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「虛構 / 批判石油文化」：當代美國與奈及利亞之石油小說研究

“Plotting against Oil”: Reading Contemporary Petrofictions of the United States and Nigeria

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Chinese Abstract

關鍵字:石油文學、石油文化、奈及利亞、美國、密謀、感知結構

絲蒂芬妮·勒梅娜喆曾概述以偵探小說風格的方式去講述如何抗衡石油是對於後現代以及非理性的世界中,一種努力開闢出新觀點的方法。本論文旨在比較奈及利亞以及美國之石油文學,深入探討和比較兩地區的作者們接露生存在石油環境中以及現實生活中被石油公司所壓榨的感受。透過分析這四本關鍵小說:海陀·哈比拉的《水上石油》、阿蒂卡·洛克的《上漲的黑水》、梅美·埃文斯的《油與水》以及恩內迪·奧科拉福發的《潟湖》。我將概述石油文學對石油文化的貢獻,以及小說能揭發進而瓦解人們對石油的幻想。我希望能闡明縱使小說有其限制,但與許多數據類型或資料收集型的文獻的相比,小說提供了多樣的、不同的觀點去看待石油。經由本土化、類當地的口語敘述,小說提供了一些經常被忽略的觀點,以及帶領我們深入探討其他不被看見獲重視的微小地方。小說提供了另一種石油的觀點。作者可以藉由小說反駁對於所謂的“資源魔咒”,並聚焦在石油公司如何和政府之間互相合作創造出現今我們對於社會的“感知結構”核心關係。”

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English Abstract

Key Words: Petrofiction, Petroculture, Nigeria, The United States, Plotting, Structures of feeling.

The aim of this thesis is to compare four key petrofiction texts, two from Nigeria and two from the U.S., as a means of illuminating the structures of feeling within these nations in relation to the oil industry and the petroculture it fosters. The novels I shall analyse are Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, Attica Locke's *Black Water Rising*, Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* and Mei Mei Evans' *Oil and Water*.

By including works that represent the Global North and the Global South, this study demonstrates that in the Global North, oil serves as an invisible, unquestioned foundation for the concept of freedom and the "American way of life." Conversely, in the Global South, oil is an eminently visible source of structural violence, political oppression, and injustice.

Stephanie LeMenager outlined the need to "plot against oil" in the style of a detective novel in order to illuminate the occluded realities of the interconnectedness of oil and modern life. Petrofiction is particularly productive as a medium through which to do just that.

I hope to show that fiction, despite its limitations, is fertile ground for proffering divergent viewpoints on oil. Through its use of localised narratives, fiction offers insights into oft-overlooked elements of petroculture, elements that are often absent from data-driven macro-analyses. Fiction provides a perspective that enables authors to shine a spotlight on the nexus of oil corporations and governments that cooperate to create our contemporary structures of feeling. I will measure the extent to which each of the four key texts accomplishes this objective in their plots against oil.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements i
Chinese Abstract ii
English Abstract iii
Table of Contents iv
Fig..... v

Introduction 1

Chapter One: Representing Contemporary Petroculture 30

Chapter Two: Petrocultural Divergence: Nigeria
and The United States……69

Chapter Three: Delta Narratives: Attica Locke's
Black Water Rising and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* 101
3.1 *Oil on Water*……135

Chapter Four: Oil in Water: Mei Mei Evans'
Oil and Water and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* 162
4.1 *Lagoon*……..194

Conclusion 220
Works Cited 234

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Figures

Fig. 1. Abu Dhabi National Oil Company……6

Fig. 2. “Freedom” Oil Drum……33

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Introduction

The development of petroculture has differed dramatically between the Global North and the Global South. Global North nations have prospered due to access to cheap and abundant carbon-based fuels, yet the wealth associated with this access remains unevenly distributed among population groups within these nations. In contrast, Global South nations have often fallen victim to the predation of Global North nations and multinational corporations seeking to monopolise access to carbon-based fuels in a manner tantamount to resource colonialism. Access to cheap and reliable sources of energy, particularly the energy derived from the burning of oil, reinforces the international hegemony that benefits the wealthy nations of the Global North. The nascent "energy humanities," pioneered by academics including Imre Szeman, have acknowledged the need to refashion established theories of forces that generate the social and its subjects, in line with our newfound understanding of the culture-formative power of energy (10).

Historically, it was often assumed that oil was an inexhaustible resource; therefore, profligate usage by Global North nations did not result in a course correction. The rapid growth of industry and consumer culture in developed nations led to an ever-increasing demand for carbon-based fuels to support and propagate the resulting economic growth within these nations. The post-World War II carbon-fuelled economic boom, which saw "worldwide industrialization, techno-scientific development, [a] nuclear arms race, population explosion and rapid economic growth," has been termed "the Great Acceleration" by Steffen et al. (845). During the period of the Great Acceleration, the United States cemented its position as the preeminent global superpower. To help secure its primacy on the global stage, the U.S. needed

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

energy sources to generate power, both kinetic and political. Borrowing Patricia Yaeger's term "energy unconscious," Vivasvan Soni examines the concept of energy itself. Soni notes that modern physics assumes energy has a stable meaning, despite an acknowledgement from within the scientific community that the concept of energy is opaque and elusive. For Soni, there are two forms of energy unconscious: "culture's silence about the energy that powers it, and the unsignifying opacity of the modern concept [of energy itself]" (133). The juxtaposition of energy and the Greek word *energeia* becomes a cornerstone of Soni's argument.

The concept of *energeia* is based not upon the magnitude of power contained within an energy source but upon the ends which its discharging achieves. Soni contrasts this potentiality with the description of energy, which is germane to modern energy physics, in which no reference is made to the purpose of the expenditure of energy (133). A second important distinction between energy and *energeia* is potentiality. Soni writes: "*energeia* refers to what is actual, whereas the dominant sense of *energy* is potentiality" (133). The petroleum-induced freedoms, which citizens of Global North nations avail of, are actualised by the potentiality of energy. This potentiality, latent in carbon-based fuels, inevitably leads to exploitation. The exploitation of such potentiality entails dual exploitation of the source of energy: the utilisation of the carbon-based fuel itself and the manipulation of the political and material realities of the nations in which these fuels are interred.

During the Oil Crisis of 1973[1], the issue of the manipulation of oil-producing regions came to a head as the United States drew up plans to invade OPEC nations to restore the flow of oil and bring down prices (Harvey 27). Access to energy generates

[1] Timothy Mitchell's concise summary of the cause of the Oil Crisis is helpful in this instance: "The October 1973 crisis was triggered by the Arab states' announcement that the availability of oil would be linked to progress in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict. The price of oil, therefore, could not be a question simply of demand and supply, for the demand for oil was now joined to another demand: that the US should end its opposition to a settlement of the conflict" ("The Resources of Economics" 197).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

economic power, and economic power fuels military power. The U.S. was and remains prepared to utilise the energeia of its military, the largest consumer of fossil fuels on earth, to secure access to the energy contained beneath the dunes of the Middle East and further afield if deemed necessary.[2] Michael Klare has argued that "the U.S. military has come to serve as a global oil protection service, guarding pipelines, refineries, and loading facilities in the Middle East and elsewhere" ("Garrisoning the Global Gas Station"). Imre Szeman concisely summarised the effect this thirst for oil has had on geopolitics, as he has stated, "The geopolitical crises of the second half of the last century and the first two decades of the current one are the result of the need for the United States to continue to have access to oil to fill the tanks of SUVs as well as fuel its larger economy" (228). Access to cheap and abundant energy enabled the creation of a set of freedoms that became synonymous with the "American way of life," a term used by Matthew Huber, to which I will return in greater detail in Chapter One.

Dipesh Chakrabarty states that "The mansion of modern freedoms stands on an ever-expanding base of fossil fuel use. Most of our freedoms so far have been energy-intensive" (40). Moreover, in his introduction to *Carbon Democracy*, Timothy Mitchell writes: "Fossil fuels helped create both the possibility of modern democracy and its limits" (1). The freedoms and democracy that are readily associated with the Global North, particularly the United States, which extolls an effervescent rhetoric of its freedoms and democracy, are built upon a base of fossil fuels that are often sourced from nations that are incompatible with the contemporary United States in terms of the freedoms and access to democratic mechanisms which are afforded to their people.

[2] In *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal,* published in 2019, Naomi Klein stated that the U.S. military is "the largest institutional consumer of oil in the world" (35). Therefore, its deployment in order to secure access to oil is not simply to ensure the continued low financial cost of the "American way of life." It is critical to the United States' continued position as the dominant geopolitical player globally.

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To quote Imre Szeman, "Oil is history" (138). Oil created the contemporary realities that humans either thrive in or are forced to endure.

Amitav Ghosh's seminal essay "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel" (1992) laid out the lack of literary engagement with what Ghosh termed "The Oil Encounter" (431). Ghosh defines the principal protagonists in the Oil Encounter as "America and Americans on the one hand and the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf on the other" (431). Ghosh focuses his attention on Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt*, which he sees as an exemplar and a progenitor of the genre of petrofiction.[3] Munif's narrative is unexpected as it deals directly with the oil encounter in the fictional town of Harran, which is potentially modelled on Doha or Kuwait ("Petrofiction" 435). For Munif to write so unequivocally about the Oil Encounter was unheard of, as both the American novelistic tradition and the Arabic tradition eschewed such direct engagement with the topic. Oil is not directly addressed in American fiction as, according to Ghosh, it "reeks, it stinks, it becomes a Problem that can be written about only in the language of Solutions" ("Petrofiction" 432). Ghosh hints at the technocratic adherence to the idealisation of the technological sublime in his claim that only the language of solutions can be used to address Big Oil. Furthermore, in *The Nutmeg's Curse*, Ghosh states that "climate change has come to be thought of, especially in the West, as a phenomenon that pertains mainly to technology and economics" (147). Stephanie LeMenager highlights comments from Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson that strengthen Ghosh's hypothesis. Tillerson claimed that climate change is an "engineering problem" with "engineering solutions" (qtd. in LeMenager 10). Our contemporary deference to the potentiality of technology can

[3] It is important to note that Upton Sinclair's 1927 novel *Oil!* is a textbook example of petrofiction. It predates Ghosh's article by some six decades. Oil is the primary drive of the plot of Sinclair's novel. It is not simply a background setting. Ghosh, however, was focused specifically on what he termed the Oil Encounter, not the entire history of oil in the United States. Therefore, Sinclair's novel was not pertinent to Ghosh's analysis.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

lead to the muting of oil in narrative form. However, avoiding an accentuation of the Oil Encounter in narrative form is not simply an issue with American literature.

As Ghosh noted, Arabic literature has also largely failed to address the Oil Encounter due to geographic and social factors within the Middle East. The littoral of the Gulf region was previously considered to be the preserve of cultural simpletons when contrasted with the great literary centres of Cairo and Beirut. The abundant oil deposits, which have fuelled the creation of modern petro-states in the region, were discovered in peripheral areas (at the time of their discovery), both geographically and socially.[4] A sense of literary superciliousness developed within Arabic literature, in which the focus of narratives was turned inward toward the traditional, culturally hegemonic centres of literature to avoid an acknowledgement of the growth of new petroleum-fuelled centres of power (Ghosh, "Petrofiction" 432-33). Ghosh notes that "The Arabic title of Munif's first novel [*Cities of Salt*] has the connotation of 'the wilderness,' or 'the desert'" ("Petrofiction" 434). The notion of what constitutes wilderness is extremely contentious due to its cultural blindness concerning Indigenous peoples in many locations that are tarred with the title of wilderness. When European settlers invaded and colonised the North American continent, they declared vast swathes of land that had been terraformed and inhabited by native people to be wilderness, thus voiding native claims to said land in the process (Horn and Bergthaller 54). Ghosh notes that European exceptionalism played a large part in this categorisation. Terraforming colonised land to create new Europes was a part of the settler identity: "The right to terraform was […] an essential part of the settler identity." Settlers made the land "productive in ways that were recognised as such by Europeans" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 63). The terraforming that had been carried out by Indigenous people was not considered to be true terraforming as it did not conform to

[4] See Figure 1.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

European ideas of what constituted productive geoengineered land. Thus, it is interesting that Munif's original title *may* indicate a sense of wilderness thinking concerning the nouveau riche petro-states.

Fig 1. This image shows the growth of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) into an economic powerhouse that dragged the emirate from cultural irrelevance to global significance. From right to left, we see the gradual transformation of ADNOC from humble beginnings to its modern statement headquarters (Photograph by the author).

Since Ghosh's essay, many more novels have been published that could be added to the genre of petrofiction. To borrow Michel Foucault's term, Ghosh is in a "transdiscursive" position as he created a "discipline in which other books and authors […] in turn find a place" (225). Scholars, including Imre Szeman and Graeme MacDonald, have elaborated upon Ghosh's pioneering creation and expanded the pantheon of fictional works that could be considered petrofiction. MacDonald illustrates the broadened view of what constitutes petrofiction in the following extract

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

from his essay "Fiction": "*Petrofiction* certainly means stories about platforms, drill bits, and combustion transport, resource colonialism, deadly spills, and exploration rights. But it is also about the relation between the oblique and surface world of fuel: an everyday world reliant on oil consumption but far removed from its backstage processes of extraction, refining, and delivery" (164). *Cities of Salt* deals directly with the resource colonialism of the oil industry in a fictional Middle Eastern sultanate. However, the appropriation and extraction of fossil fuel resources is merely one facet of humanity's contingent relationship with oil, as MacDonald has noted. MacDonald's expansion of the definition of petrofiction allows for the inclusion of novels that do not directly address big oil but whose plots are nonetheless made possible by it to be categorised as petrofiction. Ghosh's contention that Arabic literature eschews direct reference to the petro-industrial complex has prompted me to focus on Africa's largest oil-producing nation and OPEC member, Nigeria, to enquire as to whether its literature follows the same tack as Ghosh accused Arabic literature of following.[5] I am searching for petrofiction that consciously reveals oil.

Nigerian literature is a fruitful and emerging producer of petrofictions. Amanda Boetzkes and Andrew Pendakis conceived of plastic, an oil derivative product, as an eternity contained within a material reality as it "arrives from one continuous, infinite,

[5] I have borrowed the term petro industrial complex from a 1977 article titled "The Petro Industrial Complex" by Craig S. Karpel, who stated that this "complex" consisted of "a network of businessmen, bankers, and public officials within the United States [that are] working to maintain the control of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries over America's oil supply". Karpel goes on to argue that "This constellation of vested interests benefits from high oil prices overseas. It uses its vast influence to prevent the U.S. government from taking action to weaken OPEC". Finally, Karpel states that "petrodollars" are sent from American consumers to foreign oil producers before being returned to a "small number of U.S. exporters, construction companies, banks, lawyers, and consultants [whom Karpel calls] the private sector of the petro-industrial complex" (76). The term is further used by Espen Moe in his chapter titled: "Norway: A Petro-Industrial Complex Leaving Little Room for Structural Change?". Moe discusses the unlikelihood of an energy transformation in Norway due to the entrenchment of fossil fuel companies, particularly state-owned Statoil (67% state-owned and renamed Equinor in 2018), which accounts for 9% of national GDP and 18% of export revenues. Due to Norwegian energy policy being "heavily tilted toward prolonging the extraction of petroleum into an indefinite future, and with a vested interest structure biased toward satisfying the requirements of petroleum", Moe applies the term petro-industrial-complex to Norway (186-7).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

and seemingly inexhaustible source, a source *without location or specificity*" (2, emphasis added). Nigeria arguably shares these characteristics with plastic. It is Africa's most fruitful source of crude oil and a prominent exporter, satisfying the thirst of Global North nations. However, it is "without location or specificity" in the cultural consciousness of many Global North nations. Helon Habila and Nnedi Okorafor attempt to illuminate the culture, internal realities and structures of feeling in this West African petro-powerhouse in their novels. In an interview with Nathaniel Bivan, Habila outlined his rationale for writing about topical issues such as oil. Habila maintains,

> You can gauge the pulse of the society in which you live by dealing with such issues. Then you go beyond and in-depth, to look at the characters and the sociopolitical and literary implications of these topical subject matters. So I like to approach my stories that way. I start from the topical and go deeper. *I make people see what they cannot see* because of the topicality. (qtd. In Bivan, emphasis added)

Habila frames fiction writing's role as a critical technique laden with potential for exhibiting previously undisclosed or concealed realities of modern petroculture.

Stephanie LeMenager, whose book *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* inspired me to undertake this research endeavour, underscores the potentiality of fiction as a tool for revealing oil: "Fiction can lend a strong material dimension to such local impacts [as those that occur due to the refining of crude oil], and to economic relationships that have been made deliberately abstract, like the relationship of gas prices at the neighborhood pump to international oil markets" (123). This material dimension that petrofiction highlights can "make people see what they cannot see" as Habila contends. The ability to illustrate these material dimensions and make people see is one of the significant strengths of petrofiction and literature as a whole. LeMenager has briefly dissected Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

and Attica Locke's *Black Water Rising*, highlighting some of the ways in which the novels plot against oil and, furthermore, illustrating the confrontation of oil and water that the two novels foreground. For LeMenager, plotting against oil is "an act of detection that reconstructs the object it pursues, in this case an energy source that seeks to hide itself, to dematerialize as capital" (124). I concur with Habila and Le Menager, and I believe that petrofiction can help to subvert the opacity of relationships between the oil industry, governments and the ecological and social consequences this causes.

In *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks illustrates the reduction of the importance of plot in critical assessments of literature. Brooks notes that "Plot has been disdained as the element of narrative that least sets off and defines high art – indeed, plot is that which especially characterizes popular mass-consumption literature" (4). However, both Brooks and LeMenager attempt to reassess our relationship with plot and to emphasise its utility in literary discussions. Highlighting Habila's *Oil on Water* and Attica Locke's *Black Water Rising*, LeMenager argues that both novels "plot against oil" (124). LeMenager is influenced by Brooks in her conception of the meaning of plot in this instance. Brooks clarifies the potentiality of plot to explain oblique realities to the reader: "Plot […] is the logic and dynamic of narrative, and narrative itself a form of understanding and explanation" (10). Narrative confers understanding upon the reader via explanation, while narrative itself is made possible by plot. Detective stories use "the plot of the inquest to find, or construct, a story of the crime," which offers the reader the necessary features of thematic coherence, leading to a solution made necessary by the commission of the crime (Brooks 29). Our need to plot meanings produces narrative (Brooks 29-30).

In this dissertation, my aim is to compare four key petrofiction texts, two from Nigeria and two from the U.S., as a means of expanding on LeMenager's argument

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while also questioning whether contemporary petrofiction novels from both the U.S., a participant in the Oil Encounter, and Nigeria, Africa's leading oil-producer, avoid directly addressing oil, an issue that Ghosh highlighted in 1992 in relation to American and Arabic literature. I will argue that petrofiction offers promising potential to illuminate the structures of feeling within specific locations in the United States and Nigeria in relation to the oil industry through its plotting. Furthermore, petrofiction highlights the inequality within the petroculture that the oil industry fosters in these locations through its ability to platform the voices of those directly affected by the industry. I refer to petroculture rather than the pluralised form petrocultures as I am following Imre Szeman's lead. Szeman, using Franco Moretti's musings on world literature (*weltliteratur*), noted in relation to energy use, that we have "one petroculture, but a profoundly unequal one" (226). By plotting against oil and offering a platform for the voices of those who rarely feature in broader discussions about oil, petrofiction can circumvent the language of solutions that Ghosh has noted has become a programmatic manner of addressing oil. The Nigerian texts I will refer to are Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2011) and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2016). The American texts I will refer to are Attica Locke's *Black Water Rising* (2010) and Mei Mei Evans' *Oil and Water* (2013). In this dissertation, I will focus on the rough time period that the novels cover. Despite this focus, I will examine consequential events to provide historical context for the events described in the novels. However, I will not extend my analysis beyond 2017, one year after the publication of the last of the four novels.

I have chosen Habila's *Oil on Water* and Locke's *Black Water Rising* as I want to engage in a deeper reading of the novels that LeMenager proffered as archetypes of novels that plot against oil. I intend to read these novels both for the manner in which they critique oil and also to assess how they represent the structures of feeling in the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

regions they depict. I will also enquire as to whether they resort to the language of solutions in their conclusions. I have chosen Evans's *Oil and Water* and Okorafor's *Lagoon* as I am interested in comparing the ways in which a realist novel and a petro-magic-realist novel plot against oil. Furthermore, these novels share a commonality with *Oil on Water* and *Black Water Rising* in that they also highlight the confrontation between oil and water, which LeMenager described as "the mingling of eternity and modernity, god-time and industrial time playing out against each other" (123). LeMenager, paraphrasing historian Martin V. Melosi, has noted that "the potentially devastating coupling of hydraulic systems and energy infrastructures has not been conceived clearly enough in terms of physical impacts" (123). I will investigate the ways in which these novels illustrate the structures of feeling surrounding oil in the regions in which they are set, and how they reveal the local impacts of the mingling of oil and water at a regional level. I will also assess whether they resort to the language of solutions as a means of addressing oil.

Two key terms that I have used thus far require accurate delineation before I continue. These are structures of feeling and *petro-magic-realism*. Writing about oil is essential due to its elusiveness. Platforming the voices of those who live in the occluded areas of production is crucial to increasing transparency. If we are to begin to illuminate petroculture, it is crucial to focus on the ongoing formative nature of the processes that create it. This is why I have borrowed Raymond Williams' term "structures of feeling" throughout this dissertation. The forces that generate contemporary petroculture and the ways in which people experience petroculture are ongoing. They are not past experiences.

In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams highlighted how our semantic interpretation of experience hinders our understanding of evolving contemporary cultural activity: "The strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is this immediate

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

and regular conversion of experience into finished products" (128). Williams employs the term "structures of feeling" as a necessary new terminology for examining the present. He decries the tendency to express culture and society in "an habitual past tense" (128). Williams deliberates before settling on the word feeling, as he believes the term is distinct from formal concepts of worldview and ideology (132). Williams links thought to feeling as opposed to pitting the two against each other in his insistence that "We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity" (132). Acknowledging the continuity of feeling is crucial.

Feeling differs from experience as it is not framed as already past tense; it is continuous and evolves with the world around it. Williams suggests that not all art relates to a contemporary structure of feeling, that it is "primarily to emergent formations […] that the structure of feeling, as solution, relates" (134). Petrofiction and the energy humanities as a whole, as I have previously noted, are emergent formations that could provide solutions to cultural blindness regarding the structures of feeling that oil generates. If petrofiction aims to highlight the lived experiences of petroculture, then speaking simply of experience necessarily relegates the subject's daily interactions with Big Oil to an already finished past tense. When reading petrofiction, it is, therefore, essential to read for structures of feeling, as the authors are invariably writing about an ongoing process in a modern world that cannot kick its addiction to the abundance of energy that can be procured from oil.

In *Lifeblood*, Matthew Huber comments on the structure of feeling engendered by oil dependence as he reveals the spatial effects of petroleum on people's lives, "The dense, versatile fuel of petroleum fuels a particular lived geography – a

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'structure of feeling' – that allows for an appearance of atomized command over the spaces of mobility, home, and even the body itself" (23). Oil fuels the notably masculine and particularly Western desire for individual control over all the spaces that surround us. In my reading of Okorafor's *Lagoon*, thanks to the insightful analysis provided by Melody Jue, I shall highlight the repudiation of this desire for dominance that Okorafor pointedly makes central to her plot. By investigating divergences between the petrocultural imaginaries of the United States and Nigeria, I aim to illustrate my contention that the petrofictions of a nation are crucial in delineating the structures of feeling generated by petromodernity. An analysis of works of petrofiction enables us to pinpoint the structures of feeling that are latent in the petrocultural imaginary of nations and people groups across the globe.

One method that petrofiction authors may utilise to avoid creating a reductive, Western-centric understanding of oil and the structures of feeling it generates is to employ Jennifer Wenzel's *petro-magic-realism*. Wenzel illustrates how nationalised petroleum produces a state, which becomes the owner of the means of production. This state creates the contemporary political and social conditions in nations such as Nigeria. Wenzel contends that,

> Oil […] produces the state as an indispensable and magical mediator between international capital and markets, on the one hand, and the national's political and natural bodies – its human and natural resources – on the other. Yet at the same time that oil yields legitimacy and "visibility" to the state, its excesses "reveal … the state and the nation to be sham, decrepit, venal, and corrupt notions." ("Petro-Magic-Realism" 492-93)

Petro-magic-realism links literary production and the political ecologies of oil extraction in countries that produce both magical realist stories and oil as exports sent to the Global North. Wenzel has coined the term *petro-magic-realism* to combine the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

magical and the mundane, thereby refuting binary classifications with which Nnedi Okorafor also took issue. In an interview with Tinhouse's David Naimon, Okorafor touched on the culturally-limited Western view of magical realism. Okorafor highlighted the rigid categorical separation that exists between the magical and the mundane,

> There's that issue of point of view where in one point of view, the mystical and the magical are separate from the mundane, that's the more Western point of view, to have something mystical or magical is odd, it's bizarre, it's not the norm or you go to the magical world. Whereas in other cultures, to have the mystical and the mundane worlds coexisting is normal. (Naimon)

Okorafor employs *petro-magic-realism* in *Lagoon* as she mixes Nigerian mythology and deities with the mundane realities of contemporary Lagos life.

Wenzel has applied *petro-magic-realism* to Ben Okri's "What the Tapster Saw," leading her to describes it as "a literary mode that combines the transmogrifying creatures and liminal space of the forest in Yoruba narrative tradition with the monstrous-but-mundane violence of oil exploration and extraction, the state violence that supports it, and the environmental degradation that it causes" ("Petro-Magic-Realism" 494). Wenzel presents the term to "complicate and historicise the empty globalism of the label *magical realism*, in which the magical might be anything unfamiliar to a European or American reader" ("Petro-Magic-Realism" 494). Jeff Diamanti concretises the usefulness of *petro-magic-realism* in his contention that "the problem of fossil fuels as social relation, environmental force, and economic setting – above and beyond the problem of monopoly capital and pollution it typically figures – *exceeds the literary landscape of realism*" (404, emphasis added). *Lagoon*'s inclusion of many plot elements and references to Nigerian mysticism that could be classified as *petro-magic-realism,*

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allows the novel to overcome the impediments associated with both realism and magical realism.

Arguably, *Lagoon* attempts to represent the unrepresentable. It stumbles upon the lack of a vocabulary that adequately depicts the struggle of daily life for the Nigerians affected by the inhumane practices of the corrupt government-petro-oligarchy. Rancière noted that "there is no appropriate language for witnessing," which provokes the necessity for *petro-magic-realism* as a framework for representing the unrepresentable (126). Of course, Rancière is referring to Robert Antelme's chronicling of being held captive in a concentration camp; however, he highlights an important point that is equally pertinent to the devastation being caused to the people groups and the ecology of the Niger Delta when he posits that "The language that conveys this experience is in no way specific to it" (126). Jeff Diamanti concretises this notion in his theorisation that "the problem of fossil fuels as social relation, environmental force, and economic setting – above and beyond the problem of monopoly capital and pollution it typically figures – exceeds the literary landscape of realism" (404). When language and realism fail to address the complexity of petromodernity, *petro-magic-realism* offers an alternative. Okorafor is compelled to follow this path due to the absence of any indication that government and international agents are proactively making attempts to secure the future health of the Niger Delta biosphere.

Ignoring literature contributes to our inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to interact with or acknowledge the ecological devastation caused by the oil industry at sites of extraction, including but not limited to those in Nigeria. Imre Szeman stated the importance of literature in revealing fossil fuels, as he noted that they were missing from "the literature and culture of modernity, from those novels and films that we rely on to capture the unconscious forces and stresses shaping the social" (6). We

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rely on novels and films in a way that scientific, factual, data-laden analyses cannot compete with. That is not to say that the latter are unimportant; however, they are not socially pervasive in the same manner as cultural productions such as novels and films. They are unlikely to draw as much interest and engagement from a general audience, given that they often use specialist language and appear inaccessible to the uninitiated. A desire to represent oil through a scientific prism of problems and solutions, using specialist language to describe this process, enables it to elide comprehensive delineation as a culture-formative phenomenon. This style of representation goes some way toward explaining the relative invisibility of oil in the literary works of Global North nations such as the United States. Sheena Wilson et al. concisely illustrate this point as follows: "The importance of fossil fuels in defining modernity has stood in inverse relationship to their presence in our cultural and social imaginaries" (Wilson et al. "Introduction"). The carbon-fuel-led modernity experienced by the Global North has created a culture that obfuscates its genealogy. As Szeman writes, "our own creations take on the character of 'natural,' pre-ordained reality in a way that obscures the quotidian character of their invention" (72).

Lynn White Jr. has stated that "Today, around the globe, all significant science is Western in style and method, whatever the pigmentation or language of the scientists" is significant in this situation (1204). It must be noted that White Jr. made this observation in 1967. Given the time that has passed since his pronouncement, there is doubtless potential for this situation to have changed or improved in the intervening years. However, Amitav Ghosh stated in 2021 that scientific knowledge related to climate change in particular is "located squarely within Western institutions of learning" with the vast majority of the research in this area being produced by "colleges, universities and think tanks in the global north" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 148). Although the parameters that pertain to Ghosh's observation are narrowed by the fact

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that he is speaking of climate-related science, they are nonetheless indicative of the likelihood that White Jr's observation remained true to some extent up to 2021, decades after he initially spoke out on the subject.

Science, often inflected with Christian elements and dominated by Western thinking and methodology, is flawed due to its exclusivity. If science and the research output it produces cannot be entrusted to assiduously critique modernity's over-reliance on fossil fuels and enlighten the public as to its dangers, to where do we turn? Szeman argues for the importance of the humanities in this respect. He states that "what distinguishes intellectuals in the humanities from their brethren in some other parts of the university (research scientists, engineers) is that they also occupy a position that is decidedly out of step with the times – a 'residual' position that makes them both connected to, and yet separate from, the dominant ideas of the moment" (91). Szeman closes this discussion by insisting that "the lack of synchrony with the present, sometimes experienced by intellectuals as a frustration, is in fact a source of their analytic strength." This lack of synchrony, Szeman states, "creates a position in which a degree of autonomous thought […] is made possible" (91). I believe that this argument can be extended to include literary authors, with some caveats.

Historically, both literary authors and humanities intellectuals have engaged with a shared subject matter: the exploration of humanity, culture, and society. Humanities intellectuals often use literary texts, as I will in this dissertation, as the source material for their exploration of the human condition. Literary authors and humanities intellectuals attempt to reflect, illuminate and critique societal values. Writers such as George Orwell and Virginia Woolf also held positions as both literary authors and intellectuals in the humanities. Of the authors whose novels I shall analyse in this study, Helon Habila is a professor of creative writing at George Mason University; Mei Mei Evans is a professor emeritus who teaches courses in literature, cultural

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studies and writing at Alaska Pacific University; Nnedi Okorafor is employed at Arizona State University as a "professor of practice" whose appointment to the role is described on her biography page as "the first to bring together the humanities and the Interplanetary Initiative [with the intention of] fostering creativity and bridging disciplines." These authors are simultaneously humanities intellectuals and petrofiction writers.

Petrofiction provides an opportunity to proffer mainstream criticism of our flawed energy systems, an opportunity that LeMenager has emphasised in *Living Oil*. Novels that consciously seek to plot against oil can repudiate conventional adherence to the aforementioned established precept of writing about oil "in the language of Solutions"; instead, focusing on constructing a story of the crime and illustrating the misdeeds of the oil industry (Ghosh, "Petrofiction" 432). This is where literature, specifically petrofictions, can offer a much-needed insight that might otherwise be overlooked in a focus on the transnational spaces that Martin V. Melosi maligned (LeMenager 123). LeMenager, following Graeme MacDonald, notes that there can be no national oil novel, but there can be a regional oil novel. A national oil novel is precluded on the basis that oil culture cannot exist "without the self-consciousness of the world energy markets and foreign wars that oil sustains" (LeMenager 14). A regional oil novel, however, can adeptly offer "scrupulous accounts of material effects and aesthetics, the feeling of petroleum stench in the bayou and the look of prison laborers on a California beach, raking up oil-soaked hay" (LeMenager 14). Thus, when I refer to American and Nigerian petrofictions throughout this dissertation, it is in reference to the nation in which the novels are set, not an insinuation that these novels accurately speak to the structures of feeling in every corner of the nations in question. These petrofictions cannot cover such a broadly interconnected issue in the course of their plots, but they can, of course, hint at the broader national or

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international issues that assist in the creation of the structures of feeling at the regional levels that they portray, namely, in this case, the Niger Delta, Lagos, Houston, and Coastal Alaska.

However, literature, particularly that of the Global North, or as Szeman puts it, "the first world," must overcome its contemporary marginalisation as "a matter of the private rather than the public sphere, a matter of individual tastes and solitary meditations rather than public debate and deliberation" (Szeman 27). LeMenager has also noted that "the novel as a form in the West has been deeply associated with privacy and leisure" (136). It is quite ironic that during World War II, the U.S. Council on Books in Wartime's slogan was "Books are weapons in the war of ideas" (Green 30). Perhaps humanity needs to adopt a wartime footing and arm itself with literature that serves as a weapon in the war on climate change. Hyperbole aside, we must remain cognizant of the fact that the great technological and social leaps that oil fuelled in the wake of World War II have also led to the marginalisation of books, to the point that their role in society has been reframed in a manner that is detrimental to our collective ability to comprehend and evaluate large-scale contemporary quandaries such as global warming. Whether Nigeria occupies, to continue the usage of Szeman's language, a third-world or a second-world position is debatable. What is not debatable is that it certainly does not occupy a position among first-world nations, based on the modern post-Cold War interpretation of the three worlds along lines of economic development. In the Nigerian novels that I will discuss, it seems clear that there is an intent to appeal to the public sphere through a refusal to comply with John Updike's outline of a novel that appears to be sufficiently Westernised. I will discuss Updike's criticism in greater detail in Chapter One.

Petrofiction novels illuminate culture, often a culture of literary or, in some cases, violent militancy, in the areas in which they are set. As was illustrated by Fredric

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Jameson in his essay "Globalization and Political Strategy," the binary description of those who suffer at the hands of transnational global capitalism as powerless victims who engage in passive acquiescence can be unhelpful (52). These sentiments can all too easily stray into the realm of offensive tropes. Therefore, an analysis of African petrofictions written by African authors is, of course, necessary to avoid the risk of focusing on a narrow Global North narrative and removing agency from the people groups affected by contemporary petroculture. Such an analysis is particularly pertinent given Ghosh's assessment that the voices of those affected by climate change "very rarely figure in the discussion. And when they do, it is usually merely as victims, whose voices fill the blanks in a script that has already been written by specialists" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 148).

Despite the positive effect that petrofiction can have on revealing the structures of feeling regarding oil, it suffers from the fact that literature has become a commodity that relies on capitalist markets for its dissemination. In the contemporary world, literature is inextricably linked to capitalist markets. It relies on these markets for its advertising, distribution and reach. As such, the scope for growth in the number of people who regularly interact with and have a broad knowledge of African literature, even that which is written in English, is limited by how aggressively market actors pursue growth within that sector. However, in the case that a reader picks up an African petrofiction and engages with the work, the transmission of experience from author or character to reader offers the potential for the dissemination of realities and thoughts previously unknown to the reader. Georges Poulet illustrates this point as follows: "Because of the strange invasion of my person by the thoughts of another, I am a self who is granted the experience of thinking thoughts foreign to him" (308). This is where literature can perhaps assert some authority in petrocultural discourse. There is the possibility of experiencing thoughts that seem foreign to oneself through

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empathising with the characters in petrofiction. Readers are capable of thinking these seemingly foreign thoughts due to our capacity for empathy. Ghosh suggests, "It is empathy that makes it possible for humans to understand each other's stories: this is why storytelling needs to be at the core of a global politics of vitality" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 240).

Suzanne Keane's discussion of empathy highlights the potential limitations inherent in expressions of empathic concern. According to Keane, "Empathy, a vicarious spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading" (1285). Ghosh further qualifies the power that reading, although he refers specifically to stories that can be read or spoken, possesses to generate empathy. He proposes that our capacity for empathy is "linked neither to blood nor to the soil: in humans […] the capacity for empathy is nurtured by stories" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 240). However, Keane has noted that "For a novel reader who experiences either empathy or personal distress, there can be no expectancy of reciprocation involved in the aesthetic response" (1289). Keane has stated that "an empathic response can be diverted from a prosocial outcome through interfering cognition" (1289). In other words, attempts to create empathy among the readers of petrofictions are limited by the readers' inability to come to the aid of fictional characters. However, Keane offers a glimmer of hope that real-world empathy generated by fiction is at least plausible: "Readers' cognitive and affective responses do not inevitably lead to empathizing, but fiction does disarm readers of some of the protective layers of cautious reasoning that may inhibit empathy in the real world" (1290). Furthermore, LeMenager also notes that "Neurobiological speculations about intersubjective relations suggest that recognition of the shared states that make us human requires 'inner imitation,' which might be reinforced in silent reading, by imagining other lives" (122). While petrofiction may

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not be a panacea that suddenly generates a global swell of empathy for those whose lives are negatively impacted by the oil industry, it nevertheless offers the possibility of a growing awareness of those impacts and the potential to disarm the readers of some of the protective layers that act as a barrier to empathy.

The structures of feeling generated by petromodernity provide a further barrier to overcoming the lack of empathic concern generated between people groups. The daily difficulties faced by many inhabitants of the Global South are both geographically and cognitively remote to the average Western reader. African petrofictions could perhaps be categorised as providing bounded strategic empathy. Keane contends that this form of empathy works within what she describes as "an in-group" to create feelings of mutuality and familiarity within that group (1291). Therefore, African petrofiction may not create a groundswell of empathic concern among Western readers; however, that does not eliminate the potential social power of these petrofictions. African petrofictions maintain an ability to engender empathic concern among groups who live in similar situations to those portrayed in the novels, among people who share one of the same identity characteristics elucidated by Keane, and furthermore, they possess the ability to spread this empathic concern over a wide geographic area and among diaspora populations.

Petrofiction may also offer the potential to create an emotional connection and a sense of empathy among its readers towards non-human actors within its plots. The Niger Delta biosphere, or the water systems that are regularly victimised by the oil industry, are prominent characters in *Oil on Water*, *Oil and Water*, and *Lagoon*. Perhaps it is feasible to argue that petrofictional representations of these vibrant ecosystems could engender a change in human interaction with those environments. In *The Nutmeg's Curse*, Amitav Ghosh discusses the extermination of the Bandanese people by Dutch colonisers who sought to exploit the islands in the Indonesian

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

archipelago for their nutmeg. Ghosh states, "The horror of the story of the Bandanese lies, in no small part, in the fact that the narrative of their elimination from their land revolves around a tree, a species of incomparable value, gifted to the islanders by the region's volcanic ecology" (31). This historical example echoes the situation experienced by the Ogoni in the Niger River Delta. The narrative of their elimination from their land revolves around oil, a resource of incomparable value in the modern age. Ghosh highlights how the way in which we tell stories about the past is limited, as "empirical, documentary methods of historical scholarship […] depend critically on language, literacy and writing" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 32). This critique echoes Melosi's uneasiness at the tendency of geographers to focus their descriptions of the footprint of energy production through the language of "transnational spaces" rather than focusing on local environments. Continuing his articulation of the issues that historical texts encounter, Ghosh states,

> In the stories [empirical, documentary methods of historical scholarship] tell, entities that lack language figure only as backdrops against which human dramas are enacted. Nutmegs, cloves, and volcanoes [to which I would add oil] may figure in these stories, but they cannot themselves be actors in the stories that historians tell; nor can they tell stories of their own. (*Nutmeg's Curse* 32)

Petrofiction offers the opportunity to give a voice to non-human actors, to stage these actors as protagonists in the stories whose plots they make possible. This is particularly important given the dual suffering that the Niger Delta region endures at the hands of Big Oil. On the one hand, the Delta is incessantly drilled for the carbon resources that are buried beneath it, causing ecological devastation in the process. On the other hand, the Delta is vulnerable to the effects of climate change, a process that has been accelerated since World War II, largely due to our increased reliance on oil to power modernity. Stephena Udinmade Ighedosa briefly outlines the distinct ecological

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

zones that comprise the Delta region, and their vulnerability to climate change:

> There are five ecological zones in the Niger Delta: the Mangrove Forest and coastal vegetation; Fresh water swamp forest, lowland rain forest, derived savannah and Montane region. The impact of climate-related hazards on the ecosystems is compounded by extreme poverty, and devastating environmental degradation by oil spillages and gas flaring associated with the petroleum industry. (777)

The mangrove forest and coastal vegetation areas that Udinmade Ighedosa mentions are extremely vulnerable to sea level rise, storm surges, coastal erosion and the intrusion of saltwater into freshwater sources. The petrochemical industry is directly responsible for this devastation: "Greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation from petrochemical industrial activities in the Niger delta promote climate change and directly threaten the biodiversity of the rich mangrove ecosystem" (Ighedosa 777).

Chinua Achebe's novels offer multiple illustrations of the importance of elements of the broader ecosphere in Nigerian culture. In *Things Fall Apart*, the village of Mbantu reveres the sacred python that lives in the locality. When Okoli, a converted Christian, is believed to have killed the sacred python, the villagers find that "no punishment was prescribed for a man who killed the python knowingly. Nobody thought that such a thing could ever happen" (121). The fact that Okoli is a converted Christian, a religion whose discourse figures the biosphere as an asset to be used in whatever manner best serves humanity's needs, illustrates just one of the many issues associated with colonialism, as it destroys and devours local culture. In the process of destroying that local culture, it removes the cultural barriers that inhibit or prohibit people from destroying the ecosphere. One prominent example of this was illustrated by Horn and Bergthaller, who discussed how the British and the Germans destroyed a

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

balanced and functional commons usage policy in the East African Rift Valley in the 1890s.[6]

The East African Rift Valley example illustrates the situation in which approximately two billion people find themselves today, relying on traditional forms of fishing, pastoralism or farming to sustain themselves. These forms of subsistence depend on "common-pool resources," the expropriation of which "produces a landless proletariat which migrates to the cities to sell its labor" (Horn and Bergthaller 90). The oil facilities that proliferate in the Niger Delta voraciously destroy the ecosphere without providing any benefit or security to the local inhabitants. The hydrosphere is destroyed by oil leaks, leading to the decimation of the biosphere and geosphere as animals, trees, mangroves, and even humans, all of whom rely on clean, fresh water to sustain them, find that such a resource no longer exists. The final nail in the coffin is the destruction of the atmosphere via emissions from flaring and other manufacturing processes, ensuring that while life may continue in the vicinity, it will not be fecund or healthy, and the vast majority of the region's human inhabitants become landless proletariat who migrate to Port Harcourt or Lagos in search of work.

The usage of English as a means of representation in Nigerian petrofictions should not, I believe, be construed as inhibiting the conveyance of invaluable cultural insights when juxtaposed with what Achebe termed "ethnic literature," that is, literature that is "available only to one ethnic group within the nation" ("Morning yet" 93). English is effectively Nigeria's national language, a position it serves in many other African nations, from Ghana to Sudan. Achebe advocated for African writers

[6] Before the arrival of the colonisers, the tribes who inhabited the valley maintained a system of collective land use based upon a mutual desire to preserve the resilience of the ecosystem. The system "was based on an intricate web of mutual obligations, sustained by intermarriage and trade, and guarded by a strict code of honor," and differences in the size of herds owned by each farmer were not a cause for argument or distrust (Horn and Bergthaller 89). The European colonisers viewed the unused tracts of land that this system protected, land that provided ecological flexibility, as a sign of inefficiency and waste, and distributed much of this land to white farmers, eventually causing ecological degradation through overuse of available land resources (Horn and Bergthaller 89).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

who chose to write in English; however, he added the caveat that it is important for African writers to avoid a fixation on attempts to write like native speakers. For Achebe, English is malleable and must submit itself to reconstitution at the hands of those upon whom it was foisted during the British colonial era. He insists, "The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost" ("Morning Yet" 100). Tanure Ojaide offered a similar view when musing on his own writings, as he states that "I may be writing in English, but it is not quite the same English as the British or the Americans or the Australians write. I have endeavored to Africanize the language to serve my ends" (20).

The need, or at the very least, the desire to use English as a means of communication, is entirely logical in a continent where European colonial powers created arbitrary borders, uniting disparate ethnic groups or creating boundaries that disassociated members of the same ethnic group from one another. Once again, Achebe illustrates the need for the retention and usage of English despite its colonial legacy: "There are not many countries in Africa today where you could abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility for mutual communication" ("Morning Yet" 95). Concurring with Achebe's viewpoint, Nyuol Lueth Tong explains the usage of English among the writers whose works appear in *There is a Country*, "English […] allowed many of the writers [featured in this compilation] to encounter literature from elsewhere; it seems reasonable to use it to send our own work out into the world" (8-9).

The usage of English can, I believe, potentially be construed as a positive in that it can assist in the avoidance of one of the pitfalls of literary compartmentalisation.

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Ilana Xinos noted that a lack of engagement with oil can be put down to formal issues, such as language. Xinos notes that the oil encounter, which I extrapolate to include Africa despite Ghosh's initial focus on the United States and Arabian Gulf nations, is multilingual in nature, but the novelistic form operates more comfortably in a monolingual community or a nation-state (2). The usage of English by Nigerian writers, among others, grants access to a far-reaching audience. The accessibility of these petrofictions magnifies dramatically from the local to the global scale. Some beneficial indigenous or local insight will assuredly be lost due to a lack of availability of translation into English from indigenous languages; however, the insights provided by authors who write in English or those whose texts have been translated offer the potential to influence a larger audience, and in this aspect, they prove their value. Due to this, I believe that reading Nigerian novels written in English offers beneficial insights that outweigh the potential negatives associated with translation. These novels circumvent the potential issues of multilingualism; however, they may also carry some lingua-cultural emphases or viewpoints within them that would not appear in texts written in Igbo or Yoruba, for example.

The importance of reading African petrofiction is illustrated by Tanure Ojaide and Alastair Niven. Nigerian poet Tanure Ojaide highlights one of what he believes is the most conspicuous differences between African literature and that of other cultures in his assertion that "Literature might be devoted to leisure in other cultures, but for us Africans who are experiencing the second half of the twentieth century, literature must serve a purpose: to expose, embarrass, and fight corruption and authoritarianism" (17). This argument is, in effect, a plea for African literature to serve a higher purpose than merely providing entertainment. African literature provides a platform from which writers can advocate for change, fight corruption, and expose the inner workings of governments that do not serve their citizens as they might be expected to.

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Alastair Niven argues for the importance of African literature in his article "An Overview of African Cities and Writing." Niven states that non-Africans "think of Africa in stereotyped ways: […] political corruption on a huge scale, endless wars, poverty and famine, and today's trails of refugees departing from conflict zones […] gross simplifications though they are, they are not easily dispelled" (481-2). He argues for the importance of reading African literature. Niven is specifically referring to literature set in African cities. However, I believe his key point, that "It is by reading literature set in cities or moulded by them that patronising simplifications can be averted," stands regardless of the setting of the plots of the novels in question (482).

African writers, through the plots they create, can become activists who take action, rather than remaining patient and pacified. Ojaide, recognising the economic and social disadvantages that African people are forced to live with in comparison to their Western counterparts, notes that some Western writers are "apolitical and can afford to write art for art's sake and be confessional," whereas African writers, in his opinion, must be activists (17). The Western petrocultural imaginary maintains a noteworthy silence concerning the energy that powers it. Following Ojaide's argument, I believe it is self-evident that the African petrocultural imaginary cannot maintain such a silence, nor is it likely that it would, given the palpable discrepancy in the structures of feeling that surround oil in the Global North and the Global South. These structures of feeling, created by neoliberal capitalism and resource colonialism in the Global South, are cemented in societies' collective consciousness by mainstream media outlets, which I will discuss in Chapter One.

