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**The Ecological Discourse in *The Famished Road* and *Wizard of the Crow*: A Comparative
Eco-Critical Analysis**

By

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Jimma, Ethiopia

**The Ecological Discourse in *The Famished Road* and *Wizard of the Crow*: A Comparative
Ecocritical Analysis**

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Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in Literature**

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Declaration

I declare that this research on The Ecological Discourse in *The Famished Road and Wizard of the Crow: A Comparative Ecocritical Analysis* is the result of my work and has not been presented to any University and all sources used for the thesis has been properly acknowledged.

Koang Gach Keat

January 2021

List of acronyms

TFR=The Famished Road

WoC=Wizard of the Crow

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the Ecological Discourses in two African novels: The Famished Road and Wizard of the Crow from an ecocriticism viewpoint. Postcolonial ecocriticism has been used as a theoretical framework to conduct the critical analysis in the selected novels. Within the ambit of this framework the concept of the “aesthetics of proximity” has been employed. The two novels were selected purposively as both employ a narrative perspective which is usually referred to as magical realism and because the ecological issues are dominantly addressed by the authors. The methodology employed to approach the analysis of the novels is purely qualitative, and a close reading of the symbols, theme, characters, and interactions among ecological entities are made in undertaking the textual analysis. A descriptive style is followed with the methodological orientation driven by the proximity aesthetics. Textual techniques that express ecological discourses in both novels were gathered as pieces of evidence for the human and non-human relationships represented. The study reveals that both novels uniquely present a multispecies dwelling of the ecology in which the interaction among the human and nonhuman entities are guided by the discourse of proximity. The nonhuman entities presented in both novels are also given the agency to bring impact on humans taking the attention paid to the usually othered part of the ecology. Hence, the agency is distributed between the two entities challenging the anthropocentric discourse which places agency only on the human. Beyond depicting the multispecies presence, the balanced relationship among the varieties of species, and empower the narrative capacity of agency, the two novels also embed instances of dismantling boundaries between the human and nonhuman entities depicted in the novels. This last discourse has been made possible through the special capacity the protagonists of both novels are given to embrace the human and nonhuman identity through the technique of magical realism. Kamiti in Wizard of the Crow can transform himself into a bird form and Azaro in The Famished Road dwells both in the physical and spiritual worlds taking both human and nonhuman forms. The two novels also recurrently present contemporary ecological challenges such as climate change, pollution, and deforestation. Based on the analysis conducted, the researcher concludes that Ngugi and Okri present African discourse of the ecological proximity created their narratives on the style of magical realism that dominates the African oral tradition. As the study is delimited to only two novels the researcher suggests a further inquiry into the other novels.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Ecological discourse has been a focus of multidisciplinary inquiries including the discipline of literature, but debates over the impact of humanity on the environment are said to have been triggered in the 1960s with Rachel Carson's influential report on the ecological impact of chemical pollution in her seminal work *Silent Spring* (1962). The ecological discourse ignited by then had a profound effect on raising consciousness about human's relationship with the environment. As to this endeavor, several movements gearing towards the protection of the environment mushroomed, and various environmental organizations have been formed to create more consciousness about the ruinous effects of environmental degradation and to push for favorable policy reforms on the environment and Earth Day for instance was first celebrated in 1970 to create awareness and protest the negative impact of industrialization on the environment (Iheka, 2018).

Dealing with ecological discourse demands a clear understanding of what the term ecology stands for. Ecology has got its meaning from two Greek words "eco" and "logy" which means "nature" and "study" respectively. Ecology is concerned with the study of the interrelationship between natural beings/things to one another, and to their physical environments (Odum, *et al* 2005).

The history of ecology goes along with the history of science; it was first described as a separate discipline by the German Biologist Ernst Haeckel (1869): History of ecology. Sources indicate that the first ecologists may have been Aristotle or perhaps his student, Theophrastus, both of whom had an interest in many species of animals. Theophrastus described the interrelationships between animals and between animals and their environment as early as the 4th century BC (Cleveland, *et al.* 2005).

At this point, it is also imperative to give a context on how the issue of ecological discourse is related to the subject/discipline of literature. Literature is a cultural product that represents human life in diverse perspectives, it remains to be a means of transmitting and perpetuating cultural values and norms, (Rudaitytė, 2012). Through literature, the realities of human

situations, problems, feelings, and relationships are vividly presented (Moody, 1971). Literature stands as a form of social dialogue that is made to reflect and examine the different experiences of a society it represents (Kolawole, 2005, p.11)

The ideals embedded in the culture or creative motifs of the society include their ways of representing how they relate themselves to what surrounds them (the environment). Later ecology taken in this context as the affinity between the human and their environment. This subject is among the indefinite issues represented in literature. What is more, literature derives its images from the surrounding environment, and nature appears to be the outer world often described in the literature (Rudaitytė, 2012). Therefore, it is understandable that literature and ecology are interrelated. The recent outgrowth of literary criticism called ecocriticism embarks on the study of this relationship between literature and the environment. Hughes' (1983) definition of human ecology stipulates such a relationship by listing out the details with which the human engage in interaction, he defines it as follows:

“a rational study of how mankind interrelated with the home of the human species, the earth; with its soil and mineral resources; with its water, both fresh and salt; with its air, climates, and weather; with its many living things, animals and plants, from the simplest to the most complex; and with the energy received ultimately from the sun, (Hughes, 1983, p. 75).

The concern with ecology in the literary study came with the increased engagement of scholars in the humanities discipline with the role the discipline could play in curbing global ecological concerns. So, ecocriticism, which is considered to be a broadways for literary and cultural scholars to investigate the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture, and the physical environment, took its great leap in serving the purpose. The term was coined by William Rueckert who first used it in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (Glotfelty & From, 1996). Following that many scholars broadly defined ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. The approach is said to be among the youngest revisionist movements, which has swept the humanities over the past few decades. The premise which has led to its popularity is the argument that science and technology are not enough to combat the global ecological crisis. This implies that there is a persuasive demand for the humanities to revise the way they deal with the

concept of nature, and its relation to the human. In this case, literature does not float above life, so it has its role to play in changing this attitude (Mishra. S. K, 2016).

Africa literature in its diverse genres represents the issue of ecology from the indigenous values and experiences perspective. The formation of African prose fiction has also dominantly addressed concerns with land, soil, forest, and indeed, narrate the historical struggle to regain ancestral lands lost to the colonizers. The land is presented as an integral part of the identity of the people and most writers insist in their works that no generation should lose contact with nature or surrender nature to foreigners. In Ngugi's works, for instance, the landscape is a site of resistance: he expresses resistance in terms of landscapes, grains, harvests, domestic animals, and so on (Prasanth, 2016).

African novels like Ngugi's *Weep Not Child*, *The River Between*, and *The Petals of Blood* also portray the changing landscape in the context of development and neocolonialism accelerated by the octopus grip of global capital (Prasanth, 2016). Ben Okri's works, like Ngugi's, portray fictional settings full of multiple species including human and depict the complex relationship among the entities in the natural environment. Several other writers have presented ecological issues like deforestation, species loss, pollution, global warming, and depletion of natural resources in their creative works. The critical appraisal from that angle on African literature, however, appears to be faint. As witnessed by Wright, there are efforts that stand currently articulating the African environmental literary tradition and use of ecocriticism as a framework gearing towards the postcolonial perspective (Wright, 2010).

In the determination to join the initiatives so far, this thesis focuses on comparatively analyzing the ecological discourses in the fictions of Ben Okri and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o focusing on *The Famished Road* and *Wizard of the Crow*. The two novels share the features of grand, mixed, and low styles as can be seen in the stylistic mannerisms and methods of the authors. Ben Okri is one of the famous Nigerian writers residing in London. He published his first novel, *Flowers, and Shadows* (1980) at the age of nineteen. His third novel, *The Famished Road*, one of the texts targeted in this study was published in 1991 and won him the Booker Prize. Okri is known for his depiction of characters capable of crossing the limits of the human capacity to incorporate the nonhuman perspective in his fictional works. Similarly, Ngugi Wa Thiopng'o, one of the famous African writers of fiction from Kenya, is celebrated for the decentering and decolonizing

perspective while depicting the African issue and characters. His most recent voluminous novel, *Wizard of the Crow* (2006) includes elements of magical realism similar to Ben Okri's novel indicated above. Both celebrated writers have taken a unique and complex way of presenting ecological consciousness in African tradition. This thesis attempts to explore the representation of the ecological discourses in their respective works.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

African fiction has been devoted to the project of telling African indigenous perspectives and experiences including how the people lived in harmony with each other, and with entities around them since the time the earlier narratives began to be produced. The earlier novels, for instance, targeted their thematic concerns on correcting the African image misrepresented by the earlier Western writers like Joseph Conrad. Chinua Achebe has instigated this misrepresentation of righting the wrongs in his famous *Things Fall Apart* which was published in 1958 (Ofori, 2016). While writing back to the misrepresentation, this and multitudes of other fictional works conveyed the indigenous perspective of living with nature. The fictions have also criticized the colonial encroachment of Europe towards Africa destabilizing the cultural life as well as the ecological and environmental peace of the continent. African literature has also dominantly depicted the impacts brought up by the colonial military invasions and the postcolonial political turbulences, and other forms of violence on the people and their environment.

However, the focus of most studies picking African literature as a subject has been, until very recent times, on the obsession with the socio-economic and political themes in the literature. Even though the historical injustices of slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism involve both cultural and ecological impact, and though the fictional works present these challenges in an integrated way, the emphasis so far has been on the study of the cultural aspect. As some researchers point out, this might have come from the fact that the paradigms followed in studying African literature have fallen under Western influence and recently, with the appearance of postcolonial ecocriticism as a viable means to approach African literature, many studies are being conducted on the ecological themes of African literature (Huggan and Tiffin, 2014). This thesis is partly motivated by the growing attention paid to the untapped area of research in African literature.

The indigenous African wisdom about the environment, i.e., all the nonhuman nature without which humankind can never survive, has long been among thematic preoccupations of African novels. Added to this, the continued global multinational manipulation of the African natural resources, and the imposition of Western mainstream environmentalism on postcolonial Africa, has led to the increase in the depiction of ecological discourses in African fictions. Following this, one might find a fresh perspective on the complicated nature of the ecological discourses in African literature. As a result, the global ecological crisis coupled with the engagement of scholars from various disciplines on tackling the challenge has opened a door to approaching African fiction from an ecocritical perspective.

This study focuses on examining the representation of ecological discourses taking the works of two renowned African writers: Ben Okri and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. In exploring the ecological discourses in the selected novels, this thesis examines the discourse of proximity portrayed in the novels to unveil the perspectives uniquely forwarded in African literature on the human-nature relation. In doing so, the study aims at joining the critical endeavors being made in analyzing African literature from an ecological point of view.

Through the Studies that were conducted before on the representation of ecology in African literature, then it's revealed that many of the fictions depict thematic concerns about both the cultural (human) and natural (nonhuman) beings in the environment. The Comparative writing taking up the issue of ecology in African literature are few: Zolfagharkhani and Shadpourt conducted a study: *An Eco-Critical Study of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*, and came up with the finding in their analysis that social and environmental justice is an important issue in the ecocritical study, discussing the concept of colonization is vital. The true African culture, disseminating morality and humanity, was in close connection with nature, so it could pose a threat to the colonizers. Consequently, the colonizers attempted to wipe out this culture to enslave Africans (Zolfagharkhani and Shadpourt, 2013).

The pre-colonial African culture was merged with religion which itself was full of natural concepts. After overcoming African culture and religion, the colonizers and their Christian missionaries started spreading their own culture and founding their colony which is an obvious sign of the destruction of Nature. Ashenafi (2015) also presents *An Ecocritical Reading of Representations of Human-Nature Relations in Selected Novels Set in Africa*, and compared the

ways how African and western related to the environment. The resistance towards the use of the approach appears to have lessened now, and the studies reviewed while conducting this thesis appears to have focused mostly on the environmental themes, the possibility of application of the critical approach, and the portrayal of the human-nature relation. These studies, except very few of them, however, are not visible in the Ethiopian Universities' research landscape. This implies that there is a gap in researching African literature from this angle.

So, emphasis has not been paid to the discourse of proximity addressed in African literature. The approach followed is also focused on a single writer and a single novel. The current study attempts to build on the contributions made so far by taking into account the dimension of the proximity aesthetics dominant in the African worldview about human-nature relations. Hence, the motivation for this research is partly methodological and partly the comparative texts which follow a unique style of magical realism. The two novels fall under the category of the second mimetic level of representation according to Frye's account that pertains to an action in which the central figure is human and yet capable of functioning at a level outside the limits of natural law. Here, nature is in some respect fixed and in some changeable: in which human beings can exercise extraordinary powers. This perspective appears to have not attracted the attention of studies so far as per the review the researcher has conducted to his best effort.

Besides, Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* and Okri's *The Famished Road* is postcolonial texts addressing the African situation in the milieu of global competition for "capitalist development" and its dire socio-economic and environmental impact. Exploring the texts would reveal unexplored ecological perspectives embedded in the fictional works. This being the case, the existence of fewer studies is also another motivation to take up the project.

Therefore, in the attempt to fill the gaps indicated, this study focuses on answering the following key questions through analyzing the novels comparatively.

1.3. Research Questions

1. How are the ecological diversity depicted in the selected novels?
2. How are the relationship between the human and nonhuman components represented in the selected novels?

3. How are Agency distributed between the entities in the novels?
4. How are boundary/proximity delineated between the human and nonhuman in the selected novels?
5. What ecological themes are depicted in the selected novels?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

1.4.1. General Objective:

The main objective of this study is to conduct a comparative critical appraisal of ecological discourses in “*The Famished Road*” and “*Wizard of the Crow*”

1.4.2. Specific objectives

1. To comparatively analyze the portrayal of ecological diversity in the selected novels
2. To find out how the selected novels represent human-nature relationship.
3. To examine the distribution of agencies between human and non-human entities in the selected novels.
4. To explore how the myths delineate/blur the distinction between the human and the natural.
5. To identify the ecological themes portrayed in the novels

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study is intended to bring various outcomes. It firstly reinforces the need for the development of knowledge among students, readers, and critics of African literature about the ecological discourses/voices embedded in African literary works. In so doing, it would bring to the notice the neglected environmental issue in the literature. the challenge of ecology can not only be alleviated by looking for technological advances, but also by transformations in the way we perceive the environment, researchers point out.

Secondly value is the study's hammering impact on the way in literary and cultural studies, African literature and cultural values are respected. Ecocriticism gives a new position on African literary studies that have embarked on the human-centered theories/approaches that have silenced the natural voice for a long time. The research was therefore making a methodological

contribution to the study of literature, particularly African novels. As the approach explores the interconnections between nature and culture, as shown in Glotfelty's works (1996 p19). it offers a significant point of shift in emphasis, "this new approach to nature and culture Literature claims that structured literature does not float up the substantial universe in some beautiful ether, but rather plays a role in an incredibly complex universal system in which energy, matter, and ideas connect

Finally, the research would also help discuss the aesthetics of proximity embedded in the fictions that illuminate the worldview through imaginative narratives. This illustrates how the cultural component of literary influences and is affected by the ecological discourses represented in literature. The research could therefore raise the consciousness of the inseparable cultural and natural process of negotiation.

