novel, Nanga himself is involved in another scandal when it transpires that, years earlier, he used money gained by corruption to build 'three blocks of seven-storey luxury flats at three hundred thousand pounds each' that 'were immediately leased by British Amalgamated at fourteen hundred a month each' (91). In a country where urban construction is either financed by or a way of increasing corrupt capital, it is no coincidence that American capital is involved in cement production. Moreover, as in the case of the road, the considerable environmental impact of this urban construction is never considered. Akande interprets these episodes as bound up with Achebe's preoccupation with 'systemic corruption in the city'. However, I argue, it is clear that Achebe's focus here is not on the city itself but on the Ministers' corrupt neocolonial practices, which, as shown in the previous paragraph, are not limited to the city. Bori is the Ministers' place of work and centre of business –no one would expect luxury houses and seven-storey buildings to be built in the village– but it is misleading to attribute this corruption to the city's negative moral influences, or even to confine corruption and socio-material circulation to urban settings.[195]

The reader learns about Bori through Odili's first person narration, and it is this character that signals the gap between the rich and the poor on more than one occasion and to a much greater extent than Obi. One of the ways in which this is done is through two references to excrement and waste. In the first place, reading 'the daily newspapers' at Nanga's house, Odili comes across a 'notice' 'by the City Clerk of Bori', reminding citizens of the laws governing excrement disposal. Here, Odili muses about the 'surprises and contrasts' of his country, when he finds himself 'reading about pails of excrement from the cosy comfort of a princely seven bathroom mansion with its seven gleaming, silent action, water-closets' (*MP* 36). He then ranks bucket latrines as the least sanitary method of excrement disposal, after pit-latrines, which seem to be the most usual form of disposal at the time of the narrative, and even remembers 'the most squalid single year of [his] life' during which he 'lived as house-boy' in the small town of Giligili (37). It is thus possible to appreciate the aforementioned *double irony* once more. While Odili again points out these contrasts from the comfort of Nanga's mansion, Gikandi also identifies here a certain 'ironic negation' used by Odili 'to distance himself, and his reader, from the language he uses to represent the absurd situation'. In other words, Odili narrates this in a

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seemingly sarcastic and detached tone, even explaining in detail Giligili's residents' 'nightly war on rats' (*MP* 37).[196]

The same can be observed when, later, during Odili's early morning walk after Elsie sleeps with Nanga, the former sees 'Bori stirring'. He comes across 'a night-soil man carrying his bucket of ordure on top of a battered felt hat', he sees 'beggars sleeping under the eaves of luxurious department stores and a lunatic sitting wide awake by the basket of garbage he called his possession' (*MP* 64). Even if Odili 'treats' these issues 'with levity and unconcern', his description is not thus rendered irrelevant or ineffective, as Akande claims. If anything, it allows the reader to understand these inequalities in the light of Odili's comfort and self-absorption, after being a guest at Nanga's mansion and experiencing what he sees as Elsie and Nanga's betrayal.[197]

Following Esty, these excremental references can be read on two different levels. Considering excrement 'as a material object', Odili's observations and reflections are significant because, like *NLE*'s description of the slums, they show the environmental injustice that comes with poverty; as well as the deeply embodied, material, visceral reality of experienced inequality. In this sense, *MP* can be said to expand on *NLE*'s second chapter on Lagos, paying even more attention to the materiality of urban space. On the other hand, says Esty, excrement in 'postcolonial writing' can be analysed 'as a powerful "discursive resource" within a new symbolic order', and thus utilised to 'redress' or reappropriate 'a history of debasement by displaying the failures of development and the contradictions of colonial discourse'. In this sense, if, according to Akande, 'Achebe […] shows concerns about problems commonly associated with the city such as filth, over-crowding' and 'environmental degradation', it is important to foreground that, as explained in the previous paragraph, these problems are being articulated in clear opposition to the elite's conspicuous consumption, through the use of irony.[198]

After all, says Esty, following Warwick Anderson, '[t]he toilet […] is a powerful symbol of technological and developmental superiority', which can reinforce 'the negative valence of shit'. In *MP*'s case, Nanga's seven toilets only reinforce the contrast between the urban residents' living conditions.[199] Crucially, although 'excremental language' is not sustained in Achebe's novels, these references convey the author's construction of an urban cityscape that repeatedly points to the indivisibility of neocolonialism and urban ecological issues: 'To the extent that excrement serves as a sign of failed development

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[196] Gikandi, *Reading*, p. 118.
[197] Akande, 'City Life', p. 15.
[198] Esty, 'Excremental Postcolonialism', p. 26; Akande, 'City Life', p. 16.
[199] Esty, 'Excremental Postcolonialism', p. 29.

[…], it becomes part of a vexed political (and interpretive) question. Is shit the residue of colonial underdevelopment or evidence of failed African government?' The answer to this question of course eschews the kind 'binaristic anticolonial politics' the question itself seems to adopt. This is in line with Gikandi's observation that, throughout 'Achebe's career', we can observe 'the progressive collapse of binary oppositions as the destiny of Africa becomes more localized'.[200] As in Esty's analysis of Armah's *The Beautyful Ones*, in these passages, the 'shit and the gleam are figurative expressions of underdevelopment and overconsumption, of failed modernization in the streets and hypermodernization in the luxury estates'. Interestingly, while 'failed modernization' refers here to infrastructural urban development, 'hypermodenization' alludes to conspicuous consumption. Esty's use of the same term to refer to both issues itself points to a common origin. Unlike Armah's protagonist, who directly and earnestly associates the postcolonial elite with filth, however, Achebe's Odili sarcastically comments on the observed contrasts, or absent-mindedly describes them as part of the cityscape, while being under Nanga's roof; that is, he only indirectly alludes to the link between 'underdevelopment and overconsumption'.[201]

These inequalities are again mentioned during Jean and Odili's night drive around the city. Odili's description contains repeated extreme opposites and references to filth: 'the fresh-smelling, modern water-front' and 'the stinking, maggoty interior'; 'wide, well-lit streets bearing the names of […] well-known politicians' and 'obscure lanes named after some unknown small fish'. It is in 'these back streets', thinks Odili, 'that the City Clerk's notice about pails [is] indeed a live issue' (*MP* 49). Because it is Jean who is driving and seems to have a better knowledge of Bori than Odili, neocolonialism hangs like a cloud over the whole ride. In fact, after Jean's comment about the Minister of Construction's houses, Odili secretly accuses Jean of '[contaminating]' their fight against corruption 'by espousing it' (49). Later, he is convinced Jean derives some sort of personal pleasure from 'driving through [their] slums', having 'taken hundreds of photographs already to send home to her relations' (50). In Odili's eyes, the city's *radical unevenness* is being mocked or ridiculed here by being turned into a noble cause and a spectacle for Jean, who indeed represents the neocolonial interests that are partly responsible for the issues she finds so fascinating. During this drive, the visible, material consequences of corruption and conspicuous consumption are both crucial to what Odili sees as the perverse 'delight' Jean takes in lecturing Odili about his own country's faults, and an ironic antithesis of postcolonial infrastructural spectacle (50).

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[200] Esty, 'Excremental Postcolonialism', pp. 32 and 35; Gikandi, *Reading*, p. 102.
[201] Esty, 'Excremental Postcolonialism', p. 33.

After confronting Nanga, Odili goes to Max Kulamo's house, a former classmate and lawyer, who describes Nanga as a 'corrupt, empty-headed, illiterate capitalist' (*MP* 67), and claims that all the elite cares about is '[w]omen, cars, and landed property' (69). That same day, Odili learns about and is made 'foundation member' of Max's new political party, the Common People's Convention. The other members are 'mostly professional types', and there is among them a white European, 'from one of the Eastern Bloc countries'. Even though the members cannot agree on whether to identify themselves as communists or not (72), they claim to plan to 'draw in the worker, the farmer, the blacksmith, the carpenter…' once the party is fully formed (71). That is, at least in principle, Max and his party are trying to do what Fanon says is the 'duty' of 'an authentic national middle class' in 'an underdeveloped country': 'to put at the people's disposal the intellectual and technical capital that it has snatched when going through the colonial universities'.[202]

That Max's fight against neocolonialism has an ecological dimension is clear when we read his poem, 'Dance-Offering to the Earth-Mother'. Written seven years earlier, 'during the intoxicating months of high hope soon after Independence', it now reads as a lament, full of 'tragic feeling' (*MP* 73). The last verse that Odili quotes acknowledges and promises to repair the socio-ecological damage caused by colonial capitalism: 'I will rebuild her house, the holy places they raped and plundered, / And I will make it fine with black wood, bronzes, and terracotta' (Ibid.). The poem refers to the high colonial period that is described in *Arrow of God*. Now, in this fictional West African country, the illusion of independence has worn away, and the promise of a socio-ecological restoration sounds hollower than ever. Odili exclaims '"Poor black mother!"', and Max agrees (73). It is at this point that Odili accepts being head of the party in the Eastern region, and the novel moves back to the village for a fierce political campaign.[203]

However, true to its *ironic discourse*, there is another function of Max's poem that needs to be considered, similar to that previously identified regarding Obi's poems in *NLE*. Gikandi also points to a 'quixotic' impulse in Odili's political activity, as 'the only way he can engage with it and still retain what he considers to be his integrity'. I would like to suggest here that Max's ecologically-aware poem also inscribes the lawyer within this *quixotic* world of politics. Like Obi's poems, Max's 'Dance-Offering to the Earth-Mother', and the young men's lament seven years later, betray the fact that their 'ideals are [also] based on "books"', and, like Obi's idealist nationalism, are also incompatible with the new

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[202] Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 150.
[203] Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God* (London: Penguin Books, [1964] 2010).

postcolonial order. The truth is that, although Odili and Max neatly conform to the figure of the intellectual, or perhaps because of this, they both fail to effect any meaningful change; or even survive, both literally and figuratively, in the world of postcolonial politics. Crucially, this ironic critique of the intellectual is another feature that *MP* shares with '[s]catological satire', since, says Esty, 'shit-figures complicate moral and political binaries by diffusing guilt and shame'.[204]

Since Nanga's betrayal, both Max and Odili clearly condemn the postcolonial elite and its neocolonial corruption, and Odili dives deep into a world he has hitherto tried to avoid. However, they both soon fall prey to the system themselves. Indeed, after the Nanga and British Amalgamated scandal, Odili returns from Bori 'with a brand-new Volkswagen, eight hundred pounds in currency notes and assurances that more would be forthcoming' (*MP* 92). While he hires a bodyguard and moves his headquarters to his home village, Urua, Odili remembers his early ambition of becoming a member of the national bourgeoisie, and his later vow 'never to be corrupted by bourgeois privileges of which the car was the most visible symbol' (100). At the campaign launch, Odili becomes for Urua what Obi is for Umuofia. With the same proverb used by the UPU President, '"Ours is ours but mine is mine"' (*MP* 115), Odili is presented as Urua's son, who, if elected, would 'bring [their] share', like Nanga has been doing for Anata for a long time (116). Odili, who so far has refrained from taking Obi's path because he values his 'autonomy' too much (15), is now nevertheless in a very similar position: his village will vote for him, so that he goes to Bori to get what is theirs. Odili, however, is spared, and prevented from even becoming a candidate, by Nanga's party. Even worse is the fact that he is forced to acknowledge his ignorance regarding the origin of his party's funds, and his own lack of interest in this matter (104). Ironically, after the launch, Max tells Odili that the party is being funded not only by Chief Koko's money, but also by British Amalgamated and American capital.

In other words, the obvious differences between Obi on the one hand and Max and Odili on the other –namely, the latter's alleged lack of naivety and their political commitment– only serve to reinforce Achebe's ironic critique of neocolonial capitalism in *MP*, since their failure to fight the system becomes even more significant than Obi's. It is thus possible to say that *MP* also utilises 'excremental satire' as 'an index of national or collective self-implication in folly or excess', since it 'deploy[s] excrementalism' to signal 'the complication of a simplistic anti-comprador position by the recognition that intellectuals are themselves implicated in neocolonial failure'. Odili's apparent recovery of

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[204] Gikandi, *Reading*, pp. 116 and 98; Esty, 'Excremental Postcolonialism', p. 34.

his integrity after leaving Nanga's house, and after his sarcastic excremental references, is as fleeting and futile as Max's Common People's Convention. The young men's *quixotic* ideals, symbolised by Max's poem, soon crumble, and with them any hopes of social reform the reader may have entertained. [205]

After this moment, says Booth, 'the political element of the book [becomes] fragmented and incoherent' when the reader least expects it, leaving behind the *ironic discourse* that characterises its first part. While Gikandi explains this fragmentation as a direct consequence of the uncertainty that characterises the 'historical situation' during which the novel was written –the first years after independence–, Esty again provides an excremental explanation applicable to Achebe's novel. It is possible to say that, like Armah's Ghana, *MP*'s fictional country also 'suffers from a kind of hyperactive metabolism: accelerated modernization means accelerated rot'. Modernisation here equals the development of neocolonial capitalism; and the fast-paced, incoherent action that takes place in the villages of Urua and Anata is thus highly relevant to a socio-ecological reading of the text. As in *NLE*, an examination of the villages in *MP* completes the picture and restores the reputation of the city of Bori, while the savage political campaign exposes the undeterred spread of capitalism and conspicuous consumption, especially regarding rural poverty and infrastructure.[206]

Because of his political campaign, Odili becomes much more involved in village life than Obi, and this affords the novel a different angle into city-village relations, since Odili's return to the village links the past and future fate of town and country in more than one way. The impact of colonial capitalism on the village is in fact mentioned as soon as Odili returns to Anata from Bori. Josiah, the owner of the 'shop-and-bar' close to the Grammar School, has stolen a blind beggar's stick to 'make juju' with. The villagers' reaction is one of anger, and they blame 'the white man's money' for Josiah's greed and lack of scruples (*MP* 76). He is accused of stealing 'in the name of trade' (Ibid.) and one villager exclaims ominously: '"What money will do on this land wears a hat; I have said it"' (77). This money brought by colonialism is definitely a negative element, whose full impact is yet to be felt by the villagers. Josiah's actions, however, are at least partially justified when the reader next encounters a level of rural poverty reminiscent of that depicted in *NLE*.

After visiting Mrs. Nanga, Odili goes to visit Edna Odo, Nanga's soon-to-be second wife, whom the young man has decided to seduce as part of his revenge plan. Edna's

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[205] Esty, 'Excremental Postcolonialism', p. 35.
[206] Booth, *Writers & Politics*, p. 105; Gikandi, *Reading*, p. 105; Esty, 'Excremental Postcolonialism', p. 52.

family is very poor, and actually depend on Nanga to pay for Edna's mother's hospital treatment, which Edna's father tellingly says is costing him 'water and firewood', not simply money (*MP* 84). It is interesting to note here that this pattern of a powerful politician providing health care for a family member in exchange of marriage, to put it simply, is repeated much later in Okoye's *The Fourth World*, set in the slums of contemporary Enugu. Moreover, it is Edna's mother who, later in the novel, calls Odili and Nanga for what they are, 'white man's people', and recognises both her ignorance and lack of participation in political processes (*MP* 97). The woman's apathy towards the two men and their problems is resonant of Fanon's analysis of the masses, who cannot see any material differences in their situations between colonial and independent times: 'The bourgeoisie who are in power vainly increase the number of processions; the masses have no illusions. […] they turn away from this nation in which they have been given no place and begin to lose interest in it.'[207]

Indeed, Mrs Odo's remark finds its material reflection in each family's house. While the Odo house is made of red earth and a thatched roof (*MP* 81), Odili's father's house betrays his prosperous past as District Interpreter. Having once been 'the best and most modern house in Urua', it is 'a stone and cement building' with a corrugated iron roof and wooden jalousies (107). Lastly, Nanga is building a 'very modern four-storey structure' next to his current house, the result of his neocolonial transactions with 'the European building firm of Antonio and Sons whom Nanga [has] recently given the half-million-pound contract to build the National Academy of Arts and Sciences' (88). The houses, then, constitute the material, visible signs of an inequality that is not restricted to the city but that is closely linked to the deals struck therein. Anata and Urua seem to be more uneven than Obi's Umuofia, and exhibit an even stronger (neo)colonial presence. Nanga's four-storey house is in fact a textbook definition of conspicuous consumption, and is the equivalent of the luxury buildings built by the ministers in Bori, thus attesting to the fact that the socio-ecological consequences of corruption are not circumscribed to urban environments and also impact rural landscapes.

Odili's contest of Nanga's seat further exposes and strengthens the links between village and city, while it makes Odili resemble Obi more than the former would have liked to admit. Interestingly, it is rural infrastructure that is used as a weapon in this political fight and further exposes the village's socio-ecological concerns. We first read about this when Couple, an ex-policeman and local councillor, says during the campaign launch that he accepts the politicians' corruption because they are bringing water and electricity to

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[207] Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 169.

Urua (*MP* 114). Moreover, after a personal attack of Odili's father, 'seven Public Works lorries' 'cart away the pipes' for the village's Rural Water Scheme, as a response to Odili's candidacy and his village's support (122-3). After the village Crier announces their full support of Chief Nanga in the coming elections, some of the pipes return to the village, and Odili cannot blame his people for not wanting to 'lose their chance of getting good, clean water, their share of the national cake' (124). It is through rural infrastructure, or the promise of it, that village and city are linked during the campaign. Far from being isolated and peaceful rural retreats free from poverty and corruption, Anata and Urua are necessarily and visibly implicated in these issues. As Nanga cynically explains to Odili's father, '"Whatever we achieve over there in Bori is because we have the backing of people like you at home"' (106), a support won by threatening the villagers' access to clean water and energy.

The novel ends on a very different note from that on which it starts. Odili wakes up in hospital after being attacked by Nanga's thugs during the latter's inaugural campaign. Max has been murdered and his girlfriend Eunice imprisoned. The last chapter describes the events leading to the coup through images of energy and resource consumption, tinder specifically, which is also the material used to build the platform for Nanga's inauguration (*MP* 126). Max is 'felled' by Chief Koko, and the ensuing fight '[strikes] a match and [lights] the tinder of discontent in the land' (132). By the end of the novel, there is both a literal and a metaphorical identification of natural exploitation with violence and chaos, one through which the country consumes itself. Odili is careful to explain where this destructive fire comes from: not the people, they are content waiting for their son to 'bring home [their] share', but the 'unruly mobs and private armies' hired for the campaigns, hired to help keep the national bourgeoisie in power (133). After the army coup that extinguishes the fire, Nanga is arrested, while Odili recovers and marries Edna, using leftover party money to pay Edna's family what is owed for Nanga's previous expenditures. He plans to open a school in his friend's memory.

Despite the military government making Max 'a Hero of the Revolution' and releasing Eunice, the reader knows the country is not headed in a good direction (*MP* 136). Max is a martyr but, one might say, he dies in vain. Neocolonial capitalism and corruption will only keep expanding, in the city and in the village. Odili's acknowledgement of this comes at the very end of the novel, when he reflects on Max's death: 'you [die] a good death if your life [has] inspired someone to come forward and shoot your murderer in the chest – *without asking to be paid*' (*MP* 137, emphasis added). It helps here to return to Esty's concept of *hyperactive metabolism* and its *accelerated rot*, since a coup seems to be

the only possible denouement for the violent and frenzied race to power that takes place during the second half of the novel. In this sense, *MP*'s ending could also be said to represent 'the temporal dislocations of new nationhood', and to '[claim] instead an anti-utopian temporality of deferral and postponement'. *MP*, then, seems to signal postcolonial disillusionment through two distinct but interrelated mechanisms: if the first part of the novel boasts of an *ironic discourse* articulated through Odili's close contact with the postcolonial elite, the second half transforms this irony into a self-consuming competition between the elite and the corrupted intellectuals. Along these lines, the newly-independent nation that is rotten to the core will simply have to wait (and hope) for a better future.[208]

2.3. Conclusion

Discussing corruption in 1983, Achebe states:

> Unlucky is the country where indiscipline is seen by ordinary people as the prerogative of the high and mighty. For, by the same token, discipline will be seen as a penalty which the rank and file must pay for their powerlessness. The consequences of such a view on the mental attitudes of a people are too glaring for words. But that is precisely the view which Nigerian elite groups foster in their private and public behaviour.[209]

This statement is directly related to this analysis of *NLE* and *MP* for three reasons. Firstly, it alludes to the difficulties of putting into words the social impact of political corruption. This is, however, at least one of the main aims of the novels analysed in this chapter. As Gikandi explains, both texts must grapple with the kind of verbalizing difficulties mentioned by Achebe in his essay: 'his referents resist organization into any simple textual framework', because these works represent history 'in the making'; whether this is the birth of a new nation in *NLE*, or the discovery of postcolonial disenchantment in *MP*. Secondly, it denounces the public and private displays of political corruption by the postcolonial elite. Once again, this is also done by *NLE* and *MP*. Thirdly, the city plays a key role in this process, as the site where these public and private displays mostly take place, as well as where the socio-ecological impact of corruption seems to be mostly felt.[210]

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[208] Esty, 'Excremental Postcolonialism', p. 53.
[209] Achebe, 'The Trouble with Nigeria', p. 53.
[210] Gikandi, *Reading*, p. 81.

Indeed, both novels illustrate Williams's claim:

> because the city ordinarily concentrates the real social and economic processes
> of the whole society, […] a point can be reached where its order and
> magnificence but also its fraud and its luxury seem almost […] to belong in the
> city, and to breed there, as if on their own.

That is, a point where the city is blamed for social and environmental faults that respond to larger forces at play.[211]

Moreover, summing up his chapter on the country/city binary in the former colonies, Williams claims that postcolonial 'literature continues to embody the almost infinitely varied experiences and interpretations' of each type of settlement, as well as of the 'vast mobility' that exists between them. He then provides Achebe's *NLE* and *MP* as examples of texts that represent 'the complicated process of educational mobility and new kinds of work in the city'; which, although seemingly distant for a British or European audience, is indeed the sign of a 'connecting process', of 'a common history' that happens 'at different times and in different places'. Besides referring specifically to the two novels analysed in this chapter and identifying in them themes that go beyond the facile tradition/modernity and village/city binaries, Williams is here connecting postcolonial literatures and historical processes, specifically those related to urban development and internal migration, to those of the former colonial centres. As explained in Chapter One, Williams argues that these similarities do not respond to merely imitative processes but to the reproduction of British cultural, economic, and environmental patterns in the colonies, albeit in diverse ways and paces, which account for the observable differences.[212]

This first analytical chapter subsequently argues that an urban ecological approach to Achebe's works is needed to fully understand their insight on corruption and consumerism in the early years of the postcolony. Applying a village-vs-city interpretational approach to these works, which pitches traditional rural virtue against modern urban corruption and understands the city as a purely negative force, narrows the critical frame and ignores Nigeria's full immersion into an extractive capitalist system, as well as the fluid and causative relationships that exist between the rural and the urban in the novels. This in turn results not only in a partial or simplistic interpretation of the texts' critiques of urbanity and corruption in Nigeria before the 1970s, but also overlooks the ecological aspects of

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[211] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 71.
[212] Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 414.

these critiques. In Achebe's novels, there 'is […] no simple contrast between wicked town and innocent country', between virtuous village and corrupt city, because 'what happens in the town', and in the village, 'is generated by the needs of the dominant' (neo)colonial system. The texts have been shown to ultimately undermine the artificial demarcation between village and city, exposing interconnected processes of development and exploitation that continually (re)produce human-nonhuman imbrications.[213]

I would like to return here one last time to Esty's analysis of postcolonial excremental writing, whose application to Achebe's novels supports an understanding of the works' urban redemption and the nuanced complexities that surround the question of corruption, and thus negates a simplistic village-vs-city reading. As noted above, Gikandi identifies a growing rejection of 'binary oppositions' and dualist thinking on Achebe's part, coincidental with Nigeria's immersion in a neocolonial capitalist system. According to Esty, as we have seen, this blurring of demarcating lines is achieved in excremental writing not only through the superimposition of symbols of 'underdevelopment and overconsumption', but also through what he calls 'the autocritical function of excremental postcolonialism—the shared tendency of these texts to question the status of aesthetic discourse itself in the new nation'. That is: 'Shit […] becomes a symbolic medium for questioning the place of the autonomous individual in new postcolonial societies.' In other words, the characters examined by Esty are repulsed by the filth that surrounds them but do not develop a social conscience that pushes them to act against this waste, nor is it suggested they can actually do something about it.[214]

In *NLE* and *MP*, something similar happens, but with a key difference: Achebe's individuals do try to act, and fail spectacularly. As Gikandi states, Odili, as well as Max and, to a lesser extent, Obi, '[allow] Achebe to both expose the corrupt world of [their] politicians, but also the limited knowledge of the interpreters of this world – the intellectuals'. In effect, the figure of the intellectual is questioned in the novels through its *quixotic* nature, represented by the poems written by Obi and Max. Directly or indirectly, the three young men also register the filth that surrounds them, while they are shown to have a distorted idea of their country's socio-political reality and how to fix it, which is symbolised by their artistic pursuits. When they try to participate in society, Obi as a member of the *national middle class* and Odili and Max as politicians, and maintain their ideals, the three of them fall in the trap of corruption and consumerism they so despise. In this sense, even though Achebe only makes specific excremental references in his novels

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[213] Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 74-75.
[214] Gikandi, *Reading*, p. 102; Esty, 'Excremental Postcolonialism', pp. 33 and 36-38.

and does not 'use excremental terms' throughout, he does utilise his main characters'
relation to filth and waste 'to confront the problems inherent in building a new political
culture from the institutional byproduct (Fanon's national bourgeoisie) and ideological
residue (nationalism) of an alien regime'. In this scheme of things, the urban environment
is where excrement and filth, both literal and figurative, are concentrated. But Obi, Odili,
and Max's failures are played out against a much more complex background, integrating
rural and urban settlements that both shape and are shaped by a (neo)colonial capitalist
system. [215]

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[215] Gikandi, *Reading*, p. 111; Esty, 'Excremental Postcolonialism', p. 47.

CHAPTER THREE. MAKING THE CITY A PLACE OF ONE'S OWN: URBAN
INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE *ENTRE-DEUX* IN THREE LAGOS NOVELS

> *He had looked at a map of Lagos and seen no mention of their new home but they
> were here nonetheless, their residence defying cartographers.*[216]

As explained in Chapter One, despite constituting a major form of metabolization of urban
nature, infrastructures have been, and still are, conceived in direct opposition to an external
Nature that needs to be subjugated in the name of modernity and progress. At the same
time, because of their *mediating* function, infrastructures participate in the creation of
unequal environments, differentiating access to urban space and services, and shaping
multiple human and nonhuman urban experiences. Moreover, in postcolonial cities and
nations, infrastructural projects usually constitute the expression of the *internalization of
the colonial sublime*, through which they become not just a symbol but a spectacle of
development and progress, in direct opposition to tradition.[217] Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta
and Hannah Appel perfectly summarise this discussion: 'While privileging the circulation
of people and things, infrastructures also served to permit states to separate politics from
nature, the technical from the political, and the human from the nonhuman.' That is, while
contributing to the *radical unevenness* of Nigerian cities, (post)colonial urban
infrastructures have developed in opposition to both an external, controllable Nature *and* a
tradition associated with it. In other words, as Elleke Boehmer and Dominic Davies claim,
the *planned violence* exerted by infrastructural spatial differentiation in postcolonial cities
becomes 'explicitly *visible*'. If, initially, this visibility served the purpose of symbolising
(post)colonial splendour, now, in the 21st century, it captures the encroaching
'privatization' of 'neoliberal urban development'.[218]

On the other hand, as all these authors contend, infrastructures can be
(re)appropriated and (re)purposed, in order to challenge this *planned violence* and enable
alternative ways of participating in city life and culture. This contestatory potential of
alternative infrastructural uses was first identified by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of
Everyday Life*, which refers to coexisting government-led planning and alternative
(resident-led) city-making practices. In AbdouMaliq Simone's words, 'it is always possible
to do something different in and with the city than is specified by these domains of power'

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[216] Onuzo, *Welcome to Lagos*, p. 350.
[217] Anand *et al.*, 'Introduction'; Larkin, *Signal and Noise*; Omezi, 'Nigerian Modernity'; Nixon, 'Unimagined
Communities'.
[218] Anand *et al.*, 'Introduction', p. 4; Boehmer and Davies, 'Planned Violence', pp. 11-12, emphasis in the
original.

produced by top-down urban planning. According to Anand *et al.*, 'infrastructure is a terrain of power and contestation'; while Mamadou Diouf and Rosalind Fredericks indeed explain that '[u]rban studies scholarship from the Global South' has focused specifically on 'the role of built form […] as key sites of performative government practice *as well as claims-making by elite and disenfranchised citizens alike*'. As Brian Larkin points out, 'the material qualities of these technologies, while working to implement those designs, also create possibilities outside the imagination of their designers'. In essence, despite their unequal power dynamics, and because, as Larkin says, infrastructures 'mediate and shape the nature of economic and cultural flows and the fabric of urban life', they can in turn be (re)imagined, (re)appropriated and (re)purposed to (re)claim the city and produce alternative cityscapes.[219]

Consequently, and in line with the previous discussion of the role and power of city literatures, it is possible to say that the artistic dimension of fictional cityscapes makes them a very apt medium through which to (re)create what Diouf and Fredericks term the 'arts of citizenship': 'forms of experimentation, adaptation, and negotiation surrounding claims to the rights and rewards of the city'; 'creative innovations that may be out of the range of the familiar'. It is thus possible to say that urban imaginaries, like urbanity itself, are both shaped by and simultaneously shape infrastructural uses. City literatures, Boehmer and Davies claim, can play a key role in contestatory experimentation processes of urban space that question the concept of urban modernity in at least two different ways. On the one hand, they are a means of critiquing the *planned violence* exerted on human and nonhuman nature through infrastructural mediation of urban space. On the other, and in line with Christopher Schliephake's theorisations of cultural urban ecology, they have the power to both enable a reinterpretation of existing infrastructures and spaces, and imagine new ones. Moreover, both the denunciation and contestation of *planned violence*, which muddles the neat association of technological infrastructures with progress, with Humanity and Modernity, can and should be understood as challenging the tradition/modernity binary as an expression of the Nature/Society dualism.[220]

That is, the artistic freedom referred to by Schliephake and Eric Prieto allows us, in Simone's words, 'to understand urbanization as something capable of stirring productive

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[219] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA; London: University of California Press, [1984] 1988), p. 95; AbdouMaliq Simone, 'People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg', *Public Culture*, 16:3 (2004), 407-429 (p. 409); Anand *et al.*, 'Introduction', p. 2; Mamadou Diouf and Rosalind Fredericks, 'Introduction', in *The Arts of Citizenship*, pp. 1-23 (pp. 6-7), emphasis added; Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, pp. 3 and 5.