This dissertation is organised into four chapters. Chapter One interrogates the dominant narratives of petroculture perpetuated by global media, Christian teachings, scientific orthodoxy, and capitalist rhetoric. I argue that these narratives serve as the

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discursive backdrop that petrofiction seeks to circumvent by amplifying the perspectives of those who are often marginalised and exploited by Big Oil. Chapter Two traces the historical trajectories of the oil industries in the United States and Nigeria, establishing the contextual foundation for the structures of feeling depicted in the four petrofiction novels. In Chapter Three, I offer a comparative analysis of Attica Locke's *Black Water Rising* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*. Building upon Stephanie LeMenager's brief reading of the two novels, I examine how these novels, situated within two distinct delta regions, foreground water as a central protagonist and utilise the style of detective fiction to plot against oil, revealing the covert machinations of an exploitative industry. Finally, Chapter Four contrasts the realist narrative of Mei Mei Evans' *Oil and Water* with the petro-magic-realism of Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*, illustrating how divergent literary forms capture the structures of feeling created through the impact of both coastal oil infrastructure and the spills it causes.

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Chapter One:
Representing Contemporary Petroculture

The rationale of petroculture is constantly evolving, particularly as belated attempts are being made to wean humanity off the black gold. However, despite reaching the age of "tough oil," a term coined by Michael Klare, we have seen no abatement in the desire of governments and energy companies to invest in the exploitation of sources that require a much more intensive extraction and refining process ("Grappling with the Age of 'Tough Oil'"). Canada is pushing ahead with plans to profit from the Athabasca Tar Sands, which were the key point of contention in Warren Cariou's short story "An Athabasca Story," despite the knowledge that the fuel that will eventually be created after mining the lands near Fort McMurray is considered to be the "World's Dirtiest Oil" (Tuttle and Platt). Oil refiners have been preparing for the arrival of this heavy crude on the market; in 2008, BP's Whiting refinery in the Chicagoland metro area of the U.S. initiated an upgrade project at a cost of USD $4.2 billion to facilitate the processing of Canadian tar sands oil (Starr).

The Canadian Atlas Network think tank, The Macdonald-Laurier Institute (MLI), has targeted legislation that would have enshrined more rights for Indigenous people and potentially hindered the development of the Athabasca Tar Sands. The Atlas Network, per its own website, is a "nonpartisan, nonprofit foundation that supports the development and success of pro-freedom organizations throughout the world" (Atlasnetwork.org). The Atlas network's global influence is considerable. It is a think tank that spawns other think tanks. Atlas often obfuscates the origins of the various think tanks under its control in an attempt to masquerade as an authentic, unified

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voice of the people, rather than a billionaire-funded organisation that simply advocates for pro-business policies. In a pertinent connection to Nigeria, the forerunner of the Atlas network, Antony Fisher's Institute of Economic Affairs, received its first corporate donations from Royal Dutch Shell, whose Nigerian subsidiary became infamous following Ken Saro-Wiwa's public campaigning and subsequent execution (Westervelt and Dembicki).[78] The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was of great concern to the MLI.[9] An internal Atlas report unequivocally asserted that the goal of the MLI campaign against the UNDRIP was to remove potential barriers to the expansion of oil and gas projects (Walker 112). Indigenous people, such as Big Brother in Cariou's "An Athabasca Story," stand in the way of plutocratic corporate interests and find themselves crushed by the power of these multinational entities.

Overreliance on technology to ride to humanity's rescue is, unfortunately, high on the agenda in the Tar Sands example I have provided. Canada relies on carbon capture technology, which is known to have a "checkered track record," to cut carbon emissions from its mining and refining operations (Tuttle and Platt). This reliance on technology is far from unexpected. Naomi Klein has posited that it will increase as climate change begins to affect not just the poor but also the wealthy, which will lead to an increasingly risky and desperate search for "techno fixes" (97).

The climate crisis has not significantly changed the rationale of petroculture. The exploitation of oil as a source of energeia caused the Great Acceleration, which led to

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[7] The Atlas Network is a corporate non-profit registered in the U.S. state of Delaware, a low-tax, business-friendly state. Due to Section 501 (c) (4) of the U.S. tax code, organisations are permitted to make independent expenditures on politics without revealing donor names, provided the organisation making the donation can not count politics as its "primary activity" (Miller).

[8] Fisher, who was born into a family whose wealth derived from extractive business, mining in this case, founded the IEA in 1955 after conversations with Friedrich Hayek. Fisher was shocked that the British public elected a Labour government post World War II and decided to engage in a "war of ideas," a notion proposed to him by Hayek, to ensure that in the future, voters would elect politicians with ideologies more closely aligned to his own (Westervelt and Dembicki).

[9] The UNDRIP was adopted in 2007.

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global warming and finally to the exploitation of previously inaccessible oil sources to which global warming itself has now facilitated access. Lessons must be learned. The culture must be changed. Literature and the humanities attempt to engender this change, but they are fighting against dominant discourse curated by corporate interests via their privately held news media and social media sites. These corporate interests engage in scaremongering, warning the public that policies or interference that restrict their businesses are, in fact, a threat to people's individual freedom.

The term freedom often metamorphoses into a hollow platitude that is weaponised, particularly in the United States, to reassure the American public of the privileged position in which they find themselves and to assuage any feelings of discontent or contumacy within the populace.[10] The well-known climate-denying Heartland Institute has claimed that climate change is a plot to steal American freedom (Klein 71).[11] The ideology associated with freedom is so deeply ingrained in the American public's collective consciousness that it is often invoked to justify actions that may otherwise encounter severe public resistance. David Harvey illustrates this connection in his argument that "The word 'freedom' resonates so widely within the common-sense understanding of Americans that it becomes 'a button that elites can press to open the door to the masses' to justify almost anything" (39).

Yuval Noah Harari equates the term freedom with the term soul, the concept of which is revered by many religions worldwide: "The sacred word 'freedom' turns out to be, just like 'soul', a hollow term empty of any discernible meaning" (*Homo Deus* 329). Jeremy Walker, a historian and professor at the University of Technology Sydney, castigates neoliberal thinkers' coopting and weaponisation of the term "free"

[10] See Fig. 2

[11] A former affiliate of the Atlas Network. It left the network in 2020 but remains funded primarily by the Koch brothers (Westervelt and Dembicki).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

to justify their clandestine machinations:

> In public, neoliberals claim to defend 'freedom of the individual' through 'free markets', 'the rule of law' and 'small government'. In reality, the MPS[12]/Atlas Network aims to institutionalise a supra-national legal order of rules to 'encase' the global market, immunising wealthy elites and transnational corporations from the unwanted 'government interventions' of majoritarian democracy and national parliaments, whilst simultaneously striving to capture, transform and strengthen the coercive, interventionist powers of the strong state. (110)

Despite the linguistic and political limitations of the term freedom, for reasons of pragmatism, it can still serve as a conduit through which to illustrate the contrasting embodied realities of social life in the Global North and the Global South, realities that are made possible by the *energeia* contained within fossil fuels.

Fig 2. An oil drum emblazoned with the word Freedom. Ironically, it also includes the text U.S.A., unintentionally highlighting the inescapable link between oil

[12] Mont Pelerin Society.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

and much of the freedom on which the United States prides itself (Photograph by the author).

The contrast between energeia and energy is compelling once again. Vivasvan Soni emphasises the need for humanity to "remember that it is energeia and not energy that gives meaning to our actions" (134). Simply put, we must focus less on the means and more on the ends as we voraciously consume carbon-based fuels in the search for power. However, neoliberal capitalism's elevation to the status of global paradigm has ensured a much greater focus on potentiality to the detriment of a long-term analysis of the purpose and effect of the continued rush to convert energy to *energeia*. It has been argued that capitalism is not just an economic system; it is a sweeping social relationship that shapes much of our lives, including how we interact with nature. Capitalism appears to be a system that is proficient at proliferating a plethora of illusions. In the digital age, data and financial markets have pushed this to new heights, reducing nature to a source of material resources or an opportunity to profit from green business incentives. From material things, such as luxury vehicles, to symbols like the myth that wealth is a result of morally righteous behaviour and hard work, to language, where words like optimisation, productivity, and efficiency serve as substitutes for financial growth, these illusions make our lives increasingly abstract. Freedom seems to fit neatly into this category of comforting illusions.

Capitalism feels real, but it is not the reality. It is an intersubjective reality. It is a collective myth. Yuval Noah Harari likens the capitalist system and its collective mythology to religion. Harari states that we have witnessed the creation of multiple "new natural-law religions, such as liberalism, communism, capitalism [etc]." However, as Harari notes, these natural-law religions do not use the term religion as an identifier; they opt for the term "ideologies" (*Sapiens* 254). Furthermore, Harari

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

adroitly notes that to cement collective belief in an imagined order, such as capitalism, "you never admit that the order is imagined. You always insist that the order sustaining society is an objective reality created by the great gods or by the laws of *nature*" (*Sapiens* 126, emphasis added). The mythology of neoliberal capitalism not only weaponises the word freedom, but it has also added nature and natural to its terminological arsenal.

It seems abundantly clear that neoliberalism is culture-generative, not merely a monad but an inherent participant in the creation of most, if not all, aspects of globalised modernity. To reinforce its culturally hegemonic position, neoliberalism has sought to fabricate a narrative that emphasises its naturalness. Pierre Bourdieu criticises economic science for creating its own mythology.[13] Bourdieu posits that the illusion of ahistorical universality created around economic projects, such as neoliberalism, is nothing more than a calculated tactic designed to imbue the system with perhaps one of the most culturally unquestionable traits in Western thought, that of being natural (5). To render something natural is to remove it from the sphere of debate, to jettison it into the realm of ahistoricity. Ghosh notes that capitalism's genesis story has been inverted by positioning capitalism as the driver of history: "The hold of the economy on the modern imagination has progressed to the point that capitalism has come to be seen as the prime mover of modern history, while geopolitics and empire are regarded as its secondary effects" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 116). The individualistic bent of neoliberal capitalism, its disregard for the collective, and its emphasis on the naturalness of its own existence affects literature and other artistic modes of creation by disempowering them in their struggle to reveal oil. With the

[13] I must acknowledge that neoliberalism's dominant position appears to be weakening, given events that are taking place during Donald Trump's second presidency, which began in January 2025. However, these events are outside the scope of this dissertation as I wish to remain temporally delimited to the years in which the four petrofiction novels I will analyse were published.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

focus pointed entirely on one's own personal freedom amid the apparently unquestionably natural neoliberal system, collective action, even in works of fiction, can seem incongruous with the structures of feeling in our daily lives.

The reification of the individual has been made culturally possible by the United States' access to cheap and abundant carbon fuel resources. It has also led to an obfuscation of responsibility for climate change. John Beck succinctly summarises our collective inability to frame the causes of our contemporary environmental crisis in an appropriate manner due to our focus on the individual: "Global problems, including environmental crisis and globalisation itself, are ultimately made the private responsibility of individuals, while the structural and systemic causes remain elusive and collective solutions unimaginable" (85-6).

Data that individualises responsibility for climate change is consistently produced and published to infer that it is individual consumers who are culpable for the impending disaster facing the Earth. This data posits petrochemical corporations as inert entities through which oil flows from the bowels of the earth to the end consumer. These corporations are framed as lacking agency and, therefore, responsibility for both causing the climate crisis and for taking actions to ameliorate it. Ghosh notes that BP has previously spent over USD $100 million per year on an advertising campaign that produced the data and graphs required to shift the blame for the climate crisis away from the company. Ghosh, taking cues from Julie Doyle, states that the goal of the campaign was to "assign 'responsibility for climate impact to the individual' and to promote 'a view of climate change not so much as a present reality but rather as a future threat'" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 152). This propaganda campaign follows a similar logic to the contemporary framing of people as neoliberal resilient agents, in other words, people who are responsible for taking care of themselves so that governments can abdicate their responsibility to their citizens. John Beck notes

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

the disconnect between the reification of the individual and their actual agency in the modern context: “Even as the significance and agency of the individual shrinks, ‘he or she is elevated to the apparent throne of a world-shaper’” (85). Despite the increasing powerlessness of individuals and the evident need for collective action, the cultural focus continues to fixate on elevating the individual to the position of a “world-shaper.”

Returning to my discussion of capitalism, although some of capitalism’s products, such as technological innovations, skyscrapers, and convenience, are entirely tangible and occasionally beneficial, the system itself is built on unsustainable foundations. The consequences of such flimsy foundations are undeniable: climate disaster and mass inequality. Despite a growing awareness that we are facing deeply rooted problems, it has become difficult to envision alternatives. When mythology is so pervasive and so widely believed, doubt is often misconstrued as madness. The foundation of that doubt, a lack of advancement, opportunity, or, in many cases, hope for the future, is often twisted by believers in the system to be a tangible example of the doubters’ non-conformity with the rules of the system. They have not worked hard enough. They cannot be rewarded by the system without adhering to its rules. This confrontation can create a sense of cognitive dissonance as believers grapple with information and examples that challenge their steadfast beliefs in the capitalist system.

During a presidential news conference on August 12th 1986, U.S. President Ronald Reagan infamously stated, “I've always felt the nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the Government, and I'm here to help” (“The President’s News Conference”). Capitalist interpretations of government as inherently inefficient, weighed down by a bloated force of public workers who are lazy and useless, have become ubiquitously accepted orthodoxy since Reagan’s presidency.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Petroleum has played a critical role in the creation of this social reality, this structure of feeling.

Plastic provides a pertinent example of the lack of foresight attached to the drive for *energeia*, leading to the culturally dominant notion of the disposability of resources, which is particularly prevalent in the capitalist Global North. Gay Hawkins' description of the abundance of plastics that permeated post-war consumer culture is strikingly similar to the previously widely-held global north view of petroleum. Hawkins writes: "The anonymity and ubiquity of ever more plastic generated cultural consciousness of an increasing flow of plastic in everyday life. Disposable plastic things seemed to come from an inexhaustible source; they arrived from a 'continuous infinite'" (272). Replacing the word plastic with oil still generates a remarkably accurate social commentary on petroculture in the Global North, particularly in the United States. I emphasise American petroculture in line with Amitav Ghosh's bifurcation of what he terms "The Oil Encounter" into "America and Americans on the one hand and the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf on the other," and Matthew Huber's theorisation of oil as a crucial resource in the construction of the "American way of life," a cultural ideal that has gained a global foothold ("Petrofiction" 431; Huber 30). Furthermore, automobility, a cornerstone of petroculture, is a decidedly more critical, foundational facet of American culture than that of almost any other nation, to the point that it is responsible for prompting Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and the continued mystique around long-distance road trips in the U.S., particularly on the old U.S. Route 66.[14] The quantity of fuel required to

[14] The narrative in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* (1957) is established upon the possibility of uninhibited, long-distance mobility (see freedom) within the continental United States. Kerouac's utopian vision of the freedom afforded by automobility in post-World War II America is quite the contrast to the dystopian view provided in J.G. Ballard's portrayal of an abandoned West London traffic island in *Concrete Island* (1974). The petrofictions of North America tend to display quite a thematic divergence from their African counterparts. This divergence is naturally rooted in structural differences within the nations of both continents. Petroculture could be seen as hierarchical, with North America

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

sustain such a culture is astronomical.

Petroculture in the Global North is predicated upon what Brent Ryan Bellamy describes as "an energy-reliant system of [accumulation] and dispossession that operates at a global scale" (259). The immense scale of the energy-procurement system, which feeds the Global North, is directly responsible for the anonymity and supposed inexhaustibility of carbon-based fuels in Global North petrocultural thinking. The rapid rise of automobility post-World War II was facilitated by, to borrow Jane Bennett's phrase, an "assemblage" of dependent relations that relied upon globalisation to procure the socially constructed freedom that automobility signalled within the petrocultural imaginary of the Global North. The major function of globalisation, as described by Szeman, is "to transform contingent social relations into immutable facts of history" (78). Thus, globalisation obscures the contingent relationship that links just one aspect of Global North petroculture, automobility, to violence, dispossession and precarity, and formulates the ongoing situation as an immutable fact of history.

Turning to the mainstream media, I want to illustrate how it can, at times, perpetuate a notably pro-oil narrative. The mainstream media's ability to offer unbiased coverage of global events is often compromised by its ownership structures. Walter Benjamin illustrates the limitations of the mainstream media as a vehicle for conveying information in his discussion of Western newspapers in "The Author as Producer." Benjamin notes that the newspapers of Western Europe "belong to capital" (83). Of course, this situation has only been exacerbated by the creation of new forms of media, including television and online digital news sites. The ownership status of the media places onerous stresses upon the writers employed by these media empires.

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and Europe benefitting the most from access to energy.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Writers for the mainstream Western media are faced with the need for a tacit acknowledgement of their dependent social position, coupled with the need to fulfil politically expedient tasks expected of them by their employers. Dorota Golańska, in *Affective Connections*, acknowledged that "what we care about is contingent on what we encounter in either random or imposed ways" (201). The mainstream media imposes itself upon us daily. It highlights the issues about which we become accustomed to caring. In essence, it plays an outsized role in determining what we encounter on a daily basis.[15] It is, of course, not just the Western media that struggles under the onerous task of objectively reporting news events.

Clement Mweyang Aapengnuo, in his article "Misinterpreting Ethnic Conflicts in Africa," illustrates some of the issues that African countries face in terms of overtly subjective media entities:

> The media also play a unique role in communicating information and impressions in society. As such, they have an indispensible function in a democracy to foster dialogue and debate. Unfortunately, in practice, it is common in Africa for certain media outlets to be controlled by politically influential individuals who are willing to whip up identity divisions to support their interests—greatly elevating the potential for ethnic conflict. (5)

Aapengnuo's accusation that African media whip up identity divisions is also applicable to Western media, which is not averse to sowing the seeds of division to serve an ulterior motive, often involving deregulation or the granting of certain rights or privileges to large multinational corporations.

Rupert Murdoch's News Corp provides a prominent conservative voice in the

[15] It must be acknowledged that the mainstream media's role appears to be steadily diminishing in the age of social media, as many begin to turn to online forums or social media sites such as TikTok for information and opinion concerning current events. Once again, this particular turn is quite recent and is outside the temporal scope of this dissertation's focus.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

United States and across the anglosphere under the banners of FOX and Sky. There are many examples of entanglements between global media empires, such as News Corp, and business interests covertly represented by Atlas Network think tanks. As we are all no doubt aware, perception is incredibly important. If an extractivist corporation were to openly advocate, using its own name, for the removal of, or denial of rights to, Indigenous people groups in order to secure access to the resources that sustain its business, then the optics may negatively impact its brand in the eyes of the public. Therefore, extractivist corporations conceal themselves behind the veil of Atlas Network think tanks to which they provide funding. The key strategy appears to be redirecting the general public's focus away from the suffering that is necessary to achieve the notional efficiency that vested interests dare not quantify. Atlas Network think tanks, including the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, the Heartland Institute and the Manhattan Institute, among many others, have become very adept at this kind of obfuscation (Walker 109).

Jeremy Walker notes that there is a long-standing working relationship between Australian Atlas organisations and their US-based counterparts, which has seen them coordinate efforts to challenge established scientific confirmation of global warming and also to oppose government policies that negatively impact the bottom line of fossil fuel companies, ranging from carbon taxation to support for renewables and a UN climate treaty (109). The goal of the Atlas Network's expansion, to the point that it now includes over five hundred separate think tanks, was to "enhance oil industry efforts to undermine support for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, est. 1992) and to prevent the negotiation of binding, equitable, quantified, timetabled, legislated, science-based national CO2 reduction targets" (Walker 109).

The majority of the Atlas think tanks' funding is sourced from fossil fuel companies. Walker asserts that these think tanks have "foundational histories of

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

oil-derived core funding among wider corporate support, including from ExxonMobil and other oil majors, from the oil-refining billionaires Charles and David Koch's 'philanthropic' foundations, and those of Richard Mellon Scaife, heir to the family banking, Alcoa and Gulf Oil/Chevron fortune" (109). The Atlas Network ensures that no publicity is linked to its own name. The origins of its diatribes are obfuscated, insulating the controlling organisation from its subsidiaries. The large number of think tanks that Atlas controls enables it to disseminate a consistent message through multiple sources, which, to the average citizen, appear to be independent of each other, creating the illusion of a broad consensus.

Atlas's deep links to oil are unclear to the uninitiated. However, understanding what to search for reveals the scale of the entanglement. The organisation's headquarters is on the Virginia campus of George Mason University, a university that, like the US think tanks associated with Atlas, has a history of funding from the Koch Foundations (Walker 110). Such powerful and deep-pocketed donors steer the network's agenda toward global action to further the cause of extractive businesses, achieving notable success in South America, for example. The links between Antony Fisher, the Atlas network and the Koch brothers run deep.[16] Fisher's first foray into the United States political scene was carried out at the behest of the Institute for Humane Studies, an organisation whose funding is derived from Charles and David

[16] Walker argues that Atlas helped bring President Jair Bolsonaro to power in Brazil (110). During his time in office, Bolsonaro initiated a now-annual bidding process that grants corporations the rights to carry out oil and gas operations throughout Brazil's territory, including in the Amazon River Basin, home to a multitude of Indigenous peoples and the planet's most biodiverse ecosystem. Brazil's incumbent president, Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva, has allowed Bolsonaro's bidding system to remain in place since he assumed office on the first of January, 2023. In fact, in December 2023, Brazil's Oil, Gas and Biofuels Agency, known as ANP put 602 oil blocks up for auction despite the fact that many of these blocks violate state environmental guidelines and overlap with protected areas and Indigenous and Quilombola territories (Gabay). However, president Lula da Silva has also made promises to protect Indigenous land rights and to transfer private farmland to worker ownership, actions against which Atlas has campaigned (Westervelt and Dembicki). Karen Tei Yamashita's captivating petrofiction novel *Through the Arc of the Rainforest*, despite pre-dating Bolsonaro, implicates the Brazilian government in the destruction wrought upon the Amazon by fossil fuel corporations. Furthermore, Atlas think tank, the Centre for the Dissemination of Economic Information (CEDICE), was pivotal in deposing Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (Westervelt and Dembicki).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Koch.[17] Two of Fisher's formative U.S. think tanks, the Manhattan Institute and the Pacific Research Institute were founded with help from the Koch brothers (Westervelt and Dembicki).

FOX, News Corp's U.S. arm, aligns itself as a right-wing, pro-Republican mouthpiece, in an almost binary opposition to MSNBC, which leans left-wing and pro-Democrat. Efrat Nechushtai proposes that the contemporary U.S. media system, with its notably open partisanship, has created a hybrid polarised liberal media system in which the traditional liberal media model has adapted polarised pluralist elements. Nechushtai highlights the "political slants" that can be seen in media released by FOX and MSNBC, as they contrast conspicuously with more centrist media such as CNN, CBS, NBC and ABC (Nechushtai 190). Fielding et al. note a similarity between FOX and far-right media site Breitbart in how they operate in the U.S.:

> In the U.S. context, Fox News and Breitbart have been depicted as: working for segments of the public (Kreiss, 2018); crusading by 'imploring action' from their audiences (Peters, 2010, p. 837); informing and mobilizing Republican audiences (Hoewe, Brownell, & Wiemer, 2020); activating 'viewers' partisan group identity' (Levendusky, 2013, p. 567); setting and advancing conservative agendas (Hobbs & McKnight, 2014; Hoewe et al., 2020); casting those with different views as untrustworthy, and using emotion, ridicule and ad hominem in the place of arguments (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008); using fear to garner support for conservative ideas and to attack the opposition (Conway, Grabe, & Grieves, 2007;

[17] The Institute for Humane Studies is one of many institutes and think tanks funded by the Koch brothers. One of their most prominent organisations is Americans for Prosperity (AFP). The AFP has engaged in activities designed to weaken organisations that support liberal candidates. Alexander Hertel-Fernandez et al. compare the AFP with the Republican party and claim that the AFP is both intertwined with the party and also rivals it in size. Summarising the AFP's goals, Hertel-Fernandez et al. claim that "To succeed in electing conservative candidates and promoting right-leaning policy, then, AFP would need to hobble unions, especially those in the public-sector that were powerful state-level allies of Democrats." The AFP has what the authors describe as a "laser-like focus on anti-union legislation" to achieve its goals (Hertel-Fernandez et al.).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

> Hoewe et al., 2020; Kreiss, 2018; Peters, 2010; Young, 2020); and deliberately insulating their viewers from opposing perspectives (Bard, 2017; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). (440-1)

Fielding et al. equate News Corp's conservative campaigning with advocacy journalism, which "occurs when news producers figuratively step away from the liberal tradition's normative standards to deliberately advocate for particular positions as participants in the public sphere" (442). Incidentally, an internal email from Fox News' VP of News, Bill Sammon, illustrated that FOX sees itself as providing a middle ground rather than any kind of advocacy. Sammon's email told staffers that they should "refrain from asserting that the planet has warmed (or cooled) in any given period without IMMEDIATELY pointing out that such theories are based upon data that critics have called into question. It is not our place as journalists to assert such notions as facts, especially as this debate intensifies" (Dembicki "Rupert Murdoch Has Known").

In an ironic twist, behind the scenes, News Corp management is fully aware of the implications of climate change and has made efforts to mitigate its effects on their operations while simultaneously platforming climate denial. Geoff Dembicki states that leaked documents "show a company that's taking steps to protect its operations and thousands of employees from a climate emergency it knows is getting worse, while giving a massive media platform to people who say the emergency isn't real" ("Rupert Murdoch Has Known"). Dembicki notes that News Corp is saving tens of millions of dollars due to government green initiatives while also generating significant profits by downplaying the crisis and rage-baiting its audience with criticisms of liberal viewpoints.

The American imagination, a significant part of which is fuelled by mainstream media outlets such as those under News Corp's banner, often in coordination with

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

European allies, has overtly exerted its dominance upon global socio-political issues throughout what Stephanie LeMenager and others have termed "the American Century," and into the present day. Oil and petroleum have been so culturally formative that LeMenager highlights how "the story of petroleum has come to play a foundational role in the American imagination and therefore in the future of life on earth" (4). The conspicuous discrepancy in power dynamics between Nigeria and the United States creates a marked difference in the literary output of these two disparate regions. The petroculture that has developed in Nigeria owes much to historical inequality, initially brought about by European colonialism and further exacerbated by 20th-century corporate resource neocolonialism. Economic, historical, and political realities have reinforced the preeminent position in the international hierarchy of nations that the United States occupies.

Matthew Huber further develops this idea by pinpointing the moment access to cheap oil became the foundation for the "American way of life." The creation of The New Deal as a reaction to the rise in anti-capitalist sentiment caused by the Great Depression was a transformative moment in U.S. energy politics.[18] It pushed for mass usage of cheap energy to create the "American way of life" (Huber 30). The "American way of life" reshaped the concept of the American dream. Traci Parker, an associate professor of history at UC Davis, notes that after the beginning of the Great Acceleration, in other words, post-World War II, the American dream became unambiguously tied to the nuclear family, automobile ownership, and owning a house in the suburbs (Russell and Sestito). At the outset, the American Dream was associated with equality, opportunity, and freedom, as outlined in the Declaration of

[18] An economic relief program during the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. The New Deal was a reaction to the Great Depression. It attempted to bring both economic relief and reform through a more hands-on approach to regulation by the federal government. Naomi Klein has stated that the New Deal "overwhelmingly favored white, male workers" while simultaneously violating Indigenous people's land rights with massive new infrastructure projects and conservation efforts (36). This theme is also readily applicable to the oil industry and its dealings on both U.S. and foreign soil.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Independence. Its ties to consumerism and the trappings of a wealthy life that could be provided by oil were a modern addendum. The consumerism and suburban lifestyle that the American Dream now evokes in people's minds are based on an unsustainable model of energy usage, whose insidious effects we can no longer claim to be ignorant of. Oil created new economic, geographical, social and political realities that continue to hold great sway over global culture to this day. Oil and the fossil fuels that preceded it, such as coal, are so crucial to the development of a modern capitalist society that Andreas Malm notes, "They are incorporated into capital *as its own motive force*" (56).

Contemporary literature often reflects a capitalist mode of thinking that cannot conceive of a future without oil, a future that positively differs from our present reality. Authors, including Jennifer Wenzel and Matthias Nilges, have delineated a temporal disconnect in contemporary Western literature between the present and the assumed future. Nilges has provided evidence of "the utter exhaustion of our ability to imagine the future as difference, an inability that signals the full subsumption of culture under neoliberal logics" (369). The neoliberal logics that Nilges maligned have entailed what David Harvey called "creative destruction," a process through which everything from "institutional frameworks" to "ways of life and thought" have been refigured (3). Timothy Morton, paraphrasing a quotation that is often attributed to Fredric Jameson, expands on Nilges's suggestion that humanity may have exhausted its ability to see the future as difference, in his insistence that "It seems that for many people, it's easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" (100-01). Ghosh, not incorrectly, disagrees with this statement as he points out a multitude of examples of cases where people groups are not trapped by this inability to think differently (*Nutmeg's Curse* 120). However, as Morton caveats his statement with the words "for many people," I believe that he narrows the scope of his assertion,

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

precluding a problematic universalising generalisation.

Imre Szeman notes that both eco-dystopians and techno-utopians "take the current configuration of the political and economic as given" (96). Sarah Truman, using Mark Fisher's concept of capitalistic realism[19], argues that,

> Capitalistic realism describes the prevailing notion that accepts capitalism as foundational for how politics and economics function; and more significantly, the reckoning that we've grown so used to this reality that it has become difficult to even imagine or conject an alternative world that isn't governed by capitalism. (28-29)

Truman argues that our inability to imagine an alternate future is brought about by a colonial crisis of imagination, due to the overwhelming influence of Western thinking on global issues. Nigerian petrofiction novels that consciously reveal oil can offer an alternative mode of thinking in this instance.

Ghosh has emphasised the contemporary cultural impediments that erode "serious fiction's" ability to deal with anthropogenic climate change, as he has forcefully critiqued modern cultural blindness in an era that he dubbed "The Great Derangement" (*Great Derangement* 9). Furthermore, Ghosh has underlined that most contemporary works of fiction have been coopted and "drawn into the modes of concealment that [prevent] people from recognizing the realities of their plight," thus making them participants in the calculated occlusion of the environmental damage caused by our reliance on fossil fuels to power a cultural notion of freedom (*Great Derangement* 11). Our "ways of life and thought" have been refigured to prioritise the individual and their freedom while jettisoning the collective.

Canonical limitations imposed upon novels have hindered our ability to address

[19] Fisher argues that capitalism is seen as the only viable political and economic system and we have now reached the point where alternatives are impossible to imagine.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

issues that fall outside the purview of what is generally accepted as constituting an appropriately Western novel. Novels that attempt to deal with the huge assemblage that is modern petroculture via a method that carries no cultural weight are discarded out of the realm of "serious fiction," as we can see in John Updike's criticism of Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt*.

In *The Great Derangement,* Ghosh raises Updike's review of *Cities of Salt* as an example of a U.S. or Western-centred precept in literary criticism. Updike wrote: "Mr. Munif […] appears to be […] insufficiently Westernized to produce a narrative that feels much like what we call a novel." Furthermore, Updike criticised *Cities of Salt* for lacking "that sense of *individual* moral adventure" as its chief concern seems to be "men in the aggregate" (117, emphasis added). John Green illustrates the manner in which humans often individualise history in their stories and chronicles. Using Halley's Comet, an entity which had existed for thousands of years before receiving its new and lasting moniker, ensuring Edmond Halley's legacy, as an example, Green notes that "Because we so often center history on the exploits of individuals, it's easy to forget that broad systems and historical forces drive shifts in human understanding" (24). Given the precarious position in which humanity finds itself in the Anthropocene, it seems pertinent to question the desire to funnel narrative through the prism of Western tastes with a fierce focus on individuals. I do not wish to castigate Updike for his observation, however, particularly as it was made at a time when our collective influence on the future of the planet was not as readily apparent as it would be to a contemporary reader.

Cities of Salt, although criticised by Updike, has been highlighted by Rob Nixon for the instances of *petro-magic-realism* that appear within the novel. Nixon notes that although *Cities of Salt* is not a sustained work of *petro-magic-realism*, it nonetheless contains examples of it throughout the narrative (93). Nixon states that,

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

> *Cities* is peppered with scenes of cross-cultural mistranslation where the inexplicable, the hallucinatory, and the realistic converge. These nodal, often humorous scenes of apparent magic coalesce around technological encounters, as Munif simulates, from a Bedouin perspective, the complex emotions triggered by the arrival of a procession of technologies from beyond all possible belief: the radio, the air conditioner, the generator, the telephone, the thermos, and the automobile. (93)

The Bedouins observe both the seemingly magical technologies that the U.S. oil prospectors employ to extract the subterranean black gold and also the seemingly magical technologies that have been imported to ensure a quality of life that is concomitant with that which would be available to these American oilmen in their home country. *Cities of Salt* successfully combines the magical and the mundane, rejecting the "more Western point of view" that Okorafor maligned in her interview with David Naimon and embracing the coexistence of the magical and the mundane that Okorafor states is normal in other, non-Western cultures.

The arts can play a crucial role in demystifying the role of oil and in illuminating the machinations of contemporary sociocultural, political, and ecological relations. Placing a focus on African petrofictions is an attempt to eschew a U.S.-centred mindset concerning big oil. Ecocritic Shiuhhuah Serena Chou has highlighted the pertinent drawback of a U.S.-centric mindset in modern critical thought: "Ecocriticism [between 2009 and 2014] witnessed a growing awareness of the need to challenge the limits of the overshadowing influence of place-rooted US-American centered ecocriticism in addressing humanity's future in the face of globalized environmental crises" (3). Jennifer Wenzel has argued that a disenchanted modern world is the only one with a future; in other words, as Nilges has stated, our ability to imagine the future as difference has been quashed ("Petro-magic-realism" 496).

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Paradoxically, given our culturally created inability to rebel or resist on a scale large enough to have a tangible effect on ameliorating the climate crisis, due to our focus on the individual, humans now cooperate and act on such a grand scale that we have become the ultimate terraformers. Humanity has long been applying that skill imprudently to the detriment of the planet. To avoid becoming overwhelmed by the large-scale effect that humans have on the planet, an analysis of works of fiction can prove fruitful. Ignoring the local or the regional allows for the occlusion of the realities that sustain the neoliberal capitalist project. Szeman highlights the effects that neoliberal capitalism has on regions: "The environmental consequences of global, neoliberal capitalism create further regions – of eco-destitution, monocultures, commodity frontiers, soils drained of life, polluted geographies" (265). Many of these effects are starkly evident in the Niger Delta and are highlighted in the novels I will discuss. Given the era in which the novels I will discuss were published, climate change did not figure as a central concern in their plots. It is, however, an issue that will no doubt wreak havoc in the near future. Scientific studies related to climate change, as with ecocriticism, illustrate a pervasive Western-centric mindset.

Ghosh defines climate change as "not just […] a process that is unfolding in the world, but also […] a highly specialized field of knowledge, one that extends across a wide swath of learned disciplines, ranging from the atmospheric sciences to engineering, law, economics, and so on" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 148). Perhaps the greatest issue with the apparent specialisation of climate change knowledge is that "this large and growing field is located squarely within Western institutions of learning: whether we speak of paleobotany, renewable energy, carbon taxes, or climate economics, the great bulk of the research on these subjects is produced by colleges, universities and think tanks in the global North" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 148). Ghosh also illustrates how the narrative setting powers afforded to these institutions assist in suppressing

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

counter-narratives from less influential voices, particularly those in the Global South who are often most at risk due to the very issue under discussion. He states that credentialed work on the subjects mentioned in the previous quotation sets the global agenda for the discussion of the phenomena themselves, particularly as the authors of much of that credentialed work sit on United Nations and government committees that discuss solutions to these very issues (*Nutmeg's Curse* 148).

Works of petrofiction exhibit a localised focus within their narratives. Furthermore, they also offer the opportunity to eschew the narratives set by Western institutions of learning and provide a voice to those who inhabit oil-producing regions to describe the structures of feeling in the Niger Delta, for example. They do so without resorting to trite definitions that simply echo the narratives set by distant academics whose thought processes mimic the dominant culture and established way of thinking without recourse to the emergent culture in affected regions. To concretise this point, I want to draw attention to a fantastic paragraph from South African writer and journalist Lewis Nkosi's *Tasks and Masks*, in which he illustrates the importance of novels in re-framing our views on Africa:

> If we are also to see African society as a living organism, a society constantly in motion, always plunged in conflict and contradiction, we surely need the novelist as much as the professional historian to recover for us the essential meaning from the 'supple confusions' of history and to guide us with a firmer hand than we have been accustomed to through history's 'cunning passages.' (qtd. in Niven 482)

Following Eva Horn and Hannes Bergthaller's lead, I want to discuss how our focus on the transnational spaces that Melosi has described presents us with a scaling problem that seems unavoidable in what Peter Haff has termed the "technosphere." Horn and Bergthaller state that "the ability of humans to interact with the technosphere is […] limited – and these limits are related to a scaling problem" (79).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Haff describes the technosphere as follows:

> The technosphere includes the world's large-scale energy and resource extraction systems, power generation and transmission systems, communication, transportation, financial and other networks, governments and bureaucracies, cities, factories, farms and myriad other 'built' systems, as well as all the parts of these systems, including computers, windows, tractors, office memos and humans. (2)

Horn and Bergthaller argue that "the disruption of the Earth system by humans is only possible through technology, which arguably has come to constitute an entirely new realm: the 'technosphere'" (78). Clearly, without the multitude of technological advancements that have emerged since the Industrial Revolution, humanity would never have reached the scalar mass needed to tip us over from the Holocene to the Anthropocene. The work of geographers, which focuses on "transnational spaces," could be framed as fixating on Stratum III of Peter Haff's strata scale.

Haff places the human (S) at Stratum II. Stratum I is populated by "components that are spatially much smaller than S." In Stratum III, "all components, whatever their actual size […] are much larger than S" (5). Haff bases this stratification upon a coarse-grained modelling system that simulates the behaviour of complex systems. Each stratum is incompatible with that above and/or below it. A larger system cannot effect change at the minute scale of the stratum below it without encompassing more facets of the lower stratum than intended; Haff calls this fact the rule of inaccessibility. Just as Stratum I is detached from and essentially unintelligible to Stratum II, Stratum III is equally incomprehensible from a position within Stratum II. The technosphere occupies Stratum III, a level which humans cannot truly grasp, leading to a greater focus being placed on other Stratum II "actants" or "operators," as Jane Bennett, borrowing from Bruno Latour, re-named the agents of a subject-centred vocabulary (9).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

The rule of inaccessibility allows humans to focus on the familiar:

> For humans, the upshot of the rule of inaccessibility is to draw attention toward what we are familiar with and thus towards local cause and effect, and away from one of the principal paradigms of the Anthropocene world, namely that humans are components of a larger sphere they did not design, do not understand, do not control and from which they cannot escape. (Haff 6)

Focusing on transnational spaces can tend to attribute agency to the larger system without recourse to the constituent parts at different strata, which participate in the chain of causation. Following on from Haff's clarification of the rule of inaccessibility, it appears that attempting to interact with or control the stratum III technosphere is a futile endeavour. With stratum III being out of our reach, it would seem appropriate to maintain a focus on acting within stratum II, the level of the familiar.

In contrast to the work of geographers, as summarised by Melosi, works of fiction tend to focus on Stratum II, the familiar, or to borrow an oft-used phrase from urban planning debates, the human scale. This focus, in contrast to that of a geographical report, illuminates the local, human cost of fuelling the technosphere. Haff emphasises the technosphere's reliance on fossil fuels in what he calls a "compact description of the technosphere," where he notes that the technosphere "is a global apparatus that searches for, extracts, and does work with (mostly) fossil energy resources to provide support for its own existence as well as that of its essential parts, including members of the world's human population" (4). The scale of energy extraction required to power the technosphere is, of course, global, but the procuring and consuming of that same energy is undoubtedly unequal. Works of petrofiction are adept at illustrating the human and local scales that are largely overlooked in geographical analyses, while also being hidden or obscured by some mainstream media outlets. Fiction's focus on Stratum II, on the human scale at local centres of oil

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

production, provides an opportunity to push back against the narrative-setting power of the mainstream media. The potential power of petrofiction lies in its ability to make the abstract more concrete in the eyes of the reader, as noted by LeMenager (123).

In *Slow Violence*, Rob Nixon pinpoints one of the critical issues that facilitates the occlusion of the oil industry's destructive social and environmental effects in Global South nations: the primacy of sight. Nixon writes: “An influential lineage of environmental thought gives primacy to immediate sensory apprehension, to sight above all, as foundational for any environmental ethics of place” (14). Sight is firmly established as a belief paradigm, particularly within Western cultures. Anthony Synnott outlines how it has become a key component of folk sayings or cultural aphorisms such as: “Seeing is believing,” “I’ll believe it when I see it,” or “I couldn’t believe my eyes” (618). Petrofiction can place the oil industry firmly within the reader’s sightlines, thereby avoiding the pitfalls associated with being out of sight and out of mind. I want to use an example from oil’s biggest competitor as an energy source, the nuclear sector, to illustrate the manner in which cultural productions, such as stories, that can take multiple forms, can ensure that the public sees the material reality of their energy sources.

France generates 75% of its power through the use of nuclear reactors. Such a significant reliance on nuclear power creates a problem for the government, namely, how to dispose of the waste that is created during the power generation process. Srećko Horvat states that France has opted to bury the waste in repositories deep underground, which has led to the question of how to warn future generations of the threat posed by the waste being at the forefront of the government’s thoughts. As a result, the national nuclear waste agency, known as Andra, created a competition in 2015 in which it asked artists to propose methods through which memories of the threat could be kept alive. An Italian composer put forth the idea of writing

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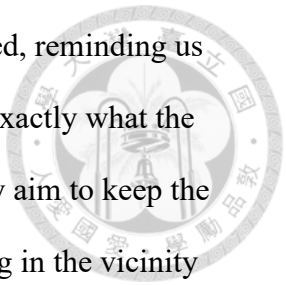

"children's songs telling the story of where the French waste is buried, reminding us of the importance of story-telling" (Horvat 131-32). Storytelling is exactly what the petrofictions I have included in this thesis are attempting to do. They aim to keep the memory of the impact that the oil industry has on communities living in the vicinity of its facilities alive and in the public's sightlines.

Rob Nixon elaborates on the significance of sight as a mode of apprehension by highlighting the importance of writer-activists as conduits of witnessing, a concept that Tanure Ojaide also advocated for in the case of African writers. Writer-activists, according to Nixon, "can help make the unapparent appear, making it accessible and tangible by humanizing drawn-out threats inaccessible to the immediate senses […] The narrative imaginings of writer-activists may thus offer us a different kind of witnessing: of sights unseen" (15). While many of the writers discussed in this dissertation may not consciously identify as writer-activists, they nonetheless fulfil such a role by using their narratives to draw attention to realities often overlooked by mainstream public consciousness, particularly in developed, Global North nations. Their fictions bring important issues into the reader's sightline. These writers offer a potential counterbalance to the influence of mainstream media.

It must be noted that in the case of a sizeable number of the fictions written about African nations, the authors are members of the African diaspora who reside overseas. Despite this, the contributions of these authors offer valid insights into the machinations of their ancestral homeland. Accusations of neocolonialist practices have been made concerning the publishing and commercial availability of certain African fictions. Jennifer Wenzel, deliberating upon Amos Tutuola's "The Palm-Wine Drinkard," notes that many Nigerian readers "objected to the Anglo-American embrace of what we might think of as Tutuola's inexpert 'tapping' of Yoruba narrative traditions" ("Petro-Magic-Realism" 488). A compelling dialectic was established in

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

the wake of the publication of "The Palm-Wine Drinkard" by Anglophone presses. Initially, many Nigerians saw Tutuola as a plagiarist who "tapped" the works of D. O. Fagunwa, an author whose works had not yet been translated from Yoruba to English. In later years, Tutuola was framed as a victim whose works had become another commodity that the Anglophone nations exploited for their own financial gain (Wenzel, "Petro-Magic-Realism" 488). In this sense, Tutuola's work became analogous to both the palm oil that he wrote about and Nigeria's petroleum, whose extraction by foreign companies commenced in 1956 with the tapping of the first well at Oloibiri (Watts, "A Tale of Two Gulfs" 450).

Chinua Achebe, speaking to a Nigerian audience, has commended Tutuola for his assertion concerning the maintenance of a balance between work and leisure. Tutuola's drinkard is an exploitative force who relies on the tapster to provide the means of his leisure, palm oil. Achebe compares the drinkard to the Global North, whom he regards as "spectacular and insatiable consumers" (qtd. in "Petro-Magic-Realism" 488). The process of selecting African novels for translation and publication for a Global North audience could be denounced as a neocolonial practice that attempts to frame a narrative from a Global North perspective, especially as there have been accusations of "lit-washing" levelled at Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG), a joint venture between oil giants Shell, Elf, and Agip, which offered the USD 20,000 Nigerian Prize for Literature ("Petro-Magic-Realism" 499). The position of authors such as Nnedi Okorafor and Helon Habila as members of the Nigerian diaspora may, in this case, be beneficial. Both authors write in English and reside in the United States, distanced from the potential for lit-washing that has been associated with the presence of Big Oil in Nigeria.[20] Perhaps what these authors lack

[20] Habila was born in, grew up in and was educated in Nigeria, but lives in the U.S. Okorafor was born in and lives in the U.S.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

in day-to-day, firsthand experience may be compensated for by the potential for a more objective portrayal of the structures of feeling in Nigeria than that which may be illustrated by authors who do not have geographical distance from the potential lit-washing. Furthermore, Alastair Niven has argued, "Writers living in more than one country, or staying away from their place of birth but still identifying with it, is so commonplace today that it starts to become problematical to describe them by a national designation or to locate them in one city" (489). Nnedi Okorafor has spoken in interviews of her travels throughout Nigeria and the experiences she has had when in her familial homeland. Despite being a member of Nigeria's diaspora population, Okorafor evidently identifies with her heritage and ancestral homeland.

Despite the notable drawback of relying on a publishing industry, which, according to LeMenager, is ironically the fourth largest industrial emitter of greenhouse gases, is led by its own financial motivations and is dominated by Global North publishing houses, fiction nevertheless offers a compelling snapshot of structures of feeling in countries in which the oil industry operates (122). However, in this situation, where publication is dominated by Global North publishing houses, which inarguably choose to publish those works that they believe will provide the greatest return on investment for the company, literature, which is a form of cultural expression, becomes commodified. Szeman, arguing that the aesthetic has disappeared from globalisation, has bemoaned the marginalisation of culture: "if 'culture' shows up at all, it is in the guise of a commodity that contributes to economic vitality" (85). Those novels that do succeed in passing the gatekeeper hold the potential to bring to light structures of feeling that appear alien to readers in what is likely the publisher's target audience, Global North nations. Whether using Jennifer Wenzel's *petro-magic-realism*, as seen in Okorafor's *Lagoon* or plotting against oil to reveal information "otherwise unavailable to the reader," as seen in Habila's *Oil on*

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Water, fiction holds great potential to illuminate the human struggles associated with Big Oil (LeMenager 124).

Tanure Ojaide illustrates the early onset of oil-related pollution in Nigeria in his observation that "By the 1960s the rivers had been dredged to allow pontoons or even ships to enter our backyard. Shell BP had started to pollute the rivers, streams, and farmlands with oil and flaring gas" (15). The rapidity of the expansive pollution from the oil industry is highlighted by the fact that crude oil, as Michael Watts has noted, was only discovered in commercial quantities for the first time in 1956 at Oloibiri, roughly seventy kilometres west of Port Harcourt ("A Tale of Two Gulfs" 450). Since the birth of the commercial oil industry in Nigeria, ecological disasters have continued to occur. There has been so much death and suffering that Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa was compelled to argue that these incessant spills amounted to genocide (Jue 171-2).[21] Unfortunately, Saro-Wiwa's pleading on behalf of his homeland and his people was often ignored or dismissed, even by Western environmental charities such as Greenpeace. Rob Nixon has stated that Western entities, such as Greenpeace, treated Saro-Wiwa and the devastation occurring in Ogoniland as "an unfathomable anomaly" (258). This dismissal is a clear illustration of centre-periphery thinking that corroborates Chou's point about US-American-centred thinking inhibiting our ability to comprehend global events that do not align with that train of thought. Centre-periphery thinking has been a debilitating anchor that has weighed upon environmentalism, limiting the field's ability to diversify its methodologies and logics. Diverting some of the field's attention away from American literature and toward literatures of the Global South, engaging what Nixon terms "transnational environmental literatures" could be of

[21] "What Shell and Chevron have done to Ogoni people, land, streams, creeks, and the atmosphere amount to genocide. The soul of the Ogoni people is dying and I am witness to the fact" (Saro-Wiwa qtd. in Steyn 371).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

significant benefit to both environmental and cultural studies (Nixon 258-60).

