



An Ecocritical Analysis of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Revolutionaries*

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Abstract - This article addresses the representation of ecological concerns in the African literature. It approaches Ayi Kwei Armah's aesthetics as a case-study, and attempts to identify through his novel, *The Revolutionaries* (2013), the features which inform the articulation of ecological issues in the African postcolonial production. What unfolds from this critical analysis conducted with postcolonial theoretical tools is that ecology is inseparable from the African self. Oral storytelling and spiritual ritual performances are two of the many ways whereby African ecological philosophy is conveyed through space and time. Armah advocates that this ecological culture is nevertheless threatened by modern-day material culture. Therefore, he campaigns for efficient ecological ethics, based on ecological justice, in order to safeguard Africa's ecosystem and ensure a sustainable development in the black continent.

Key words: ecological ethic, oral storytelling, cosmology, postcolonial ecocriticism, ecological justice.

Résumé - Cet article traite de la représentation de l'écologie dans la littérature africaine. Il prend appui sur l'esthétique romanesque d'Ayi Kwei Armah et cherche à déterminer et à analyser à travers son œuvre, *The Revolutionaries* (2013), la problématique de l'écologie dans la production postcoloniale africaine. Il ressort de l'analyse critique opérée au moyen de la théorie postcoloniale que l'écologie est inhérente à la vie de l'Africain. En cela, le récit oral et les rites spirituels apparaissent comme deux des divers mécanismes d'encrage de cette conscience écologique à travers l'espace et le temps. Armah entrevoit toutefois le matérialisme contemporain comme une menace à cette culture. Par conséquent, il milite pour des principes écologiques plus accrus, fondés sur une justice écologique, en vue de sauvegarder l'écosystème africain et d'assurer un développement durable en Afrique.

Mots clés: conscience écologique, oralité, cosmologie, écocritique postcoloniale, justice écologique.

Introduction

Drawing on Cheryll Glotfelty's conceptual approach to American ecological writings, Tosic (2006) advances that ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary study "concerned with the relationships between literature and environment or how man's relationships with his physical environment are reflected in literature" (p.44). The term ecocriticism, according to Glotfelty (1996), "was possibly first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism'" (p.xx).

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Glotfelty acknowledges that literary works featuring ecology and environment existed long before Rueckert's formulation. Such, for example, is the case with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, an environmental exposé which was written as early as 1962. Williams Raymond's *The Country and the City* (1973), considered a seminal work in British pastoral literature, can also be read from an ecocritical perspective. The same goes for Joseph W. Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972), which situates the fundamental cause of the West's environmental crisis in the primacy given to culture over nature.

Still, ecological concerns go further back in ancient literary productions. Postulating an ancient Greek inspiration in the rise of ongoing environmental ethical thinking, Chemhuru (2018) deplors that the contribution of "eminent thinkers in ancient philosophy such as Thales (ca 585BC), Anaximander (ca610-546BC), Anaximenes (585-528BC), Pythagoras (ca570-497BC), Heraclitus (ca540-480BC), Parmenides (ca510)" is only little recognized (p.25). He finds in their mostly anthropocentric thinking - which prioritizes the human over the non-human - "some serious environmental ethical attempts to bridge the gap between the animate and inanimate reality," especially in Thales (2018, p.25). Similarly, He considers early classical Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle as "having a lot to offer to environmental ethics" (2018, p.26).

On his part, Jackson (2013) explores the environmental and ecological semantics in Daoism - a Chinese indigenous religion of the Sinitic Civilization dating from 142 CE - intending to show the relevance of Daoist ideas to present-day "discourses of ecology and environmentalism" (p.41). His work is one of the numerous testimonies that some ancient Indian, Chinese and East-Asian religions developed environmental and ecological principles. In non-written traditions like Africa's, oral literature drawing mostly on storytelling and ritual narratives inherently imbeds nature-bound doctrines.

Despite the various literatures on ecology across world cultures, none actually established a theory in the field. It was not until the early 1990s that ecocriticism gained true scholarship when Cheryl Burgess Glotfelty considered it to organize the disparate works "developing ecologically informed criticism and theory" produced over time in American literature into "a distinct critical school or movement" (1996; pp. xvi; xvii). She benefited from the invaluable assistance of Harold Fromm to co-edit *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), the first collection of those different texts informing ecological concerns or theories. Glotfelty's interest lies in the necessity to set up an "environmental perspective in contemporary literary studies" in order to implicate literary scholars



fully in the “most pressing contemporary issues of [...] the global environmental crisis” (1996, p. xv).

