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Reimagining Futures: Environmental Activism and African Futurism in Nnedi Okorafor's Lagoon

Ayo Ogunsiji^{1*}

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Nnedi Okorafor's "Lagoon," combining African futurism with environmental themes to shed light on how the text influences our understanding of ecological activism from an African perspective. By scrutinizing Okorafor's storytelling, this paper unveils the intricate ways the narrative integrates traditional knowledge and forward-looking visions, championing a sustainable and balanced relationship with our environment. "Lagoon" offers a vibrant depiction of Nigeria's environmental challenges, highlighting the adverse consequences of petroculture while also displaying a joint effort among humans, non-humans, and extraterrestrial entities to address these environmental perils. The novel emerges as a poignant evaluation of environmental disregard and a tribute to collaborative resilience, presenting a compelling outlook of optimism and rejuvenation. This analysis locates "Lagoon" as a core element of African futurism, demonstrating how the genre can transcend mere conjecture to serve as a crucial tool for environmental advocacy and transformation. Through an examination of "Lagoon" from the perspectives of African futurism and environmental critique, this article illuminates the novel's substantial contributions to both literary and ecological dialogues. It highlights the potential of speculative fiction not only to portray urgent environmental concerns but also to stimulate innovative thoughts and initiatives. In essence, this research stresses the significance of embracing indigenous perspectives and advancements in shaping sustainable futures, establishing "Lagoon" as a pivotal text that resonates with audiences and academics alike in its plea for environmental consciousness and accountability.

INTRODUCTION

The scope and definition of Afrofuturism is important to our understanding of African futurism. According to Hodapp (2021), one allegation against Afrofuturism is that it does not adequately represent Black African science and its peculiarities. For Hodapp (2021, 3), Afrofuturism gives agencies to "Black elements of science fiction that have been suppressed, misunderstood, and eschewed by traditional literary powerbrokers. Afrofuturism pushes back against the absence of Black people in much mainstream science fiction, arguing that science fiction can at times appear to be a white fantasy in which Blackness has been erased from the future." The claim above is accurate and valid, especially if one considers the context of Afrofuturism and the movement's criticisms. The movement relates primarily to African Americans in the United States particularly how they have been pushed to the margins in the world of science fiction. Popular western media has always constructed a future that is mostly white, pushing to the background black people and people of color. This recalls the question asked by Octavia Butler (208), "why is science fiction so white?" Octavia has wondered if anyone has any doubt in their minds regarding the possibility of an all-white future of the world especially if the present white domination in science fiction remains unchecked. Butler (2018) argues that if science fiction is encouraged and seen from just one perspective, the less-represented group may not see a

need for science fiction. Afrofuturism agrees with Butler in questioning white dominance in science fiction and reimagining a future in which blackness is central.

Hodapp (2021) identifies two shortcomings of Afrofuturism especially in its rejection by Africanfuturist scholars: First off, it did not initially include Africa but was created to give expression to the concerns of African American perceptions of futurity. Second, it has been found guilty of positioning Africa within the African American imaginary rather than visa-versa. Consequently, science fiction producers, such as Nnedi Okorafor, believes that their work is being incorrectly categorized through a western oriented understanding even if it is the case that their writings protect the interest of Black diasporic discourses. Bristow points our attention to the absence of Africa in Afrofuturism. According to her, 'Unlike what it suggests, Afrofuturism has nothing to do with Africa, and everything to do with cyberculture in the West' (Bristow 25). It is Bristow's argument here that Afrofuturism only pays lips service to the realities and concerns of Africa. It does not account in a comprehensive way for African experience or their projections into the future. Scholars such as Samatar and Mashigo have corroborated the position taken by Bristow that the origin and expression of Afrofuturism cannot be traced to the African continent. The material realities, life experiences and the geopolitical contexts of Africa have not been catered for by Afrofuturism (Mashigo). It is

¹ University of Ibadan, Nigeria

* Corresponding author's e-mail: olarotexy911@gmail.com

because of this that Okorafor proposes African futurism which asserts the importance of an Africa-specific sense of futurity in science fiction. According to Okorafor (2019),

African futurism is concerned with visions of the future, is interested in technology, leaves the earth, skews optimistic, is centered on and predominantly written by people of African descent (black people) and it is rooted first and foremost in Africa . . . Its default is nonwestern; its default/center is African. This is distinctly different from “Afrofuturism.”

