# When the Lagoons Remember: An Afroqueer Futurist Reading of "Blue Ecologies of Agitation"

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**Abstract**

In this essay, I conduct an afroqueer futurist reading of e-waste ecologies in postcolonial Ghana. I bring ethnographic observations undertaken at the Agbogbloshie e-waste dump, arguably the world's largest e-waste dump, in conversation with Nnedi Okorafor's feminist and Africanfuturist novel, *Lagoon*, which focuses on the environmental consequences of petrochemical capitalism in Nigeria. The e-waste dump, located in Accra, Ghana's capital, sits on the Korle Lagoon and Odaw River. These water bodies have become conveyer belts that carry waste from the city into the Atlantic Ocean. Their despoliation is synecdochic of the violent consequences of neoliberal infrastructural modernity. Here, I highlight how a "real" lagoon in Agbogbloshie and a fictional lagoon in petrochemical Nigeria amplify the impacts of ongoing global environmental crises on African bodies. I argue that both the bodies on the e-waste dump in Agbogbloshie and the characters in Okorafor's *Lagoon* embody "agitated ecologies" (i.e., ecologies and bodies overwhelmed by suffering and resignation). How then does a queer novel like *Lagoon*, whose ecological aesthetics imbricate with the queerness of Korle Lagoon, provide a lens through which to explore what some scholars of e-waste in Ghana call "blue political ecologies" of e-waste and vice-versa?

> In many ways, Bar Beach was a perfect sample of Nigerian Society. It was a place of mixing. The ocean mixed with the land and the wealthy mixed with the poor. Bar Beach attracted drug dealers, squatters, various accents and languages, seagulls, garbage, biting flies, tourists, all kinds of religious zealots, hawkers, prostitutes, johns, water-loving children and their careless parents.
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> *Nnedi Okorafor, Lagoon (2014: 7).*

"Abi we dey do work wey many Ghanaians from the South no go do. As for us, ibi borlar work wey we do, like we be borlar people, but eno be so. Ibi sey this system no dey work for us." (We do the work that southern Ghanaians would not do. We live in a society that imagines us as a people who are trash and deserve to work with trash, but we are not. Ghanaians do not care about northerners. It is as if the system does not work for us). On a hot July day in 2019, this conversation in Ghanaian pidgin unfolded between me and Mustapha, a muscled, angular-faced man in his early thirties. Strolling on a path that snaked along the banks of the Korle Lagoon, we chatted about life. Surrounded by detritus from Accra's urban landscape, the lagoon, according to the geographers Peter Little and Grace Akese, has been described as a "pollution nightmare"[1] in narratives of global climate change. Old Fadama, an informal settlement and residence to mostly migrant workers from northern Ghana who work on the e-waste deposition site in Agbogbloshie, sits on the lagoon. Popularly known in Ghana as Sodom and Gomorrah, the dump is the world's largest e-waste site, and its effluence flows directly into the lagoon. E-waste work is gendered, with men and boys working exclusively on e-waste while women and girls engage in food vending or supplying "pure water", which quenches the thirst of the e-waste workers or is used to extinguish the fires that incinerate electronic gadgets and wires to reveal their treasured parts—copper.[2]

The Korle Lagoon pours into the Atlantic Ocean. Described as a "black nauseating syrup", (Little and Akese, 2019: 456) its largest tributary, the Odaw River is a sinkhole of urban ruination, evidence of the ills of neoliberal "infrastructural modernity".[3] Arguably, the lagoon is a synecdoche of Africa's paradoxical location as a site of extraction and deposition, to paraphrase the radical Guyanese historian Walter Rodney (1972). The lagoon and its surroundings have become props in neoliberal experimentations that purport to pursue global environmental justice. Possibly well-intentioned, these pursuits ignore how the destruction of ecologies like the lagoon are far too common in postcolonial Africa. One only has to look at the frequent oil spills in the Niger Delta and small-scale illegal mining activities in Ghana, also known as "galamsey".

Mustapha dismantled obsolete technology for their treasured parts on the dump. Upon arriving in Agbogbloshie from Tamale, his hometown and the capital of Ghana's Northern Region, his hopes for a less precarious life were dashed when he was sucked into the vortex of urban poverty and the virulent ethnic discrimination and islamophobia directed at members of Northern-based ethnic groups by more urban Southern-based ethnic groups, most of whom are Christian.