Like its American and British counterparts, African literature (past and modern altogether) has not developed an especially ecological ethic. Yet – and in the image of what Buell, Heise and Thornber (2011) read in former Western cultural productions – Africa’s arts and literature too have always “been drawn to portrayals of physical environment and human-environment interactions” (p.417). From this premise, this article attempts to investigate the specific form(s) of African ecological representation, focusing on post-independence African literature. To reach this end, it uses the conceptual framework of postcolonial ecocriticism set by Brizee, Tompkins, Chernouski, Boyle and Williams (2015). It therefore seeks the way the text constructs relationships between the human and the non-human; informs on nature and natural resources; exposes the power or oppression of the environment; establishes a parallel between the marginalized people (natives, women, minorities, immigrants, etc.) and the treatment of the land; and expresses the influence of nature on culture.

Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Resolutionaries* (2013) encapsulates the above-mentioned concerns, even more. This novel parallels the critique of profligate African delegates to costly myriad international conferences – whose “resolutions” are never implemented, hence the sarcastic title “The Resolutionaries” – with ecological chaos mostly caused by exploitative international companies in the black continent. This work articulates the particularities of that postcolonial ecocriticism following a three-step organization. The first postulates African oral storytelling as basically ecological. The second detects Africa’s ecological heritages inside spiritual rites and rituals. The last discusses the writer’s radical ecowriting through a postcolonial lens.

1. African Oral Storytelling as an Ecological Aesthetic in *The Resolutionaries*

Armah’s address of ecological issues is conspicuous for its atypical form. Although it conforms to the multidisciplinary facets of environmental studies, ecological representation in *The Resolutionaries* draws especially on African oral aesthetics. The author announces his preference for that narrative discourse in the preface of the novel. Armah (2013) chooses indeed to inscribe his own narratorial mediation in the “the exoteric role of story-teller” (p. iv). Tuwe (2016) – citing Ngugi (1986) and others – advances indeed that “the function of storyteller has been identified as mediating and transmitting of knowledge and information



across generations, conveying information to the younger generation about the culture, worldviews, moral and expectations, norms and values" (p.2).

Tuwe (2016) paraphrases Ngugi (1986), defining storytelling as "retelling a tale or a narrative to one or more listeners through voice and gestures" (p.2). As he does so, the "storyteller generates a series of mental metaphors, and images associated with words" which, according to Ngugi, confer different forms to storytelling, namely "songs, music, dances, plays, dramas, and poetry" (Tuwe, 2016, p. 2). Armah's ecowriting presents the same transgeneric aspects. "Defined broadly as both the inscription of a genre in another and the passage from one mode of representation to another" (Meere, 2016, p. 313), transgenericity in Armah's approach conforms to the conceptual features that Nkamanyang (2008) detects in Byron's poetry as "[narratorial] voice, narrating objects, mental and extra-mental aspects, consciousness representation strategies, perspectives, and forms of perceiving, etc."

In *The Revolutionaries*, the narrative aesthetic vacillates between verse poetry, lyrical poetry, chorus singing, and ritual performance. That transgeneric discourse essentially displays African oral storytelling style and structure. Armah's ecological representation best encapsulates that form, and reads as follows:

"Land is not for sale";
"Whatever is in the land and under the land is not for sale";
"The earth is not for sale";
"The sea is not for sale";
"The air is not for sale";
"The sky is not for sale"
"People are not for sale";
"The universe is not for sale." (2013, p.264)

The passage above is built following well-cut anaphoric schemes in its versification. Its structure and style comply with those of oral storytelling techniques, which denote a pedagogical purpose (Chinowa 2000, as cited in Nkamanyang, 2008). In the preface of his Doctorate Thesis, Nkamanyang (2008) supports, indeed, that "African storytelling (and theatre performance) is closely linked to the African people's humanistic philosophy and hence its functions are central medium of social, cultural, mental and emotional edification." In his Curriculum Unit on African Storytelling entitled "Keeping the Tradition of African Storytelling Alive", Utley (2008) advances the many purposes of African storytelling aesthetics to include interpretation of the universe, resolution of



natural and physical phenomena, teaching of morals, keeping of cultural values, transmission of methods of survival, and praises to God.