African futurism is concerned with the imaginations of future that centers Africa and decenters the Western world. To achieve this, African futurism in the words of Hanchey (2021) “requires its own terminology and trajectory, distinct from that of Afrofuturism, because too often diasporic understandings and representations of Blackness function to obscure African continental imaginings.” The call is for a Blackness that is characteristically African in its form, language, and perspective. It cannot be a stew of African and diasporic configuration. It is a project in the words of Mashigo that can predict “Africa’s future postcolonialism.” African futurism is therefore projected to take care of the needs, aspirations and future imaginations of Africans living in Africa, who feel the pulse of the continent. According to Moshiga, from the perspectives of Afrofuturism, Africa is just a “costume or a stage to play out ideas.” One implication of this is that African materiality is ignored and sometimes what has been tagged African science fiction has paid attention on White continental lives at the expense of Africa and her people (Blomkamp; Hartman). Nnedi Okorafor is not alone in advocating a departure from Afrofuturism and establishing a branch of African science fiction that represents primarily the interests of Africa and Africans. Other African authors such as Oghnechovwe Donald Ekperi and Suyi Davis Okungbowa have lent their voices to the debates between Afrofuturism and African futurism. For example, Hanchey quotes Oghnechovwe Donald Ekperi that “Afrofuturism mostly pertained to the broader diaspora to the exclusion of stories from within the African continent itself” (2021). African futurism is a tool through which Africans can create a future that is distinctly theirs; one that is free from stereotyping. According to Hanchey (2020:120), “those who tell the future are creating it.” This confirms why it is important that African writers and thinkers must invest in science fiction that create alternate futures for Africa, futures that are not only liberatory but also put us on the path to “decolonial justice” (Hanchey). Earlier Eshun (2003) argued that through science fiction, the present can be preprogrammed and channeled toward a desired future. The present study which is a consideration of Nnedi Okorafor’s Lagoon situates the study in the African futurism tradition. This tradition sometimes seems to have mystical elements drawn from African cultural beliefs/worldviews.

Existing studies on the science fiction of Nnedi

Okorafor’s have investigated her oeuvre from the perspectives of animal representation, geography, magical realism, and indigenous futurism. For example, Redondo (2020) explores Lagoon and pays attention to animal instrumentalization in the contemporary world and how human characters are willing to accept animals as coworkers in finding solutions to the malaise that besiege the earth. Hugo (2017) examines the futuristic representations of Lagos in Okorafor’s Lagoon and reveals that Okorafor utilizes a West African knowledge order that births a future Lagos that accommodates modernity and magic and the human and nonhuman. Crowley also explores space and place in Nnedi Okorafor’s oeuvre and focuses on how Lagos is constructed as a center for interplanetary connection. Crowley (2019) argues for a fruitful transformative interaction and connection across geographical and discursive frontiers. For Rahn (2019), the distinctiveness of Black subjectivities and its representation is captured in the speculative fiction of Okorafor. Rahn focuses on Lagoon and makes a case for the plurality of human existence and a renegotiation of classifications of Western and non-Western subjectivities. In addition, Eubanks explores how Okorafor questions racist ideologies that help perpetuate contemporary slavery and colonialism. From the available literature, it is obvious that there are a few excellent studies on Nnedi Okorafor’s oeuvre. These extant studies on her works provide the needed context to situate my study. I am particularly interested in how ecological and environmental concerns are addressed via indigenous or a non-Western perspective in the text. This is an aspect of the leitmotifs in her work that has been neglected by scholars who are interested in her African futuristic fiction. I would point out how Lagoon chronicles the ecological devastation, pollution and spills that have come to characterize the communities and the marine ecosystems of Lagos and by extension other places in Nigeria. Further, I would draw attention to how speculative fiction has come of age in Africa as a weapon for environmental critique. This study’s exploration of environmentalism, African futurism and the praxis of agency as presented by Okorafor aims to shift the literature on speculative fiction forward while simultaneously providing new insights into African science fiction. My article would ask the following set of related questions: how does Nnedi Okorafor set up the novel as a critique of the environmental degradation in Nigeria? What evidence does she produce to support the usefulness of indigenous knowledge, nonhuman agents and human agents in finding solutions to environmental and ecological challenges in the text?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study similarly employs a literary discourse analysis framework based on Ogungbemi’s (2023) innovative method, which integrates critical discourse analysis and stance theory to scrutinize environmental narratives within literature. By applying this approach to Nnedi Okorafor’s Lagoon, our analysis seeks to highlight and