In this essay, I draw on Nnedi Okorafor's Africanfuturist novel, *Lagoon,* to undertake an afroqueer futurist reading of ecologies like the lagoon Mustapha's life interfaced with.[4] Okorafor's *Lagoon* evokes Patricia McFadden's notion of "contemporarity", which she describes as "the innovative feminist energies and sensibilities that will enable each of us to live the new politics of this moment in African time" (McFadden, 2018: 417). By diagramming modes of African future-making undertaken by the novel's female protagonists—Ayodele and Adaora— the book foregrounds "agitated ecologies" (i.e., ecologies overwhelmed by suffering and resignation), Ayodele's ability to shape-shift, and Adaora's inquisitive traits as critical queer subtexts.

Okorafor's *Lagoon* invites an afroqueer futurist reading. Thus, as a queer novel whose ecological aesthetics imbricate with the queerness of the lagoon itself,[5] it provides a lens to explore what some scholars of e-waste in Ghana call "blue political ecologies of e-waste".[6] Okorafor's evocative description of Bar Beach in the epigraph and Mustapha's life on an e-waste dump adjoining the Korle Lagoon evince the lagoon as a frontier of agitation; a space of anxiety over the excesses of neoliberal modernity.[7] Like the protagonists in Okorafor's novel, namely Ayodele, the emissary; Adaora, the marine biologist; Agu, the soldier, and Anthony Dey Craze, the musician, Mustapha is (1) a spectre that beckons the failings of the neocolonial state and the neoliberal international, and (2) a queer subject whose life agitates the neocolonial/neoliberal nation-state. Here, queer is figured as the placeholder for the "non-normative" in the same way Cathy Cohen (1997) describes the term in her disillusionment with queer politics when she argues:

> that a truly radical or transformative politics has not resulted from queer activism. In many instances, instead of destabilising the assumed categories and binaries of sexual identity, queer politics has served to reinforce simple dichotomies between the heterosexual and everything

> "queer". An understanding of the ways in which power informs and constitutes privileged and marginalised subjects on both sides of this dichotomy has been left unexamined (Cohen, 1997: 438).

Cohen proceeds to call for "a politics where the non-normative and marginal position of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens, for example, is the basis for progressive transformative coalition work" (1997: 438). I read Okorafor's *Lagoon*, Korle Lagoon, and Mustapha's life on an e-waste dump as queer instantiations that supply new vocabularies to humanise the bodies we study, without simultaneously diminishing the precarious circumstances surrounding them. Hence, is "queer" a kind of practice that agitates by assembling marginal ecologies against normative regimes?

Arguing that Mustapha's appearance on the banks of the lagoon marks it as a frontier of agitation, I contend that he is also a frontier African precisely because his multiple marginalisations resulting from his class, gender, rural, ethnic, national, and transnational backgrounds queer him. Francis Nyamnjoh (2017) has argued that the frontier African questions the paradigm of completeness in Western projects that assume wholeness and stability as prerequisites for making sense of subjectivity by gesturing towards "incompleteness". Accordingly, "no boundary, wall or chasm is challenging enough to defy frontier Africans seeking conversations with and between divides". Nyamnjoh reminds us, "At the frontiers, anything can be anything" (2017:258). Alongside reading Okorafor's *Lagoon*, I illuminate, in what follows, Mustapha's vexatious entanglements with the Korle Lagoon, the e-waste dump, and the extended lives of neoliberal and neocolonial structures of domination and extraction, and his multiple queer locations.

**Korle Lagoon as a Blue Ecology of Agitation**

In Ayi Kwei Armah's (1968) postcolonial novel *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, which documents the failures of Ghana's independence, we encounter one of the earliest and most visceral imageries of the Korle Lagoon from the standpoint of the protagonist. On board public transport crossing the lagoon, he describes his experience thus:

> In gusts the heat rises from the market abandoned to the night and to the homeless, dust and perpetual mud covered over with crushed tomatoes and rotten vegetables, eddies from the open end of some

> fish head on a dump of refuse and curled-up scales with the hardening corpses of the afternoon's flies around. Another stretch of free sea line. More than half-way now, the world around the central rubbish heap is entered, and smells hit the senses like a strong wall, and even the eyes have something to register. It is so old it has become more than mere rubbish, that is why. It has fused with the earth underneath (1968: 40).

