



WORKSHOP

Decolonial Ecology: Literary and Cultural Representations in the Global South

25–26 July 2024 | College for Social Sciences and Humanities, Essen

The workshop seeks to deepen the dialogue between ecology and decoloniality in the context of indigenous knowledges and practices of the Global South, often epistemologically relegated as non-knowledge. The Global South is invoked here as a geographical marker of formerly colonised nations struggling with severe postcolonial and environmental crises, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a systematic occlusion of their indigenous knowledge systems. The theme is a bold signpost to examine how literary and cultural artists, including writers, (oral) artists, filmmakers, (traditional) performers, musicians, among others, represent, interpret, and foreground their ancient, autochthonous, and local ecological practices. The theme also privileges the decolonial lessons that can be harnessed from such practices for planetary balance in the present time.

Scholars from Nigeria, India, Cameroon, Uganda, the Netherlands, and Germany will elucidate various aspects of the topic. Their presentations – centred on African and Asian literary and cultural productions – will discuss the entanglement of ecology and coloniality, but also how literary and cultural artists deploy neglected ecological ideas, practices, natures, as decolonial strategies. How, for instance, their representations of the ecology of indigenous communities serve as colonial counter-discourse in the face of universalised forms of western knowledge systems. To think ecology from the perspective of colonially repressed humanities that tend to undermine how historical processes sometimes overdetermine

environmentalism in the Global South. It is above all to decongest the ecological epistemic space of any neo-colonial 'superior' knowledge system disguised as universality in favour of a communal, pluriversal knowledge system.

Organisation & Chair

Prof. Dr Sule Emmanuel Egya | Senior Fellow, College for Social Sciences and Humanities

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Further Information & Registration

www.college-uaruhr.de/news-events/events/decolonial-ecology

Please register by 21/07/2024.

PROGRAMME

Thursday, 25 July

- 10:00 **Opening proceedings and welcome address**
Prof. Dr Sule Emmanuel Egya, College for Social Sciences and Humanities,
Germany
- 10:30 **Indigenous Environmental Knowledges in Cameroon Western Grassland Oral
Narratives: An Ecocritical Perspective**
Prof. Dr Eunice Ngongum, University of Yaoundé, Cameroon
- 11:05 Tea break
- 11:20 **Cultural Ecology in Decolonial Perspective**
Prof. Dr Hubert Zapf, University of Augsburg, Germany
- 11:55 **Indigenous Way of Knowing and Practices that Shape Nonhuman-Human
Relations: African Divinatory System and Human Personality Traits and Types**
Prof. Dr Anthony Adegboyega Kolawole, University of Abuja, Nigeria
- 12:30 Lunch break
- 13:30 **Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Nonhuman-Human Relations in Ngas
Masquerade Culture: An Eco-metaphysical Approach**
Dr Peace Longdet, Federal College of Education, Nigeria

- 14:05 **The Sisyphean Drudge of Decoloniality: Thinning Groves and the Ecoimagination Promise**
Prof. Dr Chike Okoye, University of Munster, Germany
- 14:40 Tea break
- 14:55 **Ritualizing Plants and Decolonial Bioregionalism in Kodagu, India**
Dr Subarna De, University of Groningen, The Netherlands
- 15:30 **(Re-)Framing Environmental Thinking: Indigenous Ecologies and Decolonial Praxis**
Dr Goutam Karmakar, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, India
- 16:05 Tea break
- 16:20 **Once Upon a Time: Human Relations with the Landscape in Selected Ganda Folktales**
Dr Eve Nabulya, Makerere University, Uganda
- 17:05 **Confronting Environmental and Epistemic Injustices in the Congo Basin**
Dr Nsah Mala, University of Cologne, Germany
- 18:00 Speakers' dinner

Friday, 26 July

- 9:30 **Natures and Negritude: Poetry, Coloniality, and Decoloniality**
Prof. Dr Sule Emmanuel Egya, College for Social Sciences and Humanities, Germany
- 10:05 **Poetry, Water Politics and Decolonial Ecology"**
Dr John Olorunshola Kehinde, independent scholar, Nigeria
- 10:40 Tea break
- 11:05 **Knowing as Belonging: Soil and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart***
Dr Douglas Kaze, University of Jos, Nigeria
- 11:40 Closing, packed lunch, and excursion to Welterbe Zollverein