The plotting of non-Western petrofictions is therefore essential in revealing the obscured realities of the Global South in the face of the dominant, globalisation-enforced Western paradigm of the individual, and the notable ignorance toward inhabitants of the Global South displayed by Global North agencies such as Greenpeace. Insufficient westernisation is exactly what is needed to highlight the manner in which the oil industry has shaped and simultaneously decimated our world. These fictions reject dominant cultural metanarratives and provide a counter-discourse. Apart from the narratives espoused by media empires such as News Corp and think tanks such as those controlled by the Atlas Network, two further narratives that these fictions can challenge are provided by Christianity and science, which have both succeeded to varying degrees in establishing a normative framework from which people can understand purportedly common-sense parameters of social behaviour.

Many oil industry figureheads and supporters continue to tap into a fruitful support base in U.S. society by linking their arguments to God. Fracking billionaires Farris and Dan Wilks have a history of providing funding to high-profile conservative and religious groups, some of which have previously been linked to the Atlas Network. Farris Wilks is a preacher in the small town of Cisco, Texas.[22] Peter Stone, a journalist for *The Guardian*, has noted that in his sermons, Farris Wilks has equated the climate crisis with God's will by claiming, "If [God] wants the polar caps to remain in place, then he will leave them there" (qtd. in "Texas Fracking Billionaire Brothers"). Wilks has also stated that global warming is a punishment for humanity's sins, as he decreed during a sermon that "We're going to reap what we have sown,

[22] The Wilks family created the Assembly of Yahweh, a hybrid Judeo-Christian church that adopts elements of each religion (Dembicki "How Fracking Billionaires").

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

and what we have sown has not been good" (qtd. in Dembicki "How Fracking Billionaires"). Farris Wilks' sentiment brings to mind a 2013 study conducted among U.S. businesses, which found that management at U.S. firms based in regions with high levels of religiosity, specifically Christianity, was far less likely to make pro-environmental decisions (Grasse 6). The Wilks brothers, as previously noted, are residents of Texas, which contains a large, albeit declining, population of Christians.[23]

The Wilks Brothers have astutely sought to utilise their wealth to advance a conservative agenda at the national level within the United States. Peter Stone relays comments from Chris Tackett, a campaign finance analyst, who provides a concise summary of the mentality of the Wilks brothers and the actions they take to ensure their continued prosperity:

> Farris and Dan Wilks, who believe their billions were given to them by God, have spent the last decade working to advance a dominionist ideology by funding far-right organizations and politicians that seek to dismiss climate change as 'God's will', remove choice, demonize the LGBTQ community, and tear down public education, all to turn America into a country that gives preference to and imposes their extreme beliefs on everyone. (qtd. in Stone "Texas Fracking Billionaire Brothers")

Tackett's assertion is echoed by Mark Jones, a political science professor at Rice University, who contends that the Wilks brothers' climate denial and the resulting political actions they have taken are "driven by their faith" (qtd. in Dembicki "How

[23] In 2024, 67 per cent of Texans identified as Christian, a decline of six per cent over the past decade. Craig Considine, a senior lecturer at Rice University, has attributed the drop, specifically in Houston, to "millennial and Gen-Z Houston residents being far less religious than older adults and to a steep drop in self-described liberals identifying as Christians in the last decade" (qtd. in Killelea). Eric Killelea acknowledges the overall drop in the percentage of self-identifying Christians in Texas, but he also highlights the growth of evangelical churches, such as that operated by the Wilks brothers. This could be seen as a sign of polarisation among a percentage of Christians in the state, whereby moderates now self-identify as unaffiliated and more pious Christians identify with the more hardline evangelical churches that proliferate in the state.

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Fracking Billionaires"). Peter Montgomery, a senior fellow at the watchdog organisation Right Wing Watch, believes that "The Wilks brothers' fracking fortune was allowing them to take the extreme religious beliefs they'd developed in West Texas to a national audience. 'They see their wealth as a sign of God's favor'" (qtd. in Dembicki "How Fracking Billionaires"). This evident linkage of Christianity and climate denial, funded by oil money, mobilises one of the most vocal groups in U.S. society, religious conservatives, to advocate for an agenda that is detrimental to their own lives in the long term.

Michael Thomas has noted that the Wilks brothers donated at least USD $6 million to the unaccredited PragerU in 2013 ("How a Nonprofit Spread Climate Misinformation"). PragerU is a media outlet that presents itself as an online university and produces content that advocates a conservative perspective. Thomas also notes that, according to 2015 IRS filings from PragerU, two members of the Wilks family were on the registered non-profit's board. The power of the conservative donors behind PragerU has led to the faux university's materials being adopted for use in the Florida and Oklahoma school systems. When questioned as to why the Wilks brothers were interested in providing funds to PragerU, founder Dennis Prager stated, "I presume [The Wilks Brothers] saw in PragerU an innovative and sophisticated presentation of the case for American values" (qtd. in Dembicki "How Fracking Billionaires"). The unquestioned assumption that "American values" are those of the deeply Christian, majority white citizens is troubling.

The crossover between Christian teachings and traditions, oil, and American values is impossible to ignore. Matthew Huber's term "American way of life" is closely linked to American values, as the values ascribed to a nation inevitably shape the way of life, the structure of feeling that a nation provides or is expected to uphold. The content that PragerU produces and publishes paints an unmistakable picture of

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what it believes constitutes American values. Peter Stone illustrates the spurious and controversial ideology espoused by PragerU's online content:

> Among the many controversial statements that appear in PragerU's content, the viewer can find various false claims, including a depiction of solar and wind power as environmentally dangerous, spurious accusations that liken environmental activists to Nazis, and claims that recent intense heat events are simply part of the natural weather cycle. ("US 'University' Spreads Climate Lies")

PragerU also regularly appeals to the Wilks brothers' support base, Christian conservatives, by publishing videos that frame capitalism in a positive, Jesus-approved manner.[24] Furthermore, PragerU opines what it sees as the erosion of the United States' moral structure due to the separation of church and state in a video titled "What Does Separation of Church and State Mean."

American values, judging by PragerU's general output, appear to constitute anti-socialist sentiment, a desire for a Christian theocracy to enforce prescribed moral standards, and low taxation policies, with the resulting financial shortfalls being plugged by charitable donations from purportedly moral citizens.[25] Christianity's anthropocentric bent exacerbates the climate denial issues that have already been mentioned. Relying on Christian theological orthodoxy to set the values of the United States as a nation serves to enhance anthropocentric sentiments and promote actions that disregard the earth and the ecosystems that sustain all of its non-human inhabitants. Alexis Grasse outlines the Christian teachings that reinforce this

[24] Prager U's YouTube channel published a video titled "Was Jesus a Socialist?" in July 2019. The video concludes by claiming that Jesus never endorsed forced redistribution of wealth, that he was categorically not a socialist, and that the only thing that has ever lifted people out of poverty in human history is free market capitalism.

[25] One particularly egregious example of the tax breaks that PragerU and Atlas-affiliated think tanks advocate for was given to BP in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon disaster. USD $15.3 billion of the settlement that BP paid out in the wake of the disaster was legally allowed to be treated "as a cost of doing business," thus making it tax-deductible. BP deducted 35% of the total figure from its taxes, resulting in a net gain of USD $5.35 billion for the company that was responsible for the worst environmental disaster in U.S. history at the time (Caron).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

anthropocentric view. Grasse argues that "Genesis 1:27 provides the foundation for two key anthropocentric beliefs among Christians: the doctrine of *imago dei* and the doctrine of dominion over creation" (3). The assumption that humans have dominion over nature is unmistakably anthropocentric, as it portrays nature as a fecund resource that was created for humans to harvest as they see fit. The doctrine of *imago dei*, which states that humans have been created in the image of God, concretises the Christian human's superiority complex and leads to what Grasse calls a "general consensus" throughout Christian history that "humans have the right to use nature to meet their needs, and that this is part of nature's intended purpose" (3).

In 1967, long before there was mainstream acknowledgement of anthropogenic climate change, Lynn White Jr. offered an unreserved criticism of Christianity's role in exacerbating the earth's ecological crisis. White Jr acknowledged the dominance of Western thought on a global scale, highlighting the West's influence on science. White Jr. has stated: "Today, around the globe, all significant science is Western in style and method, whatever the pigmentation or language of the scientists" (1204). White Jr adds to this assertion by noting that science and technology have grown from Christian attitudes regarding humanity's relationship with nature (1206). This simple acknowledgement highlights a substantial concern regarding the impartiality of scientific results and methodologies; an issue that is particularly problematic given the authority accorded to science in the contemporary world.

Science occupies an authoritative position in contemporary society and culture. However, it occupies a position where its authority comes under significant resistance when the scientific results do not align with the goals of specific businesses. Big Tobacco provides a vivid historical example of science denial. Big Oil has followed Big Tobacco's playbook almost to a tee. Sharon Eubanks, the leader of the U.S. Justice Department's legal team in their case against Big Tobacco, highlighted

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

similarities in the manner in which both the tobacco and the oil industries manipulated public perceptions of their products and their associated side-effects: “The cover-up, the denial of the problem, the funding of scientists to question the science. The same pattern. And some of the same lawyers represent both tobacco and big oil” (qtd. in McGreal). Former Exxon scientist Marty Hoffert elaborates upon a pertinent example of such a cover-up.

In the 1980s, Hoffert created a model that predicted the effects of anthropogenic climate change. Hoffert left Exxon after finding that Exxon chief executive Lee Raymond was publicly “saying things that were contradicting [Exxon’s] own world-class research groups.” Hoffert chastised Exxon’s conduct in his assertion that “What they did was immoral. They spread doubt about the dangers of climate change when their own researchers were confirming how serious a threat it was” (qtd. in P. Keane). Exxon’s position on climate science, taken from a company internal memo in 1988, was to “Urge a balanced scientific approach.” Cook et al. contend that this approach was a “‘both sides’ approach to confuse people” (7). In coordination with the American Petroleum Institute, “Exxon executives were internally notified that the public position of Exxon and the American Petroleum Institute (API) would be to ‘emphasize the uncertainty in scientific conclusions regarding the potential enhanced greenhouse effect’” (Walker 109). Evidently, science provided a method through which humanity could discover and plan for future eventualities. However, science is only as useful as our willingness to listen to and publish its conclusions, as evidenced by Exxon’s desire for a balanced approach, which science cannot provide without human manipulation.

The diversionary tactics employed by Exxon and by the American Petroleum Institute successfully sowed the seeds of doubt among the American public as to the legitimacy of anthropogenic climate change through a multi-pronged approach that

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

included employing and giving air time to fake experts, presenting logically fallacious arguments designed to lead to false conclusions, setting impossible expectations of certainty concerning the legitimacy of anthropogenic climate change before taking action to counter it, cherry-picking data that supported denialist arguments, and promoting conspiracy theories (Cook et al. 10).[26]

The petroleum industry maintains a deeply contradictory relationship with science. As evidenced by the Exxon example, the industry systematically discredits or suppresses scientific findings that portray the negative effects of its business operations. Conversely, it instrumentalises scientific authority to promote speculative technological advancements when it is beneficial to do so, framing science as the primary mechanism for mitigating the very crises the industry itself has precipitated. The industry's positive framing of technological and scientific advancements is often spurious at best, based on hope rather than certainty. This framing exemplifies the technological sublime. Without adequate investment in alternative energy sources, humanity remains at the mercy of the source of the impending climate disaster. Alternative energy sources are seen as unnecessary as the narrative concerning scientific breakthroughs defers change in favour of a business-as-usual trajectory. This reliance on an assumed future solution allows the industry to treat environmental mitigation and investment in green energy as a secondary concern.

As I have noted, science occupies a position of discursive authority. This authoritative position, particularly in relation to the humanities, was not always as it is today. In "What is an Author?" Foucault illustrates that science and the humanities exchanged places in the social hierarchy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The two disciplines became inverted in terms of the status and authority accorded to

[26] Exxon worked alongside Chevron, Shell, BP and smaller oil firms to fund the API's climate change denialism (McGreal).

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them. Karen Pinkus bemoans the humanities' contemporary position in relation to science, as the humanities are now governed by "a tyranny of the practical" (418). Science has become, and continues to be, trusted because it has adopted a position of authority and practicality. This authoritative position has been detrimental to modern society's ability to think critically when presented with fantastical techno-scientific solutions to the precarious situation in which we find ourselves in relation to the earth's ability to sustain neoliberal capitalism's demand for growth. Following the shift Foucault has outlined, literature, in contrast to science, needed an esteemed author to grant it status (Foucault 223).

Yuval Noah Harari notes that the modern social order's ability to remain in place and go unchallenged has been facilitated by "the spread of an almost religious belief in technology and in the methods of scientific research" (*Sapiens* 282-3). Eva Horn and Hannes Bergthaller argue that "It is no longer possible to deny that scientific facts are the product of social processes" (61). Although Horn and Bergthaller note that these processes also involve non-human actors, the reality remains that scientific facts are arrived at after much mediation and interference by humans in a discipline that is often considered to be objective.

Marc Andreessen, a venture capitalist who co-founded investment firm Andreessen Horowitz, has publicly displayed an enthusiasm for technology that utterly disregards the energy that will be needed to sustain its growth. Andreessen has openly advocated for a dramatic expansion of technology throughout society, which he justifies by claiming, "We believe that there is no material problem – whether created by nature or by technology – that cannot be solved with more technology" ("The Techno-Optimist Manifesto"). As one of the most powerful and wealthy investors in the United States, Andreessen's ideas, whimsical or otherwise, carry

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

weight.[27] Consistent advocacy for technology is tied to a tacit advocacy for the continuation of the neoliberal project through what Keller Easterling termed "extrastatecraft."

Imre Szeman discusses Easterling's "extrastatecraft," a strategy employed by modern governments to achieve their objectives through the use of infrastructure, public spaces, or collaboration with the private sector. Szeman, following Easterling's lead, outlines how contemporary infrastructure "has an agency, capacity, or disposition through which it exerts power, both separate from and in partnership with the actions of states." Summarising, Szeman observes, "In short, extrastatecraft is neoliberalism carried out or enacted by the infrastructures of modernity" (249). Assuming that there is no problem that cannot be solved with more technology aligns with the ideas of extrastatecraft, whose "power lies precisely in the fact that infrastructures tend to be seen as neutral, rational, and technical solutions to modern problems, and so are seen, too, as devoid of political interest or impact" (Szeman 249-50). Andreessen's rationale accords entirely with Szeman's hypothesis that infrastructure, in this case technological infrastructure, is seen as a neutral, rational solution to modern problems.

Andreessen's techno-optimism is followed by deference to markets as the method through which poverty will be ended. Szeman's assertion that "the response offered by the narrative of globalization is not to hide [contingent social relations], but to claim first their inevitability, and then to provide a utopic future-oriented claim about a coming global community in which the traumas of the present will be resolved in the fluid shuttling of freely-traded goods around the world," is quite apt at this moment, as it seems quite clear that Andreessen believes in a utopic vision of the

[27] *Venture Capital Journal* ranks Andreessen Horowitz as the number one venture capital firm globally based on capital raised over the five-year period between January 1st 2018, and January 1st 2023.

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market as a solution to contemporary issues of poverty (84).

A stubborn refusal to formulate a coherent plan for the future, combined with an inherent deference to the technological innovations that are yet to come, illustrates a dominant problem that permeates a significant proportion of people's general mindset (particularly those who inhabit Global North capitalist cultures): they cannot see the future as heterogeneous. Matthias Nilges notably observed that this inability to see the future as heterogeneous has infiltrated the plots of many modern novels.

Petrofiction confronts such utopian visions and obfuscatory narratives and ideologies in its quest to substantiate the ecological and bodily costs of the oil industry, while also subverting the opacity of relationships between the oil industry and amenable governments. To contextualise my analysis of the four petrofiction texts, chapter two will examine the historical trajectories of the petroleum industries in Nigeria and the United States. Establishing this historical foundation is crucial to understanding how my four chosen petrofiction novels articulate the distinct structures of feeling created by the oil industry in these divergent geopolitical contexts.

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Chapter Two:
Petrocultural Divergence:
Nigeria and The United States.

In Nigeria, a considerable proportion of the nation's citizens are forced into poverty by the economic and political structures that rule over them. According to Michael Watts, the per capita income in Nigeria fell from $250 to $212 between 1965 and 2004, while the number of people subsisting on less than one US dollar per day rose from 36% to over 70% of the Nigerian population ("Imperial Oil" 228). This increase in overall poverty is despite the vast wealth generated from Nigeria's abundant crude oil production sites. In the United States, Indigenous and minority groups can find that they occupy a position of inequality. Citizenship of a nation does not guarantee social and economic equality. Szeman outlines this issue as he states that "citizenship is shaped around inclusions and exclusions, around violent delineations of belonging. The differential quality of citizenship extends not just to who one is, but what one does and where one lives within a nation-state" (264). This inescapable truth is consistently exposed by, to name just two examples, the treatment of the Ogoni people in a nation dominated by the Hausa-Fulani and the treatment of African-Americans in the United States when compared with the treatment accorded to white Americans. These issues are illustrated in the disregard shown toward Niger Delta communities in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, and the racially segregated workmen's unions seen in Attica Locke's *Black Water Rising*.

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In the United States, the burden of the contemporary thirst for fossil fuels is often outsourced to the poor and Indigenous communities; however, despite this outsourcing, the U.S. does not come close to matching the indices of poverty that Watts illustrated in the case of Nigeria. Societies in the oil-producing nations of the Global South tend to be markedly different to those in Global North nations. These nations, according to Paul Collier, appear less disposed to democracy than those of the Global North (42). Poverty and corruption in Nigeria are often attributed to non-human factors that come under the common umbrella misnomer of "resource curse."

The concept of the resource curse is ostensibly flawed, as it seems to manipulate new materialism by displacing the culpability for all of the negative aspects of resource colonialism onto the object that animates that rapacious quest. Janet Stewart contends that, "The performative language of a 'curse' imbues oil with agency: a curse, after all, is an utterance that does something. It acts. And by attributing agency to oil, the language of a 'curse' appears to shift responsibility for the consequences of oil extraction to the substance itself." Stewart further states that the attribution of agency to fossil fuels risks positing that "the significant inequalities of many petro-states [are] natural, magical, and, in any case, inevitable (287). Despite both the United States and Nigeria being petro-states, their economic realities are starkly divergent, as are the structures of feeling for a large proportion of the nation's inhabitants.

Postcolonial Nigeria suffers from many of the same ills that have befallen fellow African nations that emerged from European rule to independence. One of the most glaring issues is the territorial boundaries that define the newly formed nation. Many postcolonial states retain arbitrary borders that were wantonly established by an ignorant and uncaring ruling nation during the scramble for African territories and the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

subsequent hoarding of the land's natural resources by these colonial powers. Contemporary Nigeria comprises three dominant ethnic groups and as many as 500 tribal groups. The three largest ethnic groups, the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the west and the Igbo in the east, vie for control of the nation and its oil bounty. The British, Nigeria's colonial rulers, established the Northern, Western and Eastern regions of the country as bureaucratically separate, self-governing entities, which became ethnicised and dominated by the three groups I have mentioned (Apter 27). After independence, which was achieved in 1960, the Nigerian government created new states that disempowered regional interests and centralised power, thus creating a situation in which dominance of the government by one ethnic group led to the disempowerment of others. Those who controlled the government monopolised access to the nation's oil, which in the 1990s accounted for 95% of government revenue (Apter 27).

In *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria*, Andrew Apter, a historian and professor at UCLA, emphasises the role that the central government played in disempowering regional interests. Apter notes that "The convenient marriage of oil and politics is, in fact, well represented by their coterminous centralization within the corridors of power" (28). The government used the self-governing Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) as its vehicle for the management of the nation's oil resources. Through the NNPC, the government assumed control of petroleum licensing, reducing each state's autonomy. NNPC is now a majority rights holder in all oil and gas concessions within Nigeria.

Nigeria's oil, which funds the entire nation, is unequally distributed throughout the country. The vast majority of the resource is located in the Niger River Delta region in the southeast of the country. Ogoniland, so-called as it is home to the Ogoni people, occupies approximately 1,000 square kilometres of land in the Niger Delta

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

state known as Rivers State. The city of Port Harcourt, the centre of the Nigerian oil industry, is the capital city of Rivers State. The appropriation of oil resources ensconced within Ogoni territory for sale and distribution by the central government has resulted in the Ogoni suffering all of the negative effects of oil production without experiencing the financial benefits that accrue from its sale. Nigerian citizens as a whole, regardless of whether they belong to one of the dominant ethnic groups into whose communities a portion of the state oil wealth flows, find that access to refined petroleum products is hard to come by, despite such a vast quantity of crude oil being drilled within the nation's boundaries.

Apter notes that Nigeria became beholden to foreign agents, namely multinational petro-conglomerates, for its fuel needs: "The Nigerian post-colony – in a classic model of underdevelopment – produced and exported its high-grade crude through multinational companies, only to buy back refined fuel to meet rising domestic demand" (31). Shortages of fuel, among other issues, within Nigeria came to be blamed on rogue pipeline saboteurs. The government implemented the Petroleum Anti-Sabotage Decree in 1975, which carried the threat of a death sentence for anyone found guilty of disrupting the flow of oil within the country. The united front presented by oil companies and the Nigerian government amounted to victim-blaming. Financial losses from pipeline sabotage were framed as a loss of property and punished accordingly. The root causes behind the damage that was being done to pipelines were routinely ignored. Pipeline thieves were seen as criminals who undermined the flow of value throughout the nation. The government claimed that the death penalty was a justified punishment (Apter 32-33).

An ostensibly unitary image of the Nigerian nation was presented by the government. The government seemed to imply that the value that flowed through the nation, thanks to its oil reserves, was somehow shared by all, rather than siphoned off

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

by an elite cabal of military officers and government officials who held government positions and therefore also controlled NNPC. Following the creation of the Pentagon's Excess Defense Articles Program, initiated in 2004, Nigeria became eligible to receive surplus U.S. military weapons and also military training coordinated by the U.S. Department of Defense (Klare, *Blood and Oil* 143). The Nigerian military's ability to protect the value it publicly lauded and ensure it continued to flow into the pockets of those who wield power within the nation was strengthened in the process. Protecting Nigeria's oil sources is of vital importance not only to Nigeria itself but also to the United States. Michael Klare notes that unnamed U.S. officials went as far as to inform Greg Jaffe of the *Wall Street Journal* of the possibility of assisting the Nigerian military in its oil protection mission by deploying U.S. military personnel to the nation in the event that it was deemed necessary: "a key mission for U.S. forces would be to ensure that Nigeria's oil fields, which in the future could account for as much as 25 percent of all U.S. oil imports, are secure" (*Blood and Oil* 144). The tantalising illusion of a shared cake in Nigeria was, and remains, just that, a mirage masking the truth of the prebendalism that was occurring, and continues to occur, within the nation.

Apter refers to rampant prebendalism multiple times in his chronicling of the history of the Nigerian government's role in the management of oil wealth. Some of the policies implemented by the government were beneficial on paper; however, in practice, they led to a greater accumulation of wealth among fewer people. A government mandate that foreign oil interests sell forty per cent of their company shares to local businessmen created what became known as *Mr 40 percenters*. These local investors attained their forty per cent share in the companies, and rather than offering a powerful voice or assuming control of operations, they rested on their laurels and accumulated wealth while the foreign oil companies continued to do as

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

they pleased within Nigeria's territory. The wealth that these 40 percenters accumulated was not invested in a productive manner, which would benefit their communities; instead, it favoured patterns of conspicuous consumption (Apter 37).

A second example of the misappropriation of funds that was rife within the corridors of power was known as the fifty per cent rule. Government probes into financial mismanagement were usually ineffective if this rule was assiduously followed. A tacit understanding among government officials stipulated that fifty per cent of all bribes must be sent up the chain of command to ensure that everyone received their share of the spoils (Apter 40). As long as this rule was followed, government probes would be stymied, or simply not initiated at all. As the benefits of being a member of the government grew, ethnic conflict began to follow a similar trajectory: "Competition for the rising national cake intensified ethnic sectionalism and parochialism" (Apter 40).

Interestingly, Nigeria paralleled the United States in the manner in which it interpreted bourgeois lifestyles. Advertisements for televisions and cameras that were run in Nigeria were "a celebration of the new Nigerian family in Western bourgeois form" (Apter 42). Habila illustrates how these commodities became a symbol of newfound wealth in *Oil on Water*. Commodities became the visual proof of Nigeria's booming economy. They completed the illusion of industrial development within the nation, as it was oil money that made the importation of luxury consumer goods possible in the first place. To many a layperson, Nigeria's economy was thriving. However, in reality, it was, and still is, entirely reliant on one commodity, the extraction and refining of which were carried out by foreign companies (Apter 44).

Former Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida's kleptocratic reign, which ran from August 1985 to August 1993, highlights one of the greatest flashpoints of ethnic discord in Nigeria, the power of the northern-based Hausa-Fulani. Shortly after he

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

came to power, Babangida became involved with a bank known as Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI). Babangida's godfather was the chairman of BCCI's Nigerian affiliate. Apter asserts that Babangida's association with this bank unequivocally illustrates the power that the Hausa-Fulani northern bloc holds: "The BCCI link pinpoints with almost topological precision how international finance and fraud, on the one hand, and national banking and petroleum revenues, on the other, were coordinated by the northern-based bloc of old power and new wealth known as the Kaduna Mafia" (236).[28] Hausa-Fulani dominance of Nigerian society, politics, and government did not begin nor end with Babangida.[29]

The Hausa had long dominated the north of the country, establishing Islamic emirates before the British colonisation of the nation. Fulani cattle-raising nomads began migrating westward into Hausa lands over the past several centuries. These nomads established villages on Hausa lands and traded with the Hausa people. Conflicts arose over resources and during droughts, sparking a "Fulani-led intra-Muslim holy war and the founding of the Sokoto Caliphate" (Cohen and Goldman 100). Fulani leaders took control of Hausa states, intermarried with the ruling Hausa families and settled into the ruling Hausa households. Due to this intermixing, "by the twentieth century, the ruling elements of Hausaland were often referred to as Hausa-Fulani" (Cohen and Goldman 100).

With the large Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups seemingly unable to impede Hausa-Fulani dominance of the postcolonial Nigerian State, it is clear that the Ogoni and the Igbo people, on whose land most of the country's oil resources could be found, were not in a strong position to resist the will of the central government, and by

[28] Kaduna is located in North-Central Nigeria between Kano and Abuja.

[29] Northern Muslim and member of the Hausa Murtala Muhammad, though not directly involved in the coup d'état that brought him to power, nevertheless gained control of Nigeria in 1975 until his assassination a year later. Interestingly, unlike Babangida, Muhammad did not seek to reinforce Hausa-Fulani dominance of the country; in fact, he won broad support from the citizenry due to his policies and his decisiveness (Lovejoy 68).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

extension, the Hausa-Fulani who dominated it. Gendered violence has also been a disturbing issue in Nigeria, with a particular incident from Babangida's reign illustrating the similarities between women and the Ogoni as marginalised and subjugated people within their own nation. During Babangida's reign,

> Government raised the domestic price of petrol, increasing transportation costs of food commodities that were passed on to consumers, adding to inflation. With characteristically inverted logic, the government then blamed market women for greedy and unpatriotic pricing – as if they were responsible for the rising costs – and periodically mowed down their stalls with armored vehicles. (Apter 250)

This incident is a vivid illustration of the shared situation in which the Ogoni and many, if not most, women in Nigeria have found themselves. Okorafor's *Lagoon* clearly delineates the issue of gender-based violence in Nigerian society. The Hausa-Fulani men who control the government are shown to be unwilling to publicly accept blame for any of the ills within the nation they govern. Their preference is to outsource blame to minorities and "others" while invoking the nebulous term patriotism as a stick with which to beat them. This contrived social narrative, which places citizens into the binary categories of patriotic and unpatriotic, a trope that is ironically also trotted out at moments of convenience in the United States, is created to ensure public buy-in and acceptance of government policy and/or the gratuitous use of violence to deflect from the government's own failings.

The baton of patriotism was also, unsurprisingly, wielded against the Ogoni for their refusal to forsake their traditional lands and yield their right of ownership to the rapacious central government. Apter illustrates how the usage of the term patriotism in relation to the Ogoni strayed into the kind of colonial rhetoric that many would associate with the British in his observation that the Ogoni "were portrayed as subversives and saboteurs, as unpatriotic vermin on the national body, and as a

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

backward and subhuman minority 'tribe'" (252). This rhetoric aligns with European colonialist rhetoric, in which a binary was created between savagery and civility. Ghosh outlines this binary classification in *The Nutmeg's Curse*. Ghosh states, "The war against vitalism would go hand in hand with the expansion of European projects of colonialism and conquest. An essential element of these projects was the idea that only 'savages' and 'primitives' believe that the Earth – or earthly entities like forests and volcanoes – have qualities that elude human perception" (87).

The Nigerian national press, many of whose outlets were government-controlled, also embraced this form of colonialist rhetoric to discredit and dismiss the Ogoni, as it likened them to "pygmies of a lower evolutionary order" (Apter 259). The government's PR campaign against the Ogoni was decidedly effective as "the majority of Nigerians did not really care about the tiny, relatively isolated 'tribe' of folk who were considered scarcely human, happy to be fishing their mangrove creeks and planting their gardens, cut off from the modern world" (Apter 259). Ghosh notes that "Those who are most attentive to environmental change are, more often than not, people who are at the margins, people whose relationship to the soil, or the forest, or the water are minimally mediated by technology" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 150). This statement can be seen to be true in relation to the Ogoni. The Ogoni were perceptive to change as the environment they relied on to sustain their mode of life was destroyed by not just a symbol of, but also a driver of modernity, in the shape of oil. No doubt the categorisation of the Ogoni as being of a lower evolutionary order was bolstered by their seemingly archaic lifestyle, in which they rely on the environment to provide subsistence, and therefore oppose the exploitation of a modern resource that provides a radically different lifestyle that is deemed to be infinitely superior to their subsistence lifestyle.

The moment things began to fall apart for the Ogoni occurred in 1914 when the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

British forcibly incorporated the Ogoni and their lands into the Obopo Division within Calabar Province. From this point onwards, the Ogoni were subjected to remote administration and taxation by the British before independence, and by the Nigerian government after independence. Assimilation into a larger administrative unit disempowered the Ogoni as they were overwhelmed by the dominant Igbo interests in the Eastern region, into which they were unwillingly annexed by the 1951 constitution. Today, as I have noted, Ogoniland forms part of Rivers State. Rivers State was created in 1967 and is the epicentre of Nigeria's oil industry and therefore the bulk of the nation's economy. Maximilian Feldner has outlined the post-independence failure of Nigeria to create an independent, stable national economy that does not overly rely on oil extraction:

> Following the country's independence, a combination of subservience and corruption prevented Nigeria from building an independent national economy. Its elites became "commission agents of the big commercial houses and mining companies that the departing British still controlled, while also moving to capture political power in order to use it as an instrument to secure more economic benefits for themselves" (Okonta and Douglas 2001,28). This situation attracted powerful transnational companies such as Royal Dutch Shell, which have been active in Nigeria for many decades now. While presenting a benevolent image, Shell has "quietly and unobtrusively worked its way to the epicentre of power over the years" (58), taking advantage of the "symbiotic relationship" with local politicians and soldiers in the mutual interest for control over the region and its oil. (517)

The nation's first oil refinery was commissioned by Shell-BP in Port Harcourt in 1965. In 1978, the refinery was nationalised under the NNPC (Raimi). Incongruously, as far as it concerns the Ogoni, Rivers State's official nickname is the "Treasure base of the nation" (Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission). This treasure that the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

post-colonial nation claims as its own has been nothing short of a calamity for Ogoniland and its people. Though it may be the treasure base of the nation, that treasure has also been the base of destruction, disillusionment, displacement, and despair for the Ogoni and their land. Long before the Ogoni suffered the colonial rhetoric and resource colonialism (one might go so far as to say kleptocracy) of the Hausa-Fulani-dominated post-independence government and its international petro-industrial allies, they suffered what Apter called "internal colonialism" at the hands of the Igbo, who employed divide-and-conquer tactics similar to those used by the British (261-2).[30] This unceasing, prolonged oppression and ostracisation that the Ogoni have suffered inspired Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues to create the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), of which Saro-Wiwa soon became its figurehead (Boyd x).

Saro-Wiwa, a renowned writer and activist, remains a global symbol of resistance. Saro-Wiwa was imprisoned on multiple occasions before being executed by the regime of General Sani Abacha on claims of "incitement to murder" after an Ogoni protest descended into a riot, leading to the deaths of four Ogoni elders. The fact that Saro-Wiwa was not present at the event but was, in fact, "in a car some miles away" was immaterial to the Nigerian military government, whose kangaroo court sentenced Saro-Wiwa and eight co-defendants to death (Boyd xii). Also, during Babangida's reign, Saro-Wiwa was imprisoned on spurious charges and held in Port Harcourt for a month and a day, which led him to write *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary.* In his diary, Saro-Wiwa highlights the bureaucracy of Nigeria along

[30] Ogoniland received no direct investment from Shell, which had been awarded the oil concession in the region: "Company undertakings such as the Ogoni Rural Community Project existed in name only, with diverted funds counting as tax deductions" (Apter 263). Furthermore, Ogoniland received no revenue from the oil that Shell extracted. The Nigerian Federal Government reduced the share of oil revenues given to the areas in which it was drilled from 20% down to 1.5%, which ended up never being paid. Federal revenues given to Rivers State went to the Ijaw majority within the state, depriving the Ogoni of even the most basic investment (Apter 265).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

with the ethnic divisions that vitiate the nation.

Saro-Wiwa remarks on the proliferation of Ogoni prisoners in the Port Harcourt prison, despite the Ogoni being a tribe of only around half a million people at the time (Boyd x). He notes that one-third of the prisoners in Port Harcourt prison are Ogoni, along with many of the guards, as he asks rhetorically, "Who wanted to work in the prison except the condemned of the earth?" (228). This situation somewhat echoes that of the United States, where a disproportionate number of incarcerated individuals are African-American or from minority backgrounds.[31] Saro-Wiwa questions who would want to work in the prison due to both the appalling state of the prison itself and the pittance of a salary that is afforded to its staff. The prison was built during colonial times and was the largest in West Africa at that time. Saro-Wiwa notes that it was "well laid out, with plenty of open space for fresh air, and all educational facilities, such as workshops and library […] But everything was in disrepair, everything was collapsing, everything was gone" (224). In what sounds like an allegory of Nigeria as a whole, similar to Saro-Wiwa's fictional Jebs prison, Saro-Wiwa describes the cause of the dire state of the prison as follows, "The negligence, callousness and incompetence of some thieving officials who had run the place over the years had a lot do with [its current parlous state]" (225). In Saro-Wiwa's satirical fiction *Prisoners of Jebs*, the prison stands as a symbol of Nigeria itself. Saro-Wiwa scathingly criticises all manner of officialdom and its excesses. Published in 1988, the events that transpire in the novel almost foreshadow some of the first-hand experiences that Saro-Wiwa would suffer in later life.

Highlighting the issues of ethnicity within Nigeria, Saro-Wiwa exhibits to the reader the general ethnic makeup of the prison population, along with some personal

[31] Data provided by *The Sentencing Project*, sourced from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, shows that in 2022, there were 1,196 black prisoners per 100,000 adults as opposed to 229 white prisoners per 100,000 adults in U.S. prisons.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

commentary on the circumstances which led these prisoners to Port Harcourt prison in the first place. Returning to the one-third of the prison population that is made up of Ogoni, Saro-Wiwa suggests that they had been "dumped there on minor charges, forgotten by the police and the judicial system which sent them there, with no one to take up their cases and give them justice" (*A Month and a Day* 228). Saro-Wiwa's words also ring true in the case of the United States' penal system, which is infamously heavy-handed in its punishment of ethnic minorities in drug cases.[32]

Another anecdote from *A Month and a Day* that highlights the unilateral abuse of power that leads to the imprisonment of Port Harcourt's inmates concerns Major-General Lekwot, the former governor of Rivers State, whom Saro-Wiwa alleges is "the victim of one of the worst cases of political injustice – the well-known Zangon Kataf affair" (230). The Zangon Kataf affair concerns an incident in which the minority Kataf tribe rose up against the Hausa-Fulani, who Saro-Wiwa describes as their "oppressors." Hausa-Fulani reprisals were swift and unjust. A sham tribunal was arranged, and a group of Kataf people who had nothing to do with the uprising were condemned to death. General Babangida commuted their death sentences to prison sentences. Hence, Major-General Lekwot was consigned to a lengthy term of detention in prison (230-31). Saro-Wiwa's description of the demographics of the prison highlights the abuses suffered by minority ethnic groups at the hands of the Hausa-Fulani-dominated government. Due process did not exist and was not expected in Nigeria at the time of Saro-Wiwa's writing. Even his release from prison seems

[32] Pamplin II et al highlight the structural racism in the United States that has led to harsher punishments being meted out to offenders from minority backgrounds. The author's write: "For decades, the primary policy approach to drug use in the United States has been to arrest, prosecute, and incarcerate as many people as possible for as long as possible. This approach has been ineffective in reducing drug use and is associated with increased drug-related harms, including nonfatal and fatal overdoses, injection-related endocarditis, and HIV and hepatitis C incidence. Strategies like mandatory minimum sentencing and disparate sentencing for crack versus powder cocaine have unjustly and disproportionately penalized Black and Hispanic/Latino people, making this set of policies a hallmark example of structural racism in the United States".

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

absurd.

He notes that his release from prison was ordered by "someone called Aikhomu, who was said to be Vice-President of some place called Nigeria" (237). Saro-Wiwa's amusing dismissal of the Nigerian nation in this instance serves to highlight the arbitrary nature of the postcolonial nation that is comprised of many people groups that have been forcibly assimilated due to borders imposed by European colonisers. He then humorously poses rhetorical questions regarding the chain of judicial command and the judicial agencies that should have been involved in the decision to release him before stating, "The court no longer mattered. A man called Aikhomu had decided" (237). Between his release from prison and the depths of officialdom and bureaucracy through which he and his family wade in attempts to have him transferred to Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital due to illness, the arbitrary nature of decision making in Nigeria is revealed. Those in positions of power within the security services have carte blanche to make decisions that override civil and judicial services.

Upon presenting a high court order for Saro-Wiwa's transfer to the hospital to the commissioner of police, Bayo Balogun, Balogun simply "threw the court order to the floor" (233). The power of the security services is unimpeachable, leading to corruption, cronyism and graft. Saro-Wiwa concludes his diary with an almost sardonic admiration for the efficiency of Nigeria's security services, as he states, "In a country where virtually nothing worked, the security services, armed with all the gadgets of modern invention, made sure all orders were carried out with military precision" (237-38). Similarly, the United States' military, the world's largest institutional consumer of oil, is armed with all of the gadgets of modern invention, and its spending power is utterly unrivalled globally. The power held by the Nigerian security services, a control that extends almost exclusively to one ethnicity, can often

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

lead to the misinterpretation of conflict within African nations as ethnically driven; however, Clement Mweyang Aapengnuo illuminates the fallaciousness of these assumptions.

Aapengnuo states that ethnicity is typically "a lever used by politicians to mobilize supporters in pursuit of power, wealth, and resources. While the ethnic group is the predominant means of social identity formation in Africa, most ethnic groups in Africa coexist peacefully with high degrees of mixing through interethnic marriage, economic partnerships, and shared values" (1). Inflammatory rhetoric can obfuscate the true source of conflict between ethnic groups, leading to superficial assumptions from external commentators. Aapengnuo illustrates this issue in the following excerpt: "The misdiagnosis of African conflicts as ethnic ignores the political nature of the issues of contention. People do not kill each other because of ethnic differences; they kill each other when these differences are promoted as the barrier to advancement and opportunity" (2). Michael Klare also discusses this misinterpretation, as he states, "When the divide between privileged and disadvantaged coincides with tribal or religious differences […] violence is a likely outcome. The Western press may describe such strife as 'ethnic' in character, but it comes largely from the perversive effects of oil production" (*Blood and Oil* 22). Nigeria provides a clear illustration of the impact that oil, combined with the privileges accorded to a particular group in society, can have.

Aapengnuo states that issues that are often described as ethnic conflicts arise in particular situations, situations he describes as follows:

> Multiethnic, underdeveloped societies when the behavior of the state is perceived as dominated by a particular group or community within it, when communities feel threatened with marginalization, or when no recourse for redressing grievances exists. Ethnic thinking and mobilization generally emerge from the resulting

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

inequitable access to power and resources and not from an intrinsic hatred. (2) What is at stake in many of the conflicts in Nigeria is the unequal access to the nation's fossil fuel resources and political power that is shared between the multitude of ethnic groups within the nation. The Ogoni suffer violence, displacement and disempowerment at the hands of Nigeria's state security forces, operating on behalf of the government due simply to the "great misfortune […] that their homeland happens to lie above a significant portion of Nigeria's oil reserves" (Boyd x).

Before continuing, I want to articulate that state bureaucracy in Nigeria does not unconditionally support a nebulous unified Hausa-Fulani agenda. Members of the Hausa-Fulani also suffer bureaucratic discrimination. In Nigeria,

> State and local governments have enormous influence […] controlling roughly 80 percent of the country's gross domestic product. In addition to the implications for resource allocation, local governments are responsible for classifying citizens as 'indigenes' or 'settlers.' Settlers are banned from holding some positions in state government, are not eligible for state education subsidies, and are restricted from owning land. In Plateau State, this translates into Hausa-speaking Muslims being classified as settlers even if their families have lived in the region for generations. (Aapengnuo 3)

Although the Hausa-Fulani have historically dominated the Nigerian national government, this does not equate to a scenario in which the tribe as a whole lives a detached Elysian existence while the rest of the nation suffers in abject poverty. The government and its security forces tend to take care of themselves, as can be seen by Babangida's amassing of a personal fortune that Apter estimated at between five and seven billion US dollars (Apter 236).

Returning to the plight of the Ogoni, their small number and lack of political power has left them in a defenceless position in regards to the advances of the

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rapacious central government. Aapengnuo notes that "in much of Africa, the executive rather than the legislative branch determines most land policies. Invariably, the ethnic group of the president benefits from these policies" (3). This situation has played out in an abundantly transparent manner in Nigeria, with the Ogoni falling foul of policies which led to a sense of unimpeachability among the security forces to the point that Bayo Balogun can throw court orders on the floor or a man called Aikhomu can make unilateral decisions as "the court no longer mattered" (*A Month and a Day* 237).[33] I will now turn to the United States to investigate the structure of feeling surrounding petroculture in a major consumer nation.

As we have seen in Updike's criticism of Munif's *Cities of Salt,* individualism is inarguably a central conceit of American cultural ideology; it is part of the "American way of life." Matthew Huber notes the many ways in which oil is implicated in the creation of the conditions that allowed for the lionising of individualism at the expense of the community, including the real estate development-automobility nexus in post-World War II America that laid the foundations for the atomised lifestyle now considered by many to be the natural way for humans to exist. Huber contends, "The single-family home is the most perfect expression of an individual wage worker's life as capital, the style and location of the home being a specific material indicator of one's own capital (savings) and wage-earning capacity" (81). Raising a family, being prudent with money, and working hard are all morally righteous activities in the cultural mindset of the colonial United States, a nation created to reflect an assiduous Protestant ethos. Thus, raising a family in a single-family home, earned through

[33] One of Aapengnuo's most pertinent suggestions to combat abuses of power is to diversify the security forces within African nations: "Key among […]state functions is minority participation within the leadership and ranks of the security sector. The military can be a unifying institution, creating bonds between ethnic groups, helping to forge a national identity for all ethnicities, providing youth an opportunity to travel and live throughout the nation, and allowing minorities to advance to positions of leadership through merit. Diversity in the security sector also has tangible benefits as ethnically representative police forces are linked with lower levels of conflict in diverse societies" (4).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

diligence and conscientious saving, speaks to the character of the homeowners themselves. *Black Water Rising*'s Jay Porter illustrates the prevalence of this mindset at the outset of the novel. Jay, recalling his younger days and his dreams of social equality, thought to himself, "There are other American dreams [than his own]. One is money, of course. A different kind of freedom and seemingly within his reach. If he works hard, wears a suit, plays by the rules" (11). Jay clearly outlines the social expectation among many Americans that working hard and playing by the rules should lead to financial stability and, therefore, to freedom.

In his analysis of a 1950s ESSO advertising campaign that proclaimed to the public that they need not concern themselves with the machinations that make individual life possible, Huber shows that American cultural ideology created the illusion that the material processes that ensure the possibility of an individual, atomised life need not concern the average citizen. ESSO's message focused on a "heroic entrepreneurial life constructed through individual efforts," and simultaneously relegated oil to a position of cultural obscurity (83). Accepting the atomisation of our social and cultural lives leads to a weakening of our collective ability to resist at a time when our collective influence over the planet's biosphere and various ecosystems has increased to the point that we can be considered a "geological force." Thus, it could be argued that our collective impotence in the face of climate disaster is a result of an unconscious acceptance of the cultural construct of individualism.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his essay "The Climate of History: Four Theses," charts the course of history that has seen humans graduate from biological agents to a "geological force." Chakrabarty argues that humans began to acquire the force of geological agents during the Industrial Revolution; however, this potency increased dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century, at the advent of what Steffen

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

et al. have termed "The Great Acceleration" (Chakrabarty 38-39). The ability of humankind to become geological agents can only be reached "historically and collectively, that is, when we have reached numbers and invented technologies that are on a scale large enough to have an impact on the planet itself" (Chakrabarty 39).[34] Here, the Western cultural focus on the individual stands in juxtaposition to the collective force of humanity that has reached the stage of geological agency. Literature, the arts, protest, and any expression of indignation at the systemic circumstances that have empowered big oil and precipitated global warming are rendered ineffective if they are individualised as opposed to collectivised. In fact, peaceful protesters are now being targeted by governments across the developed world, in some cases even being classified as terrorists.

In the United States, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), an Atlas affiliate, has been drafting legislation that Jeremy Walker describes as "radically pro-corporate, anti-labour and anti-climate legislation" with the intention of having it introduced by sympathetic politicians (112). One of the most insidious effects of the legislation that ALEC has drafted is the re-classification of non-violent environmentalists as terrorists, a designation that carries a particular heft in the American social and cultural psyche (Walker 117). Andy Parker's in-depth analysis of the 2006 Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA) highlights the efforts of ALEC to affect pro-corporate change in American legislation. Parker defines ALEC as a "conservative organization of state legislators," a classification that is more indirect

[34] The power required to support contemporary society's reliance on artificial intelligence, server farms, and automated machinery is on a vast scale. Ireland has become a hub for US tech giants who have built data centres and their Europe-Middle East-Africa (EMEA) headquarters in the country. Data from the Irish Central Statistics Office from 2023 shows that data centres consumed 21% of total metered electricity, a considerable leap from the 5% that data centres consumed in 2015 (Cso.ie). Guillaume Pitron states that in Dublin, "data centers now consume more energy than the city's population" (108). Given the increasing proliferation of data centres and the environmental impact that their thirst for power is having, Digital Cleanup Day was created in 2020. Its main goal is to inspire people to remove unnecessary or outdated files from their cloud accounts, thus reducing data centre power consumption.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

than that provided by Walker who suggests that ALEC is an Atlas "affiliate" (Parker 2; Walker 112). Parker's investigation focuses on model legislation produced by ALEC that is notably similar to AETA yet more forceful in tone.

