‘The end of the world as we know it’: imagining new possibilities for the Anthropocene through a study of Nigerian Africanfuturism

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Introduction

As humanity faces a crisis with the potential to end life as *we* know it, many writers have called for literature to take up the cudgels to change minds and behaviour in a way that may alleviate, if not avert, the environmental apocalypse facing the planet. In an opinion piece on the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) Ben Okri proposes "an existential creativity … [that] means everything I write should be directed to the immediate end of drawing attention to the dire position we are in as a species" in an impassioned plea to artists to employ literature (and other forms of art) to fundamentally change human imagination so as to save this planet *we* call home (Okri). Similarly concerned with environmental catastrophe, Amitav Ghosh wonders if literature has been complicit in what he calls the Great Derangement, (*The Great Derangement* 121) where "our lives and our choices are enframed in a pattern of history that seems to leave us nowhere to turn but toward our self-annihilation" (111). This concern about the role art must play in changing the way we engage with the rest of the planet is well founded, but not all literature has been languorous with regards to this crisis besetting the Anthropocene, a crisis that does not affect *us* as a species homogeneously. Science fiction has been particularly vigorous in its interrogation of the issue, with its dual focus on future possibilities and present-day commentary.

Tales of apocalypse, a long-time favoured trope of science fiction (SF), examine both the coming climate catastrophes predicted by both scientists and concerned earthly denizens, and present-day environmental transgressions, providing a unique role of both critique and call to action. In *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction* (2014), Gerry Canavan writes:

> SF is our culture's vast, shared, polyvocal archive of the possible; from techno-utopias to apocalypses to ecotopian fortunate falls, it is the transmedia genre of SF that has first attempted to articulate the sorts of systemic global changes that are imminent, or already

> happening, and begins to imagine what our transformed planet might eventually be like for those who will come to live on it.
>
> (Canavan and Robinson 16)

This interest in the environmental crisis is by no means new as the genre of science fiction was born during a previous period of climate change, albeit short lived. In 1815, Mount Tambora (in Indonesia) erupted, sending over one hundred cubic kilometres of material into the atmosphere and triggering a few years of profound climate disruption and harvest failures around the globe. To provide a potted history, this period, which became known as the 'year without summer', prompted a literary outpouring, including the publication of *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley in 1818 (Ghosh *The Great Derangement* 66). *Frankenstein* is considered by many to be the first example of science fiction, with the narrative employing technology to debate what it is to be human. So perhaps it is not particularly surprising that science fiction has seen a global boom in publication in the last two decades. Science fiction has always followed political and societal events, from its development in tandem with colonisation, as detailed in John Rieder's 2008 book *Colonisation and the Emergence of Science Fiction* to some of the last century's most important ideological battlefields, for instance, where works by authors such as Ursula le Guin and Marge Piercy allowed readers in the last century to imagine a more equal society for women and in this way undermined the prevailing patriarchy.

Returning to this century, Darko Suvin suggests in the afterword to a collection of essays entitled *Learning from other worlds estrangement, cognition and the politics of science fiction and utopia* that "the best SF [is] about clairvoyance — literally, clear seeing — of what's hidden yet advancing upon us?" (235). This is particularly pertinent with regards to climate change that has been approaching so slowly over decades that its effects have been overshadowed by more attention-grabbing issues. However, while climate change is a planetary issue, it affects regions differently and science fiction has been long perceived as a literary genre both written and read mostly in the Global North. In a 2009 conversation with Nnedi Okorafor, award-winning Nollywood director Tchidi Chikere claimed that “Africans are bothered about food, roads, electricity, water wars, famine, etc, not spacecrafts and spaceships. Only stories that explore these everyday realities are considered relevant to us for now” ("Is Africa Ready for Science Fiction" Okorafor). Nevertheless, the new millennium has seen a sudden surge in science fiction focused on Africa, including award-winning novels by both Okorafor and Tade Thompson, amongst many others, indicating that many writers and readers disagree with Chikere and embrace the imaginative possibilities of science fiction. This new generation of African science fiction exudes a distinctive flavour, incorporating elements of fantasy that have long been part of African narratives – notably D.O. Fagunwa’s *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (1938), Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991). Recent 21st century novels examine concepts traditionally the domain of science fiction such as advanced technology, space exploration, and the future of humanity, but shift the focus to include race, incorporating African mythology and supernatural beliefs, while often blurring the focus between fantasy and hard science fiction, “in order to imagine the future” (Samatar "Toward a Planetary History" 183), an act of imagination that is of increasing importance as the planet hurtles towards a climate tipping point, regardless of Chikere’s focus on the very real hardships of the present.

It is this new type of futurist writing that allows this study to interrogate the Anthropocene as a global phenomenon and examine imaginaries that depict the experience of environmental apocalypse as profoundly different in the Global South. The Anthropocene has been uneven in its effects, with the Global South experiencing this new epoch in which humankind’s impact on the planet has become overwhelming in ways quite different from regions such as North America and Western Europe, the centre of the ‘capitalocene’, a term coined by Jason W. Moore, in the 2016 “Anthropocene or capitalocene?: nature, history, and the crisis of capitalism”, in which he interrogates the links between capitalism and the impact on the environment.

I have used 'we' and 'us' to highlight the collective nature of the current geological age, but I have deliberately italicised the pronouns to highlight the difference in experience in the Global North versus the Global South. While the collective *we* can be used to represent how all humanity experiences and is responsible for global climate crisis, this representation fails to capture that there are vast differences in both the experience and the agency. I mark the pronouns to indicate that they are fundamentally vague, and the reader (and writer) should interrogate who exactly is designated by them. Extending beyond this thesis to the pages of the novels, there is a general uncertainly that surrounds the range of these pronouns – do they include all of humanity, everyone in the Global South, just Africa, only those in Nigeria, or merely characters in a fictional world? While the term 'Anthropocene' focuses on humankind's relationship with the planet, in general, the complexity of reality requires that the pronouns be read and used judiciously. Perhaps, they should be used to incorporate all life beyond humanity.

This science fiction centring of Africa is more than just a rejection of neoliberalism and extractive capitalism, but also an embrace of indigenous practices and knowledge, finding alternative ways of being, exploring alternative futures than the ones mapped out by former colonial powers and examining the experience of the crisis that faces the planet from an African perspective. Pier Paolo Frassinelli uses Stefan Helgesson's notion of 'living the apocalypse' (from the perspective of the once-dominant West) to assert that "life goes on in a pragmatic, patchwork fashion" (Frassinelli 304). This combination of the trope of apocalypse with haphazard survival can be seen in recent works of science fiction that present the Global South at the very centre of things, showing an Africa of energy, survival and ingenuity echoing Frassinelli's summation of the "global south leading the way" with "turbocharged urbanisation," (297) refracting the way the world is viewed so that the lens is focused on African realities.

Nigeria: current curses and future possibilities

As one of the top five petroleum-polluted environments in the world, the Niger Delta is subject to constant gas flaring and oil spills that have "poisoned the air, water, and land and resulted in the loss of traditional livelihoods, food sources, and potable water, as well as catastrophic health problems" (Caminero-Santangelo 363). Nigeria can certainly be said to be afflicted by the "resource curse", a phenomenon that Rob Nixon presents as having a double meaning with "taut suspense notions of fortune and misfortune… suggesting the vulnerability of the world of solid, useful goods to spiritual force fields—the curses and blessings that can have profoundly material effects" (Slow Violence 69). While the abundance of Nigeria's oil resources has provided the potential for enormous material wealth, it has also spawned immeasurable despair, the breakdown of cultures and kinship ties, the corruption of government and countless deaths, not just from the associated poverty, but also the violence generated as a result of the conflict over these potential riches, including that of writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa. Nixon sums it up here:

> Who could have dreamed in 1958 [when Nigeria became independent from Great Britain] that four decades and $600 billion of oil revenues later, some 90 million Nigerians would be surviving on less than a dollar a day? And that Nigeria would rank below Haiti and Congo on the United Nations Human Development Index, a composite gauge of life expectancy, education, and income?
>
> (Nixon *Slow Violence* 106)

This complex and diverse country, home to over 500 languages and dialects ("World Population Review") and more than 250 ethnic groups ("American Historical Association"), that is beset by a variety of political and socio-economic challenges has provided rich material for a multitude of renowned writers, such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Helon Habila, Ben Okri and Chimamanda Adichie. Habila's 2010 'petrofiction' novel *Oil on Water* was shortlisted for the 2011 Commonwealth Writers Prize, the 2012 Orion Book Award and the 2012 PEN/Open Book Award and deals directly with the tragedy of the Niger Delta.

I will concentrate on work set in Nigeria by four authors of this century, connected to the country either by birth or ancestry. Okorafor and Thompson have both received critical attention for their recent novels, with Okorafor's 2014 novel *Lagoon* a finalist for the British Science Fiction Association Award, the Red Tentacle Award, the SFX Award and the Tiptree Award, and Thompson's *Rosewater,* the first novel in the *Wormwood* trilogy*,* winning both the Arthur C. Clarke Award and the Nommo award as well as being a finalist for the John W. Campbell Award. Both authors are included in Hugh O'Connell's survey of African writers rising to prominence in 2019's *The Cambridge History of Science Fiction* ("Science Fiction and the Global South" 688). *After the Flare* by Deji Bryce Olukotun won the 2018 Philip K. Dick special citation award, while Suyi Davies Okungbowa, called "one of the most promising new voices in the growing coterie of African Sci-Fi/Fantasy writers" by *Wired* magazine ("Wired's 14 Must-Read Books of Summer"), published *David Mogo, Godhunter* in 2019 and subsequently won the 2020 Nommo Award for Best Novel. This thesis will analyse how Thompson's *Wormwood* trilogy – *Rosewater* (2018), *Rosewater insurrection* (2019) and *Rosewater Redemption* (2019) – in conversation with the three other examples of Africanfuturism mentioned above, can be read as imaginaries of the Anthropocene from the perspective of the Global South. Thompson's trilogy, at the centre of this study, builds an incredibly rich and varied world and his epic narrative explores human-nonhuman ecologies within the context of apocalypse after an invasion by aliens who have destroyed their own planet and control the human population through micro-organisms known as xenoforms. *Lagoon* provides some useful comparisons of the relationship between the human and nonhuman with the *Wormwood* trilogy though it's a depiction of alien invasion which also eventually takes microbe form. *David Mogo: Godhunter* takes a different slant on the science fiction trope of alien invasion with Yoruba gods falling to Earth after a celestial war. In contrast, there are no aliens in *After the Flare*, but the imagined Nigeria in this novel faces a different type of apocalypse resulting from global technological failure after a solar flare.

Theoretical Framework: Africanfuturism and the Anthropocene

The 2005 essay "Postcolonial Science Fiction," published by the Science Fiction Foundation, calls for a re-examination of critical approaches to science fiction:

> Traditionally science fiction is a genre characterised by ideals of expansion and colonisation, but it also has the great potential to imagine "otherness" and other ways of being; postcolonial approaches to science fiction seem long overdue. Yet I believe we're only just beginning to work out what these are. My current thinking is that we have to do more than apply existing postcolonial theories to sf writing—we need to examine what makes science fiction so strongly identified as a literature of empire and expansion, and how this might be resisted and subverted from within the genre itself.
>
> (Reid)

Although the term 'genre' is often used to describe science fiction, Farah Mendlesohn, in her introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003), suggests that this type of writing forms less of a genre and more an ongoing discussion, containing elements of mystery, romance, and horror. Certainly, this interpretation opens science fiction up to new influences from the postcolonial world with different world views and life experiences, and where the experience of colonisation is from the perspective of the colonised, rather than the coloniser. While I consider 'genre' a useful way of describing science fiction, Mendlesohn's argument does illustrate the width and depth that this kind of writing can have, something that is particularly pertinent when it is written with Africa at the centre, including strands of thought and belief from a world view 'alien' to that of the Global North. O'Connell writes that "what unites the SF of the Global South perhaps more than other traits is its decentering of the West as the singular site and progenitor of futurity" ("Science Fiction and the Global South" 682). Instead, it produces imaginaries of a future that dispenses with much that has for so long been considered doctrinal by the Global North.

This African 'brand' of science fiction has been called many things. In *Literary Afrofuturism in the Twenty-First Century*, Isiah Lavender III, and Lisa Yaszek list some of the many labels used to describe it: "Afrofuturism has died and transformed into afrotopia (1998), afro-alienation (2006), steamfunk (2012), Imhotep-hop (2013), black quantum futurism (2015), Afrofuturism 2.0 (2016), speculative blackness (2016), Africanfuturism (2018), black utopia (2019) – and the list goes on" (4). 'Afrofuturism' was first used by Mark Dery in 1994 to describe twentieth-century speculative fiction that deals with African American themes and concerns and was for about two decades the dominant label used to describe science fiction that included black protagonists and African diasporic culture. In his review of these narratives, Dery suggests that "the unreal estate of the future [is] already owned by the technocrats, futurologists, streamliners, and set designers…who have engineered our collective fantasies" (180). Herein lies the importance of Afrofuturism, in providing an alternative imagined future that does not dismiss or erase black experience and history. According to Tiffany E. Barber, this new genre deliberately subverts science fiction tropes in order to excavate issues of racial difference (Barber et al. 137). But Afrofuturism encompasses works that are not grounded in Africa or African experience, and although they usually tackle race, prejudice, conflict, oppression and often the legacy of slavery, the works of authors such as Nalo Hopkinson, Rivers Solomon, N. K. Jemisin are not focused on the African continent itself. South African writer Mohale Mashigo argues that Afrofuturism is not for Africans*:*

> Afrofuturism is an escape for those who find themselves in the minority and divorced or violently removed from their African roots, so they imagine a 'black future' where they aren't a minority and are able to marry their culture with technology. That is a very important story and it means a lot to many people. There are so many wonderful writers from the diaspora dealing with those feelings or complexities that it would be insincere of me to parrot what they are doing.
>
> (xiii)

Mashingo’s focus is on matters relating to the continent itself and she refuses to mimic (parrot) issues that are rooted is the diasporic experience, for although she recognises the importance of those narratives, they are not hers. For Africans, the narrative is not about being part of a minority torn away from a homeland and existing within an ‘alien’ culture, but instead dealing with the aftermath of colonisation and the ongoing subordination of the Global South with entrenched and expanding inequalities.

In 2019, Okorafor coined the term Africanfuturism in her blog Nnedi's Wahala Zone, after receiving multiple awards and critical acclaim, suggesting that Afrofuturism, the term being used to label her work, failed to capture the essence of her writing.