ABSTRACTS AND SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

Ritualizing Plants and Decolonial Bioregionalism in Kodagu, India

Subarna De | University of Groningen, the Netherlands

Plants provide human sustenance, centrally essential for food, ecology, and cultures. Yet, since the nineteenth century, continuous global thinning of plant species in Kodagu, situated in the Western Ghats in Karnataka in South India, has led to immense biodiversity loss, transforming, affecting, and displacing human and more-than-human lives. Paying attention to Kodagu provides an example of adopting a decolonial bioregional approach that transforms colonial coffee plantations into indigenous sites of multispecies conviviality and resituates human-plant relationships ecologically to perform re-inhabitation and revive Kodava nature-culture relationships. In this presentation, I study Sarita Mandanna's *Tiger Hills* (2010) and Kavery Nambisan's *The Scent of Pepper* (2010) to understand the importance of native plants, forests, vegetal and feral spaces in the Kodava ritual of Kailpodh, celebrated annually to mark the commencement of the hunting season in the Kodagu coffee district. In doing so, I investigate how ritualizing unique plants, flowers, forests, and vegetation as 'sacred' deepens the Kodava human-plant interaction across space and time and emphasizes the changing relational geographies of the human-plant entanglements between Kodagu's pre-colonial past and the (post/de)colonial present.

SUBARNA DE is an associate researcher at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands. She is the curator and coordinator of the environmental debate webinar series, SEPHIS Programme. She recently completed her Landhaus Fellowship at the Rachel Carson Center, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich. She researches the transformations of the environment and society, focusing on bioregionalism and indigeneity. Her research is situated at the interface of cultural anthropology, human geography, environmental history, literature, ethnography, and environmental humanities scholarship. She earned her PhD in English Studies (2019) from the Central University of Tamil Nadu, India, supported by the Central University Doctoral Fellowship (India) and Collaborative Research grants from Queen's University, Belfast, NI. She values collaborative work with non-academic partners to encourage bioregional practices in indigenous landscapes and volunteers as an environmental researcher for the Environment Society of Oman. She can be reached via s.de@rug.nl.

Negritude and Natures: Poetry, Colonialism, and Decoloniality

Sule Emmanuel Egya | College for Social Sciences and Humanities, Germany

The most controversial literary movement to have emerged from Africa, the archive of critical response to negritude appears inexhaustible. From the twentieth century to the twenty-first century, scholars have engaged the aesthetics and politics as well as the relevance or otherwise of negritude. Varied interpretations of negritude have come from different fields – literature, philosophy, politics, anthropology, among others. Much of this critical attention to the movement appears concerned with, in Chike Jeffers words, “how *intellectually European or African* the Negritude thinkers were” (305). Using material ecocriticism, my intention is to relocate negritude from the socio-cultural sphere of readings to an ecocentric sphere. Though there has been a few ecocritical references to and readings of negritude, not much has been done to unpack the African natural world that constitutes negritude’s cultural poetics. The recourse to natures of Africa, I argue, makes its philosophy speak to generations of Africans, even till today, if we properly understand its ecological basis. In poems and other artistic works of the negritude persuasion, there is a nuanced engagement and deployment of the flora and fauna of Africa, a foregrounding of the African natural world as a counterpoint to colonial modernity. I am interested in stressing the anticolonial politics of negritude and emphasizing its relevance to decolonial discourse and practice in the present time. The implications, among others, is to advance the argument that a protest aesthetics rooted in the African natural world, underscoring nonhuman-human interdependence and attentiveness to planetary balance, remains one of the best ways to confront the destructive effects of industrial modernity on environment.

SULE EMMANUEL EGYA is a professor of African literature and environmental humanities at Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Nigeria. He is currently a senior research fellow at the College for Social Sciences and Humanities, Essen, Germany. His research interests include literature and environment, African migration writing, knowledge production in Africa, and decolonial discourse. His current research examines environmental imagination in African twentieth century literature. He is the author of many articles that have appeared in journals in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. His books include *Nation, Power and Dissidence in Third Generation Nigerian Poetry in English* (NISC, 2014, 2019); *Niyi Osundare: A Literary Biography* (SevHage, 2017); *Power and Resistance: Literature, Regime, and the National Imaginary* (SevHage, 2019); and *Nature, Environment and Activism in Nigerian Literature* (Routledge, 2020). He has co-edited *Studies in Scientific and Cultural Ecology* (SevHage, 2021), and *Orality, Textuality, Society: New Perspectives on Nigerian Literature and Culture* (SevHage, 2023). He also writes fiction and poetry under the pen-name E. E. Sule. He is the author of the novels *Sterile Sky* (winner of the Commonwealth Book Prize Africa Region, 2013), and *Makwala* (ANA Prose Prize, 2019); and the poetry collection *What the Sea Told Me* (winner of the ANA Gabriel Okara Prize, 2009).