Parker analyses the tone and language of ALEC's model legislation and advocates for the monitoring of new legislation that may emerge based on ALEC's bill, as he believes that it may come to pass in increments due to its "even harsher (than AETA)" propositions (2). The conservative, pro-corporate bent of ALEC's model bill comes as no surprise, as Parker reveals that its members are majority Republican (3). Parker notes that ALEC has several task forces, each of which is co-chaired by a public sector chair, in other words, a state legislator, and a private sector chair (3). The influence of corporate interests upon model bills introduced by ALEC is deliberately obfuscated to protect those interests. ALEC has also engaged in an advocacy role, promoting pro-corporate legislation drafted by other entities. In 2017, the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers formulated legislation that criminalised protests in the vicinity of critical infrastructure.[35] The state of Oklahoma passed the legislation, while ALEC continued to advocate in favour of the legislation with senators from other states (Westervelt and Dembicki).

Parker claims that ALEC treats corporate interests as "equal partners" in the creation of model legislation, thus granting them an incredible opportunity to craft bills to suit their personal agendas (3). In his analysis, Parker highlights the similarities between the AETA bill, signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2006, and the ALEC model bill that influenced its creation. The most galling aspect of the bill is the usage of the word terrorism, as the AETA bill expands the possible interpretations of terrorism far beyond the definition of terrorism in U.S. law at the

[35] A trade association that represents fossil fuel and petrochemical companies. The organisation claims to "advocate for public policy that benefits members, consumers, and the nation" (Afpm.org).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

time. Parker states that,

> AETA's use of the 'terrorism' label is inaccurate and misleading. Branding animal rights and environmental activists as 'terrorists' is excessively punitive and unfair. It is unfair because many of these crimes do not traditionally constitute 'terrorism,' which has been defined by United States law as 'premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents.' Given that AETA goes beyond physical damage to include economic damage (and even planning to inflict economic damage), labeling all of these actions as acts of terrorism is simply incorrect. (7)

Considering the mental associations that a large proportion of American citizens tend to conjure upon hearing the term terrorist, Parker fears that the act may result in judges or juries being swayed by the emotional association of the word with the traumatic events of 9/11 (7). AETA, therefore, allows peaceful protesters who "do economic harm – but no physical harm to an animal enterprise" to be charged as terrorists (Parker 6). In one fell swoop, AETA dismisses and criminalises decades of successful legal activism, such as boycotts, as acts of terrorism. One of the most latent ironies of this whole situation is that the United States, as noted by *Climate Rights International*, is a vocal advocate for the "internationally protected rights to freedom of expression and assembly," particularly when those rights are being infringed upon by authoritarian regimes in other countries, yet its legislature is adopting measures to criminalise peaceful protest domestically.

As I have previously mentioned, Ken Saro-Wiwa was in a car some miles away from the site of the protest that resulted in the deaths of four Ogoni elders, yet he was charged with incitement to murder. The Ogoni MOSOP movement gained a martyr but lost a leader and was weakened as a result. On March 14th, 1995, the U.S. Department of State issued a statement regarding the Nigerian government's actions

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

in dealing with Saro-Wiwa and other protesters who disrupted the oil industry in the southeast of the nation. According to Melissa Crow and Sophie Silberberg, "The Department of State expressed concern that persons charged with wrongdoing, including Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues, receive *fair and open trials*. The State Department's recommendations to the Nigerian government were to remove the bans on closed media houses, release or charge detainees, *respect due process*, and end harassment of government critics" (emphasis added). It is ironic that the contemporary United States, via AETA and "terrorism enhancements," seems to be ignoring the advice it gave Nigeria in the 1990s.

AETA is a fascinating case study into the power of corporate interests, uniting under the guidance of Atlas, to shape legislation in the United States. Although the bill specifically targets animal enterprises, it sets a legal precedent that can easily be taken up by corporate interests from other sectors, including the fossil fuel industry. The invocation of terrorism as a justification for heavy-handed police action has continued both in the United States and abroad. In 2016, Jessica Reznicek, an American climate activist who campaigned against the Dakota Access Pipeline, went from peaceful protest to destruction of property as she snuck into pipeline valve sites, set fire to equipment and burned holes in the pipeline. Reznicek saw her actions as nonviolent civil disobedience; however, the Justice Department persuaded a judge to increase Reznicek's sentence by applying a "terrorism enhancement" (Bruggeman et al.). Reznicek's attorney highlighted that the enhancement was applied "even though no person was hurt, no person was intended to be hurt, she wasn't charged with terrorism, and she didn't plead guilty to terrorism" (qtd. in Bruggeman et al.). The terrorism enhancement doubled Reznick's sentence. Paraphrasing the reaction of many critics who were shocked at the application of the enhancement, Bruggeman et al. state that critics see the application as "a broader push from the powerful oil industry to level

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

harsh penalties against activists who target energy infrastructure."

Kelcy Warren, CEO of Energy Transfer, the company building the Dakota Access Pipeline, claimed that "Everybody's afraid of these environmental groups and fear that it might look bad if you fight back with these people" (Bruggemal et al.). Oil companies have become increasingly aware of the potential for negative press and, as a result, are more active in avoiding it. In 2009, Shell reached a USD $15 million settlement with Ken Saro-Wiwa's family to prevent a human rights violation lawsuit from reaching court and thereby reigniting the press cycle surrounding Shell's corrosive actions in Ogoniland and against Saro-Wiwa in particular (Walonen 72). This settlement is a clear example of how energy companies, Shell obviously included, are adept at fighting back out of the public eye, having learned from the exposure Shell received for the part it played in the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a situation that certainly made the company "look bad," to use Kelcy Warren's words.

In a subtle hint as to potential covert dealings between oil companies and the United States government resulting in the heavy-handed sentence being passed down to Reznicek, Bruggeman et al. list some notable cases in which the defendants were not charged with terrorism despite intentionally killing civilians. These incidents, which importantly did not target energy infrastructure, include: the racially motivated 2015 Charleston church shooting in which nine African American churchgoers were murdered by white supremacist Dylann Roof; the 2017 Charlottesville car attack, once again perpetrated by a white-supremacist assailant.

While it is possible that certain conversations and backroom deals between corporate interests and the U.S. government never become known to the public, Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey has openly stated that the oil and gas industry has spent years trying to silence opposition, lobby the government to legislate more stringent penalties for protesters and to increase penalties for trespassing, damage and

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

destruction at energy infrastructure sites. The ultimate goal of the oil and gas industry, according to Senator Markey, is for protesters "to be charged as ecoterrorists, so that they are sentenced to longer time in prison as a deterrent against legitimate civil disobedience" (qtd. in Bruggeman et al.). Further clarification of the links between the energy industry and the government was provided in 2017 when eighty Republican and four Democratic members of Congress pushed the Justice Department to treat environmental protesters who engage in industrial sabotage as domestic terrorists. These members of Congress had received a combined thirty-six million dollars in campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry up to that point in their careers (Bruggeman et al.).

Amy Westervelt and Geoff Dembicki analysed the influence of Atlas Network think tanks on legal policy changes that favour the oil and gas industry in the United States and in a wider context.[36] Scrutinising the network's historical viewpoint on environmentalism, the authors highlight an unabashedly anthropocentric usage of language, which the Atlas member, the Mackinac Institute, used to dismiss early environmentalists; Mackinac branded them "anti-human" (Westervelt and Dembicki). Such a binary characterisation, echoing the tone of George W. Bush's response to the 9/11 attacks in which he implicated the entire world by claiming, "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists," ignores the possibility of humans living in concert with nature and opts for an overly-simplistic with-the-humans or with nature framing (Bush). Ironically, President Bush's definition of what a terrorist is was far clearer and less generalised

[36] They noted that Frank Schäffler, a member of the German parliament, has used much of the same anti-regulatory rhetoric as the fossil fuel industry has used to fight gas bans in the United States. Two of Schäffler's key themes have been an accusation that new legislation would impinge on the public's freedom while also engaging in fearmongering by claiming that the government may enact a "heating ban" for private homes. Westervelt and Dembicki note that Schäffler's outsized influence on German politics, which grew at an astonishing rate in recent years, can be put down to his think tank joining the Atlas Network.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

than that being perpetuated by the likes of ALEC, other Atlas think tanks and conservative media two decades later.

Mackinac claims that the "anti-human" environmentalism it is railing against highlights an underlying "preference for nature over human beings" (Goodman and Stroup). Goodman and Stroup's chagrin at the notion of a preference for nature over humans is akin to the Christian teachings espoused by people such as Farris Wilks and countless other zealous Christians before him. It is, therefore, ironic that Goodman and Stroup liken environmentalists to religious zealots when, as I have already shown, Christian theological orthodoxy has often advocated for the theory that nature was created for humans to exploit. The false dichotomy of being either with humans or with nature enables Mackinac to construct a straw man argument in which it attacks nature and highlights its destructive capabilities as a means of deflecting from the core issues against which protesters are voicing their concerns. The anthropocentric views expressed have a notable echo of Christian fundamentalism. Protesters are often demonstrating against what Rob Nixon termed "slow violence." It is a variant of violence that appears banal in the face of the powerful forces of nature, something that Stroup and Goodman weaponise in their argument.

A form of slow violence can be seen in the seven thousand oil spills that occurred in the Niger Delta between 1970 and 2000, and the thousands more that have occurred since 2000 (Jue 171).[37] Inhabitants of the Niger Delta region and those who live in proximity to oil industry facilities have been forced to learn to live with this continual slow violence. These incessant spills are also examples of what Graeme MacDonald called "banal petro-violence," having become banalised by their sheer ubiquity ("Containing Oil" 45). Perhaps a portmanteau such as *banal slow*

[37] Shell publicly reported 1,010 oil leaks from 2011 to 2022, amounting to 17.5 million litres of oil (Craig).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

petro-violence might accurately summarise the situation experienced by Nigerians. However, the situation in the United States differs quite significantly from that in Nigeria.

In the U.S., one tends to find that the destructive effects of oil are concealed by a veneer of safety, which Graeme MacDonald has elaborated upon as follows: "Oil's general safety is punctuated by considerable spillage; highly publicized moments of catastrophic tanker or platform failure tend to obscure 'lesser' but frequent (and often under-reported) line faults and 'routine' spills" ("Containing Oil" 37).[38] This veneer of safety is crucial in maintaining the illusion that cost-cutting decisions made by oil companies do not result in indirect sacrifices of lives, both human and non-human, to boost corporate earnings.

Discussing Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben, LeMenager argues that Agamben revised Arendt's theory on the sacred nature of humanity by "urging a consideration of *homo sacer* as the modern everyman, the man who can be killed, without legal retribution, but not sacrificed" (106). The practices that the oil industry engages in in the Niger Delta, although not directly sacrificing human lives, nevertheless, due to a lack of regulation and an absence of a duty of care from the corporation to the inhabitants of the region it is exploiting, enable the oil companies to commit both ecocide and what we may term involuntary manslaughter. Many people die thanks to their proximity to oil facilities, their attempts to fight against the exploitation of their lands, or their attempts to earn a living through oil piracy, given that it is one of the only viable options that remains. We will see evidence of this in Habila's *Oil on Water*, in which Rufus' father's business partner dies in a fire sparked

[38] Apart from the Exxon-Valdez disaster, which is covered in Mei Mei Evans' *Oil and Water*, the Union Oil disaster in Santa Barbara, California serves as a great example of a highly publicized disaster, all the more so for its occurrence in an affluent area of a global north nation. On the 28th of January 1969, a blowout in an underwater oil well six miles off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, allowed 200,000 gallons of oil to escape to the surface It took eleven days to seal the well (T. Mitchell, "The Resources of Economics" 198). This highly publicized incident inspired the first Earth Day (Thulin).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

by pirated oil stored in a shed in their village.

Arguably, these deaths amount to sacrifice due to negligence and greed. Those in charge of the oil companies cannot but comprehend the inevitable outcome of their decision to maximise profit at the expense of implementing safety measures to prevent leaks, of swindling local communities out of their land ownership rights to gain access to subsurface oil deposits, or of funnelling so much money out of the country, or into the hands of a cabal of elites who work in cohort with the oil companies, that the only life that is left to those who do not abandon their ancestral lands is one fraught with danger and haunted by the spectre of death. The value placed on the lives of impoverished Niger Delta communities is irrefutably incompatible with that placed on the lives of middle-class Americans or the white hostages taken by insurgent groups in the Niger Delta, of which we will also see an example in *Oil on Water*.

MacDonald's phrase "highly publicized moments" is incredibly pertinent to the comparison between the events portrayed in the American and Nigerian petrofictions that I shall analyse. Much of the damage done to the ecosystem of the Niger Delta is effectuated not in a single dramatic event, in the manner of an Amoco Cadiz or Torrey Canyon-sized spill, but rather as slow violence over many years, while the ecological catastrophe that is illustrated in Oil and Water is the result of the very definition of a highly publicised moment.[39]

Cleveland, Ohio's Cuyahoga River, offers an interesting counterpoint to the Niger. As the home of Standard Oil, Cleveland is no stranger to the deleterious effects of the oil industry. Lorraine Boissoneault, in an article for *Smithsonian Magazine*,

[39] The Amoco Cadiz ran aground and sank barely two kilometres off the coast of Western Brittany, France. The spill has been called "one of the worst maritime disasters in human history," as over 220,000 tonnes of oil contaminated over 300km of coastline (Ahmed). The Torrey Canyon ran aground off the southwestern coast of England, between Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Over 100,000 tonnes of crude oil spilled out of the wrecked ship (Bell and Cacciottolo).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

illustrates the marked difference between the United States and Nigeria when it comes to dealing with river borne pollution. Boissoneault observes that, "For more than a century, the Cuyahoga River had been prime real estate for various manufacturing companies. Everyone knew it was polluted, but pollution meant industry was thriving, the economy was booming, and everyone had jobs." One immediately apparent difference between the two regions is the prosperity of those who lived within the vicinity of the polluted rivers. Boissoneault highlights that pollution in the Cuyahoga River was of little concern to most Cleveland residents for almost a century, as they benefited from the industries that caused the pollution. Employment opportunities were accessible to all in Cleveland, unlike the residents of the Niger Delta. The situation in Cleveland changed in 1969.

On June 22nd 1969, an oil slick on the Cuyahoga River caught fire. The fire was neither unique nor potent, and yet its sociocultural legacy is outsized. *Time* magazine published an article on the fire. This was followed by a *National Geographic* feature dubbed "Our Ecological Crisis" that also discussed the fire. The fire occurred at an important moment in U.S. history. It was the same year as the Union Oil spill in Santa Barbara, a catalyst for the Earth Day movement. As the pressure of public sentiment regarding the environment began to grow, the U.S. government was compelled to establish the Environmental Protection Agency in January 1970. Boissoneault links the growing environmental awareness in Cleveland with its well-known position as a former industrial powerhouse turned rust belt economic basket case.[40] She states, "That the Cuyahoga fire evolved into one of the great disasters of the environmental crisis tells us something about Americans' growing suspicion of industrial landscapes, a suspicion encouraged by the decreasing benefits they derived from such places."

[40] The city of Cleveland defaulted on loans to six local banks and became the first U.S. city since the Great Depression to default on loans (Larkin).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Once the American public's structure of feeling regarding large industries, oil included, and the pollution they create compared to the benefits they offer began to slide in the direction of that experienced in the Niger Delta, the narrative shifted dramatically, and most importantly, action was taken to ameliorate the situation. This has not been seen in Nigeria. To crudely summarise the situation, it can be implied that the public began to care about nature and environmental pollution as soon as they stopped deriving economic benefits from it. Oil companies are aware of this propensity to care about an important issue only when one is not benefiting from it or when one is directly suffering its negative consequences.

The Exxon-Valdez disaster, which inspired the plot of Evans' *Oil and Water*, was both devastating and egregious; however, it is patently incommensurable to the consistent state of calamity suffered by the Niger Delta, which, according to Rob Nixon, is an "enduring, incremental disaster, however, [that] has lacked a focal, fiery, news-grabbing explosion – and a spillcam" (274). The news-grabbing images of violence that circulate within and emanate from the Niger Delta often serve to camouflage the slow violence of oil extraction further. Philip Aghoghovwia reveals this issue in his essay titled "Nigeria." Aghoghovwia focuses on images of violence that are produced and circulated by a group known as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Rufus, the protagonist in Habila's *Oil on Water*, interacts with a fictionalised militant group during the novel. He does not pass moral judgment as might be expected in Western media. Rufus understands, at least to some degree, the reason for the group's actions. MEND, to highlight the injustices suffered by the Indigenous peoples of the Niger Delta, resorts to violence as a means of drawing attention to their plight: "The political reality of cultural expression in the Niger Delta, which seeks to make visible the felt experience of petro-injustice, stages violence as a form of performance" (241). Aghoghovwia argues that these images,

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

which include photographs of Western hostages with guns pointed at their heads, are the "visible expression of the experience of violence that is felt but eludes visibility because of the nature of its operation in the Niger Delta" (241). These images serve only to deflect attention from the slow violence caused by the oil being pumped out of the region to supply Global North forecourts, as in the absence of a "news-grabbing explosion – and a spillcam," they provide the most memorable images of violence in the region. John Green further clarifies this issue in his analysis of what CNN deems newsworthy, as he states, "So much of what actually changes in human life isn't driven by events, but instead by processes, which often aren't considered news" (128). The root cause of these hostage-taking events is a complex, protracted process involving multiple actors that requires far more attention to detail and, crucially, more airtime to be comprehensively explained. However, Nigerian petrofiction could offer a means to counter the narratives that unfold in Western news media.

Many Nigerian petrofictions relate the ineffectuality of the government in addressing inequality and poverty in a patently resource-rich nation and in managing the environmental negligence of the foreign oil companies that exert so much power over the country. These novels do not posit oil as a curse; rather, they often see the intertwining agendas of multinational oil companies and local government as the true curse that has befallen the nation. In Chris Abani's *Graceland*, Elvis critiques the underinvestment in infrastructure and the rampant culture of grifting among people who hold all manner of official positions. His critique is immediately rebuked, to which he replies: "That is the trouble with this country. Everything is accepted. No dial tones or telephones. No stamps in post offices. No electricity. No water. We just accept" (58). In Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, Obi ponders corruption in Nigeria as he wonders, "what kind of democracy can exist side by side with so much corruption and ignorance?" (456). Furthermore, in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*,

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Rufus defends the local Nigerian people who stand accused of vandalising the infrastructure of foreign oil companies. He declares, “I don’t blame them for wanting to get some benefit out of the pipelines that have brought nothing but suffering to their lives, leaking into the rivers and wells, killing the fish and poisoning the farmlands” (103). The fact that Rufus highlights the desire of the local populace to “get some benefit” from the oil reserves that lie beneath their ancestral land separates the resource itself from the powerful nexus that monopolises access to it. Rufus’ statement also highlights the total lack of investment or economic benefits that necessitated the creation of MOSOP as an advocacy vehicle for the Ogoni people, as unlike Clevelanders pre-1969, they did not even receive decent jobs from the polluting industry that devastated their homeland.

At this juncture, it is important to acknowledge that North American petrofiction narratives, despite the real-world differences between Nigeria and the U.S. that inspire their creation, cannot be dismissed as uniformly realist or as systematically structured around the fallout from real-world, highly publicised events. I specify North American in this instance because I feel that Canadian author Warren Cariou’s “An Athabasca Story” is very instructive. Minority and marginalised groups in Global North nations often suffer under economic and social conditions that lead to the creation of petro-narratives that do not acquiesce to the dominant Global North narratives or conform to what Updike might call a Western novel. As settler colonial states, both the United States and Canada share some historical similarities.

Warren Cariou, who was born into a family of mixed Métis and European heritage, creates plots that are “deliberately insensible or irrational” as a means of rebutting the dominant logic of petromodernity (McHolm 430). Irrational, in this instance, signifies strategic irrationality as opposed to nonsensical writing. Cariou’s writing refutes the rationality of both the colonial state and petromodernity, a nexus

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

that dominates the agenda in North America and arguably also on a global scale. We will encounter an example of strategic irrationality in Locke's *Black Water Rising*.

I will now turn to my reading of Attica Locke's *Black Water Rising* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*. I will begin the following chapter by briefly addressing LeMenager's reading of the two novels, before turning to my own interpretation of each novel individually, and expanding upon the groundwork that LeMenager has laid.

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Chapter Three: Delta Narratives: Attica Locke's *Black Water Rising* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*

Before I turn to my own reading of and interpretation of both *Black Water Rising* and *Oil on Water*, I would like to begin by briefly addressing the comparison that Stephanie LeMenager made between the two novels. LeMenager's comparison inspired her theorisation of plotting against oil. LeMenager contends that "Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Attica Locke's *Black Water Rising* plot against oil, if we conceive of 'plot,' after Peter Brooks, as the interpretive activity that constructs 'a story of the crime' otherwise unavailable to the reader" (124). These novels do so by engaging in a form of detective fiction, a novelistic style which, "in the twentieth-century United States has been conceived as an 'oppositional discourse,' a response to the decenteredness and privatization of modern life, where social relations, laboring bodies, and material infrastructures have become difficult to see" (LeMenager 124). Locke's novel provides a rare example of US literature that consciously attempts to place oil firmly in the reader's sightlines. Imre Szeman has argued that,

> From the perspective of the United States, oil is simply what makes the country 'go,' and in a way that doesn't necessitate comment or concern; as a result, it gets lost to the background of the physical apparatus within and against which social, cultural, and political life is played out, no more worthy of comment than furniture or the asphalt covering its streets – indeed, less so. (229)

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Black Water Rising refuses to allow oil to get lost in the background. The novel unflinchingly reveals the oil industry's effects on the social, cultural, and political life of Houston and its environs, ranging from the racial divisions it promotes among the city's unions to the political power it endows on oil CEO Thomas Cole. *Oil on Water* plots against oil by presenting the reader with a detective story that reveals oil's insidious effects on the Niger Delta region during the course of an investigation into the kidnapping of a British woman named Isabel Floode, who is married to an oil company executive. Both of the aforementioned novels feature the word water in their titles. I would like to briefly discuss the role of water before delving into a deeper analysis of the plots of *Black Water Rising* and *Oil on Water*.

Water is crucial to the plots of not just *Oil on Water* and *Black Water Rising* but also to Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* and Mei Mei Evans' *Oil and Water*. LeMenager notes that Habila "recognizes that water can do imaginative work beyond conventional European-American cultural constructs such as the sublime and the frontier" (125). Furthermore, LeMenager astutely points out that bodies of water "carry some of oil's worst external costs" (137). Before turning to my reading of *Black Water Rising*, it is crucial to underscore the cultural importance of water in Nigerian culture, as water is fundamental to the plots of all four novels, yet its cultural significance differs quite dramatically. To do so, it is necessary at this juncture to turn to *Lagoon*. My brief analysis of *Lagoon* is intended to foreground how aquatic landscapes form a critical element of Nigerian traditions and cultural understandings of the world.

In *Lagoon*, the ocean is a thriving ecosystem replete with non-human life that, significantly, interacts with and affects humans throughout the plot of the novel. In traditional Nigerian cultures, water and the ocean are not framed as an unknown wilderness, as is often seen in Western cultures. *Lagoon* eschews a Western tradition

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of positing aliens as an existential threat to humanity. In fact, it is the aliens who arrive in the Gulf of Guinea to rid Nigeria of oil, who eventually reshape Nigeria's interactions with the environment. Whereas it is relatively common in Western cultural thought to perceive aliens as invaders hell-bent on aping Western capitalism by dominating the earth's natural systems with the express goal of bleeding the planet dry before moving on to decimating another unwitting host, the aliens in *Lagoon* arrive intending to cooperate with the Lagosians to live harmoniously as they declare, "We can work with you people […] And we will. We're coming" (Okorafor 40). There is a stark difference between the usually aggressive aliens seen in Western culture and the more benign aliens represented in *Lagoon*.[41] Melody Jue argues, "Because *Lagoon* takes place in Africa rather than the Americas, it seems more plausible to see the aliens in *Lagoon* as benign and in the tradition of Mami Wata, rather than of abductors akin to European slave traders" (179). The aliens in *Lagoon* do indeed abduct humans; they take Adaora, Anthony, and Agu. However, there are no nefarious intentions behind their actions. They wish to use the three aforementioned characters as envoys through whom to make contact with Lagos as a whole. As Jue has noted, these aliens echo the tradition of Mami Wata.

In Nigerian culture, Mami Wata is a water deity, or spirit, whose name is a pidgin translation of Mother Water. Interestingly, many pay tribute to Mami Wata as a deity of fortune, believing that she can bring either good or bad fortune in the form of money (Caputo). Mami Wata appears to have been conceived through various local

[41] H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* (1898) may be the most prominent example of this trope of alien aggression. Ironically, the novel was based on British colonisation of Tasmania and the ensuing conflict that eliminated the island's Indigenous people. Ghosh notes that Wells uses this historical event as an inspiration for his novel, but he reverses the scenario by making Britain the site of colonial invasion (*Nutmeg's Curse* 54). The shock factor associated with Wells's novel, and also its wide reach, illustrates a prominent issue related to the global hierarchy of nations and people groups. Few people are aware of the devastation wrought upon Tasmania by the British, yet a work of fiction that saw Britain colonised became so famous globally that it inspired a radio drama by Orson Welles, multiple films, theatrical productions, and television spin-offs.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

and international cultural influences. Henry John Drewal remarks that Mami Wata is "believed to have 'overseas' origins, and depictions of her have been profoundly influenced by representations of ancient, indigenous African water spirits, European mermaids and snake charmers, Hindu gods and goddesses, and Christian and Muslim saints" (60). Through a complex process of assimilating foreign influences with traditional local beliefs, the contemporary vision of Mami Wata was created. In contrast to the modern representation of Mami Wata as a capitalist deity, *Lagoon* portrays Lagos' future exchanges with the waters that surround it not as a capitalistic exploitation of a buried carbon resource for the creation of surplus value but rather as a respectful, enlightened relationship of coexistence without exploitation. In *Lagoon*, the water spirit echoes Ghosh's description of Indonesian volcanoes in *The Nutmeg's Curse*.

Ghosh has stated that in Indonesia, a volcano "is almost always 'a spiritual as well as a geothermal entity – a vengeful and angry geospirit'" (33). Volcanoes are, therefore, simultaneously capable of shaping history and also of telling stories. Water can be seen as occupying this role in *Lagoon* and *Oil on Water*, as it plays a substantial role in shaping both the plots of the novels and the historical and geographical realities that shape the structures of feeling for the characters within them. Furthermore, Ghosh states that "The Indonesian reverence for volcanoes is a matter of frustration […] for Islamic and Christian fundamentalists, who regard such beliefs with abhorrence" (33). Nigerian novels also illustrate this abhorrence on the part of imported religions, particularly Christian fundamentalists; however, in their case, the abhorrence is reserved for the worship of water, forests and the animist spirits that inhabit these areas. *Lagoon* and Achebe's African Trilogy novels all illustrate this reality. I will touch on this in more depth in my discussion of *Lagoon*. Now that Okorafor's *Lagoon* has assisted in establishing the significance of water in

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Nigerian culture, let me return to Le Menager's discussion of water.

In her discussion of water, LeMenager points out that the collective response by the U.S. government and BP after the Deepwater Horizon blowout was to sacrifice the water for the sake of the shore as the toxic substance Corexit – which is manufactured by petroleum companies and is used as a solvent to disperse oil slick – was liberally sprayed all across the areas of the Gulf of Mexico that were affected by the spill, "for the purpose of reducing the quantity of tarballs on beaches and other visible evidence of the oil slick" (LeMenager 125). Interestingly, we see a similar ploy by the fictional version of Exxon, known as Mammoth Petroleum, in Mei Mei Evans' *Oil and Water*, as the company rushes to cleanse coastal areas of visible signs of spillage, drawing the ire of local residents who believe that this is simply a "show-and-tell" exercise for the benefit of the news cameras (125). These threats to the ecosystems of both the waters and the coastal areas of the United States are not extraordinary or uncommon.

Oil industry facilities in Global North nations tend to be consciously constructed to be as minimally invasive as possible. Whether it be the careful creation of the THUMS islands[42] at Long Beach in California or the hidden oil wells of Los Angeles, such as the San Vicente Drill Site secluded behind the famous Beverly Center, which is located less than a kilometre from the opulent neighbourhood of Beverly Hills, many oil facilities are well-hidden in affluent regions of the United States. Facilities that are not directly related to the extraction process, such as refineries or storage facilities, are generally located either far from prosperous cities or in areas where the

[42] A series of artificial islands whose moniker derives from the names of the oil companies that established drilling on these sites: Texaco, Humble, Unocal, Mobil and Shell. The islands are "decorative" (Ruiz). The islands were decorated by landscape architect Joseph Linesch, who was well-known for decorating theme parks such as Disney World, Busch Gardens, and Universal Studios. In 1962, voters in Long Beach approved "controlled exploration and exploitation of the oil and gas reserves" beneath the site where the islands would be built. Furthermore, the voters added a caveat to their approval that the islands could not look like "oil digging operations." A beautification clause was inserted to prevent the islands from becoming like nearby Signal Hill, nicknamed porcupine hill due to its abundance of oil derricks (Addison).

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demographics include predominantly minority and/or deprived people groups. Examples include the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), which was created as a direct response to the energy crisis of 1973 when Middle Eastern oil producers refused to sell to the West as punishment for U.S. support for Israel during the Yom Kippur War. The largest of the four major SPR sites can be found in the small town of Freeport, Texas, roughly seventy kilometres south of Greater Houston (Baraniuk). Chemical plants and oil refineries are also heavily concentrated in the southern United States. A pertinent example is what Ghosh refers to as Louisiana's "chemical corridor," an area with a large African-American population in which a multitude of petrochemical factories dump dangerous chemicals into the water, air, and ground, greatly increasing incidences of cancer among the local populace (*Nutmeg's Curse* 70). These petrochemical facilities required large swathes of land, which were readily available in the South as they were generally purchased from former plantation owners. The one-hundred-and-fifty-mile stretch of the Gulf Coast that Ghosh termed the "chemical corridor" has also earned the nickname "Cancer Alley" due to the negative health impact that the oil and chemical facilities have had on the populace (Huber 68-69). Oil is so inescapable in this part of the U.S. that even the large wildlife refuge located between Beaumont, Texas and Lafayette, Louisiana, bears the family name of Standard Oil's founder, John D. Rockefeller. This discussion of the SPR leads me directly into a key point of the plot of Locke's *Black Water Rising*.

In *Black Water Rising*, water plays a crucial role in revealing the oil industry's, most specifically Cole Oil Industries', nefarious and criminal actions in the city of Houston and its surroundings.[43] The novel's opening scene takes place on the Buffalo

[43] Stephanie LeMenager interprets Cole Oil Industries as "perhaps a nod to Koch Industries." Given the far-reaching influence of Koch Industries through the funding it has provided for Atlas Network think tanks, George Mason University, and Antony Fisher (whose Institute of Economic Affairs was the forerunner to the Atlas Network), LeMenager's observation appears well-founded. Cole Oil Industries' CFO Thomas Cole is portrayed by Locke as akin to a ventriloquist controlling the city of Houston

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Bayou, a river that flows through Houston and whose banks are densely populated with oil industry facilities. Jay Porter, the novel's lawyer protagonist, and his wife Bernie are taking a private evening cruise along the Bayou when their reverie is disturbed by the sound of screams and struggling on one of the river's embankments. A woman's body drops into the water, prompting Jay to dive in and rescue her. Jay and Bernie drive the woman, whom the reader later learns is connected to Thomas Cole of Cole Oil Industries, to a police station. At this moment, Jay and the reader know nothing about the woman. She remains anonymous. Upon dropping her outside a police station, Jay expeditiously drives away as "just the idea of being anywhere near a police station at this time of night […] tangled up in some white woman's mess makes him more than a little dizzy" (22). Jay will later learn that the woman, whose name is Elise Linsey, is connected to Thomas Cole through a shell company known as Stardale Development, a connection that is only revealed to him by chance due to black water rising ominously out of an undisclosed SPR site. Thomas Cole's role as a ventriloquist in the city of Houston will become readily apparent thanks to Jay's detective-like attempts to untangle a sinister plot that is only brought to his attention by water, a subtle hint as to the incompatibility of oil and water.

In the course of its plot against oil, *Black Water Rising* thrusts the SPR into the reader's consciousness, illuminating a reserve that many may be unfamiliar with, in much the same way that songs about the locations of the French nuclear waste repositories aim to keep knowledge of such locations alive, as noted by Srećko Horvat. During Jay's investigation into the chain of events that led to him pulling Elise Linsey out of the Buffalo Bayou, he is spurred to track down a man named Erman Joseph Ainsley of High Point, Texas. Ainsley was brought to Jay's attention via an article in the *Houston Chronicle* newspaper, in which Ainsley castigates the government and

(135).

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speaks of his desire to save his town.[44] Ainsley, a former salt mine worker, rails against the government's neoliberal project and its support for business at the expense of the working man. The novel is set in 1981, when Ronald Reagan became U.S. president. Ainsley criticises "this one they got up in Washington now," by which he means Reagan, and laments that he is "All business, that's how they do now. That's all these fellas care about" (314). William K. Tabb has argued that the Reagan administration's policies were effectively "the New York scenario writ large," referring to the neoliberal policies imposed upon the city of New York following its bankruptcy in the mid-1970s (15).[45] These policies, projected on a national scale, directly led to the empowerment of corporations like Cole Oil Industries, Locke's fictional megacorporation, and the disenfranchisement of people like Ainsley, as illustrated in *Black Water Rising*. Throughout the novel, the reader discovers that Thomas Cole, CFO of what is described as "the largest oil and gas company in the city," is effectively Houston's puppet master (37). The mere mention of his name can open doors in the city.

Ainsley's major gripe is that the government shut down the salt mine where he was employed and appropriated it as an SPR location. What was initially intended as a means of providing energy security for the United States during the 1973 energy crisis morphed into a method of market manipulation by the privately held Cole Oil Industries. The novel highlights factual historical events in the creation of the SPR

[44] High Point is, according to Locke, "a small community just outside Baytown" (280). Baytown sits on the eastern extreme of the Greater Houston Area, across the embryonic stage of the Buffalo Bayou and San Jacinto River Delta.

[45] Tabb, reviewing the New York City Fiscal Crisis of the 1970s, asserts that this crisis "with its resolution in budget cuts and austerity measures on the one hand, and incentives to business, the substitution of economic rationale for social welfare as the guiding force behind government spending, and taxation policies on the other – evolved as the model for the national economic policies of presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan" (9). The Fiscal Crisis was a complex issue that could not be pinned solely on overborrowing and economic recession. There was, in fact, a range of potential causes of the Fiscal Crisis, from white flight – the migration of middle-class white Americans to suburbs, abandoning the inner cities and leaving mostly minority populations in these now underserved and underinvested areas – to economic changes in technology (Tabb 3).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

facilities and proceeds to illustrate how the close relationship between the federal government and the oil industry could lead to market manipulation. Further critiquing the petro-government nexus that cost him his job, Ainsley states: "They making hand over foot, crying OPEC this and market forces that, and all the while they got a shitload of black gold running right underneath your feet. […] I'm short a pension now" (314). He concludes his impassioned defence of blue-collar workers by condemning the perceived immorality of the situation he finds himself in: "I'm just saying, I don't think it's right, that's all, to kill off a workingman so somebody else can make a dollar" (315). Jay's interview with Ainsley illustrates to the reader two issues that have shaped the Delta and much of the Gulf Region of the southern United States. The first issue is the government's neoliberal policies that "kill off a workingman," and the second is the collusion between the U.S. government and petroleum corporations, as Ainsley alleges.

Cole Oil's appropriation of Ainsley's former place of employment as a secret storage location for its oil is achieved not through an abundance of violence, but rather through financial might. Ainsley is the only remaining resident of his small village, which sits above the SPR site, as all of his neighbours have accepted monetary offers for their properties. Cole Oil Industries purchased the neighbouring properties through a shell company called Stardale Development, headed by Elise Linsey. During his investigation, Jay discovers that Elise's attempted murder was carried out by an associate of Thomas Cole named Dwight Sweeney. The unsuccessful attempt was intended to cover up Cole Oil's links to Stardale Development and ensure that the illegal pumping of oil into the High Point mine remained undetected. Dwight Sweeney was instructed to stage the murder as the strangulation of an ex-prostitute in a fit of passionate rage to ensure that the police would not dedicate much time and effort to the case. However, with Elise surviving

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the assassination attempt, Thomas Cole successfully scrambled to keep his company's name out of the news by persuading Elise to remain silent. I will elaborate further on Elise's refusal to divulge incriminatory information on Thomas Cole's secret dealings when I discuss Jay Porter's meetings with *Houston Chronicle* reporter Lonnie Philips.

Elise's survival was not the only factor that exposed Cole Oil Industries' illegal oil storage facility. Oil's presence was brought to Ainsley's attention due to the influence of water, which caused what Ainsley calls "creepage" (316). Pavan Kumar Malreddy, to whom I will return in my analysis of Habila's *Oil on Water*, has stated that oil "is always superimposed upon water" (11). This observation stands true in the case of the oil and water contained within Cole Oil's secret SPR site. Ainsley informs Jay that "that oil down there floats on brine water, and when the water level changes for some reason only God can account for, the oil gets pushed up to the top, right up through the ground." Ainsley concludes by noting that Cole Oil came very close to succeeding in keeping the storage facility a secret: "If I had sold my house when everyone else did, I guess no one would have ever known about it, now would they?" (316).

Houston Chronicle reporter Lonnie Philips asserts that Ainsley's statement as to how close Cole Oil came to keeping its secreted oil cloistered is correct, and his discovery presents a profound problem for Cole Oil and the oil industry as a whole. Lonnie informs Jay that "the whole city's economy is built on a lie" in reference to Houston and its reliance on the oil industry, which is suddenly experiencing a surplus that significantly devalues its product, in great contrast to the position it found itself in only eight years previously during the Oil Crisis (367). Lonnie understands that the current oil glut is what prompted Cole Oil to secrete its excess crude in the SPR site beneath Ainsley's home. He informs Jay, "Hiding the oil, that's just one tactic of many, to keep the supply-and-demand balance the way they want it. If the shit hadn't started

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

coming up in Ainsley's backyard […] wouldn't nobody have ever known the difference" (367). In reference to the title of the novel, Lonnie describes the oil seeping out of the SPR location as "black water rising in the streets" (367). Crucially, it is this black water, combined with Jay's detective-like investigation, which led him to Ainsley, that lead to the revelation of oil.

Returning to Ainsley's condemnation of the policies that he believes are killing off the working man, from the early 1970s onwards, a neoliberal assault was launched to convince the public of the merits of neoliberalism itself. Lewis Powell, who would be elevated to the Supreme Court by Richard Nixon, sent a memo to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in 1971 in which he clearly encouraged corporations and big business to engage in propaganda to sway public opinion in their favour. In his memo, Powell bemoans a "chorus of criticism" that is being levelled at the "American economic system." Powell's memo is based on a fear that the voices engaged in criticism of the American economic system are not simply zealots or those whom society generally ostracises; Powell believes the critics hail from "perfectly respectable elements of society" (2-3). Erman Joseph Ainsley fits the profile described by Powell. Ainsley was a diligent worker who followed the rules, put in his hours and saved for a pension that he has now been stripped of. Ainsley's social conformity places him within the perfectly respectable realm that Powell describes. However, given his impoverishment and the lack of reward for his conformity, his criticism should be seen as perfectly reasonable.

Powell cites a poll conducted by the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, which shows that "Almost half the students [on twelve representative college campuses] favored socialization of basic U.S. industries" (5). The importance of student-led social movements is emphasised in *Black Water Rising* through both Jay and his former girlfriend, now mayor of Houston, Cynthia Maddox. Powell then turns to notions of

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

freedom as a means of strengthening his call for corporations to take action: “The overriding first need is for businessmen to recognize that the ultimate issue may be survival – survival of what we call the free enterprise system, and all that this means for the strength and prosperity of America and the freedom of our people” (10). In a somewhat ironic manner, given the need for organisation and unity in fighting anthropogenic climate change in the modern era, a unity that the dogma associated with the “American way of life” seeks to preclude, Powell calls for corporate unity to combat the dissenting voices:

> But independent and uncoordinated activity by individual corporations, as important as this is, will not be sufficient. Strength lies in organization, in careful long-range planning and implementation, in consistency of action over an indefinite period of years, in the scale of financing available only through joint effort, and in the political power available only through united action and national organizations. (11)

Some of the fruits of the unity that Powell is pleading for can be seen in the aforementioned ploy by the American Petroleum Institute to spread disinformation regarding anthropogenic climate change and to ignore or bury the scientific evidence provided to members, such as Exxon, by their in-house research teams. That unity, however, is lacking on the opposite end of the spectrum in the struggle to establish a way of life that does not trade environmental destruction for convenience, freedom and wealth.

Powell declares to the chamber that “Labor unions, civil rights groups and now the public interest law firms are extremely active in the judicial arena” before alerting the chamber and big business to their combined capacity to outspend other interest groups in the arena of litigation and thus strengthen their position in the effectuation of social, economic and political change: “This is a vast area of opportunity for the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Chamber, if it is willing to undertake the role of spokesman for American business and if, in turn, business is willing to provide the funds" (26). Labour unions play a key role in the plot of *Black Water Rising*. I shall turn to them momentarily

Powell concludes his argument with a section on the nebulous term freedom. Powell calls this section "Relationship to Freedom." He claims, "The threat to the enterprise system is not merely a matter of economics. It also is a threat to individual freedom" (32). This viewpoint could be criticised as potentially myopic in that it posits one specific economic system as the only true way to achieving freedom in any capacity. Powell also posits absolute freedom as inherently good without recognising the potential downsides of an unfettered freedom to do as we please. Powell ignores the potential problems of "freedom" as he claims that "There seems to be little awareness that the only alternatives to free enterprise are varying degrees of bureaucratic regulation of individual freedom – ranging from that under moderate socialism to the iron heel of the leftist or rightist dictatorship" (32). Powell equates economic freedom for large corporations with individual freedoms, a definition boosted by the American legal system's classification of corporate entities as people, a classification that Naomi Klein argues corporations must immediately be stripped of if we are to more effectively fight climate change (90).

In her article "Does 'We the People' Include Corporations?" Ciara Torres-Spelliscy briefly outlines the origins of the corporate crusade to achieve personhood: "The idea of anthropomorphizing corporations through 'corporate personhood' dates back to a medieval pope who was also a lawyer. The idea of corporate personhood spread across Europe, jumped to England, and landed in America along with the British colonists." One of the most insidious aspects of classifying corporations as individuals derived from a 2010 Supreme Court ruling that

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granted corporations the right to buy advertisements in all American elections.[46]

A further example of the empowerment of corporations within the U.S. political and legal systems occurred in 1970, when a case known as *Santa Clara* was "used to justify granting corporations the First Amendment right to spend unlimited corporate funds on ballot initiatives" (Torres-Spelliscy). Lewis Powell's equating of economic freedom for large corporations with individual freedoms ignores the empowerment of corporations, often with government assistance, to the detriment of the individual freedoms of blue-collar workers, such as *Black Water Rising's* Erman Joseph Ainsley. Despite my criticism of Powell's pro-business stance, it is important to note that he did not seem to be ideologically opposed to labour unions, something we see more and more often in this advanced stage of neoliberal capitalism that we have reached.[47] Powell, therefore, cannot be classified in a binary sense as purely pro-business and anti-worker.

Black Water Rising goes into great depth in its depiction of union activities in Houston. There are two powerful unions in the novel: The International Longshoreman's Association (ILA), which is for white workers, and the Brotherhood of Longshoremen, which is for black workers.[48] The disparity between the social positions of the workers in both unions manifests in an unwillingness to cooperate for the greater good of labourers as a whole. LeMenager notes the importance of the Brotherhood in framing the plot of the novel at a comprehensible scale in her assertion that the Brotherhood and its members foreground the events of the novel by providing a human-scale to a nexus of events that incorporates both micro and macro

[46] In "2010 […] the Supreme Court ruled in *Citizens United* v. *FEC* that corporations have First Amendment political rights to buy ads in all American elections" (Torres-Spelliscy).
[47] Powell urged the chamber of commerce to follow the unions' lead by appointing a full-time president to increase the effectiveness of their operations. He does not explicitly argue for the dismantling or disempowering of unions; instead, he argues for the empowerment of the chamber of commerce as a counterpoint to the unions.
[48] Locke uses the term "blacks" in reference to the members of the Brotherhood of Longshoremen.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

scales, stratum II and stratum III elements (134).

In Chapter One, I discussed the importance of the New Deal in ameliorating the situation of labourers in the United States, eventually leading to the creation of a strong middle class. However, the New Deal was heavily skewed in favour of white male workers. That reality influences the white workers' willingness to strike in solidarity with their black co-workers in *Black Water Rising*. The U.S. government mandated that the International Longshoremen's Association and the Brotherhood of Longshoremen merge, creating a scenario in which both racial groups must strike together or not at all. With the black workers keen to strike against Cole Oil Industries, they rely on solidarity from their white colleagues, a solidarity that is not particularly forthcoming. In a meeting among Brotherhood members, one member states, "If some of us strike, we all got to go," which is met with a reply of "ILA ain't having none of that" (48). Talk soon turns to the divide between the white and black longshoremen, as some Brotherhood members proclaim that "They got some good white ones down there […] But the rest of them crackers is up to no good" (48). Accusations are levelled against members of the ILA for using scare tactics to dissuade the Brotherhood from striking, while the Brotherhood members also have no faith in the police, who they believe "ain't doing a damned thing about it" (48). Ineffective, or in some cases nonexistent, policing is a running theme throughout Locke's novel. The opening scenes of the novel have already established that, as an African American male, Jay Porter inherently distrusts the police. The members of the Brotherhood of Longshoremen, who consult with Jay on legal issues, are in the same boat.

Internal tensions among the two unions lead to an outburst of violence directed at the Brotherhood by the ILA. Jay's father-in-law wakes him in the dead of night with a phone call claiming that ILA members are shooting at Brotherhood members' homes. Jay questions his father-in-law's certainty that the shooting was carried out by the ILA,

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

to which his father-in-law replies: “They’ve been harassing these boys all week, son, after every meeting. The union’s gon’ vote on this thing soon, and some of the ILA are bent to see it come out their way. This boy here, man’s house I’m in, he’s been getting calls all week, saying what they gon’ do to him and his family if he votes for the strike” (93). This incident, coupled with the beating that was meted out to Darren, a young member of the Brotherhood, by ILA members, ensures that the divide between the two unions remains impossible to bridge. Brotherhood members become enraged at the lack of protection afforded to them by the Houston police, and they formulate a plan to sue the police department. Jay discovers that members of The Policemen’s League (a union) and the ILA bowl together, and according to Cynthia Maddox, the mayor of Houston, “The boys in blue are pretty protective of their buddies at the port” (118). The futility of suing the police department suddenly becomes abundantly clear to Jay.

Jay discovers that the violent assault on Darren was orchestrated by Carlisle Minty, a prominent member of the ILA. After investigating the incident, Jay finds that Minty has a bulletproof alibi in the City of Houston, the word of Thomas Cole. Minty informs Jay that “Thomas Cole and a couple of suits from downtown were doing a site visit at the refinery [the night of the assault]. I had a cup of coffee with the man myself. He told the police as much already. Unless he’s lying too” (353). Jay is naturally sceptical, but after listening to the opinion of Wayne Carlin, president of The Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW), Jay realises that pressing the issue is futile. Wayne makes it abundantly clear that Cole’s word is unimpeachable: “As far as the police are concerned, if a man like Thomas Cole says he saw Minty at work, then it’s enough for them” (353). Cole’s honour and power are unquestionable, as the narrator’s truism that “oil made Houston” reflects (22). Locke symbolically frames Cole’s powerful grip over the city and its bureaucracy in her

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

depiction of the oil giant's headquarters, which comprises two tall towers crowned by the Cole name and "casting a heavy shadow across city hall" (110). Of course, an analysis of Thomas Cole's role in the situation flags up the very pertinent question of what Cole has to gain from concerning himself with affairs that seem far too trivial for a man of his standing. The obvious answer to this question is that division between the unions directly benefits Cole Oil Industries, ensuring that strikes remain an unlikely proposition. Both Amitav Ghosh and Timothy Mitchell, among others, have astutely dissected the role of oil in disempowering labour unions compared to its antecedent fuel, coal.