1.6. Scope of the study

This research resolves only in two of the postcolonial African novels which were intentionally chosen to analyzed the addressing ecological discourses. The novels and writers are chosen based on the common stylistic and thematic obsessions of ecological obsessions concerns. Both concentrate on the narrative form that includes a summary of the ecological component's diversity and includes a magical realist form of narrative in the selected novels. The collection, therefore, is done from that perspective. However, this study focuses on the discourses related to the ecological dimension only. Therefore, the research was also confined to eco-critical analysis and is concerned with how the research is performed. In the realities of postcolonial Africa, ecological problems are discussed, the distribution of agencies, and how human/nonhuman entities are perceived to be linked or distanced.

The research was methodologically limited to the ecocritical approach and looks for data related to the ecological problems in the novels. The novel is multifocal in its very essence, discussing any problem in human life. Therefore, this study has left out problems/themes that are reflected in the novels but are not specifically suited to the study's intent. The conclusions to be drawn from the analysis carried out are therefore limited to the two novels and may not reveal the realities of other African writers or, even, other works considered in the study by the authors.

1.7. Organization of the study

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter has presented the introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, and scope/limitations of the study. The second chapter contains a review of related literature and research related to the issue being investigated. The third chapter deals with the methodology and procedures used to excavate data for the study and how analysis is being conducted. The fourth chapter presents the critical analysis conducted on the two novels by structuring them based on the research questions presented in the first chapter. The final chapter presents the conclusion of the findings and suggestions for further exploration in the area.

1.8. Definitions of some Key Terms

Ecocriticism: an analysis of the relationship between literature and the physical world (Cheryll Glotfelty, 1996).

Ecology: A science that deals with the relationship between groups of living things and their environment or is a record of interaction between man and nature, man and man, and man and the supernatural and also defined as an environment which is the totality of physical surroundings, living conditions and emotional situations affected by human activity (Merriam Webster Dictionary 1928).

Discourse: In the context of this study, discourse refers to a particular way of representing some part of the (physical, social, psychological) world (Fairclough, 2003, p.28). Different discourses are different perspectives on the world, and they are associated with the different relations people have to the world.

Ecological Discourse: refers to the perspectives or viewpoints of the ecological community and its relationships in the context of this research. In other terms, it relates to the perceptions of mankind keep on to the atmosphere around them and the challenges they face.

Ecological consciousness: The knowledge created by the depiction of human interaction with the environment in stories.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

This chapter presents a brief review of related literature focusing on the historical development of ecological discourse, its enclosure into the mainstream literary studies, experiences in the sphere of African literature, and finally the framework derived for the study. According to Ashenafi (2015), though there is variation in paying emphasis across continents and countries all over the world, the issue of ecological crisis is a problem of international concern. It has become momentous and received attention in several fields of study as the perceived tragedies happening, and expected to happen are becoming irritating. Hence, the ecological crisis is a global phenomenon, no nation or society is immune to it. The local and global related studies have been reviewed and included in the subsections of the chapter as deemed necessary.

2.1. Trends in Ecological Discourse

The concern for the natural environment dates back to the beginning of creation as recorded in the various accounts of creation, especially the one proposed by the Greek and the Judaeo-Christian traditions (Moncrief, 1970). The cultural basis for our environmental crisis: Judeo-Christian tradition.

Ecology has long been the subject of multidisciplinary inquiries including literary studies. These studies have brought the issue of the human-nature interaction to the fore of discourses dealing with the environment. In the humanities, the concept of ecological discourse refers to both the process of creating awareness and raising interest in establishing a cordial relationship between the human and nonhuman entities. These concepts of “awareness” and “interest” reflect the centrality of the change needed to be brought on the “worldview”. This desire for creating a balanced relationship has been in place for a long. The institutionalized and organized way of engaging in a serious debate is said to have been triggered by Rachel Carson’s 1962 work *The Silent Spring* that presented the grim realities of the impacts of chemical pollution on the natural environment. The discourse created has had a huge influence on the policies and politics related to ecology.

Following the trigger from *The Silent Spring*, several organizations devoted to have consciousness on the ruinous effects of humankind’s activities on the environment has been value. The 1970s, has been a very seminal decade for the mushrooming of international

engagement on the issue. Two years later, in 1972, an international conference focusing on the environmental crisis was conducted in Sweden. This conference led to the birth of the UN Environmental Program (UNEP), which focused on supporting sustainable development (Mathaai, 2009). Again in 1975, a convention targeted at reducing the commercialization of endangered species, named “International Trade in Endangered Animals and Plants” was inaugurated.

The 1980s and 90s also saw the appearance of more international conventions and treaties focusing on ecological concerns. The Montreal Protocol on a substance that depletes the Ozone layer took place in 1987. Two years later, the Basel Convention was signed. The 1989 convention focused on controlling the transportation of hazardous waste and disposals carried out crossing boundaries. The 1992 Earth Summit at Rio brought forth the issue of environment and development. At the summit, ‘developed’ nations were recommended to voluntarily cut down carbon emissions, and an agreement was reached to protect endangered species. A follow-up summit was held five years later in 1997 in Japan, the Kyoto Earth Summit. A better commitment to the reduction of carbon emission by industrialized countries was deliberated at the summit, but one of the most industrialized countries, and of course the one contributing much to the Ozone depletion, America refused to sign the deal.

At the onset of the 21st century, the UN General Assembly set development goals which also included the issue of ecology. The 2000 MDGs set included environmental sustainability as one of the key goals to be achieved in the year 2015. This goal was identified by some as an essential goal to meet the other goals set by the UN (Mathaai, 2009). In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development on which nearly 200 countries of the world participated was held in South Africa. This summit came up with more commitment to the provision of technical expertise by developed nations to support the growth and development of developing nations. The propositions at the summit included reducing health and environmental problems associated with chemical pollution by 2020. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) currently in place also pays attention to the ecological concerns of the world.

This trend on the institutionalized discourse on ecology has led to consciousness-raising and knowledge production in various disciplines. The ecological crisis, however, still looms large and the negative effects are witnessed all over the world with climate change. As a result, several

disciplines have embarked on taking the issue at the front of research endeavors to understand its root cause and seek a viable solution. At the center of the humanities discipline pertinent to ecological discourse, is the reevaluation of the way humanity views its relation to the ecological beings around him/her. These views determine the way humanity engages in the relationship. The literary study takes the stand that the ecological problem the earth is facing now is partly an ethical/ philosophical problem. This means, the challenge as well as the solution to be sought for the challenge partly resides in the value attachment. Values are at the heart of arts and as some scholars attest ecological discourse is better engaged through aesthetics (Evernden, 1978, pp16-20). To this end, the reevaluation of our value system is needed to chart a sustainable path in the ecological discourse.

2.2. The Ecological turn of Literary studies

Environmental perspective in contemporary literary studies began in the latter part of the twentieth century. It started as a result of the concern for a literary solution to the environmental crisis which has reached an all-time high. Literary scholars saw the need to respond to contemporary pressure posed by the natural environment, and, therefore, came up with an ecological approach to literature.

However, literary advocacy for the environment has started long before the twentieth century. As Ogunpitan (1999, p.3) observed, literature has always been involved with —the relationship between man and his sociocultural world”. The myths, legends, fables, and folktales are rooted in “man ‘s interaction with himself, with the gods and with the surrounding community of other diverse creatures”. The neo-classicists, the romanticists, and the naturalists have their works linked to nature. To the neo-classicists, nature is subjective. The romanticists regard nature as a source of inspiration, and the naturalists see nature as wielding a strong influence on man in terms of his responses to the events around him.

Literary ecology had been studies how literature both reflects and influences human interaction with the natural environment. The negative effects of humankind’s activities on the ecology have prompted a widespread disciplinary reevaluation that has led to a concerted effort at reassessment of cultural values and extension of human morality to the nonhuman world (Love, 1996, p. 229).

Literature deals with the representation of the world. As Potter attests, the way we represent the world informs how we live in it. Hence, ecological literary works “reflect our attitudes towards the natural world to appeal to our affective recognition which in turn raises the ecological consciousness of the society who can see itself in the mirror” (Potter, 2005, p.2). This explains that human interaction with the natural environment is informed by his/her understanding and representation of the world around him. Harre, Brockmeter, & Muhlhauser (1999: pp.3-4) attest the environmental crisis of our time is at root, a discursive phenomenon. It comes about through a shift in our way of seeing and assessing what we see, made possible by taking up into our discursive resource new vocabularies, new judgmental categories, new metaphors, and analogies that have promoted awareness of much that was previously overlooked.

Ecological issues have taken the attention of several disciplines and have influenced policy and political trends of international organizations. The discourses created in the last four decades have created a fertile ground for the appearance of a new theoretical perspective in the study of literary works. As Rachel Carlson was triggered the ecological discourse with her 1962 seminal work, Rueckert’s coining of ecocriticism later in 1978 was initiated the development of Ecocriticism as an independent critical approach in the study of literature. The ecological turn of the literary study had its initiation in the 1970s, but the 1990s is the decade when it received important attention with the publication of several books on the approach.

The ecological turn in the study of literature puts forward the conviction that humanity’s interaction with the natural environment is fundamentally informed by humanity’s understanding and representation of the world around us. In this case, the relationship between literature and the natural environment is reciprocal. The natural environment is a key source for the representation in literature, and at the same time, literary representation shapes the way people view the natural environment through the aesthetics of presentation. From its very nature, literature is a thorough examination of the role of humankind in their environment as well as the conflicts and tensions between groups and with the surrounding entities. Humankind’s interaction with ecological beings including the place is a vital component of literature. The effects of human activities bring to the environment of the place is also a part of the discourse in the study of literary works.

Literary studies worldwide have placed much emphasis on socio-cultural concerns like race, class, and gender leading to the development of theories like Marxism and Feminism. The

ecological turn started to gain ground only in the 1970s as has been indicated previously. With the development of ecocriticism as a critical paradigm in the study of literature in the 1990s, several scholars in the west conducted literary studies asserting how the discipline could contribute towards the consciousness-raising project on ecological discourse. These studies have foregrounded the perspective that humanity should reevaluate the way it relates to the natural environment.

The history of industrialization, in the west had altered the mutual interdependence between humanity and nature positioning humankind as a dominant figure to exploit and make use of nature without any recourse. The civilization ideology has also come with the desire to annex the natural resources of a region and expand territories of a group of people leading to colonization. Colonialism, the subjugation of a people's culture and resources, triggered off a series of conflicts that have been recorded in different literary works. The African experience of colonialism with regards to land and resource looting is reflected in the works of several literary artists. These works have revealed the ills of capitalism taking root in the civilization and industrialization discourse of the west. The industrialization of the west has been boosted through the exploitation of labor and natural resources causing ecological damages. The segregation created between the colonialists and the natives, on the other hand, have created the urban space (Bigon, 2008, p.378; Love, 1996; White, 1996)

Though there is variation in paying emphasis across continents and countries all over the world, the issue of ecological crisis is a problem of international concern. It has become momentous and received attention in several fields of study as the perceived tragedies happening, and expected to happen are becoming irritating. Hence, the ecological crisis is a global phenomenon, no nation or society is immune to it. Later, it is imperative to transform the way people imagine the environment (Ashenafi, 2015, p. 40).

Several studies conducted worldwide had revealed the discourses about the environment in literature. For instance, opines that the extensive misuse of natural resources has left humanity at the brink of the ditch, and lists the effects: the rainforests are cut down; the fossil fuel is fast decreasing; the cycle of the season is in disorder; ecological disaster is frequent now round the globe and our environment is at the margin. His study argues that environmentally oriented study of literature brings about an ecological literacy among the readers who in the process become

eco-conscious. Environmental concern is one of the major concerns of the day, Ecocriticism has undergone rapid development during its short tenure since its introduction. The present ecological crisis is a bi-product of human culture. Since his inception, a man started living near nature in the natural environment (Mishra, 2016)

Long before it had its landfall in the context of African literature, the practice of analyzing literary works from an eco-critical approach had established its roots in the West. Ecocriticism has developed as a worldwide emergent movement' during the last three decades. The term ecocriticism was first coined by William Rueckert in his critical writing "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978. According to him, ecocriticism applies ecology or ecological principles to the study of literature. He defines ecocriticism as “the bid of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world” (William, R.,1978).

Ecocriticism assumes that literature has been too humanistic in its approach; it elbows out nature by representing it as inert, exploited, dominated, and as that which is acted upon. Concerning this perceived misrepresentation, Love (1996, p.227) states that “...literary studies have remained indifferent to the environmental crisis in part because our discipline’s limited humanistic vision has led to a narrowly anthropocentric view of what is consequential in life.” The main drive of ecocriticism in literature is to the act of digging literary themes, subject matter, and characterization decentering man by giving nature back its subjectivity on exclusively human concerns. It’s noted that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and being affected by it. Ecocriticism takes interest in the interconnections between nature and culture. This places nature as an integral part of humanity and man as a crucial part of nature, both having the power to make or ruin each other (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996).

The critical works that laid the foundation of ecocriticism published in the 1990s have slowly taken the global perspective with the publication of works like *Postcolonial Eco-criticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* by Huggan & Tiffin (2010), and *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor*, by Nixon (2011), *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literature of the Environment* edited by DeLoughrey & Handley (2011) and several articles dealing with the intersections between social and environmental justices. These have led to the embracing of the

perspective all over the world. As one of the youngest and revisionist movements ecocriticism has swept the humanities over the past few decades and recently gained ground in the study of African literature.

2.3. The African Experience of Literary Ecological Discourse

Asika and Madu (2015) published an article that presents the European perception of the African environment in Obinkaram Echewa's *The Land's Lord*. The Europeans relaxing in the euphoria of their achievement and civilization often cast aspersion on the African continent as a 'dark continent' with a deep-rooted belief that nothing good could emanate from the continent. The idea of inferiority of African goods and products in various competitive markets even in Africa is traceable to the negligence of African natural resources and products as inferior and illicit during the time of colonial contact between the Africans and the Europeans (Asika & Madu, 2015)

Although environmental literary studies began in the mid-eighties in America, and blossomed in the early nineties, spreading its tentacles to Britain and other parts of Europe, it has gradually started to take roots in Africa through various ecocritical efforts in African literary studies

While the efforts of African critics in assessing the relationship between literature and other forms of social consciousness such as morality, politics, psychology, pedagogy, and philosophy are commendable, more conscious research into the study of the environment in criticism would go a long way in a better understanding of literature and the appreciation of the art's interaction with other forms of human practice. The 2004 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Professor Wangari Maathai, a non-literary scholar, in recognition of her contributions to the environment. This shows that more conscious attention should be paid to it among African literary scholars. It is, therefore, imperative that a closer look be given to environmental issues in literature and solutions should be offered in addressing the crisis between man and the environment as instantiated in the works of (Ogunpitan, 2018); Olaoluwa, 2012); Neimneh, & Muhaidat, 2012).