(Re-)Framing Environmental Thinking: Indigenous Ecologies and Decolonial Praxis

Goutam Karmakar | Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, India

For a considerable period, the environment and the aspiration to achieve a sustainable world have garnered significant attention. In September 2019, the United Nations Secretary-General called for a decade of action on sustainable development, urging various groups, including youth, public intellectuals, media persons, academicians, and stakeholders, to engage with and encourage the facilitation of sustainable practices (Guterres, 2019). The predominant goal behind such encouragement is to assess the prevalent models of progress and developmentalism and acknowledge alternative worldviews to foster renewed models of environmental thinking and awareness. The need is to debunk colonial capitalism and anthropogenic parameters of growth and accentuate the core values of Indigenous and suppressed knowledge forms that endorse the interconnectedness of social existence and the interdependence of humans and the natural world. In this context, literary narratives play a significant role in representing tribal perspectives, either by retelling or interpreting the historical accounts of Indigenous communities, or by upholding fictional accounts that disseminate the necessity of dismantling hegemonic perspectives and incorporating Indigenous epistemology. In this talk, I will be discussing two literary narratives from India: Bhoopal's *Forests, Blood, and Survival: The Life and Times of Komuram Bheem* (2023), translated from Telegu by P. A. Kumar, and *The Coffey Dams* (1969), authored by Kamala Markandeya. Bhoopal's narrative portrays the injustices endured by tribal communities in India at the hands of colonial forest officers, money lenders, capitalist extractive authorities, and other oppressive authorities. Simultaneously, the narrative also shows the resistance of the tribal communities against the capitalist powers, exemplifying the discourse of subaltern environmentalism and Indigenous activism against environmental injustices. *The Coffey Dams*, on the other hand, are about the challenges faced by Western-educated British officials in constructing a massive dam in India. The novel shows the inadequacies of monolithic forms of environmental knowledge, the undersides of epistemic hegemony, and accentuates the necessity of assigning importance to local and situational knowledge. These literary narratives, thus, highlight the importance of embracing decolonial practices by going beyond the colonial methods of hierarchical top-down or formalized forms of education and fostering dialogues with the affected, the impoverished, and the victims of environmental injustices.

GOUTAM KARMAKAR is an honorary research associate at the Faculty of Arts and Design, Durban University of Technology, South Africa. He is the recipient of the 2024 Alexander von Humboldt Postdoctoral Fellowship and a three-year CHS Postdoctoral Research Position at the Department of English Studies, University of South Africa. Previously, he worked at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa as a National Research Foundation postdoctoral fellow and as a visiting scholar at the Rachel Carson Centre for Environment and Society, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany. He is also an assistant

professor of English at Barabazar Bikram Tudu Memorial College, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, West Bengal, India. He can be reached via goutamkrmkr@gmail.com.

Knowing as Belonging: Soil and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Douglas Kaze | University of Jos, Nigeria

This presentation seeks to explore the nature of the relationship between the precolonial community in Chinua Achebe's celebrated novel *Things Fall Apart* and the natural environment, in this case, the soil. I specifically argue that the novel does not only present a community whose relationship with nature is rooted in a spiritualized cosmology, but one that possesses a body of indigenous ecological knowledge that can be called scientific. This is to disassemble the dichotomy that constructs African epistemologies as essentially superstitious against a more rational and scientific western epistemology introduced via western education and colonization. In this argument, I employ a formulation of material animism to examine Achebe's imagination of what it means to be a 'son of the soil' (a relationship rooted in knowledge), the place of *ani* the earth goddess in shaping this knowledge and the colonial disruption of the kind of human-earth relationship that the community of Umuafia represents.

DOUGLAS KAZE is a senior lecturer in the Department of English, University of Jos, Nigeria. He received his PhD from Rhodes University, South Africa, where he studied the poetry of Arthur Nortje (1942-70) from an ecocritical perspective. He has since published and presented papers in African literature and ecocriticism both locally and internationally. He is also widely published in academic journals. His latest publication is "Humans as Waste: Slum Ecology in African Poetry" in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*" (2024). He can be reached via dr.douglas.kaze@gmail.com.