Modern politics is possible due to the new ways of living that carbon fuels actualise. The social systems powered by coal were sagely manoeuvred by labour unions to generate political power and accrue rights that had previously been unimaginable. This political power would not last as the advent of mass oil production and consumption enabled rights to be stripped back and unions to be disempowered. The dockworkers in *Black Water Rising* discover their vulnerability in a world constructed around oil, which contributes to their disdain for the notion of uniting in a strike against their paymasters. The materiality of coal ensured that human labour power was always required to extract and transport it to the markets that required it. In *Carbon Democracy*, Timothy Mitchell notes that "strikes became effective, not because of mining's isolation, but on the contrary because of the flows of carbon that connected chambers beneath the ground to every factory, office, home or means of transportation that depended on steam or electric power" (21). European and US labourers benefited from the requirement for labour in the extraction and transportation of coal, as strike actions were effective in paralysing the large centres of industrial production within these areas, due to the fact that they were entirely reliant on access to coal for their operations. Amitav Ghosh provides a succinct

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

summary of the potentiality of coal to empower labour unions, as he states that "The very materiality of coal is such as to enable and promote resistance to established orders" (*Great Derangement* 73-4). The power that coal afforded to the working classes was a significant threat to established orders, and as such, it was deemed necessary to quash it. The post-World War II shift from coal to oil, as Ghosh argues, was a calculated ploy to disempower unions. In fact, the post-World War II Marshall Plan funded oil due to fears of working-class militancy (*Great Derangement* 74).

The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the precursor to the modern-day European Union, was formed after World War II with the backing of American business interests, ostensibly to ensure that war between France and Germany would become "not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible," according to the Schuman Declaration presented by French foreign minister Robert Schuman in May 1950 ("Schuman Declaration"). In the late 1940s, coal miners in Britain, France and Germany campaigned for improved pay and working conditions. Timothy Mitchell notes that American industrialists were "keen to promote their new corporate management model abroad (and to have Washington subsidise their exports)" and that to effect such a change, they emphasised the communist threat in Western Europe to convince Washington to construct an extensive postwar aid package for Europe (*Carbon Democracy* 28-29).

The Marshall Plan, Mitchell observes, was an "American-funded reorganisation of the power of labour [that promoted] US-style industrial management" (*Carbon Democracy* 29). The funds on offer were conditional on the acceptance by European governments of plans to integrate the region's industries, beginning with coal. The European Coal and Steel Community was "Established as a first step towards the political union of Europe, reduced competition in the coal industry and supported the mechanisation of production." The U.S. government assisted in the financing of the

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ECSC as it "reduced the ability of coal miners to carry out effective strikes by rapidly reducing their numbers and facilitating the supply of coal across national borders" (*Carbon Democracy* 29). The disempowerment of labourers began with the mechanisation of coal production and was completed by the energy transition from coal to oil, a substance that flowed freely to the surface of the earth and was easily transportable through pipelines to centres of demand. Technologies developed to transport oil took advantage of its liquid form to eliminate manual labour. Pipelines, pumps, tankers and large storage tanks ensured that local oil monopolies were vulnerable to supplies from many different sites and almost impervious to strike actions (*Carbon Democracy* 46). *Black Water Rising*'s Charlie Luckman, a lawyer for city councilman and port commissioner J.T. Cummings, clarifies to Cummings just how powerless oil has rendered union workers.

Charlie declares to J.T. Cummings that "they're not going to strike" regarding the dockworkers. Cummings frets about the impact on the city's economy and notes that "Oil's the only thing keeping this goddamned city afloat" (79). Charlie quickly reminds Cummings of his position in the post-war, post-coal economy, as he asserts that:

> Oil don't run through the port, J.T. That's not your jurisdiction. Those oil tankers up and down the Ship Channel dock on private land. The Coles, Exxon, Shell … they all got their own refinery workers. The longshoremen, the ones unloading little plastic dolls from China or some shit, they don't have a goddamn thing to do with oil. They can picket all they want to. (79)

In the modern oil-powered world, the reality for manual labourers is their disenfranchisement and their general inability to effect change in the manner that their predecessors, who loaded and unloaded coal, did. Ironically, Charlie states that the dockworkers "don't have a goddamn thing to do with oil" when, in fact, oil is an

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

inescapable part of their lives, as the plastic dolls from China that they unload regularly are, of course, manufactured using oil derivatives. Charlie assuages J.T.'s fears by claiming that "This economy is foolproof." The two men's conversation takes place in an upscale gentleman's club. Charlie entreats J.T. to look around as he motions to a room filled with "wealthy white men," among which clientele Thomas Cole can be counted. Pointing at Cole, Charlie remarks, "He don't look nervous to me" (80). This scene illustrates the racial uniformity of those who wielded power in early 1980s Houston, and potentially still do so to this day. Coupled with the conspicuous privilege and relative influence exerted by the ILA, in comparison to their black coworkers in the Brotherhood of Longshoremen, the racial dynamics of Houston are clearly laid out by Locke.

Regardless of the seeming powerlessness of the union workers to effectively stifle the productivity of the oil industry, the political perception in Locke's Houston is that they do possess the capability to cause problems for the industry, particularly at the refineries. The transportation of the oil is mostly done via pipelines and large ships, but the refineries do require a reasonable cohort of workers to function effectively. The importance of oil, not just to Houston's economy but to the national economy, is made plainly clear by the sudden presence of journalists from renowned publications on the East Coast appearing at press conferences in Houston. Pat Bodine, the president of the ILA, declares, "It's the oil that's got people scared shitless. It's the shutdown at the refineries that's got the fucking *Washington Post* coming around. The *New York Times*, reporters from out East. This is all about the oil" (350). Bodine's pinpointing of the refineries as the weakest site in the chain of petroleum production highlights the reason for Thomas Cole's intervention in the potential strike actions by a coalition of the ILA and the Brotherhood. Any strike action would inhibit Cole's ability to truck oil out of his overflowing SPR site and into his refineries in an attempt

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

to cover up the illegal operation.

As Charlie previously pointed out to J.T., Cole Oil Industries has its own refinery workers who are neither longshoremen nor members of a longshoremen's union. However, Cole Oil Industries' employees are members of OCAW, which is likely to walk out on strike in solidarity with the longshoremen should they unite and vote to strike. This inter-union solidarity is problematic for Cole, and therefore, the strike needs to be stopped at its source before it can mushroom into a calamity for Cole Oil Industries. Pat Bodine is acutely aware of the importance of oil to the functioning of the entire nation, particularly as the 1973 Oil Crisis occurred less than a decade before strike action threatened domestic petroleum production. Bodine ends his impassioned dialogue by assiduously highlighting the United States' undisputed reliance on oil by pointing out that "The dockworkers might have started the strike, but like almost every other thing in America, it's being fueled by petrol" (350). By closing out his short speech in this manner, Bodine sheds light on petroleum and how it has firmly taken hold of U.S. culture, economic productivity, politics, and much more, to the point that they have coalesced into a distinct entity known as petroculture. Both the strike itself and Thomas Cole's subversive actions to ensure it never comes to fruition are fuelled by petroleum, the inescapable building block of modern America.

The disempowerment of unions is further enhanced by containerisation at Houston's port, a common symptom that afflicted dock workers across the United States at the time. Jay visits the port of Houston and witnesses mechanisation first-hand. Jay is sympathetic to the workers' cause, but he is not naïve. The narrator informs us that Jay "can see it's an infinitely more efficient way of going about things, easier and faster too […] he gets a clear picture of how labor problems might be solved in the future: machines" (147). Humanity is now living in the midst of Jay's "clear picture" as machines and AI dominate discussions on the future development of

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human societies. After visiting the docks, Jay attends a teamster meeting where workers express their fear and dismay at the accelerating mechanisation of the port. At the meeting, one of the workers lays out what everyone fears:

> Another five, ten years, and it's all machines loading containers onto the ships. We got merchants hiring their own people now, loading the containers right at their home base, getting rigs to drive 'em to the docks, already set to load. The machines do the rest. The Teamsters aren't stupid. Everybody needs a driver. But the rest of us . . . every one of us in here might be out of a job. (157)

It is clear from the fear expressed at the teamster meeting that mechanisation has utterly disempowered the unions. It was not long before Jay noticed the increased mechanisation at the port that Mayor Maddox, in a meeting with Jay, decried the potential economic damage that could be done to the city and its oil industry if a strike were to proceed: "This is the second-biggest international port in the country. You know that? You got any idea how much money floats on that water? Not to mention the oil. The *oil*, Jay. Those petrochemical workers go on strike too, and this whole country's going to feel the effects of it" (119). Eventually, a strike does indeed transpire, putting Mayor Maddox in the difficult position of needing to appease both the workers and industry leaders. Her solution is to "let the problem self-correct" (343).

The neoliberal logic inherent in Mayor Maddox's solution to the strike is blatantly evident to both the reader and to the dockworkers, who had expected so much more from a mayor who openly aligned herself with their cause in her claim that "No one understands discrimination more than I do […] As a woman in politics" (339). Mayor Maddox's solution is to enforce a policy she terms "race-blind hiring," with the addendum that "there will be no *advancing* people because of their race either" (342-43). Mayor Maddox's assumption that a policy of race-blind hiring will

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

be unreservedly adhered to in a society where discrimination is endemic is naïve at best; however, it appears more akin to willful ignorance, sweeping a significant social issue under the rug in the hope that it will regulate itself if government does not interfere. This line of reasoning directly correlates with the rationale of neoliberalism, in which markets are assumed to be capable of self-correcting and regulating themselves, and government interference or regulation is viewed as imprudent and undesirable. The Brotherhood of Longshoremen adroitly recognises the wilful ignorance behind Mayor Maddox's policy, as members lament the fact that it "does not redress the wrongs that have already been perpetrated against them" (345).

I want to return to Jay's investigation into the events that placed Elise in the vicinity of the Buffalo Bayou on the night of her attempted assassination. Jay furtively tracks Elise down until he discovers her living in an upscale Houston suburb. It seems clear that Elise has been paid off by Cole as she now inhabits a salubrious home and has also had her criminal record expunged (193). After Jay visits Elise, she abruptly turns herself in to the police for the murder of Dwight Sweeney, who died while attempting to assassinate her. Jay discovers that Elise is being represented by Charlie Luckman, J.T. Cummings's lawyer and an ex-district attorney whose hourly rates are assuredly not within Elise's budget (228-30). As Jay delves deeper into Elise's background, his investigation reveals troubling information about Cole Oil Industries and the company's deceptive and dubious conduct. Mr Ainsley informs Jay that Elise regularly visited his neighbourhood, attempting to convince local landowners to sell to her. Jay begins to piece the timeline together, discovering that Elise was the head of Stardale Development, Cole Oil Industries' real estate shell company (315-16). Jay learns that there is no official, government-approved strategic petroleum reserve facility in High Point, which confirms the theory that Cole Oil Industries has been conducting off-the-books activities to enable it to hoard oil without federal

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

government approval (359-63). It was only Ainsley's stubborn refusal to sell, water's non-complicity with oil, and Jay's investigative fervour that brought the entire situation to light.

Lonnie Philips informs Jay that Cole Oil Industries, along with Exxon, Shell and other oil majors, had been under investigation by the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Energy from 1974 until recently for their cartel practices and oil hoarding. The timeline Lonnie refers to is a clear reference to the Oil Crisis, which had occurred just a year prior to the opening of said federal investigation. Lonnie also informs Jay that she assumes Elise has talked to the Federal Trade Commission, as Lonnie had tried to interview her, but Elise was "all talked out" by then (364-66). It seems, however, that the federal investigation was a superficial façade that lacked true integrity and funding, highlighting Erman Joseph Ainsley's accusations of collusion between the government and the oil industry. Lonnie reveals the reason for such a manufactured presentation as she asserts that "half of the Energy Department's policy was written by oil industry analysts, guys who used to *work* for Cole and Shell and Exxon and Gulf Oil" (366). Lonnie's accusations hold up to scrutiny when we examine the historical connections between the U.S. government and the oil industry. To name but one example, President George W. Bush established the National Energy Policy Development Group (NEPDG) in 2001 and appointed former Halliburton CEO Dick Cheney as its director. Unsurprisingly, the NEPDG's policies[49] under Cheney

[49] In May 2001, the NEPDG published its report titled *Reliable, Affordable, and Environmentally Sound Energy for America's Future: Report of the National Energy Policy Development Group*. The document mentions the word technology one hundred and fourteen times. It regularly assumes that technology will (or in some cases already is) solving a multitude of problems related to the extraction and burning of oil. One example I'd like to focus on states, "Enormous advances in technology have made oil and natural gas exploration and production both more efficient and more environmentally sound. Better technology means fewer rigs, more accurate drilling, greater resource recovery and environmentally friendly exploration" (xiii-xiv). This techno-optimism appears almost embarrassing in hindsight. More accurate drilling in a more environmentally sound manner sounds fantastic until we recall the Deepwater Horizon disaster, at which point we can ascertain that this techno-optimism is once again misplaced.

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amounted to a doubling down on oil rather than an attempt to develop renewables (Klare, *Blood and Oil* 57-58). Lonnie emphatically states that the investigation into Cole Oil Industries and the oil majors was closed when Reagan and George Bush Senior came into office as President and Vice President, which he wryly comments is a "Big fucking surprise" before ending his monologue with a comment on the power wielded by Cole as he states that it was unsurprising that the investigation went nowhere "especially with all the friends the Coles got up in Washington" (366).

Notably, Locke's novel does not shy away from discussing Houston's over-reliance on the oil industry, which in turn is beholden to foreign nations to supply it with the crude oil it requires to maintain its ascendancy. Reminiscing on his past as an activist, Jay recalls a speech he delivered advocating for "consumer sanctions" against companies that commit injustices (265). Jay excoriates the oil industry for its role in neocolonialist practices in Africa and against. Jay pointedly states that oil companies "were continuing to benefit from a history of colonial and economic oppression of brown people, [and these companies] made money off the continent of Africa and its people" (265). Back then, the targets of Jay's ire were Shell and Gulf Oil, who he argued were "sucking the Congo dry" (265). Since the night he discovered Elise Linsey in the Buffalo Bayou, Jay's attention has been focused on Cole Oil Industries, rather than Shell and Gulf

In an interesting parallel to Ken Saro-Wiwa, Jay recalls being spared a life sentence in jail "by an inch, a single juror" (9). During his activist years, Jay was charged with "inciting a riot and conspiracy to commit murder of an agent of the federal government" (10). These charges somewhat echo those levelled at Saro-Wiwa who was charged with "incitement to murder" after a riot broke out at an Ogoni protest. Unlike Saro-Wiwa, however, Jay was not subjected to a kangaroo court. As a U.S. citizen, he was charged in a court of law, with judgment being passed by a jury

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

of his peers. However, despite this stark difference, simply being a U.S. citizen does not guarantee social equality for Jay, who is an African-American man. He notes that the single juror who refused to prosecute him was "the only black on the panel," speaking to the racial division that existed in Houston in the early 1980s, when the novel is set and may arguably still exist to this day (10).

During his impassioned speech in which he criticised Big Oil for exploiting Africa and its people, Jay rallied the African American students to whom he was speaking by demanding an economic boycott: "If big business wants us to buy, they gon' have to show some respect for the issues we got in our hearts and minds. They gon' have to come correct, you hear? From this point on, we take the fight for justice from the political to the economic" (271). Though it may seem incredible, given the situation with the AETA bill and ALEC's ongoing attempts to expand some of the AETA measures to the energy sector, should the interpretation of the law be expanded to include the energy sector, Jay's incitement to boycott could be construed as terrorism for doing economic but no physical harm to an energy enterprise. During his speech, Jay insisted that "Injustice abroad is a threat to justice here at home" (270). The attempted murder of Elise refocuses his attention from Africa to the home front and provides him with a clear case of injustice to which he dedicates his efforts.

Cynthia Maddox, like Jay, is a former ardent activist whose strident tone has cooled considerably since she achieved a position with considerable political power. As the narrator recalls Jay and Cynthia's past, the reader is presented with an incident of foreshadowing. Jay was concluding his aforementioned speech, his plea for consumer sanctions, at the university cafeteria with a rousing call to action that he could not follow up on as Cynthia and her Students for a Democratic Society colleagues stormed the cafeteria and commandeered the microphone. Cynthia hijacked the narrative and spun it to suit her agenda, dismissing the struggles of

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Africans who have suffered tremendously under colonial rule and corporate colonialism. Cynthia, who is white, addressed a cafeteria full of African American students, saying, “Make no mistake, we appreciate the struggle for our people in Africa. […] But we have some domestic issues that need to be addressed first” (272).

In literature, as in life, universalising is impossible in the manner that Cynthia attempts on multiple occasions. Joseph Carroll argues that people “have individuality that is distinguished by the peculiarities of their individual temperaments, their cultural conditioning, and their individual experiences” (1329). Furthermore, Carroll argues that meaning resides in the interpretation of events, and interpretation is dependent on point of view. Point of view is created by culture and experience. Therefore, Cynthia’s claims that African people are “our” people, alongside her assertion that nobody understands discrimination more than she does, simply ring hollow as her cultural conditioning and her individual experiences necessarily differ from those she claims as her own. This is exemplified by her redirection of Jay’s speech to draw the cafeteria’s attention to domestic issues that are important to her and away from “our people” in Africa, as she experiences these domestic issues in her day-to-day life. What Cynthia has neglected to pay attention to is Jay’s perspicacious assertion that “Injustice abroad is a threat to justice here at home” (270). The injustices committed abroad facilitate the accumulation of wealth that can be spent on legal teams, media campaigns, and political contributions, thereby fueling further injustice at home.

Cynthia’s appropriation of other people’s struggles to suit her narrative and her beliefs illustrates a common criticism of Western advocacy groups. As I have previously mentioned, Rob Nixon highlighted that Greenpeace treated Ken Saro-Wiwa and the devastation of Ogoniland as “an unfathomable anomaly” as the organisation neglected local viewpoints by viewing events through a Western-centric

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

prism. I would like to borrow a concise summary from Hannes Bergthaller's "Cli-Fi and Petrofiction: Questioning Genre in the Anthropocene," as I believe it offers a clear insight into one of the key issues at play in the aforementioned situation. Bergthaller states "[…] global ecological transformations are linked with national imaginaries that shape consumption patterns and the geography of everyday life, and the inhuman scales of deep time stand in tension with expectations for individual self-realization that are likewise fueled by distinctive national traditions" (125). Western advocacy groups and activists often misinterpret global issues through the narrow prism of their own imaginaries and traditions. Ghosh picks up this thread as he discusses the damaging effects American environmentalism has had globally. He laments, "American environmentalism has had a powerful influence far beyond the borders of the United States, leaving a poisoned legacy of elitist, anti-Indigenous prejudice in conservation organizations around the world" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 225). Both the American national imaginary and its national traditions are so powerful and entrenched that they could potentially obscure other possible interpretations of the geography of everyday life and the structures of feeling in oil-producing nations. Cynthia falls victim to this narrow-minded interpretation, whereas Jay appears to understand the bigger picture.

Returning to the investigation into Cole Oil Industries for hoarding, while it did not exactly bear razor-sharp teeth, it nevertheless caused a nuisance for Thomas Cole. The strike hindered Cole's ability to move the oil hidden in the caverns in High Point back to the refineries, just when the company was under investigation for sequestering resources and price fixing (367). Jay later discovers, via Lonnie Philips, who is referring to the federal investigation that was initiated in 1974, that Cole "made a whole federal investigation go away" after Lonnie learns that Martin Burrows, the Federal Trade Commission agent who conducted the investigation into Cole Oil

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Industries, was suddenly fired (412-3). Thomas Cole's manipulative skills are further displayed when the company closes refineries in a year in which it made a profit of $950 million, as doing so helped to sustain the image of supply shortages while also keeping the company's share price inflated, despite the glut of oil rising to the surface beneath Ainsley's home (368). Furthermore, Jay discovers another layer of proof that Cole Oil Industries is behind the Stardale Development shell corporation when he learns that the lawyer who sent the paperwork to the High Point residents who sold their homes to Stardale was an ex-Cole Oil Industries lawyer named Alexander Bakker (371). Jay's investigation, his detective work, reveals that Thomas Cole is a powerful plutocrat whose political influence and mammoth bank balance ensure the silence of those who could implicate him in any crimes. Cole Oil's financial might, secured via the exploitation of both domestic and foreign sources of crude oil, ensures that injustice occurs both abroad and at home, further demonstrating Jay's assertion that "Injustice abroad is a threat to justice here at home" (270).

During Jay's discussion with Lonnie, Lonnie infers that the likelihood of the newspaper that employs him publishing anything negative about Cole Oil Industries is close to nil, as the energy conglomerate is one of the paper's most prominent advertisers (391). After Jay hangs up on Lonnie, Elise arrives at the bar where he is drinking. Jay confronts her with what he has discovered, namely that Dwight Sweeney was an associate of Thomas Cole. Elise seems utterly unfazed and nonplussed. She unequivocally tells Jay that she and Cole have come to an understanding, that he has done a lot for her, and then ends her diatribe by warning Jay that it is he who should be worried about Cole, not her. Suddenly, clarity descends upon Jay, and he realises that Elise's intention was to offer him money on behalf of Cole to ensure he would stop investigating her attempted murder and keep all of his discoveries related to Cole Oil Industries quiet. In fact, Elise is baffled that Jay is not

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

a man who can be bought. She bluntly tells him she does not know "a red-blooded American who can't be bought" and that she "begged" Cole not to hurt him (394-95). It appears that Elise's plea was successful. When Jay bumps into Cole at the courthouse, Cole cooly, with the confidence of a man who knows he has won the battle, warns Jay, "Don't make me regret I didn't kill you when I had the chance" (415). When Jay returns home from the courthouse, he learns that the strike has ended; Cole's victory has been emphatic.

Cole decommissioned a government investigation into his company's illegal conduct, secured a not guilty verdict for Elise in her murder trial, and ended the city-wide strike that had been hindering his business, leaving only Jay standing in his way. Jay is determined to continue his investigation into Cole and resolutely fight the losing battle despite all evidence pointing to a resounding defeat. Bernie pleads with Jay to "leave it alone," but his rage at the injustice he has seen drives him on. His retort to Bernie is an acerbic criticism of the immorality and profiteering he has uncovered within the oil industry:

> They're stealing from people, B. People like me and you. People like your daddy, your sister, the ladies at your church, working people. We're paying more at the pump, paying more for our clothes, the shoes on our feet, the food the grocers pick up from their suppliers in those big, gassy eighteen-wheelers. This oil thing touches everything. You're paying an extra fifty cents on that chicken breast for the cost of the plastic it's wrapped in. That's made from petroleum too. […] They're cheatin' people every which way. And I'm not gon' be pushed into keeping my mouth shut about it. (416-17)

Despite Jay's investigation revealing the "story of the crime," as LeMenager contends is the forte of petrofictions that plot against oil, the reader, like Jay himself, is left indignant at the lack of justice and the hubristic pomposity of Thomas Cole,

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

who knows that all of the detective work carried out by both Jay and the U.S. government has been summarily dismissed, and modern society is complicit in allowing it to occur. Cole's victory was part-financed by those who wished to see him punished, for as Jay assiduously asserted, "This oil thing touches everything" (417). Oil's ubiquity in modern society ensures the continued thriving of Thomas Cole's business, driving revenues that safeguard Cole's position among a cabal of plutocrats with enough wealth to withstand any potential challenge they may face. The realization of his relative powerlessness against Cole likely fans the flames of a deeper, more profound anger within Jay, driving him to continue his skirmish with Cole, regardless of the advice of his wife or that of Mayor Maddox who entreats him to "think about who [he is] taking on" and that "This thing is much bigger than [him]" (424).

If we are to truly benefit and learn from the narrative presented in *Black Water Rising*, I believe that Jay's refusal to give up must be seen as a rallying call to the reader and society at large. Jay's obstinacy acts as a plea to the reader not to allow their silence to be bought, a proposition Elise expects every "red-blooded American" to accept. Unfortunately, Elise's assumptions carry weight as many people do accept such proposals. Perhaps it is more effective to buy than to threaten Americans, as the United States offers greater legal protections to its citizens than many countries in the Global South do to their citizens, as Jay experienced in his jury trial as a young man. Furthermore, the ideals of the "American way of life" are based on living a comfortable and successful lifestyle. Financial clout ensures comfort, and culturally, success is often defined through wealth, thus creating a scenario in which most people are highly receptive to proposals like that which Elise intended to offer Jay. Jay's stubborn refusal to be scared, as Thomas Cole expected of him after their encounter at the courthouse, is inspiring. Finally, Jay's perseverance is an appeal to not feel

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daunted in the face of a colossal enemy, as Mayor Maddox expects of him. Jay's determination to continue his fight despite the intimidating challenge facing him is a rallying call to readers to reject indifference and apprehension and to fight for what they believe is right.

Black Water Rising reveals the "story of the crime" through what LeMenager describes as Jay's critical realist "plot to remake neoliberal policies and the systems that sustain them back into public knowledge" (132). Jay's investigation into the attempted murder of Elise leads him to map out Houston's geographical and political points of intrigue, attempting to weave disparate events and locations into a single, coherent, communicable thread. LeMenager calls *Black Water Rising* and *Oil On Water* postmodernisation fictions as they refuse to unquestioningly equate modernity with rationality and realism. Jay's refusal to accept the powerless position in which he finds himself is an example of strategic irrationality by Locke. An entirely rational character, particularly one that was born and raised in a society that frames wealth accumulation as a defining pillar of one's personal success and self-worth, would likely accept Elise's proposal, enriching their own life and securing financial stability for their family, in the knowledge that they are locked into a David vs Goliath battle with Big Oil. Jay's continued battle against Cole can be seen as entirely self-destructive from a rational point of view. His is not a biblical story of good vs evil. His story is set in a world that does not follow biblical rules. Fighting alone, he is destined to lose. Novels that plot against oil deconstruct what LeMenager terms "technological optimism" by using fantastic elements or refusing to offer a neat resolution at the end of the narrative (135-36). Both *Black Water Rising* and *Oil on Water* fall into the latter category, leaving open or diminished plots as an invitation to the reader to come to their own conclusions as opposed to ending on a note of technological optimism.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

LeMenager notes that the oil industry refers to the Niger Delta and the Gulf of Mexico as being part of the "New Golden Triangle" (136). The triangle is completed by Brazil, which also appears in American petrofiction, in Japanese American writer Karen Tei Yamashita's novel *Through the Arc of the Rainforest*. The connections between the two Delta regions are significant. Delta blues music, a cultural innovation from the American South, was brought to the United States by West African people. Adam Hudson, an African-American teacher, writer and journalist, asserts, "Blues music is ours; it's an example of our ancestors preserving African music in the United States."

Naomi Klein laments the destruction that oil has wrought upon the Gulf Coast of the United States and how it is far more than just the economy that suffers due to the oil industry's presence. Klein points out that fishing families along the Gulf Coast "don't just gather food […] They hold up an intricate network that includes family tradition, cuisine, music, art, and endangered languages" (57). Klein also points out that "No amount of compensation money can replace a culture that has lost its roots" (58). The notion that money can remedy all ills is a very Western bourgeois idea, as we will see illustrated quite clearly by Tess in Mei Mei Evans' *Oil and Water*. However, connections to the land are extremely important in many cultures. As we will see in Nigeria, Christian teachings and missionaries have wreaked havoc upon local cultures and traditions. Okorafor picks up this theme of Christian customs being foisted upon colonised people groups through the character of Father Oke in *Lagoon*. Achebe also elaborates upon the same theme in his African Trilogy. Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* provides a great example of the importance of ancestral land and the historical and cultural connections to this land through the character known as Chief Malabo. The prescribed viewpoints of Christianity, which seek to erase local cultural connections to land, highlight the importance of Okorafor, Locke, Habila, and others

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

writing in ways that bring their cultures to the fore, rather than simply promoting Christian American culture.

In a piece written for *The Guardian*, Attica Locke refers to the importance of land in her family's history. Locke's family did not migrate north to the US's most prosperous cities as they had land, "and that land meant economic power" ("Why Did My Black Ancestors Never Leave Texas?"). Locke notes that her ancestors on her mother's side used homesteading laws to claim land in East Texas, which led to the creation of a town called Nigton. Nigton was formed as a "freedmen's community" that also included some Native Americans. Nigton appears in *Black Water Rising* as Jay's hometown, anchoring Jay firmly within an important moment in the history of African American liberation and also tying him to Locke's family history. The economic power gained from the land that Locke previously referred to is minuscule at best. Nevertheless, that land has remained under constant threat from white rural landowners. Locke states,

> People have been trying to steal our land since we got it, helped along by later generations of black folks moving to big cities like Dallas and Houston, leaving white folks the freedom to steal rural land that black folks had left sitting empty. Us being away, trying to build a different kind of wealth than the kind made off the land meant we couldn't always keep an eye on what was going on in the land from which we came. ("Why Did My Black Ancestors Never Leave Texas?")

The idea of "a different kind of wealth" is crucial in this instance. The cultural and traditional wealth that had been established by African-American communities, such as that of Nigton, was under threat of expropriation by white farmers as the local community migrated en masse to centres of prosperity in search of financial wealth. This prosperity, as we have seen in the case of Houston, was almost entirely driven by oil. Thus, oil indirectly devastated the southern, rural African-American culture that

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had been built in towns such as Nigton by sucking the populace out of these areas towards centres of oil-generated prosperity.

I will now turn to Habila's *Oil on Water*, a novel that deftly reveals the extent of the damage wrought on a Global South Niger Delta community in search of the fuel that powers the mansion of modern freedoms that Chakrabarty referred to (40). The thrust of the plot of Habila's *Oil on Water* is generated by the protagonist, a journalist named Rufus, whose investigation into the kidnapping and disappearance of British citizen Isabel Floode provides what LeMenager calls "a compelling excuse to explore the political ecologies of oil" (135).

3.1 *Oil on Water*

Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* revolves around the search for a kidnapped British woman named Isabel Floode. Floode has been captured by militants operating in the Niger Delta region for use as a bargaining chip against the oil company that her husband works for. Zaq and Rufus, who serves as the novel's narrator, are two journalists who plot against oil in Habila's novel. They function as detectives in the sense that they continue to pursue Isabel Floode, even though the police have already abdicated responsibility for the search. The two journalists travel through the mangroves, encountering members of the few remaining local communities. They see firsthand the worry that consumes parents, who implicitly understand that there is no hope for their children, that the world that created the militant groups who kidnapped Isabel is likely to become increasingly appealing to their children as well. A fisherman whose boat Zaq and Rufus charter, informs the pair of his despair for his son's future: "He no get good future here. Na good boy, very sharp. […] But see, wetin he go do here? Nothing. No fish for river, nothing" (39-40). The fisherman implores the men to

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take his son with them to Port Harcourt, to give him a chance to get an education and have a future with more promise than that which his home village can offer. Port Harcourt, the largest city in the region and the home of Nigeria's oil industry, is seen as a beacon of hope for these impoverished Delta communities, who inhabit a desolate wasteland. However, Rufus downplays the notion that Port Harcourt is an antidote to Delta poverty. After leaving a seriously ill Zaq on Irikefe Island, Rufus returns to Port Harcourt. During his journey, he passes through some of the small villages on Irikefe, one of the few places that has not been tarred by the oil industry's effluent. The scenes are bucolic. The pace of life is slow and relaxed. The locals grow their own food behind their huts. Rufus thinks to himself, "Here, time seemed suspended and inconsequential, and for a moment I felt Zaq had chosen the better option by remaining and not hurrying to return to Port Harcourt" (92-93). *Oil on Water* provides an excellent example of what Sule Emmanuel Egya termed literary militancy.

Egya states that literary militancy provides a means of battling "the combined forces of the irresponsible government, the exploitative oil companies, and self-serving groups of armed robbers and kidnappers who call themselves militants [MEND, for example]" (98). Egya expounds his rationale for his claim to the presence of literary militancy in *Oil on Water*:

> The militancy stems from the political or ideological stand that the narratives, such as Habila's *Oil on Water*, take by dramatizing the destructive orchestrations of the anti-environment agents: the government, the oil corporations, and militias. [Egya's] contention therefore is that any literary work that describes the Niger Delta condition with the intent of showing the evils of the three destructive agents, and with a political stand toward the liberation of the suffering of human and biotic communities of the region, as *Oil on Water* does, is a form of literary militancy. (103)

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Pavan Kumar Malreddy echoes Egya's sentiments in his assertion that Habila uses "militant metaphors" to reveal the many interconnected layers that create the structures of feeling in the Niger Delta.

Malreddy states, "From the global crisis of oil engineering and the international media frenzy and fascination associated with the kidnapping phenomenon in the Delta, Zaq and Rufus gradually move inward: to the local subjects, fish, water, ecology, and the militarization of their entire biosphere" (11). The metaphors that litter the plot of *Oil on Water* are multiple, ranging from Rufus' sister Boma's charred facial skin, the result of an oil-fuelled fire that engulfed her home village, to the fish in the Delta rivers. Malreddy reads the scars on Boma's face as a militant metaphor for "two incompatible substances which cannot coexist but cohabit – under the condition that oil is always superimposed upon water – like the etching of oil scar into Boma's being" (11). The contrast between oil and water is a recurring theme, not just in Habila's novel, but also in Okorafor's *Lagoon*, where it is water, or more specifically, the aliens who live in the water that save the land from oil. Habila's novel certainly accords with Szeman's assertion as to the minimum role of literature as a means of offering a "refusal of the contemporary prohibition on metaphor and its imaginative possibilities" (87). The allure of militancy, despite the potential earnings that can be generated from kidnapping people such as Isabel Floode, who have connections to the oil industry, is far from the only issue that oil has brought to the Niger Delta. I want to begin by turning to the fire that engulfed Rufus' village. It was caused by the other prominent social issue that arises from poverty, pipeline piracy.

It is worth noting that although oil was the accelerant that supercharged the fire that left Boma scarred, the oil companies were not directly at fault in this instance. The root cause was the poverty that afflicts the villagers in the Niger Delta region, an indirect consequence of the oil industry. Many civilians in the Niger Delta region are

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

pushed towards either pipeline piracy or militancy as a result of the lack of investment in their region by the Nigerian government and by the oil conglomerates that bleed the area dry. John, Boma's husband, after losing his job, becomes extremely disenfranchised and irascible. He begins "hanging out in backstreet barrooms with other unemployed youths to play cards and drink all day, always complaining about the government" (95). This environment inflames John's sense of indignation and sets him on the path to militarisation. According to Stephena Udinmade Ighedosa, the Niger Delta region's poverty indices are higher than most other regions in Nigeria. 48% of people in the region earn less than 5,000 Naira per month (slightly under USD$3.50 per month based on November 2025 exchange rates). Furthermore, the unemployment rates in the Niger Delta region are higher than the national average. The national average sits at 5%, yet the unemployment rates in Akwa Ibom, Rivers State and Cross Rivers State are all above 16% (Ighedosa 775). These three states make up the southeast of Nigeria, from Port Harcourt to the border with Cameroon. With the statistics that Ighedosa has provided in mind, it is no surprise to find that John is both unemployed and enraged.

The Niger Delta communities not only fear the violence they may suffer due to militant activities, but they also fear for their children's futures as the allure of joining the militants becomes ever stronger due to the dearth of opportunities available for young men in the Delta. The ability of these communities to act in solidarity with each other and resist both the oil industry and the militants has been eroded by the massive social and economic changes that modernity has brought. Gregory Claeys, although not specifically referring to the Nigerian context, elaborates upon the manner in which intercommunity solidarity has been stripped back:

> Solidarity requires a degree of social equality which has been in retreat for some five hundred years, in the face of the breakdown of traditional forms of community,

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

> of organised religion, and of extended family and tribal groupings, the most elementary forms of association throughout history, and even the great trade unions created in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to safeguard workers' rights. (47)

John is a living example of this breakdown. He does not occupy a position of social equality. His community has been torn apart by the oil industry's adverse impact on the tribal lands that sustained it. Finally, as I have already mentioned, oil stripped back many of the hard-won union rights that coal bestowed upon workers, ensuring that even those who secure employment in Nigeria's oil industry do not prosper in the manner that energy industry labourers did so in the past.

The visibility and intrusiveness of oil pipelines in Nigeria compared to the United States and Global North nations in general is starkly different. Szeman states that "pipelines are everywhere" before describing the vast network of pipelines that serves fuel terminals, refineries, factories, etc. Szeman then argues that "The most significant feature of this massive system is that it has managed to remain invisible even as it has expanded to supply increasing levels of product to an ever-expanding economy and population" (245). Szeman is specifically referring to the invisibility of pipeline infrastructure in Canada, and he notes that most Canadians, impoverished communities, rural communities and indigenous communities excluded, would find it nigh on impossible to locate a supply pipeline in the vicinity of their community. Niger Delta communities evidently do not share this luxury. They, like the impoverished, rural or Indigenous Canadian communities to whom Szeman refers, are marginalised and therefore bear the brunt of the intrusive oil infrastructure. Pipelines often run directly through the heart of Niger Delta villages, such as Rufus' hometown, Junction, where no economic benefit is derived from the pipeline infrastructure that is both obtrusive and intrusive. Moreover, there is, of course, also the element of danger that these pipelines pose to the Delta communities. There is a latent anxiety that issues

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

may arise, causing devastation within the community, either through a circumstantial event or through human interference with the infrastructure, particularly in the form of piracy.

According to Ruth Olurounbi, incumbent Nigerian President Bola Tinubu's policies since his inauguration have attracted over $30 billion in foreign capital, and these policies have "been welcomed by investors from offshore and international observers, but crimped purchasing power in Africa's most-populous country where nearly half of its citizens live in extreme poverty."[50] The contrast between Nigerians and non-Nigerians in this quote is stark. Investors "from offshore," therefore non-Nigerians, and international observers, whoever these unspecified people may be, are pleased, whereas the Nigerian public is left to deal with ever-worsening Dutch disease as their spending power is "crimped" by continued investment into the Nigerian economy's predominant sector. The lack of opportunities afforded to people like John in *Oil on Water* makes this situation abundantly clear.

Habila illustrates clearly the precarity associated with living in a Niger Delta town that is situated in the heart of the region that produces the bulk of Nigeria's wealth, as he shows how John turns to militancy, while the other villagers, particularly the children, continue to tap the pipelines that scar their land and sell to any willing buyers they can find. Rufus' family, and the villagers of Junction, are "precarious subjects" according to Malreddy's definition of the term. Malreddy defines precarity as "an experiential and affective subject position that is produced by a lack of access

[50] President Tinubu is a former executive of Mobil Oil. As has unfortunately become commonplace in Nigerian politics, President Tinubu is surrounded by controversies. The US Department of Justice (USDOJ) has alleged that the foundation of his wealth, which currently stands at 115 billion naira, was built with money acquired through the trade of white heroin. Tinubu reached a settlement with the USDOJ and forfeited $460,000; he kept the rest (Orijnmo). Furthermore, Tinubu is accused of money laundering, tax evasion and vote buying. He has also caused indignation among Christians in Nigeria by choosing Kashim Shettima, a Muslim from the north of Nigeria, as his vice-president. Tinubu is a Muslim from the south-west who, according to Christians, has gone against the tradition of mixed-faith tickets for the presidency (Orijnmo).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

to institutional structures that ensure safety, stability, income opportunities and protection." Malreddy adds that "precarity involves potentially combative, at times violent responses" (3). John serves as a representation of the violent responses that Malreddy highlights, while Rufus' father and John's father, Emmanuel, illustrate the inevitable outcome of a lack of access to safety, stability, protection and crucially, income opportunities.

Rufus' father and Emmanuel are the principal buyers of the oil that is tapped from the pipelines that skewer the village of Junction, by the local children. The purloined petroleum is then sequestered in a large barn behind Rufus' father's house. Rufus recounts to the reader his last visit to his hometown, which took place after his graduation from a journalism course at a college in Lagos, and before the fire that destroyed the village and left Boma scarred. His father eagerly brought him to the large barn behind the house, where Rufus noted that he could smell the petrol before his father even opened the door. Rufus explained his future plans to his father, plans that did not involve the oil industry. Upon hearing these plans, his father hastily interjected, "No, not in this town. There's nothing here. [Pointing to the oil drums, he says] This is the only business booming in this town" (69). This scene illustrates another point of contention that Malreddy brings to the fore, the Nigerian state's "lackluster attitude toward oil piracy" (3). It is worth noting that Malreddy's article was published in 2022, significantly later than Apter's *The Pan-African Nation*, which was first published in 2005. The contrast in the dates of publication highlights the shift in the Nigerian government's attitude toward pipeline piracy, situating the more lenient approach firmly in contemporary times, as compared to the far stricter approach noted by Apter back in 2005. The strict approach noted by Apter applies to

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the events in *Oil on Water*, which was first published in 2010.[51]

Rufus' father elaborates on how he makes his money, "I buy from little children. I buy cheap and I sell cheap to the cars that come here at night" (69). Rufus' father understood the insecure nature of his business, noting that he and his business partner, Emmanuel, had bribed police officers to turn a blind eye to their piracy. However, they recognised that there was nothing stopping the police from eventually becoming greedy and taking the business over for themselves. As Andrew Apter noted, the Nigerian government previously believed that the death penalty was a justifiable punishment for those who tap oil pipelines, as doing so interrupts the flow of value throughout the nation (32-33). This elusive nation certainly doesn't include the villagers of Junction, as no value flows to them. Perhaps one could be obtuse and take the word at face value, claiming that the value certainly does flow *through* Junction, via the pipeline that bypasses the village. Yet, it is exactly this bypassing of Junction that incites the illegal behaviour of the village's residents, as they experience none of the value while bearing the brunt of the pollution and death that occurs due to the oil industry.

The precarity that overwhelms those living in the mire of the Niger Delta breeds violent responses from insurgent groups such as MEND. Despite its vast mineral wealth, the Nigerian nation does not provide a social safety net for its citizens. As I have previously discussed, Hausa-Fulani dominance of the national government leads to the marginalisation of non-Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups within the nation, increasing the precarity of the position these groups inhabit. With next to no investment in the provision of infrastructure, education and health services, or any other facilities that contribute to the social good in the Delta region, locals often take a leaf out of Rufus'

[51] My copy of *Oil on Water* was published in 2011. The novel was first published by Penguin Adult in 2010.

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father's book and turn to oil piracy to scavenge together a reasonable existence. Stephena Udinmade Ighedosa has noted that "Illegal oil bunkering is effectively Nigeria's most profitable private business" (776). Tapping pipelines aside, the only other option that seems viable to them is to follow the same path as John. Malreddy states that the Nigerian government justifies its lack of action on combatting oil piracy with claims that "oil theft provides temporary employment, never mind the unsafe and unprotected work conditions as well as the precarious subjects who are exposed to the dangers and violence involved in stealing, transporting and retailing it in the streets" (3). This represents quite an about-face turn from previous regimes, which Apter noted sought the death penalty for acts of piracy. In essence, the government outsources its responsibilities to the shadow economy, inciting violence and precarity in the process. The doctor who treats Zaq neatly summarises the Delta region as he says, "I've been in these waters five years now and I tell you this place is a dead place, a place for dying" (151). However, despite the temporary employment provided by oil theft, President Bola Tinubu has promised to end oil theft once again, another in a long line of policies that benefit Nigeria's energy sector over its citizens.

Jon Marks, founder of *African Energy*, a website that purports to be "the leading independent provider of news, analysis and data on Africa's energy industries," wrote of President Tinubu's attempts to halt oil theft in the Niger Delta ("About African Energy"). Marks wrote,

> For Bola Tinubu, as for previous Nigerian presidents, one measure of success at overcoming the graft and mismanagement that have undermined the economy for decades will be his ability to halt systemic oil theft in the Niger Delta. Tinubu's administration and military chiefs are setting drones and other technology to work, but whether they can overcome the usual vested interests to harness desperately needed higher revenue flows and investment remains to be seen.

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There is much to discuss in this extract. Furthermore, an analysis of Marks' career history is enlightening. I want to begin this brief analysis by singling out the phrase "systemic oil theft in the Niger Delta." Marks does not name the thieves he is alluding to; however, it seems quite clear that he is referring to the likes of Rufus' father and his cohort Emmanuel. It is ironic, given Ken Saro-Wiwa's campaigns and the total lack of investment or financial benefit reaped from Ogoniland oil by the Ogoni people, that the impoverished layman of the Niger Delta is accused of "systemic oil theft," while the state and the oil companies that pump the oil and destroy the environment are seen as the rightful owners of the bounty.

I want to shift to the latter part of the extract from Marks, in which he talks of the deployment of technology to stop oil theft and to increase "desperately needed higher revenue flows and investment." Firstly, one must acknowledge that once again, technology is seen as the solution to problems caused by the oil industry. The root cause of pipeline tapping in the Niger Delta is widespread poverty. This mass poverty has been caused by a combination of factors, including Dutch disease, which renders other economic sectors unprofitable; environmental destruction, making agriculture and fishing impossible; underinvestment in services, resulting in a lack of education and healthcare that inhibits human potential; and prebendalism, which ensures that oil revenues only benefit those in power. Secondly, Marks speaks of "desperately needed higher revenue flows and investment," without stating who desperately needs these. The Ogoni people have desperately needed investment in their future for decades, and neither the state nor the oil companies has ever shown an inclination to correct this inequity. Rufus, addressing Mr Floode, the oil company executive and husband of Isabel, presents the case for the impoverished people whose land the pipelines and refineries are located on. He informs Mr Floode that:

All they are told by the oil companies and the government is that the pipelines are

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

there for their own good, that they hold great potential for their country, their future. These people endure the worst conditions of any oil-producing community on earth, the government knows it but doesn't have the will to stop it, the oil companies know it, but because the government doesn't care, they also don't care. (104)

Given the historical lack of investment in Delta communities, a situation that Rufus is all too aware of, one can infer that Marks is referring to the oil corporations, not the impoverished Nigerian people, in his plea for this investment and revenue growth.

African Energy's claim to be "independent" seems anaemic at best. Marks' biography page on the African Energy website states that from 2003 to 2015, he was an associate fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, also known as Chatham House. Chatham House is a British think tank that lists the following companies as "corporate members": BP plc, Chevron Ltd, Crescent Petroleum, Equinor, Eni S.p.A., ExxonMobil Corporation, and Royal Dutch Shell ("Chatham House corporate members"). In Marks' defence, he has not been an associate fellow at Chatham House for a decade; however, his engagement with the organisation for a period of twelve years could be argued to have furnished him with multiple contacts within the oil industry, given the extensive oil industry participation in Chatham House. Therefore, his wording in relation to the oil theft in the Niger Delta is questionable at best. Should President Tinubu succeed in eliminating oil theft, then one of the few viable avenues through which impoverished people in the Niger Delta region support themselves financially, the only business booming in these kinds of towns, will be closed off.

Returning briefly to Boma's role as a militant metaphor. Boma unwittingly attained this role due to two events in her life. When she and Rufus were children, Rufus was swept out to sea by tempestuous waves, only for Boma to dive in, save him, and be captured by the ocean in his stead. Boma remained missing overnight, until she

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

was discovered unharmed, washed ashore on an outcrop “in the middle of the sea” the following morning. Rufus’ description of the outcrop as being in the middle of the sea is important as it illustrates an almost merciful side to the water, one that is conspicuously lacking in its counterpart, oil. The oil fire that destroyed Rufus’ childhood village also took Emmanuel’s life. Rufus tells us that if it had not been for Emmanuel’s heroism, Boma would have died (3). The contrast between Boma’s survival, without human intervention, after being washed out to sea, and the need for Emmanuel’s intervention to save her from oil is compelling. There is something of a similarity between Elise Linsey and Boma’s survival when being submerged in water. Although Elise’s survival required human intervention from Jay Porter in *Black Water Rising*, it is significant that she nonetheless survived falling unconscious into water after her attempted murder, and that oil was the reason Dwight Sweeney was sent to kill her. In a sense, Elise was oil’s detritus, dumped into the water, and yet water mercifully did not take her life. Water, it seems, is framed almost as a benevolent character, one that is being subdued and victimised by the oil that always appears to be superimposed upon it, denying it agency. Jennifer Wenzel, reviewing *Oil on Water*, notes that “The land and water seem to speak directly, in their own voice, without quotation marks” (“Behind the Headlines”14). Wenzel thus illustrates that Habila has successfully framed both the land and the water as central characters within the novel's plot, as actors rather than merely incidental elements on which a human drama is played out.