The ecological discourse has been at the center of the production of African literature long before the arrival of the Anglo-American theory which appeared with the impulse of global environmentalist literary growth in the 1990s. The African creative artists have taken nature seriously in their works and revealed the historical mutual interdependence between Africans and their environment. The earlier novelists like Amos Tutola, Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi Wa

Thiong'o had presented an enormous representation of nature in their most popular works. These works address the natural environment is embedded in the cultural worldview of the natives and the disasters that came with the encroachment from colonialism. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi's *The River Between* are good examples in this regard.

African literary works depict the difference that exists in how Africans and western characters relate themselves with ecological beings in their environment. The Africans' relationship goes far beyond the relationship between an art collector and an art piece and is not a cosmetic relationship. Hence, for the Afrocentric writer or critic, studies on the African environment must necessarily implicate human consciousness, as well as nature consciousness.

In the most extreme discussion to date on African literature and eco-criticism, Slaymaker argues that the "global eco-critical responses to what is happening to the earth have had an almost imperceptible African echo", and calls for both African writers and critics to embrace what he sees as a global eco-critical movement. This call has been well embraced, and many critics have in the last decade engaged in the analysis of African literature from an ecocritical perspective. The approach, however, has shifted from the emphasis normally given in the Western style of the earlier ecocritical appraisal (Slaymaker, 2001, p.138)

Recent environmental studies in Africa bring into question those aspects of ecocriticism that would downplay the social and political implications of representations of nature, especially as these representations are related to the claim to speak for and to protect nature. Given that much African literature struggles to offer a different vision from the one produced by colonial discourse, it should be no surprise that the potential challenges posed for ecocriticism by recent African environmental history can also be found in African literature with anti-colonial agenda. Much recent work has been citing in African environmental studies, warns that "arguments rooted in anti-colonial and sometimes populist or anti-modernist discourse can present us with an analytic closure, too neat an inversion". Bienart and Coates points out that the pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial rural communities have been in flux, and that their environmental knowledge and practices are not outside relationships of power. They also argue that pre-colonial African practices were by no means always in harmony with local ecology, and notes how the long histories of Western influence and colonialism have transformed local environmental knowledge, attitudes, and practices (Bienart & Coates, 1995, p.284),

Following the shift of ecocritical practice in Africa to the postcolonial dimension which addresses both the cultural and natural concerns, several studies focusing on the ecological issues in Africa literature have been conducted.

Olaniyan and Quayson have broken the silence on the ecocritical analysis of African literature when they published an anthology of African literary criticism and theory which included four essays on the ecocritical approach to African literature. These essays presented diversified perspectives including the call for more engagement of African critics on the enterprise and the postcolonial turn of the endeavor. The editors suggest that ecocriticism as “potentially one of the most vibrant areas of critical discourse” in African literary criticism. The essays, through presenting a rather skeptical view of Slaymaker to the preliminary space-clearing gestures of Nixon, and on to the attempts at applying forms of ecocriticism to African literary texts by the remaining two critics, reveal how much rich seam is waiting to be discovered in this branch of African literary theory and criticism (Olaniyan & Quayson, 2007, p.1178)

Vital’s essay “Situating Ecology in Recent South African Fiction: J.M Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals* and Zake Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*”, published in *Journal of South African Studies* presents the reading of two novels against the developments in the environmental culture that came with the continued influence of colonialism. The writer claims that both novels develop a similar implication for ecology. He adds that drawing on the postmodern strategies of deconstructing meaning; the novels articulate a carefully circumscribed value for ecology within current social and cultural orders (Coetzee, 2005). In “Towards African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology and the Life and Times of Michael K”, which was addressed a recent article for postcolonial and ecology-minded criticism engage with each other, though with some difficulty. Vital indicates that his essay proposes to resolve the difficulty through a materialist apprehension of discourse and suggests that postcolonial ecocriticism enacted this way might have value generally for African Studies (Vital, 2008)

Nwagbara (2010) presents an ecocritical reading of African poetry in his article “Poetics of Resistance: Ecocritical Reading of Ojaide’s Delta Blues & Home Songs and Daydream of Ants and Other Poems” He presents Ojaide’s poetry as a resistance medium towards ecological imperialism. The author argues that since the poems intersect with the realities of ecological

imperialism, it is thus a dependable barometer to gauge the Nigerian environmental/ecological experience.

Other ecocritical studies targeting African literature include articles published by some individuals like Alam (2010), Fai (2010), Victor (2014), Njanji (2014), Ashenafi (2014, 2015), and MA and Ph.D. dissertations written in various universities which include Maun (2012), Aghoghovwia (2014), Campbell (2010), Iheka (2011) and Ashenafi (2015). These individuals dealt with the issue of ecocriticism or African literature that in some way has a connection to the study at hand, but on account of the texts, genres, objectives, scope, and methodological considerations are different from it.

2.4. Aesthetics of Proximity as Framework of Analysis

The environmental track of human activities in Africa can be broadly located in the historical development of the continent from the pre-colonial to the colonial, and post-colonial periods. The pre-colonial period was marked by traditional values and practices with communalism as a basic philosophy for a productive and peaceful co-existence between human and non-human nature.

The invasion of the colonialists, the Western civilization, and its touted development, however, led to the imposition of western values on the Third World. This development is characterized by a “top-down, ethnocentric and technocentric approach” whereby people and cultures are regarded as —abstract concepts, statistical figures to be arbitrarily moved up and down the charts of “progress”. This unwholesome practice is still sustained in the post-colonial period with the collusion of the neo-colonialist elites of the former colonies. Beyond influencing the developmental agenda, the practice has also silenced indigenous ecological discourses that serve the purpose of sustaining the health of the ecological entities (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010, p.29).

Hence, in the project of unearthing ecological discourses in African literature, it is important to take up a framework of reading which is impervious. To this end, this study adopts Cajetan Iheka’s (2018) concept of “aesthetics of proximity” as the framework of analysis to decipher the ecological discourses embedded in Ngugi’s “*Wizard of the Crow*” and “Okri’s *The Famished Road*”. This framework has been chosen on account of its emphasis on the silenced voice of

nature, and its inclusion of indigenous African relational discourses with the environment. The framework is discussed as follows.

2.4.1. Proximity and its Ecological Aesthetics

Iheka's (2018) concept of aesthetics proximity emanates from the gaps observed in African ecocritical studies. The discussion of the framework begins by challenging the inattention paid to "the nonhuman implications of environmental tragedies" in the scant scholarship on the African literary narratives that elucidate "catastrophic and long-term environmental challenges". He stresses this by saying,

"The emphasis on human life in the growing corpus of environmental scholarship in African literary criticism does not take sufficient cognizance of the interlinking of human and nonhuman lives in African societies represented in literary works."
(Iheka, 2018, p.2)

Contrary to that skewness in the African ecocritical enterprise, the literary narratives are full of relational discourses. So, the overemphasis on anthropocentrism in the critical practice leaves untapped the voices of "relations across species" and "visions of sustainability" embedded in the literary texts. The aesthetics of proximity framework, which capitalizes on listening well to these voices, is opted for as it has significant implications for rethinking questions of agency and resistance while studying the connection between humans and other life forms in African literature. The framework considers the intersections of humans with their environment in those instances of oppression, resistance, and agency, and moves away from the dominant tendency to read nonhuman figures as symbols for oppressed humans in African literary criticism. It also welds together different theoretical tools and orientations, and in doing so, the framework helps in delivering an enriched interpretation of African literary narratives that stage connections between human and nonhuman lives, and Africa's complex ecologies.

Proximity in the context of this study refers to the expression of closeness in a relationship, and the identification by humans with ecological entities, as opposed to the claim of distance in a hierarchical relationship. Foregrounding the discourse of proximity, rather than distancing, in the relationship between human and nonhuman life presented in literary narratives allows us to focus on common attributes including suffering and mortality. Such a discourse is at the root of the

project of challenging the anthropocentric valuation of the relationship which is thought to have brought an ecological crisis of our time. Iheka stresses that the concept of proximity is essential for the rethinking of the critical approaches to African literature, and of course, the overemphasis on human concerns in the critical engagement while dealing with the literary narratives. He expresses that the “... idea of proximity encourages us to read African literary texts in innovative ways with attention to the fact that nonhuman forms are often implicated in the concerns of the text even when they are not explicitly stated” (Iheka, 2018, p.24).

Iheka’s notion of proximity takes the senses of both “spatial nearness” and close identification based on “similarities and shared characteristics”. In its first sense, the emphasis is on the blurring of spatial distance rendering the setting of the fictional narratives as a space for the community of multispecies, not just humans. The second sense challenges the ideas of “human exceptionalism and absolute distinction” from other forms of life by presenting inherently shared attributes. Iheka had contended, African literary and cultural practices stage the enmeshment of human and nonhuman lives and its implication for ecological justice. Putting the concept of proximity at the center in the senses described above, Iheka defines aesthetics as “the processes by which African literary artifacts depict the interconnectedness of human lives with others in the environment.” The narratives present the inseparability of human beings from their environment, and their reading should pay attention to “the closeness and similarities among the different aspects of the ecological community”. Hence, the practice insists on pondering the place of the nonhuman in African literature more seriously, and on examining the possibilities for the alternative sustainable world these texts often embody (Iheka, 2018, p.23)

2.4.2. Ecological Dimensions of Proximity

In his discussion of the aesthetics of proximity, Iheka presented four dimensions that the concept of proximity takes in the context of African literature. These strategies are (1) multispecies presence, (2) interspecies relations, (3) distributed agency, and (4) indistinction between humans and other life forms. These dimensions could be deciphered by dealing with the genre, narrative voice, diction, and thematic preoccupations of the literary texts. Seen from the two senses of the proximity notion, the first strategy illuminates the spatial, the second one illuminates both the spatial and shared attributes, and the last two illuminates the shared attribute senses of proximity.

As these levels of proximity are central to the framework of analysis for this study, brief descriptions of the notions are presented as follows.

2.4.2.1. Multispecies Presence

The multispecies presence dimension of proximity is concerned with the ecological composition of literary narratives. It focuses on how far the nonhuman entities of the ecology are represented in the narratives. Hence, the reading from this perspective attempts to reinstate the nonhuman as an integral component of African ecological discourse in the literary narratives, and as an essential force in the narrational progress of the texts. About this concept, Iheka discusses that the African literary texts make central the presence of nonhuman life forms—material and supernatural—as important constituents of Africa’s ecosystems. What this dimension of the aesthetics of proximity presents, then, is the issue of being accommodative inclusive. This dimension of proximity enlarges the angle of vision of African literary texts by adumbrating the significant presence of nonhuman life forms and their spatial closeness to humans, but it leaves unaddressed the question of the kind of relationships that ensue between them. Later, the next section focuses on relations (Iheka, 2018, p. 25)

2.4.2.2. Interspecies Relations

The second level of proximity has been devoted to the representation of forms of interaction among the network of the ecological community in literary narratives. If the first level of proximity addresses how diversified is the community of ecologies in the narratives, the second level focuses on the kind of relations epitomized between the diverse life forms. Hence, at this level, the framework examines the relationship between humans and nonhumans dramatized in the literary narratives highlighting both the “benign forms of interspecies interactions” and the more prevalent “exploitive relationships”. Iheka argues that the interactive moments provide opportunities for contrasting various forms of the human relationship to the nonhuman world, and stresses that: A benign relationship that is mutual and reciprocal is quite rare because of the prevailing exploitative thrust of human relations with the nonhuman world; however, a non-exploitative model of behavior could exist side by side with an exploitative relationship, which is often portrayed in such a way as to call for ethical reflection on the part of humans regarding their obligations to the Other(s), broadly conceived. Depictions of exploitative relationships provide avenues for critiquing the abuse of the nonhuman worlds as well as amplifying such

abuse for the reading public. The interaction of humans with nonhumans involves “agency and production of effects” and according to Iheka these are not restricted to humans through “our anthropocentric orientation limits our perception of nonhuman agency”. So, the issue at stake is whether the texts present the interactions as harmonious or discordant (Iheka, 2018, pp 26, 29-30).

2.4.2.3. Distributed Agency

This dimension of proximity accentuates the agency shared by the human and nonhuman components of the ecologies in African literary texts. African literature portrays multispecies ecologies and the interrelationships that characterize these complex ecosystems, but the agency from the nonhuman side in the interaction or production of effects has often been denied expressions. This results according to Iheka from the emphasis on human agency rooted in the idea of intentionality. The concept of distributed agency, then, capitalizes on the nonhuman agency which Iheka baldly expresses saying “the nonhuman can act and therefore has agency” In using this concept in the analysis of the selected texts, emphasis would be made on the roles nonhumans play in connection to the agency of characters and the effects they produce. In fictional works, nonhuman actors participate in moving the course of narratives forward and also place some impacts on the human actors in the process. Hence, it is important to pay attention to the narrative details where there are instances of granting some power of agency to nonhumans. In his analysis of African literary texts, Iheka (2018, p.44) discusses instances where the literary texts foreground the impacts of nonhumans on Africa’s environment Presenting this shared characteristic reveals the point of convergence between the human and nonhuman entities in the ecological discourse challenging the anthropocentric perspective that restricts agency to only humans and portrays nonhumans as an object, inert, and passive. The emphasis placed on the shared trait of agency between human and nonhuman entities signifies the proximity discourse discussed at the outset.

2.4.2.4. Indistinction

The three dimensions of Iheka’s aesthetics of proximity presented above rely on the foundational issue of the boundary between human and nonhuman nature. This last level attempts to challenge the perspective by blurring the boundary. It presents the radical moments of indistinction as represented in African literary fiction. therefore, this dimension obfuscates the clear lines of

demarcations drawn between the entities. It is important to recognize here that all four dimensions share an opposition to anthropocentrism, yet the clarity of the distinction between humans and other forms of life characterizing the initial three stages of analyses gives way here for the notion of sameness in the sense approximately similar to the concept of hybridity forwarded by Bhabha. The human has always defined himself or herself as distinct from nonhuman nature, just as the colonizer's identity in Bhabha's work is constructed to the colonized. Though his work does not consider the ecological entities considered in this study, Bhabha's analytical insights allow for understanding the way human identity formation also proceeds to other beings. In his deconstruction of the fixed notion of identity, Bhabha maps space for rethinking the well-constructed and pervasive idea of human superiority. The notion of indistinction is not targeted at denying differences, but at challenging the claims of human exceptionalism that sanctions the brutalization of other members of the biosphere. Such a project attempts to encourage a relational disposition toward other beings, who are not always human (Ibid, p.50).

Altogether, the aesthetics of proximity provides an innovative framework to critique African literature based on the indigenous accommodative valuation of entities in the larger ecosystem. Hence, the critical analysis of the novels in this thesis is undertaken through this framework

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

the purpose of this study was to conduct a comparative analysis of ecological discourses embedded in two African novels: *The Famished Road* and *Wizard of the Crow*. The nature of the research, then, is purely qualitative focusing on textual analysis and it follows a descriptive design. The methodological orientation of this study is guided by Iheka's (2018) aesthetics of proximity framework discussed in the previous chapter. Hence, textual strategies in both novels articulating ecological discourses are teased out to collect evidence of relationality between the human and nonhuman entities of the ecosystem as depicted in the imaginative setting of the narratives. Ecological themes, perspectives, and correlation addressed in the works through the creative techniques employed by the novelists are the focuses of the investigation. The core target is on unpacking the textual strategies used in articulating the ecological discourses targeted at relational and harmonious coexistence of lifeworld.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

The main objective of this study, as stated in the introductory chapter, is to explore the aesthetics of proximity in human-nature relations represented in the two African novels. So, the thesis relies on the theory of ecocriticism that embarks on the study of how humankind depicts their relationship with ecological beings around them in creative works of art. Ecocriticism, however, is a vast approach and embraces various standpoints ranging from ecocentrism to anthropocentric perspective. As has been stated at the outset, this study is delimited to the appraisal of the ecological discourse of proximity/relationality between the binary entities of the human and nonhuman. An approach that fits this objective has been adopted by borrowing key concepts from ecocritical and postcolonial approaches. Before discussing these concepts, however, it is important to show the dynamic standpoints in the course of development of the ecocritical approach.