> Africanfuturism is concerned with visions of the future, is interested in technology, leaves the earth, skews optimistic, is centered on and predominantly written by people of African descent (black people) and it is rooted first and foremost in Africa. It's less concerned with "what could have been" and more concerned with "what is and can/will be". It acknowledges, grapples with and carries "what has been".
>
> ("Africanfuturism Defined")

Since 2019, this new term has become widely used to describe work that brings to centre stage Africa and African people. As well as incorporating technology, as does traditional science fiction, it envisions possible futures based on realities past and present rather than imaginaries of alternative histories. The integral role of science fiction’s legacy in Africanfuturism can be illustrated by that genre’s fascination with the ‘alien’ – a word I have used above to describe both a world view and a culture – and how its facility for exposing the inherent strangeness that society has normalised allows it to interrogate Africa’s position at this moment in history as *we* face a planetary crisis. This crisis is the focus of *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*:

> This coming century looks like the moment in human history when we will either invent a civilization that nurtures the biosphere while it supports us, or else we will damage it quite badly, perhaps even to the point of causing a mass extinction event and endangering ourselves.
>
> (Canavan and Robinson 244)

Green Planets stresses ecocriticism's synergy with science fiction. However except for one chapter on South Africa, the book largely ignores examples of the genre from Africa. This is something I hope to rectify here.

The new 'genre' of Africanfuturism, for this is what it has become, renders visible the imagined futurity of Africans in Africa in this age of the Anthropocene, which is the "result of a 200-year experiment in hydrocarbon-fueled capitalism whose historic beneficiaries have been disproportionately rich and white" (Nixon *Slow Violence* 266). Nixon merges ecocriticism with postcolonial studies to examine how the environmental devastation affecting the Global South is different from that in the Global North in his 2011 book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Nixon's notion of "slow violence" is invaluable in describing incremental changes that result over time in complete transformation, and often utter devastation. This happened historically when one ship followed another and another, sometimes with decades in between, resulting in complete societal disruption in Africa, and is occurring *now* environmentally with increases in carbon emissions escalating slowly but steadily until *we* face irrevocable climate change.

Research question

Africanfuturism's science fiction roots in combination with the ecocriticism espoused by Nixon allows for an interrogation Africa's position, already in a post-colonial apocalypse, of facing another planetary catastrophe caused by environmental change. Reading Africanfuturism, from an ecocritical perspective, this study examines how imaginaries can undermine the perceived universality of the

Anthropocene. It further challenges the Western humanist view of the rational individual at the centre of the universe.

Firstly, I explore the form of narrative needed to deal with the temporality of the environmental catastrophe that has resulted from extractive capitalism – Nixon's "slow violence" – while questioning the Western framing of the Anthropocene as an epic planetary narrative – one planet, one story. Secondly, I examine Africanfuturist representations of the nonhuman and posthuman in this era so dominated by humankind's actions to find, as Lawrence Buell writes, "the place of humankind within biogeological processes" (417). I consider how the novels present a decentring of Western thought, and a system of knowledge described by Moira Marquis as, "wholly other than the colonial and imperialist legacies that assert the essential identity of race and the unavoidable naturalness of racism" (409). In the final chapter, I analyse how the concept of the apocalypse, a trope that is shared by literatures of futurism and the Anthropocene, is used to represent the differentiated imaginaries of survival and a reimagining of the future in a region that has, in so many ways, already faced the worst the world can offer.

Literature review

Africanfuturism emerged early in the 21st century and, since then, has garnered increasing attention from literary critics, gaining momentum in 2021 when *Feminist Africa* devoting its second volume to gender and sexuality in Africanfuturism. This edition includes no less than three articles on Okorafor's work including "When the Lagoons Remember: An Afroqueer Futurist Reading of 'Blue Ecologies of Agitation'" by Kwame Edwin I and "Africanfuturism and the Reframing of Gender in the Fiction of Nnedi Okorafor" by Arit Oku, as well as an analysis of Thompson's trilogy by Jenna N. Hanchey and Godfried Asante that I have found to be both thought provoking and illuminating. Also, published in 2021, and republished in 2022, Dike Okoro's *Futurism and the African Imagination* has brought together in one volume much that has been discussed in stand-alone articles earlier and includes conversations with several African writers, including one, which is particularly relevant to the themes that concern me, with the Niger Delta poet and academic Tanure Ojaide, who speaks to how the "issues of environmental degradation, minority rights, issues of justice and fairness" have informed his work (Okoro 186). It's worth noting though that Africanfuturism has received much less critical attention than the earlier defined Afrofuturism, which although rejected by authors such as Okorafor and the South African Mashigo is still used in conjunction with their work. Indeed, Okoro uses Afrofuturism exclusively, even when analysing African writers living in Africa.

Although Okorafor is not at the centre of my own analysis, she is by far the most prolific of the authors studied here and has received the most critical attention. Her impressive bibliography includes several novels and novellas aimed at both adults and young adults, as well as a selection of graphic novels. She started by writing for young adults with *Zahrah the Windseeker* (2005) and *The Shadow Speaker* (2005). Her adult novels include: *Who Fears Death* (2010), *"Hello, Moto"* (2011), *Kabu Kabu* (2013), *Lagoon* (2014), *The Book of Phoenix* (2015), the *Binti* trilogy (2015, 2017, 2018), and the 2021 *Remote Control*. Joshua Burnet focuses on *Who Fears Death* in "The Great Change and the Great Book: Nnedi Okorafor's Postcolonial, Post-Apocalyptic Africa and the Promise of Black Speculative Fiction," published in *Research in African Literatures* in 2015 but his suggestion that postcolonial speculative fiction has the potential to examine possibilities that are not available within mainstream realist literature is just as relevant to *Lagoon* (134), which has been read as a reaction to the racist undertones of the stereotypes of Nigerians presented in the South African science fiction film *District 9,* directed by Neill Blomkamp in 2009 (Marquis 398). In the 2020 article "The Alien Within: Divergent Futures in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* and Neill Blomkamp's *District 9*" published in *Science Fiction Studies*, Marquis argues that Okorafor takes an Afrofuturism view, while *District 9* embraces Afropessimism. She argues that "the end of *Lagoon* emphasizes not the intractability of the legacies of racism but the mutability of perception and the suggestion that change is possible" (411). In the 2016 article "'We are change': The Novum as Event in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*," published the *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry,* O'Connell's writes that

"Okorafor's novel engages with the difficult implications of radically rethinking the alien encounter narrative within the framework of neoliberal globalization as neoimperialism," ("We Are Change" 292). The critic observes how drawing on alien invasion tropes, *Lagoon* has beings emerging from the sea, just as historically the 'alien' European arrived by sea. "The figure of the alien shifts from being the representation of the colonizer to the point of identification for the colonized as It moves from the position of technologically superior oppressor, conqueror, and abductor of Africans to that of alien-other, that is, the alienated within the enslaving or colonizing system" ("We Are Change" 294). This fluidity of identity is an important theme that runs through *Lagoon* and is part of the reason for its inherent optimism, suggesting that change is possible. The novel continues to inspire much analysis as it deals with an array of themes, from postcolonialism to gender issues, but I have confined my study to articles such as Esthie Hugo's 2017 article in *Social Dynamics* "Looking forward, looking back: animating magic, modernity and the African city-future in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon"* that explores how encounters between the human and the nonhuman allows for the relationship between human and environment to be transformed (50). Other articles, such as Nedine Moonsamy's 2020 "Fish Out of Water: Black superheroines in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon",* that has informed my understanding of the myths of Mami Wata incorporated within the narrative, mostly deal with lines of enquiry, such as gender depictions, that while challenging and thoughtful, have not been part of my own research. *Lagoon* has received so much critical attention that this overview is just a representative selection, confined mostly to approaches that overlap with an ecocritical analysis – the very tip of the iceberg. Beyond critical readings of her work, I have also consulted Okorafor's blog regularly – Nnedi's Wahala Zone Blog – where she defined Africanfuturism in 2019, although it is not updated all that frequently ("Africanfuturism Defined").

Thompson's *Wormwood* trilogy, at the centre of this study, has received growing notice in the last few years with the publication of the second and third novels in the series completing a narrative that covers many more themes than are examined here, as my focus is on how the trilogy comments on the Anthropocene. In an interview with Sofia Samatar, he explains his reasoning for setting the novel in Nigeria in the following terms: "Being a former colony gives a country a better perspective on alien conquest… The invasion in *Rosewater* has more in common with neocolonialism. It's invisible, it's insidious, but it's no less harmful. There is complicity" (Samatar "An Interview with Tade Thompson"). O'Connell's 2020 article "Everything is changed by virtue of being lost: African Futurism Between Globalization and the Anthropocene in Tade Thompson's Rosewater" published in *Extrapolation*, focusses on how a number of science fiction tropes and the intermixing of multiple genres including cyberpunk, first-cum-second contact and alien-human symbiosis, hardboiled detective fiction, the geopolitical novel, combine to produce an apocalypse narrative, ("Everything Is Changed" 113). Also in *Extrapolation*, but in 2021, Dustin Crowley examines the dynamics of technology and global capital in "The Planet Already Turned Black: Colonization and Networked Subjectivities in Tade Thompson's *Wormwood* Trilogy", something that has deepened my understanding of Thompson use of xenoforms as an allegory for neocolonialism. An ecological reading by Kylie Crane entitled "Fungi Functions: Cross-Species Imaginaries in Tade Thompson's *Wormwood* Trilogy" was published in June 2022 providing an engagement with the trilogy's non-linear timeframe and the nonhuman other through the metaphor of fungi. I predict that this is just the beginning of critical interest in Thompson's work.

Olukotun and Okungbowa have received less critical attention. Written as a sequel to Olukotun's *Nigerians in Space* (2014), *After the Flare* (2017) inhabits the same fictional universe as the earlier novel but while the former is more of a thriller, the later novel combines futuristic technology with African history, Yoruba mythology, along with current political and social issues such as Boko Haram and political corruption. Industrial development flourishes beside nomadic trading, and the novel includes fluid explorations of sexuality and gender, as well as what it is to be African. In his 2018 essay 'Cultural Heritage, Future Vision', Mark Bould discusses how "figurations of uncertainty, contradiction, and fluid identity recur in the novel" (23), with the protagonist identifying as Yoruba, while having a Ghanaian name and a skin tone that sees him labelled as a 'Yankee' by locals. The novel depicts fabulous, imagined technology that allows the characters to project themselves to others via an avatar, allowing them to change their cultural or sexual identity. Bould further suggests that imagery in the novel can be read as a metaphor for the science fiction emerging from Africa. “It represents a collision neither of modernity and tradition, nor of Anglophone sf and African lore, but a locally articulated transnational modernity” (23). The narrative of this novel, focussing on Nigeria’s traditional knowledge and technologies that have been devalued, can be examined through the optic of postcolonial ecocriticism, something that has not received much critical attention. Similarly, Okungbowa’s *David Mogo, Godhunter* (2019) draws on Nigerian mythologies and traditions, using the real Yoruba pantheon to paint a post-apocalyptic city. In 2020, Louise Green published “Reading for Background: Suyi Davies Okungbowa’s *David Mogo, Godhunter* and ‘the end of the world as we know it’”[i], providing an ecocritical reading of the text:

> In the era of the Anthropocene, the future has become the focus of a diffuse but pervasive global anxiety. As the unpredictable and damaging side effects of modernity proliferate and environmental transformation becomes more and more evident, the future becomes not only radically volatile but also a contested site in global world politics.
>
> (Green 24)

This encapsulates the importance of literature of this kind, and the role it can play in changing minds and behaviour, something needed if *we* are to survive the predicted Sixth Extinction. However, ecocritical readings of these works are few and far between, and I am unaware of any study that takes a comparative ecocritical approach to the works studied here.

Methodological Considerations: Genre Analysis and Ecocriticism

This thesis combines a study of science fiction tropes that have been subverted within Africanfuturism with the evolving debates of ecocriticism. Nixon suggests that "we seem to be at a crucial turning point in the contribution literary scholars can make to the ecological humanities" (*Slow Violence* 30). For this reason, I have attempted a convergence of literary theory and environmentalism in this thesis to interrogate the various ways narratives of and from Africa can provide the needed impetus to change the way *we* relate to *our* planet. The urgency of the crisis facing *us* calls, I believe, for a transparency in language, and I have thus tried to avoid the impenetrability of much academic language. I request your indulgence here.

I rely on Nixon's concept of "slow violence" to understand the pace of environmental catastrophe as it edges itself forward in such slow increments as to appear almost static, but the difficulty of integrating this into storytelling that needs to hold the reader's attention is something I will discuss in chapter one. Secondly, *we* are not alone, but in "a universe animated by nonhuman voices" (*The Great Derangement* 73) . This concept is useful in an analysis of Africanfuturism that combines mythological and fantastical elements, and ecocriticism that is concerned with entities/beings other than the human and how the entanglement of the planet needs to be recognised if *we* are to survive.

My analysis focuses primarily on Thompson's *Wormwood* trilogy – the three novels are read together as an epic of planetary proportions – with the novels of *Lagoon*, *David Mogo: Godhunter* and *After the Flare* being studied as comparative texts to find similarities and differences with the themes and representational strategies utilised by Thompson in his incredibly rich narrative of the Anthropocene in the Global South.

Chapter one examines how Africanfuturism offers the development of narrative techniques, including the combined use of myth and epic, to capture the concept of urgent crisis within eons of time, while subverting the universality of the Anthropocene from a Western perspective through an exploration of the intertwined concerns of environmental catastrophe and regimented inequality. In chapter two, I explore representations of the post- and nonhuman in Africanfuturist imaginaries of an ecology in crisis, while in chapter three I examine the science fiction trope of the post-apocalyptic world in relation to the environmental crisis of the Anthropocene. This analysis looks at imaginaries of how the Global South may respond to crisis, engaging Africanfuturist “bricolage” (adaptability, resilience and resourcefulness), as well as reimagining existing dystopian experiences as possible contributions to this response.