While both oil and nature are potentially destructive, oil’s pernicious powers are under human control. Oil’s catastrophic energy, its potential as Soni argued, is only translated to *energeia*, or actualised by human interventions and human needs. However, it seems that Habila is not optimistic about the possibility of a sea change in how humanity satisfies its energy needs. Rufus’ description of the destruction of his

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hometown places the blame not only on oil, but also on the Nigerian government and its lack of regulation, leading to piracy, poverty and peril. Once again, the doctor offers Rufus some sage words to describe the structure of feeling for the people who live in the region. Quoting a village elder, the doctor relays the people's core concern: "I am not ill. I am just poor. Can you give me medicine for that? We want that fire that burns all day and night" (152).

In *Oil on Water*, there is an overwhelming sense of inevitable destruction surrounding oil. The village elder who spoke to the doctor tells of the people's desire to have a refinery, complete with its flare stacks, built next to their village in the hope that it will be the medicine that cures their poverty. Those villages that do not contain oil refining facilities resort to pipeline piracy, as we saw in Rufus' hometown of Junction. Both situations lead to death and destruction. Refineries pollute their vicinity, extirpating the ecosphere and making fishing and agriculture impossible. Even clean drinking water becomes elusive, precipitating the eventual abandonment of villages. Piracy leads to spills and fires, damaging the environment and once again precipitating the abandonment of villages. Interestingly, this sense of inevitability is not present in *A Rebel Star*, a novel set in the Niger Delta but written by Alyssa Rae, an American author with no ethnic, ancestral or cultural ties to Nigeria.

The scope of *A Rebel Star*'s plot to offer criticism of the structures of feeling in the Niger Delta region and the potential for rejecting the status quo is somewhat hollowed by the novel's bildungsroman-esque plot. *A Rebel Star* focuses on Marienela's personal growth and her moral development as she discovers the appalling effect her father's oil company is having on the Niger Delta. After travelling to the Delta and embedding herself within a local village, the structure of feeling begins to overwhelm Marienela, offering motivation and a sense of purpose to her rebellious side. Marienela dreams of her mother, who passed away long ago. In the

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dream, her mother implores her to stop her father: "You have to finish what I started. Stop your father. You and [your brother] are the only ones who can do it" (322). Perhaps this is the author's cultural background shining through in her work, but the notion that Marienela, a seventeen-year-old girl, and her brother are the only ones who can stop the devastation in the Niger Delta, who can put an end to the inevitability of oil's deleterious effects on the region, feels like a considerable oversimplification, perhaps intended to fit the constraints of a bildungsroman. This scenario follows John Updike's delineation of a western novel by providing "that sense of *individual* moral adventure," while losing critical potency in the process.

Water is extremely prominent in Okorafor's *Lagoon*, and is also, evidently, prominent in Habila's novel. There is an interesting scene in which a restless Rufus turns on the television to assuage his boredom and finds himself watching Kevin Costner's *Waterworld*. Rufus elaborates on what he sees, and there are some striking similarities to the plot of *Lagoon*. Rufus says, "The star, Kevin Costner, is a hated mutant, with gills and webbed feet, and he is clever with contraptions and devices" (96). This description provides a vivid echo of the aliens in *Lagoon*. Rufus also notes how Costner's character "takes the heroine underwater in a bell jar and shows her an inundated city," another similarity that will be echoed in *Lagoon*, as the alien character known as Ayodele brings Adaora, a human marine biologist, down to the depths of the ocean to see the oil-free life that the aliens can provide. Rufus concludes his analysis of *Waterworld* by stating that there is something sad about a people whose "wars and industries and relationships and culture [are] all driven by the myth of dry land" (96). It is interesting that Rufus makes this claim about a society that is engulfed in water, when the title of Habila's novel and also Malreddy's analysis, which I have previously mentioned, refer to oil as a substance that "is always superimposed upon water" (11).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

In Rufus' world, as well as our actual world, if we accept the notion that oil is always superimposed on water, we may begin to feel, as Rufus does, that there is something sad about this situation. One interesting example of oil being superimposed on water is provided by Stephanie LeMenager, who discusses the Santa Barbara oil spill caused by a Union Oil drilling platform in 1969. LeMenager dissects a newspaper image that was printed in the aftermath of the spill, in which a mother who resides in a beachfront Santa Barbara home holds her baby and stares out her oil-stained windows. LeMenager notes how this image illustrates the ecological compromises that are made to uphold the expected living standards that accompany the "American way of life" in the twentieth century: "The young woman, her oceanward gaze, the child, the beachside home, and the visual surprise of the stains tell a story of middle-class happiness and the ecological compromises made to assure it in the twentieth century" (20). The infamy of this oil spill highlights the radically different structures of feeling surrounding oil extraction in Nigeria and the United States. Spills such as the Union Oil spill have become unremarkable in the Niger Delta, whereas such an event just off the coast of an affluent American town, where the middle-class lifestyle provided to its inhabitants is entirely dependent on oil, offers a stark reminder of that way of life's dependence on oil.

The contemporary world is engulfed in oil, and there is something tragic about the fact that our "wars and industries and relationships and culture" are all driven by the myth, a myth that was wielded by the Nigerian government in its justification of the death penalty as a punishment for inhibiting the flow of oil, that oil provides a flow of value throughout the nation, or in this case the World. Ken Saro-Wiwa, in *Night Ride*, referred to Nigeria's oil wells as "the main argument of, and fuel for the war" (310). We will see in Mei Mei Evans' *Oil and Water* that the mythology surrounding oil extends so far as to obfuscate the origins of the fuel itself, the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

energeia that powers bourgeois, capitalistic notions of modernity, resulting in a cultural focus on energy, which Soni described as the potentiality of oil. This potentiality is linked to the mythology invoked by the Nigerian government, the mythology surrounding the flow of value. The energy of oil, its potential, is always greater than what is actual, the *energeia* that is expended to provide an excellent standard of living for the few at the expense of the many.

Rufus, traversing the waterways of the mangrove-filled Delta in his plot to reveal the web of interconnected events that led to the kidnapping of Isabel Floode, illustrates the ecological incompatibility of oil and water, as he highlights the environmental destruction caused by the oil industry and the resulting village abandonments that have occurred. Rufus states,

> Soon we were in a dense mangrove swamp; the water underneath us had turned foul and sulfurous […] The atmosphere grew heavy with the suspended stench of dead matter. We followed a bend in the river and in front of us we saw dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil; dead fish bobbed white-bellied between tree roots. (9-10)

It is plain to see that no human community could survive in such a desolate wasteland. Animals are brutally exterminated by the effluent associated with the procurement of the *energeia* that powers modern society and its myths. As we saw in Junction, and also through the commentary of a village elder, fishing and agriculture are not viable as sources of income; one must either hope to benefit from a nearby refinery, resort to piracy, or turn to militancy.

Landing their boat next to a nearby village, Rufus hastily disembarks and makes a beeline for the village well, eager to quench his thirst. This scene illustrates the nail in the coffin, so to speak, the final straw that ensures the abandonment of villages after their economic potential has already been snuffed out. Rufus states,

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> I bent under the wet, mossy pivotal beam [of the village well] and peered into the well's blackness, but a rank smell wafted from its hot depths and slapped my face; I reeled away, my head aching from the encounter. Something organic, perhaps human, lay dead and decomposing down there, its stench mixed with the unmistakable smell of oil. (10)

If the decomposing lifeform at the bottom of the well is human, then it is an unmistakable nod to the violence that oil brings to human communities in the Delta region. The person may have been killed by militants. They may have been a militant killed by the soldiers who protect oil industry facilities. They may also have been killed by their desperation for fresh water in a wasteland where such a thing has become next to impossible to source. Violence, be it direct human-on-human violence incited by oil, or be it the violence associated with oil's incompatibility with water, as it eradicates the possibility of access to life-supporting fresh water, has deracinated this community's future, forced the abandonment of the village, and directly taken at least one human victim with it. These communities have, according to Rufus, "borne the brunt of the oil wars, caught between the militants and the military," and a human corpse at the bottom of the village well is the perfect illustration of this (37). If the lifeform is not human, then this scene illustrates the impossibility of human communities surviving in a world where their reliance on water and animals to provide the economic bedrock for their existence cannot be sustained. The entire ecosystem that these village communities depend on is slowly being wiped out by the oil industry, while the communities themselves are at the mercy of the military and the militants, with potentially violent flare-ups never far away, causing mass migration of people towards urban slums in places such as Port Harcourt and Lagos. The novel does not reveal whether the dead organism is human or non-human, adding to the power of the scene and allowing the reader to decide for themselves the extent

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of the devastation caused by the oil industry. This open-endedness allows for multiple empathic possibilities; empathy for a fellow human who has been affected by the oil industry, or empathy for the ecosystem and the animals that bear the brunt of the devastation.

Whether voluntarily or involuntarily, most Niger Delta communities are forced off their land and end up in slums in Port Harcourt or Lagos. Those that refuse to leave voluntarily cling on until the ecosystem that supports them has been destroyed, making migration unavoidable. Rufus and Zaq are taken by the fisherman to his village to rest for the night. The village is described as being "on stilts, situated by the river on a vast mud flat, which at that moment was underwater, so the village appeared to float." The settlement is haphazard at best, with Rufus stating that it looked as if "the next strong wind or wave would blow it away" (16). The two journalists are welcomed into the village by Chief Ibiram. As Rufus sleeps during his first night in the stilt village, he hears the chief listening to the radio and discussing what he hears with the fisherman. Rufus states, "I couldn't understand their words, but I imagined they were speaking of the dwindling stocks of fish in the river, the rising toxicity of the water and how soon they might have to move to a place where the fishing was still fairly good" (18). This brief excerpt highlights two key points. The first is that Rufus cannot understand their language, indicating that the chief and the fisherman may be Ogoni. The second is that they may be forced to move to a place where fishing is still viable, despite having already moved from their ancestral lands to this stilt village due to the oil industry. This situation makes it abundantly clear that the Delta region as a whole is becoming unliveable, and eventually, Port Harcourt or Lagos may become the only viable options for communities like Chief Ibiram's.

Rufus recounts a conversation he had with Chief Ibiram and his brother on their

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

first night in the village. Chief Ibiram recalls his home village, his ancestral land, which the community was eventually forced off, thanks to the oil companies. Rufus begins by stating, “Once upon a time they lived in paradise” (42). However, some of the neighbouring villages had already been tempted into selling their land by the promise of access to American middle-class consumer goods such as cars, televisions and video players. Chief Malabo, who preceded Chief Ibiram, called the whole village to a meeting to relay to them that he had unilaterally rejected a monetary offer from “oilmen” for the land on which the village sat. The chief's reason for rejecting the offer was the community’s ties to its ancestral land:

> This was their ancestral land, this was where their fathers and their fathers’ fathers were buried. They’d been born here, they’d grown up here, they were happy here, and though they may not be rich, the land had been good to them, they never lacked for anything. What kind of custodians of the land would they be if they sold it off? (43)

The chief’s rejection of an offer that would purportedly have seen the villagers “relocate elsewhere and live a rich life” is the antithesis of the mentality that we will see from Tess, a middle-class American, in Evans’ *Oil and Water*. The chief did not see money as the be-all and end-all. He believed that history, tradition and culture were more important. Chief Ibiram discusses how each town that accepted the oilmen’s money watched the oil industry render their villages and towns uninhabitable, while their luxury goods broke down and became useless. They were forced to relocate multiple times, eventually ending up in the cities, severed from any form of connection with their now destroyed ancestral lands. For Chief Malabo, money did not alleviate the loss of a connection to ancestral lands or the dangers of residing next to a refinery. He rejected the offer, yet he was powerless to stop disaster from eventually forcing his community to relocate.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

In Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Night Ride* we see a similar viewpoint on the inadequacy of money as a means of compensation. An old woman approaches the narrator and bemoans the loss of her farm: "they arrived this morning and dug up my entire farm, my only farm. They mowed down the toil of my brows, the pride of the waiting months. They say they will pay me compensation. Can they compensate me for my labours? The joy I receive when I see the vegetable sprouting?" (311). However, despite a recognition that money is not a panacea, some are tempted by the sums on offer.

The villages next to Chief Malabo's village, which took the money on offer, fared no better than Chief Malabo and his community. Chief Ibiram recounts to Rufus how "already the cars had broken down, and the cheap televisions and DVD players were all gone, and where was the rest of the money? Thrown away in Port Harcourt barrooms, or on second wives and funeral parties, and now they were worse off than before" (43). Chief Malabo and his community could not hold on to their land for long after rejecting the financial incentives that had been proffered. Irrespective of the chief's rejection, the oil companies sent teams out to take soil samples. A village canoe patrol happened upon two oil company workers who were surveying the land, and a skirmish occurred. This was the death knell for the village. The injured oil workers reported back to their company, and the following day, government soldiers arrived and arrested Chief Malabo, subjecting him to a kangaroo court (44). This incident is a reminder of the scathing criticism of the Nigerian judicial system that Saro-Wiwa put forth in *Prisoners of Jebs*: "During the civilian regime, for all the thefts committed by officials, the only Federal Minister jailed was the one from the oil-producing area. The Kangaroo said this showed that the men who owned the oil did not even have the right to steal it. *All others could steal it, if they so wished*" (157, emphasis added). The oil companies and their associates in the Nigerian government

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

can steal the oil if they wish, yet Chief Malabo and his fellow villagers have no right to protect their own land from this theft. The plight of Chief Malabo and his community provides echoes of Abdelrahman Munif's second novel, *The Trench*, the sequel to *Cities of Salt*. The town of Harran, which *The Trench*'s narrator describes as once having been a fishing town, has seen its structures of feeling upended by the oil industry. Munif's narrator informs the reader that "the riches in the city, and underneath it, were unique in the world, yet no one in Harran was rich or had any hope of becoming so" (162). The similarity with the Niger Delta situation is striking.

Within days of the chief's death in prison, the oil companies had moved into the village, accompanied by an army and waving a contract purportedly signed on his deathbed by Chief Malabo, ceding land rights to the company. The villagers abandoned their village expeditiously and moved to the stilt village, which, of course, they are now very likely to be forced out of, once again due to the actions of the Delta's oil companies. The situation that Chief Ibiram's community finds itself in contrasts quite starkly with that of Erman Joseph Ainsley in Locke's *Black Water Rising*, illustrating the relative power that an American citizen has in comparison to a Nigerian citizen. Ainsley is allowed to remain in his home above the SPR site despite Cole Oil's need to continue to conceal its illegal usage of the mine from both the public and the government. Ainsley is not threatened or forcibly relocated, whereas Chief Malabo's entire community is evicted by the military and left to fend for themselves. Although both Ainsley's community and Chief Malabo's community suffer due to the actions of the oil industry, the structures of feeling are not comparable because of the locations in which the incidents occur. To conclude my analysis of *Oil on Water*, I want to turn to a discussion of Isabel Floode, whose kidnapping prompts Rufus and Zaq's detective-style investigation, serving as a catalyst for the revelation of the numerous ways in which the oil industry has

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

negatively affected the region and its inhabitants, both human and non-human.

The novel is ostensibly about Isabel Floode being taken hostage and the attempts to return her to safety. Zaq and Rufus are sent to the Delta to report on the hostage situation, thus setting the detective story in motion, as Rufus discovers the truth of the situation piece by piece. In a conversation with James, Isabel's husband, James, referring to Isabel, states to Zaq and Rufus, "She's a British citizen." Zaq interrupts him and questions, "So, does that make her more important than if she were, say, Nepalese, or Guyanese, or Greek?" (35). Habila touches on the importance and value of human lives as he contrasts the silence surrounding the deaths among Nigerian communities in the Delta with the media storm created by the kidnapping of a white British woman. This point is further reinforced in *A Rebel Star*. Rae's protagonist Marienela is a seventeen-year-old white Briton. She travels to Ogoniland to visit the village where her mother grew up.[52] Marienela possesses a rebellious streak that sees her board a bus to Calabar, which is located in Cross Rivers state, and is only 35 kilometres from the border with Cameroon. Despite being advised by Danny, a white male living in the region, that it is unsafe to do so, Marienela boards the bus anyway. During her journey, the bus is stopped at a military checkpoint, and all passengers are ordered off. As the military soldiers are performing their checks, rebels appear, and a gunfight ensues. Eventually, Marienela is brought to safety by Danny, who had spotted her boarding the bus and had decided to pursue it. Danny scolds her and shouts, "Do you have any idea how valuable you'd be as a hostage … for either side?" (183). Just like Isabel Floode, Marienela is related to an oil company executive, in this case, it is her father.

The sad reality of the inequality in the value placed on human lives, as Danny

[52] Her mother was also a white Briton. Her family moved to Nigeria soon after she was born. Her parents were killed when she was young, so she was taken in by a Nigerian family and raised as one of their own.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

intimated to Marienela, is bluntly illustrated in *Oil on Water* by a situation in which a militant group has kidnapped the wrong person. Rufus is captured by a militant group, and a fellow captive relays the story of an incident where that same group, led by a man known as the Professor, went to Port Harcourt to kidnap a white person to raise funds to pay for a shipment of guns. The group made a comical mistake as they kidnapped an albino Nigerian as opposed to a white foreigner. The captive informs Rufus that the group sent their demands to the oil company, but the company showed no interest. The assumptions that guide the rebels are twofold: one, the captive's life *is* more valuable purely on the basis of their race and nationality; two, the captive's life *may* be more valuable as there is a likelihood that they may be linked in some way to the foreign oil companies that exploit the region, particularly given the notable lack of Western tourists that visit the Delta region. Eventually, the group discovers the problem, which Rufus' fellow captive relays to him as follows: "The hostage was not a white man at all, despite his very fair skin. You know what he was? An albino! And here he was eating the best food and sleeping all day, as if he was on vacation. Very funny, isn't it?" (214).

The novel, as it is written, its entire plot, can only exist because Isabel Floode is white and "She's a British citizen." Habila makes this point very clear in his description of the absolute non-event that was the kidnapping of an albino Nigerian. There was no mobilisation of police forces, no media circus, which is the direct reason for Zaq and Rufus' insertion into the plot, when the kidnapped man was Nigerian. After nine days searching for Isabel, Rufus begins to question "if going in search of the kidnapped British woman with Zaq was wise after all" (5). Rufus notes that all of the other journalists have long since given up and returned to Port Harcourt. Rufus and Zaq share an illuminating conversation that points to the meaning behind the search for Isabel. Zaq asks Rufus, "what do we seek?" Rufus responds, "The

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

woman and the Professor." Zaq rebukes Rufus and tells him, "I said 'what,' not 'whom.' Forget the woman and her kidnappers for a moment. What we really seek is not them but a greater meaning. Remember, the story is not the final goal." Rufus ponders this and asks, "Then what is?" Zaq replies, "The meaning of the story, and only a lucky few ever discover that" (5-6). Zaq's reply comes across as an early indication from Habila that the kidnapping of Isabel Floode, although being the driver of the plot, is not the intended meaning behind the novel. Essentially, Isabel is not the point, but her existence, her nationality, and her whiteness allow the true purpose of the novel to be brought to the fore.

Habila's intended meaning appears to be the revelation of the structures of feeling in the Delta region, with the plot, inspired by detective fiction, allowing this information to come to light in a manner that feels more natural and unforced, if a little didactic. LeMenager has asserted that detective fiction novels have been conceived as "oppositional discourse" in the twentieth-century United States. These oppositional discourses are "a response to the decenteredness and privatization of modern life, where social relations, laboring bodies, and material infrastructures have become difficult to see" (LeMenager124). The open-ended conclusion of Habila's novel hints at the author's usage of Isabel Floode as a means of revealing the social relations, labouring bodies, material infrastructures and, of course, the privatisation of land in the Niger Delta.

The final chapter of *Oil on Water* focuses on Rufus, Boma, and their fellow Nigerians, rather than on Isabel Floode. The chapter begins with Rufus being summoned to a meeting with the Professor. Despite his apprehension, Rufus has now come to the conclusion that the Professor is no danger to him because "the Professor needed the press, and from all that I had heard about him, he wasn't a madman who shot people for fun" (229). This realisation, coupled with Rufus' earlier conversation

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

regarding the kidnapping of the albino man who was treated so well that he might as well have been "on vacation," illustrates a sort of begrudging respect for the militants, despite the image of them that is portrayed in global media outlets. It hints at the idea that the militants are not bad people, in the binary good vs evil sense, they are simply people, like John, who are forced into this situation by issues that are far beyond their control. The novel's narrative, as noted by Maximilian Feldner, affirms the Professor's standpoint in contrast to that of the military Major, who perhaps simplistically sees the rebels as terrorists and kidnappers who behave as they do because they "dream of becoming instant millionaires" (Feldner 521; Habila 156). Although their behaviour is brutish, Habila seems to be hinting that it is not borne of callousness. Habila affords the Professor an opportunity to defend himself, as he states to Rufus, "We are not the barbarians the government propagandists say we are. We are for the people. Everything we do is for the people, what will we gain if we terrorize them?" (232). Whether the Professor is being truthful is left to the reader to interpret, as he also acknowledges that, as with many noble causes globally, there are elements within the resistance that seek to exploit the situation for their own personal gain.

The Professor releases Rufus with orders to take an envelope containing locks of Isabel's hair to her husband, and a warning that the militants are running out of patience and have set a two-day deadline (231). Notably, Rufus is not hurried by the deadline the Professor has set. He returns to Irikefe Island to find Boma and Gloria, a woman he became close to during his kidnapping. When he tells the two women that he has to get to Port Harcourt because "a woman's fate rests in my hands," Gloria demands that he rest first and head to Port Harcourt the following day (235). Rufus assents, perhaps hinting at the need to prioritise Nigerians over foreign interests. The following day, Rufus goes down to the water to ponder all that has transpired. This

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

scene provides a hopeful yet inconclusive ending to the novel.

Boma, whose life has been filled with suffering, from being washed out to sea while attempting to save Rufus as a child, to the scars that cover one side of her face due to the oil fire in Junction, finally feels at peace. Irikefe Island is the antithesis of the many abandoned, noxious, lifeless towns that Rufus visited on his journey with Zaq. Boma tells Rufus that her spirit "feels settled" on Irikefe as she joins the locals who worship in the water. Rufus believes that Irikefe is "a place of healing," a far cry from the militants' doctor's words to Rufus during his internment with the Professor's militia, "I've been in these waters five years now and I tell you this place is a dead place, a place for dying" (239; 151). Rufus briefly thinks of Isabel, whose safety has not yet been secured, and he ponders how "this could all be over by tomorrow" (238). That is the last we hear of Isabel, as the final word is given to Rufus and his reflections on the newfound optimism he has for the people he has met on his journey. His optimism stems from Boma's evident happiness and the enduring spirit of Chief Ibiram and his people. Despite being forcibly moved on from their stilt village, Rufus felt hopeful when he watched their "fragile flotilla, ordinary men and women and babies, a puny armada about to launch itself once more into uncertain waters" (239).

Oil on Water ends with uncertainty, albeit optimistic uncertainty. Although the story remains incomplete, the novel ends with hope and optimism, which stems from the Nigerian people. Technology does not ride to the rescue. Japa syndrome does not take hold.[53] The resilience of the Nigerian people takes centre stage. The novel does not imagine the future as difference, as Nilges argued has become commonplace among contemporary novels. It is unable to predict the future or proffer a reading of what the future may bring. It relies on hope and optimism, based on Chief Ibiram and

[53] Japa Syndrome is a term coined to refer to the desire (one might go as far as to say necessity in certain cases) among Nigerian people, particularly young people, to emigrate in search of a stable life and reliable economic opportunities. Japa is a Yoruba word meaning to run, flee or escape (Dayo).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

his community, and Boma's return to the water that is framed as "a place for healing." This framing of water offers a stark contrast to oil. Oil is a substance that is incompatible with water, a substance that cannot coexist but cohabits. Both water and oil were involved in traumatic experiences in Boma's life, yet she remains drawn to the water. Boma has turned toward the water and away from the oil, providing hope of healing and a settled spirit. Chief Ibiram and his tribe turn to the water in search of a new place to live, and in doing so, they turn away from the emotional scars that oil has imprinted upon them, the scars of losing one's ancestral land, one's home, one's sense of place to oil, and toward optimism, optimism that the water will provide somewhere new for their community to flourish once more. I will now turn to the final two novels that I intend to read for this dissertation. These are Mei Mei Evans' *Oil and Water* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*.

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Chapter 4 Oil in Water: Mei Mei Evans' *Oil and Water* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*

In this chapter, I aim to contrast the structures of feeling in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* and Mei Mei Evans' *Oil and Water*. As outlined in the introduction, I chose these two novels as they share a commonality with *Oil on Water* and *Black Water Rising*, in that they highlight the confrontation between oil and water, or what LeMenager termed "eternity and modernity, god-time and industrial time" (123). As Martin V. Melosi noted, the potentially devastating consequences of the confrontation between oil and water have not been conceived clearly enough (LeMenager 123). In this chapter, I hope to illustrate how petrofiction can help to clearly conceive the impacts of the coupling of hydraulic systems and energy infrastructures. Both novels give truth to LeMenager's statement that "marine habitats that bear the effects of energy production are often unhappy ones" (123).

As I have previously noted, Amitav Ghosh hints at the technocratic adherence to the idealisation of the technological sublime by arguing that only the language of solutions can be used to address Big Oil in American fiction. Despite its use of *petro-magic-realism* as a means of plotting against oil and revealing its insidious effects on Nigeria, *Lagoon* somewhat falls into the language of solutions trap. The

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novel concludes with the tantalising prospect of a different future; however, it is the method through which this future is achieved that conforms to narratives such as those advocated by Marc Andreessen, namely that technology will solve all of humanity's problems. *Lagoon* resolutely attempts to imagine an alternative future in which big oil does not dominate Nigerian politics; however, it unfortunately falls victim to the idealisation of technology, as I shall illustrate.

Oil and Water, on the other hand, is less sharp as a criticism of Big Oil due to the nature of its plot. The novel retells the story of the Exxon Valdez disaster through the eyes of the inhabitants of a town named Selby, which is directly affected by the spill and is therefore the fictionalised surrogate of Valdez, Alaska. The novel reveals many connections between Big Oil and the U.S. government, among other issues; however, as it is based on an infamous, highly publicised real-life event, it does not provide new information that was not already in the public domain. Where the novel shows its potential is in its ability to illustrate situations that may evoke empathy within the reader. As I outlined in the introduction, fiction has the potential to generate empathy within the reader through its localised focus and its ability to humanise the effects of the oil industry. Fiction provides a human-scale narrative which is more accessible and familiar than the petrol-scale that LeMenager noted.

As I have previously established, in Nigeria, environmental disasters are a continual calamity. They have become *banal, slow petro-violence*. In the US, one tends to find that "highly publicized moments" of failure or disaster are more common than persistent, continual calamity, in line with Graeme MacDonald's explication of "oil's general safety" ("Containing Oil" 37). This Nigerian reality influences the plot of *Lagoon*, as it is not prompted by a single, infamous real-world event; rather, it is spurred by unceasing slow violence. Graeme MacDonald has argued for a broader focus on the part of cultural production if it is to effectively

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highlight the burden that the oil industry places on the environment: "If cultural production is to play a more involved role in establishing public scrutiny of the environmental costs of extended and expanded production capacity, *it cannot solely focus on the dramatic spectacles of spillage* and the disastrous (but deferred) endpoint of carbon overburn" ("Containing Oil" 42, emphasis added). This, it could be argued, is where *Oil and Water*'s potential to offer a forceful criticism of the oil industry loses some of its potency. Its focus on the dramatic spectacle of a historical spillage diminishes the impact of its role in encouraging public scrutiny of the oil industry.

In contrast to the realist plot of *Oil and Water*, *Lagoon* contains elements of both science fiction and folklore as it foregoes "realist conventions" in its portrayal of Lagos (Jue 173-74). *Lagoon* leans on *petro-magic-realism* as a means of prophesying a prosperous and pollution-free future for Nigeria. The science-fictional angle of *Lagoon* differs from expectations of a Western science fiction novel. Ayodele, the alien character who seeks to alter the course of interactions between humans and the planet, is curious about nature. She does not seek to dominate or exploit it, as Melody Jue argued would be expected in Western science fiction (174). The dominant Western capitalist logic prioritises the production of value, often via interactions with the biosphere in the form of resource extraction and pollution emission.

Turning back to Alaska, where *Oil and Water's* plot transpires, Maria Shaa Tláa Williams, in her essay "Neo-Colonial Melancholia: Alaska Native People, Education and Oil," bemoans the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), which she believes was a "social engineering effort to change Indigenous people into resource exploiters who would develop oil, gas, and other natural resources in the corporate-system" (193). In this sense, the ANCSA is a form of "creative destruction," as David Harvey has explained. Williams contends that the ultimate goal of the ANCSA was to erase native cultural bonds to the lands and the environment of Alaska

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

in favour of spreading a capitalist, neocolonial, exploitative mindset (193). A similar tactic, known as "redwashing," has been used in Canada.[54] The production of value via interactions with the biosphere is thus high on the agenda in this instance. This has also been shown to be the case in multiple other examples, from the European colonisers in North America who maintained very specific ideas as to what could be classified as terraformed land, to the European Colonisers in the East African Rift Valley, who upended a delicately balanced cooperation agreement that maintained a fragile ecosystem for communal use. This situation is also illustrated in fiction. Chief Malabo's tribe is removed from their treasured land, as the form of land use that they are engaged in, subsistence farming, produces far less value than the subterranean oil is capable of producing.

Oil and Water does not provide a robust native Alaskan voice to counteract the aforementioned neocolonial mindset. As I shall clarify in my analysis, Lee, who is often mistaken for an Alaskan native, appears to be the strongest objector to the neocolonial, oil-dependent culture that has been created around her, but her repudiation is meek at best. Conversely, *Lagoon* refutes the neocolonial mindset Williams lamented by framing human interaction with the biosphere as a consumption of value. Furthermore, *Lagoon* avoids succumbing to resource curse logic, as it centres its criticism on the human agents involved in the oil encounter and not on the material substance itself.

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[54] In his article "How Canada Uses 'Redwashing' To Crack Down On Indigenous Pipeline Protesters," Geoff Dembicki adroitly breaks down the influence of the Atlas-affiliated MacDonald Laurier Institute in pushing an extractive agenda. The Macdonald Laurier Institute has received considerable funding from the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation, alongside donations from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Exxon-owned Imperial Oil, one of Canada's top tar sands companies. Dembicki notes that the institute employs a two-pronged carrot or stick approach to dealing with Indigenous opposition to oil and gas expansion. The first prong, the carrot, involves bringing First Nations groups on board as "equity partners." The second prong, the stick, is far more sinister. It calls for the employment of "counterinsurgency" tactics against Indigenous protesters, whom it claims have "a taste for violence and excitement." This kind of rhetoric is notably similar to that used by other Atlas affiliates and conservative media in their claims that environmentalist protesters are eco-terrorists.

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As I have previously discussed, the term resource curse is often used to justify and excuse the rapacity that exacerbates poverty within oil-producing nations. Janet Stewart argues that "naming oil a curse mobilizes its imagined agency to maintain and justify the political and economic status quo" (287). It is not the resource itself that is a curse but rather the layers of complex human-created administration that govern its extraction, usage and trade. Anthropomorphised oil provides a convenient cloak that beclouds government and corporate policies, interactions and manoeuvrings. Many Nigerian petrofictions highlight the ineffectiveness of the government in addressing inequality and poverty in a resource-rich nation, as well as its inability to manage the environmental negligence of foreign oil companies that wield significant power over the country. *Lagoon* follows suit, as Adaora wonders aloud, "When had the Nigerian government and military done *anything* for its people?" (Okorafor 89). Nigerian novels tend not to posit oil as a curse; instead, they often see the intertwining agendas of multinational oil companies and the national government as the true curse that has befallen the nation. Representing the structures of feeling in Nigeria concerning oil is a difficult task, but criticising the issues that have created this situation is more effective when not relying on a realist plot to do so. At this juncture, I would like to turn to an in-depth analysis of *Oil and Water*, before then turning to *Lagoon*.

Oil and Water and *Lagoon* are situated in spatially divergent locations and culturally incongruous situations. Their literary approaches are similarly incongruous. Let me begin by discussing water's role in *Oil and Water's* realist plot. The Kuparuk oil tanker, owned by Mammoth Petroleum, runs aground on Montague reef and begins disgorging its cargo into the waters surrounding the town of Selby, Alaska.[55] Fishing trawler captain Gregg is aghast at the lack of a coordinated response to the

[55] Evans' fictional Exxon-Valdez is named after the ConocoPhillips Kuparuk field on the Alaskan North Slope. The extensive field contains "1,000 wells with three central processing facilities plus a seawater treatment plant" (Stricker).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

spill, which he learns of from a radio broadcast: “While the radio crackles emptily, Gregg considers what he’s heard, none of which has mentioned any kind of coordinated oil spill response” (19). He decries the state of the water he sails through, angrily mumbling, “The Gulf of Alaska’s as discolored as the fucking Mekong Delta” (21). Unfortunately for Gregg and the Gulf of Alaska, the brown colour that has tainted the once-pure water is not derived from mud and silt, as it is in the Mekong Delta; rather, it is the product of oil resting atop the water’s surface. Attempting to assuage his anger, Gregg makes for the boat’s outer deck. He “looks around for something to hurt, finally seizing a galvanized tub that he crumples against his chest before hurling it over the side. No splash” (22). The lack of a splash illustrates clearly just how viscous the ocean water has become, as the oil has asserted its dominance over the water. Aghast at what she witnesses as their boat sails back to Selby, deckhand Lee continuously repeats to herself, “Oil and water, […] oil and water don’t mix” (27).

After sailing for a considerable period of time, Gregg and Lee eventually escape the suffocating stench of the Kuparuk’s crude oil. Lee is elated to have reached a patch of the ocean where normality endures: “When they at last reach clean water, she gives thanks and breathes more easily. They pass Baidarki Island, apparently uncontaminated” (28). Baidarki Island provides echoes of Irikefe Island in *Oil on Water*. It is a fragile Eden in an oil-scarred wasteland. While all around it is chaos, the island remains tranquil and uncontaminated. Sadly, this oasis disappears as quickly as a mirage, and they re-enter oiled water soon after passing the island.

Although *Oil and Water* is based on the Exxon-Valdez grounding, the events that transpire within the novel also mirror some of the events that took place after the Deepwater Horizon spill in 2010. As I have already noted, Stephanie LeMenager has pointed out that the U.S. government and BP sacrificed the water to save the shore

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

after the blowout of the Macondo well in the Gulf of Mexico. LeMenager has noted that Corexit, a solvent manufactured by petroleum companies, was used to disperse oil slick "for the purpose of reducing the quantity of tarballs on beaches and other visible evidence of the oil slick" (125). *Oil and Water* illustrates a similar reaction to the devastation caused by the Kuparuk spill. The narrator informs the reader that during an emergency meeting convened to address the ongoing spill, "The secretary of the interior lobbies for the use of dispersants – solutions and powders designed to scuttle, or sink, floating oil" (30). Removing the oil from public sightlines is the first item on the government's agenda. Borrowing from Rob Nixon, who noted that the Niger Delta "has lacked a focal, fiery, news-grabbing explosion – and a spillcam," there is an evident desire on the part of the Alaskan government to remove the spillcam, so to speak, rendering the catastrophe less newsworthy and more banal in the process (274). A professor who is present at the meeting notes how the solution proffered by the secretary of the interior will benefit Mammoth: "The professor then adds that he can't resist pointing out that Mammoth Petroleum itself manufactures the lion's share of the world's dispersants" (30). Mammoth not only benefits from the new market it has unintentionally created for another of its products, but it also benefits from tax breaks, just as Paul Caron showed that BP did in the wake of Deepwater Horizon and just as the real-world Exxon did in the aftermath of the Exxon-Valdez's grounding.

Francisco Enriquez and Phineas Baxandall, journalists for *Houma Today*, a Louisiana-based news organisation, wrote about BP's efforts to secure tax deductions on its clean-up costs after Deepwater Horizon. In their article, Enriquez and Baxandall highlight the Exxon-Valdez spill as an example of a historical precedent for tax deductions accruing to oil companies that are simply cleaning up their own mess. The authors state, "Exxon argued the decision [to fine it USD $5 billion] in court for the

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next 20 years until 2005 when the Supreme Court decreased the fine to $500 million. Exxon then took a $200 [sic] tax deduction. When all was said and done, Exxon ended up paying about $300 million for the spill" (Enriquez and Baxandall). *Oil and Water* brings this tax deduction to the reader's attention during a scene in which Mammoth's public relations manager, Dean Carson, addresses the town of Selby. Keith Tomashaw, drafted in to assist in the emergency response efforts and bestowed with the amusingly euphemistic title of "incident commander," addresses the town's residents. He informs them that "Mammoth Petroleum's already written the oil spill off as a tax deduction" (109). Dean Carson attempts to win the astonished crowd back by flexing Mammoth's financial muscle. Carson informs everyone that they are eligible to make financial claims and consistently repeats the phrase "we will make things right" (109-10). In the weeks that follow the meeting, Gregg becomes weary of Mammoth's deep-pocketed approach.

Observing the multitude of ways in which Mammoth has thrown money at the problem, Gregg feels, "It's as though the petroleum company can't come up with enough ways to hand out money […]. As if it's counting on all those greenbacks to magically soak up the oil – if not in the real world, then at least in everyone's imagination" (160). Mammoth has created thousands of jobs, from "oil spill technicians" to chartering fishing boats to ferry cleanup personnel to ensure that the spill is cleaned from all visible surfaces, both aquatic and terrestrial (160). Their approach, as anticipated by Gregg, offers two distinct benefits. First, they are paying for a labour force that can assist in soaking up the oil in the real world. Second, the sudden influx of high-paying jobs cleanses the oil from people's minds, turning it from a source of devastation, both ecological and economic, to a financial boon shared among everyone. Water, the habitats it supports, and the animals that depend on it are irrelevant to Mammoth. Between the spraying of solvents onto the ocean's

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surface and the pressure-washing of the shoreline that will ensure the oil returns to the ocean, water is sacrificed to save the shore.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I noted that scientific, data-laden analyses often employ specialist language and appear inaccessible to the uninformed layperson. The scene in *Oil and Water* in which Dean Carson addresses the town of Selby illustrates this issue. A scientist from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) accompanies Carson on stage and attempts to pacify the crowd with jargon that they cannot comprehend. The scientist states, "The light ends of the hydrocarbons – the toxic components of crude oil – have all evaporated. The oil has largely emulsified with ocean water into what we call 'mousse.' […] We estimate the mousse from this particular spill to be composed of as much as eighty percent seawater" (101). It is noteworthy that the scientist appears to be framing these developments in an overly optimistic manner. He seems to believe that the fact that the polluted water is not the most hazardous kind somehow mitigates the situation. The toxic components may have evaporated, but the oil remains. The emulsified mousse continues to make fishing impossible. Any animals that have survived up to this point are still faced with an ecological holocaust. Their habitat has not returned to normal simply because the most toxic elements of the crude oil have evaporated.

After the NOAA scientist concludes the preliminary part of his lecture, the narrator intervenes, stating, "The NOAA scientist continues his explanation, wielding his specialized vocabulary, the effect of which both numbs and perplexes. Like his use of the word 'mousse,' as if calling crude oil mixed with seawater after some dessert will make the fact of it more palatable" (101). Lee is left perplexed by the NOAA scientist's explanations. The narrator informs us that she "has trouble grasping what this intense specialist seems at pains to explain" before adding "she notices that others in the audience seem equally bewildered" (101). This scene makes clear the difficulty

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that the uninformed average citizen faces in deciphering the events described in jargon-filled scientific documents. Petrofiction narratives can overcome this difficulty by presenting catastrophic events of oil infrastructure failure in a language and form, the novel, that is accessible to the layperson.

In an interesting parallel to the Niger Delta, in which commercial quantities of oil were first discovered in 1956, *Oil and Water*'s Camille recalls growing up in the town of Kalifornsky, which is located on the Kenai peninsula, described as "Alaska's first oil and gas province" by Jerry McBeath et al. (24). Oil was first drilled in the Kenai Peninsula in 1957, only a year after it was discovered at Oloibiri in Nigeria, despite what McBeath et al. term "Alaska's first environmental protest action," which occurred as the U.S. Congress had authorised Richfield Oil Corporation's drilling operations within the boundaries of the Kenai National Moose Range (27). *Oil and Water*'s narrator describes the town of Kalifornsky as "a sprawling inland settlement west of Selby, the first place in Alaska to be pioneered for its petroleum deposits." The narrator informs the reader that Kalifornsky in the 1950s had been "an unregulated free-for-all," illustrating the gold-rush mentality that oil is adept at promoting (161). Tess used to visit her sister Susie in Kalifornsky, and she recalls how "The water tasted bad enough that many in the makeshift community paid to have drinking water delivered" (161-62). Tess's recollection highlights a marked difference between the Niger Delta and the Kenai Peninsula, that is, the ability of members of the public to pay for the necessities of life. Residents of Kalifornsky can afford to pay for clean drinking water, and systems are in place to deliver this water to customers. In the Niger Delta, people struggle to source clean water, as Rufus illustrated on his journey through the abandoned villages of the region and his discovery of poisoned wells in the centre of those villages.

Camille enlightens the group as to the reason for the importation of drinking

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water; many families in the town had discovered benzene in their wells. Tess's response to Camille's reminiscence is coldly dismissive: "No one had made Camille's family live in Kalifornsky, she decides. If they were so unhappy there, they should have moved" (163). Tess resorts to the freedom argument without pausing to consider whether freedom is also the cause of the issues that compel people to import clean drinking water in the first place. The reader has already been informed that the town of Kalifornsky had been an "unregulated free-for-all" directly leading to the leaching of benzene into the water table. The freedom to conduct business in an unfettered manner has directly impinged upon the local populace's rights to clean drinking water, artificially creating a quandary for Kalifornsky's residents. Tess cannot see past her culturally constructed values. Being forced to choose between paying for something that was once free or uprooting your family and moving to another area of the state is not freedom; rather, it is a coerced choice. Tess's perspective illustrates an unshakable belief that all freedom is positive. Negative outcomes resulting from the exercising of freedom are reframed as expansive opportunities for further choice, which Tess believes is a further form of freedom. Tess's stance ignores the structural inequities that limit personal mobility. For many, relocation is not economically viable. For others, connections to their land are so strong and innate that leaving voluntarily is not an option. The discussion between Camille and Tess abruptly ends after Tess's dismissive interior monologue, inviting the reader to ponder the illusory nature of Camille's family's purported agency and freedom regarding their future in Kalifornsky. David Harvey has stated that the connotations of the word freedom have become such conventional wisdom among the American public that elites can weaponise the word to "justify almost anything" (39). Tess does just that in this instance.

As Gregg has already discovered, there was no coordinated, expeditious response

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

to the grounding of the Kuparuk tanker. Mammoth, rather than springing into action and attempting to contain the spill, instead seeks to improve its relationship with the local community by initially offering twenty dollars an hour to those engaged in cleanup operations. At the moment in time that Mammoth begins offering salaries, all clean-up operations, including the animal cleaning station at the Port of Selby, are volunteer-led. Mammoth's financial offer soon becomes mandatory as the company annexes public space in the name of the cleanup effort and compels all workers, either paid or unpaid, to sign employment contracts with the company.

It is noteworthy in this situation that oil, which is, of course, a source of energy, engages in twofold compliance with an assertion made by Matthew Huber, in which he notes, "Energy powered the privatization of social space" (xv). From the first perspective, Mammoth coopts and privatises the physical social space in which the townspeople of Selby are engaging in cleanup efforts. The townspeople created the bird cleaning station at the Harbor Air hangar, intent on contributing to the amelioration efforts in any way they could, without seeking to profit from their labour. However, when Mammoth finally ends its vacillation, it attempts to wrestle control of the narrative in a manner that disgusts Lee. Referencing the cleanup operation, Lee bemoans that Mammoth has begun "making it about money" (117). The ad hoc cleanup site created by the public is abruptly privatised, forcing the volunteers to accept employment contracts with Mammoth as "only registered employees will be permitted on the premises of the otter and bird rehabilitation facilities" (126).

The second sense in which Mammoth privatises social space is in a more abstract mental sense. Mammoth not only colonises public land but also engages in efforts to colonise the emotional and mental structures of feeling that create social narratives. Mammoth co-opts the publicly led cleanup initiative to ensure it can retain control over the narrative that emanates from the disaster zone. What began as a repudiation

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

of anthropocentrism by the Selby locals, a selfless act of care for the non-humans affected by the oil spill, quickly became a curated public relations ploy by Mammoth to engender goodwill through the offer of salaries and the company's association with disaster mitigation. Mammoth effectively incorporates and instrumentalises both public space and publicly-led initiatives to ensure it can retain control over the narrative that emanates from the disaster zone, a fact that Lee is all too aware of as she lashes out at the aforementioned Tess, a middle-class mother and resident of Selby, who is easily placated by Mammoth's actions.

Tess and Lee's argument centres on their antithetical views concerning money. Tess quantifies everything in her life via an inherited a priori financial or monetary value. Naomi Klein has noted the difficulty this framing produces in the U.S. when debating climate action: "Debates about climate action remain trapped in a paradigm that equates quality of life with personal prosperity and wealth accumulation" (265). Tess's single-minded focus on personal financial gain echoes the sentiments of *Black Water Rising*'s Elise, who felt confident that every "red-blooded American" could be bought. Lee, on the other hand, is wary of Tess's suppositions in relation to quality of life and the importance of wealth accumulation. Upon hearing of Mammoth's plan to compel all of the volunteers to become official company employees, Tess exclaims, "That's good […] Right?" Lee instantly rebukes her, insisting, "We have to be free agents. That's the whole point." Lee, exasperated after her disagreement with Tess, curtly ends the conversation by chastising Tess, "If you don't see the problem […] then that's a problem" (117).

Matthew Huber contends, "Postwar suburbanization in the United States should be seen as a construction of a kind of neopeasantry where politics often becomes constrained within 'narrow limits' focused on the family, private property, and anticollectivist sentiments" (79). This limited form of politics consumes Tess, as she

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

cannot comprehend the collectivist sentiment that leads to the instigation of cleanup efforts. Huber calls this form of politics a "politics of privatism." Through the financialisation of the collectivist cleanup efforts, Mammoth only exacerbates the difficulties being faced in Selby, as it encourages individual disaster capitalists to flood the town in search of spill jobs, simultaneously destroying the town's fragile economy and, as Tess will later understand, its sense of community.

While it may be a stretch to accuse Tess of being anti-collectivist in her deference to Mammoth's wage offer, she is undoubtedly not a collectivist in the sense of feeling a kinship with the volunteers aiding the clean-up efforts, nor the non-humans affected by the spill. She rationalises Mammoth's offer, which is still simply an offer at the time the argument occurs, by asserting, "Why not pay those who want to be paid, and let everyone else work for free?" (117). Tess's disregard for the collectivist sentiment that drove people to come together for a higher purpose than earning money is soon shown to be naïve as Selby becomes overrun with prospectors seeking to make their fortune. Thanks to the high-paying oil spill jobs, "no one wants to wait tables or flip burgers in local restaurants; no one wants to work as lowly salesclerks in retail businesses; no one will stoop to changing bedding in area hotels or at the hospital – or to caring for children, the elderly, and the infirm" (135). By the novel's conclusion, Tess understands that her haste to disregard and dismiss the positive, socially binding aspects of collective, charitable action was misguided. Tess realises that "one of Selby's greatest strengths was the tolerance most people routinely extended to one another […] Now, the community's so divided that it's hard to imagine it ever recovering its former unity" (261). The echoes of Chief Malabo's comments in *Oil on Water* are emphatic in this instance. Describing the current situation of the neighbouring villages that took money from the oilmen and spent it on a bourgeois lifestyle and the commodities that go with it, the chief stated, "and now

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

they were worse off than before" (43). Selby is undoubtedly now in the same situation, regardless of the money that has suddenly flooded its economy. The abrupt revenue boost offers the illusion of prosperity, and Tess falls for it, only to belatedly realise that there are other aspects of small-town life that should be considered of equal or perhaps greater importance than the purely financial aspect.