[220] Diouf and Fredericks, 'Introduction', p. 5; Boehmer and Davies, 'Literature, Planning and Infrastructure', p. 397.

relationships among people, materials, and places,' through the subversion or disruption of infrastructure's official *mediating* role. In fact, one of Prieto's main claims is that literature is 'drawn to the emergent, the interstitial, and the difficult to understand'. Prieto subsumes this in-betweenness in 'the *entre-deux*', a term that 'designates the many different kinds of sites that fall between the established categories that shape our expectations of what a place should be and that often tend, therefore, to be misunderstood, maligned, or simply ignored', such as 'third-world squatter cities'. In other words, the *entre-deux* describes those sites that defy normative or pre-conceived ideas of place, and may consequently challenge *planned violence*.[221]

According to Prieto, these uncategorised sites are often assessed 'in terms of what they lack or what is wrong with them', what prevents them from being identified with an established category. However, 'such places, despite their very real problems and inadequacies, may also prove to be unexpectedly resourceful loci of innovation and development'; they may contain untapped or unrecognised productive potential in spite of their infrastructural shortcomings. Here, I want to suggest that, when examining urban literatures, Prieto's concept of the *entre-deux* can be stretched or adapted to think about urban space transformed or (re)created through infrastructural (re)appropriation. In this way, the term would include not only those marginalised sites characterised by the partial or total absence of functioning infrastructures, such as slums, but also those that are made multivalent by infrastructural disruption and/or unofficial city-making practices, such as roads or markets. The revaluation or creation of *entre-deux* sites thus becomes a means of denouncing and redressing infrastructural violence.[222]

Within this framework, the present chapter explores three contemporary Lagos novels by Nigerian authors living abroad: Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief*, Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos*, and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*. Following, Maximilian Feldner, the authors of the novels examined here 'are members of the new African diaspora', and their works 'can therefore be subsumed under the heading of "Nigerian diaspora literature"', which inevitably deals with 'the fundamental tension of living abroad while being drawn back to Nigeria'. The novels examined here thus follow diverse characters navigating the deeply uneven urban geography of Lagos; they are authentically urban novels that delve into their characters' affective relationships with the city –its spirit, its energy, its materiality– as they struggle to change and/or connect to

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[221] AbdouMaliq Simone, 'Too Many Things to Do: Social Dimensions of City-Making in Africa', in *The Arts of Citizenship*, pp. 25-47 (p. 25); Prieto, *Postmodern Poetics*, p. 1.
[222] Prieto, *Postmodern Poetics*, p. 9.

Lagos in a specific way. However, even if both Cole's and Okorafor's novels have been examined from an urban perspective, and there are some ecocritical analyses of *Lagoon*, Onuzo's work has been largely ignored by critics. More importantly, there seem to be no comparative studies of these texts.[223]

If Chapter Two considers the subversion of the village/city binary through a revaluation of the city within a neocolonial capitalist system, this third chapter addresses the tradition/modernity binary in its urban infrastructural and spatial dimensions, through a comparison of the three novels with a focus on specific representations of Lagos's visible infrastructures and *planned violence*, as well as of contestatory and/or alternative imaginaries of spatial (re)creation through infrastructural (re)appropriation. In other words, through an analysis of the relationships between human and nonhuman agents and Lagos's topography, the chapter examines the socio-ecological consequences of and responses to capitalist modernity as perceived in the city's spatial (re)configurations. These responses may either offer a fresh interpretation of existing places as *entre-deux* sites, or create new ones altogether.

The chapter thus argues, in general terms, that the three novels examined here fulfil the literary role of acknowledging the violence that can be exerted through infrastructural differentiation of urban space, while imagining the potentialities of new spaces and alternative forms of relating to the city. I here identify, in relations between Lagos and its inhabitants, different forms of that ambivalence which makes the city 'the site of catastrophe and the arena of possibility', together with a gradual actualization of its potentialities.[224] Specifically, I recognise in the novels a progressive level of involvement with and resistance to *planned violence*. Through almost complete passiveness and nostalgic observation, *Every Day* exhibits a complicated neocolonial gaze in which infrastructures seem to stand between the narrator and a lost home. Partial disruption and rearrangement of the system in *Welcome to Lagos* portray infrastructures as very socially and politically charged networks with both material and symbolic consequences. Complete disruption with the alien invasion in *Lagoon* allows for a reconfiguration of violent infrastructures that explicitly affect both human and nonhuman residents. However, perhaps due to the diasporic nature of their authors' outlook, the three novels offer alternatives that are fraught either with a controversial idealisation that eschews material and environmental issues, or with the fantastic opacity that characterises oil economies.

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[223] Feldner, *Narrating*, p. 2.
[224] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, p. 158.

The texts can indeed be organised in a kind of escalating order, which is the one followed for the chapter's structure: if Cole's *EDT* focuses on a single character's nostalgic search for home, boasting of a sustained presence of the past and a privileged marginal positionality throughout the entire narration, Onuzo's *WL* tells the story of five characters' very present struggle for a place in the city, which takes them from the disenfranchised margins to the centre, and back to the margins. Finally, as a work of science fiction, Okorafor's *Lagoon* is clearly future-oriented and involves the entirety of Lagos, Nigeria, Africa, and the world; whilst the three main characters are quite abruptly thrown from the margins into the centre, where they remain. Attention to nonhuman nature in the city can also be seen to become more prominent from Cole's, through Onuzo's, to Okorafor's work.

3.1. Revisiting: *Every Day Is for the Thief*

Every Day Is for the Thief follows a nameless privileged Nigerian expatriate, a medical doctor living in the United States, during a return visit after fifteen years abroad. This visitor, also the first-person narrator, takes the reader along while he wanders aimlessly (*EDT* 128) through Lagos, in his quest to discover/recover 'home' (35). First published in Nigeria in 2007 and then, in a modified version, in the UK and the US in 2014, *EDT* is, according to its author, 'a work of fiction, because it has quite a number of things in it that are made up'. Nonetheless, this 'travelogue-like novella', as characterised by Gabriele Rippl, which according to Cole first 'appeared online in January 2006' as a series of blog entries, contains many autobiographical elements and is punctuated by pictures taken by the author himself. In terms of criticism, *EDT* has been somewhat ignored as a stand-alone object of study, although it has been frequently compared to Cole's other novel, *Open City*, due to the similarities shared by the works' narrators. Within the existing criticism, close attention to the city's geography and physical infrastructure has been scarce and sparse, with a prevalent focus on the narrator's positionality as what Adebayo Williams terms the 'postcolonial *flaneur*'.[225]

Building on previous studies that focus on the main character's cosmopolitanism and Cole's treatment of the travelogue, I want to suggest that the narrator's very specific and sustained marginal position with regards to the city gives *EDT*'s Lagos an ambivalence

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[225] Teju Cole, 'A Conversation with Aleksandar Hemon', in *Known and Strange Things* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017), pp. 78-92 (pp. 80 and 89); Gabriele Rippl, 'Picturing Lagos: Word-Photography Configurations in Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2007/2014)', *Social Dynamics*, 44:3 (2018), 472-484 (p. 472); Teju Cole, *Open City* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011); Adebayo Williams, 'The Postcolonial *Flaneur* and Other Fellow-Travellers: Conceits for a Narrative of Redemption', *Third World Quarterly*, 18:5 (1997), 821-841.

that is more ideal than practical. In line with Katheine Hallemeier's and Yvonne Kappel's reading of the work as espousing a complex middle ground between colonial and postcolonial standings, Cole's unnamed narrator repeatedly leaves the reader wanting more. His observations seem to start off in the right direction, only to fall short of the expected analysis. Hallemeier contends that, through a critique of 'the limits of a cosmopolitan literary culture', *EDT* foregrounds a '"middle zone" [cosmopolitanism]', reminiscent of the UPU members' *local cosmopolitanism* in Achebe's *NLE*, much better suited to contemporary urban Nigeria. Kappel, on her part, suggests that 'by reproducing [colonial] discourse', Cole's narrator 'questions it by highlighting its limitations'. Kappel specifically analyses Cole's 'covert play with the generic conventions of the travelogue', which 'goes beyond the colonial/postcolonial divide'. That is, both critics identify the conscious adoption and subsequent critique of a neocolonial perspective on Cole's part.[226]

A similar dynamic can be said to take place regarding the protagonist's appreciation of Lagos's infrastructural issues, which ultimately exposes his own lack of understanding while it 'foregrounds transcultural entanglements that cut across time and space'. The westernised young man thus registers the infrastructural and spatial issues that surround him but does not always identify, or properly engage with, the origin or nature of these problems. More often than not, it is Nigerians at large that are blamed for the differentiated access to urban space and infrastructure, as opposed to a *planned violence* that derives from a number of local and global forces. Nor does the narrator try to overcome or contest the observed issues, because, as a privileged visitor, he is no longer palpably or permanently affected by them. Moreover, what he considers as hopeful and positive in Lagos's infrastructural space is also quite problematic: it is not rooted in practical, concrete reclamations of urban space, but on idealised notions of what the city could or should be. Indeed, the last chapter, a reflection on his sole venture into unknown territory, seems to point towards some form of spatial reinterpretation, albeit one whose externally-assigned mysticism is as problematic as it is refreshing. In essence, Cole's text masterfully manages to simultaneously expose the consequences of Nigeria's neocolonial economy and the pitfalls of a global cosmopolitanism. It is the subtlety and complexity of this critique that lends *EDT* its particular form of idealist urban ambivalence.

As Rippl points out, *EDT*'s narrator 'resembles the author in many ways: both are middle-class New York City dwellers of Nigerian descent, who spent their childhood in

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[226] Katherine Hallemeier, 'Literary Cosmopolitanisms in Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief* and *Open City*', *ariel: a review of international english literature*, 44:2-3 (2014), 239–250 (p. 248); Yvonne Kappel, 'Re-Membering the Travelogue: Generic Intertextuality as a Memory Practice in Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief*', *ZAA*, 65:1 (2017), 67-83 (p. 68).

Lagos, and both have an in-between Nigerian-American identity, albeit with no apparent trauma associated with this in-between status.' This means that 'the city is not presented as an exotic location'. Kappel explains that 'he is not a stranger'. Rather, the narrator is refamiliarizing himself with the place of his childhood. However, 'he has changed through living in a Western country' and 'he perceives his home country with Western eyes'. Feldner calls him '[s]imultaneously an insider and outsider', who 'inhabits an in-between position' due to his diasporic membership. According to Feldner, the protagonist thus presents his experiences as 'less a novel than a collection of vignettes dealing with [his] movements through' the city, what Rippl terms 'fragments of Lagosian life' which 'offer only random glimpses, not systematic descriptions of the urban space'. These, states Helon Habila, 'the author then uses to examine the general state of politics or art or religion in Nigeria'.[227]

It is the narrator's status as a visitor, and his freedom of movement, coupled with his privileged upper-middle-class background, that allow him to experience and convey the city in this way, as isolated urban episodes, from the safe margins of only temporary discomfort. Several critics have indeed commented on *EDT*'s narrator's curiously detached attitude towards his home country in general and Lagos in particular. Kappel describes him as 'oddly detached and unemotional', while Monika Mueller states that he 'express[es] a detached cosmopolitan humanism through [his] observations'. Focusing specifically on his subjectivity, Ángela Suárez Rodríguez analyses the narrator's attitude towards the city as one of nostalgic, albeit 'detached', reflection. She argues that *EDT*'s narrator is an '*othered* cosmopolitan stranger', someone who is 'living in between a sense of belonging and unfamiliarity'. He is 'simultaneously judgemental and sympathetic', because he is aware 'of his own privileged positionality', both in terms of class and citizenship.[228]

Crucially, Suárez Rodríguez concludes that '[t]he textual rendering of the city […] serves as a prism through which to inquire into the narrator's position of insider-outsider in his place of origin,' and that the young man's 'emotional ambiguity highlights the impact of his condition as a cosmopolitan stranger on his perception of Lagos.' In other words, Suárez Rodríguez utilizes the urban portrayal as a starting point to explore the narrator's

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[227] Rippl, 'Picturing Lagos', p. 473; Kappel, 'Re-Membering', p. 72; Feldner, *Narrating*, pp. 166-167; Helon Habila, '*Every Day Is for the Thief* Review – Return to Lagos', *Guardian*, 25 April 2014, Books <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/25/every-day-is-for-the-thief-teju-cole-review> [Accessed 9 June 2024] (paragraph 5 of 7).

[228] Kappel, 'Re-Membering', p. 71; Monika Mueller, 'Walking in New York City and Lagos: Spatial Memory in Teju Cole's Novels', *Atlantic Studies*, 18:3 (2021), 316–330 (p. 316); Ángela Suárez Rodríguez, 'The experience of Homecoming in Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief*: An Investigation into the *Othered* "cosmopolitan stranger"', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 56:6 (2020), 789-802 (pp. 793-794). See also Feldner, *Narrating*, p. 165.

particular situation, and understands his contradictory feelings towards Nigeria as emphasising the effect this situation has on his apprehension of Lagos. Here, I take the converse route, and have started by establishing the protagonist's narratorial position to focus precisely on the effect this has on his rendering of urban space and infrastructure. For analytical purposes, I focus first on those infrastructures that the narrator describes as purely negative; followed by those in which he identifies ambivalent forces, which can thus be interpreted as presented by the narrator as in-between spaces. I end by interpreting the novel's presentation of Iganmu as an idealised *entre-deux* space.[229]

Energy, water, air transport, and culture infrastructures are among *EDT*'s negative features of Lagos. Their failures and inequalities are registered and commented on by the narrator, although usually from the comfort of provision or the security of alternative sources, which elude difficult conversations about the origins of these problems. As soon as he arrives in Lagos, while waiting to collect his luggage, the narrator comes across an example of the damaging presence of international oil companies examined in Chapter One. He meets a Scottish man who 'works on the rigs', returning from holidays in Paris. The narrator simply thinks to himself that he 'is not Europe's finest, but he'll earn well here' (*EDT* 10). Immediately after this we learn that the oil man is staying at the Sheraton while waiting for his next-day flight to Port Harcourt. This level of luxury contrasts with the poverty the narrator encounters as soon as he leaves the airport, while the whole episode points to the exclusion of the Nigerian workforce from the oil industry, further analysed in the following chapter. However, no further mentions or evaluations are made. While silence could itself be interpreted as criticism, the narrator is later quite vocal regarding his other negative impressions of the city. Conversely, based on Kappel's analysis of *EDT*'s use of photography, it is possible to interpret this situation as an exposure of both Nigeria's oil economy *and* the narrator's restricted understanding of it: 'Instead of presenting a counter-discourse, the text subversively disrupts the genre from within'. Similarly, the protagonist's colonial mindset is also undermined, since the reader soon understands that it hinders an adequate appreciation of the incident.[230]

When discussing bribery and corruption in the third chapter, the narrator concludes that certain practices, such as 'piracy' and 'graft', actually make 'most people', those who participate in Lagos's 'informal economy', stay where they are, 'on the margins': 'Precisely because everyone takes a shortcut, nothing works', the narrator explains, only those with the most means will survive (*EDT* 19). Here, there seems to be an initial

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[229] Suárez Rodríguez, 'Homecoming', p. 799.
[230] Kappel, 'Re-Membering', p. 79.

understanding of the problem, but a proper, deeper analysis is again missed. Moreover, one such form of infrastructure malfunctioning is power cuts, which are referenced three times by the narrator and serve as clear examples of 'his self-absorption' while 'provid[ing] insights about the neighbours and the city he judges from a careful distance'.[231] The first one is right after these considerations, during his first night in Lagos. As Suárez Rodríguez points out, there is a difference here between those who live in Lagos, and are thus used to this, and the narrator, who is not. While Lagos residents are said to have come to accept 'this sudden deprivation' as 'a nocturnal ritual', the narrator has trouble sleeping. His mixed feelings about returning to Nigeria and his lack of comfort become one and the same: 'The air is hot, and thick with old ghosts, and with the smell of kerosene' (*EDT* 19). In essence, his position as outsider is made clear, in opposition to the residents' alleged passive acceptance. To the protagonist, his temporary discomfort is indeed much worse than a life of daily power cuts.[232]

The second reference is longer and more complete. Here, questions of privilege mingle with immediate discomfort, pollution, and the narrator's creative impulses. He is considering the different issues involved in his potential move back to Nigeria and his struggles to produce any 'creative work' (*EDT* 68). One of them is his 'tolerance for the environment' (66). After 'enjoying' the first few power cuts, the narrator is getting tired of them. The family is wealthy enough to have a generator, but do not usually leave it on all night. The heat makes sleep difficult, and the narrator emphasises the noise and air pollution caused by the 'three loud diesel generators in the compound'. Interestingly, he focuses not on 'the real privilege' that this implies, but on the 'noise, the dark gray plumes of the diesel smoke' (67). While the ecological impact of generators is certainly an important and often overlooked issue, the narrator fails to point out that not all residents can afford such worries, nor are they responsible for them. A similar approach can be observed in Onuzo's opening chapter, although this description belongs to an army base in the Niger Delta, thus associating environmental damage with militarism: 'He stood with his back to the generator hut, the tremor of the machine passing through him. It drank over two hundred litres of diesel each day, its belly never satisfied' (*WL* 5-6). Abani's Elvis, on the other hand, is more aware of class differences, when he [wonders] why anyone who [can] afford a generator would live in Maroko', the water slum.[233]

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[231] Hallemeier, 'Literary Cosmopolitanisms', p. 242.
[232] Suárez Rodríguez, 'Homecoming', p. 794.
[233] Abani, *GraceLand*, p. 137.

The third reference to a power cut also registers another infrastructural issue common in Nigeria: fuel shortages. The narrator exposes the irony clearly, but does not go into the reasons behind it: 'Half the city runs on diesel generators, and Nigeria is one of the world's leading producers of crude oil. The shortages make no sense' (*EDT* 95). Except they do, as another consequence of neocolonial infrastructural mismanagement and malfunctioning. Once again, the narrator's ignorance or lack of understanding only reinforces the text's critique. This scene also shows the narrator's privilege compared to most people in the same situation, since he and his childhood friend, also a medical doctor, drive for a long time trying to find diesel, wasting fuel to get fuel; a luxury not many can afford. This episode contrasts starkly with Ijeoma's struggles to get kerosene in war-torn Biafra in *Under the Udala Trees*: walking and waiting 'over an hour' in a long line with a glass bottle in her hands only to be told the kerosene has run out. In *EDT*'s contemporary Lagos there is no civil war, but many people still endure similar hardships to that of Ijeoma due to causes the novel does not directly delve into.[234]

In fact, we come across a similar image in a later chapter, when the narrator is running errands with his aunt and uncle. In a peripheral neighbourhood that has the air of 'busy village life', the narrator sees 'a long line of children and women fetching water at a tap' (*EDT* 133). When he questions his aunt about it, she explains: 'The government doesn't provide any running water in this area. So you've got a local big man with his own water supply. […] He puts a tap outside his house, hires someone to watch over it, and charges per bucket' (Ibid.). In the absence of infrastructure, a wealthy individual makes even more money. Once again, the narrator reflects on this 'life on the margins', so different to his. Like Ijeoma, who has not eaten since the previous day because there is 'no kerosene to cook', for these people, 'no money on a given day' means 'no water' (*EDT* 134). In a comment reminiscent of Obi's desperate frugality measures in *NLE*, the narrator highlights that, in this neighbourhood, 'every drop [of water] is cherished like a quintessence' (*EDT* 134). His reflections, however, are suddenly terminated. Interestingly, while there is no attempt on the narrator's part to reconcile this enforced management of resources with the squandering habits of the rich, including his own, neither does he 'offer an easily accessible, emotively steered portrayal of difference' such as one would expect of 'colonial discourse'. As Kappel argues regarding another episode of this nature, 'what seems to be a representation of the imperial discourse is really the beginning of its dismantlement' through its rejection. This is in line with Hallemeier's contention that Cole

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[234] Chinelo Okparanta, *Under the Udala Trees* (London: Granta Publications, [2015] 2017), pp. 98-99.

'[gestures] towards a literary cosmopolitanism premised on neither revealing nor exploiting the reality of "other" lives'.[235]

A similar process takes place when the failure of water distribution infrastructure is again mentioned in the following chapter. The narrator tells matter-of-factly of a plane accident that killed 'seventy-five schoolchildren', among others (*EDT* 136): 'The fire department has no water, and can only watch as the plane incinerates its passengers'. The reader also learns that 'parents witness the accident, because it happens on arrival'. The same parents that 'are teargassed by police' '[a] few days later', during 'a peaceful protest in Lagos' (137). Events are simply narrated in quick succession, before the narrator moves on to a general diatribe against the Nigerian people. Indeed, planes and airports are another negative infrastructural aspect in *EDT*'s Nigeria. Built during the second oil boom, Murtala Muhammed International Airport is described in the second chapter as 'all that is worst about the architecture of the seventies', and is compared to 'a low-rent tenement' (9). A frustrated passenger, annoyed at the inefficiency of the arrival experience, asks: '"Is this the impression visitors should have of our nation?"' (10)

But even worse than a rundown and inefficient airport are domestic flight plane crashes whose frequency seems to defy 'the laws of statistics' (138). With Nigeria Airways 'defunct after years of mismanagement', something already mentioned in Flora Nwapa's *Women Are Different*, 'foreign airlines ply the lucrative routes between Lagos and Europe', while 'private ventures supply the flights within Nigeria and West Africa' (*EDT* 138). The problem is that these private companies use '*tokunbo* planes, bought after they [have] been discarded by European carriers' (Ibid.); a dangerous form of neocolonial 'recycling' through which poor countries inherit rich countries' trash. Like Sarah Harrison says of 'e-waste', 'this global waste flow in fact brings with it severe physical and environmental costs for its recipients'.[236]

As usual, no reference is made to the fact that the lack or failure of maintenance and repair of state infrastructure enables national and international private companies to make more money, while endangering human and nonhuman nature; since old planes are not only more likely to break down but also to produce more air and noise pollution. The narrator instead echoes James Booth's 1981 observation regarding Obi's late 1950s Nigeria's inadequate 'industry and commerce', but with an apparent lack of historical understanding of the situation that, as Kappel shows, 'mirrors' 'the rhetoric of

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[235] Okparanta, *Trees*, p. 102; Kappel, 'Re-Membering', p. 76; Hallemeier, 'Literary Cosmopolitanisms', p. 244.

[236] Flora Nwapa, *Women Are Different* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, [1986] 1992), pp. 130-132; Harrison, *Waste Matters*, p. 2.

imperialism': 'Nigerians do not always have the philosophical equipment to deal with the material goods they are so eager to consume. We fly planes but we do not manufacture aircraft' (*EDT* 139). What we see here is the recognition of a lack of industrial and commercial infrastructures, without a reference to wider implications or causes. While it is possible to establish a clear link, for example, between Nanga's deals with British Amalgamated, Abaka's new cement factory (*MP* 43), and *tokunbo* planes, no mention is made in *EDT* of the socio-material bases of Nigeria's infrastructural issues: postcolonial Nigeria's problems seem to respond to an inherent cultural and/or psychological fault of Nigerians as a people, instead of acknowledging the structural violence of neocolonial politics and economy. This incomplete picture painted by the cosmopolitan narrator again highlights his own faults as much as Nigeria's.[237]

The same faulty imperialist rhetoric that is unable to grasp the importance of transnational forces can be observed in the narrator's analysis of two oppositional pairs related to culture infrastructures, identified by Suárez Rodríguez. The first pair is the National Museum vs the Musical Society of Nigeria Centre. The former sits 'in the heart of old Lagos', which is 'a combination of the borrowed old and the uncertain new' (*EDT* 71). Like the airport, the national airline, and the power and water infrastructures, the museum is mismanaged and poorly maintained. The narrator's memory of the museum is what he '[holds] on to' while abroad (72), which makes his 'disappointment' so much worse (73): the 'content' is scarce, 'meagerly documented' and poorly presented (73-4). As with others portrayed in *EDT*, this issue has its colonial roots, but is also a consequence of Nigeria's complex political economy. This is indirectly alluded to by the narrator: while acknowledging that '[t]he best pieces have probably found their way into the hands of dealers' in Europe, the narrator compares the glory of Nigerian museums during 'the 1960s and '70s', the oil boom years, with the deterioration of 'the 1980s', the bust years. However, he does not mention economic reasons here but only attributes the decay to the 'military years' (74-5). Once again, he concludes on a negative note that fails to see beyond the surface and blames Nigerians themselves for their lack of preservation of national culture and history: 'It is as though there is the idea that a national museum is a good thing to have, but no one has the interest or ability to present it properly' (79).[238]

This experience contrasts sharply with his following visit, to the MUSON Centre. It was 'founded in the 1980s' and plays 'a leading role in the musical and theatrical life of the country'. Its grounds are 'well organized', and there we can find, among other things,

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237 Booth, *Writers & Politics*, p. 95; Kappel, 'Re-Membering', p. 73.
238 Suárez Rodríguez, 'Homecoming', p. 797-799.

'a world-class auditorium', 'a pristine lawn', and 'an upmarket restaurant', together with expensive 'cars and SUVs gleam[ing]' in the parking lot (81-2). The narrator explains that 'this is a place for genuine music enthusiasts': 'Culture, at least in this one corner of the city, seems to be alive and well.' We learn in the next paragraph that MUSON 'is largely a private venture'. 'Perhaps that is the secret,' the narrator guesses; not because private means international capital, as is indeed the case, but because '[t]hey know the importance of presentation', as opposed to the Nigerian state. He celebrates the fact that, as a 'nonprofit organization', MUSON has partnered with 'corporations'. Tellingly, both the recital hall and the auditorium bear the names of oil companies, Agip and Shell (82). After some enquiries, however, and true to his in-between positionality, the 'irrational pride' (83) that first fills the narrator is tempered with disappointment. He learns not only that 'expatriate teachers' are paid more than Nigerian ones, but also that students 'must own the instrument [they] wish to learn', which 'means […] that […] serious musical instruction in Lagos is available only to the wealthiest' (85-6). Despite all this, the narrator is satisfied with MUSON, and sees it as 'a meaningful forum for interacting with the world' (87). His disappointment, then, although duly noted by the reader, barely scratches the surface of the problem that the protagonist in in fact describing: as a privately owned cultural space, MUSON is as infrastructurally rich as it is exclusive; a perfect example of neocolonial capitalism and the oil economy filling in the void left by the state, shaping Nigeria's cultural scene, and determining, in exclusionary ways, who has access to that scene.

The second pair comes in the form of stores that sell cultural products, namely, books and music. After further disappointing visits to the CSS Bookshop on Lagos Island (*EDT* 116-7) and a jazz shop on Allen Avenue that only sells pirated music (130), the narrator comes across Jazzhole, in Ikoyi. This is 'a combination music and book shop', whose owners have also 'created a record label […] as well as a publishing house', which is in fact producing a book about the city. As with the National Museum and MUSON, the narrator compares the store to those found in the West. It is expensive and prices are 'certainly beyond the reach of most Nigerians', but it nonetheless fills the young man with 'gratitude' and 'hope', because creativity is flowing 'in spite of everything' (130-1). As with the first pair, accessibility issues directly related to an unequal experience of urban space mediated by culture infrastructures are identified and registered, but seem to be only minor inconveniences for someone that is not actually affected by them and is more worried about the country's external appearances.

Power, water, air transport, and public cultural infrastructures are definitely negative aspects of *EDT*'s Lagos, and create spaces of need and violence. As already stated, the

narrator observes, comments, and reflects on these issues; he is intellectually and superficially emotionally involved with them. He does little to compensate for or remedy these infrastructural failures because he does not need to. Conversely, his rendering of infrastructures of urban public transport is much more ambivalent. There are certainly positive transformative elements here, potentialities which, although still ideal and far from realisation, seem to hold the promise of a different future. *EDT* makes, of course, the inevitable references to Lagos's infamous traffic problems (14, 67). But it also contains an entire chapter on public transport, and what it means to the narrator. Despite his family's objections, he sees using public transport and 'being there on the streets' as an 'exercise' (34). In this struggle, the 'danfo, carrier of the masses', has a symbolic quality. The Ojodu – Berger Bus Terminus, a place of passage and movement, is both an 'assault to the senses' and a space where the 'energies of Lagos life—creative, malevolent, ambiguous—converge'. It is also the best place for the narrator 'to make an inquiry into what it was [he] longed for all those times [he] longed for home' (35). There follows an explanation, clearly directed at non-African audiences, of what danfos are and what touts do.

For the narrator, taking the danfo, 'yellow and decrepit', is a choice (*EDT* 35). There might be some nostalgia involved in this activity –he used to do it 'frequently in [his] high school days' (33)– but public transport and bus stops, both dangerous and unsanitary, represent here the search for home, as well as the point of convergence of those opposing energies that make Lagos what it is. It is thus that they could be said to become, in *EDT*, in-between or *entre-deux* spaces, filled with unrecognised or ignored transformative potential that coexists with the filth and daily danger. Nonetheless, in line with the work's ideal ambiguity, this potential is not actualised in the novel, at least not in these spaces; it is only imagined, and sketched by the narrator in his quest for inspiration. Similarly, the okada, or 'commercial motorbike', is described as 'a good way to get a feel for the city', despite it being 'extraordinarily dangerous', and another source of pollution (148). Moreover, the narrator explains that 'it is in [his] aimless wandering that [he finds himself] truly in the city' (128), and it is through his wanderings that we best get to know how he experiences Lagos.[239]

Interestingly, he sees the market space as the epitome of urban ambivalence and the centre of human activity, an *entre-deux* space par excellence: 'the essence of the city', it 'is

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[239] Compare, for example, with Ben Okri's nightmarish description of a molue ride in 'Stars of the New Curfew', in *Stars of the New Curfew* (London, Vintage [1988] 1999), pp. 83-144 (pp. 100-108). See also Kehinde Olatunji, Adetayo Adeowo and Yetunde Jeariogbe, 'Lagos Motor Parks: Where Stench, Filth Reign', *Guardian*, 2 August 2020, City File <https://guardian.ng/sunday-magazine/lagos-motor-parks-where-stench-filth-reign/> [Accessed 13 May 2023] (30 paragraphs).

always alive with possibility and danger' (57). This idea of the market is reminiscent of Simone's characterisation as the place where a number of different activities 'happen side by side, on stages too cramped, too deteriorated, too clogged with waste, history, energy, and sweat to sustain all of them'. The possibility identified by Cole's narrative, though, which seems to be invested with positive valency, is again not actualised in the novel. The reader learns instead about a child accused of theft that is lynched and burned to death, for which the market itself is responsible, through a personification reminiscent of that usually reserved for the road: 'The market has seen everything. It must eat. It does not break its habits' (62).[240]

As the narrator explains after his visit to MUSON, '[t]he most convincing signs of life […] in Nigeria are connected to the practice of the arts' (*EDT* 87). This is why I argue that *EDT*'s ambivalence is ideal more than practical. While the negative infrastructural and spatial aspects constitute clear physical barriers to socio-ecological wellbeing, for this narrator, the possibilities lie in Lagos's 'creative energies' (81), in the 'wealth' of yet untapped 'stories' that he could pump out of the city if only he decided to move back to Nigeria (64 and 68). In other words, this idealistic ambivalence has a certain extractivist tone, conveyed by what Habila terms a 'scout's-eye view, always prospecting for a congenial and habitable environment' that is never found. Hallemeier suggests that the reason why Cole's narrator fails in his creative enterprise is precisely his 'literary cosmopolitanism', which, I add, does not enable him to understand art's potential to change the 'messy reality' that he sees as opposed to art itself (*EDT* 69). Although the narrator is 'fascinat[ed]' by some of the 'wonderful solutions' people have 'to some nasty problems' (68), which are in fact examples of the *arts of citizenship* explained earlier in the sense that they are ways of (re)claiming urban space, he fails to see a productive connection between these arts and storytelling. Indeed, Hallemeier claims that the narrator's judgement of internet scammers –who, in their own way, do find this productive connection and find a solution to their problems– signals 'a reluctance to acknowledge' the 'greed' that drives them *and* him, an idea also proposed by Kappel. Moreover, she also sees here 'an awareness that they are able to produce stories in Lagos, while he is not': 'The "yahoo yahoo" belie the claim that Lagos is inimical to profitable creativity', since they combine their arts of citizenship with storytelling.[241]

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[240] Simone, 'People as Infrastructure', p. 426.
[241] Habila, 'Review', paragraph 2; Hallemeier, 'Literary Cosmopolitanisms', p. 247; Kappel, 'Re-Membering', p. 75.