Chapter 1: Time and justice in the Anthropocene

> ... the crisis of futurity has become inextricable from the neoliberal crisis of disparity.
>
> (Nixon "The Anthropocene" 10)

Coined by Eugene Stoermer in the 1980s (Mitman et al. ix) the term ‘Anthropocene’ has seen rapidly increasing usage this century, but there is still considerable debate about when this new epoch actually started. Proposed dates range between the end of the last glaciation in the early 17th century to the 1960s (Lewis and Maslin 171), with some scientists suggesting an even earlier start, as far back as the dawn of agriculture (rather than the industrial revolution) (Ruddiman 261-93). The collision of the two biotas known as the ‘Columbian exchange’ that resulted from the European arrival in the Caribbean certainly marked the stratigraphy, but it was really only from the 1950s onwards that what has become known as the ‘Great Acceleration’ significantly marked geological records in indelible ways through tree rings and glacier ice (Lewis and Maslin 176). However, it can be argued that jointly colonialism, global trade and the use of fossil fuels coal brought about the Anthropocene and, with it, unequal power relationships (177). The marked inequality that has become a glaring feature of today’s planet is particularly relevant within the African context, with the debate about when the Anthropocene started having political implications, as it suggests that certain countries and regions have greater historical responsibility for the excess carbon dioxide emissions to blame for climate change (171). This has been acknowledged with the agreement reached at the COP27 climate summit in November 2022 to establish a fund to pay for climate damage incurred by Global South countries, providing confirmation that while this epoch is defined by humankind’s mark on the planet, not all human’s played an equal role in its development and this difference in experience continues today.

In his chapter ‘The Promise and Pitfalls of an Epochal Idea’ included in the 2018 anthology *Future Remains,* Nixon details the “deepening schism between the uberrich and the ultra-poor, between gated resource hogs and the abandoned destitute" that distinguishes the Anthropocene, as much as the environmental disruption that is more often linked to it:

> Californians burn more gasoline than the 900 million inhabitants of Africa's fifty-four nations combined. A one-way flight from Los Angeles to New York produces more carbon emissions than the average Nigerian does annually. Oxfam reports that in 2013 the combined wealth of the world's richest eighty- five individuals equaled that of the 3.5 billion people who constitute the poorest half of the planet.
>
> ("The Anthropocene" 7-8)

This deepening inequality has been accompanied by an increase in concern surrounding climate change in many Global North countries and what can be done to alleviate its effects, while many in the Global South feel penalised for something they had no responsibility for, experiencing a triple loss: the historic loss of lives and land during colonialisation, the ongoing deprivation of environmental resources, and the requirement to cut back on carbon emissions now even though they did not contribute to this process during the Global North's period of industrialisation and wealth-building. While overlapping social, political and economic practices have resulted in a global phenomenon, the experience and responsibility are differentiated, not all of *us* are equally to blame, just as not all have benefitted. Proposing capitalism as the force behind the Anthropocene, John Parham identifies "imperialism and global trade; plantations and industrial scale agriculture; factories and the carbon economy…; the twentieth century's acceleration of consumerism" as some of the socio-economic-political practices (2) that have precipitated the crisis. These practises have left an enduring mark on Africa, one that is still felt today as extraction of resources continues with neoliberal dictates relating to global trade and finance. It is a tragedy that often appears to have been entirely ignored by large parts of the world in both the Global North *and* the Global South, but one that has received the attention of so many Nigerian writers – such as Tanure Ojaide, Ogaga Ifowodo, Kaine Agary, Ebinyo Ogbowei, Ebi Yeibo, Isidore

Okpewho, Ben Okri, Ahmed Yerima, Helon Habila, J.P Clark and Nnimmo Bassey – who have focused their energies and lives on the devastation that has transformed the Niger Delta from a region of abundance to a place marked by pollution, violence and poverty. In 'Petro-Violence and the Act of Bearing Witness in Contemporary Nigerian Literature', Byron Caminero-Santangelo observes that before his execution, Ken Saro-Wiwa, "emphasized how a close relationship between the Nigerian state and Shell-BP enabled the company to appropriate land for little or no compensation and to avoid regulation just as it had with the blessing of the British colonial government" (364). And while Saro-Wiwa's death in 1995 met with global condemnation, the process continues as can be seen by *Al Jazeera's* report in December 2021, over 25 years later, that an 'oil and gas spills from a leaking wellhead that has been affecting local residents for more than a month' (Egbejule).

In the last decade, several Africanfuturist Nigerian novels have interrogated the concept of environmental justice from the perspective of the Global South and, here, I explore concerns of temporality and justice relating to the Anthropocene through an analysis that compares Thompson's *Wormwood* trilogy to Okorafor's *Lagoon* and Okungbowa's *David Mogo: Godhunter* – to show how they rise to the challenge by blending various literary structures to interrogate the planetary epic that *we* face in the 21st century. These writers face difficulties framing the immense time lags of geological time, besides the immediacy of pressing problems affecting the Global South on a daily basis. Nixon raises the question of the temporality of the environmental crisis in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*:

> How … can we rethink the standard formulation of neoliberalism as internalizing profits and externalizing risks not just in spatial but in temporal terms as well, so that we recognize the full force with which the externalized risks are outsourced to the unborn?
>
> (*Slow Violence* 35)

Nixon is primarily concerned with this temporality in terms of the environmental costs of neoliberalism, and I believe that science fiction, and particularly Africanfuturism, provides a way to examine alternate paths than those signposted by modernity, a futurity for the unborn where a diverse cultural heritage can be used as a foundation, escaping the trap Le Guin outlines in *Dancing at the edge of the world*: "It seems that the utopian imagination is trapped, like capitalism and industrialism and the human population, in a one-way future consisting only of growth" (84). The texts explore possible ways out of this trap created by capitalism and neoliberalism, where 'progress' is so often defined in terms of wealth and economic development. The narratives offer imaginaries from an African perspective, with Africa at the centre, finding solutions to Africa's own problems, Africa's way.

As well as a concern with futurity, Africanfuturism, as with much of science fiction, is concerned with a critique of current society, committed "to visions of human transformation" and with the "potential for political radicalism" (Parrinder 2), mirroring concerns raised by Achilles Mbembe in his 2019 book *Necropolitics,* where he outlines the history that has led to the present moment where the projectile of capitalism has split into the twin catastrophes of carbonisation and extreme inequality.

> Civil peace in the West [depended] in large part on inflicting violence far away, on lighting up centers of atrocities, and on the fiefdom wars and other massacres that accompany the establishment of strongholds and trading posts around the four corners of the planet. It depends on the supply of canvas, masts, timber, pitch, flax, and rope for sailing ships, but also luxury goods ... the love of luxury, and other passions were no longer subject to vexing condemnation. Rather, the fulfilment of these new desires depended on institutionalizing a regime of inequality at the planetary scale.
>
> (Mbembe and Corcoran 19-20)

Here Mbembe encapsulates so clearly (and poetically) the way we arrived at this moment in history where inequality is institutionalised, a process that has taken generations but just the blink of an eye in geological time. In one paragraph he covers the events that spurred the first voyages of 'discovery' and converted so much of the world to mere resource stashes resulting in a fundamental change in values where materialism is upheld as a virtue. Africanfuturism offers possible mechanisms for an exploration of these intertwined concerns of environmental catastrophe and regimented inequality, as well as an interrogation of the values *we* have been indoctrinated to believe are worth pursuing. To begin this exploration, I investigate the literary form used to explore the issues surrounding ecological justice that have developed alongside the 'Capitalocene' (Moore).

Mythic and epic elements in narratives of the Anthropocene

How can we share the experiences of the Global South in a way that makes a difference? Nixon is convinced that stories do matter:

> Stories matter—they matter immeasurably… it is easy for humanities scholars to lose track of what they do best, like explaining why telling a story one way as opposed to another can have profound imaginative, ethical, and political consequences. In a world drowning in data, stories can play a vital role—for example, in the making of environmental publics and in the shaping of environmental policy.
>
> (Nixon "The Great Acceleration")

To reach hearts and minds and to *change* hearts and minds, literature has long played a crucial role in human society, from oral traditions and epic poetry to science fiction novels that have tackled colonialism, gender politics and more in recent times. However, Parham critiques literature as "ill-equipped to address a requirement, in the Anthropocene, for human perspective to readjust to vast spatial, temporal and existential scales" in the 2021 *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Anthropocene* (5). While literature has a role to play in imagining new ways of relating to the planet, what form can it take to meet the challenge of the slow-motion crisis hidden behind a 24-hour news cycle? Stories matter, as Nixon suggests, but how can they be moulded to meet the challenges put forward by both Ghosh, mentioned in the introduction, and Parham?

While imaginaries of the Anthropocene evoke catastrophic experiences like hurricanes, fire storms and floods, the slow creep of rising temperatures and the frequency of droughts is incremental rather than immediate – slowly violent in Nixon's parlance – and Ghosh suggests that the literary, realist novel is unable to capture the slowness of the calamity with its many gaps in time and space (*The Great Derangement* 63). Instead, he looks to epic, myth and science fiction as potential genres to enable ways to imagine possible ways forward through the complexities of the Anthropocene (128). Reconciling the age of catastrophe – with the daily news reports of fire and flood making calamity almost passé – with the urgent need to make long-term compelling changes to avert the worst of climate change appears to be confounding us as even though possible solutions may exist, the political and social will to pursue them often does not. How can literature contend with the incongruency of urgent long-term issues? Ghosh's suggestion of the epic as a possible form finds some vindication in the 2017 *Epic: Form, Content, and History*, wherein Frederick Turner argues that "the epic is basically about human evolution – that is, epic is the traditional way we have explained to ourselves as a species our emergence from nature and the stresses within our own nature that result from that emergence and our look back at it" (8). This form is particularly relevant in the planetary narrative of the Anthropocene, as a new way of thinking and living needs to evolve if the planet is to survive as a place inhabitable for both rich and poor, as well as the nonhuman. The *Wormwood* trilogy, *Lagoon* and *David Mogo: Godhunter* all display some elements of the epic and/or mythology.

Thompson's first *Wormwood* novel, *Rosewater*, employs a narrative device like that of ellipsis that omits portions of novel's sequence of events, highlighting the protagonist's story at different points and thus allowing it to span a greater time period; and the trilogy features an epic hero to negotiate the obstacles of

Anthropocenic temporality and themes of planetary importance. The narrative jumps backwards and forwards in time as it encompasses events over several decades, from 2032 to 2066 following the events of a slow-motion alien invasion. The alien itself lands in London in 2012 (already history by the time the novel's action starts) but it disappears underground after being attacked by the British government, only to resurface in Nigeria many years later, where a biodome emerges in a place that becomes known as Rosewater. By covering an extended period in this manner, Thompson maintains the narrative's momentum and tension, focussing on moments of importance either in the protagonist's personal development or in the plot itself. The invasion itself predates the 2012 landing by a considerable period of time, with the aliens having left their own planet after destroying it in much the same way that humans are currently destroying Earth. The human-alien hybrid who acts as their spokesperson, Anthony, claims to have been on Earth longer than the human characters: "By the time you were born, my organisms were already part of the biosphere. It calls into question your concept of alien, does it not?" (*Rosewater* 246) Meanwhile, Kaaro, the antihero/epic hero, has himself, as have most humans, been infected by alien microbes (xenoforms), but he has a special ability that allows him to use these xenoforms to explore thoughts and control minds. The novel follows his discovery of these powers as a sensitive, or "quantum extrapolator" (*Rosewater* 322) associated with the internal microbe invasion, in parallel with the more apparent alien invasion that is manifest in the biodome. This tried and trusty science fiction trope functions as an allegory for colonisation, but by using xenoforms in parallel to the external alien structure, Thompson compares the more conspicuous colonialisation of the 19th century with the subtler and more encompassing spread of neoliberal practices, both of which have entrenched planetary inequality. Thus, the novel covers an extremely long period of time and even longer-term effects while capturing the significance of catastrophe.

The *Wormwood* trilogy not only covers an extended temporality, but it deals with a momentous theme, that of humankind saving itself from extinction. Kaaro, the flawed protagonist sacrifices himself to this end as he eventually travels to the alien home world to commit genocide, a crime consciously undertaken for the benefit of his fellow humans.

> Kaaro is broken down, put back together, broken down, reformed …. It takes years or it takes seconds, he does not know, but one minute he is in Rosewater, then he is on the Homian side of eternity… There is just Kaaro for eternity, the most successful mass murderer in history, alive after a fashion and alone in a moon light years from Earth… He activates the self-destruct sequences on the surviving servers, and Kaaro simply is no more.
>
> (*Rosewater Redemption* 362-3)

This epic theme of the quest to save the planet mirrors the current reality with climate change providing a new set of circumstances from which *we* need to emerge if *we* are to survive. Narratives can provide a way for *us* to explore possible ways *we* can evolve, and the difficult decisions that need to be taken along the way. By exploring the ultimate evil of genocide, Thompson proposes that this is indeed a possible future and humans are indeed potentially culpable of killing *us* all, along with the planet. Certainly, an epic theme that contemplates the stresses of this time: the Anthropocene.

Similarly, Okungbowa draws another epic hero in *David Mogo Godhunter*, a novel that combines elements from fantasy and science fiction to build a post-apocalyptic world that has Yoruba deities taking up residence in Lagos after being expelled from the pantheon. This event, the Fall, has laid waste to the city, and Okungbowa uses the de-familiarity of this alien landscape as a representational strategy to interrogate the current environmental (and other) problems faced by the real Lagos. The imagined city lies in shambles, the government and police ineffective against the godly invasion and as the novel progresses through sections reminiscent of epic poetry, 'Godhunter', 'Firebringer' and 'Warmonger', the chaos grows and David, who is half god himself like many epic heroes, must find a way to use his innate godliness, while working with a team of supporters, to find a liveable future. The use of real deities gives the novel an even greater sense of the epic, as does David Mogo's quest to save his city, following Turner's earlier stated criteria for an epic as David deals with the stresses within his own nature and contemplates his origins (8).

Instead of an epic hero, African deities and Nigerian mythology are incorporated into Okorafor's *Lagoon*, published in 2014 to critical applause, with the inclusion of mermaids and spiders as pivotal characters. In the 2017 article 'Toward a Planetary History of Afrofuturism', Samatar writes in that "the combination of folklore and science fiction is perfectly possible; in the poetics of mythmaking, which draws on the past in order to imagine the future, it is necessary" (182-83). By including references to Nigeria's mythology and gods, including Legba the Yoruba trickster god of language, communications and crossroads (*Lagoon* 195) and references to Chineke, the Igbo Supreme Deity (123), the novel encompasses the pre-colonial period, suggesting that the distant past continues to influence the present, just as the Anthropocene is the result of eons of time. Okorafor includes Udide Okwanke, the mythical spider, as one of the narrators emphasising a pre-human memory of the land, a temporality beyond the comprehension of humans. Udide recalls the earlier invasion of Lagos too.

> *I have seen people come from across the ocean. I have seen people sell people. I've knitted their stories and watched them knit their own crude webs. They came in boats that creaked a desperate song and brought something I'd never have created. Lagos has fed me. Fast life, fast death. High life, low life. Skyscrapers, shanty towns.*
>
> (*Lagoon* 292, original italics)

Through the use of African mythology, Okorafor highlights the possibility of a different relationship with the planet where humanity is not viewed as the pinnacle of creation. As a storyteller, Udide decides to leave the web to save Lagos and closes the novel asserting the importance of storytelling, and its link to action in the Anthropocene.