elucidate themes of African futurism, and environmental activism thereby offering a broad exploration of these pivotal elements within the text. The primary data source for this study is the text of “Lagoon” itself. I conducted a close reading of “Lagoon,” focusing on passages that directly engage with environmental themes, Africanfuturistic elements, and instances of agency. I aim to dissect the novel’s narrative strategies, thematic content, and character development to unveil its engagement with environmental activism, African futurism, and agency. This analysis identifies how Okorafor integrates these elements into the narrative structure and character arcs. The study pays special attention to how environmental issues are portrayed, including depictions of ecological devastation, pollution, and the interaction between human and non-human characters in addressing these issues.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an analytical framework and methodology that connects theoretical perspectives and practical applications, enhancing the understanding of critical phenomena (Van Leeuwen, 1996). CDA focuses on exploring how language usage shapes and is shaped by social power dynamics. It explores language’s role in characterizing social and cultural constructs and processes beyond mere sentence analysis, considering the broader impacts of discourse (Fairclough 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). CDA emphasizes the meaning-making process, advocating for a detailed and interpretative examination of discourse, beyond mere textual meaning (Ogungbemi 2018). This field is noted for its interdisciplinary nature, incorporating diverse methods and theoretical frameworks, reflecting its complex and multifaceted approach to discourse analysis (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). CDA scrutinizes power relations, particularly how they manifest between dominant groups and those marginalized or with lesser power, addressing overt and covert forms of power and their social repercussions. Key concepts in CDA, such as ‘power,’ ‘struggle,’ and ‘conflict,’ are instrumental in analyzing the societal imbalances and struggles stemming from unequal power distributions. These concepts are crucial for understanding how dominant entities maintain their status, often perpetuating societal divisions and exploitations (Hodge & Kress, 1988).

Stance is a concept utilized to comprehend how individuals articulate their thoughts, sentiments, viewpoints, and attitudes regarding a subject through verbal or written communication. By carefully selecting words and structuring sentences, individuals can effectively communicate their sentiments or beliefs on the topic being discussed (Biber, 2006; Akinola, 2018; 2019). This notion may be referred to as evaluation (Bednarek, 2006), appraisal (Martin, 2000), or attitude (Halliday, 1994), depending on the source. Essentially, when an individual adopts a stance, they are employing language to convey their personal perspective or emotional reaction in relation to the message being conveyed. There exist two primary categories of stance: epistemic stance, which pertains to

the level of certainty an individual has in their assertions (Ochs, 1990), and affective stance, which focuses on the emotions or sentiments being conveyed. Adopting a stance transcends merely expressing an opinion; it also involves how individuals position themselves in connection to their message. They may vigorously assert their own viewpoint or, conversely, present their ideas in a more impartial manner to conceal personal involvement (Hyland, 2005). This positioning serves not only as a rhetorical tactic but as a means for the speaker or writer to navigate their social and cultural milieu, indicating to their audience their stance on matters of accountability and principles (Du Bois, 2007, Ogungbemi 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Confrontation and Transformation: Environmental Struggle in a Polluted Seascape

This section emphasizes the dynamic interplay between confrontation (the swordfish’s determined struggle against pollution and destruction) and transformation (the potential for positive change through unity and technological intervention). The focus on the environment is highlighted by referencing the “Polluted Seascape,” underscoring the central issue of environmental degradation that underpins the narrative.