There is one last oppositional pair, however, that registers a different kind of ambivalence, whose possibilities are more related to that 'messy reality' mentioned above. On the one hand, the narrator tells of his visit to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, another example of the realisation of the postcolonial *sublime*; a 'modernist apparition […] with that soulless and vaguely fascistic air common to capital cities' (*EDT* 139), with its 'borrowed progress' devoid of 'ideological commitments' (140). A perfect example of the influence of oil and ethnicity on urbanisation, Abuja was created from scratch to serve the purpose of a unified Nigeria. Financed by oil money, the city is described by Michael Watts as a 'massive […] multibillion iron and steel programme'. Envisioned in 1976, it was built during the second half of the 1970s, and the 1980s, but was not declared the capital of Nigeria until 1991. Abuja was to be neutral ground, free from ethnic tensions and colonial legacies: 'a new city built on a virgin site directed by the state and delinked from primordial claims of divisive ethnic groups and memories of colonial subjugation', explains Giles Omezi, the 'symbolism of unity and democratic institutions in a clear vision for the national project'. The 'planned city was envisioned in an ambitious, grand design', states Garth Myers in the same vein, as 'a potent symbol of national unity'.[242]

The specific and distinct purpose of the city has shaped in a very direct way its official landscape and 'aesthetics'. Because it 'was envisioned as a global city', says J. N. C. Hill, its 'founding fathers […] were determined that Abuja was going to be different', it would exhibit none of the 'chaos and confusion' that characterises other urban centres in Nigeria. This aesthetic difference is not only patent in the city's architecture and planning, but also in the consistent elimination of 'unappealing manifestations of poverty and human suffering'. Consequently, 'all structures and individuals' that do not fit within the 'vision of Abuja as a wealthy, ordered and modern city' are banned or destroyed. Abuja thus becomes, at least in theory, the very opposite of the numerous ghettos that characterise Lagos and other urban centres; the FCT is a site of state-directed order and hygiene, where insanitary poverty and pollution seemingly have no place.[243]

This top-down artificiality can be compared with Iganmu, where 'the city becomes as trackless as a desert' (*EDT* 158). This is the narrator's only excursion into unknown territory and into the city's 'numerous slums and shanty towns', as Rippl says; in Habila's words, a '[belated]' 'detour from the well-trodden middle-class' areas of Lagos he has wandered so far. Through a retrospective description, we arrive at 'a little […] street in the heart of the district', whose male residents seem to be entirely dedicated to the making of

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[242] Watts, 'Oil as Money', p. 432; Omezi, 'Nigerian Modernity', p. 293; Myers, *African Cities*, p. 62.
[243] Hill, *Nigeria Since Independence*, pp. 102-103.

coffins (*EDT* 159-60). Despite it being a poor area where people carry out hard manual labur, the narrator focuses on the specific mystical meaning this place has for him: 'There is a dignity about this little street, *with its open sewers and rusted roofs*.' He feels in it both the 'uncanny' and 'an enlivening purity' (161, emphasis added). The area's unfamiliarity, he claims, 'makes [him] connect to the city as pure place' (159), and this is the first time he can see beyond infrastructural *failure* and view less privileged people as more than just struggling individuals, as residents whose life goes, as Simone says, 'beyond simply putting food on the table'.[244]

However, the narrator's description of the place infuses it with a transcendental, 'deep-structured order' (*EDT* 161), so that the novelty in his appreciation of Iganmu is still problematic. As Rippl points out regarding the picture of Makoko water slum that accompanies this last chapter, the narrator is ignoring here the physical reality of the place. That is, the ambivalent element in Iganmu's rendering does not rest on those 'wonderful solutions' mentioned earlier, nor on the residents' challenging of those 'nasty problems', but on the narrator's own need for 'order' and 'assurance' (*EDT* 161). While the young man could be interpreted as portraying Iganmu as an *entre-deux* space, as possessing more to it than meets the eye, he is doing so from the outside, in a manner comparable to the colonisers' creation of John Thieme's geographies '*out of place*'. In essence, the problem is that the mystical quality of this externally-assigned ambiguity does not disrupt or repurpose violent or exclusive urban spaces, but both moves beyond and eschews the *planned violence* of infrastructural failures, such as the 'open sewers' or 'rusted roofs'. They are mentioned and dismissed in one swift sentence, replaced by the narrator's personal imaginings of an alternative place altogether.[245]

In line with the rest of the work, the narrator's problematised global cosmopolitanism, allows him to go as far as Iganmu, to find there something more than what can be seen with the naked eye, but does not let him grasp it, or even understand it. Once again, this contrasts with what Hallemeier terms 'Cole's "middle zone" cosmopolitans'. In a way, the narrator's global cosmopolitanism is the contemporary equivalent of Obi's idealistic, 1950s, one; while, as mentioned earlier, *middle zone cosmopolitans* such as 'the yahoo boys' (*EDT* 27) are closer to the UPU's *local cosmopolitanism*: 'they aspire to membership within the global elite', explains Hallemeier. And, even if they remain outside of it, they can thrive where the narrator cannot. If Achebe

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[244] Rippl, 'Picturing Lagos', p. 474; Habila, 'Review', paragraphs 6 and 7; Simone, 'Too Many Things', p. 42.
[245] Rippl, 'Picturing Lagos', p. 476; Thieme, *Postcolonial Literary Geographies*, p. 3.

demonstrates Obi's naivety by making him fall prey to corruption, Cole's novella, as argued by Hallemeier and Kappel, undermines its narrator's westernised mindset by exposing its shortcomings. In infrastructural terms, this translates into either a partial or altogether incorrect understanding of urban space and its socio-ecological issues, one that still frames Nigerian history within a colonial narrative of modernity and development. Ultimately, *EDT* shows that such a view leads to a dead end, and is not conducive to any form of change or progress, either at the individual or social level.[246]

3.2. Discovering: *Welcome to Lagos*

The next work analysed here, *Welcome to Lagos*, ends in Makoko, the water slum, on a similar note to that of *EDT*. The place's *entre-deux* quality, however, is now assigned from an internal, even if still idealising, position. First published in 2017, *Welcome to Lagos* is the second novel of young author Chibundu Onuzo, who was born in Nigeria and lived there until her teenage years, when she moved to England to continue her education in a boarding school. *WL* tells the story of five people running away to Lagos in search of a new beginning. The novel opens at an army base in Bayelsa State, in the Niger Delta, where blood-thirsty Colonel Benatari is said to be defending Nigeria from Ijaw militants fighting oil extraction by international companies. The night a sleeping village is ruthlessly attacked, an Igbo officer, Chike Aemobi, and a Yoruba private, Yẹmi Ọkẹ, desert, unable to stand the violence any longer. They soon meet Fineboy, a militant whose dream is to become a radio star, and Isoken, a born and bred Lagosian teenage girl who has just lost her parents in a nearby village. Finally, in the bus to Lagos, they add Oma to their troop, a middle-class housewife running away from her abusive husband, an oil worker for a Dutch company. As the group struggles for survival, navigating the city and trying to carve out a space of their own, they come across the runaway Minister of Education carrying stolen money. They are then forced to choose a course of action that defines the rest of their stay in Lagos.

Despite finding 'blunders, missteps and excessive plot twists' in the novel, Lovia Gyarkye seems to imply that the story of *WL* could very well be one, or perhaps many, of those untold stories that *EDT*'s narrator wishes he could capture.[247] Not only do the 'walks through the streets, attempts to find jobs and search for makeshift lodging give Onuzo an opportunity to provide colorful commentary on the city', but also, as Habila notes, they

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[246] Hallemeier, 'Literary Cosmopolitanisms', p. 248.
[247] Lovia Gyarkye, 'Going AWOL in Africa's Largest City', *The New York Times*, 2 August 2018, Book Review <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/02/books/review/welcome-to-lagos-chibundu-onuzo.html> [Accessed 21 July 2022] (paragraph 7 of 7).

make of Lagos another character in the novel, 'perhaps the best-painted […] of all'.[248] As with *EDT*, this prominence of the city remains true throughout the novel; even if the last part of the book exhibits a different dynamic, in which 'narrative momentum' seems to replace the initial 'meditative sketches of the city'.[249] Indeed, *WL*'s final section is comparable to the second half of Achebe's *NLE* and *MP* in terms of plotting devices and narrative pace. However, if Achebe's choices can be explained as a product of the uncertainty of the times during and about which he was writing, Onuzo's could be interpreted as portraying the multifaceted and transnational nature of contemporary Nigeria.[250]

On the other hand, the urban marginality of Onuzo's heterogeneous group could not be more different from that of *EDT*'s narrator, given that it stems, first and foremost, from their condition as strangers, newcomers not acquainted with Lagos's ways. Of the five members, only Isoken is returning home, although home as she knew it no longer exists. While none of them come from an indigent past, a destitute present is what they are thrown into as soon as they arrive in Lagos. The group thus joins the thousands of people that every day 'move from countryside to city to realise their dreams'. Theirs is a newly acquired destitution, which they try against all odds to overcome, and whose harsh reality is a novelty.

In fact, I argue, *WL* provides us with more than one example of those 'wonderful solutions' to which *EDT* only alludes (68), while also registering the inequality of Lagos's topography. It thus presents the reader with instances of what Simone terms 'people as infrastructure', through which citizens actively contest *planned violence* –both on a daily basis and as temporary fixes for the group's predicaments–, while (re)creating a number of *entre-deux* spaces. *WL*'s five main characters move from the margins to the centre and back to a liminal space, literally and metaphorically. This movement is both enabled and structured by the group's interaction with physical infrastructure, which is more involved and practical than that of *EDT*'s narrator. In the end, the Makoko water slum seems to offer the home they have been searching for since the start, its portrayal, nonetheless, once again infused with a metaphysical quality that seems, all too easily, to erase its very material problems.[251]

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[248] Gyarkye, 'Going AWOL' (paragraph 3 of 7); Helon Habila, '*Welcome to Lagos* by Chibundu Onuzo Review – High Hopes, Big City', *Guardian*, 18 January 2017, Culture <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/18/welcome-to-lagos-by-chibundu-onuzo-review> [Accessed 21 July 2022] (paragraph 5 of 5).
[249] Gyarkye, 'Going AWOL' (paragraph 4 of 7).
[250] Habila, 'High Hopes' (paragraph 2 of 5).
[251] Simone, 'People as Infrastructure', p. 407.

Initially, Lagos for Chike is a fascinating and dangerous place: it is compared to London, but with an underlying 'layer of unease' due to the high level of criminal activity (*WL* 66). As Habila says, the characters 'lack what it takes – money or connections – to make it in Lagos. What they do have, though, is hope.' However, the officer soon realises that Lagos still belongs to the Nangas of the world, and acknowledges that it is capitalist 'self-interest' and conspicuous consumption that decide one's fate: without that money, and the 'right talismans' to exhibit it –'runic Mercedes symbols sketched on conspicuous keys, chunky gold watches'–, it is extremely hard to be a part of the city; its promises are elusive, if not outright lies (*WL* 99). These talismans are in effect those luxury items acquired through conspicuous consumption, identified in the previous chapter, and further explored in the next one. Disappointed by his unsuccessful job search, Chike concludes that 'Lagos [is] a jungle, an orderly ecosystem' in which he is already a loser (100). Because *WL*'s characters are not simply wandering around the city of their childhood but actively trying to get settled and make a living, the novel does not focus equally on several forms of infrastructure but instead registers those with which the group interacts the most. There are four key forms of physical infrastructure that punctuate Onuzo's narrative: those related to oil, to housing, to transport, and to education.[252]

In the first place, the socio-ecological violence of oil infrastructures is registered both in its direct and indirect forms: in the fight between the military and the militants in the Delta, and in the corruption that is visibly developed in the city. The novel is divided into three parts; the first of which, 'Zombie', possibly an allusion to the characters' initially dormant state, narrates the origins and formation of the group of five. Within this first part, Onuzo's first five chapters offer quite a detailed account of the issues involved in the Niger Delta, briefly described here in Chapter One. Once in Lagos, oil is still there in the form of corrupt political deals, such as those struck by Achebe's 'old Africans'. When Ahmed Bakare, a young and idealist journalist, and his newspaper, *The Nigerian Journal*, are introduced, Ahmed receives a scary visit from Chief Momoh's men. Chief Momoh is 'a former Minister of Petroleum and a billionaire', and Ahmed's newspaper has published 'a piece on an oil rig that the chief [is] alleged to own by proxy', presumably through some deal with an international oil company (*WL* 40). Later, when Ahmed meets the runaway Minister of Education, Chief Sandayọ, the latter attempts to distract the former from the stolen money by offering information on Delta 'militant groups […] in the pay of the presidency'. He also claims that, if one wants to 'get allocated an oil block', all one has to do is be in good terms with the First Lady and '[b]uy her purple things' (174). Finally, in a

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[252] Habila, 'High Hopes' (paragraph 3 of 5).

subsequent conversation, we learn that Ahmed's father, also very wealthy, was a Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum during the 1980s. Both Sandayọ and Ahmed know that the ex-civil servant also took his share of the national cake in his time (189). That is, in its first half, *WL* points both to oil's materiality, and its social and political dimensions.

If oil is behind the group's formation and urban migration, housing and transport shape the group's arrival in Lagos and the novel's end, interrupted by education, which lies at the heart of the conflict the five of them face. The group's search for an adequate home reflects the deficits of the housing infrastructure in the city, as well as the resourcefulness of those left out of it, those 'homeless' who 'abound' in Lagos (*WL* 187). This makes up the novel's second part, 'Monday Morning in Lagos', where the city takes centre stage. Indeed, the group's first time in the city, when Gyarkye says that it 'comes most alive', seems to be the perfect fictional illustration of Amy Otchet's *UNESCO Courier* article, 'Lagos: The Survival of the Determined'. Moreover, Onuzo peppers this second part with snippets from Ahmed's fictional *Nigerian Journal*, in a manner similar to Cole's use of photography: there is no patterned or logical order, and the extracts include editorials, advertisements, obituaries and even uncategorised fragments. However, even if the fragments are not always directly related to the chapter where they are placed, the reader can still see the connection. These extracts write the city from another, everyday perspective, which complements the group's differentiated experience of urban space.[253]

Because they know no one and have nothing, the group is forced to settle under a bridge until they can find something better. While their sojourn is only temporary, it is through their experience that we can see the underside of bridges as an *entre-deux* space created by infrastructural repurposing and reappropriation. According to a 'Lagos Snapshot' featured in the *Nigerian Journal*, they 'are multipurpose spaces: shade and shelter, house and office, church and mosque' (*WL* 91). They are '[colonised]' by 'touts' and governed by 'a strange chaotic order'. Its inhabitants '[pay] their levy and they expect security in return': 'Under the bridge, our government dey work', explains an area boy proudly (Ibid.). Ironically, it is Chairman's respect for Fineboy's freedom fighting that gets the group a discount in the security fee they otherwise cannot afford (96-7). The 'chaotic order' of life under the bridge could in fact be an example of Simone's concept of 'people as infrastructure'. Like the 'ruins' of inner-city Johannesburg, the underside of bridges 'not only mask but also constitute a highly urbanized social infrastructure'. Their residents have

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[253] Gyarkye, 'Going AWOL' (paragraph 3 of 7); Amy Otchet, 'Lagos: The Survival of the Determined', *UNESCO Courier*, 52:6 (1999), 22-25.

also '[engaged] complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices' which 'become an infrastructure'. Their 'experience of regularity' is also enabled by 'radically open, flexible, and provisional' endeavours. While Simone emphasises the economic and collaborative aspects of this concept, however, I would like to highlight here its spatial side, which is the one foregrounded in Onuzo's novel.[254]

Even if this social infrastructure is presented as contrasting with physical ones, according to its definition, it 'is constituted through the capacity of individual actors to circulate across and become familiar with a broad range of spatial, residential, economic, and transactional positions'. That is, both the actors' positionality and interactions with space and physical infrastructure are key to the constitution of these social networks. For the purpose of this analysis, I understand Simone's concept as referring to those flexible and provisional collaborations destined to make up for failing or non-existent physical infrastructure, which are simultaneously spatially configured and can help us to (re)imagine urban space. In other words, *people as infrastructure* becomes a means through which *entre-deux* spaces like the underside of bridges are (re)created, which themselves become what Prieto calls 'loci of innovation and development'. It is this process that thus constitutes a form of contestation of *planned violence*. Also present in Abani's *GraceLand*, these are self-contained, self-governed cities within the city that develop under official infrastructural sites; sites of illegal squatting and unwritten laws, whose alternative landscapes seem to offer its citizens the protection and sense of belonging that official institutions do not. It is within these spaces that provisional and flexible relations are forged, allowing a multiplicity of individuals to coexist: 'The bridge-dwellers [speak] different languages, [worship] different gods, [support] different premiership teams' (*WL* 101). Indeed, Harrison states that 'intermixture is [...] a longstanding characteristic of metropolitan life', produced, among others, by '[u]rban growth' and 'infrastructural collapse'. In this sense, if ethnic loyalties are relevant in the Nigerian city for both the global and *local cosmopolitans*, this does not seem to be true when it comes to the urban poor.[255]

Nonetheless, Onuzo's novel is also quite aware of the negative aspects of these spaces. Not only does it acknowledge the incorporation of these flexible networks into the same capitalist system that excludes their members in the first place, but also registers, albeit briefly, the environmental violence of life under the bridge, against which there is

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[254] Simone, 'People as Infrastructure', pp. 407-408.
[255] Simone, 'People as Infrastructure', p. 408; Prieto, *Postmodern Poetics*, p. 1; Abani, *GraceLand*, p. 29; Harrison, *Waste Matters*, p. 10.

little residents can do on their own: 'Hygiene [is] not an option', and 'open-air defecation' is their sewage system (119-20). When it rains heavily, 'their new home' floods, 'dead smells and creatures rising to the surface' (100). It is Oma who knows how to make the most of such a downpour, collecting rainwater in a bucket and '[fashioning] raincoats out of nylon bags' (Ibid.). This again highlights the forced environmentalism that comes with poverty, which is both unjust and inadequate. As opposed to *EDT*, then, *WL* seems to offer a more nuanced and lived experience of Lagos's ambivalence. Even if the bridge-dwellers are able to make up for the lack of infrastructural support in innovative ways, and thus (re)claim urban space, they are, perhaps unwillingly, integrated into that same exclusionary space through the circulation of capital, while they still face sanitary deficiencies which are harder to make up for. The bridge-dwellers, then, seem to contest infrastructural violence only partially.

The *radical unevenness* of the city's housing infrastructure also features in Onuzo's novel, as urban poverty and *entre-deux* spaces are contrasted with more affluent and infrastructurally-rich areas, such as 'the business district', with its 'tall buildings with mirrored facades' (*WL* 91). Together with the MUSON Centre, these buildings represent the 'neoliberal urban development' referred to by Boehmer and Davies. In *WL*, we also return to Obi's Ikoyi, this time as the home of Richard Brown, BBC correspondent. The area's past as a 'British reserve' and its consequent disregard for the 'politics of road signs' are mentioned, together with 'the nearby affluent ghetto of Victoria Island' (246-7).[256]

In fact, after some time, the group moves from the in-between space under the bridge, a place whose value needs to be looked for underneath the surface, to one that is purposefully hidden and disguised as ruins: Chief Sandayọ's underground flat in a gated 'residential state, the type that rich people [parcel] themselves into all over the country' (*WL* 116). Fineboy comes across the flat after realising that in 'abandoned buildings', perhaps remnants of unfulfilled oil-boom projects like those mentioned in *GraceLand*, lies the key to the group's new lodgings (*WL* 112). This time, they disrupt and appropriate existing elite infrastructure, entering the estate through a hole 'in the perimeter wall' (116). If the underside of the bridge is tellingly compared to 'an unfinished mansion', referring to it in spectacular yet unrealised terms (91), the estate contains actual mansions whose signs of wealth are described as designed to separate the estate's residents from everyone else: 'built like bunkers, the pillars and trellised balconies that decorated them added as afterthoughts' (169); its technological comfort a spreading cancer: 'satellite dishes growing like tumours on their roofs' (116). Underneath 'an incomplete building' in an unkempt

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[256] Boehmer and Davies, 'Planned Violence', pp. 11-12.

alley, the flat is fully equipped and functional. If the mansions of the estate are critiqued for their hostile appearance, the flat's luxury leather furniture is described in terms of the 'small herd [that has] been slaughtered to make' it: 'mothers and calves stitched together' (116-7). In terms of housing, then, Onuzo's work is much more attentive to material issues and, while not the focus of the narrative, the imbrication of human and nonhuman nature is certainly presented as a key element of an urban landscape shaped by neocolonial capitalist forces.[257]

Fineboy believes the flat to be abandoned and the group moves in. A month later, runaway Sandayọ comes into his property carrying ten million dollars stolen from the 'World Bank-approved […] Basic Education Fund' (59). This encounter both changes the tone and pace of the narrative, and throws the group into the centre of the conflict, since they now have to decide what to do with the minister and the stolen money. Here we see again how Chike's disappointment with the city makes him understand Sandayọ's money as a realisation of 'the Lagos dream of sudden changes in fortune' and the power of capital: 'No one would admire him for his honesty [there]', and with the money 'he would become […] a person of substance and dignity' (148-9). Interestingly, like the UPU members in *NLE*, Chike seems to wrongly blame Lagos for his temptation to keep the cash, making the city responsible for the money-driven success model of capitalism.

In terms of infrastructure, the encounter with Sandayọ puts public education in the limelight, showing how political corruption ensures its failure. According to the minister, the money would have never reached its final destination, a fact known by the president himself, as well as by the World Bank (*WL* 59 and 189). As with the National Museum and MUSON, this neocolonial corruption again results in jarring differences between the public and the private, which translate into exclusionary infrastructures and unequal access to resources. While the private school built by the narrator's aunt in *EDT* receives *tokunbo* supplies from the United States carried by school buses (102), the public school Chike visits is both unsanitary and unfit for learning: it is dimly lit, and smells of 'sweat and latrines. The students [are] crowded' (*WL* 158), and the school has been long waiting for 'textbooks, computers, desks, whiteboards, fans' (160). Tellingly, Michael Bennett demonstrates how 'unequal' education in America is necessarily bound up with 'the spatialization of race'. Even if *WL* points to class rather than racial differences, access to adequate and safe education is clearly still as much a material and spatial issue as it is a sociopolitical one.[258]

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[257] Abani, *GraceLand*, p. 27.
[258] Bennett, 'Manufacturing the Ghetto', pp. 177-178.

When the group decides to put Sandayọ under house arrest and use the money to renovate schools instead of distributing it among themselves, it is possible to stretch Simone's and Prieto's definitions to understand it as an act of social infrastructure that transforms the underground flat into an *entre-deux* space, a parastatal Ministry of Education. According to my expansion of *people as infrastructure* above, while the group does not necessarily belong to a permanently excluded community, it certainly behaves like Simone's inner-city residents. Its members divide themselves into teams and take on different tasks; they forge provisional and open collaborative relationships that enable them to supply a few primary schools with very much needed resources and infrastructure, including 'internet access, […], school buses, flushing toilets,' and sports facilities (*WL* 164). If capital can be said to be still routed through the bridge-dwellers, it is certainly *re-routed* through this parastatal ministry. The underground flat, on the other hand, once a luxury hiding place for a corrupt politician, now becomes a prison and ministry headquarters, where the group pursues the honourable goal of using the money for its assigned purpose. Even if it is not originally 'misunderstood' or 'ignored', the flat definitely becomes an in-between space, where innovative methods are utilised to achieve the group's objective.[259]

Before focusing on the novel's ending, I would like to address the presence of transport and road infrastructures, which also shape the narrative. Compared to *EDT*, whose narrator sees public transport as a site of converging energies and a symbol of his search for home, *WL*'s references to cars, buses and roads are more grounded in lived experience and are in fact reminiscent of Obi and Mr. Adeyemi's plight in *NLE*. Indeed, as Lindsey B. Green-Simms argues, from the inherent contradictions of automobility that become heightened in a West African context, stem the 'ambivalent pasts and presents' of 'cars in Africa'. These ambivalences take the form not only of precarity, but also of 'dynamism, spontaneity, and flexibility': 'Anxieties about the dangers of driving are therefore often mixed with the excitement and pleasures of street life and consumer culture.' While the main characters in *WL* do not drive, as opposed to Obi and Odili, Onuzo's work still reflects these contradictions and ambivalences. If Achebe focuses on the symbolic value of cars in the early postcolony, which, judging by Chike's comments cited earlier does not seem to have changed much in contemporary Nigeria, the group's movement from Bayelsa to Lagos offers a different viewpoint. Both the precarity and

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[259] Prieto, *Postmodern Poetics*, p. 1.

dynamism of mobility are noted, contained in prayers before departing (*WL* 36) coupled with Chike's excitement when approaching the city (72-3).[260]

Moreover, like the underside of bridges, both the bus park and the road itself are conceived of as multivalent, liminal spaces where unregulated social infrastructures produce alternative landscapes. A *Nigerian Journal* editorial describes 'an assortment of individuals' that frequent 'Lagos bus parks' for reasons other than transport: the hawkers 'who wish to make honest money' selling overpriced wares; the luggage thieves; and those looking 'for entertainment: to chase a thief, to fetch petrol for burning if the thief is caught' (*WL* 71). These are, indeed, the 'multiple energies of Lagos life' mentioned by *EDT*'s narrator (35). Once again, alternative, and unexpected socio-material relations take place in bus parks. The newcomers are also divided into two groups: one 'with a destination', and one 'whose ambition saw no further than reaching the city', to which the main characters belong (*WL* 71). The difference, though, is much more than a sense of direction. As we have seen, the type that 'has nowhere to go' will struggle to be part of a city that 'is no different from anywhere, except there are more people, and more noise, and more' (Ibid.).

Chike and Yẹmi come into close contact with the multivalence of the road when they find work as traffic controllers, an official form of human infrastructure. Subverting or, at the very least, going beyond the road as the ultimate symbol of urban modernity, the novel can in fact be said to illustrate Savonick's description of the streets of Lagos as 'both economic spaces and stages on which life and death occur for many of the world's inhabitants'. The road as a socio-ecologically violent space, a site of power and pollution, is soon acknowledged: 'Only noise and grit at the centre of this crossroads' (*WL* 104); 'The road always [smells] of exhaust, a lace of petrol on the atmosphere, smog in each breath' (114). The two men learn the 'basic tenets of their new trade': old cars can be 'banged'; you risk your life by touching a new car; saluting 'the most impressive car' may make 'money […] fall from its tinted windows'; okadas only stop if they want to (106). In fact, Chike classifies 'road users' into 'a taxonomical tree […], an urban Linnaeus, ordering the world' (114). Like a colonial botanist, Chike observes and organises those individuals that, as Green-Simms says, 'create new uses and meanings for road space': while 'pedestrians and motorists [are] migratory', 'fixtures' who do not use the road for transportation include 'beggars', '[h]ustlers', and 'gawkers' (*WL* 114).[261]

After a series of plot twists, the group is forced to leave Sandayọ's flat and pushed back to the margins of the city, powerless and homeless again. The five return briefly to

[260] Green-Simms, *Postcolonial Automobility*, pp. 5 and 10-11.
[261] Savonick, '"The problem of locomotion"', p. 678; Green-Simms, *Postcolonial Automobility*, p. 11.

the 'open stink of running sewers and rotten food' that is the underside of the bridge, where, however, their former payment 'is still valid' (*WL* 313). Following an attack on the bridge, they ask Ahmed, the journalist who first interviews Sandayọ, for help. The novel once again points to the huge gap between rich and poor, and the ecological consequences of consumerism, when the group moves to Ahmed's parents' mansion, which has a swimming pool as well as 'a pristine and sterile Eden' for a garden, and 'where electricity [burns] twenty-four hours like the sun' (337). Chike sees their stay here as a 'holiday' (336). In the end, Sandayọ is assassinated and the group leaves the Bakare mansion, relocating to the Makoko water slum, which Yẹmi discovers when he '[becomes] a tourist in Lagos', during their stay with the Bakares (295).

It is at this point that the title of the novel's third section, 'Water No Get Eenemy', becomes clear, although not unproblematic. An allusion to a song by Nigerian activist and singer Fela Kuti, in turn based on a Yoruba proverb, the title of the last section can be understood as referring to the power of nature, and water in particular, as well as the importance of being in alignment with it. However, this is not entirely reflected in the novel. Initially, Makoko is described objectively, seen through Yẹmi's curious eyes: the houses on stilts, the canoes, the planks on 'soggy swamp' (*WL* 297). Unlike the description of the bridge, Makoko's environmental issues, also caused by lack of infrastructure, are only registered: 'rubbish [drifts] together in small islands' (Ibid.), and one resident tells Yẹmi that it is in the water that they 'go to the toilet' and 'have [their] bath' (298). Like under the bridge, plastic bags are also recycled here, 'sewn together' to make sails for the fishermen's rafts (Ibid.). Later, the novel's epilogue offers further insight when the place becomes the group's new home, 'their residence defying cartographers' (350). However, even if, as Tolu Ogunlesi's article shows, Makoko is an even more complex *entre-deux* space than the underside of bridges, this is not shown in the novel. While the *Guardian* article addresses both the place's well-known problems and its less-known positive features, including a local clean water infrastructure, primary schools, and trading and industrial networks, in the novel's ending, Onuzo chooses to abandon her particular attention to the materiality of places and resort to a mystic quality similar to that of *EDT*'s Iganmu.[262]

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[262] Tolu Ogunlesi, 'Inside Makoko: Danger and Ingenuity in the World's Biggest Floating Slum', *Guardian*, 23 February 2016, Cities Section <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/feb/23/makoko-lagos-danger-ingenuity-floating-slum> [Accessed 8 August 2022] (27 paragraphs). Since the novel's publication, efforts have been made to '[put] the slum on the map' and thus bring to it much needed infrastructural services. See Celia Lebur, 'Drone Project Aims to Put Floating Lagos Slum on Map', *Tech Xplore*, 29 November 2019 <https://techxplore.com/news/2019-11-drone-aims-lagos-slum.html> [Accessed 8 August 2022] (paragraph 3 of 30).