For the first time since the birth of Lagos, my glorious city, I will
pause in my storytelling.
I will leave my web
I become part of the story.
I join my people

And we spiders play dirty.
(293, original italics)

The use of mythological creatures convoys both the vast period of time covered by the storytelling process from prehistoric epics to the present story, from slavery and colonisation to urbanisation and environmental degradation, as well as the agency of nonhuman characters in a possible planetary salvation (more on this in chapter two). The use of mythology allows the authors to tackle Nixon's "slow violence" of the Anthropocene, without the narrative floundering in the slowness of time.

As in *Rosewater*, Okorafor includes the trope of alien invasion, again making allegorical references to colonialism, with a spaceship diving into the polluted waters of Lagos's lagoon, where once slave ships arrived. The three protagonists, Adaora, a marine biologist; Agu, a soldier; and Anthony, a hip hop star; find themselves, for individual reasons, on the beach as the aliens arrive and are swept up in a massive wave to meet the alien ambassador. The three are all revealed to have supernatural powers and the reader initially thinks these are the result of the alien's influence, but the novel demonstrates that they have always had these strengths: "… from the moment that my mother first took me to the ocean, I could swim. No one ever taught me. I was ... like a fish" (*Lagoon* 257). These larger-than-life heroes mirror heroes of ancient epics and oral poetry. "After the aliens land, the human characters begin to acknowledge elements of their identity that correspond with Yorùbá and pan-African deities," writes Marquis (406). For example, Adaora appears to be an incarnation of the African deity Mami Wata, a mermaid-like figure connected with healing and fertility. The integration of mythology with the natural environment, particularly water in *Lagoon*, allows Okorafor to point to traditional knowledge and perhaps of a better balance between humanity and the planet, mentioned by Frederick Turner earlier in the importance of epic in human evolution. The authors' employment of the epic hero and mythology elevates the narrative to a higher plane, indicating concerns with matters of planetary survival.

Imagining a future beyond capitalism

While Africanfuturist novels use elements of mythology and folklore to explore the temporality of the environmental crisis, they also use typical science fiction techniques of cognitive estrangement to critique socio-political-economic issues in the here and now, in particular, capitalist neoliberalism that continues to extract resources from Nigeria. "Science fiction is one of the greatest and most effective forms of political writing. It is all about the question: 'what if?'" says Okorafor in a TED talk "For Africans, home-grown science fiction can be a will to power" ("Sci-Fi Stories That Imagine a Future Africa "). For while these narratives are purportedly set in a future Nigeria, they are the creations of writers deeply concerned with the Nigeria of the early 21st century, our now. They explore a futurity beyond "the conditions of capitalist realism [that] reduce any notions of the future to a mere extension or intensification of the conditions of the present" (O'Connell "We Are Change" footnote 3). This is particularly important when considering ecological issues: how can changes be made in the now to prevent future catastrophe. The novels explore the 'culture of extraction' as outlined by Buell:

> "[The] 'culture of extraction' that has powered industrial modernization swaddles its beneficiaries in material comforts and conveniences, from central heating and SUVs to laptops and iPhones that largely buffer them existentially from direct contact with their negative externalities: the costs and consequences, both environmental and human, of production and disposal."
>
> (414)

This points to a clear differentiation between the experience powered by extraction, in the Global North, and the experience of extraction itself, for instance in the Niger Delta. I argue that the novels dispute modernity's assumption that this extraction-powered development is a progressive, forward movement through temporality, something that is beneficial and necessary. Instead, there are non-linear ways of thinking and imagining with the past and future intertwined, as so masterfully portrayed through Thompson's time-hopping literary structure. They ask if different futures are possible, and by giving the Global South's past centrality, we can redirect the path forward. Buell's use of the word 'swaddles' also suggests a lack of individual agency, with beneficiaries being little more than cogs in the machine, reliant on capitalism for its largesse, but also trapped within its restraints. This may suggest that the 'unswaddled' in the Global South have greater agency for change than is often thought; something that is reflected in the novels' energetic, world-changing protagonists.

Thompson provides a hard-hitting appraisal of his native Nigeria with his narrative centred on an alien biodome that supposedly heals the sick and injured, but, in reality, infiltrates the population with alien spores as part of a long-drawn-out invasion plan, which can be read as an allegory for colonialisation of the mind, something Thompson himself suggests, in a 2017 interview (Chela). This toxicity disguised as beneficence mirrors the 'aid' provided by many neoliberal agencies that often impairs rather than helps. The title of the trilogy and the alien that sustains the biodome, Wormwood, encapsulates the ambiguity and complexity of the relationship between the aliens and Rosewater and between Western aid agencies and Nigeria, as the herb wormwood has both toxic and some medicinal qualities, considered moderately poisonous, in contrast with the rosy prospects suggested by the name Rosewater, indicating the novel's multiple layers of ambivalence. The biodome exerts a certain sinister fascination, extending electricity-sparking ganglia into the air and spreading underground as it colonises the Earth. When Kaaro first enters the biodome, on an intelligence gathering mission as a reluctant agent for the Nigerian secret service, he finds a seemingly pastoral ideal, but soon discovers more sinister facets.

> Every few yards there is a mound of hard flesh, tumours, extrusions from Wormwood isolating toxins that xenoforms cannot neutralise. The tumours are safe, but I did not believe there was anything Wormwood could not render harmless and recycle. It introduces uncertainty.
>
> (Thompson *Rosewater* 355)

This evidence of toxicity – a toxicity that abounds in 21st century Nigeria – is mirrored by the xenosphere, a sort of psychic network powered by alien spores that allows some humans known as sensitives to read other people's thoughts and in some cases assert mind control, with Thompson here again alluding to colonisation of the mind. This influence from the Global North is part of O'Connell's analysis of the novel's political and environmental apocalyptic aspects, and the ways it "wrestles with futurity at a time when so many potential futures seem to be annulled by the twinned forces of economic globalisation and the Anthropocene" ("Everything Is Changed" 109). Thompson makes this control through globalisation obvious through his world-building creation of the xenosphere, pointing to the external forces that manipulate the Global South and shackle its future to external whims.

When Kaaro searches for clues to the disappearance of his colleague Bola, whose defences have been destroyed by the aliens, he discovers a scene of appalling devastation. "Now it is putrefying flesh. Every step I take sinks in, and pus wells up …" (*Rosewater* 231). This world of decay highlights how the aliens have already destroyed their own planet and are now looking for a new home, with Thompson continually pointing to the ongoing destruction of *our* own planet. Anthony, the alien avatar, explains the alien strategy to Kaaro:

> We are called footholders, and our function is to descend on planets with fauna and flora from our home world and see if we survive. It is

> a wasteful colonisation technique, but the masters can no longer go back home. They live in space now, but would love to live on a new planet.
>
> (*Rosewater* 348)

As well as this en passant criticism of colonialisation, Thompson uses the imagined planetary destruction to reflect the devastation happening now in Nigeria. The exploitation of oil resources by foreign corporations continues to pollute vast tracts of the Niger delta, decades after Ken Saro-Wiwa's execution, making it uninhabitable. Thompson reflects on this situation with an observation made by Kaaro in Rosewater's year 2066 as he watches a fisherman: "Some poor fool is trying to fish in a canoe in the sluggish flow. He will catch nothing but mutants and disease" (*Rosewater* 362). Thompson's ecological concerns get even more explicit in the second novel, *Rosewater Insurrection*, when Kaaro is offered a pact for his personal survival by the alien avatar called Anthony.

> "You're asking me to help the extinction of my race."
> "You humans are doing a good job of extinctioning each other already. Rosewater is being bombed right now, and that's only one of thirty-three conflicts currently happening around the world. Shall I talk about hydrocarbon waste products? Shall I talk about surface water contamination? Nuclear waste? Stop me when we get to a world-ending scenario that impresses you enough."
>
> (*Rosewater Insurrection* 321-22)

This "world-ending scenario" enables Thompson through the science fiction trope of apocalypse to shock the reader into acknowledging the reality of what *we* are doing to our planet, just as the aliens did to theirs.

The trope of apocalypse is shared by *Lagoon*. This "postcolonial, postapocalyptic Africa is a messy, often ambiguous place", Joshua Yu Burnett writes regarding Okorafor's work (Burnett 148), but it's a statement equally relevant to observed reality in a Nigeria of oil spills and widespread water and air pollution. Green suggests, also referring to Okorafor's writing, that it "is not about escaping from the real", but is always a "response to the world as it is at the moment of writing" (Green 24). Thus, we read *Lagoon's* prologue*,* which begins from the perspective of a swordfish angry at the oil polluting the ocean.

> She is angry. She will succeed and then they will leave for good. They brought the stench of dryness, then they brought noise and made the world bleed black ooze that left poison rainbows on the water's surface.
>
> (*Lagoon* 3)

This may be an imagined moment, but one based in the ravages of the oil industry in Nigeria. It is significant that the narrator here is nonhuman, but more on that in the next chapter. The reference to pollution provides a level of realism to the novel despite its undeniable attempt to "imagine a new global futurity for Nigeria—that is, a condition of radical possibility that breaks with the conditions of capitalist realism" (O'Connell "We Are Change" 292). This is where the imaginaries of science fiction are particularly potent as they allow readers to escape the preconditioned thinking that there is no functional possibility beyond capitalism. Through imagination, changes can be made as broadcast by the alien Ayodele: "THE WINDS OF CHANGE ARE BLOWING. WE ARE CHANGE. YOU WILL SEE" (*Lagoon* 112, original capitals). By merging realism with the fantastical, Okorafor offers a powerful message that a new way of being is indeed possible. The three protagonists rediscover their supernatural powers, along with the creation of beings such as the spider Udide Okwanka, allowing the novel to suggest that change needs to come from within by harnessing Nigeria's innate creativity and energy, as well as reconnecting with the planet in a way beyond simple exploitation.

Although *Lagoon* concludes with a fairly optimistic vision, it shares *David Mogo Godhunter's* critique of the Nigeria of *now*, as a society on the edge. Okungbowa pulls much of the detail directly from the current situation in Nigeria, where despite its extensive oil wealth, energy shortages are pervasive. In the novel's Lagos, David Mogo runs "a 650VA Yamaha generator for three hours every day; just enough to charge our phones and watch the evening news" (Okungbowa 7). The reality of the environmental crisis in Nigeria is also highlighted by David's interlude in Makoko. In 2016, *The Guardian* published a feature article on this floating slum, believed to be the largest in the world, where poverty is endemic and the state of the lagoon a constant health risk (Ogunlesi). After being rescued, David awakens in Makoko to the "smell. Now this, I recognise: the classic Lagos smell of sewage, refuse, spirogyra and faeces all commingling in stagnant water. Stick around long enough and this just becomes part of the air" (Okungbowa 155). Here, with a few carefully crafted lines, Okungbowa illustrates Helgesson's notion of 'living the apocalypse', but, despite the impoverishment of this stilted fishing community that lies between the city and the Third Mainland Bridge (features of the real Lagos), David Mogo is treated with overwhelming kindness and compassion and the community is presented as resourceful and resilient, protected by their own god, Olokun, a character that again reminds the reader of the epic time of both myth and geology, compared with the briefness of the individual human experience and how the 'slow violence' of centuries affects the now and the future.

"In the era of the Anthropocene, … the unpredictable and damaging side effects of modernity proliferate and environmental transformation becomes more and more evident, the future becomes not only radically volatile but also a contested site in global world politics," writes Green in *Environmental Transformations: African Literature Today* (24). Green argues that while *David Mogo* is speculative fiction, Okungbowa deliberately uses the conventions of realism through the accumulation of small details of the everyday to imagine a dystopian-type future, and in so doing "the novel effectively gives shape to the inchoate anxiety about what might emerge after 'the end of the world as we know it'. A form of predictive realism, it extrapolates from elements in the present, to give material weight to a radically uncertain future reality" (Green 28). Okungbowa portrays the chaos as overwhelming, with 'the end of the world' not only looming with the rise of global temperatures, but as the daily uncertain experience of many Nigerians, raising the question of whether it is possible to be concerned about carbon emissions through the stink of sewage. The protagonist, David Mogo, takes on the role of social commentator with his description of Makoko as a place of refugees – Gabonese, Togolese, Beninoise, Ghanaians and Cameroonians – no one wants to be:

> The heavy stench of wet shit smacks my nose … No one wants to leave Ìsàlẹ̀ Èkó to walk on makeshift footbridges of scrapwood plank; no one wants to boast of basic architecture suspended on stilts a few feet above water; no one wants to leave their brick walls in Upper Island to come live in tin-can houses of zinc, thatch, tarpaulin and sacking. The Lagos State Commissioner for Waterfronts literally had Makoko earmarked for demolition right before The Falling.
>
> (Okungbowa 162-3)

Makoko, this place of rising waters with escapees from neighbouring countries, can surely also be read as an allegory for climate refugees as sea levels rise. *David Mogo* uses the destruction of 'home' (even such a basic home as in Makoko) and the resulting chaos as a pertinent warning of the threat to *our* home, the planet. This echoes *Rosewater's* exploration of the aliens' destruction of their home planet. An exploration of apocalypse is the focus of chapter three.

Conclusion

Mbembe suggests in *On the Postcolony* that "Africa is moving in several directions at once, this is a period that, at the same time, has been, is not yet, is no longer, is becoming—in a state of preliminary outline and possibility" (241). This state of flux is illustrated by the *Wormwood trilogy*, *David Mogo: Godhunter* and *Lagoon* as they look both backwards and forwards, while also focussing on the reality of now. By blending the conventions of epic with science fiction, and in the case of the latter two, using real examples of Nigerian mythology, such as Mami Wata and real Yoruba deities, they provide an answer to Ghosh's concerns regarding the role of literature to deal with the planet's ecological crisis. These are novels that provide imaginaries of ways to avoid the rollercoaster ride that is capitalism, with its ever more apparent costs to the environment and certain sectors of society, particularly in the Global South, while remaining rooted in the current reality of Nigeria's economic, political, and social dilemmas. "Some speculative fiction may be unconcerned with realism, but mine sure as heck is deeply concerned with it," asserts Okorafor ("Writing Rage, Truth and Consequence"). Like Okorafor's *Lagoon*, the *Wormwood* trilogy and *David Mogo* never ignore the reality of Nigeria's daily hardships and anxieties, such as the poverty of Makoko, the power shortages and the polluting oil spills. Despite the aliens, gods and mythical beings, the novels' focus is not fantastical, but rather on possible ways for African to get out of Le Guin's trap of a "one-way future consisting only of growth" (84). The analysis in this chapter shows how these Africanfuturist novels illuminate the possibilities in a world that already feels in many ways apocalyptic while exposing an experience of living that is alien to many residents of the Global North, for example in Makoko. These possibilities may have been compromised by centuries of extraction without fair recompense, followed by decades of neoliberal policies that are skewed in favour of the West, but the stories matter, they charge optimism, inspire hope, to paraphrase Okorafor's definition of the genre, while all the time warning of the heavy price of our reluctance to engage with the environmental crisis.