Excerpt 1

She slices through the water, imagining herself a deadly beam of black light. The current parts against her sleek, smooth skin. If any fish gets in her way, she will spear it and keep right on going. She is on a mission. She is angry. She will succeed, and then they will leave for good. They brought the stench of dryness, then they brought the noise and made the world bleed black ooze that left poison rainbows on the water’s surface. She often sees these rainbows whenever she leaps over the water to touch the sun. Inhaling them stings and burns her gills. (3)

The swordfish is represented as active and powerful, slicing through the water. Words like “slices,” “spear,” and “succeed” imply a sense of agency and determination. This can suggest an underlying discourse of empowerment and resilience, where the character takes assertive action against adversities. Describing the character as a “deadly beam of black light” employs a metaphor that juxtaposes the notions of ‘deadly’ and ‘light’, usually associated with purity and goodness. This can be interpreted as a critique of dichotomous thinking, challenging the reader to consider complexity beyond conventional associations. The text describes a struggle (“the stench of dryness,” “noise,” “made the world bleed black ooze”) between the character and some implied antagonists. This narrative of conflict can reflect broader themes of environmental degradation and the struggle against it. The “poison rainbows on the water’s surface” serve as a discursive construct that highlights the pollution of natural habitats. It’s a critical commentary on environmental damage, using vivid imagery to capture the impact of pollutants on the character’s world.

The character's epistemic stance is revealed through her confident navigation and interaction with the environment. The knowledge that touching the sun is possible, even though it involves experiencing pain ("stings and burns"), indicates an understanding of the consequences of her actions. The character's emotions are explicitly stated as being "angry," which establishes an affective stance. The use of emotive language throughout the excerpt ("deadly," "stings and burns") further emphasizes this stance, revealing her emotional motivation. The intentional stance is clear in the character's determination ("She is on a mission," "She will succeed") and her desire to change her situation ("then they will leave for good"). This illustrates her intentions and goals, giving readers insight into her objectives. The character's stance is dynamic and reflects a shift from a state of action and power to one of victimization by environmental harm. This shift from agency to vulnerability is a sophisticated narrative technique that invites readers to consider the multiple dimensions of her experience. The excerpt uses vivid language and imagery to construct a narrative that is not just about a character's movement through water, but also about her struggle against environmental harm caused by unnamed antagonists.

Reacting to the activities of those who "brought the stench of dryness, then they brought the noise and made the world bleed black ooze that left poison rainbows on the water's surface," the swordfish ferociously attacks a submerged oil pipeline. She engages in an act of self-sacrificial sabotage which echoes the notion of "species revenge." However, this "species revenge" comes with an unexpected twist. The two female protagonists of the novel, Ayodele (one of the aliens) and Adaora, the marine biologist, making it difficult to distinguish between human and non-human actors in the quest to ensure that the environment becomes clean and habitable for both human and non-human species. A good question at this juncture is "who are those represented by the pronoun 'they' who have brought the stench of dryness, noise and caused the world to bleed black ooze, poisoning the waters? Without a doubt, they here refer to multinational companies who have the backing of former colonial forces in a colonized country like Nigeria (Ogungbemi & Okusanya, 2016). These companies and their allies both locally and internationally continue to pollute both the waters and the environment of former colonized countries. The swordfish is on a mission to cleanse and reclaim the waters that have been subjected to unimaginable pollution and have become poisonous to both the inhabitants of the waters and their human neighbors. The oil pipelines are represented by the noun "a giant dead snake," indicating the poisonous effects that such pipelines have on marine life and the environment.

Excerpt 2

"She knows where she is going. She is aiming for the thing that looks like a giant dead snake. She remembers snakes; she's seen plenty in her past life. In the sun, this

dead snake is the color of decaying seaweed with skin rough like coral" (3).