Cynical about the promises of post-independent Ghana in the latter years of its first president, Kwame Nkrumah, Armah renders a critique of nation-state formation at the dawn of independence and the idea of independence itself. The detritus of the urban landscape of Accra, resulting from corruption and poor governance, gutted the postcolonial vision of equality. Several decades after independence, and with the passage of different political regimes, the state of the Korle Lagoon became a stand-in for the uncertainty enabled by the neocolonial and neoliberal regimes left in the wake of Ghana's independence. Indubitably, the state of the lagoon has become a literal and metaphorical embodiment of discontentment with the nation-state. How, then, does the lagoon become an ecological archive – one that not only illumines the failed promises of modernity, but also is a site that incites agitation? This essay is an elaboration of this paradox.

In their examination of e-waste deposition in Agbogbloshie, Peter Little and Grace Akese dwell on how studies of e-waste, globally and particularly in Ghana, ignore blue political ecologies of e-waste (2019). Focusing on the Korle Lagoon, they suggest that attempts to restore this "blue ecology" have faced contestations from "non-blue" sectors. These involve land tenure and housing conflicts, all of which have deep-seated roots in the colonial appropriation of land and the attendant readjustment of land ownership. For them, a blue political ecology of e-waste perspective, which considers the historical forces that contributed to the lagoon's destruction, can illuminate "Ghana's ongoing struggle to negotiate the intersecting problems of urban regeneration, e-waste management, scrap-metal extraction, and lagoon ecological restoration" (2019: 450).

Drawing on the metaphors of "sink" and "residue," Little and Akese describe the strategic role the Korle Lagoon has played in Accra, suggesting that, "as the major receptacle of runoff in the city, some of the earliest gutters and

sewer pipes first laid to drain the city all connect to the lagoon for final discharge into the sea" (2019: 454). The lagoon's putrefaction, which Armah viscerally describes, metamorphosed through time into what is now known euphemistically as "Lavender Hill". A mound of faecal matter, the hill embodies the excesses of neoliberal modernity (Chalfin, 2014). This artificial geography, contiguous with the lagoon, anticipates Little and Akese's observations that the Korle Lagoon's emergence as a sink and residue antedates the appearance of the e-waste dump, whose workers are invariably blamed for the lagoon's ongoing contamination (Little and Akese, 2019). This convergence of sink and residue, extraction and deposition, is archived by the lagoon.

The scrapyard in Agbogbloshie, which is surrounded by informal settlements that serve as havens for the majority of e-waste workers, most of whom are migrants from northern Ghana, "sits on land that is largely part of the lagoon" (Little and Akese, 2019: 454). These settlements, precisely because they are informal, like many low-income suburbs of Accra, lack an organised system of rubbish collection. Hence, in addition to the industrial and semi-industrial waste that drains into the lagoon, effluence from the settlements sitting on the banks, like Old Fadama, Agbogbloshie, Sabon Zongo, and others, flows directly into the lagoon.

Recent narratives on toxic waste dumping in the lagoon tend to scapegoat e-waste workers and the mostly poor residents along its banks.[8] Little and Akese have warned that such representations ignore complex historical contingencies, arguing that "the sources of the lagoon's pollution are varied, and importantly predate the adjacent e-waste industry along its banks, which only came into prominence in the late 2000s" (2019: 455). The contemporary ecological anxieties around the Korle Lagoon register the ongoing residues of colonisation, neocolonisation, and the structural readjustment of violence under neoliberal projects to restructure the postcolonial state from the eighties through to the nineties (Igoe and Kelsall, 2005; Manuh, 2007).