Carl Death argues that Okorafor's novels "make an important contribution to imagining and practising new genres of the human" within this era of planetary crisis (Death 243). I suggest that other Africanfuturist novels, such as the *Wormwood* trilogy and *David Mogo*, also follow this quest to discover new ways of being human in "the context of necropolitical carboniferous capitalism" (Death 247). Their use of science fiction techniques de-familiarises the present so as to portray the possibility of alternative ways of living, providing new ways of thinking that are crucial if *we* are to survive the Anthropocene, while climbing out of the spiral of inequality. But who is the 'we' *we* are trying to save? Seeing humans at the very centre of things, giving *us* primacy, may simply be pursuing the same path that led *us* to this point in the first place. In the next chapter, I explore this human primacy over the nonhuman, and new relationships within an intertwined planet.

Chapter 2: Ecologies of the post- and nonhuman

> We disagree about social change. We disagree about who we are and who we ought to be.
> We disagree about the very word. "We." We are all in this together, we are all born equal, but we are not all equally responsible and we do not all fare equally well.
> Who do you see in that mirror? Are you one of the Gods? Belonging to the God species?
> Then, what do Gods do these days? How do they go about their business?
> And— why does your face look so tired?
>
> (Sörlin 172)

The rational, autonomous individual at the centre of Western civilisation, who was king (masculine gender used deliberately) of all he surveyed, has been confronted with a mirror suggests Sverker Sörlin in his chapter "The Mirror— Testing the Counter-Anthropocene" in the 2018 book *Future Remains*. What is seen is "not just *one* world where a separate humanity impacts on everything nonhuman but a world of increasing entanglements across scales and species and forms of being in the world and thus a world of multiple becomings" (173). The entanglement of all life on this planet exists in multiple different ways, from the microbial level of bacteria in our guts to a dependence on global carbon levels and the related rising ocean levels. This chapter advances the argument that Thompson employs both science fiction and mythological imaginaries to explore the post- and nonhuman relationship in his *Wormwood* trilogy*,* subverting the human-centric conception of the Anthropocene, while comparing his vision with that of other Africanfuturist novels set in Nigeria, namely *Lagoon*, *David Mogo Godhunter* and *After the Flare*.

Posthumanism rejects the humanist assumption that *we* are both rational and reasonable and can be easily distinguished from animals and other nonhumans, suggesting instead that this dividing line is as not fixed as once believed. Donna

Haraway's seminal work, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, rejects the isolation and ascendance of the human. "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" ("How We Became Posthuman" 155). This entanglement with technology is a central theme of the *Wormwood* trilogy, with none of the characters free from xenoform infection/infiltration. Moving from technology to the nonhuman life on this planet, M, Jessica L Horton and Janet Catherine Berlo argue that "matter – whether in the forest or the lab – has agency, can move, act, assume volition, and even enjoy degrees of intelligence often assumed to be the unique domain of human subjectivity" (Horton and Berlo 17). The recognition of the nonhuman's agency challenges the primacy of the human and *our* right to control and own the nonhuman. Given the engagement with colonialism throughout the *Wormwood* trilogy, it is useful to compare with the way black bodies were used by colonisers as resources (Hanchey "The Self Is Embodied" 328), with how *we* treat the nonhuman as resources. This process is mirrored by Thompson, initially through his infiltration of the human by the alien microbes, and later through the alien appropriation of the bodies of the dead.

Examining humans as part of the world, and not overlords of it, interrogates the concept of Cartesian dualism that developed alongside the philosophical stance of humanism over the same period that European states were expanding their control across the globe. In *The Nutmeg's Curse*, Ghosh elucidates this notion that spread alongside colonialism:

> This was a radically new way of envisioning the Earth, as 'a vast machine made of inert particles in ceaseless motion.' Even in Europe, the mechanistic vision of the world had only just begun to take shape, and then too, only among elites that were directly or indirectly involved in the two great European projects of the time: the conquest of the Americas and the trade in enslaved Africans … Above all, it was the subjugation, and repopulating, of the Americas that enabled educated, upper-class European men to think of themselves as

> subduers of all they surveyed, even in their own countries, and especially within that domain they conceived of as 'Nature' -- an inert repository of resources, which in order to be 'improved,' needed to be expropriated …"
>
> (Ghosh *The Nutmeg's Curse* 37)

Thompson's aliens treat human is a similar way to which the European colonists treated Africans, and as *we* all treat the nonhuman world. Ghosh's apostrophes on 'nature' highlight the artificial boundary between humans and the rest of the planet and ask for a rethinking of the way this 'repository of resources' is viewed. Africanfuturism provides an alternative worldview than the one presented by colonialists, one that "does not privilege or center the West", as in Okorafor's definition of the genre ("Africanfuturism Defined"), a worldview that interrogates the primacy of humanity and provides an alternative lens through which to grapple with the twin concerns of the Anthropocene outlined in the last chapter: the environmental crisis and immense global inequalities. This is the setting of the *Wormwood* trilogy, wherein Thompson, a psychiatrist as well as a writer, explores what it means to be human from two angles, the incorporation of technology and the re-inclusion of 'nature'. In the *Great Derangement*, Ghosh suggests that the trajectory of modernity, with its attendant industrialisation "reinforced the mind-body dualism to the point of producing the illusion, so powerfully propagated in cyberspace, that human beings have freed themselves from their material circumstances to the point where they have become floating personalities 'decoupled from a body'" (161). This concept has alarming implications for the way *we* treat the material. The elevation of mind over body depreciates the value of the material and allows *us* to treat it will a lack of respect that has resulted in the large-scale environmental degradation and pollution seen in the Anthropocene.

Is humanity embodied?

In the *Wormwood* trilogy, this decoupling of body from mind is investigated from several positions. Firstly, the aliens themselves are no longer embodied, but are digitally stored on servers on a moon on the other side of the galaxy, after their destruction of their planet, and have sent a 'footholder' to discover a new home for them. In the second book, *Rosewater Insurrection*, the aliens start moving these stored consciousnesses into the bodies of recently dead humans, a move opposed by the Rosewater mayor's wife Hannah Jacques, who tackles the alien representative: "You haven't saved your planet or your people… What you've done instead is commit mass suicide. The mind is an illusion, a hologram generated by the body. What you've encoded is memory, and personhood is not just memories. Personhood is embodied" (*Rosewater Insurrection* 373). This mass suicide foreshadows *our* own actions in destroying this planet, but also emphasises the intersection of mind and matter, how humankind is part of this entangled planet and cannot survive without it.

This is juxtaposed with the experiences of the digital ghost that is Oyin Da and the protagonist Kaaro's own experience in the non-material xenosphere, where he can read and control minds. In Oyin Da's words: "The xenosphere is a thoughtspace connecting all humans to each other by way of alien bioengineered neurones in the atmosphere... Some alien consciousnesses are in there as well as some copies of personalities of dead humans. Ghosts. Like me" (*Rosewater Redemption* 87). This depiction of mind/body separation exposes the limitations of Cartesian dualism, and how this philosophy "authorized the foundational capitalist imperative to own and control nature" (Horton and Berlo 18). But Thompson is cognisant of the complexity of the issue, illustrating through his description of the xenosphere the ways in which human consciousness has been extended by technology, a common trope in science fiction, so as to provide greater connections between individuals and ideas. N. Katherine Hayles's 1999 book *How We Became Posthuman* examines Hans Moravec's proposal "that human identity is essentially an informational pattern rather than an embodied enaction" (Hayles xii). In *Redemption*, the final book in the trilogy, this position is taken up by both Kaaro and Oyin Da in the scene in which they recognise that by destroying the servers containing the data that is all that is left of the alien Homians they are essentially committing genocide.

> "Excuse me," says Kaaro. "Why is nobody talking about how this is fucking genocide?"
>
> …
>
> "They are not really alive," says Femi. "They are not even ghosts. They are data, stored because of faulty philosophy, bodies long gone."
>
> "We are all data, Femi," says Kaaro. "You may be wet data in a moist medium, but you're data all the same. Like me. Like them."
>
> (*Rosewater Redemption* 326)

The genocide committed in *Resurrection* prognosticates a similar outcome on Earth if we continue to elevate the human above all other types of being and the delinking from materiality, while also acknowledging the informational patterns that do construct human identity. The discussion of who qualifies as a 'being' – the Homians, Oyin Da, Kaaro (before and after death as Kaaro's ghost persists) – and who/what should be protected is debated throughout in the trilogy, (and is something that concerns Okorafor in *Lagoon* too, with a surprisingly similar invasion by microbes).

Tade's symbolism is complicated and represents the disparate elements within Kaaro's character, as he is both hero and anti-hero. His avatar in the xenosphere is a gryphon – "It isn't cuddly. Both the eagle and the lion part are pretty predatory. They like to kill and eat things" (*Rosewater* 310). As well as suggesting an absorption of colonial influences – the gryphon is a legendary European beast – it also represents the human entanglement with the nonhuman. Kaaro is not one thing, but many – part alien from the xenoforms in his bloodstream, part thief, part superhero who saves his planet, part datastream, part monster. Kaaro is initially presented by Aminat (later his lover and an important character in all three books) as "[g]ood-looking, single, has a reasonable job, and is not a dog" (*Rosewater* 38) but his name means "All Yoruba-speaking peoples or lands" (*Rosewater* 37), suggesting something of an everyman and more than just a handsome small-time thief (and perhaps a guardian of the planet). This deepening of his character is intensified through the juxtaposition of his often unscrupulous behaviour with his inner wranglings, illustrated by his resistance to reading Aminat's thoughts: "The temptation to look into her head is overwhelming, but I resist" (*Rosewater* 38). Kaaro's acknowledgement of his own flaws, past and present, suggests that the actions required to make changes that can save the planet need not be confined to the strong or the righteous. His lack of righteousness and the very contamination by the aliens themselves do not prevent him from ultimately becoming a hero.

Influence by external factors has forever altered the way of 'being' in Africa. This hybridity is ongoing, through language (English is the official language of Nigeria), economic policies and environmental practices. In *Afropolitan*, Mbembe tackles this mixing, blending of beings:

> Our way of belonging to the world, of being in the world and inhabiting it, has always been marked by if not cultural mixing, then at least the interweaving of worlds, in a slow and sometimes incoherent dance with forms and signs that we have not been able to choose freely but which we have succeeded, as best we can, in domesticating and putting at our disposal.
>
> (Mbembe and Chauvet 59)

Mbembe's notion of interwoven worlds (59) is taken up in Olukotun's examination of the posthuman through multi-layered depictions of new, hybrid life forms in *After the Flare.* The protagonist Kwesi Brackett's disconnection of self runs throughout the novel, his identity fractured by his retreat from North America where he left behind a daughter, ex-wife and position with NASA. His isolation, both personally and professionally, is profound. He struggles to make contact with his daughter at university and lives in a small caravan, while he worries that his superiors are not satisfied with his work. The narrative plays with the idea of alien/alienation in a different way from *Rosewater* and *Lagoon* that have actual aliens making their presence felt. Besides diasporic identity, Olukotun also uses technology to portray the posthuman in its extension of selfhood, a science trope seen in *Rosewater* too with the locator chips used to track people. The mobile technology imagined in *After* *the Flare* – the Geckofone – allows characters to assume different identities, and while this provides flexibility (gender can be switched to avoid prejudice) it also produces insecurity and social anxiety.

> "Turn off your identity," Josephine announced over an intercom. "You're not cleared under Hausa."
> "It's my default."
> "Switch your tribe to American, That's what you are."
> (Olukotun 35)

The thematic interrogation of 'authentic' or pure African identity is raised through the characterisation of Brackett himself, as well as others, such as the politician Nurudeen Bello who uses "an ebony-skinned Yoruba avatar" but who Brackett encounters in the flesh in a "heather-gray Western-style suit with tan calfskin oxfords that matched his belt" (87). This multiplicity is shown to be neither positive or negative, but a tool that can be used to negotiate a way forward in the hybridity of the postcolonial era. Having a malleable identity and viewpoint sees Brackett responding in more satisfying and successful ways than if he had remained fixed and inflexible, and this fluidity benefits the Nigerian Space Agency. "Responses to colonialism that imagine either an 'authentic' precolonial past or a future premised on a complete break with the oppressive past are not mutually exclusive," suggests Kotecki (166). Neither are these imagined responses are realistic as the multiplicity of identity revealed in *After the Flare* demonstrates. The layers of self cannot be peeled off and separated, with culture interwoven and mixed. Olukotun's exploration of this heterogeneity offers an optimistic view of the future postcolony where people can embrace aspects of a variety of identities.

The concoction that has resulted from colonisation and globalisation has led to a heterogeneity of being among humans that mirrors the diversity of other life on Earth, with humans being only a small part of Mbembe's "slow and sometimes incoherent dance" (Mbembe and Chauvet 59). Rigid divisions between different humans and between humans and nonhumans are illusionary and ultimately prevent us moving forward together to a new way of living and being. Kaaro and Oyin Da are part alien, part machine, but this does not prevent them getting beyond "human exceptionalism … to feel responsibility for one another and for the land [they] walk upon" (Mackey 541). Thompson stresses the entanglement of life on this planet through his metaphor of fungi and spores (Crane 463) – with his creation of antifungal cream as a guard against the mind reading that is possible through access to the xenosphere (*Rosewater* 61) – that are inescapable as slowly they infiltrate all the characters.