The excerpt involves a character who is on a path towards something described as a "giant dead snake." This metaphorical language sets a vivid scene and can invoke feelings or images in the reader. The swordfish is positioned as knowledgeable and goal oriented. She recognizes the "giant dead snake," implying a sense of familiarity and experience with her surroundings. This familiarity might reflect a survival instinct or an adaptability to her environment, suggesting resilience or wisdom. The "giant dead snake" symbolizes an obstacle, considering the traditional symbolism of snakes as danger or transformative power. The "dead snake" symbolizes decay. This could be interpreted as commentary on environmental issues. The comparison to "decaying seaweed" and "skin rough like coral" might evoke ecological concerns, pointing to decay and roughness as indicators of environmental degradation.

The excerpt shows the subject's knowledge state or certainty. She "knows" where she is going, which indicates an elevated level of confidence or certainty about her direction or purpose. The comparison of the object to a "giant dead snake" evokes an effective response, one of unease or negativity given the adjectives "dead" and "decaying." This could reveal the author's or character's feelings towards the object, reflecting feelings about a past life or about transformation and change. By remembering "snakes" from her "past life," there is an implication of judgment about her past experiences or the symbol itself. Snakes often carry moral symbolism, such as temptation or evil in certain cultures, or wisdom and renewal in others. This ambiguous moral evaluation leaves room for varied interpretations of her past and her journey. To emphasize the harmful and deadly effects of the "dead snake" on the environment, the narrator likens it to the color of decaying seaweed. The swordfish is out to revenge the pollution and the destruction of its habitat. Nnedi Okorafor creates a lethargic oceanic-like atmosphere.

The aliens are imbued with the ability to restructure matter, and Ayodele the spokesperson for the aliens makes this one of their reasons for coming to Lagos,

Excerpt 3

"We come to bring you together and refuel your future," Ayodele said. "Your land is full of a fuel that is tearing you apart" (107).

The act of "bringing together" implies that Ayodele positions himself or his group as a unifying force, suggesting a certain power or authority to change the status quo. The contrast between "refuel your future" and "fuel... tearing you apart" indicates a tension between the potential prosperity that natural resources can bring and the social strife they can cause. This duality mirrors real-world conflicts where natural resources lead to both economic growth and social conflict. The broader social implications concern the exploitation of natural resources

and its effects on community cohesion. The term “fuel” likely refers to oil or another natural resource which, in many places, has led to economic divides and conflict rather than shared prosperity. Ayodele’s statement can be seen as a critique of the situation where resources are mishandled or misappropriated, leading to division rather than collective benefit.

Ayodele’s statement exudes confidence and certainty. The declaration of refueling the future is a forward-looking promise, indicating a strong belief in the ability to effect change. In the excerpt, there is the use of affective stance. On one hand, there’s the positive affect associated with “bring you together” and “refuel your future,” which suggests hope and rejuvenation. On the other hand, the recognition that the land’s fuel is “tearing you apart” carries a negative affect, indicating sorrow or regret about the current state of affairs. Further, Ayodele’s message has a moral dimension, criticizing the divisive nature of resource exploitation while advocating for a more harmonious and prosperous path forward. It suggests an ethical judgment about the consequences of resource management and the moral responsibility to use them for communal good rather than allowing them to be a source of conflict. The aliens can cleanse the ocean and save it from tons of spilled petroleum; they also build their home under the sea to protect it and allow ocean animals to grow healthier and stronger. The technology of the aliens would ensure a Nigeria that is mightier and more prosperous especially when the country diversify and stop pollution and destruction of other species.

United for Environmental Renewal

This section underscores the collaborative effort between humans and extraterrestrial beings to address ecological devastation, emphasizing the regeneration of the environment and society. Nnedi Okorafor’s *Lagoon* devotes ample attention to the damages caused by petro-culture in Nigeria. On one occasion, during a conversation between Kola, Adaora’s daughter, and Ayodele, one of the aliens who has the capability to shapeshift, she Kola highlights the level of destruction of the environment as a result of the activities of oil companies. In what follows in excerpt 4, Kola is discussing with Ayodele.

Excerpt 4

“My mother says the waters are all dirty and dead because of the oil companies,” Kola said. “Will you all be all right in there?” Ayodele laughed in a knowing way that made a thousand more questions germinate in Kola’s head. “Yes,” Ayodele said. “Can you die?” “Maybe. Probably not” (68).