Armah's ecological narrative pertinently fulfils Utley's theoretical storytelling operations. It grounds on the universe, and considers every single being and component of it as pertaining to a general whole made up of entwined interactive networks. Maffi (2014) explores that interconnectedness, noting that

[for] indigenous peoples and local communities around the world, 'natural resources management' is not just a technical notion. It is a concept imbued with cultural and spiritual meaning. It describes the profound interrelatedness and interdependence of people and the land, the reciprocity of the land being a part of people and people belonging to the land; and it sets out people's ethical and moral obligations to care for the land that cares for people. (p.5)

Maffi's premise of interdependence between the human and the non-human finds a ground in African folktales and overall worldviews, which are mediated by their oral storytelling traditions. As the principal medium for passing knowledge, oral storytelling equally transmits the African's comprehension of and interaction with nature and natural phenomena from generation to generation. The close association between nature and oral traditions, those which do not approach 'natural resources management' from just a "technical" angle, is underscored by Darrell Addison Posey. Posey (2014) contends indeed that the "'minority' and disenfranchised peoples of the earth...speak clearly and with dedication and conviction [for all humanity], because they know their lives and immediate futures - as well as the well-being of future generations - depend upon the environment in which they live and the biodiversity upon which they depend" (p.2). For those peoples, especially those from Africa, it is the oral narrative which mainly mediates between the natural and the human.

Balehegn (2016) draws on oral *Gali Saré*, also known as "camel praise poetry," to expose the environmental philosophies of Ethiopian Afar nomads. Balehegn (2016) regards these sung poems as "eco-poetry" which encompasses issues of "biodiversity, environmental crises, livelihoods, clan politics, changing landscape, and livestock raids" (p.457). Balehegn explains that "in these oral poems, the animate and inanimate environment, including rangeland plants, mountains, rivers, lakes, animals, the weather, and spirits, are used in metaphoric, symbolic, and realistic expressions" (2016, p.457). The poems show strong pedagogic purposes, including teaching and preserving the ecological heritage of the clan. Balehegn states indeed that "the *Afar Gali Saré* serve as a means of inculcating nomadic skills among young Afar herders" (p. 462). This is achieved when poets insist on the good or wrong done to nature, and continuously recall the taboos which aim to protect "the environment from human abuses, and avert any reckless



acts that could compromise environmental sustainability and lead to disaster and human catastrophe" (2016, p. 142).

The efficiency of such knowledge transmissibility through oral channels is illustrated by Anthony Obaje and Bola Yakubu in their critical assessment of the communicative purposes of oral poetry throughout Africa. Obaje and Yabuku (2012) support Africa's communal approach to oral poetry, whose aim is to help "reaffirm the cultural heritage of the people, for African societies have rich traditions of meaningful oral poetry that focuses on the reaffirmation of African cultural heritage and cultural rehabilitation" (p. 20). Armah's verse representation of "African culture" for ecology is a condensed story of integrated knowledge. So much so that for Achebe (1987) the story, which prompts oral storytelling, "owns" and "directs" the African. That prominence of the story and oral storytelling in the existence of the African justifies the transgeneric form of Armah's ecowriting. This ecocriticism overlaps in African cosmological worldviews, which inherently dispense ecological ethics through spiritual rituals.

2. African Priestly Ecological Discourse in *The Resolutionaries*

As a rhetorical device, repetition which foregrounds Armah's ecological representation also pervades indigenous African spiritual performances. In their grounding most of these African rites ascribe a true reverence to 'nature spirits' or nature itself. Grillo (2012) notes this spiritual specificity, and contrasts "'the religions of the book' [which only] chronicle human history as the locus of God's will" with "African traditions [which] instead privilege *space* as the medium of divine revelation" (p. 113). She subsequently assumes that "the natural world itself is the milieu where sacred and profane meet and work in constant concert" (2012, p.113). In spite of its overtly proclaimed storytelling mediation, then, Armah's ecowriting mirrors the typical African religious ritual in the sense it includes all the characteristics that Paul Kyalo associates with it. Conceiving ritual as "primordial and universal" Kyalo (2013) describes it, among many other aspects, as "the sounds of chants or mantras," and through its bodily movement, as appealing to "verbal chants and responses" (p. 35). Kyalo's assumption is legible in Armah's "African culture" for ecology (2013, p. 264). If we admit with Kyalo (2013) that a "ritual is symbolic in the most profound sense, for it brings together the mind, the body and the emotions and at the same time, binds us to a community of shared values" (p. 35), then, Armah's poetic summary of the African ecological philosophy in *The Resolutionaries* (2013, p. 264) equally proves symbolic. By designedly evoking "the earth", "the air", "the sky", "land", "the sea" and "the



universe" (2013, p. 264), it undoubtedly inscribes nature and natural resources in the core of African traditions. This ecological doctrine manifests both the visible and the invisible link between African communities and their surrounding natural world, and thereby participates one way or another in preserving biodiversity.