Makoko appears here almost as a haven, as the group's place in the world. Water becomes refuge and shelter, but the infrastructural and environmental consequences of this are not adequately considered. Even though Chike can see the 'soiled' water of the lagoon, the place '[clears] his mind' for prayer (*WL* 350). If Fineboy's adaptation to the place can be explained by 'his riverine origins' (Ibid.), Chike's spiritual connection to the water cannot. In other words, Onuzo's rendering of Makoko, although offered from the group's internal position as new residents and still more nuanced than Cole's depiction of Iganmu, focuses on a spiritual dimension of the place that is not only absent from the rest of the novel, but also contrasts markedly with it, and with the intertextual references contained in last part's title. In *WL*, Makoko is still an in-between space, but its ambivalence, like that of *EDT*'s Iganmu, is portrayed on a metaphysical more than a physical level. Yẹmi's discovery introduces an initial tension, but nothing else is said about Makoko's residents, about their plights, and the social infrastructures that keep the place running and make it the refuge that it becomes for the group. If Cole's last chapter is in keeping with the rest of his work, Onuzo's epilogue marks a final change in tone, pace, and focus; one that somewhat undermines the novel's otherwise critical approach to the city and its infrastructures, by portraying Makoko's in-between nature as metaphysical. By contrast, as we will now see, *Lagoon*, where water is a central element throughout, seems to be equally and continuously composed of science fiction and 'recognizably real' urban elements, so that Okorafor's Lagos does not need to sacrifice 'reality' for magic.[263]

3.3. Transforming: *Lagoon*

The last text considered in this chapter is *Lagoon*, published in 2014 by Nnedi Okorafor, a Nigerian-American writer based in Phoenix, Arizona. The novel tells the story of an alien landing on the coasts of Lagos in the near future, and the chaos that ensues in the panicked city. While Lagos '[eats] itself' (*LG* 177), Adaora, a marine biologist; Agu, a soldier; and Anthony, a Ghanaian rapper, are chosen to fulfil the mission of taking the alien ambassador to the absent Nigerian president. *Lagoon* is a work of science fiction that belongs to the subgenre of Africanfuturism, a term coined by the author herself in response to Mark Dery's Afrofuturism, which Okorafor felt no longer represented her work. Crucially, while *Lagoon* differs markedly with the other two novels analysed in this chapter in terms of generic and stylistic choices, it shares with *EDT* and *WL* Lagos's

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[263] Janelle Rodriques, '"Being very human in one of the most inhuman cities in the world": Lagos as Site of Africanfuturist Invasion in *Lagoon* & *Godhunter*', in *Speculative & Science Fiction*, African Literature Today 39, guest eds. Louisa Uchum Egbunike and Chimalum Nwankwo (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2021), pp. 14-30 (p. 20).

central role: in Janelle Rodriques's words, its 'topography – its very name – make it ideal for this extra-terrestrial invasion, as the unnamed space aliens choose the water as their base'. This is emphasised by the inclusion of a 'Welcome to Lagos' note, and a map of the coast of the city, featuring Lagos Lagoon, as initial paratextual elements. In fact, as Mary Bosede Aiyetoro and Elizabeth Olubukola Olaoye state, '*Lagoon* is not merely a novel about Lagos but an *experience* of Lagos'.[264]

   I contend here that Okorafor's novel goes even a step further than Onuzo's and, by proposing the other-than-human aliens as infrastructure, imagines a complete break with *planned violence* exerted over human and nonhuman nature. In this case, urban ambivalence is portrayed at a more general, and extraordinary, city level than is the case with *WL*'s specific and everyday examples of infrastructural repurposing and compensation. In fact, the Nature/Society binary is challenged in *Lagoon* through a blurring of boundaries between both science and magic, and human and nonhuman nature. Specifically, I want to suggest that the novel's construction of a posthuman Lagos, enabled by the genre of Africanfuturism, means that both the author and the extra-terrestrials appear to anticipate Maan Barua's proposition of incorporating nonhuman animals into 'a wider infrastructural ontology'. Thus, the novel's registration of *planned violence*, as well as the alien technology that challenges it, take into account humans and nonhumans alike. In this sense, *Lagoon* not only challenges the separation of Nature and Society through a subversion of the tradition/modernity binary, but also confounding the distinction between human and nonhuman living things. The novel's ending, nonetheless, is as problematic as the previous two, since it fails to entertain any present or future difficulties involved in replacing oil as a source of energy. The new alien technology is both inexhaustible and harmless to the environment. In this sense, this analysis contends, following Imre Szeman, that Okorafor's novel behaves like most science fiction literature, and ultimately fails to consider 'cultures of less' regarding energy infrastructure and provision.[265]

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[264] Rodriques, 'Africanfuturist Invasion', p. 21; Mary Bosede Aiyetoro and Elizabeth Olubukola Olaoye, 'Afro–Science Fiction: A Study of Nnedi Okorafor's *What Sunny Saw in the Flames* and *Lagoon*', *Pivot*, 5:1 (2016), 226-246 (p. 239), emphasis in the original. See also Ainehi Edoro, 'Aliens in Lagos', *Africa Is a Country*, 31 July 2015 <https://africasacountry.com/2015/07/the-futuristic-lagos-of-nnedi-okorafors-lagoon> [Accessed 20 August 2022] (paragraph 3 of 9) and Esthie Hugo, 'Looking Forward, Looking Back: Animating Magic, Modernity and the African City-Future in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*', *Social Dynamics*, 43:1 (2017), 46-58.

[265] Maan Barua, 'Infrastructure and Non-Human Life: A Wider Ontology', *Progress in Human Geography*, 45:6 (2021), 1467–1489 (p. 1469). The same can be said of Habila's *Oil on Water*, which describes not only the environmental havoc caused by oil infrastructures, but also how nonhuman animals can sometimes repurpose these when they no longer serve their original function. This is seen, for example, in the case of the wasps nesting '[h]igh up in the rusty rigging' of a deserted platform (p.8). Shannon, Nardizzi, Hiltner, Makdisi, Ziser, Szeman and Yaeger, 'Editor's Column', p. 325.

This posthuman Africanfuturist worldview perhaps constitutes the main difference between Okorafor's work and the other two novels analysed here: *Lagoon*'s futuristic and other-than-human total infrastructural disruption lies between Lagos's contemporary negative aspects, which become patently clear when news of the alien invasion starts spreading, and the promise of a new, multi-agentic, dawn. This differs from both *EDT*'s representation of Lagos's presently untapped potential, which could be unlocked if the narrator decided to stay in Nigeria, and from *WL*'s actual, provisional and discrete networks. Its preoccupation with the future instead of with 'what could have been', together with its decentring of the West, make *Lagoon* a very different work from Cole's novel, which looks to the past from a subverted neocolonial perspective; and from Onuzo's, which is grounded in the present and whose second half is mainly concerned with the BBC's broadcast of Sandayọ's deeds. While the three novels deal in their own way with 'what has been', *Lagoon* definitely attempts to move beyond it, to the conception of a new era of cultural, social, economic and ecological growth.

According to Okorafor herself, 'Africanfuturism is specifically and more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point-of-view as it then branches into the Black Diaspora, and it does not privilege or center the West.' Crucially, it is 'less concerned with "what could have been", and more concerned with "what is and can/will be". It acknowledges, grapples with, and carries "what has been"'. Since, according to Rodriques, 'Africanfuturism […] does not concern itself with writing back but instead writes itself *in*', *Lagoon* not only decentres 'the West', but also seamlessly integrates the story of the alien invasion into the master narrative of the city of Lagos, precisely through the inclusion of African religious and mythological figures. In other words, because *Lagoon* is an Africanfuturist work, Lagos's culture, its history, its present and its future are key to the narrative. If *WL* could be imagined as telling some of the latent stories in *EDT*'s 'city of Scheherazades' (*EDT* 27), *Lagoon* is, according to its narrator, 'the Great Spider' Udide Okwanka, a fragment, 'a great twist to Lagos's tale' (*LG* 228). Moreover, says Tabea Wilkes, because Africanfuturism's 'aim' is 'to (re-)claim [the] future' from 'established Western tropes', *Lagoon* 'presents an ambitious […] narrative that seeks to break with contemporary realities'. Thus, in choosing Lagos as their new home, a choice that is frequently questioned and defended by different characters along the story, the aliens both recognise and enact the place's *entre-deux* quality as a postcolonial urban centre. They see beyond what Simone terms the 'incomplete' African city and Ainehi Edoro refers to as the 'over-populated third-world megalopolis in a continent thought of as

stranded in the "waiting room" of modernity', and they find a place full of life, where 'change' can happen and the future can begin (*LG* 112).[266]

The human and nonhuman 'energies of Lagos life' (*EDT* 35), *Lagoon* seems to say, can be harnessed and channelled into a world-changing revolution. In fact, this combination of fantastic and African mythological elements is especially well suited to the construction of a posthuman urban imaginary, evidenced from the start in the novel's dedication: 'To the diverse and dynamic people of Lagos, Nigeria— animals, plant, and spirit'. According to Rosa María Moreno Redondo, science fiction generic conventions already usually include the '[exploration] of the limits of human nature' and of nonhuman 'animal agency', which 'challenges us to be posthuman in our relationship with others'; or, '[a]s readers, […] to value other skills beyond rationality'. While Wilkes focuses on the posthuman element in the alien ambassador, following Chantelle Bayes, I interpret *Lagoon* as portraying one of those 'posthumanist conceptions of the city' that can be envisioned through 'new environmental imaginaries', and which can contribute to the '[destabilisation of] dichotomous notions of nature and culture'.[267]

Bayes defines the posthuman 'as entanglements of bodies, beings, matter, and phenomena'; that is, a way of understanding the human as 'neither a bounded or singular being, nor the only agent' in a given 'process'. If, according to Moreno Redondo, the posthuman is relevant to all science fiction literature, Africanfuturism, with its added inclusion of indigenous African cosmologies, is less at risk of '[reproducing] colonial forms of knowledge that erase the Indigenous and non-Western perspectives from which posthumanism also owes its origins'. Moreover, Bayes describes 'the posthuman city' as one where 'the human' is not eliminated but decentred, which enables us to '[reimagine] the city beyond the needs of only its human inhabitants', in turn 'allowing for diverse socio-ecological communities': 'In reconsidering the city as a negotiated process between nature and culture,' between human and nonhuman nature, 'the agency of nonhumans to contribute to the construction of cities, and indeed environmental imaginaries, might be acknowledged'. A posthuman understanding of the city thus not only acknowledges but

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[266] Nnedi Okorafor, 'Africanfuturism Defined', 19 October 2019 <http://nnedi.blogspot.com/2019/10/africanfuturism-defined.html> [Accessed 15 August 2022]; Rodriques, 'Africanfuturist Invasion', p. 17, emphasis in the original; Tabea Wilkes, '"Poison Rainbows": The Speculative Jurisdiction of Okorafor's *Lagoon*', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 19:3 (2022), 299–313 (p. 301); Simone, 'People as Infrastructure', p. 409; Edoro, 'Aliens in Lagos', paragraph 1 of 9.

[267] Rosa María Moreno Redondo, 'Animal Representation in Recent Anglophone Science Fiction: Uplifting and Anthropomorphism in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* and Adam Roberts's *Bête*, *Oceánide*, 12 (2020), 78-83 <https://doi.org/10.37668/oceanide.v12i.28> (p. 79); Wilkes, '"Poison Rainbows"', p. 304; Bayes, *Reimagining*, p. 28.

also centres the imbrication of human and nonhuman nature, and nonhuman agencies that participate in the formation of urban environments.[268]

Okorafor's adoption of Africanfuturism, this section argues, allows her to decentre the human and imagine a posthuman Lagos; and this is clearly shown through an infrastructural analysis of the novel. It is thus possible to say that the extra-terrestrials contest *planned violence* in four different ways: through the creation of 'reconciliation infrastructures', and through the 'repair', enhancement, and replacement of existing infrastructures. According to Barua, 'reconciliation infrastructures are those that entail an active design of infrastructural environments to foster and modulate non-human life', those purposefully built to enable the proliferation of nonhuman animals by '[incorporating] ecology into architectural assembly'. One of Barua's examples is the 'engineering of living walls and roofs to enable plant and animal communities to thrive on grey infrastructure'. This is indeed achieved in the novel at fantastical speed through alien technology, when the vines usually 'growing over the garbage pile behind [Jacobs's] building' cover 'the entire complex' in half a day (*LG* 182). The characters can in fact see the vines grow in front of their eyes and all over the 'old concrete': they have 'bulbous red flowers' with a 'sweet, roselike scent' (Ibid.). Moreover, even though the vines are not shown to be poisonous or harmful in any way, the human characters have understandable misgivings. In this sense, not only is the human decentred, but Lagos's transformation is completely out of their control.[269]

Another, perhaps less obvious and more complex, example of *reconciliation infrastructure* is imagined when Ayodele, the alien ambassador, kills the soldiers who are trying to shoot her, and uses her alien technology to '[take] the elements […] that [have] been Benson and the other soldiers and [rearrange] them into a plant' (*LG* 138). Here, the alien herself becomes an infrastructure of dead matter disposal that not only cleans Adaora's garden, but also fosters the growth of nonhuman nature. *Lagoon*'s inclusion of traditional cosmologies can be seen when one compares this episode with Oye's similar, albeit magical, reply to Elvis's question about mango trees in *GraceLand*. The old woman says that the trees used to be criminals who 'were buried alive' with a 'flowering stake […] driven through their heads'. This was done as a form of '[redemption]. In death they were given the chance to be useful, to feed fruit-bearing trees'. Crucially, both alien infrastructure and mythical story both reject colonial scientific knowledge and blur the

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[268] Bayes, *Reimagining*, pp. 13-14 and 28-29.
[269] Barua, 'Infrastructure and Non-Human Life, pp. 1476 and 1471.

boundaries between human and nonhuman living things, transforming human animals into fruit-bearing plants.[270]

The last and most significant example of extra-terrestrial *reconciliation infrastructure* is the alien spaceship, which enables the proliferation of marine life in more than one way. Firstly, the ship purifies the ocean waters; it even cleans an oil spill caused by an 'ecoterrorist swordfish', to use Melody Jue's words, at the beginning of the novel (*LG* 4-5). So as to highlight its ecological importance, when observing the spaceship, as Jue notes, the swordfish is reminded of the 'lost paradise' of coral reefs (*LG* 5). But this is not what the ship looks like. Instead, it is described as a 'great metropolis of ocean life' (*LG* 250), which is gradually merging with the submarine world. By the end of the novel, Adaora can see a vast and permanently changing extension of 'bone-white edifices' that the sea creatures inhabit (252). However, the unnaturally 'clear' water is now extremely dangerous for human beings (239): not only is it 'toxic' (248), but it also 'roils and boils with' monsters (228). This is indeed the second way in which the spaceship can be understood as a *reconciliation infrastructure*: it has, following Moreno Redondo, 'uplifting' powers, and can make the sea creatures grow in size, strength and intelligence (*LG* 5-6). As this critic points out, the alien infrastructure is put entirely at the service of underwater animals and their wishes. According to Ayodele, they 'are tired of boats and human beings', and this is a way of reclaiming their space (*LG* 240).[271]

It is interesting to consider here how this *reconciliation infrastructure* seems to undermine the previous ones' blurring of human and nonhuman boundaries, instead enabling a separation of human animals and sea creatures. Following Michael Rosenzweig, Barua explains that, as opposed to 'reservation' and 'restoration', 'reconciliation ecology is […] an attempt to work with the promises and potentials of anthropogenic environments'. In this case, it can be argued that, because the sea is not an anthropogenic environment, the alien infrastructure conversely gives submarine animals 'full control of the ocean', as Moreno Redondo says. Nonetheless, an oil-free ocean benefits both human and nonhuman animals. Moreover, as shown towards the end of the novel, the extra-terrestrials can also give human animals limited and controlled access to the water. In other words, the spaceship as a *reconciliation infrastructure* does not reinforce any binary separation; true

[270] Abani, *GraceLand*, pp. 20-21. For a deeper analysis of *Lagoon*'s inclusion of indigenous cosmologies and cultural elements see Edoro, 'Aliens in Lagos'; Melody Jue, 'Intimate Objectivity: On Nnedi Okorafor's Oceanic Afrofuturism', *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, 45:1 & 2 (2017), 171-188; Rodriques, 'Africanfuturist Invasion'.
[271] Jue, 'Intimate Objectivity', p. 179. Interestingly, the abandoned submarine platform (*LG* 96) eerily resembles the deserted villages encountered by the journalists in Habila's *Oil on Water*, pp. 8-10. Moreno Redondo, 'Animal Representation', pp. 79-80.

to a posthuman conception of Lagos, it simply restores the sea creatures' 'sovereignty' over the sea by limiting and regulating human intervention.[272]

The next example of alien contestation of *planned violence* can be understood as a form of *repair* of the existing road infrastructure. Firstly, even if, as has been already noted and as Esthie Hugo summarises, 'the highway' represents 'modernity's seductions and pitfalls', the novel foregrounds the precarity and dangers of roads, both for humans and nonhumans. Unlike *WL*'s realist examination of the ambivalence and *entre-deux* nature of the road, its dangers become patent in *Lagoon* once the panicked population starts fleeing Lagos in the second part of the novel. In the Prologue to the second Act, a section of the Lagos-Benin Expressway, referred to as a 'deathtrap' (*LG* 188), 'has named itself the Bone Collector. It mostly collects human bones, and the bones of human vehicles. But sometimes it likes the chitinous bones of spiders, too' (122). Crucially, following Barua, the Bone Collector can be identified as a 'biogeographic barrier' that obstructs mobility for a host of nonhuman animals, especially insects and other small species. In this Prologue, for example, we learn of a seven-legged tarantula whose native forest has been cut in two by the highway. Every once in a while, he risks his life and crosses the road in search of food. He can feel the vibrations caused by an approaching vehicle on the tarmac, but 'each crossing [is] a close call' (*LG* 121). This time, the spider is crushed by Adaora's car.[273]

True to its Africanfuturist genre, the lack of maintenance of road infrastructures and its consequences are explained in the novel in supernatural terms, drawing from indigenous beliefs. According to Adaora's mother (*LG* 188) and a man who is trying to leave Lagos with his family, the 'roads are full of ghosts' (203). Moreover, reminiscent of *The Famished Road* and *GraceLand*, Jacobs's grandmother used to warn him about 'playing soccer with his friends in the road at dusk. She said one day the road would swallow him right up the minute the sun went down (*LG* 171). In fact, twice in *Lagoon*, the road melts and becomes a roaring 'serpent of asphalt' (*LG* 171). The second time this happens it involves the Lagos-Benin Expressway, and the Bone Collector becomes 'a concrete wave' that swallows everything on its way (205). Interestingly, Hugo also recognises here a confounding of magical and scientific barriers when she identifies 'in this haunted highway […] a synthesis of the material and the spiritual': through this monstrous awakening and drawing on traditional elements, 'the highway […] is infused with an animist logic that weakens Euro-American modernity's hierarchical positioning of the physical, "rational" realm over the sphere of magic and myth'. Like Ayodele as a *reconciliation infrastructure*,

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[272] Barua, 'Infrastructure and Non-Human Life, p. 1476; Moreno Redondo, 'Animal Representation', p. 80.
[273] Hugo, 'Looking Forward', p. 52; Barua, 'Infrastructure and Non-Human Life, p. 1470.

then, the highway as monster also challenges colonial scientific discourse and the narrative of modernity.[274]

The Bone Collector only stops when an alien, in the form of a 'Nollywood woman', sacrifices herself to the road, to satiate its 'appetite' once and for all. It is this 'selfless act' that I understand as a form of infrastructural repair (*LG* 206-7). According to the man watching it all, the road monster is not from outer space, but 'from [*there*] and had probably been [there] since [those] roads were built' (206, emphasis in the original), clearly alluding to the violence of modernity. Once again, there is a blurring of boundaries when the road's voice makes the man 'feel like nothing but meat' (Ibid.), emphasising the human body's vulnerability and susceptibility to injury in the face of traffic accidents. The alien's sacrifice can then be understood as a form of repair that puts an end to one 'of Nigeria's worst diseases': 'The road shuddered, the road stretched, but in the end, the road was satisfied' (207). The roads are now safe for both humans and nonhumans. Lagos, Nigeria, are already starting to change and, once again, this has nothing to do with human intervention.

Last but not least, there are the cases of infrastructural enhancement and replacement, related to communications and energy respectively. Arguably, while still contributing to a posthuman Lagos, these processes are much more opaque than the other infrastructural interventions and not much is said about them, which makes *Lagoon*'s ending as problematic as those of *EDT* and *WL*. Both Ayodele and the president use alien technology to broadcast their messages to the whole country. Firstly, every existing device with a screen, regardless of its specifications and 'whether it is plugged in to anything or not' (*LG* 274-5), is used to transmit Ayodele's and the president's words in every corner of the country, even in other African nations (111-3 and 276-8). When the president asks how this is done, he is told they 'will explain, later' (275). The president then sees an alien put her hand on the camera and 'the tips of her fingers sink into its black casing' (275). This is all it takes, no physical infrastructure, no electricity, no internet connectivity, for the broadcast to be transmitted in Nigeria and Ghana.

This is indeed a revolutionary enhancement which appears to render communication technologies both ecologically innocuous and completely accessible. Unfortunately, but tellingly, neither the implications nor the technical details of this alien infrastructural upgrade are discussed; its multiple advantages seemingly taken for granted in a new era of unlimited supply. This lack of detail can in fact be interpreted as what Karin Barber,

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[274] Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* (London: Vintage [1991] 2003); Abani, *GraceLand*, p. 9; Hugo, 'Looking Forward', p. 53.

following Pierre Macherey, terms a 'silence', in the sense of what 'the text *cannot say*'. Like the silence '[surrounding] the figure of the good rich man', which '*cannot speak of* […] the real foundation of his […] wealth', the silence surrounding the alien infrastructural upgrade cannot really describe this miraculous technology, leaving it instead to someone else to imagine.[275]

Along similar lines, the aliens promise to replace existing energy infrastructures, namely, oil and gas as sources of energy (*LG* 112). The abandoned oil rig mentioned earlier seems to be the first step towards this new future. However, while the alien infrastructural creations and repair are described in considerable detail, the end of oil, like the enhancement of communication technologies, is merely addressed twice, and then only as a bountiful future. Ayodele mentions it in her initial greeting to the people of Lagos, when she explains that the aliens have arrived to 'refuel [their] future' and 'nurture [their] world' (113). The president's turn comes at the end of the novel, once he is miraculously recovered from his long-term heart illness and has spoken to the extra-terrestrial leaders about the future of his country. They tell him that Nigeria can no longer produce and commercialise oil, but that they 'have something better': their 'technology' (272). In his speech, the president talks about 'the alien technology', and about a 'pure' environment where both flora and fauna, human and nonhuman nature, will thrive (278). Although the president mentions 'solid programs' and 'both gradual and swift' change, nothing else is said about the new infrastructure (Ibid.).

Like the enhanced communication technologies, the new energy is thus clean and limitless, although its inner workings are as mysterious as those of oil itself. Jue contends that devising this revolutionary technology that can fantastically replace oil 'frees Okorafor from explaining how the rupture might occur', and allows her to focus instead on 'the important work of world building and imagining new forms of postcolonial, feminist science in its foamy wake'. That is, Jue acknowledges the novel's palpable silence here but, for her, imaging the wonderful future ahead is more important than imagining how this future might be achieved. Rodriques, on the other hand, states that *Lagoon*'s Africanfuturism is 'very aware of [its] present; [it does] not escape […] into an implausible utopia, or despair […] in an indulgent dystopia'. This may be true of the Lagos in which the novel takes place, and of the infrastructural violence that is registered and eliminated by the aliens, as shown in this analysis. Nevertheless, when it comes to energy, Okorafor's

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[275] Barber, 'Popular Reactions', pp. 432 and 448.

text does indeed appeal to a utopian future of never-ending clean energy that, as the president promises, will enable Nigeria to take its rightful place in the world (*LG* 278).[276]

In this sense, I argue, Okorafor's ending can be seen as problematic or inadequate, because the mysterious alien technology allows her to shy away from key questions regarding energy resources and infrastructures, including a lack thereof. Szeman claims that most science fiction steers clear of what the critic calls 'cultures of less'. This is indeed also true of *Lagoon*, whereas, conversely, this scarcity is contemplated in Cole's and Onuzo's work in terms of electricity and diesel. So, while *Lagoon* constructs an Africanfuturist and posthumanist Lagos which seems to harness the whole city's positive energy and transform it into the epicentre of a world-wide revolution, there are still limitations, or silences, surrounding this utopian future.[277]

As already explained, the alien technology promises to provide a source of energy that is, to use Szeman's words, 'clean, no longer a threat to the environment, and available in indefinite or even limitless quantities'. After being reborn 'like a phoenix', the city is ready for a 'transitional shift' that the president compares to Nigerian independence (*LG* 276). That is, following Szeman, 'the switch' to the new technology 'does not threaten [Nigerians'] way of life'. Thus, despite registering the *planned violence* of energy infrastructures, Okorafor's novel does not 'shake us out of our faith in surplus', or address the dread of deficit. Here, however, it is important to consider who this 'us' refers to. As we have seen and as we shall see again in the following and final chapter, Nigerian fiction does not fail to '[trace] the brutal consequences of a future of slow decline, of less energy for most and no energy for some', although these are not just futures but also pasts and presents.[278]

3.4. Conclusion

In his analysis of a literary Johannesburg, Pablo Mukherjee argues:

> Against the suggestion that this casualized and migratory mode of human existence signals a kind of unique African modernity, I would contend that they instead signal the unfolding of *a single, uneven, global modernity over time and space*. Against the suggestion that the "provisional intersections" of these migratory lives must be celebrated for their adaptability and creative

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[276] Jue, 'Intimate Objectivity', p. 184; Rodriques, 'Africanfuturist Invasion', p. 21.
[277] Shannon, Nardizzi, Hiltner, Makdisi, Ziser, Szeman and Yaeger, 'Editor's Column', p. 325.
[278] Shannon, Nardizzi, Hiltner, Makdisi, Ziser, Szeman and Yaeger, 'Editor's Column', p. 325.

energy, I submit that these are achieved occasionally and then *despite*, and not

because of, their systematic dehumanization and immiseration under the

regime of *a predatory transnational capitalism* […]. Moreover, I would argue

that it is precisely in the *resistance* to the enforced and involuntary conditions

of migration, circumlocution and "flexible existence" that the creativity and

dynamism of contemporary modernity's human subject becomes most obvious.

That is, they often fully realize themselves in acts of *rooting and habitation*

instead of acts of uprooting and travel.[279]

Mukherjee's contention is especially relevant to this third chapter for two main reasons.
Firstly, it reminds us of the importance of foregrounding the social, political, material, and
economic global forces that shape African urbanity, as well as the *planned violence* around
which this analysis has been structured – the infrastructurally-mediated and uneven
differentiation of urban space that the selected novels have been said to expose and
sometimes attempt to redress. Mukherjee urges critics to understand the latter's unequal
and unstable territories as the product of a *transnational capitalism* of which, following the
author's definition of *postcolonial environments*, neocolonialism is only the latest stage.
These global forces of course constitute a key element of the kind of literature examined
here. Consequently, this fourth chapter understands the denunciation and challenge of
infrastructurally-shaped urban spatial violence as a subversion of the tradition/modernity
binary and, consequently, the overarching Society/Nature one, simultaneously espoused
and enabled by *transnational capitalism.*

Secondly, and connected to this, Mukherjee's contention speaks to how we should
approach the 'adaptability and creative energy' that are now being recognised to
characterise African cities; namely, being weary of the why and how of this flexibility.
This third chapter has aimed to identify the productive and positive socio-environmental
relations that develop in the selected cityscapes as ways of redressing *planned violence*,
while being mindful of both the context within which these relationships are established,
and the problematics that still surround them. This is why the chapter has repeatedly
pointed to the ambivalent, or multivalent, nature of the urban spaces examined; in order to
highlight the coexistence of uneven global capitalism and transformative, creative
impulses. Importantly, the latter, as Mukherjee argues, both develop '*despite*' the former,
and, as this chapter has shown, are contained 'in acts of *rooting and habitation*'. In this
analysis, these acts are reflected in the section's titles: 'Revisiting', 'Discovering',

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[279] Mukherjee, 'Uneven City', p. 476, emphasis added.

'Transforming'; all of which point to the intention to relate to Lagos in a certain way, to connect with and inhabit the city.

This characteristically urban ambivalence has been interpreted to be generated by an escalating resistance to infrastructural violence and an actualisation of the city's generative potentialities, in turn enabled by the (re)creation of in-between or *entre-deux* spaces. Cole's *EDT*'s ideal and idealistic ambivalence, never fully realised in the novel although somehow present in the figure of the 'yahoo boys', is construed from the privileged positionality of the visitor, the outsider insider. The text has been shown to simultaneously expose infrastructural issues and the restricted understanding of the global cosmopolitan, who ultimately fails in his quest to find a home and literary inspiration in Nigeria. Onuzo's *WL* develops instead a more realistic urban ambivalence that partially disrupts the established system, grounded in everyday experience. However, her ill-assorted group of characters allows her to include a multiplicity of voices and points of view, as well as exploring innovative *entre-deux* spaces such as the minister's luxury flat. Finally, Okorafor's *Lagoon* utilises Africanfuturism to explore urban ambivalence at its highest, by proposing Lagos as the starting point of a world-wide revolution. In essence, *Lagoon* treats the whole of Lagos as an *entre-deux* space. Okorafor deliberately confounds the limits between the magical and the scientific, the human and the nonhuman, and imagines a total upending of existing infrastructures while transforming the Nigerian megacity into a posthuman urbanity.

To conclude, I would like to return to the characterisation of the novels analysed in this chapter as *Nigerian diaspora literature*, and focus on the link between this diasporic nature and their problematic endings. Crucially, Feldner says:

> Novels written abroad engage with Nigeria but, due to the authors' international experiences and transcultural perspectives, their stories avoid parochialism and aggressive patriotism. They are marked by a combination of expressing a devotion to Nigeria without unduly idealizing it and highlighting its faults and problems while explaining and contextualizing them.[280]

This sort of middle ground characteristically occupied by authors of Nigerian diaspora literature could in fact explain the problematic endings identified in the three novels. While the texts clearly represent 'the authors' international experiences and transcultural perspectives', there is still a certain level of idealism, if not of Nigeria, of the (potential)

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[280] Feldner, *Narrating*, p. 4.

ways in which citizens experience and interact with the place. These three novels expertly construct urban imaginaries in which the place of urban nature is situated within transnational capitalist relations. Ironically, this same transnational standing may be an obstacle in the way of a more fully developed (re)conception of *entre-deux* spaces.

CHAPTER FOUR. ENERGY, MATTER, AND WILL: THE HUMAN BODY AS SITE OF
OBJECTIFYING VIOLENCE AND CARING RESISTANCE

> *The whole business was made public in the end – he lost the election. It cost him seven male heads obtained from ritual murders and well over a hundred thousand naira. So don't deceive yourself, Auntie, that this kind of killing is a thing of the past. In this age of the naira, anything is possible, if it brings in naira power.*[281]

Chapter One first examines bodily objectification as a product of the mind/body binary, traced directly back to Cartesian dualism, and in turn understood as a third expression of the separation of Nature and Society. Within the wider dehumanising logic of capitalism, colonialism, as a phase of *capitalism as project*, has routinely dehumanised racialised subjects by casting them as bodies without a mind, pure animal Nature. Since the *project* of capitalism has always depended on an exploitation of this Nature, bodies as objects become commodities. Once they lose their economic value, these objectified bodies are rendered valueless and can be subjected to innumerable forms of violence. Secondly, while, and because, bodily objectification and commodification are a characteristic of capitalist societies in general, Chapter One analyses these issues in the context of Nigeria's (neo)colonial capitalism and, specifically, its oil political economy. This project thus traces a line of continuity in Nigerian society and culture between race-based objectification, and dehumanisation based on gender and class. Consequently, it examines the specific Nigerian iterations of bodily violence and resistance that develop as individuals strive not to be left out of a bountiful, shiny modernity.