As a frontier, the lagoon continues to be a site of contestations, especially among the indigenous Ga for whom the Korle has always borne sacred significance. Under the British colonial administration, attempts were made to convert the lagoon into a port to ensure the mitigation of malaria. This restructuring effort met resistance from the indigenous Ga populations

in the area (Dakubu, 1997; Little and Akese, 2019; Quayson, 2014; Roberts, 2010). I argue that the resistance magnifies the lagoon as a site of cultural and spiritual memory, and its politicisation by the indigenous populations was an agitation at the crippling presence of the British (Roberts, 2010; Little and Akese, 2019). The lagoon's vitality as a political ecological frontier continues to play out in contemporary efforts to restore it under the Korle Lagoon Ecological Restoration Project.[9] A neoliberal effort to rescue the lagoon, and reminiscent of those projects that occurred under structural adjustment, the restoration project has yielded little to no change. What does an actual lagoon in Ghana have in common with a fictional lagoon in Nigeria? Both lagoons, I argue, embody the consequences of neocolonial and neoliberal despoliation.

**Okorafor's Lagoon as an Agitated Africanfuturist Post-Apocalyptic Narrative**

Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* is arguably an agitated Africanfuturist post-apocalyptic narrative that blends African magical realism[10] with African science fiction to critique Nigeria's petrochemical capitalism. This entanglement "manifests in *Lagoon*", as Melody Jue (2017) underlines, "through the indigenous cosmologies together with the idea of the scientific novum, which combine in the figure of the alien to 'refuel' Lagos' future" (2017:174). The novel's emphasis on the sea's residents agitating or protesting because of the devastation of their habitats by humans is tied to the conditions of working-class Africans, like Mustapha, who bears the burdens wrought by ecological catastrophes. Thus, in many ways, Okorafor mobilises Africa as a site that furnishes a theory of new world-making (Otu, 2021).

Bar Beach, where all the protagonists – Ayodele, Adaora, Agu, and Anthony – first converge shortly before the arrival of the extraterrestrial bodies, is synecdochic of the Niger Delta Region, described as the cursed and blessed region of Nigeria.[11] There, narrates Okorafor, "a perfect sample of Nigerian society" (2014: 7) assembled: the prostitute, who was a secretary by day; the White American businessman, in Nigeria for oil transactions; the woman facing domestic violence at the hands of her husband; the disgruntled soldier, and the disillusioned celebrity musician.

Similar to the Korle Lagoon, Bar Beach was the microscope through which the myriad ecologies of resignation, suffering, and immiseration among the Nigerian masses came to light. It is unsurprising, then, that the Nigerian world turned upside down there, with the landing of a giant meteorite, which plumbed out the ocean's bowels, revealing its monstrously rich marine life. Creating gigantic waves that blurred the boundaries between aquatic and terrestrial, the landing represented the beginning of a new Nigeria as otherworldly bodies that took the form of human bodies began to emerge from the ocean. Emerging from the waves and metamorphosing into a woman was Ayodele. In traditional Nigerian, qua some West African cosmologies, Ayodele is "*mami wata*" – the indigenous equivalent of a mermaid with magical qualities (Jue, 2017). Ayodele's arrival amplifies the African feminist spirit of *Lagoon*. Her shape-shifting abilities, which cause a stir among Nigerian men, threatens heteronationalist patriarchy and transnational petrochemical capitalism.

Represented as the ambassador of the aliens, Ayodele explains to Adaora, Agu, and Anthony that they have been recruited to participate in an exercise to save Nigeria from impending doom. She says:

> "Please, all of you, come", Ayodele said, sitting beside Adaora..."you three were chosen"..."you made sense. I know we've made the right choice" (Okorafor, 2014: 52-54).

Having been told about the justification for their recruitment as ambassadors by Ayodele, Adaora, Agu, and Anthony embark on their designated missions throughout the novel to rescue Nigeria from its impending demise, a pursuit that is not without its challenges. It has also become clear to them that Ayodele and the rest of the aliens landing on the shores of Bar Beach are not invaders, but otherworldly bodies with the determined intent to save Nigerians and, in the process, rescue themselves. However, the aliens needed to be human, not only to be heard but to agitate. Thus, Ayodele's invitation to Adaora, Agu, and Anthony suggests the importance of the human body as a canvas of possibility – a possibility that will make agitation palatable for a new future.