In recent years, a number of studies have validated Armah's understatement. This is the case with *Sacred Natural Sites: Conserving Nature and Culture* (2010), a book which underscores the importance of sacred practices in the conservation of biodiversity, especially in Africa and Asia. Armah's insistence on the interconnectedness between the African and nature in a sermon-like narrative (2013, p. 264) suggests that sacredness helps preserve the environment. His view is corroborated by Dudley, Bhagwat, Higgins-Zogib, Lassen and Verschuuren (2010) who read that interconnection as supporting "high levels of biodiversity," and equally supporting "both local communities and conservation aims, by increasing levels of security for both the sacred site and its biodiversity" (p. 20).

From this viewpoint, Armah's ecological narrative (2013, p. 264) displays the African metaphysical perception of the natural elements which support life on earth. Of all four basic elements - whose true origin Habashi (2000) denies to Aristotle (384-322B.C.) and rather traces back to the Persian Prophet Zarathustra (600-583 B.C.), misinterpreted 'Zoroaster' by Greek philosophers (p.110) - only "fire" is apparently absent in Armah's "African culture" for ecology (2013, p.264). For most ancient thinkers consider fire to "be the primary physical substance, from which other substances sprung, and into which they merged" (Habashi, 2000, p. 110). This might explain why the Igbo associate the "sky" - *invoked* in Armah's ecological *homily* (2013, p.264) - with "major deities such as Lightning, Thunder, Sun and Moon", which generally connote "fire" (Nwoye, 2011, p. 307).

In most spiritual philosophies, all the four basic elements are alleged to contain the divine essence of any natural thing that exists in real life. Armah's "African culture" for ecology (2013, p.264), which associates tangible ecological elements with invisible principles, hereafter tends to instantiate the direct link that the African derives between metaphysical forces and the phenomenal world. That metaphysics could justify African worshipping rites intended to acknowledge and celebrate the spiritual *flux* that impregnates each of the four elements. Alolo (2007) sees "nature spirits" in those African rites (p.21). These consist of "personifications of natural objects and forces, in that people ascribe personal characteristics to certain objects and forces of the universe" (Alolo, 2007, p. 21).

Armah's association of natural elements, namely the "land", the "earth", the "sea", the "air", and the "sky" with "the people" and the whole "universe" (2013,



p.264) suggests a somewhat identical spiritual essence in them all. Alolo (2007) derives two categories of spirits in those elements. The first is closely associated with the "sky," and includes "the sun, moon, stars, rainbow, rain, storm, thunder, lightning, wind" (2007, p. 21). The second category is linked to "earthly forces and objects" and embraces "the earth, hills, mountains, boulders, trees, forests, metals, animals, and insects, certain diseases, water in different forms - lakes, the sea, ponds, rivers etc." (Alolo, 2007, p.22). Alolo notes that while some Africans revere these natural forces and objects for hosting a spirit, others worship them as actual divinities.

Under its spiritual form, Armah's "African culture" (2013, p. 264) features major ecological ethics. Fournier (2011) underscores such ecological doctrines, highlighting "the consequences of wooded shrines rituals on vegetation conservation in West Africa", basing on the case-study of Burkina Faso. Although she concludes to doubts about any prescribed ecological principles in these rituals in the first place, she conversely notes how "the Batwa deplored the fact that the plant cover of shrines was poorer today than in the past because of drought, of accidental burning, of transgressions of ritual prohibitions by 'foreigners', or simply because 'sometimes the trees grow old and die naturally'" (2011, p.7).

Armah's representation of ecology in *The Resolutionaries* expresses in clearer terms the concerns of Batwa people. Stating that ecological and environmental assets are "not for sale" (Armah, 2013, p. 164), this portraiture should suffice to wipe out Fournier's doubts in regard Africans' ecological ethics behind their religious and cultural practices. In itself, this integrated form of ecological narrative postulates a long tradition of Africans' innate ecological conscience. Chunhabunyatip, Sasaki, Grünbühel, Kuwornu and Tsusaka (2018) tend to expand Armah's assumption when they "suggest that policy makers should engage with local beliefs in order to achieve sustainable resources management," and that "such practices [...] be recognized and included in government's policies on natural resources management in locations, where indigenous people lived for generations" (p.1).