The excerpt involves two characters, Kola and Ayodele, discussing the state of the waters affected by oil companies and questioning survival in such conditions. Kola’s comment about the water’s condition due to oil companies introduces a socio-political element that critiques the environmental impact of industrial exploitation. Ayodele’s knowing laughter and the ambiguous answer to Kola’s

question about death suggest a more complex reality, possibly hinting at advanced capabilities or different existential conditions. The dialogue likely reflects broader social concerns about environmental degradation in Nigeria due to external influences like multinational corporations. Ayodele’s response implies an alternative or futuristic perspective on existence, which may involve a different relationship with the environment or advanced technologies enabling survival despite pollution—a key theme in African futurism where African protagonists often possess or interact with advanced, transformative technologies.

There is the use of epistemic stance in the excerpt. Kola’s question shows a lack of certain knowledge and seeks clarification, whereas Ayodele’s responses are cryptic, suggesting a deeper understanding or a different epistemological perspective possibly due to technological or evolutionary advancements. Further, there is evidence of affective stance in the excerpt. The “knowing way” in which Ayodele laughs could be interpreted as assurance, mocking, or a display of superior knowledge, which can be unsettling, as indicated by the “thousand more questions” it provokes in Kola’s head. This affective response reflects the mix of hope, unease, and curiosity that is often explored in African futurism narratives. Besides this, through a moral-evaluative stance, the dialogue implicitly judges the oil companies’ actions as negative due to their environmental impact. Ayodele’s ambivalence about the possibility of death presents a moral conundrum—there’s an ethical dimension to the question of survival and adaptability in the face of ecological destruction.

Ayodele’s character could be emblematic of a future where Africans have developed ways to resist or circumvent the negative impacts of environmental damage, a common narrative in African futurism where resilience and innovation are central themes. The dialogue opens up the possibility of transcending current limitations—whether through biotechnology, enhanced abilities, or otherwise—resonating with Africanfuturist themes that often blend spiritual and scientific realms to imagine new futures. Ayodele’s enigmatic responses could suggest access to futuristic technologies or evolved states that render conventional concerns about pollution and mortality obsolete or altered, which is a characteristic element of Africanfuturistic storytelling.

From the discussion that ensued between Kola and Ayodele, the oil companies are fingered as responsible for the pollution of the waters, and it is obvious that this has been allowed to go on for way too long without the government holding the oil companies responsible for their action. This echoes the observations of Edebor (2017) and Ogungbemi (2016) that there are no strict regulations to check the pollution of the environment by the actors who are involved in polluting the environment. I read the text as a critique of the activities of both multinationals like Shell and the Nigerian government who are asleep to their duties of protecting the environment. Nixon (2013) notes that Shell and several

other multinational companies in Nigeria who are into oil exploration and extraction continue to pollute the Niger Delta and claim that cleaning the environment is the duty of the Nigerian government. Nixon avers that Shell and her sister companies “continue to act as ethical absentees.” The aliens led by Ayodele decide to intervene, by first visiting the people of the waters and communicating with them. The aliens understand the animals in the oceans. The alien, Ayodele, brings the message of the people of the waters to the humans of Lagos in the next excerpt.

Excerpt 5

“It’s the people of the waters,” Ayodele said. “They are tired of boats and human beings.” “Then why’d you bring us out here?” Hawra shouted. “Your leader must meet the Elders,” Ayodele said matter-of-factly. “The world is not yet safe.” “Meeting the Elders is fine, but tell the fish to leave us alone!” Adaora cried (240).

The excerpt describes a dialogue with Ayodele, Hawra, and Adaora, which touches on the tension between ‘the people of the waters’ and human activities, the requirement of meeting with Elders, and the present state of the world’s safety. Ayodele’s comment on ‘the people of the waters’ being tired signals an environmental or ecological discourse where non-human entities are acknowledged as having agency and experiencing fatigue from human interference. Hawra’s and Adaora’s reactions imply confusion and fear, respectively, pointing to a disconnect between human actions and the expectations or rules of the natural world. Ayodele’s response suggests the existence of traditional structures (‘Elders’) that need to be consulted in uncertain times, emphasizing the role of indigenous governance in crisis resolution. At the societal level, the discourse reflects issues related to the impact of human activities on the environment, a prominent theme in African futurism. Ayodele’s insistence on the meeting with Elders alludes to the Africanfuturistic motif of intertwining past wisdom with futuristic solutions for contemporary problems.