As with the other two binaries examined here, literature constitutes a powerful means through which bodily objectification and commodification can be both represented and challenged. David Hillman and Ulrika Maude argue that by 'confronting us with the legible materiality of the body, literature often provides powerful forms of resistance to socially instituted perceptions and demands.' Specifically, they claim: 'Literature's enmeshment with the body offers not a loss of control but an acknowledgement of the illusory nature of control over our bodies (and, concomitantly, of identity and agency).' Within a cultural urban ecology, this reclaiming of the body through literature can be understood a one way of (re)constructing urban imaginaries; of exploring new ways of thinking with and about mind and body, challenging capitalist dehumanising mechanisms and (urban) bodily violence. In fact, regarding postcolonial fiction, Rebecca Duncan and Rebekah Cumpsty claim that it has often aimed to rethink and reimagine the colonised

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[281] Emecheta, *Naira Power*, p. 87.

racialised body as other than an exploitable object. They then go on to analyse what they identify as a resurgence of corporeal images in 21st-century postcolonial literature, '[mobilised] to give shape to the frequently intensely precarious experience of times and places' moulded by 'persistent imperialism'. If the critics are here still referring to race-based exploitation, their considerations can also be extended to gender- and class-based objectification in postcolonial nations.[282]

Whether we focus on the objectification of women by members of the national elite in Achebe's novels, or the treatment of the urban poor described by Cole, Okorafor and Onuzo, it is clear that human bodies are frequently objectified, commodified and/or discarded, in Nigerian urban imaginaries. Indeed, throughout Nigerian urban literature at large, we encounter, for example, the exploitation of construction and sex workers, of (social) reproductive labour, and of militarised bodies. We also come across the commercialisation of blood and body parts, as well as drug trafficking – which uses the body as vehicle. Moreover, we read about multiple instances of direct physical violence, bodily punishment, and visceral suffering: hunger and physical vulnerability as a consequence of poor infrastructure, including little or no access to health care; the burning alive of thieves; the consequences of fake medicine commercialisation; traffic accidents; violent crimes; gender-based violence, and police brutality. In sum, bodily objectification, which translates into the body as commodity and/or site of multiple forms of violence, features widely in Nigerian fictional cityscapes.

Nonetheless, while there has been isolated research focusing on certain aspects of the body in some urban works, such as travesty and sexuality in *GraceLand*, or prostitution in *Jagua Nana*, there seem to be no comparative studies of Nigerian novels that consider the human body from an ecological perspective, despite both the prominence of the body in Nigerian literature and the role of this literature in (re)imaging mind/body relations. Nor do existing analyses attempt to investigate the body simultaneously as passive and active. This fourth and last chapter thus identifies a third socio-environmental concern in the human body as both subject and part of nature. While this chapter does not focus exclusively on bodily imagery, since it also considers the body thematically and materially, it does explore how the selected novels can be interpreted to offer a critique of (neo)colonial capitalism through a consideration of objectified and disposable bodies within the political economy of Nigeria. Specifically, it interrogates the extreme forms of commodification

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[282] Hillman and Maude, 'Introduction', pp. 4-5; Duncan and Cumpsty, 'The Body in Postcolonial Fiction', pp. 590 and 596-597.

and direct and structural violence to which certain bodies are subjected, together with resistance to the mind/body binary offered by and through these same objectified bodies.

An important issue to address at this point is the simultaneous, and apparently contradictory, examination of the body as object and subject. In other words, does this approach reinforce the mind/body dualism that it claims the authors challenge? Can the authors, by portraying forms of bodily objectification, indeed challenge this binary? Or is the dualism implicit in the narratives from the start? In fact, an approach that analyses the body as a totality inscribed within nature, as this study does, understands the human as an embodied mind, and a mind and a body that are inextricably linked, as a conscious biological body, as human nature. This means, in Lesley A. Sharp's words, that 'the theme of body integrity must be addressed in both subjective and objectified terms'. Because 'the very sense of self-as-body is frequently obscured by commodification, […] an analysis that reclaims the subject must inevitably first wade through the mire of objectification'. That is, in order to rehumanise objectified characters, the texts considered here must first address the dehumanising practices that have construed these persons as disposable bodies. By considering embodied experiences of this dehumanisation, together with resistance to it, the dualism is exposed as artificial, although with very real consequences. The same can be said indeed of examinations of the village/city and tradition/modernity binaries, which must by necessity analyse representations of both separate abstractions and entangled materialities in order to undermine dualist thinking.[283]

In essence, the novels considered here can be said to expose the abstract nature of the dehumanisation process entailed in Nigeria by (neo)colonial capitalism, in tandem with its very real consequences. I argue that, by foregrounding the political economy behind these multiple forms of bodily violence, as well as the subjectivity of its recipients as care givers and receivers, and sometimes also through an emphasis on the embodied experiences of violence, the narratives (re)humanise these bodies and expose the artificiality of the mind/body binary. Moreover, it can be said that, by highlighting the humanity of objectified bodies, and/or questioning that of those who inflict bodily violence, the selected texts also signal the blurring of boundaries between, and intertwining of, human and nonhuman nature, specifically nonhuman animals, that characterises *capitalism as a process*.

The chapter analyses four different novels and is divided into two sections, each of which somehow speaks to one of the other two analytical chapters. The first section, 'Temptations', examines Ekwensi's *People of the City* along with Toni Kan's *The*

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[283] Sharp, 'The Commodification of the Body', pp. 289-290.

Carnivorous City. Building on the negative associations with the urban within a village/city binary, 'Temptations' looks at representations of the city as a meat-eating monster, seemingly responsible for all the damage inflicted on human bodies, and how these are undermined from within the same texts. The second section, 'Transactions', looks at Buchi Emecheta's *Naira Power* and Leye Adenle's *Easy Motion Tourist*. Drawing on the sense-making function of ritual, related to the tradition/modernity binary, the second section's main focus is on the commodification of human matter in the context of *money magic* and instant riches.

Before going into the first section of literary analysis, it is important to define care as applied to the present chapter, and how it is understood as a form of resistance to bodily objectification. Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto offer a comprehensive definition of care that has constituted a good starting point for further theorisation in care studies:

> On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as *a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible.* That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

Partly based on these authors' work, Emma Dowling defines care as 'all the supporting activities that take place to make, remake, maintain, contain and repair the world we live in and the physical, emotional and intellectual capacities required to do so'. Along similar lines but shifting from the idea of 'activity' to that of capacity, *The Care Manifesto* understands care as 'our individual and common ability to provide the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive – along with the planet itself'. Despite the use of 'ability' instead of 'activity', however, *The Manifesto* characterises care as 'active'.[284]

This chapter aligns with the first two definitions given above to understand care as an activity and, while this analysis focuses on human caring practices, it is also aware of María Puig de la Bellacasa's central claim that nonhuman entities are not only care receivers, as Fisher and Tronto's and *The Manifesto*'s definitions imply, but also

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[284] Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring', in *Circles of Care: Work, Identity and Women's Lives*, ed. Emily. K. Abel and Margaret Nelson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 35-62 (p. 40), emphasis in the original; Emma Dowling, *The Care Crisis: What Caused It and How Can We End It?* (London; New York: Verso, 2022), p. 21; The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (London; New York: Verso, 2020), p. 6.

caregivers. Moreover, like Tronto, I acknowledge and welcome the definition's broadness, which enables us 'to think about other ways to understand the meaning of care as more specific caring practices that are nested within this larger practice of care'. That is, a general definition of care includes multiple actual ways of caring that might be carried out and received by different agents in diverse places.[285]

There are three interrelated aspects of care that emerge from these definitions and need to be considered here in order to understand care as resistance. Firstly, and crucially, these authors suggest that care, both theoretically and practically, must attend to both mind and body. Fisher and Tronto explicitly reject the mind/body dualism and recognise their inextricability, when they speak of a 'life-sustaining web' in which 'our bodies, our selves, and our environments' are intertwined. For these authors, both human mind and body, and human and nonhuman nature, must be considered when thinking about care. Dowling similarly refers to 'the physical, emotional and intellectual capacities required' to take care of the world we live in, once again alluding to an equal caring attention to mind and body. Finally, *The Manifesto* mentions the 'political, social, material, and emotional conditions' needed for human and nonhuman nature to 'thrive', all of which affect us physically, emotionally and intellectually.

Secondly, an aspect closely linked with this comprehensive definition of care, and with a rejection of dualist thinking, is that of our interdependency: the fact that we all depend, to different degrees, on each other and on the nonhuman world in order to thrive. In their approach to the notion of care in a postcolonial context, Parvati Raghuram, Clare Madge and Pat Noxolo emphasise the need to think about 'responsibility and care' taking into account notions of 'interdependence and coexistence and the limits to these'. In a later paper, Raghuram again explains that '[c]are is produced inter-subjectively, in relation, and through practice', and not on an individual basis. Similarly, for Judith Butler, the human body is 'less an entity than a relation', which is at least partly defined by the body's 'dependency on other bodies and networks of support'. *The Manifesto* further claims that 'to put care centre stage means recognising and embracing our interdependencies'. This means that care and support are thus 'active and necessary across every distinct scale of life', and '[p]ractices more conventionally understood as care […] cannot be […] carried out unless both caregivers and care receivers […] are supported'. Nonetheless, it adds, interdependency is sometimes 'denied', for the sake of strength and autonomy; or,

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[285] Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2013), p. 19. For a biocentric study of care, which is not incorporated here for thematic reasons, see María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

conversely, 'pathologised', to weaken and humiliate 'those who should feel most *entitled* to care'. Interdependency is thus a key concept that must be acknowledged and grappled with: care is not something simply given by some and received by others, everyone and everything is capable of and needs to actively give and receive different forms of care.[286]

Thirdly, as a consequence of the first two points and as several critics have argued, care is and must be understood as a public, social, political and environmental matter.[287] Because, as *The Manifesto* demonstrates, care involves the entirety of the human and nonhuman world, because it is more than '"hands-on" care' and indeed concerns itself with both the practices and the conditions of those practices, because it is multi-scalar, care cannot be restricted to the private, the individual, the moral, and the human. Yet, this latter view of care is the one that prevails in a neoliberal and neocolonial capitalist world order, which means that '[o]ur world is one in which carelessness reigns', as the COVID-19 pandemic has painfully demonstrated. Indeed, 'neoliberalism', one should say in fact capitalism in each and every one of its historical stages, 'is uncaring by design'. In the same way that it disposes of anything, including dehumanised persons, that does not yield profit, capitalism 'seriously undermines all forms of care and caring that do not serve its agenda of profit extraction for the few'. This means that care practices have been restricted and reduced to the bare minimum, so that the majority of the global population is finding it increasingly hard to give and receive care.[288]

This is a point that Dowling makes too, and a premise on which she bases her book, *The Care Crisis*. Tellingly, Nancy Fraser also devotes a chapter of her book, *Cannibal Capitalism*, to the analysis of capitalist devouring of care understood as social reproductive work, which she locates as one expression of capitalism's depletion of the human and nonhuman world.[289] As both Dowling and *The Manifesto* argue, the neoliberal and neocolonial world order has only exacerbated a care crisis whose origins can be partly located in gendered notions of weakness, care and vulnerability.[290] The ultimate consequence, claims *The Manifesto*, is an 'unjust' overreliance on the traditional nuclear family and a tendency to 'care exclusively for and about "people like us"'. In Dowling's

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[286] Parvati Raghuram, Clare Madge and Pat Noxolo 'Rethinking Responsibility and Care for a Postcolonial World', *Geoforum*, 40 (2009), 5-13 (p. 10); Parvati Raghuram, 'Locating Care Ethics Beyond the Global North', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 15:3 (2016), 511-533 (p. 515); Judith Butler, 'Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance', in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 12-27 (pp. 19 and 16); The Care Collective, *Manifesto*, pp. 5-6 and 22-23, emphasis in the original.

[287] Fisher and Tronto, 'Toward'; Kathleen Lynch, 'Affective Equality: Who Cares?', *Development*, 52:3 (2009), 410–415; Raghuram, 'Locating'; The Care Collective, *Manifesto*; Dowling, *Crisis*.

[288] The Care Collective, *Manifesto*, pp. 5, 1 and 10.

[289] Dowling, *Crisis*, pp. 9-15; Fraser, *Cannibal Capitalism*, pp. 53-74.

[290] The Care Collective, *Manifesto*, pp. 7-9; Dowling, *Crisis*, pp. 1-5.

words, and contrary to what we have established, care is now 'voluntary and informed by an ethics of charity or other forms of moral obligation'. Moreover, '[a]usterity measures serve to convince individuals that the only person they can truly rely on is themselves', while they '[imply] a greater reliance on informal support and charity provision'. In this context, objectified and *expendable* human and nonhuman nature is very likely to be left without the necessary care and support, while being rendered incapable of providing any form of care. As we shall see in the novels analysed here, capitalist care is thus reduced to the private, the individual, the moral, and the human. It becomes mono-scalar and indeed denies interdependency and relationality. It divides humans into those who are capable of care, and those who need care, who may or may not be lucky enough to get it.[291]

Relevant to this analysis of care in a capitalist world order is of course an examination of care in a postcolonial or Global South context. In her paper 'Locating Care Ethics Beyond the Global North', Raghuram argues for a simultaneous '[emplacement]' and '[displacement]' of care ethics by being attentive to the varied locations of care, and the relationships between these, as well as by decentring the Global North in discussions about care. Importantly, Raghuram also understands '[c]are thinking as a political project' and 'a public issue', and, as anticipated, sees care as a relation.[292] Specifically, such a theorisation of care in the Global South makes two main contributions to this chapter's framework, which are more clearly fleshed out by Raghuram *et al.* Firstly, the authors introduce the concept of 'postcolonial responsibility' as a consequence of the 'complex and painful interdependence' that is '(neo)colonialism'. In essence, this means being attuned to the influence of global forces on care ethics and practices in seemingly 'distant' places. Two examples given by Raghuram are indeed very apt for the Nigerian context: the absence of 'social care' as a consequence of development and modernisation narratives, and the influence of 'missionary activity' on definitions of caregivers, receivers and practices. In other words, locating care in the Global South, as this chapter attempts to do, necessitates an understanding of the impact of (neo)colonial capitalist relations on caring practices around the globe.[293]

Secondly, and connected to this, Raghuram *et al.* urge us to decentre both care and responsibility. Crucially, this means not only challenging the alleged 'universality' of care ethics and practices, which in fact coincides with Western '[humanist]' models, but also rejecting 'asymmetry' in the construction of care relations between a weak sufferer and a

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[291] The Care Collective, *Manifesto*, pp. 17-18; Dowling, *Crisis*, pp. 9 and 11-12.
[292] Raghuram, 'Locating Care Ethics', pp. 524 and 514-516.
[293] Raghuram *et al.*, 'Rethinking', p. 9; Raghuram, 'Locating Care Ethics', p. 518. See also Duncan and Cumpsty, 'The Body in Postcolonial Fiction', p. 595.

magnanimous carer. These asymmetrical relations of care, predicated on an artificial disavowal of interdependency and relationality, as signalled by *The Manifesto*, are inherent in a capitalist world order; where, as Dowling claims, care depends on the generosity and high moral standards of isolated individuals, such as neocolonial forms of international aid.[294]

This is precisely the nature of Leticia Sabsay's critique of 'humanitarian enterprises', which espouse capitalism's conception of care as pertaining to the private, the individual, and the moral. These organisations, the critic explains, 'refer to vulnerable populations as a mechanism for presenting a moral or ethical call to appeal to the public to "help the victims"'. This moral call has two main consequences which are directly related to Raghuram *et al.*'s points regarding postcolonial care and responsibility. On the one hand, the appeal replicates asymmetrical power and care relations across the globe through the 'construction of "the suffering other" as a mute and helplessly un-nurtured, violated, or deprived body', itself devoid of agency and power. On the other, it denies postcolonial responsibility through a '[depoliticization of] the situations that [have] led to such extreme forms of deprivation'. Representing vulnerable groups as passive and voiceless, and humanitarian aid as a caring moral choice, thus removes care and responsibility from the public, social and political realms. This in turn obliterates the economic, social, political, and environmental causes of vulnerability, which ensures its continuity in 'a vicious circle'.[295]

In sum, if capitalism in all its historical stages is and has been inherently careless, then it follows that caring, in its broadest, all-encompassing, sense, can and should be understood as a form of resistance to the capitalist world order. Indeed, for us '[t]o think of care as an organising principle on each and every scale of life', *The Manifesto* argues, 'we must elaborate a feminist, queer, antiracist and eco-socialist perspective, where care and care practices are understood as broadly as possible'. Care as a theory and a practice that fosters the maintenance and growth of our world is, by necessity, anti-capitalist and anticolonial: it challenges the Nature/Society binary and its cognates and rejects unilateral, asymmetrical relations of power. It recognises our interdependency as well as the global historical, political, and economic forces behind the production of vulnerability. It is thus a public, social, political, and environmental issue. It is multi-scalar and multimodal, and

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[294] Raghuram *et al.*, 'Rethinking', p. 10.
[295] Leticia Sabsay, 'Permeable Bodies: Vulnerability, Affective Powers, Hegemony', in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, pp. 278-302 (pp. 280-281).

varies across place and time. It is not profit-driven, nor an individual capacity or a moral mandate.[296]

Importantly, because the broad definition of care adopted here includes multiple forms of care and care practices, so too does the generic resistance of care adopt a diversity of specific means and configurations. For this fourth chapter, which focuses on the human body as object and subject, I want to suggest that, if care rejects the Nature/Society and mind/body binaries, caring practices carried out by and for human bodies entail an embodied mind, that is, involve the human body as subject. Consequently, care given and received by objectified, commodified, and/or *expendable* bodies brings about the (re)subjectification of said bodies. By giving and receiving care in its broad sense, human bodies offer active resistance to capitalism's objectification and dehumanisation processes. This resistance is contained in the caring act itself, which renders objectified bodies both capable of giving and worthy of receiving care in multiple forms.[297]

4.1. Temptations: *People of the City* and *The Carnivorous City*

The first section of this chapter examines two novels published more than sixty years apart, by two male authors mostly based in Nigeria. Both novels encapsulate what we can call an expression of the urban ambivalence analysed in Chapter Three, which is also a consequence of urban conceptions within the village/city binary: the alluring essence of the city, despite all its dangers and failures.[298] Both main characters, Amusa Sango and Abel Dike, are persistently attracted to the city while blaming it for their own personal failures and all the violence that surrounds them. Unlike what happens in Achebe's novels, and aligned with the general trends in Nigerian literature described in the opening of Chapter Two, in Ekwensi's and Kan's works, the peaceful and ascetic, albeit boring and simple, village life is frequently pitched against the vibrant and thrilling, but corrupt, urban environment. While this should not come as a surprise in Ekwensi's *People of the City*, given that it belongs to the first generation of Nigerian literature, Kan's treatment of Lagos seems to differ markedly from the nuanced urban representations of contemporary literature like the ones examined in the previous chapter.

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[296] The Care Collective, *Manifesto*, p. 22.

[297] For example, research-led artist Jade Montserrat reflects on the relationship between care and resistance in artistic curation and exhibitions. Her own exhibition, entitled *Constellations: Care & Resistance*, is the product of iniva's *Future Collect* project's first commission. It can be found at Manchester Art Gallery. For further information please see Jade Montserrat, *A Reimagining of Relations*, ed. Industria (London: iniva, 2021); <https://manchesterartgallery.org/event/constellations-care-and-resistance/>; and <https://iniva.org/programme/events/constellations-care-and-resistance/>.

[298] See, for example, Ernest Emenyọnu, *Cyprian Ekwensi* (London: Evans Brothers, 1974), pp. 30-31 and Gikandi, *Reading*, pp. 87-88.

One of the guises of the tempting city in these novels is that of an insatiable human-eating monster; a beast into whose jaws people walk of their own accord, looking for money and power. In its streets people suffer diverse but equally violent fates that bring their lives to an abrupt end or, at the very least, transform them into greedy, rapacious beasts themselves. Bodies in the city are fragmented, dismembered, sold, tortured, exploited, injured, made to disappear, consumed, beaten to death. Although they escape physical violence, both Sango and Abel can see themselves changing, becoming calculating and cruel, even inflicting physical pain on others, a metamorphosis for which they blame the city's negative influence on them. However, this section argues that a close, sometimes against-the-grain, reading of the novels reveals that this image of the city as meat-eating monster is sabotaged by the text itself. While it is certainly in the urban environment that this violence takes place, for the same reason that corruption and consumerism are much more visible in the city than in the village, an animate, carnivorous urbanity actually stands, once again, for (neo)colonial capitalist values and relations, which dehumanise and commodify certain bodies.

That is, behind the devouring city are the actions of money- and power-seeking individuals, who, acting within a capitalist system, objectify, exploit, and punish certain elements of human nature, so as not miss out on the alluring promises of modernity and development. Paradoxically, they sometimes lose their own humanity in the process, blurring the alleged boundaries between human and nonhuman animal with their own inhumane behaviour. In essence, building on this thesis's second chapter and drawing on Fraser's *Cannibal Capitalism*, this section demonstrates that, in Ekwensi's and Kan's novels, the actual ravaging beast is no less than capitalism as *world-ecology*. Within these bleak urban accounts however, different forms of care given and received by objectified, *expendable* bodies in *PC* offer an alternative understanding and valuation of them as embodied minds that exist both with and within nature.[299]

First published in 1954, Ekwensi's *People of the City* is the prolific and popular author's first major literary work. It tells the story of Amusa Sango, crime reporter and musician, and his attempts to succeed and become someone important in a 'famous West African City' reminiscent of Lagos, towards the end of colonial rule (*PC* 3). According to Wendy Griswold, *PC* is 'considered by some to be "the first contemporary […] novel"' to come out of West Africa, and Ekwensi himself can be said to be Nigeria's 'second […] novelist', after Amos Tutuola. At any rate, *PC* '[is] first in a long line of city novels', and, following Griswold's definition of this genre quoted in the Introduction, it is a work 'about

[299] Fraser, *Cannibal Capitalism*, pp. xiv-xv.

the city itself', about its people and its dangers.[300] The novel's literary quality usually decried, especially in comparison with Ekwensi's later work but also more generally, *PC* offers nonetheless one of the most complete fictional accounts of late colonial urban life and, as this analysis demonstrates, is particularly well suited to a cultural urban ecologies reading. Its episodic nature and stereotypical characters notwithstanding, the novel can offer significant insight into key socio-environmental issues and, I suggest, there is a development to Sango's character that is instructive of Ekwensi's take on the city beyond the metaphor of the corruptive beast.[301]

    PC is a text that could have easily been included in this thesis's second chapter, analysed as the story of Amusa Sango's fall from grace, seemingly caused by the city, and his implied rescue, enabled by his marriage to Beatrice II. Indeed, Sango fits, like Obi Okonkwo, into Griswold's description of the 'Disappointed Young Man' who cannot seem to find his place in the city. Like *NLE*, *PC* makes frequent references to the poverty left behind in the village, and the novels even have a similar structure. Both are divided into two parts, the second of which sees the protagonist's whole world crumble down. However, Sango does not fall prey to corruption and, I argue, can be said to possess a certain level of integrity. His internal debates about his behaviour in the city are reminiscent of *MP*'s Odili, and both characters place great value in their freedom and independence (*PC* 53). Moreover, both Sango and Odili are saved in every sense of the word by their success in winning the love of and marrying an innocent, kind-hearted young woman, Beatrice II and Edna Odo respectively; after which they decide to settle down, at least temporarily, away from the city. Sango's most salient defect, since he cannot really be blamed for his homelessness and unemployment, are his womanising tendencies, most evident in his treatment of Aina. In this respect, as well as in his steering clear of politics and the public sector, he also resembles *Mercedes*'s Onuma and his consistent objectification of the female body.[302]

    These similarities notwithstanding, *PC* is characterised, unlike the other three novels, by a sustained attention to the urban environment and, more specifically, to the city as predator, as well as to the diverse forms of bodily objectification and physical violence that

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[300] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, pp. 34-35 and 157. Emenyọnu also refers to *PC* as 'the first West African novel in modern style to be published in England', *Cyprian Ekwensi*, p. 1.

[301] For negative critiques see, for example, Dennis R. Passmore, 'Camp Style in the Novels of Cyprian O. D. Ekwensi', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 4:3 (1971), 705-716; Emenyọnu, *Cyprian Ekwensi*, pp. 29-46, and John McClusky, 'The City as a Force: Three Novels by Cyprian Ekwensi', *Journal of Black Studies*, 7:2 (1976), 211-224. For an interesting contrast, see Shola Adenekan, 'Cyprian Ekwensi', *Guardian*, 24 January 2008, Obituary <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jan/24/culture.obituaries> [Accessed 16 May 2023] (9 paragraphs).

[302] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, pp. 223 and 250.

develop in it. It is this emphasis that justifies its inclusion in the last chapter, although it is interesting to remain aware of the text's connections with other early urban works. As Ernest Emenyọnu argues, *PC* is at least partly intended as a warning about the corruptive influence of the city and the terrible ways of its people. Quoting a private interview, the critic demonstrates that this is indeed the author's view:

> The city is a terribly corrupting influence, a den for Ali Baba where forty
> thieves have stored all their gold, and anyone who has the magic words can
> go and help himself. And sometimes greed traps the sesame and the thieves
> come back and stab the intruder to death as they did to Ali Baba's brother.

These are Ekwensi's words. Instructively, although referring to the city's influence, his main point is related to money. Moreover, his second sentence talks about 'greed' and being stabbed to death, the city's 'influence' not quite explained.

I would like to take this quote as a starting point, and suggest it contains, in condensed form, the same dynamic as *PC*: while the city's negative influence is mentioned in the first line, this is not what guides the thieves' and the intruder's actions, but rather the place where the gold is stored; it is actually greed, not the city, that is behind the stealing *and* the killing. Similarly, in *PC*, the great city, as the space where these converge, is explicitly blamed for influencing the characters' corrupt and violent actions, while the same text hints at socioeconomic motivations that even Sango acknowledges at the end. The following analysis looks first at Ekwensi's treatment of the city as an ambivalent, but mostly negative force, as well as at the village and the convent. It then moves on to analyse instances of female objectification and other forms of bodily violence, in order to identify the mechanisms and motivations behind them, while also exploring the caring resistance offered by Aina, Beatrice I, and Sango himself.[303]

In the first chapter we can find, once again, the ubiquitous urban promise: like Chike as soon as the group has arrived in Lagos in *WL*, Sango has come to the city 'to forge ahead', and 'carve for [himself] a place of renown in this city of opportunities' (*PC* 3). The resolution found on the novel's first page is counterbalanced towards the end of the chapter, when Sango finds himself trying to save a girl he is acquainted with from a hungry mob that accuses her of stealing. The corporal to whom Sango begs for help issues the first warning: 'You see, person who's not careful, the city will eat him!' (13). And so, the 'carnivorous city' starts unravelling before the reader's eyes, its 'opportunities' reserved

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[303] Emenyọnu, *Cyprian Ekwensi*, p. 29.

for another story. Emenyọnu, John McClusky, and Lola Akande in fact base their analyses of the text on this premise of the city as evil.[304]

Ekwensi does not fail to sprinkle his novel with the usual stock of urban socio-environmental problems, which seem to have been there even in colonial times, and are part and parcel of the negative image of the city: we repeatedly read about noise pollution and traffic jams (*PC* 9,11, 23 and 87); air pollution and infrastructural failures, which thus exclude this great city from the category of 'sensible cities' (23). We also encounter hunger and overcrowding, a failing housing infrastructure, surging energy and rent prices (34-5 and 43-6). Again, like *WL*'s Chike, Sango feels disappointment and frustration at his apparent inability to succeed in the city; he wonders what has happened to 'his noble resolutions' (*PC* 58). Towards the end of the first part, he is given notice to quit his lodging and is very much aware of the difficulty of finding new accommodation: 'Suddenly he felt angry at the way he was getting on in the city. Something must be done about it soon, for he was certain now that the good things were eluding him' (62).

However, as both McClusky and Akande note, returning to his village in the Eastern Greens is not an option for Sango.[305] While Ekwensi persistently reinforces the city/village binary in moral terms, casting the city in a negative light, he also decries, like the novels analysed in the second chapter, the terrible living conditions of the village. Interestingly, *PC*'s first part ends on a particular note, after Sango is sent to the Eastern Greens, 'the city of coal' (*PC* 68), to cover the news of a 'coal crisis', which has developed there after colonial officials ordered the police to shoot the miners over an accumulation of 'labour disputes' (72-3). This chapter not only highlights the rural poverty from which Sango and other characters are trying to escape (72), but also attests to Ekwensi's usually overlooked awareness of colonial capitalism's exploitation of human bodies and nonhuman nature, at a time before oil commerce.

The miners' place of work is aptly called 'the valley of death'. The workers, 'full of lament', are given a voice through Sango's report (*PC* 73). He writes what is described as a fairly anticolonial piece, condemning the violence inflicted upon those whose human energy is used to extract the energy that makes 'the country's trains […] run, its power-houses function, and its industries flourish' (74). Before leaving, the reporter even goes inside a mine, 'into the abyss of the earth' with an 'ever present […] sense of death, danger, disaster', where 'the men who [risk] all [work] in sweat and courage' (76). This

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[304] Emenyọnu, *Cyprian Ekwensi*, pp. 29-46; McClusky, 'The City as a Force'; Lola Akande, *The City*, pp. 52-71.
[305] McClusky, 'The City as a Force', p. 221-2; Akande, *The City*, p. 53.

chapter is sometimes ignored in critiques of *PC*, although, I suggest, it provides the narrative with a more complex dimension, where it becomes clear that colonial capitalist violence and exploitation also happen away from the supposedly malignant urban centre.

As if to complete the picture, on the way back, Sango decides to visit his fiancée, Elina, who lives in a convent '[l]ess than a hundred miles from the scene of death' (*PC* 78). Like *Nervous Conditions*' Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart, contrasting sharply with the place Sango has just left, and with the city, the convent is 'beautifully situated', secluded and looking out on the river (*PC* 77-8). The 'idealized setting' where the nuns have decided to build their convent is serene, has 'scented air, and the music of unseen birds'; it '[refuses] to see evil in the world, [talks] only of the good and the pure'. (*PC* 78). It is almost as if this appropriated piece of land, instead of the poor and death-ridden village, constitutes the opposite of the big city. It is here in the convent where peace and purity reign, and where the bodies of young women are preserved from the ravenous urbanity. It is here where Elina, Sango's fiancée, belongs, in stark opposition to 'the gold-digging women of the city', whose bodies are consistently objectified and commodified (*PC* 77).[306]

It is against this background of the urban as corruptive and the rural as hopeless, with only the convent a haven of peace and purity, that the analysis now moves to two female characters, Aina and Beatrice I. As a poor woman from the village, young and beautiful Aina is objectified, used, and punished throughout the novel until she nearly dies. She is said to have come to the city chasing after the glamour and money of urban life (*PC* 88), although her family lives in stark poverty (34-5). When the novel opens, however, we discover that she really cares about Sango and he is the one that has used her for his own entertainment, making false promises while knowing how she feels about him (5-6). We soon learn that women for Sango are usually no more than matter, an amusement, 'a gay adventure', part of everything good the city has to offer. Those who do not understand this become a distraction, an obstacle between him and his plans, and Aina is one of them (7).