Besides, while indigenous rituals ascribe living spirits to natural resources, they equally imply the human as only one such resource. According to Alolo (2007, p.22), the "sacrifices and offerings" to "nature spirits" even elevate *nature* at a higher spiritual level than the human. This mostly explains the instinctive awe that African people generally feel towards the divinities deriving from nature. Such fear for and reverence to "nature spirits" mostly evolve into indigenous taboos,



totems, prohibitions and various regulatory systems which eventually partake in ecological conservation.

This existential philosophy is clearly exemplified in Armah's ritualistic poem for the environment and ecology (2013, p.264) wherein there is an indifferent evocation of the human, natural elements, and the universe. As such, Armah's text expands a major African ontology. Gumo, Gisege, Raballah and Ouma (2012) elucidate this thinking, writing that for Africans "humankind [...] is not an isolated creature. Humanity is only part of the universe which is full of animals, plants and inanimate objects. All these components are related to each other in various ways, and all these are dependent on the Supreme God for their appearance and their continued existence" (p.525). Armah's "African culture" (2013, p.264) tends to encapsulate this worldview under its atypical structure. It derives indeed an interconnection between the African's secular life and his cosmology. Gumo et al. (2012) conceptualize this cultural practice as the "African philosophy," which "on resource utilization and environmental protection is spiritually-based" (p.525). As such, they consider "major conservation efforts and the control of resources" to be "influenced by that spirituality" (p. 225). They therefore admit "religious beliefs and taboo systems [to be] at the centre of life as a whole." Contending that "the African spiritual worldviews create respect for nature, reverence for hills, forests, animals, and rivers" (p. 225), they acknowledge the relevance of such practices to modern-day environmental concerns. They substantiate their thesis by citing the "Luhya of Kenya who use their African spirituality to conserve the Kakamega Forest" (p. 225).

From all these approaches, Armah's ecological narrative – skillfully termed "African culture" (2013, p.264) – turns out to be a complex purview of African cosmologies and behaviors. What seems peculiar in Armah's ecological discourse is its plaintive tone. The negative imprint rendered by the rhyming drill-repetition – "is not for sale" (2013, p.264), with a seemingly choral texture – tends to oppose African ecological tradition to modern-day material culture. From this angle, Armah's ecowriting echoes the age-old binary divide, which Haila (2000) identifies in "the Western view of human's place in nature" (p. 155). Haila notes indeed that in the West, "'culture' is often equated with all human artifact, and 'nature' with the external environment, that is, culture and nature are distinguished from each other as if they were two separate realms of reality" (p.155). Armah's ecological narrative infers human *culture* (in its materialistic capture) as a corrupt one, which thereafter becomes antonymous with African originary ethics towards nature. In



the post-independence context of *The Revolutionaries*, Armah's ecological representation has the resonance of a postcolonial reclaim.

3. Radical Postcolonial Ecological Writing in *The Revolutionaries*

Analogous to its tardy conceptualization in Western scholarships, ecological study appears belatedly in postcolonial literature. Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin (2007, pp. 69-70; 71-72) approach Alfred Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism* (1986) as a seminal work which imbeds ecological concern in postcolonial criticism. This book underscores the effect of the "Columbian Exchange," a phrase which designates the frequent exchange of living organisms contained in plants, animals and diseases between the Old World (Eurasia and Africa) and the New World of the Americas (Nunn & Qian, 2010, p. 163). Those organisms, especially those contained in diseases borne by European colonizers, proved particularly lethal for the colonized peoples. Too, the "introduced crops and livestock [...] annihilated or endangered native flora and fauna on which [the cultures, and sometimes the very lives of the colonized] depended" (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 69). The hegemonic resonance in such debasing patenting concepts as *exotic* or "third world plant and animal" (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 70) and overall destructive impacts of Western sponsored cash-crops on indigenous ecology inform mostly the literary productions of former colonies around the world. The juxtaposition of that particular ecowriting with the postcolonial orientation of these literatures have given rise to what is known as *postcolonial ecocriticism*.