Ayodele expresses a confident stance about the knowledge of the situation, indicating a deeper understanding of the world’s precariousness. The characters’ questions and exclamations reveal varying degrees of uncertainty and emotional disturbance about their circumstances. Emotional responses are conveyed through Hawra’s shout and Adaora’s cry, revealing panic and distress. In contrast, Ayodele maintains a composed, matter-of-fact demeanor, which might suggest a reassurance to the others or an accustomedness to the precariousness of their situation.

Besides this, Ayodele seems to hold a normative view that it’s essential to consult the Elders, suggesting respect for established, traditional authorities and processes. This stance is evaluative of the necessity for a hierarchical approach to decision-making in the face of danger.

Moreover, the ‘people of the waters’ suggests beings from African mythological traditions, which in African futurism might be real entities with whom future Africans

might have to negotiate. The notion that ‘the world is not yet safe’ and the need to meet with the Elders for guidance could be interpreted as a reflection on the ongoing challenges facing African societies and the potential paths to address these through a synthesis of ancestral wisdom and contemporary knowledge. The demand to ‘tell the fish to leave us alone’ by Adaora encapsulates a typical human reaction to the encroachment of nature, highlighting the often-fraught relationship between humans and their environment—a relationship that African futurism might re-envision as being more harmonious through both technological and traditional means.

In revenging the pollution of their habitat, they go after all the drilling facilities of the oil companies in Nigeria to ensure that the country is forced to pay attention to environmental restoration and protection, and ultimately to diversify its economy. Nigeria must look to other commodities and not rely on oil who is more of a curse than a blessing especially when one put into consideration oil spills that have negatively impacted the Nigerian environment and ocean life. Jue (2017:172) observes that “Okorafor’s fictional antidote is the sudden arrival of shape-shifting aliens off the coast of Lagos (first encountered by the swordfish), who precipitate a radical shift in Nigeria’s ecological, economic, and social well-being.” This is quite interesting. Despite their powers and shapeshifting abilities, they offer to become not colonizers or leaders of humans but as partners who would help humans to heal the environment and make them less dependent for their survival on activities that can hurt the environment. That they do not want to rule over humans is clear in the conversation between Ayodele and the President of Nigeria in excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6

“We are technology, Mr. President. And no, we are not easily manipulated.” “What do you want?” “We do not want to rule, colonize, conquer, or take. We just want a home. What is it you want?” He paused. “To be alive again.” “I will make it so” (220).

The declaration “We are technology” signals an assertion of identity that transcends traditional human categorizations, challenging the president’s understanding of technology as a tool. This identity claim also implicitly rejects technology’s assumed manipulability. The speaker’s insistence that they do not desire domination but simply a place to exist contrasts with human political motivations, while the president’s desire “to be alive again” suggests a more personal, existential longing.

The speaker’s assertive stance conveys a certainty about their nature and purpose. They clearly articulate their needs and position themselves as equals, not subordinates, to the president. The president’s response reveals vulnerability and a desire for restoration, which is acknowledged by the speaker’s promise to fulfill that desire. The dialogue evokes an affective stance of self-assurance from the speaker and a contrasting vulnerability from the president. The calm, assertive assurance of “I will make it so” provides a sense

of comfort and resolution to the president's expressed need. The speaker's stance is evaluative of the human tendency to dominate and acquire, positioning their own desires as more benign and harmonious. The president's yearning to "be alive again" is morally loaded, evoking themes of redemption and the intrinsic value of life.

The president is scared because the aliens can impose their own technology on existing technology and take over mobile phones and television, ensuring that the public listen to their broadcast. They allay the president's fears when Ayodele, the spokesperson to the aliens reveals to the president that they are not there to colonize or take over the country. They have only come to cleanse the ocean and settle in it. They fulfill their promise by cleaning the ocean. What they require from humans is collaboration; humans and non-humans can work together to achieve a cleaner environment that is devoid of pollution and other agents of destruction.