A scene from the novel captures the environmental scars resulting from oil drilling conducted by petroleum conglomerates in Nigeria. Here, Agu, the soldier, had been arrested, and the arresting officers had been ordered to follow up on information that "something had gone wrong with the hose attached to

the supply vessel FPSO *Mystras*" (2014: 95). The oilfield where the large vessel and the rig were located had been mostly abandoned because of the ongoing pandemonium triggered by the arrival of the extraterrestrials. The spillage went unnoticed by the officers. However, one of the few rig workers around, Rafiu, an engineer, insisted that there was a leakage that needed fixing and that the oil company *Mystras* had to be notified. In the moment, Rafiu's "stomach lurched", reveals Okorafor. "He would never be able to dislodge the guilt he felt for abandoning the oil rig when the hose was spewing oil into the water. He'd become an engineer to save the environment" (2014: 96). Although Rafiu expresses ambivalence, the lack of care shown by the officers epitomises the terrestrial supremacy or "terrecentrism" of humans[12] that faces, as the excerpt below shows, the agitation of oceanic beings. Reminiscent of ethnocentrism, "terrecentrism" here describes how physical geographies acquire supremacy in relation to non-physical ones.

> It flew right past the four of them and grazed Agu's arm before plunking into the water on the other side of the boat. Agu felt a wet sting, and looked down at his arm. It was dribbling with blood from a cut three inches long near his elbow. It only took Agu a moment to realise what had happened. He threw himself down and managed to crane his neck around to see fifty more flying fish zip from the water like poison darts. He shut his eyes and closed his ears. But he could still hear the meaty sound of fish slicing human flesh and the agonised screams of the others (2014: 97).

It is apparent from the above excerpt that the residents of the ocean – the flying fish and swordfish, sharks, sea cows, and other monstrous creatures – are angered by the trepidatious habits of their terrestrial counterparts, the Nigerian subjects animating the novel.

Ayodele's representation as the emissary from the aquatic world and her intentional selection of Adaora, Agu, and Anthony sets in motion a manifesto for a new world. In this manifesto, the metamorphosed conditions and leftovers of slavery and capitalism, extended by what Patricia McFadden (2011) calls "a neo-colonial/neocapitalist collusionary moment" are brought to bear. Thus, not only are oceanic creatures protesting for a new world for themselves; in fact, their agitation enjoins the Nigerian working class qua the African masses, whose lives

are at the mercies of neocolonial depredation, to speak up and agitate. Although an explicitly blue political ecological frame remains, implicit in the novel is a political attunement to the dangers and damage unleashed by the oil industry on postcolonial Nigeria. For instance, since the discovery of oil in Nigeria, the country has become solely dependent on the exportation of oil.

The emergence of the petrochemical industry displaced local economies that revolved around farming and fishing. That a swordfish destroys pipelines in the novel underscores the violence that petrochemical capitalism continues to wreak for the masses. Sometimes, those affected by this violence express rage. "People get angry", argues the Cameroonian economic anthropologist, Célestin Monga (1996), "when they are systematically oppressed, and they develop many ways of escaping repression, some of which may lead to the fragmentation of the most stable countries and the worsening of social conditions; in this new era of democratisation, the vicious legacy of anger is a factor of instability and democratic sustainability" (Monga, 1996: 5). Anger is borne out of agitation.

Transnational oil companies Shell Oil and Chevron own a large share in the Nigerian economy. Together with the Nigerian government, these conglomerates, it is estimated, "have siphoned 30 billion worth of oil from beneath [the] Ogoni [people's] earth" (Nixon, 2011; Jue, 2017) while polluting the environment. The 1994 execution of Ogoni Human Rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and others, known as the Ogoni Nine, at the hands of Sani Abacha's regime, underscores Ayodele's perspicacious invocation to Adaora, Agu, and Anthony about the tragic consequences of oil wealth. She says, "your land is full of a fuel that is tearing you apart" (Okorafor, 2014: 113). The senseless murder of the Ogoni Nine presages Ayodele's own execution at the end of the novel at the hands of the Nigerian military. These factual and fictional deaths[13] are a powerful reminder of the costs of agitation. Moreover, they foreground the retribution faced by bodies that serve as ambassadors for blue ecologies in particular and ecologies in general.