After being turned away by Sango, Aina is discovered to have stolen some cloth. Because she is considered a mere 'street girl', she is humiliated, stripped naked and beaten right outside Sango's place (*PC* 12). In order to save her from the mob, Sango calls the police, who arrest her. Aina is then summarily tried and sentenced to three months. Prison '[hardens]' Aina, and when they meet again all she wants is money, which she believes Sango can give her (88-9). Later, when Aina tells him that she is pregnant with his child and asks for more money, Sango does not believe her and sees her as a 'dark temptress

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[306] Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (Banbury: Ayebia Clarke, [1988] 2004), pp. 196-197.

who [is] […] a threat to his happiness' (*PC* 146). Aina seems now to have replaced the city and become the corruptive, destructive force herself. In a bout of rage and frustration, Sango attacks Aina and hits her until she is left in a coma (147). Although she survives, Aina suffers a miscarriage. Sango regrets his actions only in a calculative manner, trying to figure out the legal consequences of his 'savagery', for which he still blames Aina (147). This brutal behaviour towards the young woman thus turns Sango, usually himself mistreated and devalued by the likes of Lajide the landlord and Beatrice II's father, into an unrecognisable beast.

Having lost her value as commodified matter capable of providing pleasure, Aina, like so many other women in Sango's life, becomes a useless object which needs to be disposed of. Moreover, towards the end of the novel, when Sango has almost nothing left, Aina absorbs the city's faults and it is her body that pays the price for Sango's disappointment. Interestingly, I suggest, there is an attempt at Aina's (re)subjectification when, in the last chapter, she attends Sango and Beatrice II's wedding, where the former sees Aina as a person for the first time: 'Still pale, her [going there shows] that she [is] a good sport, a good loser', he thinks (*PC* 154). Taking the reader back to the first pages of the novel, where Aina is shown in love with Sango and begging for his help, Ekwensi returns the woman her personhood: 'There [are] genuine tears in her eyes and a hint of rebuke. She [has] broken down at last. Sango [looks] at her, embarrassed' (155).

It is Aina's caring about Sango that (re)humanises her, and enables her to simultaneously subvert Sango's objectification and challenge female commodification in general. She is now, once again, more than a body or an evil temptress. This is not to say that *PC* is in general a work that consistently and deliberately challenges female objectification. On the contrary, and as is the case with Achebe's *NLE*, the text tends to reinforce this process. However, just as it happens with Sango's understanding of the city, there seems to be an element of character development through which his opinion of Aina changes. I am interested here in reading the novel against the grain, to contend that it is Aina's caring about Sango that (re)humanises her in the young man's eyes, and makes him see her in a different light. Although it is arguably quite an insignificant caring act, both in terms of scale and effect, Aina's appearance at the wedding contributes to both characters' emotional wellbeing. In other words, she is doing her part to fix their relationship, '*so that [they] can live in [the world] as well as possible',* to quote Fisher and Tronto's definition.

Needless to say, Sango is not alone in his treatment of women as objects. Lajide, the landlord; Zamil, the Syrian businessman, and even Sango's friend, Bayo, are all guilty of this. After all, Sango thinks, looking at Bayo's teenage conquest, Dupeh: 'Girls ripen

quickly in the city – the men are so impatient' (*PC* 29). Bayo implies that Zamil '"marries"' many girls every year (122), but then both Sango's friend and Zamil's sister are murdered by the businessman when they try to elope, because Zamil wants to send his sister back to Syria (125). It is Lajide and Zamil, in fact, that enter into a 'battle' over Beatrice I (99). Like Sango, Beatrice I has come to the city 'running away' from the poverty of the Eastern Greens (145-6); and, like Aina, she is chasing the urban good life, which she knows 'she [cannot] earn […] herself' (68). Unlike Aina, Beatrice I is lucky enough to marry, 'according to African law and custom', an English engineer named Grunnings with whom she has three children (39). However, she is not happy with him and wants to live by herself. It is then that Lajide and Zamil, his tenant, take advantage of the situation and offer Beatrice lodgings in exchange for her body (63). Sango sums up the situation quite clearly, exposing the commodification of women, for which men, however, and not the city, are responsible: '"When you're a man," Sango said, "they want six months' or a year's rent in advance. When you're an attractive woman, single, or about to be single, they want you as a mistress. That's the city"' (67).

Nonetheless, neither Zamil nor Lajide can get what they want. Lajide is particularly confused by his inability to buy Beatrice: 'Beatrice had become the thorn in Lajide's flesh, the one woman his vanity and money could not conquer in a city where women yielded to money and influence' (*PC* 100). Like Aina, Beatrice I refuses to be rendered commodified matter by the men of the city. Interestingly, Ekwensi provides us with another instance of caring (re)subjectification when it comes to Beatrice. Sango, Grunnings, and Kofi, Beatrice's friend and lover, actually care for the woman, and not just her body; Sango not even romantically (*PC* 68). Beatrice, on her part, is shown to be honest, sweet, and caring herself. She is said to come 'from a poor but proud family where values still [matter]' (100). It is in fact her last attempt to help Sango, with whom she is in love, that costs her her life. After going to see Lajide to get him to reconsider Sango's case, she is viciously attacked in the street by Lajide's seven jealous wives, who refuse to share their husband's wealth and attention with yet another woman (133-4). Already suffering from poor health, Beatrice dies a couple of chapters later.

It is instructive that, from the start, the city is blamed for Beatrice's tragedy, reminding us once again of its insatiable appetite. When she is first introduced, we hear this from a waiter at the All Language Club: '"She get some bad sick inside her. When them tell her, go home, she no go. One day she go die for this city"' (*PC* 42). At the end of the novel, when Beatrice has already died, Kofi laments the fate of girls in the city:

"I have often asked, why do girls leave their happy homes and come here on

their own? […] They just come to the city, hoping that some man will pick

them up and make them into something. […] And some disease, something

incurable picks them up. You see them dressed, and they are just shells.

Hollow and sick…" (*PC* 145).

The reader, and Sango, already know the answer to Kofi's question, and Sango tries to explain. But Kofi insists, '"The city eats many an innocent life like hers every year"' (146). What eats Beatrice's, and Aina's, lives is not the city, but a patriarchal and ruthlessly capitalist society in which single women escaping rural poverty must sell themselves, one way or another, in order to live comfortably; a system that commodifies their bodies from a very early age and then disposes of them when it no longer needs them.

Besides gender-based commodification, *PC* contains other forms of violence inflicted on disposable bodies that betray their capitalist origins or motivations. One of them is the potential damage caused by Bayo's 'get-rich-quick plan', of which physical bodily harm seems to be an unintended consequence, collateral damage (*PC* 53). While the idea of instant riches and its connection to human bodies is further explored in the following section, it is important to highlight here Bayo's 'mixing with […] the underworld' (*PC* 59), which finds him '[posing] as a doctor' and administering penicillin to Aina's mother with the promise that it '[will] cure all her ills' (54). Human bodies here become simple receptacles of a substance that, in the best of circumstances, will not cure their ailments; the only thing that seems to matter in this exchange is the money obtained from it. The fake medicine business, also present in *CC*, preys on desperate people and sick bodies. It is a scam that can have fatal consequences and shows a complete disregard for those that cannot afford, or do not know where to find, what they need. Importantly, although Ekwensi's text does not provide any further details, this episode shows us that, even in colonial times and before the advent of the first oil-boom, there was already the sense of being left out of the system; a problem that seems to have a single solution: finding the way in at any cost. In a sense, *PC* offers another perspective from which to understand the city in 1950s Nigeria, one that complements Achebe's. If the latter focuses mostly on the privileged figure of the intellectual who will eventually govern the new nation, the former provides us with a host of characters that are already being excluded from the new nation, and who are painfully aware of this.

Also relevant here are two cases that Sango covers for the *West African Sensation*. The first is the murder committed in Mugamu Bush, an undeveloped area of the city. A

woman and her child are violently killed by two old acquaintances from 'a fishing district in the delta of the Great River' who, drunk, refuse to give back a gramophone that she has lent them (*PC* 25). While the narrative suggests that the woman may also have been raped, Sango insightfully reports on the motive behind the crime: 'The question I must ask the people of the city is this: Why? Why was the young woman killed in this heartless manner? And why the child too? The answer is simple: greed' (24). Only one more episode in the life of the people of the city, this crime represents the confounded values of the late colonial period: a gramophone, itself a symbol of urban modernity at the time, is worth more than two innocent lives, who become, like women for Sango, an obstacle between the person and their goal.

The second is the case of the 'body […] found floating on the lagoon'. Sango later discovers that it belongs to a middle-aged man called Buraimoh Ajikatu, who has killed himself (*PC* 69). Tormented by the inability 'to support his family' in the city, which is said to be his 'enemy', Buraimoh resorts to the *Ufemfe* society. This society promises, and delivers, everything he seems to be missing to succeed, materially one might add, in the city. Until one day they tell him what they want in return: 'his first-born son'. When Buraimoh refuses and is threatened with death, he does not find another way out but suicide (70). Sango describes this deal as '[selling your soul] to the devil' (71), but this is, again, a figure of speech. What Buraimoh does, albeit invertedly, is sell his first-born son in exchange for prosperity for the rest of the family. Unfortunately, nothing else is said about the society or what they actually do with the bodies they acquire. All we know is that Buraimoh is the last of his colleagues to join the society, and that Beatrice II's father also belongs to it (*PC* 137). As Sango says, the *Ufemfe* preys on 'the depressed people of the city', those crushed by a socioeconomic system that makes it practically impossible to succeed (71). Indeed, Obi Okonkwo would have been the society's perfect victim, had he come across it.

Finally, I want to suggest that Sango's reporting of both crimes is in fact a last form of caring (re)subjectification. His pieces care and inform about the personhood of the dead bodies. Telling their stories, what has led to their untimely and violent death, exposes the social fissures that have devalued their lives and commodified others in the process, in the case of the *Ufemfe*. Ekwensi makes Sango care enough to focus on the embodied subjectivities that criminal activity, led by greed, has erased. In fact, at the end of the novel, the reader learns that, although brief, the *Ufemfe* episode has stayed with Sango. When Kofi laments the city's carnivorous tendencies, the reporter replies: '"Secret societies eat a lot more"' (*PC* 146). I interpret this as Sango's realisation that the problem

is not the city, but the people that live in it, governed by a system bent on devouring itself, as Fraser puts it. It is in this sense that Sango can be said to eschew stereotypical characterisation, his narrative arc bringing him to the discovery of the real monster, along with, in Aina's case, a subjectivity he is initially guilty of destroying himself.

The last chapter sees him marry Beatrice II, a woman who does not belong to either Aina and Beatrice I's category of 'city women', nor to Elina's one of rural purity, although she initially aspires to a quiet village life. Together, they decide to leave for the Gold Coast, but only temporarily. They will return to the city '[w]hen [they] have *done* something, *become* something' (*PC* 155, emphasis in the original). They go to the Gold Coast in search of the future denied to them so far, away from the death and sadness of the moment; but Sango's plan to return can be interpreted, once again, as his conviction that it is not the city as such that has swallowed their dreams whole.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

If *PC* can be understood to end on a feeble but hopeless note that reminds us of the promise of salvation at the end of *NLE*, it is safe to say that there is no such thing in *The Carnivorous City*. This contemporary novel by Lagos-based author Toni Kan tells the story of two brothers. The younger, Soni, has become a 'Lagos Big Boy' (*CC* 10). One day he disappears and the elder, Abel, leaves his life as a small-town school teacher to look for him in the big city. Like other authors analysed here, Ekwensi included, Kan also grapples with this form of urban promise that makes people willingly offer themselves as sustenance for the hungry city. In *CC*, Lagos 'is a beast with bared fangs and a voracious appetite for human flesh', in which 'a million quick, sad ways for people to die' seem to have been created, but to which people are still attracted, 'like crazed moths disdaining the rage of the flame' (*CC* 34); because Lagos is also 'a seductive mistress with a tender touch' (60). As we shall see, the novel suggests Lagos ends up eating both brothers in their own way: the former is never found, the latter takes up his younger brother's place in every sense of the word.

According to Griswold, Nigerian crime novels are ways of making 'sense of the senseless', of attempting to explain a 'world' whose rules are not always rational. Unlike 'the typical Western crime novel', which usually ends with the resolution of the initial crime, she says, Nigerian crime novels 'often end in disorder, which may take several forms'. *CC* ends in disorder in the sense that Soni is not and never will be found. But this disorder takes the form of a new order, in which he is replaced by his elder brother, Abel.

In a way, nothing really changes after Soni's disappearance. I suggest here that, apart from being 'a love song to Lagos', to use Michael Sears's words, *CC* is an attempt to explain the city's hunger for human flesh, which is indeed a metaphor for the direct bodily violence that takes place in Lagos. As exemplified by Kofi in *PC*, this ubiquitous and multimodal violence is at first beyond comprehension. It is through the events that happen after Soni's death, that the novel provides an explanation. It is Abel's and Soni's associates and enemies' actions that are vividly and thoroughly described; it is through them that Lagos's hunger is satiated, fed the bodies of discarded humans. As with *PC*, the city is the scapegoat; but, as Victor Adeyayo states, Lagos is 'the people. Everyone is a "beast with bared fangs" awaiting' their next prey. The following paragraphs demonstrate that, as in Ekwensi's novel, the city is blamed for the insatiable hunger of a ruthless capitalist system whose main rule is eat or be eaten, but which ends up eating everyone and everything.[307]

Following Griswold's classification, *CC* is not only a city novel but also a crime novel; and perhaps both in equal measure, since it is the city, at least superficially, that is found guilty of all charges. Indeed, what is most striking about Kan's novel are the absences surrounding Soni's promotion to 'Lagos Big Boy', as well as his demise – ironically, for all the novel's visceral and pornographic descriptions, which Ezekiel Gbenga Olufayo surveys, Soni's is a bodiless crime. Drawing once again on the 'silences' identified by Karin Barber in the two Yoruba plays, it is possible to understand these mysteries surrounding Soni as revealing absences too. However, there is a crucial difference. In both Barber's plays and Okorafor's novel, the silences respond to the inability to explain seemingly '"honest"' and benign aspects of the works; namely, the origins of the fortune of 'the good rich man', and the mechanisms behind the aliens' clean and inexhaustible energy, respectively. These in turn reveal the actual impossibility of both honest great wealth and clean, limitless, and accessible energy, which thus become inexplicable.[308]

In Kan's novel, on the contrary, the silences surround the illegal means by which Soni has made his fortune, as well as the criminal activity behind his disappearance. There is no inexplicable benevolence or honesty whose artificiality is revealed by absence,

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[307] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, pp. 242, 245 and 248. While admittedly somewhat simplistic, Griswold's analysis is here looking at purely formal elements, and is not making any claims regarding this genre's critical potential. Michael Sears, 'When Trust Is a Shapeshifter', *The Big Thrill*, 31 July 2018 <https://www.thebigthrill.org/2018/07/africa-scene-toni-kan/> [Accessed 14 November 2022] (paragraph 4 of 25); Victor Adeyayo, 'Review: Kan's *The Carnivorous City* Is a Human Struggle', *Blueprint*, 11 November 2017, Arts & Books Section <https://www.blueprint.ng/review-kans-the-carnivorous-city-is-a-human-struggle/> [Accessed 14 November 2022] (paragraph 3 of 9).

[308] Ezekiel Gbenga Olufayo, 'Cannibalistic and Pornographic Images of Lagos City in Toni Kan's *The Carnivorous City*', *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 7:3 (2022), 152-163; Barber, 'Popular Reactions', pp. 423 and 448.

because we already know that Soni is a criminal that has found his fate in the hands of criminals. What is, then, the purpose of these absences in Soni's case? The silences in Kan's novel, I suggest, have the opposite effect to those in *Lagoon* and the Yoruba plays: instead of revealing the actual inexistence of something allegedly benign, they soften or push to the backdrop Soni's criminal nature and deeds. In the reader's mind, Soni's humanity, and potential return, are retained, because his violent acts are only vaguely hinted at, as is his end. The younger brother is gone by the time the novel starts and is never found. His presence hangs over the narrative, and he is remembered as a crooked businessman, but also a brother, a son, a husband, and a father. It is Abel whose transformation in the face of money and power the reader witnesses.[309]

Unlike Ekwensi, Kan only provides us with glimpses of the village, as part of Abel's memories and references to the life he has left behind to search for his brother in Lagos. These are considered towards the end of the analysis, when we analyse Abel's own transformation and stark realisation. For now, let us turn our attention to female objectification in *CC*, instances of women as commodified matter *and* energy, that the protagonist comes across while endeavouring to find Soni. A first example can be found in the novel's longest and middle chapter, titled 'This is Lagos' (*CC* 90-159), and is a crude portrayal of sex-workers as objects. A sort of guide to the city contained within the book, the chapter takes us to a strip club owned by Matthew Chu, one of Soni's former business partners with whom Abel now deals.

The level of dehumanisation in the club is such that Abel aptly calls it 'a meat shop' (*CC* 111). The place contains an 'excessive' amount of completely naked women, and body parts dominate its description: terms like 'sex', 'jiggling breasts', 'long fingers', 'crotch', and 'G-stringed ass' follow each other in quick succession (110-1). After a brief pause where we learn about the multiple screens showing porn, and the sort of customers that can be found in the club, the narrative hits again with a very graphic description of seemingly at ease girls being prodded, 'kneaded' and '[fondled]' by patrons, and then 'pushed […] aside' when no longer required (112-3). After Abel and Santos, his assistant, finish making their business arrangements, '[s]weet, clean pussy' is offered like wares in a market (114). Through Abel's character, and his reactions to the club, the dehumanising and fragmenting practices of the club are explicitly critiqued: this is bodily exploitation at its best.

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[309] As one review says, 'a lot of the time you (and Abel) forget a bit about the crime of Soni's disappearance that forms the core incident around which the novel is built'. The Crime Review, 'Review: *The Carnivorous City* by Tony Kan', 6 December 2016 <https://thecrimereview.com/2016/12/06/review-the-carnivorous-city-by-tony-kan/> [Accessed 14 May 2023] (paragraph 3 of 6).

Within the same extensive chapter, during a night out with Nnamdi Nwankwo, also called 'Money man' (*CC* 158) –another 'Lagos Big Boy' and Abel's old acquaintance–, the reader is transported to *PC*'s characterisation of 'city women' through the description of Nnamdi's partner for the night: Nimi is 'a petite woman who [looks] young enough to be [Nnamdi's] daughter'. She is 'pretty and eager in the way Lagos girls are; overdressed and over-made-up, with wandering eyes and legs that parted easily', the narrator tells us (*CC* 153-4). After initially ignoring her and forgetting to introduce her, Nnamdi gets the girl's name wrong and explains that she is there 'on industrial attachment' and the night out 'is part of her induction', followed by a wink at Abel (155). The night also boasts of a free flow of money and alcohol, and is powered by a Lincoln Navigator, a 'beast of a car' that belongs to Nnamdi (159).

Legitimate fortune or not, Nnamdi, like Lajide and Zamil, is still a member of that elite passionately denounced by *MP*'s Max Kulamo, which not only is solely interested in '[w]omen, cars, and landed property' (69), but also consistently treats women as one more possession through which to exhibit their fortunes, and preys on young women trying to 'make it' in the city. Interestingly, Abel's position regarding Nimi's treatment is not made explicit. The description seems to imply that that is how Abel sees her too, the disgust felt at the club apparently a thing of the past. As opposed to Adenle's novel examined in the following section, and *PC*'s attempt at a deeper analysis contained in Sango's final conversation with Kofi, those lines describing Nimi focus on her 'eager' attitude, and not on the possible reasons behind her current situation. While, admittedly, this kind of commodification of female bodies is not an exclusively Nigerian phenomenon, what strikes the reader is the text's hyperbolic and interconnected references to money, bodies, and cars, in which the city seems to be subsumed. This is how the chapter ends, with the following words: 'That was what made it Lagos; the wild garden where men and women came to harvest dreams, some lean and some bounteous' (*CC* 159).

Unlike *PC*, however, Kan's novel also features powerful and/or rich women. One of them, an army officer's widow that Soni was sleeping with, even fragments Soni's body in a similar way as the strip club does the women's. Talking about him with Abel, the woman regrets this: '"I told Soni he was nothing without his dick. I made a big mistake"' (*CC* 44). However, the idea of Lagos or city women is indeed closely related to the fact that, at least according to *CC*, to become a 'Big Girl' in the city, a woman must use her body. In other words, Big Girls seem to be the ones that successfully sell their bodies to the highest bidder. This is certainly also the case of Queen, in Festus Iyayi's *Violence*. In Kan's novel, we find the type in the character of Dr Nicole, a medical doctor who works as an account

officer in a so-called 'boutique bank' reminiscent of Ike Oguine's 'finance company', BTF (*CC* 93). Towards the end of her apparently interest-free meeting with Abel, during which the reader learns that she was one of Soni's many mistresses, Dr Nicole tells Abel that Soni had promised her a car for her birthday, which is the following week. It is then that the mask falls, and Abel sees the beautiful and elegant woman for what she really is: 'In that moment, all artifices of sophistication were stripped away and what stood out were her fangs and claws. This was a Lagos Big Girl' (*CC* 99). Once again, the beast with bared fangs and claws is now not the city, but a woman trying to get what she wants.[310]

Interestingly, despite his feelings for her, Abel also sees Ada, Soni's wife, in this light: 'He [knows] that deep beneath the beauty and cultivated airs [is] a woman who [will] not forgive or forget or let go when she [needs] to sink her teeth into you and lock her jaw tight' (*CC* 137). In a way, Ada is also a Lagos Big Girl. She loves Soni and has always been faithful to him, but she knows that her and their son's lives depend on him. When Soni goes missing, Ada is swift to find a replacement, and Abel is very much aware of this. It is these actions that make Abel see Ada as another ruthless beast. It is instructive here that, for Abel, only women seem to lose their humanity in the fight for survival in the city. That is, one the one hand, the novel clearly condemns the fragmented exploitation of women that takes place in Matthew Chu's club. On the other, it seems to adhere to *PC*'s idea of 'city women', those capable of doing anything and everything to get what they want, which is actually a product of the commodification of women in the first place. But, while Ekwensi moves beyond this idea throughout his novel, and (re)subjectifies Aina and Beatrice I through acts of caring performed by them, Kan's narrative utilises it to conflate the metaphorical bestiality of the city with that of women who fight for what they want with the means they have, and in the only way they are allowed.

Arguably, Calista Adeyemi, Abel's university girlfriend with whom he reconnects by chance during his time in Lagos, is the only exception to the stereotype of the Lagos Big Girl. She is a successful, independent woman, educated abroad and with an important post in the Lagos State Government. It is clear that Calista comes from a privileged background: she has British citizenship (*CC* 71) and she is the governor's cousin. But nothing in the book suggests that something other than her qualifications and hard work have got her where she is. In fact, she later resigns to start postdoctoral study in Public Policy at Harvard (102). However, this does not mean that people do not see her as a 'Lagos Big Babe' who has found her way to the top by sleeping with the right men, as Ada, Soni's wife, implies (152). When Abel asks Calista about it, she replies: '"I have

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[310] Iyayi, *Violence*, p. 97; Ike Oguine, *A Squatter's Tale* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2000), pp. 67-68.

heard that myself. You know, once you are a woman doing well, you have to be sleeping with the boss'" (161). Once again, while this is not something peculiar to Nigeria, it is interesting to examine this in the context of this chapter's considerations. It is safe to assume that it is precisely because of her privileged background that Calista has not needed to use her body as a social climbing tool, the way Aina, Beatrice, Nimi, and countless other have had to do. While it is worth acknowledging Kan's inclusion of a female character that does something with her privilege and has a life of her own –a way of balancing off the objectification identified in the idea of the 'city girl'–, instructively, Calista moves abroad twice, removing herself from the ravenous Lagos.

CC has, of course, its fair share of men acting inhumanely in the name of money; after all, fitting in with Griswold's study, Kan's novel is one in which 'action rather than detection moves the plot', with a strong presence of 'male protagonists and much violence'. We will now look at four examples of non-gender-based violence with direct or indirect monetary motivations. The first one is not specifically connected to the novel's main events, but mentioned within Abel's internal debates. An alleged example of the city's bestiality is given when Abel reflects about his brother's criminal activity, through a reference to literal body fragmentation, carried out by 'two brothers who '[kill] their older brother and [sell] bits and pieces of his body parts to ritualists' (*CC* 139). Nothing else is said about this, but, like Kofi in *PC*, Abel asks a rhetorical question whose answer he already knows: 'What demons drove the people in Lagos to do the things they did?' (139). Once again, it is not Lagos that is to blame for these practices, but Nigeria's oil economy, as seen in Chapter One. Like Matthew Chu's club, this is an excellent example of commodification of human matter, where the body is reduced to pieces of meat, or, in this case, organs. But this type of fragmentation responds to the concept of *money magic* and access to instant, inexplicable riches, which are properly considered in the following section.[311]

The other three examples are directly related to Abel. The first is an extremely violent fight in which Abel and Santos find themselves involved because they happen to be 'in Mushin when Lagos [bares] its fangs' (*CC* 35). The two men are meeting with another of Soni's business associates when 'a young man' surrounded by five others is demanding overdue payment for a job he has done (38). The conflict escalates quickly and both boy and master end up staked with a metal pole, after which chaos ensues and the whole

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[311] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, pp. 246-247. In fact, says Griswold, 'Nigerian crime fiction strikes the reader as unusually masculine, not just in its violence but even more in its focus on masculine problems', p. 251. And this is certainly the case of Kan's novel.

neighbourhood comes out to fight. In their attempt to flee the scene, Abel and Santos run over two men and then crash against another car (39-41). After this narrow escape, Abel is too scared to leave the house for some time. However, as can be seen in the quote, according to the narrator, the Mushin fight is given as an example of the city showing its monstrous nature, not the men involved in the fight, or their motivations. Mushin is said to have 'no quiet streets. It crackles with electric intensity and ripples with animosity', but the narrative does not go any deeper, giving the reader only a sample of this 'tough land with serious turf wars', where bodies are the main receptors of this easily triggered animosity (*CC* 35). Like Ekwensi's quote at the beginning of the section, Lagos is explicitly blamed, while it is money that can be recognised as the actual motive behind the fight.

Next, as anticipated, is the worrying and extremely dangerous issue of fake drugs. As we have stated, there are two interrelated sides to this issue: the socio-economic one that pushes some people to this business, and the physiological one connected to the effect on the victims of the scam. The novel explores this second side when Abel needs to get specific medication for his lifelong ailments that the search for his brother seems to have triggered again. Ada has shown Abel where it is safe to buy medicines and a conversation about this issue follows. While in *PC* Bayo never manages to go through with his plan, in *CC* it is an actual, worrying problem: '"Most people die in this country not from poor care, but from fake drugs, do you know that?"', Ada says. We then learn of not one, but two victims of this scam, one of them fatal: Abel's aunt, who dies four days after receiving the 'fake dose' (*CC* 65); and Zeal, Soni and Ada's son, who almost dies after being fed fake 'baby food' as a newborn baby (66). As explained earlier, bodily harm here is collateral damage. I interpret this conversation as zooming in on the complete disregard for human lives that is hinted at in *PC*. However, neither text goes into the structural socio-economic conditions that lead to such practices.

The last and fourth example of physical violence comes towards the end of the novel, and encompasses two acts, an attack and a response, the second of which constitutes a turning point for Abel. After the news of Soni's disappearance finally get to the media, Abel is contacted by Mayowa Akindele, publisher of a small magazine. In the end, Mayowa tricks Abel into giving him money in exchange for information about what happened to Soni, although he does not know anything. When Ada and Santos tell Abel Mayowa has 'jobbed' him (*CC* 196), Santos explains what 'makes it easy to job somebody': 'greediness' and 'desperation' (197). While the former implies that the victim is not necessarily innocent themselves, the latter refers to scams that prey on desperate people, many of which are indeed related to or have consequences on the body. One such

case is, for instance, the fake drug business just discussed. Another one provided by Santos is that of women 'desperate for a child' (*CC* 198), which is the case of Agnes in Flora Nwapa's short story, 'The Child Thief': a woman who ends up being poisoned with mercury by 'a native doctor'. In Kan's novel, Mayowa uses Abel's desperation to know something about Soni's disappearance and robs him of a considerable amount of money. When Abel realises what has happened, he and Santos decide to pay Mayowa a visit and make him 'vomit' the money he has stolen (*CC* 198). After beating him up and taking from him his clearly new possessions, bought with Abel's money, Santos ties Mayowa up and gags him. The man looks 'like he [has] been run over by a car' (203). But, before leaving, Abel kicks him in the stomach, and 'Mayowa [screams] as bloody snort [bubbles] out of his nose, tears clouding his eyes' (204).[312]

Immediately after, Abel feels 'alive', exhilarated, and proud of himself for standing up to his scammer. The narrative here marks a change in Abel, who is not usually a violent man, but temporarily exhibits, like Sango, bestial behaviour: 'that afternoon Abel [was] ready to kill' (*CC* 204). Later that day, however, Abel is 'back to his old self – the analytical, rational man'. He starts getting worried about Mayowa and does not understand how he has behaved like that (205). The blame is, of course, on Lagos (206). Here, the city, 'the hungry beast that is Lagos' (47), is made responsible for Abel's own transformation into a blood-thirsty monster; not his abrupt immersion in a world in which some human lives are much less valuable than money and power. Mayowa's death is announced in the press a few days later, after which Santos tries to blackmail Abel and Ada, threatening to go to the police. It is interesting to consider Sango and Abel's bestial behaviour in the light of Mbembe's consideration of the 'ambiguity' contained within 'the Black Man', who is 'living proof of the impossibility' of differentiating between 'the impulse of the animal and the ratio of the man'. That 'ambiguity' that Mbembe speaks about is indeed the constant reminder that there is humanity in the dehumanised other, and animality in the human, because the two terms are not, in effect, opposed.[313]

From this moment on, Abel's metamorphosis is almost complete. This time, he identifies his real problem: 'He [has] crossed some invisible line and become someone he [cannot] even recognise. There [is] blood on his hands and lust on his mind. He [has] assumed another man's wealth; how [can] he not be affected?' (*CC* 229). Abel becomes a 'Lagos Big Boy' without even having to commit a crime for it, he simply takes on his brother's former life. Like Odili as a guest at Nanga's house in the city, Abel understands

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[312] Flora Nwapa, *This is Lagos*, pp. 58-60.
[313] Mbembe, *Critique*, p. 30.

early on how easy it is to get used to 'the quicksand of comfort and luxury'; the one for which, as a friend once tells him, 'you don't need to be trained' (*CC* 136). While, admittedly, this could not have happened in the village, and as tempting as it is to blame Lagos, both Soni's disappearance and Abel's change are consequences of the dehumanisation and inhumanity that surround them daily, which are fuelled both by greed and need.