Highlighting that humans and aliens can work together productively, Ayodele says in excerpt 7.

Excerpt 7

"It wasn't just the mobile phones and it wasn't just me. They helped," she said, motioning to Adaora, Anthony and Agu. "So did Adaora's offspring," Ayodele continued. "As did my people. As did your people. It is a matter of connecting and communicating" (220).

Okorafor's position here is that humans need the help of other lives around them to heal and be whole in all spheres of life. The president acknowledges the presence of other forms of life who are helping the country to move in the right direction. "The occasion that has put me here before you tonight is momentous. It marks another kind of transitional shift. Now listen closely to me. This shift is cause for celebration, not panic. I will say it again: celebration, not panic. There are others among us here in Lagos. They intend to stay. And I am happy about it. They have new technology; they have fresh ideas that we can combine with our own. In his address to the nation the president recognizes the presence of the other who are simply complementary in the project of nation building. These ones are different from the others identified by Edward Said in his influential work *Orientalism*. Said identified the others who have exploited the people living in colonized territories and impoverish these people. The other recognized by the president are the aliens who have agreed to join their novel technology with existing African technology to build a nation that everyone will be proud of. The future looks enticing and very positive. The future of Nigeria as envisaged by Okorafor is one that is peaceful after periods of tensions. A futuristic Nigerian project is possible if the people can see one another as a family. The President continues, "People of Lagos, especially, look at your neighbor. See his race, tribe, or his alien blood. And call him brother. We have much work to do as a family" (278). The integration is one that does not differentiate between human and non-human but considers everybody as one big family. Okorafor utilizes *Lagoon* to visualize an

optimistic future in which livelihoods, species, habitats, and the environment will not be endangered.

CONCLUSIONS

Examining Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* from the perspective of African futurism has provided a sophisticated analysis of the text's investigation into ecological consciousness, resistance against colonialism, and inventive speculative narration. Okorafor skillfully integrates the speculative fiction category with a sharp evaluation of ecological damage, notably observable in the Niger Delta, establishing *Lagoon* as a compelling proponent for environmental responsibility and respect for both sentient and non-sentient entities. Viewed through the perspective of African futurism, Okorafor not only critiques the prevailing petroculture and its environmental consequences but also envisions a hopeful future of collaboration among diverse species and entities. This outlook surpasses human-centered worries, prompting a reexamination of our connection with the environment and promoting a more inclusive viewpoint that respects all life forms. Moreover, the novel highlights the significance of indigenous knowledge and viewpoints, proposing that local insights and customs can provide valuable routes towards sustainable environmental behaviors and a deeper insight into our position within the natural world. By amplifying these perspectives, Okorafor adds to an ongoing discussion aiming to decenter Western epistemological authority and highlight African perspectives and experiences in discussions regarding the future.

In summary, *Lagoon* emerges as a crucial text that not only scrutinizes the present ecological challenges confronting Nigeria and, by extension, the African continent but also presents a speculative model for a more balanced and sustainable tomorrow. Through its engaging narrative, vivid character portrayals, and forward-thinking scope, the novel encourages readers to rethink their bond with the environment, advocating for a future where respect, mutual benefit, and sustainability take precedence. In this endeavor, Okorafor's piece stands as a testament to the transformative influence of African futurism and its capacity to reshape our shared environmental awareness and initiatives. The study has shown how Okorafor in *Lagoon*, blends the tropes of speculative fiction with an anticolonial positioning to formulate a powerful critique of petroculture, environmental pollution, animal exploitation and human Anthropocentrism. Okorafor's investment in *Lagoon* is one more voice of reason that champions alternative discourse, addressing ecological devastation in Nigeria. Similarly, *Lagoon* raises awareness about ecosystem devastation in Nigeria and how all hands must be on deck in ensuring that the earth is not ruined. Put differently, the text, *Lagoon* is a call to defend and safeguard the environment and the natural resources, to respect and accept non-human forms of life and to decenter and displace human species from the center Western epistemology.

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