Bill Ashcroft et al. (2007, pp. 168-170) define postcolonialism or postcolonial theory as a critique of European imperialism, of the representation of the colonized in the colonizer's literature and arts, and globally as the responses of the colonized to the colonial discourse in their various arts and literary productions. James (2012, p.60) deduces from their combination that postcolonial ecocritical study seeks to establish a dialogue between "postcolonialism" and "ecocriticism" as two distinct paradigms. James discusses at length the apparently dichotomous relations between the two discourses basing on theoretical and methodological schisms sketched by Nixon (Ibid, pp.60-61).

Yet, Postcolonial ecocriticism goes beyond mere conceptual divergences which broadly distinguishes between "postcolonial concerns with culture, language and representation" and "ecocritical interest in the environment" (James, p. 60). Postcolonial ecocriticism embraces the interconnection between Western imperialism and the environmental and ecological crises in the colonized zones, including the impacts on the life of the colonized peoples, as well as literary



responses from erstwhile colonies to the cultural connotation of ecology in colonial and neocolonial discourses.

Most ecological addresses in African writings bear that postcolonial tone. Such is especially the case with the works of Nigerian human rights and environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa. *Basi and Company: A Modern African Folktale* (1987); *Basi and Company: Four Television Plays* (1987); *A Forest of Flowers: Short Stories* (1986), among many others, mirror indigenous African people's environmental predicaments. They mainly center on the disruption of the Ogoni people's farming and fishing lifestyles caused by land, air and water pollution on account of crude oil activities. This devotion to political ecology led to Saro-Wiwa's execution by the then Nigerian military regime on November 10, 1995 (Saale & David, 2014, p.1).

Yet, Ken Saro-Wiwa is not the sole African writer who aestheticizes ecological concerns in Africa. Byron Carminero-Santangelo (2014) provides a large-scale illustration of African critical perspectives on ecology in *Different Shades of Green: African literature, environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*. As reviewed by Missihoun (2016, p.1), this book which is "postcolonial and interdisciplinary par excellence [...] draws on a critical perspective built on the theorizing of global environmental justice and political ecology, and explores the intersectional ties among African writing, environmentalism, anticolonial struggles, and social justice."

Armah's ecowriting, which encompasses above-mentioned postcolonial features, is critical of the African's responsibility in the ecological crisis of his continent. As it is often the case with Armah's works, sarcasm and irony, and at times crude satire, fuel the ecological narrative in *The Resolutionaries*. Idiosyncratic of the author's postcolonial approach to the theme of responsibility, the Africans, especially the ruling and intellectual elite, are severely scorched for their avidity and their connivance with the West in the pillage of the black continent's natural resources. The contributions of two African scholars at conferences held on African soil in luxury hotels "'to say why [African problems] won't get solved'" (p. 213) – hence the title of the novel – exemplify the responsibility of Africans in their continent's ecological predicaments.

The first of these scholars is Dr. Stanislaus Fiaga. In *The Resolutionaries*, he stands as the leading figure of corrupt African elites. His first name (Stanislaus) suggests indeed corrupt cultural import and stands in line with Amala's paradigm of Armah's dualist "inflationary and deflationary characterization" (2013). Dr Stanislaus Fiaga postulates Africa to hold a primordial position in the Trans-Atlantic slave-trade in *The Resolutionaries* (p.255). Through a highly sarcastic



testimony based on his own family's stories collected in "*The Fiaga Saga*," a fictional book within *The Resolutionaries*, Dr. Fiaga "[shifts] the responsibility for initiating the slave trade to the African elites" (p. 255). As he does so, the African scholar assumes Africa's responsibility for what Nefert calls an "atrocious for Africans" (Armah, 2013, p. 256). Armah pushes his sarcasm so far as to deride on the slave trade as an opportunity that has originally set Africa at the heart of world economy. So much so that Fiaga dares demand recognition and acknowledgement, advocating that "Africa contributed to the globalizing process at its inception a new brand of entrepreneurs, the coastal trading elite" (Armah, 2013, p. 253).