In the last chapter, Abel completes his transformation by sleeping with Ada. The novel ends on a deeply disturbing tone, written in the present tense, unlike the rest of the narrative: 'That is when he realises, or rather, finally admits to himself, that he does not want Soni to be found. Not now. Not ever' (*CC* 241). After several tell-tale signs evenly spread through the narrative, Abel confronts the scariest of truths: he no longer cares about his brother, not enough to want him back. In this sense, while Kan deprives us of instances of caring (re)subjectification like those found in *PC* –the narrator never even goes deep enough into the embodied minds of the objectified bodies– Abel's acknowledgement could be interpreted as representing capitalism's uncaring nature: Abel knows that not finding his brother is the only way to keep his new life, and he makes his choice. Together with Abel's negative instance of care as resistance, the text provides the reader with clear examples of some of those humans profiting from and disposing of objectified bodies. In other words, *CC* begs the question: whose humanity has been lost in the end?

4.2. Transactions: *Naira Power* and *Easy Motion Tourist*

This second section looks at two novels published in 1982 and 2016. Like the first section, it also compares two very different texts: Emecheta's short frame narrative set in Lagos, spanning the period between colonial times to the second oil boom; and Adenle's fast-paced, somewhat unorthodox crime novel, set in contemporary Lagos. Unlike *PC* and *CC*, these texts do not share a similar structure, starting point, or characterisation; *Naira Power* and *Easy Motion Tourist* have much less in common with each other. Thematically, however, both works place a very strong focus on, and actively critique, the commodification of energy and matter; specifically, female objectification and physical bodily fragmentation. In fact, it is possible to say that *NP* and *EMT* zoom in on a particualr aspect of the so-called flesh-eating city that the first pair includes as mere pieces in the more general composition of urban life: the connection between bodily commodification and *money magic*.

In other words, both works explore the intersection of human matter commodification and ritual, thus functioning as literary explorations of Nigeria's *occult*

economy, and Jean and John Comaroff's idea of magic and ritual as sense-making tools, examined in Chapter One. This is also Peter Geschiere's main contention in *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, a study on postcolonial Cameroon, another country 'cursed' with oil wealth. Geschiere claims that, in postcolonial Africa, 'discourses on sorcery or witchcraft are intertwined, often in quite surprising ways, with modern changes'. Indeed, 'rumors and practices related to the occult forces […] are the subject of constant reformulations and re-creations, which often express a determined effort for signifying politico-economic changes or even gaining control over them'. In sum, as explained in Chapter One, it is possible to claim that the development of an *occult economy* in Nigeria, and *money magic* designed to capture an elusive and inexplicable wealth, is a popular cultural way of dealing with and responding to the abrupt and uneven change brought on by oil production and commerce, whose revenues evade most of the population.[314]

Specifically, Geschiere refers to the dual relationship between magic and power: 'Witchcraft offers hidden means to grab power, but at the same time it reflects sharp feelings of impotence; it serves especially to *hide the sources of power*.' Thus, the critic speaks of 'the "levelling side" of witchcraft', whose goal is to 'undermine […] power', and the '"accumulative side"', which aims to 'reinforce' it. These considerations are key to the present section, since both works examine this dynamic. Like Geschiere, I am interested here not in 'simply [opposing] reality and fantasy', but in examining 'the discourse on witchcraft' and *money magic*, as well as its material consequences regarding bodily commodification understood within a mind/body binary. In essence, the present section demonstrates that both Emecheta's and Adenle's works are concerned with the *accumulative side of witchcraft*, with how ritual killings and bodily commodification are indeed closely related to notions of acquiring power and wealth under neocolonial capitalism. However, whereas *Naira Power* deals with the reasons behind certain people's involvement in Nigeria's *occult economy* and *money magic*, *Easy Motion Tourist* delves into how, like Geschiere says, this *money magic* in fact 'serves […] to hide the sources of power'; that is, it investigates magic as both explanation and veil.[315]

Buchi Emecheta's short novel, *Naira Power*, was published at the beginning of the 1980s, when the oil bust had already started but the spell of the second boom was still in effect. Although one of Emecheta's less studied works, *NP* offers an entertaining and accessible storyline through which the author craftily exposes the terrible pitfalls of the

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[314] Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, trans. Peter Geschiere and Janet Roitman (Charlottesville, VA; London: University of Virginia Press, 1997), pp. 2-3.
[315] Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, pp. 9-10 and 21, emphasis added.

'age of the naira' (87). Initially set in a Lagos seemingly contemporary with the novel's publication year, most of *NP* takes place inside a car, where two very different women are forced to remain, waiting out a storm on their way to the market. The first-person narrator, Auntie Bintu, is Nigerian and apparently married to a Nigerian man, but both are academics who have been living in the UK for several years. At the time of the story, Bintu has taken up a one-year post back in Lagos because she has discovered her husband was having an affair with a family friend. The day the novel starts, Bintu is flying back to the UK in the evening, so Amina, Bintu's brother's third wife who lives with her husband, has offered to take Bintu to the market. While trying to find a place to park, the women witness the rounding up of an alleged thief, whose punishment is to be burned alive. This is when Amina realises that she knows the man, and desperately leaves the car in a failed attempt to save him. When a heart-broken Amina returns to the car, Bintu asks about the man, and so the story of Ramonu, told by Amina, starts.

Those critics that have focused on *NP* recognise the novel for what it really is: a clever and incisive appraisal of some of Nigeria's most salient socioeconomic and environmental issues. Tunde Fatunde, for example, identifies in *NP* a clear didactic purpose, and describes it as an exploration of the extensive 'consequences of [the] mismanaged material boom on the complex social values' of the Nigerian people. In this sense, Emecheta's purpose in *NP* regarding the period of the second oil boom can be seen to coincide, at least partly, with Achebe's in *NLE* regarding the late colonial period and the *early postcolony*. Gorgui Dieng, moreover, demonstrates how, in *NP*, Emecheta not only makes room for, but also exposes the close connection between female subjugation, 'corruption, failure of leadership', and 'environmental issues', both in the private and public spheres. Omar Sougou argues that *NP* reappropriates the genre of popular literature, which he claims to have been mostly ignored by literary criticism, to convey 'matters usually tackled by works such as those installed in the canon of high literature'. He characterises *NP* as a combination of 'a love plot with satire of social practice on the level both of the family and of the national economy'. It is possible to see, then, that there is much more to this short novel than meets the eye.[316]

Within *NP*'s critique of Nigeria's second oil boom period, this section demonstrates, there is an examination of the forces behind bodily commodification produced within an

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[316] Tunde Fatunde, 'Conflicting Social Values in *Naira Power* and *A Kind of Marriage*', in *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, ed. Marie Umeh (Trenton, NJ; Asmara: Africa World Press, 1996), pp. 433-443 (p. 434); Gorgui Dieng, 'Environmental Issues in Buchi Emecheta's *Naira Power*', *Bridges: A Senegalese Journal of English Studies*, 8 (1997), 1-15 (pp. 1-2); Omar Sougou, *Writing Across Cultures: Gender Politics and Difference in the Fiction of Buchi Emecheta* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 142-143.

occult economy, together with a clear challenge of and resistance to it, contained in Amina's narrative. It is through the voice of the subjugated, seemingly ignorant, third wife that Emecheta critiques both neocolonial capitalism and patriarchy. Emecheta's work is multi-layered and addresses more than a single issue simultaneously. While, as this section suggests, Ramonu's story is an attempt to explain the inner workings of Nigeria's *money magic* business, *NP* tackles three different forms of bodily objectification and violence that are interrelated and contribute in equal measure to Ramonu's end: female objectification and subjugation; the bodily violence of poverty; and the commodification of body parts. For the sake of structure, this is the order that the present analysis follows.

As expected, *NP* constitutes an effective and strong critique of 1970s Nigeria's patriarchal society. All the women in the book are more or less devalued, including 'Bintu the "been-to"', by her own brother, Nurudeen (*NP* 4-5).[317] Through the Westernised first-person narrator, Bintu, the reader gets an initial Malthusian explanation for everything that is wrong in Nigeria, especially for women: polygamy and the number of children born in multiple-wife families, which render ineffective any government efforts to improve the quality of life (*NP* 40-2). However, as Fatunde, Dieng and Sougou point out, it is not polygamy itself to which the novel objects, or blames, but men's complete disregard for their families' wellbeing in their quest to marry as many women as possible, have as many children as possible, and be perpetually entertained by a new woman. Amina herself, in her pretended ignorance and innocence, explains what Dieng calls a 'rash implementation of the Islamic polygamy principle': 'I know Mohammed the Prophet recommended four wives, but I am sure I have heard it said that only those who can afford to keep such wives in comfort should take them' (*NP* 58). But the men in the novel, especially Alhaji Lemonu, Ramonu's father, seem to be oblivious to this condition, and acquire 'another innocent milkmaid' (*NP* 37) whenever 'their bodies need a younger woman to keep them young' (42).[318]

This apparent misinterpretation of the Islamic polygamy principle results in turn in the exploitation of human energy through the extraction of women's reproductive labour. This may not be such a clear-cut situation in Amina's case, who, together with her children, enjoys quite comfortable living standards. Although the Westernised Bintu claims that Amina 'would tell you, without hesitation, that housework is no work, and is only a woman's job' (*NP* 9), the latter cleverly expresses her views on the matter, after explaining

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[317] Sougou, *Writing Across Cultures*, p. 145.
[318] Fatunde, 'Conflicting Social Values', pp. 439-440; Dieng, 'Environmental Issues', p. 6; Sougou, *Writing Across Cultures*, pp. 151-152.

to her sister-in-law why she cannot afford to challenge her husband and become independent:

> So, Auntie Bintu, all we are doing is giving and taking. Funnily enough, the men feel they are doing all the giving, but they forget that we provide the solid background they want and need so much. And as my reward, I have a roof over my head, hot food in my belly and in the bellies of the children I have for him and who bear his name (*NP* 53).

In other words, Amina is well aware of the patriarchal system in which she lives, and of her extremely limited options within it, which mean that she has 'to give everything' only to have 'a roof over her head' (53). However, both she and her children have their basic needs covered, which is much more than her mother, and Ramonu's mother, could say. Men like Amina's father and Alhaji Lemonu demand their wives' reproductive labour but do not give anything in return to them, or their children – although Amina's father at least pays for his children's education. Instead, they bring more people into the household and add more mouths to feed, knowing it is well beyond their means to support them all.[319]

Nonetheless, while this misinterpreted or mutated polygamy is indeed problematic, it is not the cause of Nigeria's poverty and infrastructural issues. Even Bintu acknowledges this early in the narrative, when, nearing the market, the women complain about the state of traffic, open gutters, and the flooding caused by the storm. When Amina laments that it was still possible to walk in Lagos ten years earlier, Bintu replies bitterly: '"Ten, fifteen years ago, were years before the oil boom, before Nigeria became rich. Now she is rich, we are all condemned to *choke in our wealth*"' (*NP* 11, emphasis added), the oxymoronic phrase pointing to an oppressiveness identified with the country's newly-acquired fortunes and brilliantly representing the paradoxical nature of oil economies explained in Chapter One.

Especially relevant for the present section, moreover, is the bodily violence of poverty described in Isalegangan, where Amina and Ramonu grow up, which only seems to get worse with time and is untouched by the 'age of the naira' (*NP* 87). Amina describes a lack of 'running water', and the consequent struggles of 'mothers' in charge of feeding their families and washing their children (35-6). Bintu also mentions permanent flooding

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[319] Interestingly, this is the same criticism that Odili makes of his ageing Igbo father in *MP*, suggesting this issue goes beyond a specific religion or culture: 'The trouble with my father was his endless desire for wives and children. Or perhaps I should say children and wives. […] Of course he doesn't even make any pretence of providing for his family nowadays. He leaves every wife to her own devices' (27).

of this area, so that the women decide to build a 'wooden platform' over which to walk. This, Bintu notices, despite the fact that women are taxed to set up a trade in front of their compounds (38). Finally, there is the question of overcrowded housing, also analysed by Dieng, which is Bintu's main reason for blaming polygamy. Amina recalls a total of nine rooms in the house where she lived, each of which is 'rented by one family'. At the time when she leaves to marry Nurudeen, there are twenty-four people sharing the room rented by the 'Lemonu family' (*NP* 41). As shown in Ekwensi's *PC* and in this thesis's previous chapters, the lack of affordable housing infrastructure, and the host of socio-ecological issues it entails, has been an issue in urban Nigeria since colonial times, and is not solved simply by reducing or controlling the population.[320]

We are now coming to the third and central form of bodily objectification identified in the novel, the commodification of body parts, and *NP*'s exposure of Nigeria's *occult economy*, which comes in the form of Amina's justification of, or explanation for, the burnt thief's actions. At the beginning of her story, Amina claims that what has happened to Ramonu is 'all the design of fate. If you maintain, Auntie, that it [is] not the hands of fate working and not the will of Allah, whose fault [is] it?' (*NP* 35). Like the judge's rhetorical question about Obi's descent into the abyss of corruption at the start of *NLE* (2), which is answered by the novel itself, Amina answers her own question with her narrative. She tells Ramonu's story from the very beginning, from the moment of his father's arrival in colonial Lagos from the Northern region, so that both Bintu and the reader can understand where he comes from and why he does what he does. Indeed, Amina's story is no more and no less than an elucidation of her own initial answer to the question: 'Ramonu was a handsome young man of this age' (*NP* 16); i.e., the age of 'naira power' (10).

As mentioned at the beginning of this analysis, the three main issues covered here are interrelated in the narrative, because they all lead to Ramonu's gruesome end. Ramonu is Alhaji Lemonu's first son, the first of the three children born by Lemonu's first wife, Kudi. His life starts changing for the worse after his father brings a second wife to the house. By the age of sixteen, he has suffered neglect and mistreatment by his father, of both his mother and himself. He lives in an overcrowded room in extreme poverty, and eventually stops going to school, where he is also failing. After sleeping with his father's second wife, allegedly under the influence of magic used by the woman to attract her husband's attention, he is chased out of the house by his father. While *NP* would not be classified as crime fiction, Ramonu does fit the figure of the criminal in Griswold's analysis of the genre. In this sense, his life in Isalegangan constitutes the first step in the critic's

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[320] Dieng, 'Environmental Issues', pp. 3 and 9.

delineation of 'the crime plot': 'Hardship experienced by a basically decent person'. Only a teenager when Lemonu bans him for his own home, Ramonu does 'start out as [a victim], [...] of a harsh, *uncaring* world'.[321]

Ramonu makes his grand entrance when he returns five years later, transformed by money and with a 'new silver coloured Citroen' (*NP* 68). He says 'he [has] made it as a young businessman' and, because he comes bearing gifts, he is welcomed by everyone with open arms. As with Soni in *CC*, everyone is suspicious of Ramonu's sudden wealth, but accepts it nonetheless (68-9). After some time, during which he starts a romantic relationship with Amina and promises to marry her, he goes away on business and disappears again. It is during this second disappearance that Amina begins to worry about Ramonu's dealings. After following and connecting isolated pieces of news over time, she concludes that Ramonu, now going by the name of Kinte Constantino and posing as a taxi driver, is involved in an attempt to smuggle into Nigeria drugs and 'five human heads' belonging to an entire family, 'for the get-rich business'. Despite an army of foreign lawyers going to his defence, the man is jailed for life (*NP* 90-2).

However, four years later, Ramonu returns once again. Amina suspects it is his bosses that have bought his way out of prison. When she sees him, Amina confronts him but then promises to keep his secret. She never tells anyone what she knows, until the day of his death. After his second return, Ramonu makes regular 'business trips', and his fortune keeps growing. It is his money that glues together, and feeds, his father's large family (*NP* 97). Amina describes him as 'the proverbial Robin Hood', so that people are willing to ignore the fact that his sudden wealth is completely inexplicable (98). Until his luck runs out when 'another drug syndicate [is] blown open. This time in Nigeria' (101). He is not imprisoned but starts selling all his goods, and this is the last Amina knows of him until that day in the market.

When Amina tells Bintu that she is not planning to tell the family of Ramonu's horrible death, Bintu says: 'We both agreed that the tragedy that was Ramonu was the fault of nobody, but that of a society that respects any fool who has naira. [...] The language of naira is universal here' (*NP* 102). She admits that not even Ramonu's parents can be blamed. In the smuggling of drugs and human body parts, Ramonu discovers the key to the sudden and inexplicable riches that have surrounded, and eluded, him for the first part of his life. It is at this point that the reader really understands what Amina has been saying all along: that Ramonu is 'simply a man of his time in Lagos' (*NP* 27). It is Nigeria's *occult*

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[321] Griswold, *Bearing Witness*, p. 248, emphasis added.

economy and *money magic* that make Ramonu participate in the traffic of body parts across borders.

The so-called 'get-rich business' is one of the main symptoms of this oil boom economy, in which nobody knows how, but everybody will do anything not to be left out. In such an economy, where there is a void left by the absence of a rational explanation for the constant flow of cash, everyone and everything is at the service of making money, including fragmented human bodies as matter. At one point in her story, trying to explain why Ramonu would get involved in such business, Amina says: "'We expected much from people like Ramonu even though we did not put much into them. It was a trap, Auntie, and he fell into it'" (*NP* 87). This is what separates Ramonu from the educated, middle-class characters analysed so far, such as Obi, Odili, Soni, and Abel: in a way, the latter have a choice, admittedly a less glamorous alternative, which only Odili takes in the end. On the contrary, Ramonu has nothing, but needs everything to be someone. Smuggling human heads is just the solution, demonstrating the lengths to which young men like Ramonu are willing to go to escape their poverty.

Before turning to Adenle's text, I would like to point out a crucial aspect of Emecheta's work: Amina's role in the novel, her pretended 'dumbness', and 'the naïve interpretation of fate put in her mouth', which have two extremely important consequences, besides the mutual discovery of two initially opposed female figures. On the one hand, following Sougou's analysis of Amina, I want to suggest that Emecheta deliberately chooses Amina to convey the strong and insightful critique of 1970s Nigeria contained in *NP*. Anticipating Cole's unnamed narrator, Bintu the been-to academic, whose criticism as an outsider is most unwelcome, is shown, at least initially, to parrot Western criticism of Nigeria, which eventually highlights her own limitations despite her education. Like *EDT*'s narrator, Bintu recognises the faults, but rarely the true issues behind them. It is supposedly innocent, submissive, and ignorant Amina who shows Bintu, and the reader, what is really wrong with Nigeria's naira age. And because it is unexpectedly coming from Amina, through her personal account of Ramonu's life, the explanation is much more effective and, possibly, more easily accepted by a Nigerian audience who would understandably dislike Bintu's character.[322]

Interestingly, Fatunde sees Emecheta's treatment of Bintu as a failure of the novel. The critic understands the Westernised academic as 'a literary intellectual mirror-image and embodiment' of the author, through whom Amina's story is 'analyzed for the reader'. It is in this sense that Fatunde finds Bintu's lack of understanding of and 'theoretical and

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[322] Sougou, *Writing Across Cultures*, pp. 149-150 and 155.

philosophical insight into' the mechanisms behind Ramonu's tragedy to be 'a serious artistic and aesthetic deficiency'. The question is, do we really need Bintu's enlightenment and intervention? Sougou instead interprets Bintu's lack of insight as enabling Amina – who is in a much better position to understand Ramonu's story– to take over the narrative herself and sidestep the first-person narrator: 'What is significant here is the way in which Amina secures a voice and control over the narrative by resisting Bintu's frame setting', says the critic.[323]

In fact, Sougou crucially claims that Amina's gradual revelation of her real nature and understanding throughout the novel equals her '[assuming] a new kind of subjectivity'. And this brings me to what I see as a second consequence of Amina's simultaneous storytelling and critique of Nigeria's *occult economy*: the (re)subjectification of objectified bodies, including Amina's, and a restitution of Ramonu's humanity. Amina's story, like her failed attempt to save Ramonu, which also involves actual bodily risk on her part, is an act of care. It is because she cares about Ramonu that she needs to explain where he comes from and what has happened to him. Like Sango's reporting, this has the effect, first and foremost, of restoring the five human heads to their status as human embodied minds, a family, which make the wrong decisions and fall prey to capitalism's hunger. Something similar happens with the women that feature in Ramonu's story, Lemonu's wives and Amina's own mother, who leaves her husband when he decides to marry a second wife. Amina's storytelling indirectly gives these women minds and voices of their own, it is through her narrative that the reader learns how they feel and what they have been through.[324]

However, unlike Sango, Amina is an objectified body herself, a fact she is well aware of. Caring about Ramonu, and telling his story, give her agency, allow her to seize the narrative; as Sougou claims, Amina is able to 'resist the storyteller's [Bintu's] hegemony', which inadvertently perpetuates Western objectification and devaluation, and finally 'be [herself]' (*NP* 103). Last but not least, Amina's story paints Ramonu himself in a very human, if flawed, light. As in the case of all the other characters who commit terrible acts of violence, Ramonu's own humanity is implicitly questioned when Amina confirms he is the mysterious taxi driver. It is her caring narrative that attempts to justify his acts as more than bestial behaviour, a privilege neither Sango nor Abel can boast of. Despite this restitution, Amina retains her clear judgement. In the last chapter, the two women learn that, that morning, Ramonu was burnt by mistake and the actual thief

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[323] Fatunde, 'Conflicting Social Values', pp. 440-441; Sougou, *Writing Across Cultures*, p. 156.
[324] Sougou, *Writing Across Cultures*, p. 155.

managed to escape. When Bintu says that Ramonu was then innocent, Amina simply replies, 'Oh, Auntie, Auntie, was Ramonu really innocent?' (*NP* 108), reminding us that he is indeed guilty of much more terrible crimes than stealing a wallet. In sum, Amina's storytelling is simultaneously a critique of Nigeria's naira age, with its attendant *occult economy*, and an act of caring resistance that challenges the objectification of both female and fragmented bodies; exposing the artificial separation of mind and body, and blurring the boundaries between human and animal in the complex, albeit symbolic, figure of Ramonu.[325]

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Moving on to the second novel analysed in this section, we now focus on Adenle's *Easy Motion Tourist*, which takes us back to contemporary Lagos, where white British journalist Guy Collins has travelled to cover the Nigerian elections. Guy is in Nigeria for all the wrong reasons, starting with trying to impress his London-based 'half Nigerian, half Irish ex-girlfriend', Melissa (*EMT* 7). On Guy's first night out in Victoria Island, the mutilated body of a female sex worker is dumped in the gutter across the bar where he is. Panic reigns and Guy ends up being arrested by the police while trying to find out what has happened. Hours later he is rescued by Amaka, a lawyer who embarks him on an investigative-journalism-turned-detective-mission to discover who has killed the woman and why. Like *CC*, fast-paced, action-packed and multifocal *EMT* was published in 2016 by Cassava Republic. It also belongs to the genre of crime fiction and, according to Sam Naidu, is an example of 'African noir', whose relationship with 'classic noir' is analogous to that of Africanfuturism with science fiction. As a 'sub-genre', African noir is Africa-centred, and explores contemporary African concerns. It also aims to revise race notions present in classic, that is Western, noir. Compared to Kan's novel, however, *EMT* offers a much more complex picture of Lagos's underworld.[326]

As anticipated, *EMT* is, in many respects, also quite different from Emecheta's work, although both texts share a preoccupation with female bodily objectification and bodily fragmentation within Nigeria's *occult economy*. Indeed, *EMT* shows that this economy is still very much in place in contemporary Lagos, while also explicitly challenging prostitution and diverse forms of class-based bodily violence that operate on the category

[325] Sougou, *Writing Across Cultures*, p. 156.
[326] Sam Naidu, 'How Black Is African Noir?: Defining Blackness Through Crime Fiction', *Cultural Studies,* 37:2 (2023), 263-279 (pp. 267-268).

of *expendable* bodies. It could in fact be said that Adenle's work provides commentary on what can be described as hierarchies within the criminal world, or between what Auntie Bintu calls 'big thieves' and 'pickpockets' (*NP* 34). Within an *occult economy*, we can interpret this distinction as referring respectively to those that have discovered the secret or possess the magic to access unimaginable fortunes, and those that are still struggling to find it. It is in this respect that *EMT* can be interpreted to delve into ritual and magic not only as popular explanatory tools, but also, and crucially, as occluding mechanisms that, in Geschiere's words, '*hide the sources of power*'. In effect, Adenle chillingly shows how the ritual killing business is utilised to cover up a much more serious and worrying activity: an international organ trafficking network that reaches up to higher echelons of the police department. With this in mind, the analysis that follows focuses first on the novel's critique of a social order in which certain bodies are both commodified and discarded, which forms the basis for the text's main commentary on ritual killings and *money magic*. I finish by analysing the text's representation of caring resistance.[327]

 EMT's prologue gives the reader the impression the novel belongs to the ranks of *PC* and *CC*, where dangerously beautiful 'city women' use their bodies and powers of seduction to get what they want. When Florentine, 'a mass communications student at Unilag' (*EMT* 1), discovers how her friends can afford a life of luxury while at university, she decides she cannot bring herself 'to sell her body' (2). Instead, Florentine '[finds] friends who [look] after her': mainly, 'her boyfriend, Nosa', a married banker; and an older man, 'Chief Ojo, a well-known businessman in Lagos' (2). However, we soon realise this is not what the novel is about. Some months later, Florentine is recruited to work at 'an exclusive club' called the Harem, owned by a man named Malik. One night, blindfolded and in a vehicle with tinted windows, Florentine and another girl are taken to the Harem, in the outskirts of Lagos, by Malik and 'a policeman'. Their phones are taken away and they will stay at the club for several weeks (4). Florentine's first client, on that same night, is Chief Ojo, whom she has told she is in Ghana. Nothing else is said about Florentine until much later in the novel, when we learn that she is eventually 'beaten […] unconscious' by 'a regular customer' and then, thought dead, her body 'dumped […] on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway' (189).

 In other words, Adenle's work is neither an exercise in moral judgement, nor a didactic warning about the perils awaiting young women in the city. Throughout the novel, the emphasis is put on how women who sell their bodies one way or another become commodified matter or *bodies of extraction*, to use Mbembe's term; that is, disposable

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[327] Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, p. 9, emphasis added.

entities completely devoid of rights. Amaka's official job is that of fundraiser for a foreign-founded charitable organisation called the Street Samaritans. She protects these women from inside and outside the organisation and explains to Guy why her job is so important: 'Prostitution is illegal in Nigeria so nobody watches out for these girls. They are molested, extorted, short-changed, raped, killed, you name it'. The situation is even worse because it is usually at the hands of 'powerful men' that these girls are so abused; so both the media and the police stay out of it, either bribed or too afraid to talk (*EMT* 124). These powerful men constitute, once again, that elite created and maintained by (neo)colonial capitalism, whose naira power declares them untouchable and enables them to buy everything and everyone they want.[328]

Through Amaka and her work, the reader learns not only about Florentine's case, but about countless others', such as Aunty Baby, through whom Amaka initially gets to know the charity (*EMT* 157); Iyabo (158); Agnes (220-2); Debby (30); Kevwe (56); and, of course, Angel, whose body is dumped in the gutter that night (58). Agnes's case is perhaps the most shocking, because of her young age. Agnes is brought from the village to Lagos by her uncle, in order to raise money for her mother's eye surgery. It is thus that she ends up working at Bar Beach, until the night there is a police raid. It is Guy that speaks for the reader this time:

> I was embarrassed to find myself almost close to tears. This girl was only a teenager and yet she had worked as a slave to look after a suffering mother, had prostituted herself, had been beaten – probably raped – had been falsely accused of theft, had been arraigned before a court on false charges, and had been locked up for five months (*EMT* 222).

Whether they have willingly chosen to sell their bodies, as Florentine, or are forced to do so by hunger and destitution, as is the case with Baby and Agnes, these women are completely stripped of their humanity, discriminated against, and left out of the system; made vulnerable in every sense of the word. While this is not unique to Nigeria, the importance of Adenle's novel lies in its representation of the 'acute [bodily] risk' involved in practising prostitution in Nigeria, as well as, as we shall see, in protecting these women from abuse.[329]

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[328] Mbembe, *Critique*, p. 18.
[329] Duncan and Cumpsty, 'The Body in Postcolonial Fiction', p. 598.

One of the sex workers' biggest fears is the police. Every time they are arrested, they are extorted, abused, and even raped by the officers in charge, in exchange for their freedom (*EMT* 57, 64-5). But sex workers are not the only ones that suffer abuse and physical violence at the hands of the police, so do male detainees, whether guilty or not. The novel exemplifies this with the arrest of the Iron Benders, a 'novice' gang of extremely violent carjackers, which takes place at the same time Guy is taken to Bar Beach Police Station (71). While there is a crucial difference between the sex workers and the criminals, their culpability, Adenle shows with graphic detail how these men are also treated like *expendable* bodies, from gratuitous violence to torture as a questioning method (118-9); either to satisfy the cravings of blood-thirsty Sergeant Hot-Temper, or to show the public and their superiors that the police are doing their job.[330]

When the Fire-for-Fire brigade announce the capture of the Iron Benders, for example, Guy is confused by the succinct report: 'No casualties, two fatalities' (*EMT* 70). Two gang members have been killed, but are simply not counted as casualties; their deaths part of the procedure. When Guy is later taken to Cell B with the rest of the gang, fear of the criminals is turned into fear of the police when he sees what remains of the group 'huddled on one side of the cell, looking down at the other side', where he notices 'a heap of battered bodies bleeding onto the bare concrete floor'. These bodies, 'writhing with pain, [look] broken – blood, mixed with sweat, [covers] them in a sickening slime' (82-3). To crown it all, the Fire-for-Fire men take into the cell a woman who has gone to the police station to report the theft of her car, and tell her to identify the thieves. When she fails to do this, she is threatened, until she points at one of the men in the cell, who is then immediately shot in the head by Hot-Temper (84). The only difference between the Iron Benders and the powerful men who beat and kill Amaka's protégées is the latter's money, power, and connections, which protect them from being treated in such a brutal manner. Thirty years later, Nigeria is still in the age of the naira.[331]

The living embodiment of Nigeria's *occult economy* in *EMT* is one such powerful man, Chief Amadi, whose inexplicable and sudden wealth means he will never be fully accepted into the city's elite. He cannot even be classed together with the 'corrupt politicians and dubious businessmen' because no one has the least idea where his money

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[330] Interestingly, at the end of *NP*, Nurudeen, while celebrating the burning alive of the market thief, compares robbers to 'prostitutes', and declares they 'should be lynched too' (106). While, as Bintu explains, the lynching of thieves is a consequence of police inefficiency (13), Nurudeen's comment illustrates how socially devalued the lives and bodies of certain categories of persons have become.

[331] See also Naidu, 'African Noir', p. 273. For a clear and concise non-fictional account of policing in postcolonial Nigeria, see Samuel Fury Childs Daly, 'Policing and the Limits of the Political Imagination in Postcolonial Nigeria', *Radical History Review*, 137 (2020), 193-198.

comes from (*EMT* 236-7). The truth is that Amadi, formerly Okafor Bright Chikezie, used to be one such petty criminal stuck in the Nigerian legal system, until he was rescued by The Voice and soon after popped up among the Lagosian elite (96-8). Amadi is the figure around which body fragmentation, both literal and linguistic, concentrates in the novel. Linguistic female fragmentation, perhaps a foreshadowing technique, surrounds his introduction into the novel, first as a dream, then as he regains consciousness in between two nameless girls. The first two paragraphs of Chapter Sixteen inundate the reader with body parts in a way reminiscent of Matthew Chu's 'meat shop': 'nipples', 'breasts', 'fingers', 'chest', 'groin', 'breasts' again, 'lips', 'earlobes', more 'lips', 'legs', and 'belly' follow each other in quick succession (*EMT* 94). When Amadi gets out of bed, his 'toes [curl]' and his 'fat deposits [wobble]' (95). When he thinks about his past as a homeless child, we read about 'begging hands' and 'dirty palm prints' (98).