Although it may seem like a triumphant conclusion to see Tess recognise some of the drawbacks of the bourgeois culture she has internalised, her enlightenment is prefaced by her continuous inability to understand the foundational role that oil plays in forming her way of life. After admitting, in internal monologue, that her post-spill actions were injudicious, and hoping Lee will forgive her for working for Mammoth, Tess asks herself, "What is it about petroleum […] Why do we humans sell our souls for the stuff?" (Evans 262). Perhaps Tess subconsciously understands the link between oil and her lifestyle. However, nothing more comes of her ponderance on the topic. The novel ends with Lee imagining a conversation between herself and Aaron, Gregg's son, who died from the inhalation of toxins emanating from the oil spill. During the conversation, Aaron informs Lee, "Nothing's going to change until people do" (266). Lee is left to wonder if humans are capable of change, with Tess acting as a prime example of the perhaps minimal level of change that a realist novel can conceive.

In the days following the grounding of the Kuparuk tanker, Gregg continues to ponder what could have been done to prevent the disaster that decimated the industry from which he earns a living. He begins to play an internal game of what if, concluding by criticising both state and federal governments: "What could have been done in the early hours of the grounding – *if* boom had been readily deployable, *if* contingency plans had been in place, *if* the state and the feds had ever been even halfway serious about holding Big Oil accountable for the risks posed by the ocean

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

transport of unprocessed crude. Almost two days into this thing, there's still no plan. How screwed up is that?" (20). Gregg's denunciation illustrates a level of expectation that simply did not even cross *Lagoon*'s Adaora's mind as she pondered when the Nigerian government had ever done anything for its people. The fact that Gregg seems flabbergasted that there's still no plan after two days contrasts in an almost amusing way, were it not so tragic, with the antithetical situation that Adaora's comments clarify about Lagos. Furthermore, Gregg's question "How screwed up is that?" also belies an expectation of transparency, efficiency, organisation, and impartial governance on the part of both the state and federal governments, whom he critiques. Gregg implies that these government entities are colluding with Big Oil to create a lax safety environment, with the associated cost savings for Big Oil that accompany this lack of regulation coming at the direct expense of both the American public and the natural environment, as well as non-human habitats. Unfortunately, Gregg's insinuations have proven to be true on more than one occasion.

A lack of enforcement of strict safety regulations led to the Union Oil Santa Barbara Spill in early 1969, which was discussed by LeMenager. Activists at the time optimistically felt that the event would lead to dramatic change. Unfortunately, their optimism proved to be naive. Paul Relis, a student at the University of California, Santa Barbara, when recounting the incident, stated that he remembered: "looking straight down into this huge upswelling of black out of the ocean. And [he] just instantly thought, this is going to change the world" (qtd. in Thulin). The use of the phrase "the world" belies an unintentional American-centric interpretation of events. This phrase was also trotted out by the New York Times environment correspondent Gladwin Hill in an article written in 1970 in which Hill claimed that the Santa Barbara spill was an "ecological shot heard round the world" (qtd. in Thulin). Dishearteningly, lessons were not learned after the Santa Barbara incident. In fact, the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Pacific Research Institute, a think tank affiliated with the Atlas Network, was founded in California in 1979 as a direct response to the more vocal and active environmentalist movement in the state (Westervelt and Dembicki). There's no doubt that the Santa Barbara spill received greater media attention due to the area in which it occurred. However, it did not change the world; nor, in fact, did it even change the United States.

In an act that proves Gregg's suspicion of the links between Big Oil and the U.S. government correct, Union Oil lobbied the U.S. government to renege on its duty to vigorously regulate commercial drilling sites. Union Oil, despite community concerns about drilling in federal waters, successfully petitioned to circumvent the legal safety requirement that the protective steel casing on oil wells must extend to a depth of three hundred feet below surface level, which was a factor in the eventual well blowout (Thulin). As *Oil and Water* is a realist novel that fictionalises the Exxon-Valdez disaster, Gregg is well-informed regarding the connections between Big Oil and the U.S. government. The events in the novel, published in 2013, occur 24 years prior to its publication date. As such, information that was perhaps unavailable to residents of Valdez, Alaska, at the time of the Exxon-Valdez spill can be retrofitted into *Oil and Water*'s plot and brought to the fore through characters like Gregg, whose real-life counterparts may have had their suspicions of foul play but would at the time have been unable to prove it.

The U.S. government, despite being presented with irrefutable evidence of the devastating consequences of lax enforcement of safety procedures, through events such as the Santa Barbara spill and the Exxon Valdez's grounding on Bligh Reef, has continued to allow big oil to flout safety procedures. The blowout of the Macondo well and subsequent deaths of eleven workers on BP's Deepwater Horizon rig, not to mention the ecological devastation caused to hundreds of miles of coastline in the

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southern United States, were precipitated by a combination of corporate mismanagement and lax government oversight. *Los Angeles Times* writers Bettina Boxall and Neela Bannerjee succinctly summarise the causes in the following excerpt from their 2011 article on the political fallout of the oil spill: "The presidential commission examining the causes of the BP oil spill Wednesday laid blame for the disaster on corporate mismanagement, inadequate government regulation and ultimately a lack of political will to ensure proper oversight of the oil industry as it pushed drilling rigs into ever deeper waters." This summary closely echoes Gregg's dismayed accusation that the state and the federal governments were not even "halfway serious about holding Big Oil accountable" (Evans 20). Evidently, the Santa Barbara spill did not create an environment of strict, proactive regulation; however, it did have a far-reaching impact on the future of Big Oil, as it strengthened the environmental movement and brought it to mainstream attention.

The burgeoning environmental movement, catalysed by the Santa Barbara oil spill, posed an existential threat to Big Oil. To ensure its continued survival, the oil industry skilfully manipulated the environmental movement into acting as its sentinel, shielding it from political attack through the use of astute diversionary tactics. The ever-expanding nuclear power industry posed a significant threat to Big Oil's dominance over global energy proliferation. The oil industry cunningly avoided a crisis of demand by assisting in securing the demise of nuclear power as an alternative. It was an alternative that was both credible and anticipated in the early 1970s. Spurred into action by the Oil Crisis, President Nixon, in 1973, announced Project Independence, a plan to construct a multitude of nuclear plants across the United States by the year 2000. Nixon also called for the creation of the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA), which was duly formed and became operational in 1974 ("Nixon's Nuclear Energy Vision"). However, once the Oil Crisis

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

ended in 1977, the ERDA was folded into the Department of Energy (DOE), the same government department that we have already seen *Black Water Rising*'s Lonnie Philips castigate for being in bed with the oil companies: "half of the Energy Department's policy was written by oil industry analysts, guys who used to *work* for Cole and Shell and Exxon and Gulf Oil" (366).

The Nixon Foundation concludes that President Nixon's nuclear goals were kiboshed principally by the failure to create large-scale public support for nuclear energy, combined with "the untimely occurrence of Watergate," before also acknowledging the part played by Big Oil, albeit declining to name names. The foundation argues President Nixon's plans have gone unrealised "partly due to lobbying on the part of established energy industries against the creation of a massive new competitor market" ("Nixon's Nuclear Energy Vision").

The oil industry engaged in a cunning act of self-preservation when it weaponised the environmental movement to squash its largest competitor. Timothy Mitchell situates us in the epiphanic moment when the oil industry understood that action was required: "By the 1970s the cost estimates [for nuclear power] were less optimistic, but there was still the risk that the vast funds that the government was committing to the development of the new fast-breeder reactors would produce energy at a price that would threaten the high profits now enjoyed by the oil industry" (*Carbon Democracy* 192).[56] Mitchell asserts that oil companies "joined the effort to frame the environment as a new object of politics, and to define it and calibrate it in particular ways" (*Carbon Democracy* 192). Backed by Big Oil, environmental campaigners began to insist that nuclear power generation should be forced to "take

[56] Mitchell is referring to the rather optimistic assessment provided by John Von Neumann in the 1950s, in which Von Neumann declared that energy may be free. Van Neumann based this statement on the assumption that humanity would soon perfect the art of power generation through nuclear fusion, a technique we have still not mastered roughly three-quarters of a century later. Von Neumann ominously predicted that oil would be relegated to being used for chemical synthesis.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

account of the risks of accidents and the costs of disposing of spent fuel" (*Carbon Democracy* 192). The irony of Big Oil championing accounting for the risks stemming from potential accidents is worth our attention. *Oil and Water* addresses the oil industry's lack of interest in investing in safety as members of Congress interview Mammoth executives in Anchorage. A legislator asks, "Did you think the contingency plan you signed offered adequate protection in the event of a major oil spill?" The Mammoth executive responds, "The State of Alaska approved it. The state signed off on it," before concluding with "The state did not require us to do more" (249). Big Oil has been adept at hindering regulatory efforts that would negatively impact its bottom line, while also being particularly skilled at ensuring that regulations hinder the progress of its competitors.

Big Oil's efforts to promote the regulation of the nuclear industry ensured the unfeasibility of nuclear power as a cheap alternative to oil, as downstream costs raised overheads for nuclear power generators to a level at which they could no longer compete with oil. The great irony in the collaboration between the environmental movement and the oil industry is that the vigorous environmental movement was in large part spurred by the Santa Barbara oil spill, and yet oil companies were now successfully manipulating this movement to divert the public's attention towards their competitor and away from the industry that catalysed the movement. The American public's aversion to nuclear power, partially spurred by anti-nuclear propaganda espoused by oil companies, was cemented by the late 1970s and mid-1980s, in no small part due to the incident at the Three Mile Island facility in Pennsylvania and the meltdown at the Chernobyl power station.[57]

[57] Lydia Saad, writing for *Gallup* in April 2016, stated that, "Not only did the percentage of Americans opposing construction of nuclear power plants increase shortly after the Three Mile Island accident, but the percentage saying nuclear power operations needed to be cut back until stricter regulations could be put in place jumped to 66%, up from 40% in 1976. That figure retreated to 55% by 1980, but registered 66% in 1986, right after Chernobyl."

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

With all of the historically documented manipulative machinations of the oil industry in mind, it seems surprising that *Oil and Water*'s Gregg naïvely asks, "How screwed up is that?" in the wake of the Kuparuk disaster. Gregg's reaction illustrates the effect of the perception of oil's general safety in the United States upon public sentiment towards the industry. The oil industry successfully weaponised fears about nuclear power and its adverse environmental effects to shield itself from widespread criticism, as, despite tangible evidence of the oil industry's detrimental effect on the environment, it was, in each instance, less catastrophic than a nuclear meltdown would have been. Contrasting Gregg's structure of feeling regarding the oil industry with Adaora's illustrates the reasons for their diametrically opposed reactions to the ecological devastation caused by the industry. The constant slow violence experienced in Nigeria in comparison to the rarer, more highly publicised petroviolence experienced in the United States ensures Adaora's lack of expectation regarding her government's ability or willingness to regulate the oil industry, in contrast to Gregg's indignation at the ineffectuality of his government.

Lee, who had an explosive argument with Tess over the mandatory employment contracts that Mammoth forced upon cleanup workers, is, like Gregg, far from the only Selby resident to be wary of Mammoth's *embarrass de richesses* approach to disaster remediation. At the aforementioned town hall meeting attended by Mammoth executives, a ninety-year-old resident named Stanley Nelson rebukes Mammoth's spokesperson, Dean Carson, by asserting that "no amount of money in the world can ever make this right" (Evans 111). Nelson, like *Black Water Rising's* Jay Porter and the old woman in Saro-Wiwa's *Night Ride*, sees past the money on offer, refusing to allow the prospect of financial enrichment to cloud his priorities and his judgment. Tess also has ideological clashes with her husband, Daniel, who works at the local radio station. Mammoth offers the station a "no strings attached" grant of fifty

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

thousand dollars. Daniel and Malcolm, the station manager, are morally conflicted as they are wary of becoming Mammoth's mouthpiece. Tess, however, once again sees only the financial side of the argument and urges Daniel to accept. Tess is, as Elise Linsey proclaimed, "a red-blooded American" (Locke 394-95). Daniel pleads with Tess to understand why he and many members of the public are becoming suspicious of Mammoth's "deep-pocket approach" (Evans 133-34). After their discussion ends, the reader is given an insight into Tess's state of mind as her internal monologue reveals her inability to imagine a world without oil. She non-verbally implores people to understand that "Oil is a fact of life, people. Get a grip" (Evans 134).

Tess unquestioningly affirms the "American way of life" as the sole option for constructing human society. This way of life, as Huber elucidated, is constructed on a foundation of cheap and abundant oil. Tess's beseechment to "get a grip" implies that those who repudiate the statement that oil is an immutable fact of life are not entirely in control of their mental faculties or are too given to fits of emotion. For Tess, a world without oil constitutes an unconscionable regression of civilisation. In her futile attempts to convince Lee of the inherent logic of her argument, Tess triumphantly and perhaps disingenuously, given the area in which they reside, challenges Lee to live without petroleum-powered modes of transportation, "And you'll never ride in a car, or a boat – or a bus, or an airplane – ever again? Sure" (Evans 131). Understanding the difficulty of her position, as a resident of an isolated Alaskan town and a citizen of a society that has articulated the prerequisites of a successful life, to include "the material requisites of oil-based privatism – a home, a car, a family," Lee can only meekly reply, "I don't know" (Huber 21; Evans 131). Lee's reply illustrates her unintended complicity in creating the economic value that ensures Mammoth Petroleum's continued prosperity.

The issue of forced reliance on oil-powered modes of transportation also arose

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

during the emergency meeting, at which the Secretary of the Interior spoke and Gregg was present. At the meeting, a marine biologist cautioned the Native community in the town of Pogibshi "not to eat anything harvested from the sea," to which Gregg replied, "No problem […] They'll just hop in their Learjets, fly to Anchorage for groceries" (31). Gregg's frustrated, sarcastic response highlights the oversized impact that oil has had on human lifestyles, whether or not those affected are willing participants in petromodernity. Ironically, the solution to a problem caused by oil is oil itself. Fisheries have been decimated by the spill. An entire way of life, dependent on the ocean, has become impossible as the risk to human health has become too significant to disregard. Gregg's reply, intended to mock the wealth and privileged lifestyle afforded to Mammoth Petroleum's envoys and Alaskan government officials, also highlights the untenable position in which Native communities have been placed due to oil and its effects on the modern world. The most feasible solution to the impending food crisis facing the Native community of Pogibshi is reliant on kerosene-powered jets, or, more realistically, if we account for Gregg's intended sarcasm, on petroleum-powered automobiles. The Pogibshi community is thus likely to find itself in a similar position to that which has left Lee exasperated. Tess might argue that the Native people of Pogibshi are free to move somewhere else, but their situation echoes that of the people of Kalifornsky. Neither is truly free, as the choice they are presented with is a form of coercion.

Karl Polanyi, in *The Great Transformation*, asserts that the source of economic value is "human wants and scarcity." He continues by insisting that freedom, the notion of which is held so dearly in many cultures and nations, the U.S. in particular, is illusory: "Any opinion or desire will make us participants in the creation of power and in the constituting of economic value. No freedom to do otherwise is conceivable" (267). Lee's despondency is manifested by the thrusting of a generally obscured

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

reality of market exchange into her daily life. In a society constructed around individual freedom, automobility and suburban expansionism, Lee is inhibited in her ability to make choices that do not implicate her as a participant in augmenting the contextual power that Mammoth wields thanks to its financial *puissance* and its ability to provide the lifeblood of the American economy. A vivid example of this, one that became ubiquitous in American suburbs during the early 2000s, is the Hummer, a United States Army vehicle converted for civilian use. Lindsey Green-Simms elaborates on the irony of a civilian version of a vehicle that formed part of the arsenal used to secure the resources needed to quench its own thirst for fuel, "The prevalence of Hummers in America's suburban parking lots, highways, and popular television shows seemed to propel the fantasy that gas-guzzling vehicles were somehow not the cause of the [Iraq war] but a sign of American freedom, self-determination, and toughness that were only bolstered by the 9/11 attacks" (59).

It could still be argued that Lee is free because she could simply repudiate the standard lifestyle that the society around her has created, the freedom that is associated with the "American way of life," and live a spartan, self-sufficient, off-the-grid existence; however, the likelihood of people choosing this route is close to nil. Unfortunately, as Horn and Bergthaller have noted, "The conception of freedom that co-evolved with the fossil energy regime is today one of the greatest obstacles in overcoming it" (138). That holds true for Lee. The ability of people like Lee to convene en masse and force social change is inhibited by the cherished cultural logic of individual freedom. Lee is essentially left to scream into the void, as the events that have catastrophically affected her life can simply be framed as the regrettable side effects of an oil-fuelled way of life that promotes individual freedom, which is exactly how Tess feels about them. There are three forms of fetishisation that disempower people like Lee in their desire to rebel against the oil-powered society in which they

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live.

The first form is commodity fetishism, which obscures the social origins of products intended for exchange on capitalist markets, making it more difficult to acknowledge some uncomfortable realities that enable capitalist markets to function as they do. Matthew Huber highlights the obfuscation of origin inherent in market exchanges: "If freedom is ultimately exercised through the world of market exchange, *commodity fetishism* ensures that the social origins of those commodities will be obscured" (157, emphasis added). The Kuparuk's grounding on Montague Reef expunges the cloak of secrecy surrounding oil, revealing the structures that actualise Lee's freedom. Huber is, of course, referring to the social origins of oil. However, it is not just the social origins of oil that are routinely concealed; its geographical origins are also often obfuscated.

In the case of the Kuparuk, its cargo originated from the Alaskan North Slope. The 94,000 square mile North Slope Borough is sparsely populated, with 9,703 residents, most of whom are Inupiat Alaskan Natives (U.S. Department of the Interior). In comparison, according to the Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group, the population of the Niger Delta Region is roughly 31 million people, comprising over 40 ethnic groups ("History The Niger Delta Region").[58] These statistics lay bare the stark contrast between the oil extraction industries in the two regions. Despite *Lagoon* being set in Lagos, only Nigeria's ninth-highest oil-producing state, the effects of the oil encounter on the daily lives of Lagosians are so well-understood that even Kola, Adaora's young daughter, declares, "My mother says the waters are all dirty and dead because of the oil companies" (Okorafor 68).[59] *Lagoon* illuminates the structures of

[58] The Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group (NDEBUMOG) is registered with Nigeria's Corporate Affairs Commission and holds a special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

[59] Data sourced from Lekoil.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

feeling in a region beset by banal, slow petro-violence; it refuses to accord with the commodity fetishism that obscures the origins of oil.

Oil and Water, in contrast, is inspired by a singular spillcam event revealing the site of devastation after a spill without shining a light on the source of the oil itself. The grounding of the Kuparuk provides a newsworthy flashpoint, but its focus remains entirely on the spill site without taking into account the source of the oil that has spilt. The need to avoid newsworthy events is well-known within the oil industry. In a strikingly similar admission to that of Kelcy Warren, the CEO of Energy Transfer, builders of the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline, who feared sullying his company's reputation if it openly retaliated against environmental groups in such a way as to end up on the news, Robert Brian, a former BP instrument technician cum whistleblower, noted in an interaction with the *Anchorage Daily News* that "We are trying to change that so we don't have a catastrophe that ends up on CNN and stops us from getting into ANWR" (qtd. in Leopold 45).[60] The "that" to which Brian is referring is systemic safety issues at BP due to pipeline maintenance backlogs and staff shortages. Brian is acutely aware of the fact that a newsworthy event at the extraction site, in a developed, wealthy nation such as the United States, could scupper plans to exploit the energy source itself. It would reveal the insidious side of the oil industry to a wider demographic, potentially leading to protests or social movements against the industry.

David McDermott Hughes notes the importance of pipeline infrastructure in connecting the point of crude extraction to its eventual points of usage farther down the chain: "Especially now, drillers produce oil in places too remote or inhospitable to support either human settlement or manufacturing. A pipeline carries Alaska's petroleum to the nested factories, highways, and dumps that signal industry"

[60] Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

("Petro-Pastoralism"). As I have previously noted, Matthew Huber has illustrated that commodity fetishism ensures the occlusion of the social conditions that produce oil. A second form of fetishism adds to this erasure of social relations involved in the production of oil. Graeme MacDonald argues that,

> Official oil company representations typically betray a penchant for the Enlightenment[61] visions of technological innovation, [which leads to the] fetishizing [of] futuristic, machine-cool images of efficiency and enablement that sublate notions of a solitary, "heroic" line of oil in harmony with its environment, running safely over desert dunes, through bright blue ocean or boreal wilderness. Brought from the "out there," oil transcends all landscapes and (almost magically) reaches the gas station forecourt or domestic power supply. ("Containing Oil" 39)

These images of efficiency and enablement are crucial to creating the illusion of oil's general safety, which is more perceptible in Global North nations than in Global South nations. MacDonald makes this clear in the following excerpt: "Oil's harmful effects tend to be more visible and less contained in politically and economically 'weaker' regions and states" ("Containing Oil" 33). In the case of the two novels I am discussing, *Lagoon* falls under MacDonald's "weaker" heading due to its plot taking place in Nigeria. As such, its plot radically differs from that of *Oil and Water*, set in the stronger U.S.

A third form of fetishisation, and one which dramatically hinders our contemporary ability to enforce carbon emissions cuts, is the fetishisation of GDP growth. Naomi Klein highlights how we have an economic system that "fetishizes GDP growth above all else, regardless of the human or ecological consequences, and in which the neoliberal political class has utterly abdicated its responsibility to

[61] Climate change directly challenges enlightenment ideals of progress and, therefore, Western culture's most cherished ideas. Climate change renders these ideas unviable as natural boundaries confine our ability to continue to make 'progress' (Klein 79).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

manage anything (since the market is the invisible genius to which everything must be entrusted)" (115-16). This fetishisation of neoliberal economics has neutered many of the criticisms levelled at it, as there is an unwritten rule that one must appear reasonable in one's criticisms of the system. Klein notes how this desire has affected scientists as "in order to appear reasonable within neoliberal economic circles, [they] have been dramatically soft-pedaling the implications of their research" (116). Oliver Letwin has noted that what Klein termed "soft-pedaling" is a common issue among experts who are accustomed to "operating in a particular system under normal circumstances" (81). Letwin discusses the role of "free-thinkers" or those outside of a certain expert clique in predicting future events (82). In theory, these free thinkers can force experts to acknowledge possibilities that they deem improbable, such as black swan events. However, these "free-thinkers" tend to conform to the expectations of the experts and the system in which these experts operate, for the same reasons as Klein has argued. According to Letwin, efforts to create an environment in which the unthinkable is acknowledged,

> Often fail, because those who are engaged to 'think the unthinkable' either genuinely do just that – and end up being discounted by the experts as eccentric – or seek to preserve their standing with the experts by engaging in self-censorship in order to raise only those thoughts that the experts consider to be at least nearly thinkable. (82)

Lee and the town of Selby have fallen victim to the dramatic results of the aforementioned forms of fetishisation. Commodity fetishism obscures the origins of the lifeblood of the American economy, while the second form of fetishisation, that described by Graeme MacDonald, ensures that oil arrives at the pump unseen, as if by magic. Oil has become so ubiquitous, and yet it also remains clandestine to the point that the average citizen does not contemplate its origins or its means of transportation

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

until they are faced with a highly publicised disaster and a spill cam. Oil comes from "out there," as MacDonald has noted, at the expense of minority and disempowered human populations or at the expense of entire ecosystems that maintain a fragile balance and provide habitats, food, water and the necessities of life for humans and non-humans alike ("Containing Oil" 39). This reality influences the social and cultural expectations that the average citizen of Global North nations has concerning oil. The Kuparuk's grounding is seen as a black swan event by many of the characters in *Oil and Water*, in much the same way as events such as its real-life counterpart, the Exxon-Valdez, were also seen as an aberration, in contrast to slow violence, which, as I have mentioned, becomes banal. Selby's residents continued to live an existence that relied entirely on unseen oil, not acknowledging the inherent dangers of its systems of provision until disaster occurred. Lee's attempts to reflect on the event and the necessity of oil to Selby's way of life are met head-on by Tess's refusal to reflect further than to say, "Oil is a fact of life, people. Get a grip" (134).

Gregg becomes utterly disillusioned with Selby life in the wake of the spill, as the town he knew pre-spill has morphed into something that disgusts him. He sees two forms of toxicity destroying the town that once was, the first is, of course, the crude oil gushing out of the Kuparuk; the second is the unrestrained greed of the disaster capitalists trying to benefit from the spill: "Just as uncontained crude oil has proven fatal to the wild coast, [Gregg] decides, a second wave – of unleashed greed – now toxifies the coastal community" (155). The townspeople of Selby even create a humorous nickname for the entrepreneurial subjects who are seduced by the potential financial gains on offer post-spill; these people are dubbed "spillionaires" (149). Resorting to dark humour, Gregg recollects the many economic booms that Alaska has experienced, ranging from the fur trade to the contemporary petroleum boom, before wryly declaring that the current economic boom is "an oil spill: environmental

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

holocaust turned growth industry" (155). In a rather grotesque twist of cultural logic, the ecological disaster caused by the Kuparuk can be framed by some as an opportunity for economic growth, an event upon which entrepreneurially-minded individuals can capitalise.

The cultural politics of entrepreneurial life is impossible "without the material transformation of the everyday life centred upon reproductive geographies of single-family home ownership, automobility, and voracious energy consumption" (Huber 23). The Kuparuk event highlights the fuel that enables the cultural politics of entrepreneurial life, while simultaneously generating a new growth industry that empowers people to become entrepreneurs and seek to make their fortune, thereby drawing more citizens into complicity with the prescribed cultural values of society, which oil itself helped make possible. Relationships between Selby residents become fractious in the wake of the spill as people are split into two distinct camps: those who curse Mammoth and those who revere it. Perhaps inspired by BP's rebranding, after the spill, Mammoth rebrands as MPC and creates a new logo described as a "starry red, white, and blue design" (Evans 233).[62] The allusions to American patriotism in this situation are exceedingly obvious, tying oil with a love of the nation and the

[62] BP rebranded from British Petroleum to Beyond Petroleum while "pledging to hold emissions constant and to be a steward to the planet" (Carpenter). Within a decade of its rebranding, a BP pipeline caused one of the largest oil spills in Alaska's history, and the BP oil rig Deepwater Horizon caused the largest maritime oil spill in history (Carpenter). Profitability, however, takes ultimate precedence at BP, as in early 2025, BP announced massive layoffs, a reduction in its workforce and a shift back towards the company's traditional business model. Allyson Ackerman elaborates as follows: "Almost five years ago, the energy giant embarked on an ambitious attempt to transform itself from an oil and gas company into a business focused on renewable and cleaner energies. [BP CEO Murray Auchincloss] said he intends to refocus the company on BP's traditional oil and gas business to increase its profitability."

BP was not alone in rebranding with a focus on shifting attention away from its commitment to fossil fuels for the indefinite future. Norwegian oil and gas giant Statoil rebranded as Equinor in 2018. According to Equinor, its new moniker "describes something more than oil. The name hints at a desire to help shape the future and to be competitive in a society with lower emissions." Furthermore, the company adds, "The first part originates from words such as 'equal', 'equality', and 'equilibrium'" ("The Story of a New Name"). Interestingly, this name change occurred within two years of a well-control incident on the Songa Endurance rig in which "Several breaches of the regulations have been identified, and operator company Statoil has now been issued with an order" (Norwegian Ocean Industry Authority).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

culture, lifestyle, freedom and structures of feeling it represents and facilitates. As a married home and vehicle owner who has children, Tess is the exemplification of the idealised "American way of life." Tess's conformity imbues her with the confidence to pontificate on the unacceptability of any other mode of living, as she made clear in her statement that oil is a fact of life. Tess's assumptions in relation to the correctness of the "American way of life" rely on the outsourcing of disaster to areas or people far removed from conformity with her notions of proper society.

Mammoth is aware of the need to placate middle-class Americans like Tess on the inherent safety of the oil industry. As I have previously mentioned, Mammoth vacillated for days after the Kuparuk began to soil the waters around Selby while it attempted to compose its chronicle of events. Mammoth's strategy was twofold; the first aspect has already been delineated. Mammoth privatised public spaces and cleanup efforts with its deep-pocketed approach, allowing it to seize control of the positive aspect of the narrative. Mammoth's second angle of attack involved the purposeful banalisation of the spill and the expeditious removal of visual cues of disaster. The company hurriedly pressure-washed the Selby shoreline to rid it of the visible blemishes of oil. Kurt, a Selby resident, bemoans the fact that this will generate the positive publicity that Mammoth is seeking while simultaneously killing any remaining organisms that survived the initial spill (Evans 125-26). Kurt outlines Mammoth's plan to Lee. He states that "They're going to pressure wash the shoreline. Then, supposedly, the oil will drain back into the water and they'll skim it off. […] But if there're any organisms left alive out there after the oil, high-pressure hosing will finish them off" (126). Mammoth's actions, in this instance, can be seen as an attempt to banalise the news of the spill; a ploy to placate the human community by removing the visual scars associated with the spill and murdering further non-human life in the process. In doing so, Mammoth essentially removes the spill cam, in

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

essence, downgrading the violence of the disaster to slow violence in the sense described by Rob Nixon.

Regarding the inimical aspect of the spill narrative, attributing fault for the disaster, Mammoth is quick to deflect and outsource this element, the inverse reaction to its approach to the positive elements of the narrative. Mammoth's strategy begins with creating euphemistic titles for the catastrophic event as we saw when Keith Tomashaw was introduced as the company's "Incident commander" (109). The term incident patently does not do justice to the scale of the devastation that has occurred. Mammoth's public relations representative, Dean Carson, claims the spill is an "unfortunate accident" (96). Carson also uses euphemistic words when he informs anyone whose livelihood has been "unfavorably affected by this thing" that they are eligible to claim compensation (109). It is important to note that Carson does not use terms such as spill or disaster, instead choosing the weasel word "thing," in an act of tergiversation. The term "unfavorably" is flagrantly evasive given the scale of the disaster and the total decimation of the fishing industry, on which most of the townspeople's livelihoods depend. The narrator informs us that cleanup efforts continue throughout the summer and that "eventually, authorities abandon the term 'clean' in favor of 'treated,' then relinquish 'treated' for the phrase 'environmentally stable'" (252). Euphemistic language of this kind echoes Shell's response to its implication in the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa. Saro-Wiwa's son, Ken Wiwa, wrote: "There is an oil company which, though it has publicly admitted making 'mistakes' in Nigeria, refuses to account or atone for its role in the execution of my father" ("In the Name of the Father"). The terms accident, incident and mistake all heavily downplay the culpability of Big Oil in the deaths, both directly and indirectly, of humans, animals, and entire ecosystems. Mammoth eventually declares that the Kuparuk captain, Richard Aengus, is responsible for the "incident."

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

As I have noted, Evans reserves the novel's conclusion for Tess and Lee's reflections on the events that have transpired, with Tess finally understanding the error of her cheerleading for Mammoth, yet still not comprehending her entanglement in a web of petrocultural connections. Despite being the most ardent pro-freedom, pro-individual, financially oriented character in the novel, Tess eventually reaches the point of exhaustion with the new way of life that has taken over Selby. It is expected that Gregg and Lee will become disillusioned with Selby life, but for Tess to also find herself in that situation is a powerful hint by the author as to the importance of community and camaraderie in a small town. Tess's belated realisation that the town's financial growth has not been entirely positive offers hope that even the most ardent capitalists are capable of a change in mentality. Meanwhile, Lee remains sceptical and despondent about the possibility of positive change in her internal conversation with Aaron. *Oil and Water*'s conclusion illustrates Nilges' indictment of "the utter exhaustion of our ability to imagine the future as difference" (369).

Oil and Water's plot is fundamentally inspired by the true story of the Exxon-Valdez disaster, a "highly publicized moment" in the words of Graeme MacDonald ("Containing Oil"). The novel does not use the Kuparuk oil spill to prophesy an idealist view of humanity's future interactions with big oil. Its criticism of the petrocultural contemporary is couched in realist language and themes. As such, *Oil and Water* does not reveal situations or facts previously unknown to a general audience. *Oil and Water* illustrates the continuity of the "American way of life" despite sporadic petro-violence. The future it posits is no different to the present. I will now turn to an analysis of Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*.

4.1 *Lagoon*

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Lagoon has been described as a science fiction novel by both Ainehi Edoro and Melody Jue. However, Edoro also states that "it would be perfectly legitimate to criticize *Lagoon* as being all fantasy and too little sci-fi. There are no gizmos, gadgets, flying cars, space suits, robots and so on." As Edoro states, the novel lacks all the technologies commonly associated with sci-fi. Lagoon's would-be robots appear instead as aliens who closely resemble the mythological water spirit Mami Wata. Jue describes the ocean in *Lagoon* as "not simply a space of alterity, but also an ancient and familiar element of Nigeria's traditional cosmologies" (173). Jue also notes that the deities in *Lagoon* would be seen simply as folklore and not science fiction in the West before concluding that the novel contains elements of both folklore and science fiction (173). I interpret *Lagoon* to be a *petro-magic-realist* novel, or perhaps a hybrid between *petro-magic-realism* and science fiction.

A notable similarity between *Oil and Water* and *Lagoon* is the prominence of the female characters in both novels. Tess and Lee, the most prominent voices in *Oil and Water*, represent the thoughts and opinions of citizens from two distinct social classes. In *Lagoon*, narrative prominence is given to Adaora, a female marine biologist, and Ayodele, a shapeshifting alien who chooses to appear as a human female. *Lagoon* portrays a notable gender separation in how people engage with the aliens who have begun inhabiting the Lagos waters following the bursting of an oil supply pipe in the bay. Men such as Father Oke, the Mercedes-driving priest who sees himself as superior to the impoverished people whose money he is not too haughty to accept, become enthralled by the potential power and wealth they could procure for themselves with the help of the aliens. Upon realising that Ayodele is a shapeshifter, Father Oke makes her an offer: "Maybe you can become one of my sisters in God. Join me on the pulpit and you and I will pull in a flock to be reckoned with" (47). Adaora whispers her disapproval to Anthony: "he's just trying to use her. So one-track

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minded. Even in the face of an extra-terrestrial" (47). Father Oke is, lamentably, far from unique in Okorafor's Lagos.

Adaora offers an antidote to the masculine desire for power and dominance, as illustrated by men such as Father Oke. Jue argues that "Because *Lagoon*'s scientific intimacy remains open to the surprise of the folkloric and fantastic, aligned with the novum, it constitutes a practice of resistance against western paradigms of scientific practice that are centered around the control and domination of nature based on gendered forms of 'knowing'" (174). Jue's reference to "the novum" is based on an extrapolation of Darko Suvin's early definition of science fiction, which Jue argues that *Lagoon* is an example of (173). Adaora's position as a female scientist in Nigeria prompts her to reject dominant Western scientific methodologies, instead focusing on interacting with the aliens from a position of openness and intrigue, rather than one of dominance and control.

Many men are shown to be venal and easily corrupted either by power or wealth. Two male characters could be seen as exceptions to the rule, Anthony and Agu, both of whom, along with Adaora, have been chosen by the aliens as their human conduits for discussions with the Nigerian government and people. Jue notes that "*Lagoon* frames masculine violence […] as irrational, incurious, and reactionary, in contrast to a feminist practice of intimate objectivity that confronts aliens and the fantastic with curiosity, channelling magic to defend victims of patriarchal aggression" (181). Adaora's "intimate objectivity" is something we find lacking in *Oil and Water*'s Tess, who seems to conform to more typically masculine ideologies of dominance. Anthony and Agu, however, appear as inversions of Tess. They possess the intimate objectivity that Jue associates with feminist practices and appear to have been chosen as ambassadors due to their history of rejecting gender-based violence and attempting to protect its female victims. Agu found his life and those of his family under threat after

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

he attempted to stop the men in his military unit from raping a woman (Okorafor 26). Anthony defended his mother from violent members of his father's family after his father died of a heart attack, the blame for which his father's family apportioned to apparent witchcraft on the part of Anthony's mother (Okorafor 161-64).

Jue describes Adaora's intimate objectivity as "curious and open to elements of the folkloric, fantastic, science fictional, and other things that might seem impossible within *Lagoon*'s diegetic world" (175). Intimate objectivity implies an ability to become deeply engaged with a subject while maintaining critical objectivity or control over one's subjective biases. Jue states that intimate objectivity eschews pre-categorization of things deemed other. Instead, she asserts, "It cultivates a practice of listening to the other as a precondition for working toward common pursuits, like cleansing the ocean of oil" (175). The aliens' choice of human representatives is thus patently logical.

In an interesting aside regarding the need to cleanse the ocean of oil, the Get Oil Out (GOO) advocacy group that sprang up in the aftermath of the Santa Barbara oil spill was particularly vociferous in its championing of the need to cleanse the ocean of oil. GOO campaigned to force the US government and industries to recognise a "living ocean" as a public right (LeMenager 55). Once again, the fact that these advocates are middle-class Americans is pertinent when we compare the California coast to the Niger Delta. Included in the assertions related to a living ocean were wealthy property owners' rights to a beautiful ocean view and the local council's right to a tourist industry that relied on a living ocean (Le Menager 55). In the Niger Delta, it seems unfathomable for residents to campaign for their right to a view of a pristine ocean, or the right to establish a tourism industry that relies on a living ocean, never mind the basic right to access to clean water. This stark difference highlights the disparities of petroculture. There is a stark contrast between the benefits of the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

middle-class “American way of life” and the way of life afforded to those whose lands, with their abundance of subsurface crude oil, support that middle-class “American way of life.”

Returning to the intimate objectivity that Jue notes as a particularly feminine trait, in *Lagoon*, women are depicted as occupying a lower social stratum than that occupied by men. In Nigerian society, Adaora is othered by her gender, so much so that Father Oke implores Chris, Adaora’s husband, to “Break her with [his] hands, then soften her with flowers” (44). In an interview with *Tinhouse*’s David Naimon, Okorafor briefly spoke of her experience as a woman in Nigeria, where she noted, “I’ve often thought about whenever we’re traveling through the less urban parts of Nigeria, that feeling of your femaleness, you feel it, you feel that vulnerability, you start looking in the car, ‘Who’s with you?’ ‘Okay, this man is this man, okay, all right,’ you know that feeling.” This awareness of personal vulnerability and suspicion of male presence both seem to hold for some of the female characters in *Lagoon*. Adaora, in particular, is both acutely aware of and equally sceptical of Christian preacher Father Oke and his motivations.

Apart from the prominence afforded to their female characters, particularly as we have seen in *Lagoon,* where many of the male characters offer a sharp contrast through their treacherous, deceitful and greedy actions, a further similarity between *Lagoon* and *Oil and Water* can be seen in the manner in which their characters openly voice displeasure with their respective governments. Be it accusations of collusion or general displeasure with a perceived lack of organisation and efficiency, both the U.S. and Nigerian governments are routinely criticised in the two novels. However, it is noteworthy that the criticisms levelled at the Nigerian government in *Lagoon* seem to have followed the same well-trodden path as the violence inflicted on the Niger Delta; they have become banal and routine.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

During her first moment of reflection on the aliens' arrival in Lagos, Adaora comes to the conclusion that the aliens chose Lagos due to the ineffectuality of the Nigerian government: "If they'd landed in New York, Tokyo, or London, the governments of these places would have quickly swooped in to hide, isolate, and study the aliens. Here in Lagos, there was no such order" (64). Adaora's tired acceptance of the realities of Lagos, made noteworthy by the total absence of anger on her part, combined with her assumptions that the global cities she mentions are all far more efficiently run than Lagos, serves to highlight a total lack of expectations on the part of Lagosians concerning their government. This lack of expectations does not hold true for her Alaskan counterparts in *Oil and Water,* as we have already seen Gregg's shock at the government's lack of interest in regulating Big Oil.

Returning to Father Oke and the spread of Christianity in Nigeria, I want to discuss the manner in which Father Oke manipulates his congregation's beliefs in a manner that disconnects them from their own cultural history. Although he is a chauvinistic boor, is savvy enough to realise that Adaora is the stronger-willed and more intelligent partner in her and Chris's marriage. His instructions for Chris come from a strain of calculated avarice that understands Adaora's scepticism of his racket and seeks to quieten her through violence. There is a pervasive superstition that women who do not conform to their prescribed roles in patriarchally constructed Lagosian society are witches. Chris, owing much to the prompting of Father Oke, believes Adaora is a witch, as he states to Father Oke's congregation, "I'm sorry to say, my wife has become a marine witch, o!" (61). Adaora enjoys the mischievous thought that Chris would also believe Ayodele to be a "marine witch" when he encountered her (17). She notes that her husband believes in a hierarchy of witches that includes white witches, physical witches and marine witches. Adaora states that as far as Chris was concerned, "All were evil, but the marine witch was the most

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

powerful because she could harness water, the very substance that made up 70 percent of an adult's body and 75 percent of a child's." Adaora concludes this reflection on Chris's beliefs by internally stating, "*Water is life*" (17). Chris, however, cannot comprehend what Ayodele is, so he refers to her as "something" (61).

If we accept that the aliens in *Lagoon* are representations of Mami Wata, the indigenous Nigerian water deity, then Chris's belief in marine witches and Adaora's mirth at the very thought of what she perceives to be his ignorance illustrate the chasmic cultural difference between Chris and Adaora. Chris has been comprehensively indoctrinated by Father Oke to the point that he has lost touch with a part of his cultural heritage, and thus Adaora understands that he is very likely to perceive Ayodele negatively and frame her as a witch, as opposed to seeing her as a benevolent water spirit in the traditional Nigerian sense. Adaora, on the other hand, retains her connection to Nigerian mythology, along with a reverence for water spirits, which, throughout the course of the novel, becomes a fundamental avenue through which the novel reaches its conclusion. Had Father Oke and Chris succeeded in indoctrinating Adaora into accepting a Christian belief system, she could never have served as the crucial mediator between the aliens and the humans that she eventually becomes during the course of the novel. This contrast between Chris, the Christian fundamentalist who abhors supposed witches, and Adaora, whose intimate objectivity ensures she is open to possibilities far beyond those that Chris can conceive, provides echoes of Ghosh's statement that the Indonesian reverence for volcanoes was regarded with abhorrence and frustration by both Islamic and Christian fundamentalists (*Nutmeg's Curse* 33). Chris may abhor the idea that his wife has become a marine witch, but it is exactly this connection to her cultural traditions that facilitates the eventual end of oil in the novel.

Chris is utterly ashamed to admit to the Christian flock that he believes his wife

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

has become a marine witch. He detests Adaora's fraternisation with Ayodele and sees her as a heathen for not following Father Oke's Christian teachings. After Chris's admission, the congregation begins to prophesy an apocalyptic future while also apportioning blame for all of the ills that affect Nigeria as a whole. Some members condemn the heathens who do not attend church (61). Chris's alienation from his tradition and culture echoes a scene in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, in which Obi, the novel's protagonist, recalls his family's Bible reading sessions at home. Obi remembers that his mother would always sit in the background, and he ponders whether she "would not have preferred telling her children the folk stories that her mother had told her" (467). Obi knows that his mother used to tell his elder siblings these stories before he was born. However, she stopped because her devout Christian husband had forbidden her from recounting such stories. He had rebuked her and stated, "We are not heathens […] Stories like that are not for the people of the church" (467). The Christians who surrounded Obi's family referred to non-Christians as "the people of nothing" (467).

Father Oke's congregation laments the actions of these supposed people of nothing in their continuing tirade, as they "announced that the ocean would soon swallow them all up for the sins of these marine witches and warlocks, nonbelievers in Christ who'd taken over the country" (61). It is fascinating to see how these devout Christians have so successfully severed their cultural connection to the ocean and to Mami Wata that they now see the marine witches as prophets of doom and the ocean as the weapon that will ensure it comes to pass. They provide a clear antithesis to Adaora, Anthony and Agu, who act as the aliens' emissaries and also to Rufus in Habila's *Oil on Water*, who saw the ocean as a benevolent force that saved his sister Boma's life, particularly in contrast to oil, which left her permanently scarred.

As Father Oke's congregation continues to rail against the ills that affect Nigeria

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they begin vociferously enumerating them for the other flock members' approval: "Some blamed the Muslims of the north. Others blamed the Americans. Al-Qaeda. Sickness. The British. Bad luck. Devils. Poverty. Women. Fate. 419. Biafra. The bad roads. The military. Corruption" (61-62).[63] It is staggering to see no mention of oil or the oil industry in their ravings. It appears that Okorafor is underscoring a crucial observation: Nigerians who do not retain cultural connections to their history, ancestors, and mythology are framed as working with an incomplete picture. Therefore, they may not perceive that which appears to lie in plain sight, which is to say that the oil industry is a significant contributor to the ills that affect Nigeria.

The Christian orthodoxy that fuels Chris's cultural dislocation allows for the reading of the earth as inert, in direct contrast to the animist beliefs that proliferate in traditional Nigerian cultures. Ghosh, analysing the historical events that allowed for a reading of the earth and everything in it as inert resources that exist for human exploitation, highlights the Atlantic Slave Trade as a key issue in concretising this viewpoint: "It was the rendering of humans into mute resources that enabled the metaphysical leap whereby the Earth and everything in it could also be reduced to inertness" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 37). This perspective accords with Christian doctrine in which humans are actively encouraged to subdue the earth and to use every living thing to meet their needs. In the first chapter of the King James version of the book of Genesis, we are met with the line, "God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and *subdue* it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (King James Version, Gen.1:28 emphasis added). This wording could be interpreted in a manner which does not preclude subduing other humans. The conspicuous and

[63] 419 is the section of the Nigerian criminal code that deals with fraud. The code is used as a nickname for fraudulent online activities, such as "when Nigerian Prince So-and-So sends you an e-mail claiming he's got billions sitting in the bank, but he needs 'you'" (Okorafor 305).

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

repulsive racism of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the manner in which African people were treated as resources is too important an issue for me to adequately examine in this dissertation. My reference to the Atlantic Slave Trade, via Ghosh, is made in an effort to illustrate the historical processes that enabled the wanton destruction of nature to harvest valuable resources, such as oil, not as an attempt to embark on a discussion of the horrors of the Atlantic Slave Trade itself.

Ghosh notes that an understanding of the universe as "a living organism, animated by many kinds of unseen forces" was not restricted to Indigenous people outside of Europe; it was a view that was also once widely held by "the great majority of Europeans" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 37). It was during this era that Europe exhibited a similar fear of witches to that which is palpable among Father Oke's congregation. Ghosh notes the similarly gendered dynamics behind European witch hunts, which targeted large numbers of poor women, in a similar manner to the witch tropes seen in Nigeria. European colonisation of both the African and American continents enabled the "emergence of a new economy based on extracting resources from a desacralized, inanimate Earth" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 38). It was "tropes drawn from colonialist perceptions of Amerindians as devil worshippers" that led to witch-hunts in Europe and the crystallisation of the stereotypes that create an image of what witches are and how they behave (*Nutmeg's Curse* 37). These tropes made their way to Africa with European Christian missionaries and were propagated among the local populations until they reached people like Chris, who then weaponised them to hide the fear he feels at misunderstanding his wife and her relationship with Ayodele. Chris's fear and misunderstanding are symbolic of his cultural estrangement. Chris's adoption of these tropes owes everything to the teaching of Father Oke.