Ecocriticism as a critical discourse came as a form of resistant reading explicating a set of culturally engendered relationships between humans and the natural environment (Buell, 2005). It focuses on a literary expression of human experience primarily in a natural, and consequently in a culturally shaped, world. Therefore, the wellbeing of the earth, and its inhabitants is at the

core of its agenda (Cohen, 2004). Its concerns, however, are addressed from multiple philosophical, social, and economic standpoints. The approaches derived from these standpoints have led to the examination of ecological discourses from a unique point of view resulting in different interpretations of texts. What is common to the approaches is the grim realities of ecological distress the planet is facing.

Since William Rueckert first used the term ecocriticism in 1978, the concept has been used to articulate different shades of environmentalism. These standpoints range from “cornucopia” to “deep ecology”. According to Garrard, the “cornucopia” presents anthropocentric discourse that nature retains its worth in terms of its usefulness to man, and posit that environmental challenges could be solved through “the dynamism of capitalist economies” (Garrard, 2014, pp 141-159). This standpoint does not attach any intrinsic value to nature and is a consumerist oriented approach. The approach represents what (Guha, 2000, p.196) terms as “environmentalism of the rich”.

The second position is what Garrard calls “shallow ecology” which focuses on advocacy and public awareness creation through forming organizations on identified ecological concerns like pollution, climate change, population explosion, deforestation, land pressure, desertification, nature conservation, etc. This position has anthropocentric philosophy at the base and presents technological solutions to ecological challenges (Garrard, 2014)

The other position is the eco-centric perspective of “Deep Ecology” which is the most radical form of environmentalism. The position attaches intrinsic and inherent value to non-human life on earth. The philosophy is accused of neglecting the human and presenting a direct opposition to anthropocentrism. This attitude condemned ecological imperialism of the human and do not seek technological solutions to ecological problems. They seek the need for justice, prudence, and temperance by man for a peaceful co-existence with the natural environment. They claim that non-human nature as a whole should be given the necessary moral consideration before the enactment of political, economic, and social policies. The stance is criticized for neglecting the social dimension of the environment. Huggan and Tiffin labels it as complicit in the project of Western imperialism because it upheld the portrayal of a wild Africa and a tropical Edenic trope in colonialist discourse (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010).

Ecofeminism is another standpoint in interpreting ecological discourse in literature. This socio-philosophical perspective adds gender to the discourse and associates ecological challenges with androcentrism. The approach embeds environmental justice and relates ecological imperialism with a male-centered attitude. This scholar describes ecofeminism as opposing “all forms of domination and violence. Ecofeminism has adopted the tools of environmental justice activism to address the issues of environmental racism and oppression with regards to the environmental crisis”. The standpoints of the environmental justice movement, social ecology, and eco-Marxism are entrenched in the belief that social problems and environmental problems are inter-related. These perspectives are grounded on the idea that ecological problems plague human society as a result of the exploitation of humans by other humans. They challenge the undue imposition of the burden of environmental plundering on the indigenous communities who are often deprived of the gains of natural resources extracted from their lands. A primary tenet of the environmental justice movement is that environmentalism cannot be separated from issues of social justice and equity (Garrard, 2014, pp. 27-28)

Postcolonial ecocriticism presents a different standpoint on the ecological discourse in literary scholarship. Like the previous ones, it falls under the socio-political view of ecology combining the schools of thoughts of ecocriticism and postcolonialism. The respective commitment of ecocriticism and postcolonialism on the environmental and social justice bring them together, although the emphasis they place independently on are different: nature (on the ecocritical side) and people (on the postcolonial one) (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p.3).

As it embraces both the natural and social others in the ecological discourse of literary representation, postcolonial ecocriticism lends itself easily to the analysis of African literature compared to the earlier orthodox paradigm. The approach challenges the hegemonic western culture that regards nature as a commodity, product, resource in the wheel of progress. The categorization of the human into the binaries of “civilized” and “uncivilized”, according to Plumwood (2003, p.3), has become the foundation upon which the subjugation of non-European lands and people are instilled being labeled as spaces unused, underused or empty. The critics in the area utilize the concepts of “ecological imperialism”, “bio colonization”, “biopiracy”, etc in discussing the impacts. In a way, postcolonial ecocriticism amplifies the silenced voice of nature

and the human others and seeks to redress the injustices of colonialism in terms of humans, about animals and the environment (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p.19).

Postcolonial ecocriticism also challenges the ideologies of development which is considered as a technocratic tool of the western world. The postcolonial texts are seen as a testament against the brazenness of social and ecological abuses perpetrated in the name of development. As could be understood from the above review, there are several standpoints in ecocritical theory and some of them appear to harness the ecological realities of Africa. It is also important to see that the earlier Ecocriticism which was a predominantly white movement is ill-equipped for a multicultural and cross-cultural concern. The imposition of its ecological philosophy on the third world would simply be nothing but an imperialistic arrogance which —mourn[s] what they have helped destroy (Curtin, 2005, p.66). Therefore, a modified version of it, one that addresses the context of Africa is needed. This version is the one that fits well with the project of tracing the root causes of the ecological crisis in Africa to the colonial past and the current capitalist imperialism. As postcolonial ecocriticism sets to achieve this project, it is preferred as an inclusive approach to reading African literary texts. The project of transforming the underlying causes of ecological problem is best described in assertion quoted below:

human liberation will never be fully achieved without challenging the historical conditions under which human societies have constructed themselves in hierarchical relation to other societies, both human and nonhuman, without imagining new ways in which these societies, understood as being ecologically connected, can be creatively transformed (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p.22).

The connectedness among the ecological beings addressed above is uniquely present in the indigenous cultures though the perspectives in these cultures have not received much attention. The ecological ruins in non-western countries could be well understood and addressed if the indigenous ecological knowledge is brought to the right stage. Indigenous ecological knowledge is acquired over a long period based on people's engagement with the environment. Berke (1993, p. 3) defines it as: "...a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment". An ecocritical framework that takes into account such a perspective can best fit the analysis of African literature. This is true because the

relational positioning of the human to nonhumans is a model attribute of the stories and social practices of indigenous communities worth considering in an era of hyper-capitalism, with its commodification of everything. Hence, this study follows the postcolonial ecocritical approach in analyzing the ecological proximity discourse in the two novels

Postcolonial eco-critics like Guha seek reconciliation between the hypocritical Northern environmentalism of the rich and the genuinely heroic Southern environmentalism of the poor. He calls for the bridging of the ecological and economic gap between the colonizer and the colonized. His work examines the possibility of co-habiting “post-colonial” and “ecological” issues, despite their egalitarian virtues, to achieve selfish, national, and transnational interests. Guha believes that postcolonial ecocriticism is a viable instrument for tracing —the complex interplay of environmental categories such as water, land, energy, habitat, migration with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict, literature... [as well as] social, historical, and material coordinates of categories such as forests, rivers, bio-regions, and species (Mukherjee, 2006, p.144). Postcolonial eco-critics are concerned with the reassessment of the legacies of colonialism and imperialism based on ethical, political, and environmental issues (Buell, 2005, p. 27; Cilano & DeLoughrey, 2007, p.84).

3.3. Nature and Type of Data

This study purely depends on textual data from fictional works. The primary source of data for the analysis of the discourse is the two novels: *The Famished Road* by the Nigerian novelist Ben Okri and *Wizard of the Crow* by the Kenyan famous novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong’o. The data wanted for investigating ecological discourses are extracted from the novels through critical textual analysis. These data involve contents/texts presenting life form diversity, the relationships between human and nonhuman entities depicted in the novel, the agency of the entities deduced from the actions and reactions they are involved in, ecological themes, and magical realist perspectives embedded in the two novels. More particularly, the texts were critically examined from the point of view of the depiction of protagonists’ and other characters’ relation to nature and vice versa. Besides, where the texts present ecological themes attempts were made to focus on the relational discourses presented in the texts.

3.4. Basic of Texts Selection

The scope of African novels is wide and so far, multitudes of novels had been published in Africa in various languages including the indigenous ones. This thesis focuses only on two anglophone African novels. The novels under scrutiny are drawn from the sub-Saharan African literature picking two famous works of East and West African novelists who are renowned globally. The selection of these novels is purposeful in the sense that both works follow a unique style of presenting the nonhuman as well as the human perspective. One major common style is the use of elements of Magical realism as a narrative strategy. Besides, both writers have brought forward significant ecological themes and perspectives in their voluminous novels published in the decade the ecological turn of literature and literary studies have become topical. The principal selection criteria for the texts, are their relevance for the voicing of ecological discourses from Africa and the relationality perspective embodied in the imaginative interaction between human and nonhuman entities. The magical realist perspective used in the narratives gives a window of opportunity to explore the multiple dimensions of ecological discourses as it demolishes the wall separating the humans and nonhumans to stretch the possibility of the real to include social practices and otherworldly activities governing actual life. These texts are constituted by multispecies presences, human and nonhuman, visible and invisible, that shows the limit of the human person and his or her imbrication with various nonhuman forces.

3.5. Methods of Data Mining

The data needed for critical analysis in the study are extracted from the novels. The researcher collected these textual data from the novel to answer the research questions following the critical data mining strategies of the New Critical approach. The narrative strategies, techniques, and styles employed in each novel; the ecological entities (both human and nonhuman) given some agency in the plot of the stories, the characters and narrators driving the action of the stories, themes, figurative expressions, and points of views are targeted in doing a critical reading to identify relevant extracts and perspectives. Part of the focus includes the analysis of the instrumentality of point of view in the representation of the imaginative world through either a human or non-human point of view. Putting these together, the researcher enquired whether the stories advance only through the presentation of events from a human point of view which makes the story anthropocentric, or whether it has room for the non-human perspective which positions

the story as non-anthropocentric. This data mining strategy has resulted in the identification of intact ecological discourses in the novels under consideration.

3.6. Method of Analysis and Analytical Procedures

The research methodological orientation is guided by Iheka's (2008) framework of the aesthetics of proximity which takes into account the presence of multispecies, interspecies relation, distribution of agency, and distinction as focuses of analysis. Following this framework, the researcher used the analytical procedures described below to answer the research questions set. A close reading of the two novels and identifications of pieces dealing with ecological themes, viewpoints, and representation about nonhumans, their relation to humans, the agency involved and techniques used in articulating ecological discourses have been undertaken in the first step. To do this, main focus was given on the narrators and characters of the novels, ecological issues and perspectives presented in the stories, and the techniques through which these were represented. The identified texts (extracts and clues) then were categorized based on the objectives of the study and analyzed through the analytical framework designed for the study.

The textual analysis of extracts drawn from the novels was undertaken based on the analytical tools (content and discourse analysis) developed for textual analysis by McKee (2003). Following that, interpretations of various dimensions were applied through rewritings, paraphrasing, and critical appraisal of the data obtained from the fictional works to present arguments on the discourses embedded in the narratives. In reporting the results of the analysis an attempt has been made to comparatively present the imbrication of humans and other life forms constituted in the two novels. The convergences implicated with the various scenarios of the interaction of the ecological entities, the transformation of humans into nonhumans, and the distribution of agency implicated in the actions of the story are taken as key indicators to present the discourse of proximity embedded in the novels under consideration.

The novels, are analyzed as constituting multispecies presences, human and nonhuman, visible and invisible that show the limit of the human person and his or her imbrications with various nonhuman forces. Besides, the opportunity they present in rewriting reality to be more accommodative through the magical realist strategy has been a focal point in conducting the analysis.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Ecological Discourses in the Famished Road and Wizard of The Crow

This chapter presents the analysis of ecological and the analysis is divided into five sections based on the research questions, and the analysis of data from both novels is comparatively presented under each subsection. Before presenting the analysis, the researcher has opted for a short synopsis of each novel, so that the reader gets a compressed plot story of the novels.

4.1. Synopsis of the Novels

The two novels selected for analysis in this study share certain features in advancing their plots. The styles and methods the two authors employed in the novels make them similar as they share outstanding, varied, and low stylistic features. Besides, the texts also fall under the category of magical realism in which characters are transformed into other beings to function beyond the limits of natural law. In both novels we observe dynamic features revealing the bestowing of extraordinary powers to the human characters in the stories. The magical capabilities of Kamiti and Azaro in each of the novels is just an indication.

The Famished Road (TFR)

Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* tells the story of a spirit child called Azaro living in an unnamed African village. The novel employs a unique narrative style imbricating the real and spirit worlds. It presents a hallucinatory story with striking imagery of both the spirit world and the real world. The protagonist Azaro frequently sees spirits interacting with the material world. These spirits summon him to leave his body for long periods, during which Azaro appears to be dead. In fact, on one occasion he woke up in a coffin after his parents thought their son had died. There is a spiritual ritual designed to sever a child's ties to the spirit world, but Azaro's parents cannot afford it. As time goes on, Azaro grows to understand more about his power. One day, he has an intuition that prompts him to flee his family's compound, causing his parents to follow him. Moments later, the compound erupts in flames. After being captured by a group of priestesses who hope to harness his power for themselves, Azaro escapes to the home of a police officer. There, he sees the spirit of the officer's dead son who attempts to possess Azaro. Fortunately, Azaro's mother arrives just in time to rescue her son. As the family continues to struggle financially, Azaro makes friends with local bar owner Madame Koto who often feeds

the boy when his parents can't afford food. After Koto hangs a magical talisman known as a "fetish" above the doorway to her establishment, Azaro notices that it attracts all manner of grotesque spirits. After narrowly escaping capture by the spirits, Azaro gets lost and comes down with malaria. After finding his way home and making a full recovery, Azaro steals the fetish, which causes the spirits to pursue him. After managing to lose his pursuers, Azaro buries the fetish, hoping to banish the malevolent spirits. The story unfolds with the haunting plot in which the protagonist is chased by the spirit and his family attempt to rouse him with the help of some herbalists. With the triumph of his father over the forces of evil, Azaro is finally at peace, no longer tormented by spirits himself

Wizard of the Crow (WoC)

The narration of Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* draws upon oral storytelling tradition to recount the venal exploits of "the Ruler" of a fictitious African country. It presents a satire of political corruption which also embeds the magical story of Kamiti and Nyawira, who inadvertently become the oracle of hope amidst ongoing authoritarian oppression the narrative begins by recounting the story of the second Ruler of the Free Republic of Aburiria who has reigned for so long that even he can't remember when he ascended to the throne. But, as a thorough despot, he is only interested in ruling to the extent that he can personally profit from his position, either by increasing his wealth or glory. His cabinet of sycophantic ministers constantly struggle to out-do one another's sycophancy, and to that end, have surgically altered their features. Machokali has had his eyes enlarged to better see regime traitors; Sikiokuu has had his ears stretched to better hear conspirators, and Big Ben Mambo has enhanced his tongue to better spread the word of the Ruler.