This combining of life rather than dividing it is also central to *Lagoon*, which O'Connell reads as a "powerfully utopian vision in which the violence of the alien revolution is recast into the production of new life" ("We Are Change" 308). Likewise, Hanchey suggests that *Lagoon* is not about alien conquest, but rather them joining and enabling an already vital, dynamic community (Hanchey "Desire and Politics" 119). This state of being, that is not just one thing but many, resulting from the microbe invasion, is posthuman and opens the way for new possibilities. The alien Ayodele takes on human form initially, explaining that humans are unable to relate to anything that does not resemble them (Okorafor 61). She/it deliberately resembles Adaora, one of the three humans pulled into the lagoon by the wave generated by the alien invasion. Another alien, who personifies a human camera operator while the president broadcasts his speech of welcome (or defeat) – the "woman who was not a woman's fingertips were in the camera" (Okorafor *Lagoon* 269) – further illustrates the new hybridity that is now part of the nation, suggesting that new ways of being come from this entwining of life forms. Okorafor extends this idea of fusion with the president's suggestion that this blending is required between Nigerians themselves, not just with the aliens.

> "There are others amongst us here in Lagos. They intend to stay. And I am happy about it. They have new technology, they have fresh ideas that we can combine with our own… o! People of Lagos, especially, look at your neighbor. See his race, tribe, or his alien blood. And call him brother. We have much work to do as a family."

(Okorafor *Lagoon* 270)

These novels depict a hybridity of being, that illustrates ways *we* can live in better harmony, something of critical important at this moment in the Anthropocene.

The posthuman: aliens, cyborgs, monsters, superheroes and gods

The trope of alien invasion in science fiction has been used in many varied and imaginative ways since H. G. Wells brought the Martians to Earth in 1897. Postcolonial readings often question who the alien actually is, while both *Rosewater* and *Lagoon* explore the alien as being part of *us* with the incorporation of alien microbes into the human population, subverting the idea of the alien being beyond or distinct from the human. In ecocritical readings, humans may be seen as the alien, corrupting, destroying, and controlling the nonhuman. I explore the notion of the alien as, separately and in combination, monstrous, godlike, or robotic, within the context of both Okorafor's definition of Africanfuturism as possibly including both "mystical elements" and "technology or space travel" ("Africanfuturism Defined") and Haraway's view that *we* all are now cyborgs (Haraway "How We Became Posthuman" 155).

Enhancement through technology can be viewed as acceptable when it enhances effectiveness and productivity, suggests Gaia Giuliani in *Monsters, Catastrophes and the Anthropocene*, but "unruly metamorphoses have been generally regarded as monstrous" (Giuliani 177). Monsters appear in *Rosewater*, where the symbiosis between mind and matter is explored through the reanimates that populate the books, initially as zombie-like creatures and later as Frankenstein-like monsters. Reanimates are created, in the first book, when the healing microbes from the biodome infect the recently dead and they are resurrected, but apparently without cognitive functions. At other times the 'healing' goes wrong and the result can be strange and monstrous. Some humans subvert the process, sometimes deliberately injuring themselves to receive "reconstructive surgery" (*Rosewater* 9), as for instance in the case of the "sex worker with two phalluses which he hoped would mean he could charge his clients double, but instead disgusts them" (*Rosewater* 325) and the mercenary who spent over a decade cutting himself so as to reconstruct the perfect weapon, a tentacle that can be used in a variety of effective ways (*Rosewater Insurrection* 307). This provides a darker lens on the what Samatar sees as an "Afrofuturistic bricolage… black people's right to use whatever is at hand, to enter the technologically enhanced future through whatever door is closest and to do so without assimilation into a global monoculture" ("Toward a Planetary History" 178). A different imagined future in *After the Flare* depicts new technology working in a cooperative bricolage*,* as Nigeria, with help from India, must rescue the last survivor stranded in the International Space Station following a massive solar flare that has precipitated technological failure across most of the globe. The space launch is threatened by an attack from a rebel group and the mission is ultimately saved by the last surviving members of a matriarchal nomadic tribe, the Wodaabe, who can harness the energy of ancient amulets, the songstones. The adventure includes the discovery of remnants of the advanced Iron Age culture, the Nok: "… a civilization that once possessed technologies as great as our own. A civilization forged right here in Nigeria that captured the imagination of kings and queens living on the other side of the world" (Olukotun 189). Here Olukotun reanimates the history of an ancient Nigerian culture but unlike the zombie-like beings back from the dead in *Rosewater*, the Nok has revitalised as heroes: "I think the first flare ignited the civilization of the Nok… The Nok are still alive" (Olukotun 170). The Nok represent another new form of being that can permit survival in a post-apocalyptic world, as *we* need to adapt if *we* are to survive in the Anthropocene.

Thompson carefully unpicks the mind/body relationship in *Rosewater Insurrection*, where Aminat, Kaaro's partner and one of the central characters in the series, strikes a deal with the invaders, giving them the bodies of the dead in exchange for human survival.

> "The reanimates," says Aminat. "They are empty of souls, like the wooden carving. They are so devoid of will even Kaaro can control them. Your people can transmit their consciousness into them and live

> here, with us, side by side. And when our people die, you can simply transmit into that body. Your culture, your civilisation can start a new chapter living with humans in harmony."
>
> "Since when have humans lived in harmony with anybody? Even with each other?"
>
> (*Rosewater Insurrection* 362-3)

The suggestion that humans are incapable of living harmoniously, made here by the alien avatar in response to Aminat's suggestion, is particularly relevant to the way *we* live with other species and *our* destructive overlordship of the planet. *We* become the monsters. This includes the extraction of resources through colonisation, the heavy costs of which Thompson makes several references to, including the backstory of Kaaro's 'employer/minder', Femi, head of a secret division of the Nigerian government, who tells of the story of the first contact her family's village had with a white man. When one of the man's accompanying Yoruba porters warned the villagers to put the white man to death, they ignored him and ultimately this led to the village being colonised. "Only malaria and indirect rule attenuated the harshness of the colonists" (*Rosewater Redemption* 337). But he does not absolve Nigerians of responsibility, as in *Rosewater Insurrection*, Thompson introduces an organisation called the Tired ones, a group of men and women intent on invigorating and reinventing their country. The mayor of Rosewater, Jack Jacques, is part of this secret organisation and he recalls his induction into the group: "There are those of us in society, in black African society, who are tired. Our leaders have, through the decades, established a reputation for being incompetent, despotic and unsuited to power… Swiss bank accounts swell with funds from our coffers, yet cannot be recovered even when we prove the money was stolen" (*Rosewater Insurrection* 202). Thus, Thompson acknowledges the past, but does not absolve the present, as both contain examples of monstrous behaviour: the monsters are not just aliens.

Beyond the reanimates and the humans digitally enhanced through the xenosphere, Thompson examines what it is to be human from yet another angle with his creation of the mayor's trusted assistant, Lora, in *Rosewater Insurrection*. The reader is not immediately made aware of *her* 'construct' status, but as this is revealed so is the gradual realisation that *she* is more than human, not less than –"it's like she and Jack have developed telepathy between them" (*Rosewater Insurrection* 107), but she is "a woman manufactured, not born" (*Rosewater Insurrection* 239). The reader follows Lora's story as she falls in love with Walter, a writer hired to share Rosewater's wartime experience as a propaganda exercise, her mourning of Walter when he is killed during the civil war, and her development into one of the trilogy's most intriguing characters, who realises that "luxury means separation from people who cannot afford it" (*Rosewater Redemption* 174). This is an important discovery in a country known for its huge inequality, both within itself and between itself and developed countries. That it is made by a robot, alone among the vast character cast, is telling of Thompson's critique of both his motherland and the global economy as he combines imaginaries of the nonhuman with the realities of the Anthropocene.

Thompson acknowledges the complexity of the posthuman with his unrelenting excavation of the theme. In opposition to Lora, Thompson creates the Machinery, "people who seek tranquillity by removing emotion from their lives" (*Rosewater Insurrection* 297). These humans wish to disengage from the rest of humanity, embracing instead the dispassionate rationality of the nonhuman. Finally, Thompson presents the synners, Homians who, upon taking up residence in a human body, "love to transgress and they treat humans like they're not real" (*Rosewater Redemption* 74). As their minds can be transferred from one body to another, they are essentially immortal, lords of all they survey, harking back to the colonialist vision of (some) humans being entitled to do as they please with the world and other humans.

Moving from the tropes of science fiction to the more fantastical, mythological elements included in Africanfuturism, Okungbowa presents equally immoral gods in *David Mogo: Godhunter,* interrogating this elevation of beings, one over the other, with the gods claiming the Earth as their own just as humans have long asserted their own dominion over the planet. By using the motif of fallen gods, Okungbowa dissects how figures of authority cannot be trusted, but rather are harbingers of destruction: "People say gods are wise, and I've always believed it. Today I don't think I've ever seen a more stupid god" (37). This also raises the question of what 'gods' to follow in postcolonial times, what beliefs to follow if the ideology of neoliberalism has been revealed as hollow. The novel follows David's journey of self-discovery as he accepts the powers that are within: "All you need to do is unlock who you are, and you will become an equal for all powers in this world and others" (169). The similarities with Kaaro's development from anti-hero to world saviour in the *Wormwood* trilogy suggest, I believe, the possibility, and necessity, of *our* adaption as a species if *we* are to meet future challenges. As a half god of war and fire, David must use his rage, his vengeance carefully without destroying himself and others. He must also come to terms with his dual nature to find a way to save both gods and humans. Kehinda, Taiwo's twin, points out David Mogo's own duality:

> "So you're on their side now? Do you think the same thing they do? You think us alien, an infestation of parasites come to take over your world? But you see, there's no difference between how you, David Mogo, find yourself in this world, and how we find ourselves here."
>
> (Okungbowa 43)

Similarly, Olukotun's super beings are drawn from Nigeria's past, underscoring an often ignored and undervalued history, and part of what Okorafor calls "the seamless blend of true existing African spiritualities and cosmologies with the imaginative" ("Africanfuturism Defined"). The gods are replaced with superheroes in *Lagoon* with a trio of protagonists having powers that are beyond the scope of the ordinary human. Agu believes that his super-human strength "came from the Ancestors or the soil or whatever" (Okorafor *Lagoon* 271), while Adora's powers herald from African deity Mami Wata. The imagery of "an infestation of parasites come to take over [the] world" (Okungbowa 43) can apply equally to *David Mogo*, *Rosewater* and *Lagoon*, while also harking back to the extraction of resources from the Global South. However, by shifting perspective we might find useful properties in the ‘parasites’ that could, in a collaborative, bricolage fashion, be allies rather than foes, harking back to fungal networks that provide networks instead of divisions.

The nonhuman: increasing entanglements

All these monsters, cyborgs, gods and superbeings, representing the posthuman, are just part of the lifeforms inhabiting the Africanfuturist universe. The novels debate whether humankind is really a superior being entitled to use other entities as resources, suggesting instead that humans are but just one of many beings living on this planet. This multitude, of human and nonhuman, is entangled. “The world itself is not human, but teems with organisms and life forms parallel to but distinct from our species,” writes Rosi Braidotti ("Metamorphic others and nomadic subjects"). Moreover, it is not just the heterogeneity of life that is important, but the reliance of one on the other. In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, a book investigating alternative ways of being in a post-capitalist world, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing argues that “staying alive – for every species – requires livable collaborations. Collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination” (28). The heroics of Kaaro and David Mogo are not the actions of isolated individuals, but spring from collaboration and integration with others, both human and nonhuman.

In *Rosewater*, the entanglement and collaboration of the diversity of humankind with the planet is explored in various ways. Initially Thompson uses the science fiction trope of body invasion, as microbe xenoforms infiltrate humans, to explore what it means to be human. Towards the end of the first book in the trilogy, Oyin Da tells Kaaro that despite being twenty-nine percent machine and using micro-electrodes to regulate her mood she is not a robot. “We are all part machine, Kaaro. Your phone is a polymer under the skin of your hand. You have a locator chip in your head” (Thompson *Rosewater* 376). This merging with and indeed, dependence on, both technology and nonhuman lifeforms (such as bacteria) is no longer confined to the realms of science fiction, but Thompson’s imaginaries go further with the two hybrid alien-human avatars who are intertwined with the footholder, the organic entity sent by the Homians to discover possible habitats, that burrows the earth's surface, but is itself too alien to communicate directly with humans. The co-dependency of the two different types are aliens mirrors the human entanglement with other earthly matter (planet, animal or mineral) that Thompson ponders on throughout the trilogy.

The first avatar, Anthony, uses the body of a homeless man and is able to commune with the planet itself, smelling of "crushed vegetation" and wearing plants he has grown himself (*Rosewater* 246). Anthony demonstrates the ability to grow new body parts as required, much as plants and some animals can do, reinforcing his nonhumanness. Initially he appears to be immortal, but is finally killed by a plant known as Strain-516, a controlling species created by the Homians to stop unwanted footholder spread (*Rosewater Insurrection* 161). Thompson's creation of this plant speaks to the environmental argument for preserving biodiversity: that as yet an undiscovered or little-known plant may contain the cure for a dread disease; an argument that stresses the symbiotic relationship between all living and non-living entities. Thompson kicks the ecological theme into top gear after Anthony's death, with the Homians taking over the body of a human called Alyssa, who then becomes known as Koriko. The entanglement between all things is illustrated through this character that has elements of the human, alien and nonhuman: "She is the city and the city is her. Wormwood's nerves run up the walls of every structure, reticulated under the topsoil, in the river. Everything is hers, everything is her" (*Rosewater Redemption* 4). The Homians discovery, due to the destruction of their own planet, that all things are interdependent, is deeply ironic given the hubris on the planet they are slowly invading. This recalls the conclusion of the first novel, where Thompson explicitly critiques our arrogance towards the planet: "... it's like climate change or that asteroid that will collide with the Earth and wipe us out. We all think we'll be dead and gone by the time the carnage begins" (*Rosewater* 390). The Homians destruction of their planet mirrors our own and Thompson pulls no punches in drawing this parallel.