## Queering Agitation and Agitating Queer: Embedding Mustapha on the Shores of a Lagoon

The ethnographic excerpts shared by Mustapha illuminate how blue ecologies agitate through bodies, as we see in the fictional *Lagoon*. Hailing from Ghana's Northern Region, Mustapha arrived in Accra to escape the treacherous minefields

of poverty, uneven development, and ethnic strife. Like Ayodele, whose shape-shifting abilities in *Lagoon* drew the ire of the Nigerian authorities, Mustapha was shoehorned into the pigeonholes of poverty, criminality, and laziness, simply for being a northerner. In that regard, the lagoon as a frontier of agitation is also a site at which the anxieties around gender, and especially successful and failed manhoods, become tangible. These anxieties need to be registered as agitations against what the feminist, Patricia McFadden, persuasively captures as neocolonial and neoliberal collusion (McFadden, 2011).

The trials and tribulations navigated by Mustapha bespeak the conditions that the working poor in Ghana confront. Theirs is a world in which efforts are made daily to make the inconceivable become conceivable, as Elizabeth Povinelli (2001) would say. The worlds imagined by Mustapha in Agbogbloshie can be described as radical. For Povinelli, radical worlds are created when incommensurable conditions become subject to radical interpretation, thus becoming fertile grounds for life-transforming possibility and impossibility. However, Mustapha criss-crosses these uneven transitions in ways that unsettle our conceptualisation of time and space, much like the waste deposits that distinguish him from Ghanaians who regard themselves as normative.

Residing in a makeshift structure, Mustapha, like the other migrants from northern Ghana, contends with the vagaries of extreme poverty, some of which include the "feminisation of the poor" in an ethno-classist society like Ghana. In a way, being poor, a northerner, and Muslim diminished Mustapha's access to the dividends that accompany being wealthy, a southerner, and a Christian. This disenfranchisement, the result of his peripheral masculinity, delineates his queerness. It marks him as "non-normative", to channel Cathy Cohen (1997), similar to how being non-heteronormative marks one as queer.

Mustapha's daily routine begins very early in the morning and ends at sunset. He leaves his shack in Agbogbloshie and Sodom and Gomorrah, rummaging in various locations in the city for scrap metals. He returns to the waste dump at dusk, where he picks apart the technological parts acquired during his scavenging expedition, which on occasion bear the signatures and the remains of their previous owners. He once dissected a computer with a World Bank sticker embossed on it. Anytime he has the opportunity to retell the story, he does so to prove that he too is a "big man".[14] In Ghanaian pidgin, Mustapha declares, "You use computer

from World Bank before? I use am. You see sey me, too, I taste America, some. Now, you, you be professor wey you dey university for America but you never use World Bank computer before. Now who be the boss?" Mustapha's declaration is quite perceptive. Deploying the language of "taste", he does not take for granted the fact that his dismantling of the computer for copper wire exposes him to dangerous toxins; but dwells on the fact that this obsolete World Bank equipment allows him to travel through space and time to America—to taste it.

Mustapha earns a little over five dollars on what he describes as a good day; an amount unlikely to take him through the day. However, he earns twice as much as the Ghanaian worker on a minimum wage. The current daily minimum wage in Ghana is GHS 11.82, which is the equivalent of two dollars.[15] In that regard, Mustapha earns a wage that far outpaces the wage received by a civil or public servant, the latter working within the formal economy. Being a citizen in a country in which the informal sector constitutes an integral part of the economy, the wages earned by Mustapha never get programmed into statistical calculations that determine the cost of living for people in Ghana. If Ghana is often touted as one of the world's fastest-growing economies, as was recently declared, conditions in Agbogbloshie suggest otherwise.

Reminiscent of the queer African subject whose existence agitates against the problematic idea of a heterosexual Africa, Mustapha agitates against the fiction of neoliberal perfection which masks the conditions of precarity that besiege his body. Thus, like the non-heteronormative Ghanaian omitted from the heterosexual calculus of the nation-state, he is unaccountable in "Africa Rising" narratives, which mark Ghana as a neoliberal success. This unaccountability is what Ayo Coly (2019) calls "hauntological", which explicates how colonial representations of African women's sexuality continue to hold the African female body hostage in African Studies (2019). This hauntology or unaccountability is akin to Kara Keeling's reading of Herman Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener* in her book entitled *Queer Times, Black Futures* (2019), an Afrofuturist meditation on the possibilities of Black and queer freedom in projects on radical futurity and technology. For Keeling, the character, Bartleby, remains "unaccountable" to the violent regimes under which he works, precisely "because of the kind of queer formulas they deploy" to refuse the binds that accompany "dominant standards of measure, recognition, and evaluation" (2019: 43).