Poetry, Water Politics and Decolonial Ecology in Nigerian Literature

John Olorunshola Kehinde | independent scholar, Nigeria

This article investigates the representation of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation of water resources in Nigerian literature. Utilizing decolonial theory and ecocriticism, and with a focus on the poetry of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare, Gabriel Okara, and Odia Ofeimun, the study highlights Nigerian poets' engagement with intensified patterns of extractive capitalism, resource control, power relations and repressed indigenous perspective—all of which are products of coloniality. Through thematic analysis and the exploration of symbolic imagery of these poems, the article will underscore the cultural and spiritual significance of water to Nigerians and discuss how Nigerian poets extol the indigenous ecological knowledge, condemn environmental degradation and advocate for environmental justice. This article will

foster a deeper understanding of the theory and practice of ecocriticism, reveal local and global power dynamics, resistance and resilience, and beam light on the colonial history in Nigeria.

JOHN OLORUNSHOLA KEHINDE is a recent doctoral graduate whose research interests occupy the intersection of human community and nonhuman ecology, and how literature illuminates some of the major ecological challenges of the twenty-first century. His latest publications in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, *Postcolonial Studies* and *Human Ecology Review* undercut humans' inclination to environmental abuse, species exclusion and human exceptionalism. He can be reached via johnvitoke@gmail.com.

Indigenous Way of Knowing and Practices that Shape Nonhuman-Human Relations: African Divinatory System and Human Personality Traits and Types

Anthony Adegboyega Kolawole | University of Abuja, Nigeria

Contextually, 'knowing' signifies secret knowledge available to an advantaged few. This is in reference to divination or the age-long time capsule. 'Practices' alludes to the code of conduct that has been revealed through knowing which manifests in customs, traditions, taboos and totems. Knowing and practices are reflections of the interrelationship between the celestial (non-human) and the terrestrial (human) entities and the influence of the former on the latter. This paper attempts to explicate that divination is the main source of knowledge of the human personality and the practices associated with it often described as rites of passage. Insights into African divination patterns show that their therapeutic potency has saved the system from the fatality of colonization. Another insight is the high presence of hybridity, suggestive of the interface between African culture and other cultures, predating colonization; most methods exhibit high interpolation with the Eurasian ones. Despite the diversity, findings made on a given subject by contrasting divination methods hardly contradict. Divination is either intuitive or inductive, material or trance. Its variety includes Biblical and Koranic visions and omens, cleromancy, geomancy, numerology, chiromancy/palmistry, astrology, oneiromancy, physiognomy, phrenology, crystal-gazing. By knowing, it has been established that human, independent of color, race or creed, are products of celestial/non-human configurations, predestined with diverse vibrations. All these are only possible through divination. This paper will make available findings on this claim. The study is structured on two theories. Knowing and practices being essential to human existence, only reminds us of Bascom's Functionalism. Because knowing and practices are 'frozen' and prescriptive, Ben-Amos's Oral-Formulaic theory will be employed.

ANTHONY ADEGBOYEGA KOLAWOLE holds a PhD in English from University of Ibadan, Ibadan. He is a professor of African oral literature at University of Abuja, Abuja, where he had previously held positions as Head of Department of English and Literary Studies, Dean of

Postgraduate School, and Deputy Vice Chancellor (academics). His wide-ranging research interests, in which he has published impactful articles, include folklore, comparative literature, stylistics, literary theory, oral literature and medicine, and research methodology. His most critical intervention is his innovative exploration of the therapeutic powers of oral literature in what is emerging as spiritual humanities. His recent publications include “Variations in the Application of the Components of the Oral Performance in Yoruba Chants” in *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* (2023); “Oral Literature, Spirituality, and Healing” in *Orality, Textuality, Society: New Perspectives on Nigerian Literature and Culture (Essays in Honour of Gboyega Kolawole)*, edited by Sule E. Egya et al. (2023); “Women in the Evolution of Yoruba Cosmology and the Invocatory Oral Traditional Poetic Forms” in *Nigerian Journal of Oral Literatures* (2020); and “The Ambivalent Nature of Yoruba Invocatory Chants” in *Abuja Journal English* (2020). He can be reached via anthony.kolawole@uniabuja.edu.ng.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Nonhuman-Human Relations in Ngas Masquerade Culture: An Eco-metaphysical Approach