Thompson's characterisation of Koriko continues his philosophical examination of the human-nonhuman amalgamation:

> *Koriko means Grass*
> She likes the mornings. She likes to hear the earthworms gently turning in the soil and the birds trying out their songs, and to feel the moistness of morning dew. The sun is just over the horizon and the new brightness causes a surge in all the life forms that surround Alyssa, including the humans and her people, the Homians. She has slept outside again, and from the crystals on her body, tendrils have grown into the soil and branched, covering her with a burst of delicate, branching stems. She yawns and breaks it all off by stretching, then stands.
>
> (*Rosewater Redemption* 3)

Through the very meaning of Koriko's name Thompson emphasises the indissoluble ties between all life on the planet, a point he stresses further by surrounding her with so many different forms of life. By using such lyrical language when dealing with Koriko's communing with 'nature' – the gently turning earthworms, the delicate tendrils, the crystals – Thompson recalls European romanticism, and with it, an era of world domination by one group of humans over all other life, while paradoxically also suggesting a way of living before the Cartesian duality set human over nonhuman. The tension created by this juxtaposition is one of the key elements of the *Wormwood* trilogy with Thompson constantly weighing complex, and often contradictory, perspectives. Thompson uses the character of Koriko to explore this interdependence with the nonhuman, showing her as a powerful figure both revered and feared by humans, ruthless in her pursuit of bodies for the Homians waiting as data in their moon's servers. This ruthlessness, that can perhaps be labelled 'inhumanity', is illustrated by her appropriation of the bodies of children killed during Rosewater's civil war when she commands Wormwood to send tendrils through to soil to claim their bodies despite "fierce, futile supplications from parents" (*Rosewater Redemption* 4). In *Envisioning Posthumanism,* Giovanni Aloi and Susan Mchugh define naturecultures as a term that signifies refusal to separate (human) meaning and creativity from (nonhuman) matter and decay. "Recognizing that we inhabit naturecultures commits us to the development of sufficiently complex ethical frameworks; seeing how humans live only ever with others applies productive pressure to our thinking through the heterogeneity of all of 'us''"(7-8). This 'us' is not just the diverse posthumans that inhabit this planet during the Anthropocence, but also nonhumans.

This diversity is apparent throughout *Lagoon* too: from the introduction of the swordfish in the prologue onwards, creatures are active participants, and at one point it seems as if they will triumph over the humans as "… armored fish, spiked fish, monstrous sharks, a giant swordfish" come "bearing down on the boat" carrying the human protagonists. (*Lagoon* 245). Okorafor extends the community to other nonhumans, seeking their collaboration in the negotiations, following the invasion, that take place underwater: "They were at the bottom of the ocean in a bubble created by aliens, surrounded by sea monsters" (253). In this way, *Lagoon* suggests that humans are not the only beings worthy of alien interest, but that the nonhuman have agency too. Lavender and Yaszek argue that Okorafor "flips the anthropocentric priorities of the global North by treating both human and animals as Earthlings who aliens would be equally interested in contacting" (198-9), as illustrated in this scene:

> Beyond the President and the Elders, [Adaora] could see a very large swordfish monster hovering in the background … sea creatures from fish to sea cucumbers clung, swam through, crawled and wiggled past. Adaora could not tell which were the aliens and which were the earthlings.
>
> (Okorafor *Lagoon* 246)

From sea cucumbers to the mighty swordfish, all are treated with respect by the aliens, and by having Adaora confuse the earthlings with the aliens, Okorafor illustrates not only the otherness of the sea creatures, but that they have an agency that has long been overlooked. The alien's repudiation of the extraction of fossil fuels is not for the sole benefit of humans, but for all beings, as illustrated by

Okorafor's imagery of the swordfish, from the prologue, rejoicing in the clean ocean at the end of the novel: "So she swims around the underwater part of the visitor's home three times. As she does so, she inhales the sweet, sweet water" (Okorafor *Lagoon* 283). Okorafor's uses the imagery of a swordfish, in particular with its weaponised bill, to suggest that the nonhuman can be a fearful opponent if humanity continues to destroy the planetary home of *us* all.

This agency of the nonhuman also be read in *After the Flare,* where Olukotun's use of the songstones as a critical intervention in the mission to rescue to stranded astronaut can be interpreted as an example of Horton's agency of matter (Horton and Berlo 17). Bracket finds himself humming a song from these 'inanimate' objects.

> And still Bracket heard the song. He felt it inside him now. There. There was the source of the kingdom. There was the coiled-up, thigh-burning sprint. The rush of air around the brow. The beats surging in the blood. The dream that would sling them forward.
>
> (Olukotun 290-1)

Here it is not just living beings that have agency, but the very matter that surrounds *us* – the source of kingdom, as in the building blocks of all things. By polluting the nonhuman elements of the planet, such as water, soil, the gases of the atmosphere, the living face annihilation. However, in *After the Flare*, Olukotun's entanglement of human and nonhuman allows for the novel to conclude on a buoyant note, with the songstones playing a crucial role in the success of the mission to save the stranded astronaut. I believe this narrative offers an example of the impact stories can have by providing an imaginary that may "sling [us] forward" through its demonstration of entangled survival.

Conclusion

The heterogeneity of beings is central to an ecological reading of the novels, imagining different ways of being and revealing the interconnectedness of all things, posthuman and nonhuman. Thompson's *Wormwood* trilogy dissects this intertwining of all things from a variety of different angles, from the physical colonisation by microbe to the invasion of human bodies by alien beings, from a partial integration with technology to the complete submersion into the digital, exploring *our* position on the planet, *our* responsibilities and *our* culpabilities, and interrogates the credence the very term 'Anthropocene' gives to human-centeredness, suggesting that humans are just one of the entities that call Earth home.

Both Okorofar and Olukotun present moderately optimistic visions of the human experience on an Earth faced with calamity offering imaginaries of (some) hope, thus combatting the utter defeatism sometimes elicited by the seeming unstoppable nature of climate change. Okorofor's inclusion of African mythology and the novel's energy engenders a feeling of buoyancy from a synergy between human and nonhuman, such as the spider Udide promising solidarity with the humans. Likewise, Olukotun uses real history to suggest that Nigeria need not be reliant on technology from the Global North, but can excavate traditional knowledge associated with ancient history such as the Nok to build a successful symbiosis between the planet's heterogenous beings. The co-dependence of humans and nonhuman is central to the *Wormwood* trilogy as illustrated through the creation of Koriko, who is entangled with both alien organisms and Earthly beings, and the example of the Homian's destruction of their planet. Through this narrative, Thompson probes a darker outcome, with an examination of genocide, both of the Homians and of ourselves, as *we* appear increasingly set on annihilating ourselves as a species, as well as the planet as a whole and all other entities living here, presenting *us* with an imminent apocalypse. An apocalypse that incorporates the ongoing environmental devastation along with the dislocation of human and nonhuman. The next chapter will interrogate how the novels represent this time of calamity as it is experienced by all the entities of the planet through the science fiction trope of apocalypse.

Chapter 3: The post-apocalyptic world and the Anthropocene

> There are tipping points in the Earth System and we could be approaching a planetary tipping point that could lead to Hothouse Earth and a dismal future for humanity. So it is a race against time. Can we transform our societies (and ourselves) fast enough to avoid a Hothouse Earth future? That is the critical question, and nobody knows the answer, but it will depend on us – the values that we hold and the choices that we make.
>
> (Steffen and Morgan 1307)

We appear not to be living in ordinary times, as reflected in the opening quotation by the renowned scientist, Will Steffen, Emeritus Professor at the Fenner School of Environment and Society. The genre of science fiction has long used the trope of apocalypse to throw into doubt what is considered ‘ordinary’ or ‘normal’, allowing social forms to “to be reestablished or reimagined” (Palmer 159). Within science fiction, a subgenre of dystopian fiction has often shifted actions and events into the future, heightening the drama surrounding possible outcomes in order to reflect on the present, but “for many people the present world is already full of injustice, powerlessness and violence seen in future-set fiction”, making the dystopia a reality now, not a prophetic imaginary (Stock 1), as discussed in chapter one. In *The nutmeg’s curse : parables for a planet in crisis*, Ghosh argues that “to everyone who is paying attention, especially young people, it is now perfectly clear that extractivist capitalism is on its last legs” (Ghosh *The Nutmeg's Curse* 241-2) and this certainly appears to be the case in Nigeria that continues to struggle with ongoing pollution and inequality, and the many associated ills of a capitalist system handed down by colonialism. While the coming crisis is ever more apparent, the time of the actual tipping point is still unknown and may yet be avoidable or its consequences mitigated, but this mitigation in no ways negates the current dystopia lived in many parts of the planet. The ordinary of *our* world is massive inequality and, with unrestricted exploitation of natural resources (as discussed in chapter one), this has brought the planet to the edge of a real, not imagined, catastrophe. The literary use of the trope of apocalypse is often followed in dystopian fiction by a post-apocalyptic state of utter destruction, with the rupture between the world of the narrative and the previous 'ordinary' world being all encompassing. It is this post-apocalyptic world that is the focus on this chapter.

As mentioned earlier, in my introduction, the experience of 'living the apocalypse' (Frassinelli 304) has resulted in a very different perspective from that of Global North nations on the environmental challenges of the Anthropocene. "In the European and Western popular and hegemonic catastrophe, the blame is on the irresponsible conduct of a few, and all that is needed to avoid it is minor tweaks to capitalism," writes Giuliani in *Monsters, Catastrophes and the Anthropocene* (19). In the Global North, the looming apocalypse of climate change presents a situation to be 'fixed' through technological advances and political bartering, and perhaps the outsourcing of waste to the Global South, ignoring the fact that this is a planetary issue that cannot be confined regionally. In Nigeria, as documented by Ken Saro-Wiwa, Ogoniland's environmental disaster was the result of "collaborative plunder" not just from multinational corporations but those he dubbed "Nigeria's internal colonialists" (Nixon "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism" 234). Saro-Wiwa "insisted that the Ogoni were joint casualties of a brutal European racism and an equally brutal African ethnocentrism" (Nixon *Slow Violence* 114). The environmental calamity that has resulted from Nigeria's abundant oil resources – 40 percent of all Shell oil spills worldwide have occurred in Nigeria (113) – is not surprising as the nation of Nigeria was created by the imposition of artificial boundaries by colonial powers resulting in a country with little internal cohesion making governance particularly difficult. Nigeria ranks below Zimbabwe, the Republic of the Congo, Palestine and Syria on the UN Development Programme's 2022 Human Development Index Ranking (UNDP). For postcolonial nations, like Nigeria, an apocalypse has already shattered society and been lived through, resulting in ongoing economic and political instability. The narratives explored here examine how the tools of resilience and resourcefulness, which Samatar argues is Africa's bricolage of making do and finding solutions that may not be obvious, provides an often ignored potential for survival ("Toward a Planetary History" 178). This is the setting of much Africanfuturism – a world that has already experienced an apocalyptic event in the form of slavery, colonialism and postcolonial extractivism (as in the Niger Delta) and has already been a post-apocalyptic world in terms of huge inequalities, but has learnt how to survive against the odds, without the framework of assistance and governmental infrastructure developed in the Global North through the wealth plundered from its colonies.

This question of survival that faces us in the 21st century makes it imperative to imagine new ways of being, something that has long been part of the science fiction tradition. Le Guin issued a warning in "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be" way back in 1982, arguing that the unabating pursuit of progress is not leading the human race to a better future, but that literature's ability to help us imagine alternative ways of life, "a society that has made a successful adaptation to its environment and has learned to live without destroying itself or the people next door" can provide necessary hope (96). While this sentiment may issue from a devotee of the humanities, a similar message has been delivered by eminent chemist Steffen, who was one of the authors of the 'Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C' published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2018 (and still resulting in contentious debates five years later) and believes that if *we* are to survive this environmental crisis, *we* need to make "a really deep analysis of who we are what's important to us and how we can go forward in the future and that's something that all humans need to think about and all humans need to contribute to the solution" (29:32-30:10). Steffen proceeds to reject the use of the word 'resource' to refer to the Earth, calling it instead a life support system (38:37). He strongly advocates for a change in how we view the planet to focus instead on equity and regeneration as the scientific data strongly suggests that we are facing an 'apocalypse' (my word, not his, as Steffen uses the terms 'environmental ceiling' and 'planetary boundaries') (36.25).

Apocalypse is, after all, a literary term for world-ending scenarios, but one that we face in reality. As Tsing writes in her ruminations on the possibility of life in capitalist ruins: "We are stuck with the problem of living despite economic and ecological ruination. Neither tales of progress nor of ruin tell us how to think about collaborative survival" (Tsing 19). Both Tsing and Steffen stress that a change in thought and behaviour is crucial to *our* survival and this is where literature plays such an important role. The novels of this study depict the aftermath of an apocalypse, with a vast cast of characters surviving against all odds, using resources and skills that fall beyond modernity to build a futurity cleaved apart from the expected path. In *Rosewater*, book one of the *Wormwood* trilogy, aliens are once again invading Nigeria, while the aliens are shown in *Rosewater Insurrection,* book two*,* to have already destroyed their own planet, much as the 'Anthropocene-Capitalocene' has wrought critical changes to *our* own global environment. The final book, *Rosewater Redemption*, examines the horrifying choices that may need to be made in a post-apocalyptic world. Magalí Armillas-Tiseyra argues: "Speculative histories do not just produce conjectural alternatives; in so doing, they further compel a critical analysis of the past, the present, and its possible futures" (274). I will explore how the *Wormwood* trilogy, along with *Lagoon, David Mogo: Godhunter*, and *After the Flare* are concerned, not just with the past and present society, but also with ways of reimagining the future.

Reflections on a post-apocalyptic world

Rieder argues in his 2008 book *Colonialism and the emergence of science fiction* that the genre's tales of invasion and apocalypse spring from the historical juggernaut of colonialism that transformed the entire globe, but in very different ways*:*

> Many of the repetitive motifs that coalesced into the genre of science fiction represent ideological ways of grasping the social consequences of colonialism, including the appropriation and rationalization of unevenly distributed colonial wealth in the homeland and in the colonies, the racist ideologies that enabled colonialist exploitation, and the cognitive impact of radical cultural differences on the home culture. These range from triumphal fantasies of appropriating land, power, sex, and treasure in tales of exploration and adventure, to

> nightmarish reversals of the positions of colonizer and colonized in tales of invasion and apocalypse.
>
> (20-21)

When science fiction, such as Thompson's *Wormwood* trilogy, is based in Africa, the genre interrogates the duality of the alien 'other' as both the colonial view of the colonised as a way of justifying their invasion, and the colonised view of the coloniser suggesting that modernity itself is the alien way of being and a monstrous force of devastation. Thompson pivots on this trope with an alien invasion having led to the post-apocalyptic world in *Rosewater* and the characters having had to find ways to survive in new circumstances. In a similar way to Nixon's concern with temporality of the environmental crisis, as discussed in chapter one, the 'crisis' of the *Wormwood* trilogy is not a brief moment of catastrophe but a long drawn-out period of change and adapting to that change. Set in Nigeria at an unspecified date in the future, *Rosewater's* plot follows the trajectory of aliens whose long-term invasion of the populace by spreading microbes, known as xenoforms, is slowly transforming humans into aliens. Crowley suggests that the xenoforms mirror neoliberalism's infiltration of our way of life, demonstrating the ways in which it entangles populations, with "the xenosphere [making] literal the axiom regarding social media 'you are the product,' both as a commodity and as a thing produced, transformed and fashioned to be more exploitable by ever more pervasive imperialist invasions" (72). This invasion by the 'alien' philosophy of modernity – in part, capitalism – has resulted in environmental despoliation as Nigeria's natural resources that has indeed been the "resource curse" identified by Nixon in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), as the land has been exploited in pursuit of capital's aims: profit and progress. Christian Parenti suggests that the real relationship between capital and the state is revealed during times of catastrophe, when it becomes apparent that the world of capital depends on non-capitalist values (Parenti et al. 166). Money-making, progress-driven institutions may be paralysed or significantly impacted during crises such as wildfires, floods, or even global pandemics, depending on fire-fighters, public health workers and the like to set things right. Thompson critiques government's reaction to crisis in *Rosewater*

Insurrection probing the complications of overlapping and contradictory interests with conflict developing not just between humans and aliens, but also between various groupings of humans, for instance between Rosewater that declares itself independent and the state of Nigeria. Similarly, the crisis of climate change may pit nation against nation as each endeavours to protect its own resources. The *Wormwood* trilogy's power-hungry mayor Jack Jacques's attempt to secede from Nigeria with Rosewater using the benefits that the alien biodome brings to isolate itself from the rest of the world, using technology to seal borders (288). It does not end well.