The Voice, disembodied and nameless, gives Amadi instructions. This anonymous voice is ironically the opposite of the one in Gabriel Okara's novel. While the latter is internal, the voice of consciousness that urges Okolo to challenge the violence of neocolonial corruption, the former is external, and gives Amadi orders that indicate to the reader that the Chief is but one piece in a big network of body part commodification. In order to fulfil his obligations, Amadi engages the likes of his former self, namely, Catch-Fire. He provides the Chief with drugged bodies and drives Amadi to and from 'a house off Lekki Expressway', inside of which Catch-Fire has never been (*EMT* 213). While we do not know what Amadi has told Catch-Fire regarding their activities, we do know what the latter thinks: that Amadi is in 'the spare parts business', that he is the one to kill the kidnapped persons and 'does his juju with them inside the house' (212-3). Catch-Fire's bragging about his new associate reaches two other criminals, Go-Slow and Knockout, who do not want to miss out on the business opportunity.[332]

The business of ritual killings, in connection to both prostitution and crime, in fact permeates the narrative from the very first chapter, when the mutilated body is discovered and the bartender explains to Guy that the woman's breasts have been '"removed […] for juju, black magic. It is those politicians. It is because of the elections. They are doing juju to win election"' (*EMT* 17), he goes on, this happens whenever there are elections coming (18). This is how it is established from the start that the girl's murder is a ritual killing. Later, back at the hotel, Amaka tells Guy to start doing some research on the subject. He finds more than he was expecting, not only in Nigeria but in other African countries:

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[332] Okara, *The Voice*, pp. 70-71.

> Body parts – heads, eyes, tongues, breasts – sold to witch doctors for up to ten
> thousand dollars apiece; tempting money in a continent with serious poverty.
> Apparently, witch doctors use the organs in rituals at the behest of their clients,
> to ward off misfortune, cure diseases, grant good luck and defeat enemies
> (*EMT* 187).

It looks like not much has changed since *NP*'s early 1980s Lagos and Ramonu's business deals. Both novels show the *"accumulative side" of witchcraft* explained by Geschiere, and the bartender's comment in *EMT* speaks directly to Amina's reference of the politician Baleodo and his resorting to witchcraft to win the elections (*NP* 87), quoted in the present chapter's epigraph. These episodes remind us that magic here is associated with access to both 'wealth and power. And it is especially this version of sorcery/ witchcraft as an accumulative force that prevails in more modern forms of politics'. Commodification of fragmented human matter is thus clearly bound up inscrutable sources of power.[333]

However, *EMT* expands on Amina's insightful claim – '"In this age of the naira, anything is possible, if it brings in naira power"' (*NP* 87) – and further exposes the logic behind this *occult economy*. When Guy asks Amaka if 'Nigerians really believe in magic', she replies:

> The people are poor, they are desperate. They turn to God for help, and when
> that doesn't work, they turn to crime. The young boys become fraudsters,
> armed robbers. The girls become prostitutes. Some turn to black magic. Just
> like they believe in God, they also believe in the devil. God asks them to be
> patient but the devil says, 'I will give you whatever you want; you only have to
> do one thing in return' (*EMT* 187-8).

On the one hand, Amaka's explanation effectively inserts body fragment commodification into Nigeria's economy of sudden, unimaginable riches, and abject poverty. On the other, it echoes Barber's, Comaroff and Comaroff's, Geschiere's, and Watts's claims regarding the explicatory role of ritual and witchcraft in the face of abrupt change, which also signals uneasiness with rampant inequality and elusive luxury. Moreover, it is within such a system that body parts become much more valuable than the poors' *expendable* bodies.

Interestingly, the young boys that turn to black magic do not engage the services of the witch doctors themselves. The profitable business, as shown in *NP* and mentioned in

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[333] Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, p. 5.

CC, is the supply of body parts. No one really knows what happens with them after that; all that is visible is the fortune, the luxury, and the power. The devil's request, the supply of body parts, seems to be itself what Comaroff and Comaroff term 'the key to hitherto unimaginable riches'. In *EMT*, it is Knockout who, after seeing how well Catch-Fire is doing with his new business, feels 'the dawning sense of chill desperation attendant on being left out of the promise of prosperity'. This desperation is what drives him to rip Angel's heart out of her chest after killing her, and take it to Catch-Fire's house as a token of their willingness to enter the business. Later, when Go-Slow takes him home, Knockout is still carrying the rejected heart with him 'in a nylon bag […], in wraps of paper and cellophane', like a piece of meat bought at the butchers (*EMT* 113).[334]

Ironically, while he '[tosses] the meat at his dogs', he wonders 'how anyone could chop off a puppy's tail shortly after birth. What kind of person would do that to a dog?', thinks the man that has just fed those dogs a human heart he himself ripped from another person's chest a few hours earlier (*EMT* 114). Here, Adenle not only blurs the boundaries between human and nonhuman animal by treating a human heart as a meat cut, but also, after making the reader question Knockout's humanity, shows him as being capable of feeling compassion towards puppies, and question himself the humanity of dog breeders. By exposing this other, more humane, side of Knockout, I suggest, the author both illustrates the extent of Knockout's desperation to be a part of Nigeria's *occult economy*, which can make him treat a human heart as nothing more than a piece of meat, and his internalisation or tacit acceptance of other people's dehumanisation.

It is towards the end of the novel, when Guy and Amaka discover the true nature of Amadi's business, that the real 'key to hitherto unimaginable riches' is revealed. This time, however, the truth is not far from its magical explanation. Amadi's wealth does not derive from political corruption, one-billion-naira contracts, unorthodoxly assigned oil rigs, or stolen World Bank loans, but from illegal international organ trafficking, a machinery in which, like Ramonu, Amadi is only a cogwheel:

> "They are selling body parts. Think about it. […] Back in the UK, people
> spend years on waiting lists for an organ transplant. Why wait to die when you
> can get a bent surgeon to find you the organ you need on the black market? In
> Nigeria. […]
> […] They are selling organs to rich foreigners" (*EMT* 279).

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[334] Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Occult Economies', p. 284.

Like Abani's *GraceLand*, *EMT* makes explicit the international connections of the actual 'spare parts business' that *NP* only points at. In *NP*, Amina prefaces the narration of her discovery of Ramonu's deals with a reference to a story about Nigerian students involved in the smuggling of drugs to the UK and the States (84-5). There is also the reference to Ramonu's multiple foreign lawyers, which points to something more than the smuggling of body parts for ritual killings between two African countries (91). However, Amina seems to believe Ramonu was indeed involved in nothing more than the 'the get-rich business' (92), and Bintu is none the wiser. In Abani's 1983 Lagos, Elvis and his friend Redemption are engaged as 'escorts' for the Colonel, a powerful government official. Soon, the boys discover the Colonel is smuggling not only 'six human heads' and 'several organs', but also six kidnapped children, 'ranging in age from about eight to sixteen'. While the Colonel has told Redemption the children are being taken 'to white people who want to adopt dem', Redemption soon starts thinking that they might actually be sold into slavery or sex trafficking.[335]

EMT, on the other hand, shows how ritual is utilised to cover actual, rational, and science-based commodification of body parts. That is, in this case, ritual simultaneously provides an explanatory framework for inexplicable riches and occludes their real origins. When Knockout goes to Amadi's house to tell him personally that he wants to 'do business' with him, the latter lets him believe he indeed performs money rituals, adding: '"You don't just kill people anyhow. The gods must choose their own meal"' (*EMT* 175-6). For gods read rich foreigners in need of organs. Although Lesley Sharp refers mainly to class distinctions regarding medical research, illegal organ trafficking is in fact another example of what she describes as 'socially expendable persons [being] ironically transformed into valued objects', not 'through their involvement in medical research', but as organ suppliers.[336]

Needless to say, in the case of organs being harvested and smuggled from the Global South to the Global North, there is a conflation of both race and class distinctions that makes these bodies doubly *expendable*, as Comaroff and Comaroff point out. In other words, whereas so far this chapter has focused on human energy and matter commodification based on gender and class differences *within* Nigeria, illegal organ trafficking puts race back in the picture, and can be understood not only 'as a new form of imperialism', as the critics say, but as the continuation of neocolonial resource extraction

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[335] Abani, *GraceLand*, pp. 232-237.
[336] Sharp, 'The Commodification of the Body', p. 296.

in the form of human matter; i.e., human organs as international commodities, or, in Moore's words, another form of *appropriation* of Cheap Nature.[337]

As anticipated, Amaka's multiple caring acts towards the prostitutes she protects constitute the main form of caring resistance in the novel. However, before focusing on this character, it is also important to consider Aunty Baby's acts of care which, like Amina's and Amaka's care, (re)subjectify both herself and the women she helps. After being unjustly laid off as Amaka's nanny, Aunty Baby, then a young Ghanian immigrant, was forced into a life of prostitution she could not tolerate. It was the Street Samaritans charity that helped her get out of it. Now, at the time of the novel, we learn that 'Aunty Baby and her husband Flavio' have followed Amaka's suggestion and turned 'a rundown hotel […] into a safe house' for 'girls […] at different stages of leaving the streets'. The place provides them with 'free medical care, training in different vocations – all paid for by the Street Samaritans' (*EMT* 216). It is thus possible to see that the charity is far from the humanitarian aid enterprises critiqued by Leticia Sabsay, since it gives the girls the agency over their lives that they are denied as objectified bodies. Amaka also explains to Guy why these women have resorted to this kind of life; because for them it is the only way out (*EMT* 216). Aunty Baby herself has regained her sense of personhood and agency, partly through her work helping these women.

It is at the safe house that Guy listens to Agnes's story, and, afterwards, Aunty Baby pleads with him to write about the charity so that they receive more donations: '"This is the life these girls suffer", Aunty Baby [says]. […] "People call them prostitutes but they do not know anything about them. They *don't care* what happens to them."' (*EMT* 222-3, emphasis added). While the truth is that Guy is not writing about the charity but about the mutilated bodies, what is important about Aunty Baby's appeal is that it highlights, once again, the resistance inherent in telling the stories behind the violated and objectified bodies. Like Sango's reporting and Amina's storytelling, Aunty Baby believes that Guy's writing has the power to (re)subjectify these *expendable* bodies that no one cares about, by infusing them with lives, dreams, hopes and thoughts. In essence, Aunty Baby wants readers to recognise sex workers for what they are: humans with minds, bodies, and rights.

This is exactly what Zaq, *Oil on Water*'s dwindling star journalist, does in 1980s Lagos: he spends time with Bar Beach's prostitutes, listens to them, and then writes about them. According to his editor, 'he [sees] the story in' the 'washed up' bodies: 'Raped. Brutalized. Strangled. Stabbed', 'when the rest of [them see] only prostitutes selling sex'. Zaq '[says] that by writing about the girls he [will] be showing what [is] happening to all

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[337] Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Occult Economies', p. 282; Moore, *Capitalism*, p. 17.

of [them], how [they are] gradually changing as a people. [Their] values, [their] culture, [their] way of life.' I interpret this as referring to the growing objectification and devaluation of certain persons, such as sex workers, to the way they are marginalised and neglected. Zaq's 'intimate stories', the editor says, indeed have a tremendous impact on the way people see and act towards these girls, treating them as humans for the very first time. This is in fact, according to Adenle himself, his motivation behind writing a novel about prostitution: an encounter that made him see one of them 'as a person' for the first time, followed by the decision to include her 'in [his] book, not as an apology, but as a token homage to the girl who made [him] see beyond [his] preconceptions'.[338]

Amaka's caring resistance both overlaps with and exceeds Aunty Baby's. Born into an economically privileged background, which allows her to contribute to the cause in multiple ways, Amaka has nonetheless suffered abuse as a child (*EMT* 155). She is also constantly sexualised and objectified due to her extreme beauty, which she nonetheless uses in her investigative and fundraising work, as exemplified at the beginning of the novel and during her meeting with Amadi. Specifically, the main character cares for and about the sex workers in three different ways: through her fundraising job at the charity, through her work as a lawyer, and by personally protecting the women from violent and abusive customers, including those who make girls disappear (*EMT* 126-7). Once again, then, Amaka's threefold caring act (re)subjectifies both the sex workers and herself. Importantly, the third, 'unofficial', form of care makes the bodily risk and physical violence experienced by the women, and Amaka herself, a central concern and driving force in the novel, which is one of the main differences between *EMT* and the other three texts considered in this chapter.

So far, (re)subjectifying caring practices, with the exception of Beatrice's last visit to Lajide, where this is an unintended consequence, and Amina's brief intervention on Ramonu's behalf, do not entail bodily risk on the part of the carer. In *EMT*, on the other hand, Amaka's care of female sex workers invariably involves a preoccupation with bodily risk, either her own or those of the women she tries to protect. Following Duncan & Cumpsty, it is thus possible to say that, because of their narrative prominence and physical nature, Amaka's acts of care in *EMT* not only (re)subjectify, but also emphasise 'the *experience*' of this marginalised, objectified group. In *EMT*, the exploitation, vulnerability and suffering of female sex workers is at the heart of the narrative, and indivisibly linked

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[338] Habila, *Oil on Water*, pp. 121-123; Leye Adenle, 'Of Lagos, Startups, Cigarettes and Prostitutes: A Nigerian Writer Unveils his Literary Inspiration', 22 February 2016 <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2016/02/22/of-lagos-startups-cigarettes-and-prostitutes-a-nigerian-writer-unveils-his-literary-inspiration/> [Accessed 3 January 2023] (paragraph 10 of 10).

with its resolution. Last but not least, it is important to point out that, following *The Care Manifesto*, the informal caring network formed by Aunty Baby, Amaka, and the prostitutes themselves who also look out for each other, is an example of 'alternative caring kinship' that goes 'beyond the nuclear family'. Moreover, this could also be identified as 'promiscuous care', because it is 'experimental and extensive by current standards', as well as 'indiscriminate', in the sense that every sex-worker is entitled to it.[339]

What is more, Amaka's caring resistance is the main mechanism through which crime fiction genre conventions are innovated, and what makes this work an example of African noir, since it leads her to become a sort of self-appointed, unofficial detective. Because of the nature of the crime committed and the unusual detective figure, Naidu concludes that, in *EMT*, 'links are made between contemporary violent crime and systemic historical violence'. According to Naidu, 'Amaka is the feminist detective figure that ostensibly subverts the original detective figures of classic noir'. Indeed, the critic identifies in the novel 'a detective trio', made up of Amaka, Guy, and Inspector Ibrahim, that allows Adenle to 'make a substantial "black Atlantic" comment about race and gender', thus pointing once again to *EMT*'s preoccupation with different forms of exploitation. However, Naidu's analysis finds fault with Amaka's characterisation due to a single comment made by her most probably ironically or in jest, while completely undermining her role in the investigation by claiming that she only contributes with 'sheer force of will', while Guy, the white British man, brings in the rational element. This reading ignores Amaka's continuous and dangerous work within and outside the charity before Guy's arrival, without which the crime could not have been solved.[340]

In essence, *EMT*'s structure, characterisation and subject matter make it not only an example of African noir, but a complex work of Nigerian crime fiction that explores gender- and class-based objectification. Moreover, if *CC* ends in a new order, *EMT* gives the impression of ending in order, with the resolution of the initial mystery surrounding the mutilated body in the gutter. Once again, this is only true superficially since, in the Epilogue, the reader discovers, together with Ibrahim, that Amadi's boss, The Voice, seems to be no other than the Inspector's superior, the commissioner of police (*EMT* 325). Amaka also receives an unexpected call, from the elusive Malik, owner of The Harem, whom she has been trying to track down for a while (327). Besides paving the way for the next book, *When Trouble Sleeps*, the novel's ending demonstrates that, although the initial

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[339] Duncan and Cumpsty, 'The Body in Postcolonial Fiction', p. 598, emphasis in the original; The Care Collective, *Manifesto*, pp. 33 and 41-42.

[340] Naidu, 'African Noir', pp. 274-276.

murder has been solved and one bad guy has been defeated, bodily commodification, in the form of trafficking of both organs and women, is far from over.[341]

4.3. Conclusion

Referring to the transnational expressions and implications of ritual as explanatory tool, Comaroff and Comaroff call the reader's attention to 'the very general, dialectical workings of global processes and transnational forces as they encounter human beings where they live: in local communities'. The critics subsequently claim that, if ritual and witchcraft are ways of reacting to Euro-American modernity, to put it very simply, then their examination speaks not only to African processes, but to global ones. In other words, local and localised instances of ritual and magical explanations have both communal and global repercussions, and should be analysed both within a national and a transnational context. I would like to conclude this fourth chapter by restating the idea that this is indeed reflected in the novels analysed here.[342]

That is, despite, or rather through, their focus on seemingly local issues and characters, especially those related to marginalised and struggling individuals and popular beliefs, the selected novels also point to the global forces behind the production of vulnerable dehumanised bodies. Attentive to this, the thesis' fourth and last analytical chapter has aimed to go beyond a political ecological framework, instead focusing on the human body as objectified nature in terms of the third cognate binary of mind and body, and within urban imaginaries that are also part of Nigeria's *occult economy*.

The first section, 'Temptations', has examined Ekwensi's *People of the City* and Kan's *The Carnivorous City* in conversation with, or building on, the main argument developed in Chapter Two. The section has read the novels mostly against the grain to argue that the ravenous city is in fact a metaphor for violence perpetrated by individuals desperate to succeed in the city, whether in colonial or postcolonial times. The second section, 'Transactions', has analysed Emecheta's *Naira Power* alongside Adenle's *Easy Motion Tourist*, and refers back to the tradition/modernity binary now encapsulated in the concepts of fantasy and reality. These works share a more specific concern for Nigeria's *occult economy* and the use of witchcraft for *accumulative* purposes.

Ultimately, like all the other texts examined so far, the four novels construct cityscapes that defy binary oppositions and dualist thinking, and it is through these blurred boundaries that links are established between the local and the global. Through a focus on

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[341] Leye Adenle, *When Trouble Sleeps* (Abuja; London: Cassava Republic, 2018).
[342] Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Introduction', p. xxxi.

objectified, commodified, and (re)subjectified bodies, the first pair has been shown to also blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman animal, while the second mostly challenges a direct opposition between magic and science. This fourth chapter thus builds on Chapters Two and Three, in that it recovers, or speaks to, issues surrounding the village and the city, tradition and modernity, conspicuous consumption, and urban vulnerability, among others. Finally, the question of caring resistance can indeed be applied to, or put in conversation with, all the texts considered here. In fact, bodily commodification and caring resistance are issues of global as well as local relevance, so that this last chapter already gestures towards an opening up of this project, towards possible future avenues for this research and for postcolonial urban ecologies in general.

CONCLUSION: THE NATURE OF POSTCOLONIAL LITERARY CITIES AND BEYOND

> *If I had a grave to sit on and cry I would do so, to soak up whatever solace is present atop the mound under which a beloved lies. But the dust with which my husband's flesh was formed has already merged with the Bézam soil. Or maybe a river there took his blood away. Perhaps his burnt bones were long ago blown away by a cruel gust. I'll never know. I speak to him daily, often when I'm outdoors, hoping that birds flying towards Bézam will take my words with them, and even if my words aren't what he wishes to hear, the sound of my voice will cause him to be less alone.*[343]

> *From the back porch of the house is a view into a gorge. The view used to amaze me when I visited this house in the past, and while I was away my thoughts would periodically wander over to it. The gorge is now far from pristine. Trees have been cut down, and tracts of land have been carved out for houses. Ugly buildings in various stages of completion now loom out of it. […] It is a losing battle for the forest. […] Viewed from a certain angle, the gorge can still look primeval, can still conform to a certain idea of Africa: no gasoline fumes, no gleaming skyscrapers, no six-lane highways. Africa as bush and thicket.*[344]

This conclusion's first epigraph is taken not from a Nigerian urban novel, but from Imbolo Mbue's heart-wrenching account of fictional Kosawa's destruction by (neo)colonial capitalism. Early on in the novel, Malabo, one of Kosawa's fathers who can no longer sit and watch how the village's children die by poisoned water, decides to go to the capital city of Bézam to speak to government officials about what is happening in their village. He leaves one morning with a group of men, never to return. In this passage, Sahel, his wife, mourns a missing man, and imagines what might have happened to Malabo's body in the city of his demise.

Despite being neither Nigerian nor urban, this passage articulates the essence of the argument mapped out in this study: in Sahel's musings, there is nature in Bézam; Bézam exists in, it is nature. Moreover, this inclusion of the city in nature is achieved in the passage through a blurring of the same boundaries that this thesis's chapters address. Kosawa and Bézam, the village and the city, are both involved in the oil company's dealings; as well as joined by Malabo's imagined mixing with the city's soil, water, or air. Infrastructural modernity is also questioned indirectly here, since it is the devastating effects of the American oil company's activities that take these men to Bézam, 'where evil has built its house and where it raises its children'; where either Pexton or the government, or both, gets rid of them. Mind and body are inextricably linked in Malabo's vanishing and

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[343] Mbue, *How Beautiful*, p. 148.
[344] Cole, *Every Day*, pp. 21-2.

'[merging]' with the city; as are human and nonhuman animals in Sahel's hope that birds would carry her voice to her husband, wherever he is, whatever he has become. In other words, like the novels analysed in the present project, this passage (re)imagines urban relations between human and nonhuman nature.[345]

Attentive to a research niche identified in urban ecocritical analysis of Nigerian literature, this project's main aim has been to examine, in a range of works published over a sixty-year period, how nature and the environment are (re)imagined in Nigerian fictional cityscapes; that is, the literary (re)construction of Nigerian urban imaginaries. Specifically, I have compared and contrasted nine novels along three chapters, in order to explore how the different urbanities are construed; what economic, political and socio-material relations emerge within and between the selected texts; how these urban centres stand with regard to rural settlements; how human and nonhuman agents interact with one another and within the built environment. The literary analysis has been organised thematically around three issues that emerge from both the fictional cities and Nigeria's *sociality*, its political, economic, and socio-environmental history. Each theme has been examined in terms of what have been identified as different expressions of the Nature/Society dualism, greatly responsible for Nigeria's *postcolonial environment* as defined by Pablo Mukherjee: conspicuous consumption and consumerism within a village/city demarcation; urban infrastructures and space within a tradition/modernity one; and poverty, crime, and care within a mind/body binary.

My overarching argument has been that, as Nigerian cultural products with the power to (re)interpret and (re)construct the nature of cities, all the novels included in the study somehow undermine the artificial separation of, and/or confound the boundaries between, Nature and Society as abstract categories, by making the city *with and within nature*, as Jason Moore says. In other words, the urban is portrayed to be a part of nature and not distinct from it: to varying degrees and through diverse mechanisms, the novels in this study expose a variety of socio-ecological concerns and alternative solutions or cityscapes that lay bare and/or (re)imagine urban entanglements between human and nonhuman nature. Whether they exhibit a particularly ecological conscience or not, the selected texts have been demonstrated to (re)evaluate the place of nature in the city and of the city in nature.

It is important to highlight here that these binaries have not been forced onto the analyses, but are already somehow contained in the selected texts. Although now consistently critiqued within the environmental humanities, this artificial separation of

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[345] Mbue, *How Beautiful*, p. 95.

Humanity and Nature is still operative in the popular imagination, as well as providing a rational justificatory framework for neocolonial capitalist structures and environmental injustice. The question is thus how it is represented in literature, and how we can interpret it. This conclusion's second epigraph, extracted from Cole's contemporary travelogue, where Africa as 'bush' is in clear opposition to an urbanised landscape, is a perfect example. However, as Yvonne Kappel argues, in this passage, the narrator both aligns himself with the long-debunked idea of Africa as pure wild nature, and foregrounds 'what seems to be exclusively negative by-products of an accelerated world'. The narrator thus 'appropriates the original binary' to signal a continuity between colonial and postcolonial 'forms of power'. In sum, says Kappel, 'evoking the binary and then almost simultaneously showing its limitations and entanglements that cut across it – thus rendering said binary obsolete – highlights the instability of these categories'.[346]

Besides showing how binary oppositions can be repurposed in literary cityscapes, Kappel's analysis attests to the fact that a reading framed by these binary subsets does not necessarily narrow discussions of or interpretational perspectives applied to the novels. Rather, the binary oppositions have been utilised as a starting point, and to establish structural unity along the project. This has enabled a wide range of texts and issues to be considered within the thesis without losing sight of its main objective: to explore the many forms and elements of urban nature present in Nigerian fiction. In sum, the sustained engagement with opposed pairs has been used as a framing theoretical and methodological tool that allows this thesis to address a variety of issues within a single macro-topic: the oftentimes ignored and/or misinterpreted imbrication of human and nonhuman nature in the city.

I would like to return now to Christopher Schliephake contention: 'Integrating the humanities into urban ecology means dealing with the aesthetic, creative, and imaginative impulses inherent in urban life and investigating how they can influence or alter the ways in which we perceive, negotiate, and ultimately inhabit our urban worlds.' This is, precisely, what I have aimed to do in this thesis, through an examination of the analysed works as performing urban (neo/post)colonial conflicts and tensions, which are necessarily played out in the *web of life*, across entangled and mutually constituted human and nonhuman networks. The present study has thus aimed to produce what Georg Gugelberger terms 'change-facilitating' analysis, examining specific cultural urban

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[346] Kappel, 'Re-Membering', p. 73.

products and their representations of both the damaging consequences of the abstract separation of Nature and Society, and alternative ways of inhabiting urban nature.[347]

Regarding the focus and organisation of the thesis, it is important to address its consideration of a broad range of issues within the nature of Nigerian literary cities. As usual with wide-ranging studies, this can be both an asset and a liability. While I have endeavoured to balance both depth and breadth, more restricted approaches within a similar theoretical framework could have been adopted, and can always be developed in further research. On the other hand, while the parameters and structure of the present project have been designed with the aim of carrying out a comprehensive yet deep analysis of Nigerian urban novels, key urban works such as Festus Iyayi's *Violence*, Chris Abani's *GraceLand*, and Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World* have had to be left out of the list of primary works due to time and space constraints. In other words, many more Nigerian urban novels could have been included here. The present project does not intend to be a seminal work, or a defining piece of research on Nigerian urban literature. It is, more than anything, a sustained consideration of the nature of Nigerian literary cities, whose main goal is to contribute to the environmental study of postcolonial cities in literature.

In any case, what I wish to emphasise at this point is the richness of this burgeoning research area, and all the work that is still to be done. The exponential growth of Nigerian literature in general, and Nigerian urban novels in particular, not only make it a perfect case study, as explained in the Introduction, but its volume and established tradition also make it possible for critics to identify specific recurrent elements and tropes on which future urban ecocritical research could be focused. Some of these have of course emerged in this study. While waste and dirt have already been explored before from a postcolonial urban (ecological) perspective, for example, a more comprehensive study of excremental writing in 1960s and 70s Nigerian literature would provide an interesting perspective from which to consider urban ecological iterations of postindependence disillusionment literature. Moreover, roads and markets appear time and again as multivalent spaces that contain a host of positive and negative connotations while also being materially complex places. A more focused analysis of literary roads and markets would shed some light on the possible connections between them and (re)imagined urban environments. Finally, oil and water are two substances around which further ecocritical analyses of Nigerian cityscapes could be centred, in the manner of Maria Kaika's *City of Flows*.

The conclusion's first epigraph is also a good example of this thesis's relevance beyond Nigeria and Nigerian literature. As explained in the introduction, the project's

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[347] Schliephake, *Urban Ecologies*, p. 12; Gugelberger, 'Introduction', p. vi.

focus on the cultural urban ecologies of postcolonial literary cities, together with its multidisciplinary nature, mean that this study can contribute to discussions on other fictional cities in the postcolonial world and, more generally, the Global South. Consequently, whether within the Nigerian literary tradition or across African and postcolonial literature, chronological and generic studies of urban nature, including, but not limited to, the main issues examined here, constitute another possible research avenue. Particularly interesting would be a comparative study between early postcolonial and contemporary urban works, which would point to the breaks and continuities in socioecological preoccupations surrounding colonial and postcolonial literary cities. Comparative studies between diverse fiction genres would allow for a more systematic study of formal and stylistic devices used to challenge existing notions of the nature of Nigerian, African, or postcolonial cities. Based on the current project, I would be especially interested in an analysis of urban nature in crime novels, as well as in science fiction and diaspora literature. As suggested in this thesis, generic subversions and innovations in the first two usually contain a socioecological perspective, and there is also a clear link between Africanfuturism and posthumanism that would certainly benefit from further research.

Finally, building on Maximilian Feldner's work, a more thorough exploration of urban nature in diaspora literature would be more explicitly guided towards the transnational forces behind the (re)construction of urban imaginaries. Connected to this, and to Jean and John Comaroff's claim regarding the global relevance of the study of ritual and magic in African countries, discussed in the previous chapter, I want to suggest that the same can be said of the study of the nature of postcolonial literary cities, as Mukherjee similarly contends. While the present project does not focus specifically, or solely, on cultural urban responses to Euro-American modernity, any analysis of postcolonial (literary) cities necessarily includes a consideration of 'global processes and transnational forces', both during and after the colonial period. Even if this transnational dimension is not foregrounded in the present thesis, it is still there, for example, in the creation and maintenance of the *national bourgeoisie* in Achebe's novels; in *EDT*'s Lagos and its narrator's constant comparisons with New York; in *WL*'s politics, and World Bank-approved loan; in *Lagoon*'s international repercussions of the chaos that ensues in Lagos after the alien landing; in *PC*'s colonial urbanity; in Kan's underworld and its shiny cover of luxury; in the international side of Emecheta's and Adenle's takes on Nigeria's *occult economy*.[348]

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[348] Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Introduction', p. xxxi; Mukherjee, 'Uneven City', p. 476.

In this sense, it is important to highlight here that these cities not only do not exist in isolation, but are also integral parts of global political, socioeconomic, and environmental processes. As Raghuram *et al.* highlight when talking about 'postcolonial responsibilities and care', we need to rethink 'distance', 'proximity', and 'centre'. Consequently, even if these connections are not thoroughly analysed here, the present project is of relevance both in the Global South *and* the Global North. Like Garth Myers's study of African cities, this thesis focuses on 'comparing' Nigerian literary cities 'with one another'. However, a further line of research could 'contribute to building a more robust, globalized comparative [cultural urban ecological] studies crossing divides of North and South, First and Third World, regions of the South, and so on'. This is, for example, the kind of work done by Boehmer and Davies, but there seems to be much left to do in this field, especially from a more ecological perspective. Arguably, this thesis's last chapter is the one with the clearest global relevance and applicability in terms of its thematic concerns of bodily commodification and caring resistance strategies. This provides a springboard from which to link the present thesis with Black studies in general and Black feminist studies in particular. However, such an engagement would also enrich the issues raised in the three analytical chapters, by putting them conversation with racialised experiences of the nature of cities in the Global North, such as those examined by Michael Bennet and David Teague. In other words, the nature of Nigerian literary cities is historically, socially, economically, and ecologically bound with the nature of cities all around the globe.[349]

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[349] Raghuram *et al.*, 'Rethinking', p. 9; Myers, *African Cities*, p. 7.

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