Okorafor's portrayal of Father Oke seems to owe much to what Jue has described as "a form of self-love," which is achieved through embracing one's

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

traditional culture and repudiating colonial culture (178). This reconnection with ancestral culture is of utmost importance. Adam Hudson, an African-American teacher, writer and journalist, states, "The violence of slavery severed direct communication with our Indigenous African cultures. We lost our names, languages, and long-term communication with previous African civilizations." As an African-American writer, Okorafor attempts to reclaim some of what was lost by establishing a connection with her ancestral homeland and its culture through an open dialogue with Nigerian customs and traditions, through an act of self-love.

Jue posits that Chris's anxiety over feminine power is what leads him to accuse women of being witches, as he is a Christian fundamentalist who is totally committed to the myopic teachings of Father Oke (177-78). This characterisation is supported by Okorafor's words in the postscript chapter called "Insight into the Lagoon." Okorafor refers to a "strong strain of Christian fundamentalism running through Nigeria's veins." Okorafor's most crucial point of contention with this Christian fundamentalism is that it is "teaching Nigerians to hate their own indigenous traditions, spiritualities, and religions" (306). This point is precisely what Chinua Achebe's protagonist, Okonkwo, feared in the novel *Things Fall Apart*, in which he lamented the presence of "the entire vile and miscreant gang" at the Christian church that had been established in his village. Understanding what the Christians were attempting, Okonkwo "felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation" (116). The marked difference between Christians and Nigerians who hold traditional animist beliefs is made clear by Lynn White Jr., who argues that "To a Christian a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. For nearly 2 millennia, Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature" (1206). Achebe provided an example of this strain of

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Christian thinking as Okoli, the converted Christian, killed the sacred python in his village of Mbantu (*Things Fall Apart* 121-23). The imposition of Christian beliefs on the Nigerian population and the razing of sacred groves led to an increased rejection of traditional, animist beliefs. Okoli, Chris and Father Oke embody this rejection.

Animist beliefs had been part of a system that kept humanity grounded through respect for the spirits in nature. Yuval Noah Harari concisely summarises the increased anthropocentrism that has come hand in hand with the decrease in animist religions: "When animism was the dominant belief system, human norms and values had to take into consideration the outlook and interests of a multitude of other beings, such as animals, plants, fairies and ghosts" (*Sapiens* 235). The anthropocentric transformation that has occurred explains the cultural dislocation experienced by Nigerians who adopted Christian beliefs and forsook their traditional animist beliefs, removing a potential impediment to the exploitation of nature to serve human needs. White Jr. describes the new mood towards nature as one of indifference: "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects" (1205). White Jr. is not discussing the spread of Christianity in Nigeria, but rather the historical evolution of Christian theological orthodoxy. Nevertheless, his contention is plainly applicable to Nigeria. Achebe once again illustrates this process in *Arrow of God* as the six villages of Umuaro forsake their God, Ulu, in favour of the Christian God.

After a famine causes great turmoil and hardship for the villagers across Umuaro, they begin to lose faith in Ezeulu, the prophet of the God Ulu, who is a fictional God created by Achebe for the purposes of the novel. Ezeulu had been captured and imprisoned by British colonial authorities for rejecting a position in the colonial administration. The yam harvest in Umuaro cannot be conducted without Ulu's approval, which is given through Ezeulu. After Ezeulu is released from prison, he

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

refuses to permit the harvesting of yams, leading to the famine. John Goodcountry, a Nigerian Christian missionary, sees his opportunity to intervene and gain followers, and he decides that "They must be told that if they made their thank-offering to God they could harvest their crops without fear of Ulu" (397). Goodcountry's initiative eventually sees Ulu usurped by the Christian God:

> So the news spread that anyone who did not want to wait and see all his harvest ruined could take his offering to the god of the Christians who claimed to have power of protection from the anger of Ulu. Such a story at other times might have been treated with laughter. But there was no more laughter left in the people. (398)

Many Nigerian novels, such as *Lagoon*, and particularly those of Chinua Achebe, illustrate a respect for the spirits in nature and the roles they play in human existence. This respect for spirits was obliterated by Christian teachings. White Jr. states, "The spirits in natural objects, which formerly had protected nature from man, evaporated. Man's effective monopoly on spirit in this world was confirmed, and the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled" (1205). Okorafor's portrayal of Father Oke as a selfish, rapacious boor, therefore, can be read on the one hand as an illustration of masculine rejection of feminine power on Father Oke's part, as noted by Jue. On the other hand, it can also be read as a rejection by the author of the Christian ideology that has encouraged the wanton destruction of Nigerian ecosystems in pursuit of nature's bounty. Repudiating Father Oke's masculine Christian ideology through the foregrounding of female characters offers an alternative, non-exploitative viewpoint.

Okorafor's portrayal of Father Oke, combined with her references to many Indigenous Nigerian deities, stems from a place of pride, an attempt to disavow coloniser culture, and perhaps, drawing on Okonkwo's fears, a desire to avoid cultural annihilation. Like Indigenous deities, the ocean provides a sense of familiarity in

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Nigerian culture, a point that Jue emphasises in her essay. This stands in contrast to Tanure Ojaide's usage of images and characters from folklore. Ojaide wrote in 1994 that his usage of such folkloric references "resulted from the search for a diction that would be an effective weapon against violators of the political ethos and at the same time a shield against persecution and libel for the writer" (17). For Ojaide, references to traditional culture were used simply to efface the names of the contemporary targets of his ire, a euphemistic means of protecting himself from retribution for any direct naming and shaming. For Okorafor, however, particularly given her position as an African American writer residing in the United States, she can engage with her cultural heritage from a place of pride and hope. Ojaide foresaw this emphasis on hope in his assertion that "At this stage, I feel that condemnation and lamentation are not enough for the African. I believe that commemoration of all that is good in the past and is still viable but ignored in the present should inspire hope" (21).

According to Jue, there is a long history of "Afrofuturist speculations that figure the ocean as both a means of cultural survival and a catalyst for future evolution, a familiar alterity" (177). Jue specifically referred to *Lagoon* as an Afrofuturist novel; however, in 2019, Okorafor coined a new term, Africanfuturist, which she then retroactively applied to her description of *Lagoon* ("Africanfuturism Defined"). The familiarity with the ocean that Jue describes stands in stark contrast to a common Western view of the ocean as an "other space." Maurizia Boscagli argues that the oceans are often framed as an "other space," a fantasy world where junk can be made to disappear (233). This notion holds true, to some degree, when we consider the growing trash vortexes that violate the ecologically dense oceanic spaces that lie out of sight and out of mind for much of humanity. Interestingly, Taiwanese author Wu Ming-Yi's novel, *The Man With the Compound Eyes*, effectively refutes the comfortable narrative that ocean-bound plastic waste can be made to disappear. In

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Lagoon, Okorafor challenges the framing of the ocean as an "other space," as it is the ocean and its inhabitants that save Lagos from oil. Furthermore, Adaora is depicted as having the ability to breathe underwater and survive in that dense ecosystem without fear for her life. The ocean plays a central role in the novel. It is far from an "other space." However, from the Western realist perspective, it is easy to dismiss Okorafor's meaningful engagement with the ocean as simple magical realism.

Lagoon's illustration of the conflict between water and oil accords with what we have seen in the other three key novels I have discussed in this dissertation. Petrofiction novels do not shy away from illustrating the tension between these two incompatible substances. Rob Nixon has noted that the progenitor of the genre, Munif's *Cities of Salt,* directly illustrates the interaction between the two substances. Following the American oil company's annexation of Wadi al-Uyoun, the once hospitable oasis quickly becomes a desolate industrial site. Shaalan and Fawaz, sons of Bedouin tribal leader Miteb al-Hathal, drink water from large drums in the oil company's barracks that have been constructed on the site of the wadi they used to call home. The narrator informs the reader that "when the water touched their faces they sensed its unpalatable taste, perhaps because of the rust or some foreign substance added to it." Shaalan turns to his brother and disappointedly states, "The water in Wadi al-Uyoun was better" (*Cities of Salt* 137-38). Nixon picks up the scene that follows Shaalan and Fawaz's discussion. Nixon notes tension between oil and water in Munif's novel. Nixon discusses the following excerpt from *Cities of Salt*:

> The diabolical Americans, who had come looking for water, why did they continually dig into the earth, never stopping but never taking anything out? The water from the wadi, from Sabha and from the many wells they dug was pumped back into a hole in the ground – why wasn't it given to people? Did the ground hold such ghastly hordes of thirsty jinn, whose screams day and night could be

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

> heard only by the foreigners, who had come to quench their thirst? Were the jinn burning in the depths of the earth, and were the Americans pumping the water down to extinguish the flames? Was there another world underground, with gardens, trees and men, all clamoring for water? (139-40).

Nixon notes how the oasis dwellers are "flummoxed by the foreigners' failure to respect water's insuperable value," which he attributes to the oasis dwellers' desire to find meaning in the seeming irrationality of pumping water back into the ground, as they speculate that the "ecological insanity and ethical insensitivity" displayed by the Americans must be down to their ability to perceive an alternate universe below, rather than as a means of causing oil to flow to the surface (94).

Lagoon, similarly, elaborates on the potential for an alternate universe. The oasis dwellers in *Cities of Salt* believe that there is another world underground, a world full of restless spirits (jinn) who can only be pacified by water. *Lagoon*'s conceptualised other world is situated within the aquatic realm, as opposed to underground. When Nigeria's president met the alien elders for the first time, they informed him that "the waters off the coast hid aquatic forests. All the offshore drilling facilities would be destroyed by the people of the water" (272). Henry John Drewal, in his analysis of African water spirits, described Mami Wata as follows: "Half-fish and half-human, Mami Wata straddles earth and water, culture and nature" (62). The maritime spirits that inhabit *Lagoon*'s water world, modelled after traditional spirits like Mami Wata, serve as the catalysts for Nigeria's ecological liberation from the oil industry. Using Drewal's description of Mami Wata to describe the plot of *Lagoon*, one could claim that nature saves culture.

I have noted that Okorafor's engagement with the ocean could be unflatteringly dismissed as magical realism. This ignorance of the nuanced ways in which other cultures interpret the relationship between the mystical and the mundane leads to the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

trite classification of a wealth of non-conformist literature as magical realism. In her interview with *Tinhouse*, Okorafor spoke of how her teachers often told her that she was "such a great writer but the science fiction and fantasy stuff isn't *real literature*" (Naimon, emphasis added). As an African-American educated in the United States, Okorafor consistently found fundamental elements of her culture treated with indifference or dismissiveness due to American literary tastes and sensibilities. However, Ainehi Edoro has argued that the notion that science fiction and fantasy writing is not real literature also appears in an African context. Edoro states that "African literature is a somewhat policed aesthetic regime. African writers – especially those who aren't writing highbrow realist fiction – are always under pressure to justify their aesthetic choices." Edoro also notes that "stories that experiment with non-realist forms stand a greater chance of being dismissed as imitative, inauthentic, and *unserious*" (emphasis added). *Lagoon* challenges the assumption that novels that do not follow a realist form are unserious, embracing Nigerian mythology, deities and traditions within its narrative.

I want to briefly discuss other Nigerian mythological beings and deities who appear in *Lagoon*, before returning to the manner in which the aliens who inhabit Lagos's coastal waters liberate Nigeria from oil. The narrator of *Lagoon* is a mythical spider named Udide who lives beneath Lagos. Udide informs the reader that he "[feels] *the vibrations of Lagos. This way, I see everything*" (228). In stark contrast to *Oil and Water*, *Lagoon* is decidedly less anthropocentric, as Udide, the great story weaver, is accorded the final word in the novel. He informs the reader that he is the creator of Lagos before leaping to the city's defence in his claim that "*Other people in other parts of the world – they see what is happening here. And they fear it. They are agreed. Lagos is a cancer. They wish to cut the cancer out before it spreads. I will not let them*" (291). Okorafor's choice of Udide as protector of Lagos and the newfound peace that

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

has engulfed the city following the aliens' elimination of the oil industry could perhaps be seen as a reversion to Nigerian traditions and customs and a repudiation of Western influence and some of the ills that come with it, a "form of self-love" as Jue put it (178).

In an interview with John Scalzi, Okorafor touched on the mysticism surrounding Udide Okwanka as she reveals the inspiration that a spider provided her in her writing of *Who Fears Death*:

> Maybe it was the lesser-known but equally formidable Nigerian story-spinning spider named Udide Okwanka. He is the supreme spider artist who toils beneath the ground, in the ekwuru (the spirit world). He possesses the power to gather fragments of any object and shape them into a new object.

As a concept, *petro-magic-realism* facilitates reclaiming local culture from arbitrary Western literary customs that lack the nuance to understand and accept cultural differences. Udide is not alone in representing traditional Nigerian deities in *Lagoon's* diegetic world. Ijele is a God described as "Igbo royalty" by the narrator, whose life Ijele irrevocably changed as the great God's appearance before the man compelled him to cease engaging in 419 fraud and live a morally righteous life.

Andrew Apter notes that Nigeria's fame, or perhaps infamy, as an oil-producing nation and member of OPEC enabled the 419 scams to run even more effectively than they might otherwise have done: "Many foreigners, including businesspeople from the heartland of America, have some sense of Nigeria's prominence as a major oil-producing nation, even if they cannot locate the country on a map" (227). The notion that people in Nigeria wanted to move illicit money gained through inflated contracts during the nation's oil boom was believable enough to hook many victims in the West. To truly sell the lie, many of the scammers claimed to be from NNPC, which was well-known for the control it exerted upon the oil industry and the funds

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

that accrued from it. Okorafor's narrator feels "glad" to discover that Ijele has erased all of his e-mails and contacts, making it impossible for him to continue engaging in 419 scams (200). He informs the reader that he intends to embrace a new morality approved by a Nigerian God instead of the Christian God. The narrator's thankfulness for Ijele's actions constitutes a pointed rejection of the morality enforced upon Nigeria by foreign actors and a reversion to the familiar in embracing a way of life prescribed by Indigenous deities. The other Indigenous deity in *Lagoon* is the "bone collector."

The bone collector appears on the Lagos-Benin Expressway as a fearsome deity that consumes all before it. In an interesting note to the cultural division sewn in Nigeria by foreign religions, the narrator describes himself as "not a Christian or a Muslim, or maybe I am both." However, despite his religious ambiguity, the narrator recognises the bone collector as an indigenous God. The narrator states, "I also believe in the mysteries we can never understand, especially in my country. This thing was one of them" (Okorafor 206). One of the aliens commits a selfless sacrifice by allowing the bone collector to eat her in place of all of the humans caught in the traffic jam on the road. The bone collector agrees to this proposal and consumes the alien woman, prompting the narrator to think of "Nigeria's worst diseases – pervasive corruption and unsafe roads" and how this woman's courageous act of self-sacrifice is the exact antithesis of the human corruption that plagues Nigerian life (Okorafor 206-07). The shapeshifting alien's decision to adopt the guise of a human woman as it makes a sacrifice to save Lagos sends a clear message as to the gendered politics of corruption and rapacity in Nigeria.

The Indigenous deities and aliens in *Lagoon* all seem to serve the purpose of illuminating the problems with Nigeria as it is currently constructed in its post-colonial petro-state format. Nigeria is infamous for the arbitrariness of its postcolonial borders and how these cartographic demarcations paid little to no

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

attention to the diversity of people groups and cultures that were forcibly assimilated under a new flag after European colonisers were vanquished. The Nigerian Civil War provides a stark reminder of this. The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War, took place between July 1967 and January 1970. Biafra, the dominant oil-producing region in the southeast of modern Nigeria, seceded from the post-colonial Nigerian State. Biafra is predominantly inhabited by the Igbo people, who did not feel represented in the new nation that was dominated by the Hausa-Fulani people of the North. Philips O. Okolo, a professor of political science at the University of the Niger Delta, has stated that "Like many other African nations, Nigeria was an artificial structure initiated by the British which had neglected to consider religious, linguistic, and ethnic differences" (25). The discovery of oil in Nigeria's southeastern region altered the country's historical trajectory. Okolo notes that the northern Hausa-Fulani-dominated region of the newly-formed nation was perhaps the most likely region to secede from the post-colonial state before the Biafran war:

> Prior to the discovery of oil, Nigeria's wealth derived from agricultural products from the south, and minerals from the north. The north, uptill around 1965, had had low-level demands to secede from Nigeria and retain its wealth for northerners. These demands seemed to cease when it became clear that oil in the southeast would become a major revenue source. (30)

Oil was far from the only cause of the outbreak of civil war in Nigeria, but it was certainly a factor in the southeast's desire for secession, as Okolo notes that the Igbo feared the northern Hausa-Fulani had plans to exploit the Niger Delta's oil to benefit the north (30).

Okorafor employs *petro-magic realism* to renounce the logic and history that created contemporary Nigeria in its current form, and imagines a nation constructed

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

on different values entirely, one freed from postcolonial ethnic divisions and the tyrannical dominance exerted by the petro-governmental nexus. Unlike other Nigerian novels, such as Chris Abani's *Graceland*, which notably dedicates part of its narrative to the Biafran war, the characters in *Lagoon* do not suffer from japa syndrome. Instead, they embrace their Nigerian-ness and the customs and traditions inherent to this identity while seeing the potential for a better future despite remaining in Nigeria. After encountering Ijele, the narrator begins to feel "this great swell of pride and love for Nigeria." He goes on to state that he felt "patriotism," and claims that he would die for Nigeria (199). Japa syndrome is not even a possibility thanks to Ijele's appearance.

The end of Big Oil in *Lagoon* is brought about by the aliens who have chosen the waters around Lagos as their earthly home. As I noted when making my brief comparison with *Cities of Salt*, the alien elders gave the Nigerian president fair warning of their plans to eliminate the oil industry. It is important to underscore that they do not, however, seek permission. They are seen as possessing a superior intellect, particularly as it relates to oil, to the simple humans who, in the words of *Oil and Water*'s Tess, usually decide to "sell our souls for the stuff" (262). After informing the president that they would be destroying all of the country's offshore drilling facilities, the alien elders also declare that "Oil [will] no longer be Nigeria's top commodity. It [will] no longer be a commodity at all." The Elders offer "something better" than oil to humanity, "their technology" (272). The links between the aliens and technology do not stop there, however. It is also noteworthy that Adaora runs a skin cell test on Ayodele and discovers that she can be "anything and nothing," as she is a shapeshifter. Adaora then ponders what kind of technology the aliens must have before Agu interjects, "Do they even *need* it? […] I mean, in a way, they *are* technology (28-29). Through the offer of superior technology to the Nigerian

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

president, proffered by entities who "*are* technology," we see an example of the limitations of our contemporary ability to imagine the future as difference.

Technology is seen as the most valid and logical means of replacing oil. This positive framing of technology, however, risks tumbling into notions of the technological sublime, where some as-yet-undiscovered technology rides to humanity's rescue and remedies the grand historical mistake of basing our contemporary way of life on an ecocidal system of the extraction and burning of a finite carbon-based resource. Rob Nixon has accused the oil industry, most pointedly BP, of peddling this narrative in which "some engineering breakthrough will save the day" (268). Julie Doyle highlights a 2006 BP advert in *The Independent* in which the company stated, "By developing innovative technology like BP's Advanced Seismic Imaging, we've been able to make discoveries that were unthinkable only a decade ago … Most importantly, with more accurate data we can drill fewer wells, reducing our impact upon the environment." Doyle, analysing the language in the advert, writes, "By referencing innovative technology, the advert makes discursive links to the discourse of climate change […] through the belief in technology as a solution" (210-11). Big Oil, Silicon Valley tech investors, governments and many more adopt this line of thinking. Deferring to the potential of technology and blind techno-optimism are critical obstacles that need to be overcome to find new solutions to the climate crisis.

Returning to BP, Naomi Klein's summary of the Gulf Coast crisis caused by the blowout of BP's Macondo well follows Nixon's logic: "Underneath [the many issues pertaining to the crisis] it's about this: our culture's excruciatingly dangerous claim to have such complete understanding and command over nature that we can radically manipulate and reengineer it with minimal risk to the natural systems that sustain us" (58). There is a latent arrogance in assumptions that humanity's understanding of

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

science can deliver a new technology with which the environment can be safely terraformed to behave according to humanity's wishes.[64]

It is also highly noteworthy that at the conclusion of *Lagoon*, the president of Nigeria appears to readily acquiesce to the aliens' wishes, despite the fact that their technology and the imminent coalition that will be formed between humans and aliens will effectively disempower him. Following his summit with the aliens, the Nigerian president addresses his people and preaches positivity. He proclaims, "The occasion that has put me here before you tonight is momentous. It marks another kind of transitional shift […] This shift is cause for celebration, not panic." Continuing his speech and turning to discussing the aliens, the president states, "they have new technology; they have fresh ideas that we can combine with our own" (276). Comparing the president in *Lagoon* with Nigeria's incumbent president, Bola Tinubu, yields a stark reminder of the narcissism and thirst for power that run through the corridors of power. Taha Sakr illustrates the political dynamics at play in Nigeria in his article "Nigeria: Oil Executive Linked to Opposition Leader Sparks Concern in Tinubu's Inner Circle." The Director of NNPC is an extremely powerful position to hold in Nigeria, and its current director, Bayou Ojulari, is a concern for members of President Tinubu's inner circle. Ojulari awarded lucrative contracts to Bashir Husky, the husband of opposition leader Atiku Abubakar's daughter. The wording of the following paragraph from Sakr is telling:

> Ojulari is now under pressure to explain alleged preferential deals, including recent service contracts awarded to Mars Aviation, a firm linked to Husky. According to insiders, some members of the Tinubu administration fear these deals may inadvertently fund opposition campaign activities, especially as Atiku remains a

[64] Ironically, only 26 percent of U.S. Republicans believe the scientific consensus on climate change (Klein 74). Cherry-picking the scientific findings that suit one's agenda remains a significant issue.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

likely challenger in the 2027 presidential race.

The anxiety that seems to consume President Tinubu's inner circle in relation to outside influence or control over any aspect of NNPC is symptomatic of the nation's Dutch disease, where control of the oil industry ensures control over almost the entirety of the nation's functional economy. It is only with the removal of oil in *Lagoon* that a Nigerian president may be willing to cooperate with forces outside of their own inner circle.

Okorafor's fantastical *petro-magic-realist* vision of Lagos, despite imagining the end of Big Oil, something that was impossible for Evans in the realist narrative of *Oil and Water*, slips into the contemporary Western axiom that technology will ride to the rescue, irrespective of its reliance on Indigenous deities and Nigerian traditions for the thrust of its plot. Its critique of the petro-governmental nexus that created the structures of feeling in contemporary Nigeria is bolstered by its focus on the citizens of the country as a whole, rather than placing an individual focus on Adaora. Adaora, Anthony and Agu assist the aliens in plotting the end of oil in Nigeria. Through their efforts to understand the aliens and why they have come to inhabit the coastal waters of Lagos, coupled with the assistance they provide to Ayodele to spread the aliens' message, the group reveals all manner of social, economic and environmental issues that are holding Nigeria back. Where the novel is lacking is, of course, in its conclusion, as it is unable to offer a solution to the pernicious effects of the oil industry that does not rely on a yet to be realised technological breakthrough. This conclusion perhaps diminishes the power of the criticism that *Lagoon* presents. However, it certainly does not render the criticism ineffectual. Through its tacit refusal to follow hackneyed visions of what constitutes "real literature," a classification that Okorafor took issue with in her interview with David Naimon, *Lagoon* opens up the possibility of reimagining literature's capacity to proffer

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

criticism and illuminate issues that may be alien to the reader.

If we are to caveat the success of *Lagoon* in offering a solution to our current petrocultural entanglements, credit must be given to the novel's ability to prompt the reader to consider thoughts that may have previously felt alien to them. Its return to Nigerian traditions and adoption of *petro-magic-realism* certainly assist in provoking this new angle of thought on the part of the reader. Despite its rather utopian ending, and although the novel is by no means a utopian text, I want to note a statement that Gregory Claeys made in regard to utopian texts: "Most utopian texts describe ideal societies, and can be classed as 'political novels' or 'novels of ideas'*, where the message is more important than the means used to deliver it*" (26 emphasis added). What is most important in *Lagoon* is the message it attempts to convey, a message of unity and focusing on the collective rather than blindly pursuing individual enrichment. Its utopian ending need not detract from this message, although it will undoubtedly provoke questions about the feasibility of such an ending as a critical tool. However, engagement with discussions on the end of oil and how societies could collectively imagine this would be a welcome development regardless of what prompts it.

Ultimately, *Lagoon* centres on the slow violence that has been inflicted on Nigeria for such an extended period of time that it has become almost mundane. Okorafor attempts to disturb this mundanity by pitting the mystical and magical in direct juxtaposition to the mundane as a means of revealing concealed truths. Rejecting Western and male-dominated narratives, *Lagoon* conveys meaning through the intimate objectivity of femininity and a return to Indigenous Nigerian customs. *Lagoon* follows the same tack as *Oil and Water* in the prominence it accords to female characters. However, Adaora is almost the antithesis of *Oil and Water*'s Tess. The difference in the deeply rooted national structures of feeling between Nigeria and the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

United States manifests itself clearly in the plots of these two novels. *Lagoon* attempts to make visible the petro-violence that occurs in the Niger Delta through *petro-magic-realism*. *Oil and Water,* on the other hand, illustrates the relatively sporadic nature of direct petro-violence inflicted on the US public. These divergent plots delineate what Raymond Williams termed the "practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity" (132). *Oil and Water* illustrates the continuity of the "American way of life" despite sporadic petro-violence. *Lagoon*, on the other hand, illustrates the Nigerian certainty of the continuity of petro-violence, without recourse to assistance from aliens or Indigenous deities.

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Conclusion

Since 1992, when Amitav Ghosh wrote about the dearth of petrofictions and the cultural impediment that induced this state of affairs, namely an inability to discuss oil without resorting to "the language of solutions," the genre has begun to blossom. As Imre Szeman stated, fossil fuels were missing from "the literature and culture of modernity, from those novels and films that we rely on to capture the unconscious forces and stresses shaping the social" (6). The goal of this dissertation has been to assess how petrofiction plots to illuminate the divergent structures of feeling that are created by our contemporary dependence on oil, which is unequally distributed globally. This dissertation has sought to demonstrate that the structures of feeling generated by petroculture in the Global North, as represented by the United States, and in the Global South, as represented by Nigeria, differ fundamentally. In the U.S., oil serves as the invisible foundation of the "American way of life," fuelling the often unquestioned freedoms associated with that way of life. In Nigeria, oil functions as the eminently visible source of violence, division, oppression and injustice. The novels I have discussed are but a small sampling of the burgeoning engagement with oil in works of fiction that use varying methods to illuminate the structures of feeling surrounding petroculture in both the United States and Nigeria.

Throughout this dissertation, I have outlined how petroculture is a complex construction that requires the cooperation of cultural, economic and political systems to generate the illusions and metanarratives, including but not limited to freedom and naturalness, that propagate and sustain the system that shapes our contemporary world. Neoliberal capitalism has become a culture-generative force that espouses its own mythology through various means, ranging from Atlas Network think tanks to the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

mainstream media, with the goal of ensuring broad public compliance with the system's rules. The novels I have chosen push back against the occlusion of oil from the literature and culture of modernity that Szeman saw as a broad issue with contemporary productions.

Although they employ divergent methods to achieve their goal, *Oil on Water*, *Black Water Rising* and *Lagoon* arguably succeed in accomplishing what Habila stated as his goal in his interview with Nathaniel Bivan: they "make people see what they cannot see because of the topicality." These novels reject the narratives that might be championed by some of the large media empires or Atlas Network affiliates I have discussed. *Oil and Water* makes a valiant attempt to follow suit, but its focus on an infamous real-world event that was comprehensively covered by news cameras ensures that it cannot offer a vast amount of supplementary commentary on the event, save for its attempts to generate empathic concern by drawing the reader into the mindset of the local community in the fictionalised surrogate of Valdez, Alaska. However, this could also be interpreted as a deliberate choice by Evans, allowing the novel to provide witness to the environmental and social devastation caused by the grounding of the Exxon-Valdez's fictional surrogate, the Kuparuk.

Ghosh wrote of the oil encounter, which he limited to the United States and the nations of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. However, I have expanded Ghosh's definition to include oil-producing nations, such as Nigeria, upon whom the U.S. relies for its oil imports. Ghosh noted that the oil encounter was something that many Americans perceive as problematic if too much attention is paid to the global entanglements that bring oil to American shores. He stated that it "reeks, it stinks, it becomes a Problem that can be written about only in the language of Solutions" ("Petrofiction" 432). We must ensure that we do not focus entirely on the narratives that are produced in accordance with this culture if we are to illuminate the forms of

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

structural oppression and the injustices that are currently an inescapable element of satiating the Global North's appetite for oil. The techno-economic analyses that Ghosh criticised, combined with the language of solutions that they deploy, do not seek to, nor attempt to, engender substantial change in the manner in which we generate the power that provides the energy-intensive mansion of modern freedoms that Chakrabarty has discussed (40). Petrofiction novels offer a platform through which we can ensure that the language of solutions does not take precedence when constructing a narrative of oil's effect on the structures of feeling in a region, even if that opportunity is not always taken, as we have seen in the case of *Lagoon*.

The cultural failure of basing our contemporary way of life on a finite, intensely polluting resource is masked by the perceived ubiquity of oil resources, stemming from an abundance of plastics in daily life, and the seemingly effortless access we have to petroleum via the forecourts of petrol stations in the developed world. Neoliberal capitalism's lack of foresight has been driven by the prioritisation of short-term gains in the shape of energeia and capital over a long-term focus on energy, which Soni defined as potentiality, and the purpose of our continuation of the "American way of life" during a climate crisis. We are thus presented with a critical question as to the purpose of our usage of carbon fuel sources, as Soni's concept of energeia is based upon the ends that discharging the power contained in an energy source achieves, rather than on the magnitude of power contained within the source itself. This focus on the purpose of our continued reliance on fossil fuels to power modernity is what is missing from the metanarrative of contemporary petroculture. Through the narratives of neoliberalism, modern science and Christianity, it has become received wisdom that humanity should exploit natural resources and nature itself for individual, or perceived societal gain, and simply wait for a scientific breakthrough to occur at the most opportune moment, undoing all of the damage that

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

has been done due to a relentless prioritisation of energeia. The narratives produced via mainstream media outlets, technocrat scientists and large corporations, within this culture, do not attempt to reveal the structures of feeling in the regions most affected by the exploitation of fossil fuel sources and the climate change effects that result from the burning of these fossil fuels, as doing so would reframe the narrative to focus on energy as opposed to energeia. The voices of those who inhabit these exploited regions very rarely feature. In fact, others often speak on behalf of those who inhabit oil-producing regions in the Global South, such as the Niger Delta.

Ghosh has highlighted this occlusion of the voices of those at the front lines of our extractive culture, those who we may term precarious subjects in accordance with Malreddy's definition. These individuals reside in areas that are either directly impacted by their proximity to oil industry facilities or are indirectly affected by the oil industry through the anthropogenic climate change that results from the burning of oil. These precarious subjects, particularly those in the Niger Delta, are on the front lines of climate change. The connection between the exploitation of carbon-based fuels and climate change, which Ghosh addressed, is incontrovertible. The oil industry initially brought ecocide, poverty and displacement to the Niger Delta region, all of which are clearly illustrated in Habila's *Oil on Water*. The relationship between oil and climate change, in the context of the Niger Delta, has been outlined by Stephena Udinmade Ighedosa, who has highlighted the growing threat to the region's freshwater sources, mangroves and coastal lands due to climate change-induced sea level rise. A cli-fi novel could pick up where Habila left off and expound upon the second phase of destruction that will be wrought upon the Niger Delta region due to the oil industry that has already displaced so many of the delta's residents, sending them to Port Harcourt or Lagos, where they may end up in similar situations to the characters in Okorafor's *Lagoon*.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Returning to the voices of those who inhabit exploited Global South regions, Ghosh has asserted that they "very rarely figure in the discussion. And when they do, it is usually merely as victims, whose voices fill the blanks in a script that has already been written by specialists" (*Nutmeg's Curse* 148). A similar issue was outlined by Fredric Jameson, who has noted that people who suffer at the hands of transnational global capitalism are often framed merely as victims. Analogously, Janet Stewart has noted that resource curse logic frames people as victims of a nefarious resource, rather than as a group that is oppressed and persecuted by powerful agents seeking to exploit said purportedly cursed resource. Dissenting voices, therefore, find representation in petrofiction, which picks up the baton that the mainstream media has often refused to carry.

Petrofiction offers the potential to present an antithetical image of regions such as the Niger Delta to those that proliferate within news broadcasts. Those news-worthy images, as I have noted, tend to focus on violence, be it performative or dramatic. However, they rarely, if ever, spotlight what Nixon termed "slow violence." Petrofictions highlight the corruption and corporate avarice that fuel the social problems that occasionally erupt into violence.

The petrofictions I have analysed do not shy away from highlighting the violent acts that occur due to the oil industry's presence in a region. Groups such as MEND in the Niger Delta, represented by the Professor and his fellow militants in Habila's *Oil on Water*, or the workers' unions in Locke's fictional Houston, commit acts of violence, acts that the novels' detective-like plots seek to reveal the root causes of. *Oil on Water* highlights the privation that afflicts the Niger Delta communities. Rufus does not dismiss the militants' concerns with swift condemnation; he converses with the Professor, transmitting the militants' opinions to the reader without judgment. Rufus, in essence, gives their voices a platform. *Black Water Rising* highlights the

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

power that oil companies possess to use violence to exert pressure on those who might hinder their business operations. Thomas Cole, CEO of Cole Oil Industries, plays the role of puppeteer in Houston, using his connections to encourage acts of violence against union members to prevent them from going on strike. Cole also orders the botched assassination of Elise Linsey to ensure her silence in relation to his illegal hoarding of oil in an unregistered SPR site. It is left to Jay Porter to platform the voices of those whom Cole would silence through his detective-like investigation into Elise's attempted murder. Cole's wish to silence these voices offers a literary echo of Shell's actions in Nigeria. Shell took the desire to silence dissenting voices to an extreme level, exerting intense pressure on the Nigerian government to silence the voices of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his fellow MOSOP members.

Lagoon reveals the structural gender-based violence that inhibits Nigerian society in finding new ways to address broad social issues, as this violence leads to the dismissal of the voices of close to half of the country's population. There is an intimate objectivity displayed throughout its plot, which offers an open forum for the dissenting voices of women, men who reject gender-based violence, and also traditional Nigerian deities. *Oil and Water* illustrates the violence inflicted upon human and non-human communities as Mammoth attempts to placate the humans affected by its negligence by power washing the visible signs of oil off the coastline. In the process of doing so, Mammoth eliminates any animals that still clung to life after the spill. These efforts by Mammoth transform the oil spill event from an episode of dramatic, highly publicised violence in the sense that Graeme MacDonald has highlighted, to an example of out-of-sight, out-of-mind slow violence, in the sense that Rob Nixon has highlighted. It falls to Lee, Gregg, and Kurt to speak for the non-humans whose habitats are devastated by the spill, in an attempt to circumvent the primacy of sight and refuse to allow the violence to fade into oblivion.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Petrofiction can thrive due to its ability to illuminate what Raymond Williams termed "structures of feeling" by telling compelling stories that put the reader in the mindset of the characters of a novel. Petrofiction can consciously plot against oil to reveal the fuel that has been missing from the literature and culture of modernity. Georges Poulet noted that novels can facilitate "the strange invasion of [one's] person by the thoughts of another, [rendering one] a self who is granted the experience of thinking thoughts foreign to him" (308). These foreign thoughts can lead to empathy, a critical emotion when it comes to understanding the structures of feeling experienced by those whose lives are negatively affected by their proximity to sources of oil.

The novels I have analysed repudiate the weaponisation of freedom and the unfettered prioritisation of profit and money above all else. As I have noted, the predominant value that the United States attempts to uphold is that of freedom. However, freedom has become inextricably linked to the economy and market forces. Freedom and money, generated through the enterprise system, are fundamentally interwoven in this cultural logic. Money becomes the ultimate symbol of freedom in modern neoliberal societies. This cultural logic created and sustains the "American way of life." Freedom has been weaponised, despite an acknowledgement from authors such as Yuval Noah Harari, that it is no more than a hollow term used to justify exploitation and mask the pursuit of energeia. Nevertheless, public buy-in, particularly among middle-class individuals such as *Oil and Water's* Tess, ensures that the term retains a strong cultural cachet among the general public, despite its hollow nature. It has become a metanarrative that goes mostly unquestioned. Those who do question it or who rebel against it tend to be seen as irrational. Elise Linsey's every "red-blooded American" comment illustrates the expectation of accordance and compliance with this logic, hence her shock that Jay would reject the possibility of

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

financial gain (Locke 395). Horn and Bergthaller have highlighted how this robust connection between freedom and money has become one of the most critical mental connections for humanity to break if we are to address the climate crisis: "The conception of freedom that co-evolved with the fossil energy regime is today one of the greatest obstacles in overcoming it" (138).

Jay Porter's final refusal to accept hush money and the freedom that it would provide, combined with his determination to continue his fight against Big Oil, reveals the depth of the link between oil and the contemporary "American way of life." In his stubborn attempt to overcome the obstacle identified by Horn and Bergthaller, Jay's refusal to conform reveals the overarching plot, the power wielded by Big Oil in creating the contemporary "American way of life" and the manner in which it uses that power to sustain its own dominance. Zaq and Rufus' illuminating conversation is pertinent here. "What do we seek?" Zaq asks Rufus. After a to and fro, Zaq reveals the truth to Rufus, "What we really seek is not [the woman and her kidnappers] but a greater meaning. Remember, the story is not the final goal." The final goal is "The meaning of the story, and only a lucky few ever discover that" (Habila 5-6). Jay is one of the lucky few who, through his plotting against Cole Oil Industries and his cooperation with reporter Lonnie Philips, has revealed the inner workings of the system that impoverishes and exploits large groups of people, both locally in Houston and globally, in order to provide the way of life that sustains the mythology surrounding the system itself. Jay comes to the realisation that "This oil thing touches everything. […] They're cheatin' people every which way. And I'm not gon' be pushed into keeping my mouth shut about it" (Locke 416-17). Jay's rejection of American values, of the freedom provided by financial gain, allows him to discover the meaning of the story.

The freedoms that Jay rejects are energy-intensive and rely on the exploitation of

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

fuel sources in Global South nations like Nigeria, thus cultivating the differing structures of feeling in an energy customer nation and an energy producer nation. The United States relies on nations like Nigeria to provide it with the oil that allows it to uphold its values at home, and yet this relationship, this dependence, is often obfuscated in metanarratives surrounding the procurement of oil. Graeme MacDonald pointedly asked why oil, a fuel that is pervasive in the everyday lives of those who live in developed economies, nevertheless "remains mostly 'offshore' in social and cultural consciousness, surfacing now and again in the wake of foreign wars, gas price hikes, or Gulf-of Mexico-type disasters?" ("Oil and World Literature" 7). It is only when these highly publicised incidents occur that the majority of the US public consciously recognises "the ecological compromises" that are made to provide the "middle-class happiness" that LeMenager noted in the image of a woman clutching her baby and staring at the aftermath of the Union Oil spill in Santa Barbara (20). The mental prompt provided by a highly publicised incident was also emphatically illustrated to us through the character of Tess in *Oil and Water,* who served as a paragon of middle-class values, and more explicitly, middle-class blindness in relation to the rampant injustice, exploitation, and ecological devastation caused by the system that sustains the way of life the middle-classes expect.

Jay pointedly stated in his impassioned cafeteria speech that "Injustice abroad is a threat to justice here at home" (270). It is imperative that this message is broadcast to a wider audience if we are to make the kinds of changes that are necessary to create a more equal world and attempt to address the climate crisis. Petro-injustices in nations such as Nigeria generate immense capital for Big Oil, which can then be spent on political contributions, media campaigns and legal teams, in the United States and other Global North nations, continuing the cycle of injustice on a global scale. The method through which injustice is propagated varies based on geographic and racial

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

differences, as the novels have made clear. We have seen that there is a discrepancy in the value placed on human life in different countries and across different races. Habila illustrated this discrepancy with the comical scene in which an albino Nigerian is kidnapped for ransom. Alyssa Rae also illustrated this in the scene where white British citizen Mari is almost kidnapped in the Niger Delta. A combination of Jay's race and his economic situation contributes to his awareness of the fact that oil "touches everything," as he is far more likely to experience the adverse aspects of the industry than someone like Tess is. As I have already noted, the energy of oil, its potential, is always greater than what is actual, the *energeia* that is expended to provide an excellent standard of living for the few at the expense of the many. Injustice is the foundation of this standard of living. Jay, in stark contrast to Tess, is starkly aware of this injustice.

Jay's refusal to give up in the face of such a mighty enemy must be seen as a rallying call to the reader and society at large. His refusal to accept a payoff comes across as an example of strategic irrationality, as it rejects the rationality associated with contemporary neoliberal societies, in which money is purportedly a remedy for most, if not all, ills. The rationality that frames money as an optimal solution to most ills is a fallacy that has been disproved on numerous occasions in both petrofiction novels and the empirical world. *Oil and Water's* Dean Carson asserted that "no amount of money in the world can ever make this right" when Mammoth began discussing financial compensation for the spill (Evans 111). Naomi Klein's declaration that "No amount of compensation money can replace a culture that has lost its roots" is a point that we have seen hammered home by Nigerian writers such as Chinua Achebe and Helon Habila (58). The old woman in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Night Ride* pointedly stated: "They say they will pay me compensation. Can they compensate me for my labours? The joy I receive when I see the vegetable sprouting?"

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

offering an alternative method of evaluating one's success and sense of fulfilment, as opposed to using money as the sole quantifier (311). *Oil and Water's* Lee complains vociferously that Mammoth began "making it about money" once they took control of community-instigated clean-up efforts (Evans 117). These voices, those that refuse to accede to an intersubjectively accepted wisdom, must be magnified to promote a change in the mentality that is promoting so much injustice and ecological devastation. Petrofiction and the humanities more broadly must step forward to platform these voices.

All four of the novels that I have discussed in this dissertation make a tacit link between oil and water as a means of critiquing or highlighting oil's ability to sully even the purest aspects of our planet. This link between oil and water is hinted at by the title of each of the four novels, which contains either the word water or the name of a body of water. Rufus' analysis of *Waterworld*, in which he states that there is something sad about a people whose "wars and industries and relationships and culture [are] all driven by the myth of dry land," looms large as the novels I have discussed all juxtapose oil and water in a manner that sees oil taint, contaminate and eventually poison water (Habila 96). Oil fuels climate change and thus sea-level rise, which will potentially lead to the wars over dry land that Rufus notes in *Waterworld*. Furthermore, humanity has fought many wars over oil in the past century and will almost certainly continue to do so into the future. However, water wars now loom on the horizon as the global population continues to grow and access to clean, potable water becomes increasingly scarce, an issue that Habila illustrates in *Oil on Water*.

The contrast between Boma surviving the ocean without human intervention and the need for John's father to intervene and save her from oil shows that we need to take action as a species to survive oil, as oil "is always superimposed upon water" (Malreddy 11). The entanglement of oil and water poses a further challenge for

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

petrofiction: to reframe our relationship with water, bringing it to the forefront of our minds. Rufus has already noted the dystopian wars caused by an excess of seawater in a planet ruined by climate change-induced sea level rise. The ocean, which Boscagli conceptualised as an "other space," will inevitably reassert itself in our collective consciousness if we do not act on climate change (233). Okorafor's *Lagoon* anticipates our dystopian climate future, returns to Nigerian customs and rejects Western ideologies. *Lagoon* posits water as the site of our liberation, the antithesis of an "other space." The water-dwelling aliens evoke echoes of the Nigerian deity Mami Wata, as they spring forth from the depths of the ocean to rid Lagos of oil once and for all, removing in one fell swoop the root cause of sea level rise and a significant contributor to the pollution of freshwater sources globally. This counter-narrative, proffered by *Oil on Water* and *Lagoon*, reframes water as a site of liberation, rather than the site of our next great crisis.

Finally, despite the rather utopian deference to the technocratic language of solutions in *Lagoon*, it is noteworthy that both Nigerian novels end on a note of optimism, which is conspicuously lacking in their U.S. counterparts. *Oil on Water* does not posit the future as difference, in the manner that Matthias Nilges outlined; however, despite this, the novel ends on a note of hopefulness. This is manifested in the resilience of Chief Ibiram and his community, who once again abandon their home and stoically go in search of a brighter future in another location. Conversely, *Lagoon* does posit the future as difference; however, that difference is facilitated by technological optimism that mirrors the language of solutions that Ghosh sought to avoid. Despite this reliance on technocratic tropes, the novel's resolution, a collective unification of Nigerians and the aliens who represent the deity Mami Wata, proffers a counter-narrative of national betterment that, while seemingly improbable in the contemporary sociopolitical landscape, remains a potent idealist possibility.

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

Collectively, *Oil on Water* and *Lagoon* illuminate an enduring resilience within the Nigerian spirit, despite the structures of feeling within the regions of the nation that the novels have illustrated, that appears to surpass the affective limits of their U.S. counterparts.

Petrofiction's ability to offer a stage from which diverse cultural viewpoints and traditions can be presented to challenge accepted narratives is what makes it powerful. The Nigerian novels portray an optimism that stems from the rejection of Christianity and Western influences and a return to Nigerian traditions, and a focus on the Nigerian people. This represents a clear intention to return to, or embrace Nigerian culture as an antidote to the defeatism and despondency that is illustrated in Evans' *Oil and Water*'s conclusion. In her interview with David Naimon, Okorafor maligned "the more Western point of view" in which having "something mystical or magical is odd, it's bizarre, it's not the norm." She contrasts this viewpoint, one that we must recall was championed in the literary arena by John Updike, who found himself dissatisfied with *Cities of Salt* for its lack of accordance with Western traditions, with the possibilities provided by other cultures, where having "the mystical and the mundane worlds coexisting is normal".

In conclusion, despite the systemic ecocide, poverty, and displacement inflicted by the petroleum industry upon the Nigerian people and their lands, the regional structure of feeling maintains a distinct sanguinity regarding the potential for a future decoupled from oil's adverse influence. This stands in stark contrast to the despondency or affective limits observed in the United States. This discrepancy illuminates the divergent psychological realities of an energy-producer nation as opposed to an energy-customer nation. In the latter, a deeply entrenched mythology of personal freedom, though unevenly distributed, serves to obfuscate the industry's structural violence, whereas in the former, the sheer visibility of injustice appears to

doi:10.6342/NTU202600281

catalyse a resilient optimism that refuses to concede to the current fossil-fuel regime. The optimism displayed in *Oil on Water* and *Lagoon* stems from a return to Nigerian culture, a rejection of Western influence, and the mixing of the magical and the mundane.

Ultimately, the divergent narrative trajectories of the Nigerian and American petrofiction novels that I have analysed each seek to reveal the contrasting structures of feeling that define our global entanglement with oil. By adopting the mechanics of detective fiction, *Black Water Rising* and *Oil on Water* consciously plot against oil, revealing an energy source that "seeks to hide itself, to dematerialize as capital" (LeMenager 124). Through the investigative lenses of Jay and Rufus, these novels draw the reader into the murky world of oil, revealing a multitude of hidden entanglements and the systemic violence of the industry. Similarly, *Lagoon* uses Adaora, Anthony and Agu's plot to understand the reason for their abduction by the Mami Wata-esque aliens to reconstruct oil and place it within the nation's sightlines. Through the intimate objectivity displayed by Adaora, her embracing of Nigerian traditions and deities, and her rejection of Christian teachings, she uncovers the truth behind her abduction: that oil is responsible, and she will be one of the emissaries who ensures its demise. Finally, while *Oil and Water* adheres to a real-world event, its elemental focus on water, a motif shared across all four works, illuminates the pernicious influence of oil on both human and non-human communities. All four novels, to varying degrees, plot against oil. All four novels share an ability to spotlight oil, forcing the reader consider the long-term effects of our contemporary reliance on oil. Collectively, these novels demonstrate that to ignore petrofiction contributes to an inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to acknowledge the social and ecological devastation caused by our fossil-fuel reliance by compelling a necessary confrontation with the hidden foundations of contemporary petroculture.

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