Peace Sorochi Longdet | Federal College of Education, Nigeria

As a relatively small ethnic nationality within Nigeria, little is known about the Ngas people’s Indigenous knowledge. In other words, research into the history, material culture, and traditional practices of the Ngas ethnic nation are scarce. And yet, Ngasland is rich in environmental and material practices, some of which are dying and must be rescued. This research attempts to examine the knowledge and intersections of human and nonhuman relations in the Ngas masquerade system through an eco-metaphysical approach. I argue that indigenous ways of knowing are deeply rooted in cultural traditions, spirituality, and interconnectedness with the natural world. These perspectives shape how Indigenous communities perceive and engage with nonhuman entities, including animals, plants, caves, and the land, as part of a larger whole. This holistic perspective contrasts with Western reductionism, which tends to classify knowledge into separate disciplines. Indigenous eco-metaphysics acknowledges the spiritual dimensions of existence to nature. The land is often regarded as a living entity, Mother Earth, who provides teachings and sustains life. To understand the complex concepts, principles, and philosophy of the Ngas Indigenous worldview, much of the discussion is in the context of the Ngas Masquerades system. I will share my experience in the learning of the 17 Ngas masquerades; *Nwong-gang, Na’nyin, Mat-bi-shwe, N’dikh’r, Nwong-bilta, Nwong-zang, Nwong-morgi, Nwong-wus, M Wong-as, Nwong-kebel, Nhoho, Nnaru*, and others, as a way of conceptualizing the challenges of understanding Indigenous ways of knowing. The holistic view introduces the belief that all existence is interrelated and has a life force. The paper underscores how Indigenous philosophy emanates from the connectedness of cultural values, ecology, social norms, and belief systems. The paper reveals the significance of nature in understanding the sacredness of knowledge. Indigenous ways of knowing offer profound insights into nonhuman-human

relations. They remind us that our existence is intertwined with the natural world, and our actions impact all beings. She can be reached via peacelongdet2011@gmail.com.

PEACE SOROCHI LONGDET is a senior lecturer at the Department of English, Federal College of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State, Nigeria. She obtained her PhD in 2019 from the Department of English, University of Jos, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. She has participated in national and international conferences and published articles in journals. She has won two academic prizes: the best graduating student, Department of English, F.C.E., Pankshin 1999, and the NAWCS prize for the best graduating female student in the Faculty of Arts, University of Jos, 2006. In 2017, she was awarded a grant by the Firebird Foundation for Anthropological Research Fellowship, USA, for the documentation of Mwaghavul oral literature. Her research interests are computational folkloristics/digital humanities, African Literature (oral and written), Gender Studies, Children's Literature, and Creative Writing.

Confronting Environmental and Epistemic Injustices in the Congo Basin

Nsah Mala | University of Cologne, Germany

The Congo Basin tropical rainforests in central Africa are reputed for the huge capacity of their vegetation and peatlands to sequester greenhouse gases and play host to many critical minerals and about 10% of global biodiversity. Conservation is a top priority for INGOs, NGOs and governments in the Congo Basin, but it is largely based on the fortress conservation model, underpinned by the myth of an African Eden (Nsah 2023), which perpetuates both environmental and epistemic forms of injustice to indigenous and local communities. We need decolonial, postcolonial scholarly approaches to confront these intersecting injustices. In my paper, I will draw on two novels namely *Congo Inc.: Le Testament de Bismarck* (2014) by In Koli Jean Bofane and *Les Marchands du développement durable* (2006) by Assitou Ndinga to point out some examples of epistemic and environmental injustice that accompany biodiversity conservation in the Congo Basin. These would include various manifestations of slow and simultaneous violence, including forcible displacements (Nsah 2022, Nixon 2011); epistemicide and epistemic arrogance (Santos 2014) in the selected novels. By doing so, I will not only suggest measures aimed at confronting these forms of injustice but also highlight the importance of leveraging environmental humanities, or specifically conservation humanities, (Nsah 2023, Reyes-Garcia et al 2023, Holmes et al 2022, de Smalen 2019) in addressing the climate crisis in general and the ecological crisis of biodiversity loss in particular. I will also be foregrounding the Congo Basin and sub-Saharan Africa which are often neglected in these debates that have a potential to shape environmental policy and practice.