Mustapha, in a fashion reminiscent of Keeling's assessment and Coly's evaluation of the incarceration of African women's desire in postcolonial African scholarship, is queer precisely because he is not captured by neoliberal calculations of economic success. Thus, my deployment of queer channels the Ugandan feminist Stella Nyanzi, who, concerned about the rigid deployments of queer among queer Africans asks, "Is there a place for heterosexual cisgenders in Africa's queer movement? Is there room for heterosexuals or cisgenders? When firm boundaries are drawn between homosexuals and heterosexuals, isn't this a simplistic restyling of essentialist schisms? Isn't this another polarisation of binary oppositions—this time based on sexual orientation?" (2014: 66).

The afroqueer futurist reading I have performed here responds to Nyanzi's provocation that queer must and should be an "open invitation to all of us opposed to essentialist patriarchal heterosexist heteronormative binary configurations" (Nyanzi, 2014: 67). In the spirit of dismantling rigid dichotomies by offering a reading that is both queer and futurist reading, I argue that the "context" in which Mustapha resides and *Lagoon* as a "text" expose how the collusion between neoliberalism and neocolonialism create deathly conditions for non-normative African subjects. Mustapha's ties to the lagoon through e-waste, on the one hand, magnify his queerness and on the other hand, capture how non-normative bodies are paradoxical sites of life and death. They contend both with carcinogens and other life-threatening chemicals and sociopolitical pathogens like the neocolonial and neoliberal racist policies that perpetuate global ecological crises.

To be clear, these are the forces that ultimately shape and structure those ecologies of agitation that constitute the nests in which Mustapha and many other Ghanaians reside. Predetermined by their marginal locations, Mustapha, like other workers on the dump, traverses multiple jeopardies, ranging from confrontations with Ghana's military and police, urban and landscape efforts to rehabilitate the lagoon and the dump, and Ghana's ever-increasing panoptic upper and middle classes. Yet, despite the challenges that beleaguer him, Mustapha continues to conduct himself as an e-waste worker who envisions a better life for himself and his siblings. Inhabiting a toxic environment that toxifies a lagoon, his life vacillates between life and death. The money he sends back to his family in Tamale brings them life at his own expense and at the cost of a lagoon whose contamination is carried in his body.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have explored how frontiers like lagoons amplify the metamorphic conditions in which subjects like Mustapha reside. In doing so, I underscored the relevance of an afroqueer futurist examination of the impacts of the excesses of techno- and petrochemical capitalisms, the offshoots of racial capitalism on African ecologies and bodies. An afroqueer futurist reading that draws the Africanfuturist novel, *Lagoon*, unifies Mustapha and the Korle Lagoon. It amplifies how an e-waste dump sitting on a lagoon in Agbogbloshie and Sodom and Gomorrah in Accra compels a reckoning with a past of racial capitalism, slavery, and colonialism, the reverberations of which continue to vibrate through both ecological and human bodies. An afroqueer futurist reading enables the knitting of multiple ecologies together: the ecologies of text, the human body, and blue ecologies, and how these blend and bleed into each other. Rather than think about blue ecologies such as the Korle Lagoon apart from the lived experiences of Mustapha, I have underlined here that the lagoon frontier refuses the violent dichotomy between culture and nature and human and ecology by knitting them together, while also amplifying the frictions that such rubs yield (Macharia, 2019). Arguably, the contemporary subjectivities of e-waste workers are traceable to histories of slavery and colonialism, the same histories that racialised and sexualised the African body writ large.