Armah's critique reveals a recurring cliché which informs the colonial discourse. The African is represented as an idle individual who fails to develop an actual economic culture out of the tremendous natural resources his continent is endowed with. Dr Fiaga underscores this racist prejudice, quoting from a fictional European trader's book in *The Resolutionaries*:

"There is land. plenty of it. There's water, just as plentiful...I found the settlement I had come to a place of plentiful land, remarkably well watered, inhabited by strong, well-built men, and women who look and move in ways uncannily attractive. The land yield plants, flowers and fruit readily, provided water drops on it and it does. So far I have not noticed a season with no rain...The men, though of stout build, do not put their force to work to bring water to the land. If they did that, they could make the whole land bloom. No doubt they would grow rich, and live better than they do now. Why do they not do it?" (Armah, 2013, p.283)

In the passage above, Armah expertly camouflages his critique of the African's laxity by conferring it a racist form. This aesthetic substantiates his initial resort to fiction, rather than what he ironically terms "academic repository of knowledge" (2013, p.xxi). Yet, even fiction can hardly assuage the amplitude of the author's recrimination, thus underpinning O. Ogede's perception of Armah as a "Radical Iconoclast" (2000). Armah openly attacks the ruling elite in the continent for contenting only with selling "every resource we need to live reasonably here" in his novel (2013, p.214). He even calls them "stewards," a name by which Aristotle designates the intermediary role of "slaves the slave-masters use to control other slaves" (2013, p. 265). Armah's sarcasm reaches a peak when Professor Nnoli, former "minister of finance of his country," unequivocally admits that "the raw resource export economy is what exists in Africa today..." (2013, p. 281). The former African executive further ironizes that "Africans are lucky to have these raw resources at all. It would be wicked to refuse to sell them to *those who need them to develop their industries*" [Italics mine] (p.281).

While Armah blames the African for his lack of creativity which prevents him from processing the tremendous natural resources of his continent (2013, p.281),



his harshest criticism goes against the West for acting an ecological imperialism in Africa in *The Resolutionaries*. Armah's critique of foreign powers' ecological damages in the black continent dates from his very early works of the 1960s through the 1980s. But until then, it was his "mythic" novel (Okpewho, 1995, p.294), *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979), which best epitomized the destructive impacts of Arab and European imperialisms on Africa's environment. In *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979), Armah is very critical of the systematic pillage of Africa's natural resources by European imperialists. He writes indeed that "[Europeans] have wiped the surface barren with their greed" and that "they have dug deep to take what the earth needed for itself to stay fertile earth" (Armah, 1979, pp. 6-7). He subsequently decries the "tremendous monstrosity [of] the greed of the whites" (1979, p. 163) which prompts this plunder.

In *The Resolutionaries* (2013), Armah's establishes a collusion between Western companies and Western international military treaties like NATO, Western intelligence agencies like the CIA, and Western diplomatic missions, as well. That treacherous collaboration ensures a forcible 'pacification' of resource-rich areas around the world by systematically breaking any local resistance through perpetrating "international political assassinations" (2013, p. 199). Armah's accusation is evidenced by *The Guardian* which reports on the killing of "Mexican indigenous leader and opponent of illegal logging Isidro Baldenegro López" in January 2017 (Watts & Vidal, 2017). The same criminal practice largely informs *The Resolutionaries*. Armah's novel recalls indeed the assassination of "an African political leader in the Congo, described in a company memo as the sole obstacle to secure [...] long-term control over huge strategic uranium reserves in West Central Africa [...] by agents referred to only as AO3 and AO8" (2013, p.227).

The passage above alludes most likely to the assassination of the first Congolese Prime Minister, Patrice Emery Lumumba, wherein Western chancelleries are suspected. As such, Armah's ecological representation assumes the transgeneric framework discussed earlier, as it includes Africa's recent history to the fictional narrative of *The Resolutionaries*. Reporting on the historical fact, Corera (2013) writes that "a member of the House of Lords, Lord Lea, has written to the London Review of Books saying that shortly before she died, fellow peer and former MI6 officer Daphne Park told him Britain had been involved in the death of Patrice Lumumba, the elected leader of the Congo, in 1961." It comes to Armah's *Resolutionaries* to insinuate the objective behind that connivance. In this novel, Clairexcel Uranium President-Director finds a logic in such assassinations for "the wellbeing of persons like himself, whose wealth depended on the continued



control of African resources by Europeans and American corporations" (2013, p.201).