On the occasion of the Ruler's birthday, Machokali flatters him with the proposal that, in his honor, the country construct the world's tallest building, to be called "Marching to Heaven." Although the people of Aburiria are impoverished, the Ruler considers this project an excellent use of resources. Machokali appoints as the project's chairman his friend Tajirika, proprietor of the Eldares Modern Construction and Real Estate Company. Word gets out about Tajirika's windfall, and long lines of job seekers from outside his company. Kamiti is among the hopeful. Despite an impressive education in India, he cannot find employment. Tajirika not only rejects Kamiti's application, but he also humiliates him, to boot. Nyawira,

As the story advances Kamiti and Nyawari prosper masquerading as the “Wizard of the Crow” and build a shrine where they provide occult services for anyone in need. Meanwhile, Nyawari continues to moonlight as a dissident, and on the day of celebration for “Marching to Heaven,” she directs a group of women protesters to flash their naked bottoms. The ruler is outraged, and Nyawari’s ex-husband, seeing an opportunity to score a government job, reveals her identity to Sikiokuu (of the big ears).

Meanwhile, the Ruler goes to America to engage in talks with possible investors. He’s never encountered objections, so when the banker’s express doubts about the proposal, the Ruler falls ill with “Self-Induced Expansion.” He swells like a balloon and chokes on his words. The Wizard of the Crow is called to America to heal the Ruler. Kamiti successfully restores the Ruler’s speech, and for seven days he speaks nonstop, during which time Kamiti sleeps and dreams of being a bird flying over Africa. Still swollen, the Ruler returns to Aburiria, setting off speculations of pregnancy. Kamiti returns to find the shrine has been burned down. The Ruler orders the Wizard to publicly address the pregnancy rumors. Kamiti, disguised as the Wizard, takes the stage and describes his dream. As he flew over Africa, he explains, he saw evil. The country is pregnant with possibilities for change, and the people will determine whether they deliver evil or good. Kamiti then professes his love for Nyawira. Her ex-husband is in the audience and shoots Kamiti, but he recovers and joins Nyawira’s underground rebel movement.

4.2. Ecological Diversity (Composition) in *The Famished Road* and *Wizard of the Crow*

One of the perspectives that could show ecological discourse embedded in a literary work is the degree of presence or absence of diversity of ecological beings. According to Iheka (2018) a work of literature that embeds a diversity of species, not just the human, presents a discourse of proximity between the human and non-human entities of the ecosystem. It’s important to look into how far the novels chosen for this study give space to a multispecies presentation. Therefore, this section of the analysis presents texts as evidence of such portrayal in Okri’s *The Famished Road* and Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow* to present an argument on the ecological discourse of African novels.

Ben Okri’s TFR and Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s WoC present a narrative situation populated with several species. The settings of the novels dominantly present a multispecies arena where

ecological entities are observed to relate to each other in an enmeshed way. The following extract taken from Okri's novel presents such enmeshment.

I had emerged into another world. All around, in the future present, a mirage of houses was being built, paths and roads crossed and surrounded the forest in tightening circles, unpainted churches, and the whitewashed walls of mosques sprang up where the forest was thickest. I heard the ghostly wood-cutters axing down the titanic irokos, the giant baobabs, the rubber trees, and obeches. There were birds' nests on the earth and the eggs half-formed and dried up, dying as they were emerging into a hard, miraculous world (Okri, 1992, p. 242).

The protagonist of the story in the above extract presents a scene full of several species. Azaro names it as "another world" and "miraculous world" in the first and last sentences of the extract. This world is not just a world inhabited by the human, but rather a complete complex world of life that habitats the human (houses, paths, roads, churches, mosques) and the nonhuman (forest, irokos, baobabs, rubber trees, obeches, birds' nests). In just a paragraph, the novel presents a setting full of various species. What is striking here is that the extract grants not only the beings currently in place but also, the life in the making. The narrator presents the image of birds' eggs hatched into a new life "the eggs half-formed" as well as the ones dying prematurely as in the phrase "dried up, dying". The forest ecosystem then serves as an abode to multispecies entities living in a community.

The presence of this multiplicity/heterogeneity presents a discourse of proximity that challenges human's claim of dominance and erasing of the other life forms in social discourses. The intractability is observed from the way different forms of life (spirits, humans, animals, plants, etc) form a web of coexistence and connectivity. Okri capitalizes on this issue of presenting the ecological diversity even crossing to the realm of the more-than-human perspective which the protagonist reveals in his statement;

That was the first time I realized it wasn't just humans who came to the marketplaces of the world. Spirits and other beings come there too. They buy and sell, browse, and investigate. They wander amongst the fruits of the earth and sea (Okri, 1991, p. 35).

In the anthropocentric valuation or the "normal" sense of understanding, the marketplaces are meant for humans who would engage in the "normal" business of buying and selling and interaction. Okri adds the presence of "other beings" engaged in similar interactions as the

humans would do. What is conspicuous here is the fact that the narrator comes to understand this “reality” for the first time. This implies the limitation of humankind’s understanding of the members of the ecosystem. The realization makes the perspective complete as the narrator was able to recognize the presence of the “other” in the ecosystem of “the earth and sea”. The narrative then presents the proximity among life forms. The market is positioned as a contact zone for human and other worldly interactions. Indeed, space symbolizes the point of interaction for diverse human and non-human entities involving mixing and mingling, a confluence of humans, animals, natural produce, herbal remedies, technologies, and spirits. As a result, the novel presents the entanglement of humans with earthly nonhumans and other worldly spirits, articulating the multispecies presence and interaction.

Multispecies presence (ecological diversity) is a dominant discourse embedded in the novel and this could be understood from the diversity listed in some of the sites in the novel where readers could easily recognize the various compositions. The forest, the road, and the bar, themselves varied sites in the setting of the novel, encompass diverse ecological constituents. In the wild forest, the narrator presents us with a set full of not just one type of being, but rather a congregation of spirits, animals, and plants. As one of the key sites, the road also presents similar diversity including humans, the bush, machines, and spirits. This could be understood from the following extract:

Steadily, over days and months, the paths had been widening. Bushes were being burnt, tall grasses cleared, tree stumps uprooted. The area was changing. Places that were thick with bush and low trees were now becoming open spaces of soft river-sand. In the distance, I could hear the sounds of dredging, of engines, of road builders, forest clearers, and workmen chanting as they strained their muscles. Each day the area seemed different. Houses appeared where parts of the forest had been (Okri, 1991, p.47).

In the above extract describing one of the primary sites in the novel, the narrator talks not just about humans, but also about other life forms “grasses”, “trees”, “bush”, “forest cleaners” and “workmen”. In this extract, we see the diversity of species being challenged as houses are replacing the forest which is also a site of multispecies presence due to the construction of paths in the forest. In taking this perspective, the narrator presents a discourse that forces one to consider how human activity is altering the natural proximity and relatedness among the ecological entities.

The depiction of multispecies presence is not limited to the sites of the forest and the road portrayed in the novel, rather it is also taken to what is usually considered as the human niche only, an apartment. Accordingly, Madame Koto's bar is also one of the primary sites where, humans, insects, rats, millipedes, mosquitos, and the spirits are seen to co-exist. The narrator describes "Millipedes and slugs and little snails climbed up the wall" and another character's statement "we had been sharing our lives with so many rats," (pp.48-49). Such depictions present a transformative discourse where the human house is turned into a multispecies micro-ecosystem. Okri's novel presents a discourse of proximity through diversifying the composition of members of the ecosystem living in interaction.

The same orientation is observed in the portrayal of settings in Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*. The novel is full of long descriptions of the setting of the novel in which one can recognize the multispecies presence and the co-existence among the diverse components. The following extract is one among the many examples one could cite from the novel;

Love was everywhere: in the tree branches which the nests of weaverbirds hung; in the fern where the widowbird had left two long black tail feathers; in the murmurings of the Eldares river as it flowed eastward before turning into a roaring waterfall; in the sun's rays, which pierced through the waterfall, splitting into seven colors of the rainbow; in the still waters of a small lake made by the river where Kamiti and Nyawira now swam and bathed and chased each other, splashing water on each other; in the blackjacks, the goose-grass and other plants, the flowers and seeds of which stuck to their wet clothes; in the movement of porcupines and hedgehogs; in the wings of the helmeted and crested guinea fowls, francolins that scampered away after stealing glances at the couple; in the honeybees and butterflies hopping from flower to flower; in the cooing of the doves; in the mating calls of the river frogs from among the reeds and water lilies (Ngugi, 2006, pp. 205–06)

The setting in the above extract presents a scene populated with diverse kinds of life and ecological beings and things. The diversity is presented in a very relational and unified perspective centering on the close relationship (love) of the beings. The forms listed in the extract include "tree", "weaverbird", "widowbird", "river", "sun", "roaring waterfall", "kamiti and Nyawira", "blackjacks", "the goose-grass and other plants", "the flowers and seeds" "porcupines", "hedgehogs", "guinea fowls", "francolins", "honeybees" "butterflies", "doves", "river frogs", "reeds and water lilies". The forest ecosystem described in this short extract from the novel tells a lot about the human-nature coexistence and the diversity of life and scenes in the

forest strengthens the proximity by showing the multispecies presence. This particular setting is where the two characters find peace of mind and rejuvenate their energy running away from the troubles of the city. The discourse implied in such description is very indicative of the traditional African perspective of living in harmony with the diverse nature not just with a human. The discourse in the extract romanticizes the forest ecology by presenting a bucolic environment ready to serve the human figures with natural joys, but seen from the perspective of composition and relation of the human and nature it presents a coexistence of the multispecies in just a setting.

The diversity *Ngugi's Wizard of the Crow* depicts offers the perspective of the existence of diversity in the human end of the human-nature relation in ecological discourses there is a tendency to erase diversity in each category and portray both entities as having just fixed image as opposed to the other binary. The narrator in Ngugi's novel presents the diversity in the human community and the way they relate to nature in addition to the presence of multispecies at a spot as could be seen in the following extract.

People differed as much in the languages they spoke as in the clothes they wore and how they eked out a living. Some fished, others herded cattle and goats, and others worked on the land..... Everywhere people were hungry, thirsty, and in rags. In most towns, shelters made out of cardboard, scrap metal, old tires, and plastic were home to hundreds of children and adults. He found it ironic that.....these shacks stood side by side with mansions of tile, stone, glass, and concrete. Similarly, in the environs of cities and towns, huge plantations of coffee, tea, cocoa, cotton, sisal, and rubber shared borders with exhausted strips of and cultivated by peasants. Cows with udders full of milk grazed on lush lands as scrawny others ambled on thorny and stony grounds (Ngugi, 2006, p. 39).

This quotation begins by telling how varied people are in engaging with life and how their lifestyle affects nature or relates them with nature. the human community that depends on “fishing”, “herding” and “working on land” for survival relate to nature in different ways. Life also treats these people differently. Some, particularly those who live in the shacks, are “hungry, thirsty, and in rags” while the well-to-do enjoy a different life in the mansions tile, stone, glass, and concrete.

The citation, indeed, presents the opposites of the life of the destitute and the rich living in different environs existing adjacent to each other. While many children and adults live in shanty

corners of the city troubled with economic challenges, others dwell in a comfortable scenario of the built environment. The extract presents both the “lush lands” and the “thorny and stony grounds” and the kind of life dwelling in both settings. It also helps us see the difference between “huge plantations” bordered with “exhausted strips” of peasants’ farmlands. Hence, the diversity readers would get in the extract is rich with the multispecies presence that defies similar depictions of categories as the difference is not just for nature but also for people. The setting of this extract helps us to see the striking diversity of life forms, non-living things, and varied environs. The diversity in life forms includes the human and non-human (people children, adults, peasants, cattle, goats, cows, plantations of coffee, tea, cocoa, cotton, sisal, rubber,) and the environs are presented depicting the kind of multispecies expected in the diversity (towns, cities, shelters, home, shacks, mansions, exhausted strips, cultivated land, lush lands, thorny and stony grounds) and the picture gets a complete community of the ecosystem with the details of nonliving entities that populate the setting (cardboard, scrap metal, old tires, plastic, tile, stone, glass, concrete). Therefore, the ecological composition presented in the above extract from Ngugi’s novel might be presented as evidence for the discourse of aesthetics of proximity in the human-nature relation.

The ecological diversity depicted in *Wizard of the Crow* could be understood well from the way Ngugi presents the relational perspective of the indigenous people who tell the protagonist of the novel how they lived in harmony with nature before the coming of imported fertilizers that left their land polluted and unproductive. In the following extract, the narrator presents the indigenous perspective of valuing and living with a diversity of nature.

They took him to their farms where they grew foods, millet, sorghum, yams, and arrowroots, as well as varieties of Aburirian berries. Here they were working with nature, not against it. The forest was a school to which they often came to hear what it had to tell them: you take; you give, for if you only take without giving back, you will leave the giver exhausted unto death. The gardens were nurseries for healing plants with seeds that could be planted on farms elsewhere; the healing of the land had to start somewhere (Ngugi, 2006, p. 758)

In the ecological discourse, the above quotation presents a vision of humanity aware of its imbrication with the nonhuman world, a human community taking steps to respect and respond to the other, who is not always human. Accordingly, it is the multispecies presence perspective

and accommodative nature of the indigenous people that come out boldly in the text. The diversity implied in the description of the farm and the garden, and the accommodative perspective of “working with nature” which is based on a mutual benefit the entities present the ecological discourse of proximity. The extract also implies the need for striking the balance in the relationship as dependency on just one leads to riddance (“death”) of the other entity. This phenomenon of mutual interdependence and care for the other entity then is the base for the multispecies coexistence.

Furthermore, a point that deserves critical attention in the text is the perspective that challenges anthropocentric valuation of nature through implicating humanity to learn lessons from nature presented in an expression of the narrator that “The forest was a school to which they often came to hear what it had to tell them. Hence, the indigenous perspective of coexisting with the diverse nature portrayed in the novel is one of the indications for the discourse of proximity that populate ecological discourse in African novels.

The portrayal of ecological entities focusing on the diversity of species in both novels can be presented as evidence for the aesthetics of proximity embedded in African fiction. These works, as they have paid the right attention and provided enough details to all ecological entities, have presented a blow to the diminishing perspective of anthropocentrism. Though multispecies presence which marks the valuation of the existence of all life forms and ecological entities is an indication of a level of proximity, it is not the only perspective. As giving the recognition of presence is not enough, one has to ponder on how the relationship between these entities is depicted. The section in line will present the analysis of the two novels in that regard.

4.3. Interspecies Interaction in Wizard of the Crow and The Famished Road

As has been discussed in the conceptual framework section, the presence of a community of multispecies is the first indication of the proximity. But in the web of this ecological community the kind of interaction epitomized and the model of relationship – benign or exploitive - has to be critically investigated. Accordingly, this section of the analysis dwells on analyzing the model of relationship the two novels present in the interaction between the human and nonhuman entities of the ecology.