Korle Lagoon, much like Okorafor's *Lagoon*, agitates through the lives of Mustapha and other e-waste workers on the dump, whose bodies make these agitations possible. The lagoons can only remember through human bodies – like Ayodele's appearance on Bar Beach and taking on human form. Against this backdrop, I reiterate Patricia McFadden's notion of contemporarity to magnify what she regards as the innovative strategies at work in African/Black feminist work. My reading of Okorafor's *Lagoon* and Mustapha's connection to the Korle Lagoon amplifies what "the new politics of this moment in African time" (McFadden, 2018: 417) looks like. This politics of human emancipation in the face of a looming ecological crisis is fuelled ultimately by agitation.

## Endnotes

1. For more, see: Peter C. Little and Grace A. Akese. 2019. "Centering the Korle Lagoon: Exploring Blue Political Ecologies of E-Waste in Ghana", *Journal of Political Ecology 26*:1. Available at https://doi.org/10.2458/v26i1.22988
2. I focus particularly on the men because of their dominance on the dump and the configuration of their masculinity as queer in this essay.
3. In her book entitled *Corridor: Media Architectures in American Fiction* (2013), media scholar, Kate Marshall, has a chapter on infrastructural modernity, which examines blocked infrastructure: the foetus-clogged sewers of *Manhattan Transfer* and the corpse-choked furnaces and airshafts of *Native Son*.
4. What I call an Afroqueer futurist reading here is indebted to Afrofeminist futurist readings. In that respect, an Afroqueer futurist reading draws on the same energies and strategies afforded by African feminists – namely, Patricia McFadden, Nnedi Okorafor, among others – invested in radical visions of the future.
5. Catriona Sandilands defines this term more broadly in a blog post: "The term "queer ecology" refers to a loose, interdisciplinary constellation of practices that aim, in different ways, to disrupt prevailing heterosexist discursive and institutional articulations of sexuality and nature, and also to reimagine evolutionary processes, ecological interactions, and environmental politics in light of queer theory." Catriona Sandilands. 2016. "Queer Ecologies." In Adamson, J., Gleason, W. and Pellow, D. eds. *Key Words for Environmental Studies* (New York: New York University Press). Available at https://keywords.nyupress.org/environmental-studies/essay/queer-ecology/ See here for information on queer ecologies: Catriona Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, eds. 2010. *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).
6. Here, I am particularly drawn to Peter Little and Grace Akese's work in which they engage the "particular domain of blue economic critique by focusing on Ghana" (2019: 450). Since the Korle Lagoon, which is central to this ethnographic and theoretical project, remains the focus of their conversation, my use of their term in this essay could not be more appropriate.
7. This illuminates for me those forms of protests and anger that are sparked by the suffering and misery that pushes people into the frontier.

8. See, for example, the documentary, "Welcome to Sodom" by Florian Weigensamer and Christian Krönes (2018).
9. For more, see Peter C. Little and Grace A. Akese. 2019. "Centering the Korle Lagoon: Exploring Blue Political Ecologies of E-Waste in Ghana", *Journal of Political Ecology* 26:1.
10. What is now regarded as magical realism has always been the reality in African worldviews, where reality and magic are interwoven in productive ways.
11. Bar Beach is now the location for the Eko Atlantic, one of the massive infrastructural projects in Nigeria since the construction of Abuja as the capital of the country. This project is being built on reclaimed land from the Atlantic Ocean, with the intention of preventing erosion of the shoreline of the city of Lagos. An artificial peninsula, the city adjoins Victoria Island and Lagos City. Also, "cursed and blessed" as it is used here derives from a conversation with my uncle who has lived most of his life in Nigeria. He uses the term to describe Nigeria as a land where the discovery of oil will unleash curses rather than blessings.
12. Hence "terrecentrism" underlines how terrestrial inhabitants qua beings not only abuse and misuse terrestrial habitats, but do so at the expense of the aquatic worlds contiguous with the terrestrial and arboreal worlds. Terrestrial inhabitants imagine terrains as the center around which all other habitats revolve.
13. For more of this story, visit https://www.fantasticfiction.com/s/ken-saro-wiwa/
14. In Ghanaian parlance, to be a "big man" derives from one's access to wealth, whether or not one possesses educational degrees. In effect, just having material wealth marks one as wealthy.
15. This daily wage is as of January 2020. For more information visit: https://alrei.org/research/data-bases/minimum-wages/ghana

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