Overall, Armah denounces the ecological devastation occasioned by the West's violent control over Africa's natural resources in *The Revolutionaries*. The novel clearly depicts that ecological desolation in the following passage: "[t]he land just before the shoreline looked rather bare for a tropical coast. Numerous vestigial signs indicated that once, not long ago, there had been forest here" (2013, p.324). That large-scale deforestation operated by Western companies or their local surrogates in Africa justifies Kalemba Mwambazambi's pressing appeal upon the officials of the Democratic Republic of Congo to "protect the existence of the tropical forests under threat of industries" (2010, p. 54). For deforestation (itself an ecological disaster) generally goes along with overall pollution, as it is the case in *The Revolutionaries*. Indeed, when Benga deplores a "criminal waste" in the novel (2013, p.235), he does not only intend the "gas flares" deriving from the destruction of the gas reserve which proves an obstacle to extracting petroleum underneath. He mostly refers to the "gigantic overlay of something - not oil, not ash, not grease - just a slushy residue of indeterminate waste" that seems to have "slicked" over the land (2013, p. 235). Benga's observation substantiates Ken Saro-Wiwa's sad account of the destruction of Ogoniland. Saro-Wiwa (1995) declares indeed that "the Ogoni country has been completely destroyed by the search for oil...Oil blowouts, spillages, oil slicks, and general pollution accompany the search for oil...Environmental degradation has been a lethal weapon in the war against the indigenous Ogoni people."¹

Saro-Wiwa equates environmental degradation with warfare, which threatens to "extinct" local indigenous inhabitants. While Armah's ecological representation does not so overtly alarm on the pending extinction of Africans, it nonetheless infers many societal tragedies as immediate consequences of environmental and ecological damages. For example, Armah suspects African youths' restlessness, which impels them to challenge death on risky migratory roads as one such consequence. Armah's insinuation of a causality between ecological crises and African migratory movements finds due confirmation in a report delivered by the High Representative and the European Union, which states that "there will be millions of 'environmental' migrants by 2020 with climate change as one of the

¹ The declaration was made in an interview shown on Channel 4 (U.K.) on November 15, 1995, five days after Ken Saro-Wiwa's execution. For more information refer to <https://www.kzoo.edu/praxis/without-walls-interview-with-ken-saro-wiwa/>



major drivers of this phenomenon...” (Goff, Zarin & Goodman, 2012, p.197). Yet, whereas European decision-makers see climate change as a fundamental cause of migration, Armah only tends to insinuate it as an incidental consequence of Western imperialism. For the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, uncontrollable lumbering, industrial pollution, land expropriation, mining, crude oil extraction and cash-crop farming have long had negative impacts on Africa’s environment and ecology.

As Armah dignifies Ibra – one who fails in his migratory attempt – with a prosperous and fair commercial partnership with a Chinese (2013, p.237), he tends to indicate that the key to worldwide peace and sustainable development lies in ecological justice. Any such ethic will prevent some human categories from damaging the ecological equilibrium of resource-rich natural environments inhabited by others. Respecting one another therefore comes to respecting the environmental and ecological balance which sustains human existence.

Conclusion

This article has operated a critical analysis of Ayi Kwei Armah’s representation of ecology in *The Resolutionaries*. It has revealed transgeneric features both in form and content in that aesthetization. It has shown that Armah’s ecowriting complies with African oral storytelling art, on the one hand. On the other hand, it has detected an ecological culture in African spiritual ritual practices. The study has disclosed from both approaches a pedagogic function whereby Africans translate integrated knowledges about nature from generation to generation. It has, thereafter, unveiled the inseparable connectedness (both secular and spiritual) between the African and his surrounding environment. It has inferred that while ecological ethics as defined on scientific basis nowadays are not manifest in the African culture for nature, the African has conversely developed an ecological philosophy which has long contributed to the conservation of his surrounding environment. The article has therefore concluded that not only oral storytelling and spiritual rites ensure the circulation of African indigenous ecological doctrines, but they also continuously revive them aesthetically and ensure their continuity. Besides, the study has demonstrated that Armah’s criticism has eventually adopted a radical postcolonial tone before the ecological abuses conducted mostly by Western companies and their African proxies. From that perspective, this study has shown that Armah blames the African for both his laxity and his corruptibility. Similarly, it has revealed that Armah chiefly holds the West accountable for the environmental and ecological devastation which plagues the life of the masses of



African people. In this regard, it has expounded Armah's critique that unprincipled logging activities, careless oil and mineral exploitation, extended cash-crop farming, chemical and industrial wastes equally pollute Africa's air, water and soil. Thereafter, the analysis has detected causality between these ecological damages and societal crises in Armah's ecowriting, one of which being African youths' hazardous migratory adventure. The results from this critical evaluation that Armah's ecological representation in *The Resolutionaries* is a pressing appeal to foster strong ecological ethics in postcolonial Africa. The ensuing ecological justice should eventually lay the basis for a sustainable development in the black continent.

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