In line with this, the novels considered in this study are found to present both the benign and exploitive model of the relationship between the human and nonhuman entities, but the exploitive tendency is presented from the inclination of exposing the malpractice. In the novel the image that comes out in the interaction of the entities is benign as the main characters in the story Kamithi and Nyawira epitomize that relationship. The following extract for instance reveals the call extended to humanity for an ethical way of relating to nature.

I want you to learn what nature and solitude can teach us. Simplicity and balance, the way. Call it the Forest School of Medicine and Herbology. I shall offer you such medicine that will make your eyes see what I see. Only then will you be able to say, I used to see as in a mirror darkly but now I see clearly.... Nature is the source of all cures. But we have to be humble and willing to learn from it. (Ngugi, 2006, pp. 266-7)

In this text, Kamathi is talking to Nyawira on how the natural ecology in the forest where they are taking refuge should be understood by humans. The secrets of simplicity and a balanced view of life is a lesson nature teaches humanity. A non-exploitive model of behavior is proposed by the narrator with the key concept of “balance” and that behavior comes when humanity learns to be “humble” and develop the “willingness” to learn from nature. Nature in this case is at the teaching end while humanity at the learning one. This is particularly a challenge to the anthropocentric perspective that puts humanity at the opposite end. With the reversal of the anthropocentric roles - nature teaches and humanity learns. The human ailment metaphorically depicted here is about how they see the world around through the anthropocentric angle, and in this text, the “cure” comes from nature “Forest School of Medicine” and with the cure, humanity will start to “see clearly” as the things that shadow their vision vanish with the right understanding. The above extract presents the call for a mutual and reciprocal relationship with nature which according to the text could be achieved when humanity able to understand clearly the “balance and simplicity” in nature. Hence, the implication is for building a harmonious relationship with nature which according to the aesthetic of proximity is at the core of ecological discourse.

Ngugi’s novel also presents a critique of the abuse of nature calling for an ethical restraint from the human side. Such a portrayal of the exploitive model of relationship could be understood from the following extract.

The forest was now threatened by charcoal, paper, and timber merchants who cut down trees hundreds of years old. When it came to forests, indeed to any natural resource, the Aburirian State and big American, European and Japanese companies in alliance with the local African, Indian, and European rich, were all united by one slogan: A loot-a continua. They knew how to take but not how to give back to the soil. The unregulated clearing of forests affected the rhythm of rains, and a semi-desert was beginning to creep from the prairie to the hill. (Ngugi, 2006, p. 201)

In the above citation the same forest which is previously depicted as the venue for humanity's lesson of "balance and simplicity" is seen to have been threatened with human acts. The exploitive model of the relationship between the human and nonhuman interaction is contemptuous that at the one end of the relationship the burden is so heavy. The reciprocal and mutual relationship discussed in the previous section of the analysis is dismissed as a section of the human group that is now working against nature. The imbalance comes with the exploitive tendency replacing the valuable lesson which the narrator describes saying "The forest was a school to which they often came to hear what it had to tell them: you take; you give, for if you only take without giving back, you will leave the giver exhausted unto death" (p 758). Hence, the above extract reveals how the exploitive model of relationship leaves the giver exhausted to death. The state in collaboration with capitalist forces is criticized for following this strategy and the discourse behind is a critique targeted at a call on the ethical reflection on the relationship epitomized.

Indeed, the depiction of the exploitive model of the relationship between human and nonhuman nature the novel presents avenues for critiquing the abuse of the nonhuman worlds. As could be understood from the following extract the capitalist forces and the state has been engaged in the threatening of nature that the two characters argue on what needs be done

".... We cannot run away and leave the affairs of the land to ogres and scorpions. This land is mine. This land is yours. This land is ours. Besides, in Aburiria, there is nowhere to run. As you've said, even the forests are threatened by the greed of those in power." (Ngugi, 2006, p. 209)

The powerful metaphors of ogres and scorpions represent the exploitive groups who have left nature in danger. Kamiti and Nyawira are discussing the matter of leaving the town of Eldares and hiding out in the forest escaping the exploitive regime of the Ruler in Aburiria. The exploitation is not only on nature but also on humans, but the last statement reveals that the extent has reached beyond the limit that even the forests are threatened. Hence, in *Wizard of the*

Crow, the discourse of species interaction presents both the benign and exploitive models, but in presenting the latter model the narrative aims at a critique of it than favoring it.

The issue of species interaction is also among the key ecological discourses in Okri's *The Famished Road*. The novel makes possible the entanglement of humans with earthly nonhumans. To put it differently, we can make a claim of interconnection for the novel's articulation of the relations between humans and other living beings around them. In one of the primary sites in the novel: the forest, we observe a depiction of smooth interspecies interaction. In the wild forest spirits, animals, and plant life congregate and the forest serves as a contact zone for human and nonhuman interactions. It also serves as the location for interacting with other earthly beings as it might be seen from the following citation

“An owl flew over my head and watched me from a branch. I heard footsteps approaching and I could have sworn that they belonged to a heavy man, but when I looked, I saw an antelope. It came up to me, stopped near the pole, and stared at me. Then it came closer and licked my feet.” (Okri, 1991, p.41)

In this and the following extract narrator reveals the interspecies interaction between a human figure and an animal in the forest. The gaze from Azaro, the narrator is returned by the animal owl and antelope. This portrayal of gaze from the animals is significant as it has emphasized what the nonhuman has done rather than the human breaking the anthropocentric expectations. This is remarkable because there is a looking and a look returned a mutual seeing and responding. While the narrator is positioned as the object of observation, the passage's action is concentrated on the owl and antelope that “flew,” “watched,” “stared,” “came,” and “licked. The novel also shows the forest as a stage of human contact with nonhuman others as could be observed from the statement of Azaro: “A millipede climbed up my leg and I did not disturb it. I saw the black cat again. It came towards me, slunk past, and ran off in the direction we had originally come from.” (p.43). Consequently, one might argue that there is an inkling of a form of interaction devoid of hierarchy and the ecological violence often associated with it in Okri's novel.

Similar to the portrayal in Ngugi's novel Okri's novel presents both the benign and exploitive models of interaction between species. The setting of the forest in both novels appears at first as a site of smooth and balanced species interaction upholding the benign model in the relationship. But in both narratives, the forest faces the danger of being threatened due to human's exploitive

actions. Human exploitation, in this context, widens the gap between humans and nonhumans. About the depiction of the image of the forest, one would observe the transformation from the narrator's description.

It took longer to get far into the forest. It seemed that the trees, feeling that they were losing the argument with human beings, had simply walked deeper into the forest. The deeper I went, the more I noticed the difference (Okri, 1991, p .46)

The forest which was adjacent to the narrator's parent's house is being depicted as fleeing away from it. This reveals that with the cutting of trees for the construction of houses and roads, the forest has shrunk in size and seems farther than the narrator recalls/ the exploitive model followed by the humans have created a huge gap between humans and nonhumans. The narrator depicts that the forest has lost the human argument. The argument indicates some form of interaction between humans and trees. Not surprisingly, this interaction is an exploitive one that leaves the forest on the losing side. In the end, similar to the situation in Ngugi's novel, the current narrator points to the devastation wrought upon the forest:

Steadily, over days and months, the paths had been widening. Bushes were being burnt, tall grasses cleared, tree stumps uprooted. The area was changing. Places that were thick with bush and low trees were now becoming open spaces of soft river-sand. In the distance, I could hear the sounds of dredging, of engines, of road builders, forest clearers, and workmen chanting as they strained their muscles. Each day the area seemed different. Houses appeared where parts of the forest had been. (Ngugi, 2006, p47)

This extract reveals that human progress has come at the cost of the destruction of forest life forms. Development is at work here with engines, road builders, and other contraptions of modernity; unfortunately for the forest, development occurs at its expense. Therefore, deforestation severs the proximity of humans to the environment. The same perspective is implied in the following extract which describes the impact brought on.

I reentered the forest. The sun's rays were sharp like glass the blue shadows of green trees blind me for a moment. The world of trees and wild bushes was being thinned. There were birds' nests on the earth and the eggs within them were smashed, had fallen out, had mingled with the leaves and the dust, the little birds within the cracked eggs half-formed and dried up, dying as they were emerging into a hard, miraculous world. Ants swarmed all over them. The smell of earth, leaves, sun, and the merest hint of dried excrement overpowered my senses. I wandered deeper into the world of trees amongst the solitude of acacias and needle fines and saw people clearing the bushes, uprooting trees

stumps raking great clusters of climbers, and dried mistletoes into heaps (Okri, 1991, p.280)

This extract reveals the disastrous impact of the discordant relationship between the human and nature resulting in the damaging of life in the natural ecosystem. Because of human encroachment in the forest, the once thick forest has become thin as people were “clearing bushes and uprooting trees”. It is not only the trees that have suffered from the exploitive tendency of the human but also the birds as the nests are being destroyed. The narrator powerfully describes what happened to the nests of the birds and the new life forms cut short by the smashing saying “little birds within the cracked eggs half-formed and dried up, dying as they were emerging into a hard, miraculous world”. The narrator’s characterizing of the world as “miraculous” is ironic in the sense that the destructive details of descriptions provided are indicators of the opposite.

Okri’s critical reflection on the discordant relationship between the human and the forest, however, does not stop on the losing of argument by the forest. As the narrative progresses, it is revealed that deforestation has led to the displacement of the forest beings only to initiate another form of closeness. For instance, the millipedes the narrator used to encounter in the forest have now shifted to his house due to the storm that came as a result of deforestation. “Millipedes and slugs and little snails climbed up the wall.” (p.48) As we trace the slow movement of these creatures on the wall, we are indicated those displaced by deforestation: the other-than-humans left homeless by the flooding rain following the decimation of the forests. That the novel restores some form of nearness even in this catastrophic moment is significant

In conclusion, the two novels under consideration present the discourse of proximity through depicting interspecies interaction. The forms of interaction are both benign and exploitive, but the exploitive aspect is presented in both novels as a critique of ethical reflection aimed at showing the severe consequences of the negative relationships among ecological entities.

4.4. Distribution of Agency among Ecological Entities

As the two novels considered for this study portray multispecies ecologies and the interrelationships that characterize these complex ecosystems. The section focuses on the presence of a distribution of agency focusing on the agency from the nonhuman side. The

analysis is undertaken to focus on the roles given to the nonhumans in the fictional works and the effects that result from their acts particularly affecting human life reciprocally.

Seen from the perspective of proximity agency represents the conferring of qualities usually attributed to the human to nonhumans. Consequently, both novels embed instances of conferring power of agency to the nonhuman entities. The concentration for both novels in this regard however varies.

Ngugi's novel gives agency to the landscape and forest in his attempt to challenge the anthropocentric valuation of nature. In the conversations between Kamiti and Nyawira the landscape of Eldares and Aburiria, especially the forest ecosystem is depicted as having transformative agency. Kamiti uses the forest as a site of renewal and healing. The novel presents the human and nonhuman agency comparatively. The image that comes out first without the destructive agency of humanity is one of peace and a sense of completeness. The narrator speaks of thick forests full of trees of all kinds, huge rivers brimming with fishes and other marine life, plains teeming with wild animals and mountains, and other beautiful features captivating to the eye. Yet, such an image of abundance vanishes with a human agency trying to satiate the pursuit of materialism that destroyed the natural environment. The better world is lost and Kamiti attempts to take humanity towards a better one by helping them recognize the agency of nature. The extract below which is used in the other section reveals the agency of nature

I want you to learn what nature and solitude can teach us. Simplicity and balance, the way. Call it the Forest School of Medicine and Herbology. I shall offer you such medicine that will make your eyes see what I see. Only then will you be able to say, I used to see as in a mirror darkly but now I see clearly.... Nature is the source of all cures. But we have to be humble and willing to learn from it. (Ngugi, 2006, pp. 266-267)

In his attempt to take Nyawira out of the destructive scenario created by the human agency Kamiti speaks repeatedly about the power of nature to transform and heal humanity out of its ailments. Here the forest is given the agency to "teach" humanity the way of life. This is an attack on the anthropocentric valuation which puts humanity at the apex of the hierarchy of nature. The forest in Western anthropocentric representation carries the image of darkness, terror, and fear and is meant to be tamed by a human. In this extract, however, it is humanity that needs to be tamed and transformed. The key lesson of keeping balance (doing away with the

hierarchy of anthropocentrism) is to be taught to humanity by the forest. Besides, the text also presents the limitation of human vision which could be boosted by the enlightenment from nature. The metaphor in the expression “I used to see as in a mirror darkly but now I see clearly” clearly tells the transformative power of the agency of nature from the human perspective. Humanity’s vision of life is to change from a blurred image to a clear one when the forest teaches humanity the balance of life. From this perspective, it is possible to infer the fact that the narrative bestows nature the agency usually attributed to humanity.

The agency attributed to the forest where Kamiti and Nyawira have brought effect on the characters through raising their awareness as could be understood from the following extract.

They spent a whole day near their habitation and did not exhaust the plants which were there. Nyawira could not imagine that such a small area could have so much knowledge of herbal medicine... Every tree or any plant has four important things that have healing abilities: roots, barks, leaves, and flowers. To destroy trees is to destroy human life... our identity as a people is tied to the care and concern, we give to our environment. (Ngugi, 2006, p. 321)

The narrator’s reflection on how Nyawira gets astonished with her understanding of the power and riches of the forest reveals the change in awareness. It is also this awareness that makes the two characters stay the whole day at the site without “exhausting the plants”. The remark made about the impact of destroying trees as a suicidal act for the human and a challenge to the identity “.... our identity as a people is tied to the care and concern, we give to our environment” is also a powerful lesson on the human side learned from the school of nature. It is inside the forest, at least the part which is yet to be destroyed, that Kamiti and Nyawira seek refuge, the former wants to renew his spiritual strength and the latter is fugitive, a special group of police officers has been set up to specifically capture her. Kamiti tells Nyawira that they must stay in the forest for some time to know to understand themselves before going back.

Kamiti’s propagandizing of safeguarding of nature in his dialogue with Nyawira is an effort to warn humanity of self-destruction. Kamiti is seen teaching her how to heal the body by use of traditional herbal knowledge. She is therefore taken through rigorous training in the forest as Kamiti explains to her the healing powers hidden in different tree species found in the forest and the importance of environmental conservation. Embedded in this discourse is the agency conferred on nature through the narrative to play the transformative role. So, nature is active and

plays a role, and the role here is the role of awakening the inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within ecological unconsciousness.

