

Book Reviews

Cajetan Iheka. *Naturalizing Africa: Ecological Violence, Agency, and Postcolonial Resistance in African Literature*. Cambridge UP, 2018. Pp. xii, 211. US\$49.99.

Despite the widespread response to environmentalism in literary studies in the West and the escalating environmental degradation on the African continent, the output of critical writing on literary ecology in Africa has been faint. In *Naturalizing Africa: Ecological Violence, Agency, and Postcolonial Resistance in African Literature*, Cajetan Iheka intervenes in this silence by considering how African literatures have engaged and critiqued diverse ecological crises. The author's textual choices span decades (from 1952 to 2012) and genres (magical realism, memoir, and fiction) as they cover environmental despoliation in different African countries. Significantly, the author's interrogation of Somalia's ecologies of war and the impact of war crisis on the nonhuman resonates globally. With this wide canvas, Iheka broadens the purview of African literary environmentalism through the book's focus on interspecies entanglement and agency. By challenging "human-centeredness" (41) within African literary studies, Iheka fractures normative anthropocentrism and makes nonhuman forms a primary focus.

In the first chapter, Iheka interrogates the commingling of diverse species and worlds in the works of Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri as channels for interspecies relationships. Showing how Tutuola's and Okri's novels blur the human and nonhuman divide, Iheka argues for the complexities inherent in the existence of a "pluriverse" (22). The second chapter moves to the Somalian ecology of war in Nuruddin Farah's novels to investigate the effect of war on the nonhuman and interspecies interactions in such a space of precarity. The third chapter places Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence in conversation with the violent struggle in the Delta and calls for a rethinking of postcolonial resistance, one that is not implicated in ecological despoilment. Engaging with literary works by Gabriel Okara, Isidore Okpewho, and Tanure Ojaide, Iheka also examines the role of intellectuals in African environmentalism. In the final chapter, Iheka emphasizes "resistance from the ground" (126) through agricultural practices and the resulting ecological sensitivity and rehabilitation this offers as an African praxis of environmentalism; he analyzes Wangari Maathai's provocative memoir and fictive works from Bessie Head and J. M. Coetzee for this chapter. With such an extensive

repertoire, Iheka highlights the shared vulnerabilities of diverse species and the agency of the nonhuman in African ecological communities.

Across each of these chapters, *Naturalizing Africa* emphasizes human and nonhuman interconnectedness and negotiates a turn in African postcolonial environmentalism through its focus on nonhuman agency as well as shared agencies between the human and the nonhuman. The book calls for the collapse of the human/nonhuman binary and an inclusion of all beings as full beings in a multispecies pluriverse that could engender environmental consciousness. It points out the Eurocentric leanings of postcolonial ecocriticism as embedded in human-centric notions of environmentalism that neglect the nonhuman collectives. Iheka cautions that “[d]ue to the premium it places on social justice for the humans caught in environmental disasters, postcolonial ecocriticism has not addressed the entanglement of human and nonhuman lives in Africa or the value that indigenous African communities confer on other-than-human lives” (7). This is the lacuna that *Naturalizing Africa* fills. Iheka pushes for a renegotiation with the precolonial past, a revivification of Indigenous African societies that lived in proximity to nature, and a restoration of the interrelationship with the nonhuman before colonial interruption; he also raises objections to the valorization of the violent forms of resistance prevalent in the Niger Delta region.

Naturalizing Africa opens a new frontier into postcolonial ecocriticism that embraces aspects of posthumanism, deep ecology, and environmental care ethics. Iheka’s emphasis on the nonhuman (albeit not a rejection of the human) and the web of interconnectedness and relationality that binds different species together puts the book at the forefront of a new turn in African ecocriticism and literary studies. Drawing on a theoretical lineage that includes environmental critics like Nixon, Byron Caminero-Santangelo, Timothy Morton, and Wendy Woodard and an expansive archive of African literary production, Iheka challenges human/nonhuman hierarchies and contributes to an important turn that accounts for interspecies entanglement. A timely and valuable addition, this book will prove vital to readers and researchers in the burgeoning fields of ecocriticism, green studies, African environmental studies and ethics, and postcolonial literature. *Naturalizing Africa* is the winner of the 2019 Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) Ecocritical Book Award.

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