NSAH MALA (born Kenneth Nsah), PhD, is a poet-writer, international consultant, foresight practitioner and futurist, and multidisciplinary scholar working across arts, literature and cultural studies; environmental humanities; sustainability science; foresight and futures thinking. He is currently a postdoctoral researcher and coordinator for the University of

Cologne's Hub of the UNESCO-MOST BRIDGES Coalition, a Hub with a thematic focus on Planetary Wellbeing. Winner of the 2022 Prize for Francophone Theses in Foresight and Futures from Fondation 2100 and Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), Nsah is also a 2023 Next Generation Foresight Practitioner Fellow (Judges' Choice) at the School of International Futures (SOIF). He has published widely in creative writing and academic research, and has been funded by the British Academy, SOIF, and others. His co-edited volume, *Ecotexts in the Postcolonial Francosphere*, is forthcoming from Liverpool University Press. He can be reached via nsahtoah@gmail.com.

Once Upon a Time: Dialogical Imaginations of the Landscape in Ganda Folktales

Eve Nabulya | Makerere University, Uganda

In the recent past, it has become clear that indigenous knowledges in many parts of Africa hold valuable insights in relation to the present environmental crisis. Consequently, there is a growing body of research in this direction, but a lot still needs to be done especially owing to the multiplicity of cultures around the world. This paper reports on an ecocritical study of a selection of Luganda folktales collected from central Uganda. Through a qualitative approach deploying in-depth interviews and participant observation, stories were recorded in performance, transcribed, and documented to facilitate textual analysis. The paper proposes that the Bakhtinian notion of dialogism provides a useful framework through which to examine the environmental thought in the tales. In particular, I draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's assertion to the effect that literary works break through the boundaries of their time and function within a three-dimensional reaction model: reflecting past phenomena, responding to the present and anticipating future events, ideologies and disasters. I argue that the motifs and events in the folktales, not only embody a unique environmental consciousness relevant to the ecocentrism-anthropocentrism debate, but also talk to contemporary concerns in relation to the natural environment and provide a projection of the future in what can be regarded as apocalyptic imagination. I hope that as such engaged, this paper might invigorate discussions in eco-orature and human-nonhuman relations.

EVE NABULYA is a lecturer in the Department of Literature, Makerere University. She holds a PhD in English from Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Nabulya's research interests include ecocritical readings of African literature, the interface between literature and rhetoric, oral literatures of Africa, Shakespearean writings, African drama, and literary theory. Nabulya is a former fellow of the African Humanities Program (AHP), African Peacebuilding Network (APN), UMAPS, PANGeA, and is currently working on an Andrew Mellon funded project on literature as archive. She can be reached via evenamala@gmail.com.

Indigenous Environmental Knowledges in Cameroon Western Grassland Oral Narratives: An Ecocritical Perspective

Eunice Ngongkum | University of Yaoundé, Cameroon

In an era of a great planetary crisis, the need for diverse environmental perspectives in responding to the phenomenon cannot be gainsaid. The historical exclusion of indigenous environmental voices, long informed by racist and imperialist imaginaries, have come under scholarly scrutiny in recent times. Decolonial ecological scholarship, for instance, has not only called attention to such historical exclusions but has equally sought to foreground the importance of indigenous environmental knowledges in attending to the current ecological emergency. My paper draws from current calls to decolonize knowledge in environmental circles as it examines the contribution that oral narratives from Cameroon Western Grasslands can make to the current global ecological quandary. It aims at showing that from an ecocritical frame of reference, these oral narratives constitute a rich reservoir of ecological knowledge, embedded in, and proceeding from how Grassfield peoples have interacted with their environment over time, sustaining themselves while maintaining their cultural identity. It seeks to show how the folktales propose alternative relationships with the environment hinged on an intersection of spiritual values, ethical, pragmatic teaching, and ways of being, that literally and metaphorically link Cameroon's Western Grassland people's worldview to their environment, but which worldview is vital in contributing to finding solutions to environmental crises. It argues that while the tales may betray anthropocentric underpinnings, they, nevertheless, reveal an interesting corpus of ecological knowledge, practices, and value systems that promote sustainability.

EUNICE NGONGKUM holds a PhD in African literature from the University of Yaoundé 1, Cameroon, where she is presently a professor of African literature and culture in the Department of African Literature and Civilizations. Her research interests are in the domains of postcolonial African literature, postcolonial ecocritical culture, diaspora African literature, cultural studies, literary theory and criticism. She has published widely on these subjects in peer-reviewed journals worldwide. Her monographs include *Anglophone Cameroon Poetry in the Environmental Matrix* (Peter Lang 2017), *Dennis Brutus' Poetics of Revolt* (Cambridge Scholars 2018), and a co-edited volume, *Language, Literature and the Dynamics of Conflict* (Spears Books, 2023). She is also a poet and short story writer.