The distribution of agency to the nonhuman in Ngugi's novel is further strengthened with the consciousness created on the proximity discourse and the destructive impacts the damage on external nature would have on the internal nature. Human activities (human agency) such as agriculture, habitation, poaching, and cutting down of trees have led to the shrinking of forests and the death of wild animals. Such a destroyed ecosystem resulting from the human agency is seen to confront Nyawira as she goes to search for Kamiti:

Long ago the forest that surrounded Eldares city was the home to animals of all kinds like buffaloes, elephants, and the hippocampus. During those times, it was common for travelers to find leopards and cheetahs waylaying their prey inside the long grass, Giraffes with their colorful skins could be seen bending their long necks on top of acacia trees, and zebras with their white-coated skins feeding on a distance. But now things have changed. The animals have since disappeared. Pools of stagnant waters are no more and so the hippos have disappeared. The grass no longer grows tall and constantly dries up during the hot season which makes the cattle lack food. Walking through this dry perch was a torturous ordeal and therefore Nyawira had to start her journey very early in the morning. (Ngugi, 2006, p.41)

The disturbing image of loss resulting from human action reveals the ecological consciousness at work, and seen from the conferring of the agency to nature in the discourse between Kamiti, who wishes to reverse the action, and Nyawira who has been experiencing the "torturous ordeal", one recognizes the emphasis paid to the aesthetics of proximity in the representation of ecological discourses in the narrative.

Similarly, Okri's novel emphasizes the distribution of agency to the nonhuman nature to strengthen the aesthetics of proximity at work in the ecological discourse embedded in the narrative. In *The Famished Road* as well, nonhuman actors participate in moving the course of the story forward and are observed impacting on human actors in the process. In one of the extracts used above, we can see this agency conferred to animals. The novel presents the destructive impacts of the human agency on the environment to present a challenge to the unregulated human exploitation and the greed of capitalism as in the following extract which reveals the fact the widening gap between humans and nonhumans due to human exploitation.

Steadily, over days and months, the paths had been widening. Bushes were being burnt, tall grasses cleared, tree stumps uprooted. The area was changing. Places that were thick with bush and low trees were now becoming open spaces of soft river-sand. In the distance, I could hear the sounds of dredging, of engines, of road builders, forest clearers, and workmen chanting as they strained their muscles. Each day the area seemed different. Houses appeared where parts of the forest had been (Okri, 1991, p. 47)

Human progress is putting nature at risk through the destruction of forest life forms. The power of humanity is associated with destruction here. Deforestation severs the proximity of humans to the environment, in the above extract, but how do we see the reaction from the nonhuman? The agency attributed to nature in the novel is seen to have a relationship that brings effect on the human. The inhabitation of forest lives in the human house through the relocation caused by deforestation is an example. “Millipedes and slugs and little snails climbed up the wall.” (p48). These creatures which Azaro used to see in the forest have now come to his dwelling place initiating another discourse of proximity. In this regard, the novel challenges the anthropocentric conception of the inhabitants of homes; we are urged to see the so-called human spaces as sites for realizing that humans are always commingled with nonhumans. This also challenges the restriction of the agency to humanity.

The agency conferred on the nonhuman in *The Famished Road* is partly through giving qualities attributed to humans. In the following extract, for instance, we observe the forest talking and going for exile. The trees try to block human movement to defend themselves from the destructive impacts.

I heard the great spirits of the land and forest talking of a temporary exile. They traveled deeper into secret spaces, weaving spells of madness around their arcane abodes to prevent humans from ever despoiling their transformative retreats from the howling feet of invaders. I saw the rising of new houses. I saw new bridges span the air (Okri, 1991, p. 457).

The identification with which the above extract is associated is purely human. Yet the description portrays the agency of the forest as having the capacity to engage in the activities of traveling deeper, fighting the humans to bear them from bringing harm as invaders.

Like in Ngugi’s novel, Okri’s novel imbues the supernatural and more material nonhumans with significant agency. The storm that results from deforestation is one particular example:

The freshly laid tarmac had been swept away. Bushes floated on the river. Roadworkers' tents had been blown everywhere and all those who were building the road intended to connect the highway had fled for cover and were nowhere to be seen..... The rain and wind forced me on to the forest edge, to the pit where they dredged up sand. The white man stood there with his foot on the log. He wore a thick yellow raincoat and black boots. He was looking through a pair of binoculars at something on the other side of the pit. Suddenly the path turned into a ditch. The earth moved. Floodwaters from the forest poured underneath us. I clung to a stump. The white man shouted, his binoculars flew into the air, and I saw him slide away from view. He slid down slowly into the pit, as a stream of water washed him away. The log moved. The earth gave way in clumps and covered him as he disappeared (Okri, 1991, pp. 85-86)

The storm comes amid the destruction of the forest and is described with action words in the past tense. These action verbs are used to the storm's fury, swept, floated, blown, fled, and washing away the tarmac and the tents. The rain thwarts the human agenda poised for further environmental devastation. The extract reveals the agency of nature. Here, the narrator is seen to have lost his active role and appears to submit himself to the power of the nonhuman - to the pull of the storm and in the process, witnesses the sad end of the white man who stands for the destroyers of the environment. With it we see role reversal; both the narrator and the Whiteman are seen overrun by the power of the storm. The white engineer loses control of his binoculars, an important component of his mastery, and ultimately loses control of himself as he slides into the watery pit. The attacker has become attacked as he is swallowed and covered up. The fact that the human figure loses his power of control exposes the limits of anthropocentric humanism, and this is made possible in the narrative by providing agency to the nonhuman.

Anthropocentric thinking places humans as agents and nonhumans as passive objects. Contrary to that valuation the storm in the extract above, reveals the vulnerability to which the forest is exposed because of the cutting of trees and dredging of sand. The impact has won a change in perspective from the human side that one of the characters reflects which indeed concludes the novel: "All creatures must be treated with respect from now on." (p.88). This shows the impacts of nonhumans on the natural environment and permits us to claim the narrative nonhuman agency confirming the proximity through a shared trait between human and nonhuman entities.

One critical insight of indigenous cosmologies in Africa is the capacity of nonhumans—water, trees, and other inhabitants of the environment—to produce effects on the human. Many African communities establish a relational disposition toward nonhumans, endowing them with

animating powers to shape and influence humans. In both novels, the nonhuman actors participate in moving the course of narratives forward and also place some impacts on the human actors in the process as discussed above. This perspective is made possible through the use of indigenous folkloric perspective which both novels appear to employ in crafting their stories. Hence an appeal to traditional and indigenous ways of relating to nature is presented as a solution to save nature from total annihilation. The agency issue which challenges anthropocentrism in both novels then is an element of this perspective. Presenting this shared characteristic reveals the point of convergence between the human and nonhuman entities in the ecological discourse challenging the anthropocentric perspective that restricts agency to only humans.

4.5. The Blurring of Boundaries

The main level of proximity between two entities is sameness. In the foregoing discussion about the two novels, we have seen the three dimensions of proximity embedded in the narratives. The novels under consideration present a scenario of a higher form of proximity between ecological entities in which one would recognize the possibility of indistinction. This section of the analysis presents the dimension of proximity in the two novels at which demarcations are obscured.

The use of magical realism as a narrative strategy in both novels has enabled the presentation of instances of indistinction between human and nonhuman forms paving the way for the creation of aesthetics of proximity. Both novels exemplify indistinction at those moments when the protagonists Kamiti and Azaro turns into other forms. In many instances, Kamiti turns into bird form and Azaro spirit-child. These instances challenge the usual boundary drawn between human and nonhuman entities in the ecology.

In *The Famished Road*, the discourse of proximity through blurring boundaries begins from the outset as the narrator reveals the interaction between the real and spirit world. The following text presented almost at the introductory part of the story of the novel exemplifies this.

In that land of beginnings spirits mingled with the unborn. We could assume numerous forms. Many of us were birds. We knew no boundaries ... And we sorrowed much because there were always those amongst us who had just returned from the world of the Living. (Okri, 1991, p. 31)

Beyond revealing the interaction among the many forms of ecological entities, the above text reveals the existence of one entity in several forms. The narrator, here, expresses that the identity of the ecological entities is not fixed as just one entity can “assume numerous forms”. The statement “We knew no boundaries” in the extract reveals a clear challenge to the anthropocentric wall built between the human and nonhuman forms, it is a pure transcending of the boundary. Azaro is telling that he and others appear both in human and bird selves. Hence, beyond the web of connectivity discussed in the previous sections of the analysis, the novel embodies a magical reality of the possibility of becoming the “Other”. In presenting this perspective, the narrative aims at challenging the distinction or the distancing usually depicted between humanity and the nonhuman. The resistance not to be restricted to one form, of dwelling in one space and the possibility of becoming the “Other” dominates the discourse as in what the narrator says: “We were the ones who kept coming and going, unwilling to come to terms with life.” (p33). This reveals not just the resistance to be restricted but also the easy nature of the movement through demolishing the boundary as in the phrase “kept coming and going”. That builds the bridge between the two worlds depicted in the novel.

The narrator is also endowed with the capacity to see beyond the human vision in his wanders between the worlds living and nonliving. While the other characters in the story are unaware of what is going around them, Azaro is privileged to observe the activities of other-than-human constellations and lifeworld’s activities of other-than-human constellations. That magical capacity is given to the character who is also the narrator of the story to create a discourse on the broader perception of the sameness/embodiment of ecological beings. As has been indicated in the extract used for the multispecies presentation section, the possibility of having the power of observation beyond the anthropocentric limitation is introduced. Azaro narrates at the beginning of the narrative that the market place is a site for such multispecies presence where the boundary of the human and nonhuman forms are challenged: “Spirits and other beings come there too. They buy and sell, browse and investigate. They wander amongst the fruits of the earth and sea.” (p 35). Therefore, capacity conferred on the narrator-protagonist deconstructs the boundary separating human beings and spirits.

The consciousness of the protagonist in Okri’s novel about his double identity presents a transformative view of humanity in its relation to the nonhuman as in the following text.

We feared the heartlessness of human beings, all of whom are born blind, few of whom ever learn to see. . . . One could pore over the great invisible books of lifetimes and recognize his genius through the recorded and unrecorded ages. . . . If there is anything common to all of his lives . . . it might well be the love of transformation, and the transformation of love into higher realities (Okri, 1991, pp. 3-4).

The passage voices the limits of human understanding of the nonhuman with the metaphors of “heartlessness” and “blindness”. The voice from the spiritual world is speaking about this limitation in the history of humanity as it has been searching for this transformative power for a correlation, a transformation into a better understanding beyond the anthropocentric walls. The above text then reflects the blurring of borders and speaking through stepping into the identity of the transformed self or the “other”.

Similarly, *Ngugi's Wizard of the Crow* presents instances of blurring the anthropocentric boundaries by letting the protagonist take a different form. The narrator of the novel presents the following.

Maybe he should abandon his human form and remain a bird, floating effortlessly in the sky, bathing in the fresh air of Skyland, but then he started sneezing as a whiff of gasses from the factories below reached him. Is there no place on earth or in the sky where a person might escape this poison? (Ngugi, 2006, p. 39).

In this extract, similar to the protagonist in Okri's novel, the protagonist of Ngugi's novel has conferred the possibility of becoming an “Other”. Kamiti can abandon his human form and become “a bird”. By presenting the character in two forms (both human and nonhuman) the narrative illustrates the indistinctive nature of the relationship taking the link into a higher level of proximity. Seen from the perspective of the purpose to which such representation is put, such portrayal presents the possibility of stepping out of the human anthropocentric limitation to have a broader picture of the ecological beings. The metaphor involved in the bird self of the protagonist to enable him to rise above the human limitation to have a complete grasp of nature higher above the earth “floating effortlessly in the sky, bathing in the fresh air of Skyland” comes with the discourse of ecological consciousness. Yet, in the statement following that humanity's impact on nature is being felt even higher above the human limit.

The magical possibility of transforming oneself into other forms of existence in the novel also appears to be liberated from the physical confinement of the human form in space and time. As could be understood from the following text, the protagonist feels at ease with the transformed self than his existence as a human form.

This was not the first time that he had felt himself at ease out of his own body: he had had this sensation at night in the wilderness... He would think of the prophets of old, Confucius, Gautama Buddha, Moses, John the Baptist, Mugo was Kibiru, who had all retreated into the wilderness to commune, in total silence, with the law that held the universe together. Were their lives not enhanced by what they had picked up during their pilgrimage? He would roam free in the universe the whole night, endlessly fascinated by the being of things, and when he returned to his body in the morning, he would feel his spirit imbued with fresh energy ready to face another day of walking about the streets of Eldares, knocking at every door, hoping for something that would improve his life. Thus, he had retained hope and even looked forward to his free flights into the universe as relief from the wounds of fruitless quests (Ngugi, 2006, p. 47).

Kamiti is in space and time travel out of his human body and the experience is liberating. Such sensation happens only in the wilderness where he would be communing with humans of the higher self, presented in history as prophets with the power of understanding beyond the human limitation. The protagonist associates the retreat of these prophets to the wilderness with coming closer to nature and the higher reality. The wilderness has a transformative power into a higher self which is endowed with the capacity to feel connectivity more-than-human. The law that ties all beings and things together, the law of nature, is to be experienced when this transformation happens. Ngugi's novel then presents the possibility of blurring boundaries through the capacity given to the protagonist to be transformed into a nonhuman being and then travel back to the human form. The discourse of indistinctiveness embedded in the capacity to appear in multiple forms reveals the aesthetics of proximity working in the representation of human and nonhuman relations in the novel.

The same perspective of blurring the border between the human and nonhuman is revealed in the description the narrator presents of stories embedded in *Wizard of the Crow* as in the following:

There were frightening stories of some who had followed these water women to their lairs under the sea, only to discover that the women had no feet, or rather that their lower body comprised a fishtail with scales big enough to cut a person into thousands of pieces...there were many others who were lost forever, victims of the alluring power of the female riders in the sea. There

were other stories of other women who had the power to change themselves into whatever form they choose, gazelles, antelopes, but mostly cats. Many a young man had gone for a walk at twilight holding hands with the woman of his dreams, waiting for darkness to fall to satisfy his desire, only to find himself staring at the glowing eyes of a cat. (Ngugi, 2006, p. 89).

Though the story in the above extract presents a gendered perspective, the capacity of the women to change themselves into many nonhuman forms “gazelles, antelopes, but mostly cats” demolishes the anthropocentric wall erected, and hence reveals an instance of the discourse aesthetics of proximity.

In both novels considered for this study, the protagonists occupy the liminal space between the physical and spiritual world as well as the human and nonhuman forms, presenting a multidimensional universe and collision of identities as ecological beings. The illustration of actions in which the central figures of the story are human and yet capable of acting out of the scope of the natural law serves as an ecological function in both novels. Therefore, the extraordinary powers conferred on Kamiti and Azaro in the narratives have made possible the discourse of indistinctiveness possible challenging the distancing discourse of anthropocentric portrayals.

4.6. Pressing Ecological Themes: Exploitation, Deforestation, And Pollution

The two African novels selected for the study presented ecological discourses framed from the point of view of the aesthetics of proximity. Beyond presenting the proximity discourse on human and nonhuman relations, the novels present pressing ecological concerns. The thematic preoccupation particularly the unregulated exploitation of nature calls into action a discourse of restraint on the way humanity relates to nature. The texts from the novels reveal the concerns over deforestation, unregulated exploitation, and pollution as key ecological themes in both novels.

In Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow*, deforestation and unregulated exploitation of the natural environment by the international companies in association with the local authorities are given a key emphasis as bellow:

The forest was now threatened by charcoal, paper, and timber merchants who cut down trees hundreds of years old. When it came to forests, indeed to any natural resource, the Aburirian State and big American, European and Japanese

companies in alliance with the local African, Indian, and European rich, were all united by one slogan: A loot-a continua. They knew how to take but not how to give back to the soil. The unregulated clearing of forests affected the rhythm of rains, and a semi-desert was beginning to creep from the prairie to the hill (Ngugi, 2006, p.201)

This text reveals the challenges unregulated capitalist exploitation has brought on the African forest. It is a critical take on the exploitive nature of the international as well as the national stakeholders leading the continent into a desert through deforesting its forest and disturbing the climate. The absence of a balanced relation in the interaction between human and nonhuman nature depicted through the “take and give” metaphor has wrought damage to the ecology. What is more, the commercialization of the African forest by international companies is presented as both suicidal and devoid of ethics. The clearing of “trees hundreds of years old” signifies the objectified, unethical, and distanced relation the agents are assuming in their relationship with nature.

Such a distanced relationship epitomized in the interaction between humans and the forest is associated with the ethical problems involved in the commercialization of nature. The engagement of capitalist forces in the exploitation and damaging of nature is presented in Ngugi’s novel in comparison with the native ethical relationship with the environment as could be seen from the following extract.

They took him to their farms where they grew foods, millet, sorghum, yams, and arrowroots, as well as varieties of Aburirian berries. Elsewhere Aburirian soil was dying from being doused with pollutants, imported fertilizer. Here they were working with nature, not against it. The forest was a school to which they often came to hear what it had to tell them: you take; you give, for if you only take without giving back, you will leave the giver exhausted unto death. The gardens were nurseries for healing plants with seeds that could be planted on farms elsewhere; the healing of the land had to start somewhere (Ngugi, 2006, p. 758)

This passage reveals how the natives relate to nature and it appears that the way the Africans relate to the ecology is in striking opposition to the companies expressed above. The ethical and balanced relationship established through the “take and give” model and the depiction of the forest as a site for human lessons present the discourse of proximity. The imported fertilizers that have killed the fertility of the lands in Aburiria shows how the international capitalists were working “against nature” and hence exploiting it through pollution.

Similarly, in Okri's novel deforestation and unregulated exploitation of nature with its pollutive impact are presented as pressing ecological themes. This exploitation is presented as a cause for widening the gap between humans and nonhumans in the novel. Particularly, the construction of roads and houses through deforestation has wrought an impact on the size of the forest. The narrator speaks:

Steadily, over days and months, the paths had been widening. Bushes were being burnt, tall grasses cleared, tree stumps uprooted. The area was changing. Places that were thick with bush and low trees were now becoming open spaces of soft river-sand. In the distance, I could hear the sounds of dredging, of engines, of road builders, forest clearers, and workmen chanting as they strained their muscles. Each day the area seemed different. Houses appeared where parts of the forest had been (Okri, 1991, p. 47)

This extract reveals the disturbing image of destruction done to the forest through unregulated exploitation. The imagery involved in the description of deforestation has a powerful impact of showing the suffering of nature. The once thick forest is being replaced with settlements and such an image is reiterated in the various plots of the novel

I had emerged into another world. All around, in the future present, a mirage of houses was being built, paths and roads crossed and surrounded the forest in tightening circles, unpainted churches, and the whitewashed walls of mosques sprang up where the forest was thickest. I heard the ghostly wood-cutters axing down the titanic irokos, the giant baobabs, the rubber trees, and obeches. There were birds' nests on the earth and the eggs half-formed and dried up, dying as they were emerging into a hard, miraculous world (Okri, 1991, p.242).

The quotation reveals the brutal clearing of the abode of animals putting them in a dangerous situation. The project of replacing the forest with human settlement through displacing the natural beings is illustrated with a ghostly impact. The forest is a habitat for multiple life forms and the clearing of the forest is not just the impact on trees but also all life forms. The destruction of the forest has resulted in a world strange to being created for these life forms. The worsening situation of deforestation is revealed in the words of Azaro's father, "Sooner than you think there won't be one tree standing. There will be no forest left at all. And there will be wretched houses all over the place," (Okri, 1991, p34). The worrisome speed at which the clearing of the forest is moving towards the annihilation of the forest by humans is in the voice of Azaro's father and his expression of the human habitation replacing the forest is central to the exploitation of the narrative reveals. Deforestation and unregulated exploitation through the human agency are

revealed through “the sounds of dredging, of engines, of road builders, forest clearers, and workmen” The displacement of the forest ecology and its replacement with the built environment is exemplified in the words of the narrator presented in the following extract.

Each day the area seemed different. Houses appeared where parts of the forest had been. Places, where children used to play and hide, were now full of sand piles and rutted with house foundations. There were signboards on trees. The world was changing and I went on wandering as if everything would always be the same (Okri, 1991, p. 104).

Okri uses imagery and figures of speech that can help readers visualize and feel the sufferings of the trees are undergoing-: the trees scream and cry out, while their branches drip blood.

I heard trees groaning as they crashed down on their neighbors. I listened to trees being felled deep in the forest and heard the steady rhythms of axes on hard, living wood. The silence magnified the rhythm. I found a branch which seemed perfect. I broke off the long wood of the forked ends, lacerating myself on the splinter and bled (Okri, 1991, p. 137).

The description in the above extract expresses the suffering of the trees as experiencing pain like humans. The damaged nature is embodied by the trees of the forest, whose fragility questions their ancient existence. They seem great and strong but they are very easily destroyed. The bloodiness of the act of deforestation is emphasized with the presentation by the narrator of the imagery of blood being shade as in “Red liquid dripped from its stump as if the tree had been a murdered giant whose blood wouldn’t stop flowing” (p.16). Therefore, the human exploitation of the forests is one of the key themes in the novel.

In addition to the themes of unregulated exploitation of nature and deforestation, the theme of pollution resulting from the abuse and misuse of nature is presented in the novels under consideration. Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow* presents pollution as a widely spread problem affecting the air and the soil of Africa. Kamiti and Nyawira’s discussion about the fate of Aburiria and their role embeds the extent of the impact brought on the land and that there is nowhere to escape the problem.

We cannot run away and leave the affairs of the land to ogres and scorpions. This land is mine. This land is yours. This land is ours. Besides, in Aburiria, there is nowhere to run. As you’ve said, even the forests are threatened by the greed of those in power (Ngugi, 2006, p.209)

The two characters' conversation in the above extract indeed is not just about the impact of pollution alone but also the unregulated exploitation in their country which they are determined to resist. The exploitation of the forest with the greed of those in power is also a topical issue in their discussion.

Kamiti's comments on the pollution of the air high in the sky land from the gases emitted from the factories is another instance that exemplifies the theme of air pollution as he flies in his bird forms reflecting

...floating effortlessly in the sky, bathing in the fresh air of Skyland, but then he started sneezing as a whiff of gasses from the factories below reached him. Is there no place on earth or in the sky where a person might escape this poison? (Ngugi, 2006, p. 39)

The extract reveals the far-reaching extent of the air pollution as Kamiti gives remark in the last statement that there is "no place on earth or in the sky" free from the impact of the polluted air. Besides, toward the conclusion of the novel, the movement that erupted in defense of the environment by the people voices the impact brought by the pollution. The narrator describes what the people are demanding. "They want a clean atmosphere so that people can have clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and clean spaces to live and enjoy. They reject the rule of the viper and the ogre. Their songs end up in chorus with the other parts of the globe: Don't let them kill our future. (p. 748). These lines are filled with resistance against the pollution of air, water, and the environment. The people are demanding a situation free from pollution and have joined the international movement for saving the earth from pollution.

In Okri's novel as well the impact brought up by the construction of the symbolic road and the capitalist exploitation of nature harbors the theme of resistance against pollution. Azaro's fathers' remark on the way the forest is dwindling and desertification is creeping into the hills have the implication for the pollution the narrative is presenting. The theme of pollution however did not come out as a major focus in *The Famished Road* in the same way it is presented in *Wizard of the Crow*.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Implications

5.1. Conclusion

As has been discussed in the previous four chapters, this study focused on presenting a comparative ecological analysis of two postcolonial African novels. The engagement with this study emanates, as has been presented in the introductory chapter, from the less attention paid to the relational voices in African literature pertaining to the human-nature relations. Though the attempts by scholars to address similar issues in African literature has recently increased, compared to the rich seam of literature depicting the motif of a harmonious relationship between ecological entities, the number of researches conducted so far appears to be minimal. Hence, these studies took up the project of filling the felt gap, and presented a critical analysis of ecological discourses in Ben Okri's "*The Famished Road*" and "*Wizard of the Crow*".

In presenting the ecocritical analysis, the framework of aesthetics of proximity within the ambit of the postcolonial ecocritical theory has been employed. A comparative perspective is used in dealing with the analysis of discourses in the selected novels and presenting the proximity discourse related to portrayal of ecological composition, interspecies relations, distribution of agency, and indistinction

Consequently, the analysis conducted revealed that in both novels, the setting portrayed by the novelists present several species in just few paragraphs confirming the fact that the ecological composition is of multispecies one, not just a setting dominated by humankind or just a collection of a single type of ecological entity. The predominance of such descriptions in both novels attest that the artificial human vs non-human scenario drawn from anthropocentric perspective is being challenged through framing the relation based on the ecological discourse of proximity that embeds variety. As evidenced in the quotes presented in the analysis section, the diversity in the composition of the members of the ecosystem interacting harmoniously presents an ecofriendly discourse both in what is usually seen as a human or non-human abode. Accordingly, whether it is the market place in Ben Okri's novel or the forest in Ngugi's novel, one would find a variety of species dwelling in the ecosystem peaceably. This perspective presents African relational ecological discourse pertaining to the human-nature relations

From the point of view of how the ecological entities in the novel are related, the study reveals that the multispecies depicted in the novels have a harmonious interaction. The novels present the discourse of proximity through depicting interspecies interaction in two distinct forms, benign and exploitive. The exploitive relationship among the ecological entities, however, are presented as a critique of ethical reflection aimed at showing the severe consequences of the negative relationships among the entities. Hence the model of interaction represented in the novels is a balanced one as both novels encourage the positive/mutual relationship and criticize humanity's abuse of the natural world. Characters like Kamithi and Nyawira in Ngugi's novel epitomize a harmonious and healing relationship with nature. Again, from these characters' perspective, the novel presents a critique of the abuse of nature calling for an ethical restraint from the human side. Accordingly, the narrators in both novels each present a discourse that forces one to consider how human activity is altering the natural proximity and relatedness among the ecological entities.

The third key finding of the study is related to the way agency is distributed to the ecological entities. In a taken for granted ecological discourse, it is usually the human that is active and the non-human a passive receptor of human action. But in the discourses embedded in the two novels this study focused on, agency is a shared quality, not just the one possessed by human kind. This reveals another discourse of proximity embedded in African fiction. Indeed, one critical insight of indigenous cosmologies in Africa is the capacity of nonhumans—water, trees, and other inhabitants of the environment—to produce effects on the human. In this regard, it is common among African communities to establish a relational disposition toward nonhumans, endowing them with animating powers to shape and influence humans. In Okri's and Ngugi's novels, the nonhuman actors participate in moving the course of narratives forward and also place some impacts on the human actors in the process as discussed with examples in the analysis section. This perspective is made possible through the use of indigenous folkloric perspective which both novels appear to employ in crafting their stories. Hence an appeal to traditional and indigenous ways of relating to nature is presented as a solution to save nature from total annihilation. The agency issue which challenges anthropocentrism in both novels then is an element of this perspective. Presenting this shared characteristic reveals the point of convergence between the human and nonhuman entities in the ecological discourse, challenging the anthropocentric perspective that restricts agency to only humans.

Beyond the three aspects of proximity discussed above, the two novels present a scenario of a highest form of proximity between ecological entities in which one would recognize the possibility of indistinction. This level presents the dimension of proximity in which demarcations between the ecological entities are obscured at discursive level. In this regard, the protagonists in both novels are seen to occupy the liminal space between the physical and spiritual world as well as the human and nonhuman forms. By doing this, the novels present a multidimensional universe and collision of identities between ecological beings. The illustration of actions in which the central figures of the story are human, and yet capable of acting out of the scope of the natural law, serves as an ecological function in both novels. Therefore, the extraordinary powers conferred on Kamiti and Azaro in the narratives have made possible the discourse of indistinctiveness possible, and hence presenting a challenge to the distancing discourse of anthropocentric portrayals. It is the use of magical realism as a narrative strategy in both novels, that has enabled the presentation of instances of indistinction between human and nonhuman forms, paving the way for the creation of aesthetics of proximity. Both novels exemplify indistinction at those moments when the protagonists Kamiti and Azaro turns into other forms. In many instances, Kamiti turns into bird form and Azaro spirit-child. These instances challenge the usual boundary drawn between human and nonhuman entities in the ecology, and epitomize the proximity discourse.

Beyond the aesthetics of proximity embedded in the two narratives, this study has also addressed thematic preoccupations pertaining to ecological challenges. In this regard, the analysis conducted reveals that both Ngugi and Okri present the daunting impacts coming on the natural world. The impacts that the unregulated human progress brings on the climate and the ecosystem are powerfully depicted through the exploitive tendencies of international companies. Deforestation, pollution, the use of chemical fertilizers and expansion of the dwelling areas which disturb the balance of the ecosystem are utterly criticized in both novels. In this regard, the two novels present the difference in valuation between the indigenous perspective and the capitalist international groups operating in Africa. Therefore, in addressing the timely ecological themes, both Ngugi and Okri emphasize on Afrika's ethical relationship with the environment, and purport that the way the African is related to the ecology is in striking opposite to the companies.

5.2 Implications

As has been addressed in the study, literary works do have their own contribution towards the curbing of the ecological devastation that is currently becoming a major challenge to humanity and the world in general. The critical analysis conducted in this study attempted to show the significance the African literary works pertaining to the shaping of discourses on human nature relation. The importance of the attempt could be seen on two counts. The first is that it focuses on the neglected element of literature, the "outside-the-box thought" experiment, which can provide unique opportunities for triggering questions and innovative thinking about the environmental future of the world. Secondly, reflecting on the literary works will raise increasing questions about the effects of such choices and potential alternatives to them, particularly the ecological discourses.

Based on the results of the analysis, it has become clear that the discourse of ecology is central to African literary works when seen from the point of view of the aesthetics of proximity. Yet, this study was conducted only on two novels purposely selected. Hence, further exploration into other works of the novelists concerned and other African writers is eminent. The relational discourse embedded in both modern African fictions and indigenous world views as some literature referred to in this study indicate, could be valuable and original areas for further research. Furthermore, the framework followed in this study could be applied in analyzing other genres of African literature, as the postcolonial ecocritical perspective is an accommodative and relatively Afrocentric in its way of dealing with discourses. This means that the issues the approach takes into account when dealing with African texts looks at both the African environment contexts and the people at the same time. Such perspective appears to be accommodative than the earlier ecocritical analysis which mostly reflect the European way of looking at the human nature relation.

Hence, taking the critical nature of ecological crisis worldwide into account and the African perspective as an alternative solution at discorsal level, it is important that literary critics and engage in exploration of African literary works from the point of view of the aesthetics of proximity. This study, then, recommends a critical analysis of further works in that regard.

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