The Sisyphean Drudge of Decoloniality: Thinning Groves and the Eco- imagination Promise

Chike Okoye | University of Münster, Germany

Away and far from the traditional values-eroding capacities of coloniality's appurtenances is the more insidious effect on the ecology of affected societies in Africa, especially Nigeria. Loss of cultural values, crises of identity, negative hybridization, disastrous aping and application of governance models, brain drain, economic exploitation, neocolonization, racism and so on, are symptomatic of decoloniality's losing battles despite spirited efforts. Sadly, the ecology seldom makes news apart from horrible spectacles of oil exploration's despoliations in the Niger Delta areas. Interestingly, the rapid disappearance of foliage canopy groves and arenas, natural venues for oral performances, festivals and recreation are tenuously linked to the lure of the digital tentacle of coloniality as modern studios and stadiums take over, leaving the ecological bastions at the merciless scourge of urban developers. Equally sad is the twin effect on ontologically autotelic and pseudo-mythical harmonies now disrupted, exemplified by global warming ousting the Kenyan Kikuyu God, Ngai, from his snow-capped real estate atop Mount Kirinyaga along with his symbiotic benevolence, a la Ngugi wa Thiong'o. This example is just a representative instance. Humane Afrocentric literature comes to the rescue through eco-imagination. Amos Tutuola's *Bush of Ghosts* and Wole Soyinka's *The Road* are examples with their Yoruba source-milieu, myths and Ogun-ism. Again, Chinua Achebe's and Flora Nwapa's Igbo context with the deities, farms, rivers and homesteads make their worlds and tales more realistic and soothing. On more practical terms, the simple yet ingenious stilt houses of mangrove dwellers, low-rise mud and thatch huts of the hot, humid savannah climes and the general application of eco-friendly construction materials by aboriginal and rural African settlements are also examples to be studied, emulated and if possible, improved upon. More studies and promotions of such thematics will engender eco-imaginative thoughts and buoy the efforts of decoloniality.

CHIKE OKOYE, PhD, FAvH, is a professor of poetry and postcolonial literatures with the Department of English, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. He has interests in criticism and cultural studies. He has published in *Research in African Literatures*, *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, *African Literature Today*, etc. He is the author of *The Mmonwu Theatre: Igbo Poetry of the Spirits*. He has also edited *Verses on Change and Violence*, and co-edited *Liminal Margins*. He has a forthcoming volume, *When Four are Gathered*. A proponent of two performance poetry theories, "universalist relativism" and "praxiphonoaesthetics," he is a senior AvH fellow, English Department, University of Münster. He can be reached via cb.okoye@unizik.edu.ng.

Cultural Ecology in Decolonial Perspective

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Cultural ecology is an ecotheoretical approach which specifically focuses on the role of literary and other forms of cultural creativity in the transdisciplinary context of the environmental humanities. The paper argues that some of the key assumptions of cultural ecology are mutually co-productive with a decolonial perspective. Both approaches foreground marginalized voices, particularly also indigenous forms of ecocultural knowledge and creativity; both are inspired by the cultural work of art and literature as an ecological force in culture, which has an intrinsic potential of deconstructing and, in effect, decolonizing pathogenic power structures, while also developing imaginary alternatives to these systemic realities in their creative transformation; both extend their focus from the contemporary period of the Anthropocene to a more general potential of the literary imagination within a deep-historical perspective, in which the archives of literature are sites of a long-term memory of culture-nature-coevolution that is inscribed into the generative matrix of imagination and narrative. Whereas some versions of decolonial theory tend to replace previous ideological binaries with new ones – such as between the Global South and the Global North, indigeneity and modernity -, other voices in this expanding field consider decolonial thought not as anti-modern and instead advocate for different modernities instead of one modernity, for a pluriversal versus a universal ecocultural modernism. It is in this non-binary, decentering yet also newly reconnective form of transcultural pluriversality that cultural ecology resonates and appears potentially co-productive with a decolonial perspective. This mutual co-productivity of cultural ecology and decolonial thought in the ecocritical reading of texts is demonstrated in Amitav Ghosh's novel *Gun Island*.

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