The lengthy siege reflects Nixon's 'slow violence' of the ecological crisis outlined in chapter one, also revealing how unlikely such a strategy is to succeed as the various tipping points, mentioned by Steffen earlier, may result in as yet unimaginable environmental problems. Thompson imagines them dramatically in terms of alien diseases that develop due to environmental imbalances, describing a larvae that burrows into subdermal fat, excreting waste that causes heat and finally spontaneous human combustion (*Rosewater Insurrection* 290). Here the disease is other-worldly in origin, but the change in climate may result in mutations and infections that are just as 'alien', for example, an article in *Frontiers of Medicine* raised this question in the December 2021 article about whether climate change influenced the COVID-19 pandemic (Gupta et al.).

Thompson juxtaposes the alien infiltration in *Rosewater Insurrection* with the ongoing neoliberal invasion in present-day Nigeria. His deployment of the key character of Alyssa/Koriko, the harbinger of the apocalypse, explores the concept of 'alien' from multiple angles. I discussed Koriko's alien incarnation in the last chapter, but before the bodily invasion, she was a woman known as Alyssa, a health émigré with multiple sclerosis, who lived in Rosewater for the town's healing properties. As a British woman she is 'alien' to Nigeria, her body then becomes alienated as it is infected with xenoforms, and the alien she becomes, Koriko, is far from home and slowly becomes alienated from the footholder Wormword, the probe entity from her home planet. Before being completely overtaken by this alien form, the woman she was as Alyssa has flashes of memories of her alien home, recalling one planetary destruction and foreshadowing another.

> A planet denuded of vegetation, with air like soup, carbon burned, products thrown in the air, sky cluttered with the debris of a hyper-successful space programme. All around, the detritus and bare bones of depleted industry and overuse. Factories that create nothing, roads without cars, houses without people, winds beating an unbroken path around the globe. Alyssa's job is to take readings. By this time the entire population, the survivors, are in space.
>
> (*Rosewater Insurrection* 165)

Through the post-apocalyptic landscape of that far-away planet, Thompson reiterates strong warning parallels with the looming environmental catastrophe on Earth. Paradoxically, Koriko functions as the agent of destruction of her own home planet as she drags the consciousness that belongs to the trilogy's hero/anti-hero Kaaro into the alien headquarters, allowing him to connect with interstellar networks and travel to the home world where he can shut down their network servers: "Koriko takes the bait and drags him, a Trojan horse, inside… The aliens prepare his body. He feels lightness. Just as he is leaving, he flips Koriko the bird. *Fuck you, Space Invaders!* " (*Rosewater Redemption* 361, italics original). Thompson's careful use of Koriko as the means of planetary destruction, can certainly be compared with the Anthropocene that has human beings as the agents of change on this planet, with the separation of human and nonhuman, that modernity has wrought, being ultimately responsible for the looming calamity. In the final moments of *Rosewater Redemption*, Wormwood – the organic probe – deserts Rosewater, and Koriko.

> Wormwood breaks all the tethers to the city above, snatching back all strands of flesh, all neurological tissues and water conduits, diving even deeper into the Earth's crust to avoid the toxins. It does what it was already doing slowly… It is no longer a matter of compromise, but one of survival. The humans almost killed it once already. Wormwood will no longer wait patiently or try to convince its avatar. It can feel

> the city above shear off, and it can hear the pain of millions of humans, but it cannot care. It cannot care now. Five hundred souls are wiped out in an instant when one of the caverns in Wormwood's body collapses and they fall screaming through the earth.
>
> (*Rosewater Redemption* 353-4)

Thompson's disquieting imagery of five hundred human souls screaming as they fall into the cavern vacated by Wormwood raises the question of what can be done to prevent such a catastrophe. However Thompson paints Kaaro as the redeemer, using both biblical (as the light) and Greek mythic imagery (the Trojan horse) to reinforce the temporality of the Anthropocene by spanning long periods of human history with his imagery comparing time before humanity so grievously marked the planet with the present. Kaaro's ultimate sacrifice, again with biblical undertones, is humanity's final hope, suggesting that *we* may finally find redemption, as suggested by the third book's title, but not without exertion and the renunciation of *our* current domination of the rest of the planet.

Lifeboats and closed borders

Capitalism may ultimately be incompatible with a sustainable way of life, and finding a possible solution may require a complete social and economic revolution, but as the pressure mounts to act, alternative measures may need to be implemented immediately. In his 2013 article 'A Radical Approach to the Climate Crisis', Parenti outlines a possible response to the looming ecological apocalypse as the "armed lifeboat" with the tightening of borders and the exclusion of refugees, leaving nations of the Global South to battle the rising tides of climate change (literally) alone (53): a policy that is already being seen in parts of the Global North with the exclusion of climate refugees (and other migrants).

Thompson probes the political, social and economic ramifications of the life boat scenario in the *Wormwood* trilogy at length, with Rosewater's secession from Nigeria as discussed above, as well as the United States sealing itself off and creating a power vacuum. Early in the first novel Thompson sets the global political scene like this: “China and Russia are squabbling over who will be the new United States and everybody is scared, man” (*Rosewater* 121-2). Later, protagonist Kaaro undercovers the background of the alien incursion: the alien blob known as Wormwood obliterated part of London before being damaged by the British and disappearing into the Earth’s crust. Speculation followed that the Americans closed their borders when they felt Wormwood was uncontrollable (*Rosewater* 317). Thompson uses America’s strategy in the novels to illustrate the futility of a ‘solution’ that simply retreats from a problem, even placing Kaaro on an illusionary rubber raft without paddles in the xenosphere as he reads the minds of two Americans who have found themselves in Nigeria (372). Later, Kaaro discovers that the American situation is even more dystopian than Rosewater’s, in a completely artificial environment without sky or sun, moon or stars. Kaaro finds it “sickly” (*Rosewater* 372-73). Moreover, Thompson uses the word ‘ghettos’ to describe this nightmarish situation in America (374), flipping the Global North and South on their heads, as he dismisses the possibility of survival through a refusal to assist the rest of the world.

The trope of the ‘lifeboat’ takes a different slant in *Lagoon*, that has the aliens’ arrival creating a massive wave in the Lagos lagoon, before emerging from the sea, just as historically the ‘alien’ European arrived by sea. The novel presents imaginaries of a nonhuman world fighting back against humans in chapter forty-eight entitled ‘Here there be Monsters’ that has a massive swordfish attacking a boat carrying the president, his wife, the novels protagonists, Adaora, Adu and Anthony, and several others to meet with the alien ‘elders’.

> … it seemed the entire ocean had decided to come after them. Large fish, armored fish, spiked fish, monstrous sharks, a giant swordfish; he even thought he saw something that looked like a whale. All were bearing down on the boat, on him.
>
> Why? What had they done? He knew the answer. He, Adaora, Anthony – everyone else – they were human. They didn’t belong here in the

> deep. So they would die here and it would be right. Best to leave these waters to the ocean animals, and the aliens.
>
> (Okorafor *Lagoon* 245)

The danger posed by the fish to the characters mirrors the real-world danger that humanity's exploitation of the oceans has caused. The giant swordfish's presence reminds the reader of the anger felt by this creature, the novel's initial narrator, at human despoliation of the waters off Lagos and its attack on the oil pipeline. Okorafor also uses the (life)boat as a type of sanctuary carrying the humans to a proposed peace meeting, but one that is not invulnerable to attack from those beings beyond the boat. It is in this chapter that Okorafor again shows the inner powers of her trio of protagonists as together they manage to save the president's wife who has been swept overboard (*Lagoon* 241). The scene reflects on human vulnerability when pitted against the nonhuman:

> Below the glass-like water, she [Adaora] imagined there was a great, great metropolis of ocean life below – giant, reaching, dark brown structures bloomed up from a flat surface beneath that she couldn't see the end of. And the structures had slowly shrunk and expanded even as she watched, sea creatures darting, wiggling, spiraling everywhere.
>
> (Okorafor *Lagoon* 250)

The boat provides a temporary refuge, a futile solution, but the water itself has power. The importance of water is stressed throughout the novel, right from the pollution of the lagoon mentioned in the prologue, to the setting of the meeting place between the aliens and the humans. The phrase "water is life" appears three times, on pages 12,17 and 250. This becomes a kind of mantra to Adaora, who realises, in conversation with the alien Ayodele, that it is her choice to embrace the environment after falling ill from her immersion in the water.

> *"Why am I not sick anymore?"*

> *"Why is your body part-fish?"*
>
> *Adaora paused. "Because this is . . . what . . . I wanted?"*
>
> *"Is it what you wanted?"*
>
> Adaora had always loved the water. And she didn't want to die of whatever pollutants were in the water. Yes, it was.
>
> (Okorafor *Lagoon* 252-3, italics original)

Here Okorafor highlights the importance of Adaora's choice in finding a way to survive, a choice that acknowledges 'water is life', discovering the other within herself; that she is not something apart, but could embrace how integral is her place within the planet's ecology. She is water and cannot survive without it. The importance of water is interlaced throughout the narrative, showing the agency of both Adaora and the novel's opening narrator, a swordfish, (harking back to nonhuman agency in chapter two) in healing the marine environment and highlighting this as a future possibility.

The trope of survival in a post-apocalyptic world is also key in *David Mogo Godhunter*, where Okungbowa uses the concept of sanctuary (not a lifeboat this time but rather an example of Samatar's bricolage, mentioned earlier, highlighting the characters' resourcefulness) as David joins a small band of humans, utilising whatever is at hand. In some ways, *David Mogo*'s plot plays with the reverse notion of the isolated USA in the *Wormwood* trilogy. Instead of intentionally closing itself off from the rest of the planet, Nigeria is shunned and left to fend for itself. But within Nigeria, the narrative presents several places of safety as it follows David on his lonely journey across Lagos. After leaving Makoko (as discussed in chapter one), he finds refuge in the real-world Oshodi Interchange, one of the biggest bus terminals in West Africa. Here David finds a group of refugees who provide him with a haven where he can recover, despite his reputation for trouble, with battery-powered viewings of football matches and *Toy Story*, singing sessions and special meals of jollof rice.

> Some of the new refugees brought in tinned and sachet tomatoes they managed to pack, some lugged big bags of rice. They all donated these things to be stored in the large warehouse … It is with these items people buy their way into the Arena. Not like they'd turn away those who have nothing, though—Shonekan [community leader] used the word *inhumane*—but if someone brings in a 5kg bag of rice, they get into one of the lock-up shops, the cream of the crop of Arena housing.
>
> (Okungbowa 202)

Although far from a utopia, this community still nurtures David and provides a positive glimpse of humanity, along with the kindness displayed at Makoko, illustrating the importance of collaboration in surviving a crisis. The novel explores how *we* can ensure that the human species does in fact have a future through cooperation and compassion, while carefully noting the social, economic and environmental issues that plague present-day Nigeria.

At the end of chapter nineteen, the community at Arena is attacked and suffers terrible trauma before moving on to the abandoned Murtala Muhammed International Airport (Okungbowa 201) reflecting, as does the *Wormwood* trilogy, on the futility of isolated solutions. The inefficiency of insularity is further depicted through the scene where David crawls into a luggage compartment before the final confrontation with the gods: "The inside of the plane is just as dark and I can't see jack, but I already know who it is, because there's only one person who knows the exact luggage compartment I usually crawl into" (Okungbowa 242). While there is something womb-like about the small, dark space where David retreats to gather the inner strength needed to save his fellow refugees and companions and find a new life for all of them, this is overlaid by the somewhat ludicrous image of a large demi-god hiding out in tiny overhead compartment. Nothing will be resolved until he emerges and faces the music, just as hoping that climate change will go way is unlikely to be an effective solution.

Across the novels, however the imagined sanctuary is sought – by going dark as the United States does in *Rosewater*, by Rosewater seceding in *Rosewater Insurrection*, in a the boat above rampaging marine life, or within small communities in *David Mogo* – the authors make it clear that the safety provided is illusionary at best and can be assailed by catastrophe at any moment. This is certainly the case in *David Mogo*, as the Arena is blasted apart by the "tongues of Sango's fires" (Okungbowa 203), much as wildfires and floods are devastating real-world communities with such increasing frequency.

Nigeria as a whole is used by Olukotun to represent a place of safety in *After the Flare*, with the narrative's catastrophe exposing the limitations of the planet's economic framework after a solar flare ravages the technological infrastructure in most of the Global North and elsewhere, except for a narrow band along the equator, including Nigeria, followed by a cyberattack that cripples technological networks, disabling heart pumps, generators and almost everything else: "Then the Flare came. Everything changed" (Olukotun 21). This change means a reversal of the power positions of the Global North and the Global South, with the former now in need of aid from the latter. The lifeboat theorised by Parenti is reversed, with the inhabitants of the Global North fleeing south: "Mexican drug smugglers had ferried in cocaine through tunnels until the Flare, when it became more profitable for Americans to use the same tunnels to escape to Mexico and then press on to Central America (Olukotun 205). Here is the very essence of Africanfuturism "rooted first and foremost in Africa," as in Okorafor's definition of the genre ("Africanfuturism Defined"), subverting the Global North's perceived superior development.

The trope of survival and the quest to save home

All the novels present imaginaries of a future beyond what we have come to view as 'normal', raising the possibility of other ways of being and living beyond short-term lifeboat solutions. The region has 'experience' with apocalypse – the first being colonialism and the slave trade – and the type of storytelling I have been analysing is something that O'Connell calls "the second contact narrative" ("Everything Is Changed" 112). He suggests this is perfectly suited for thinking about the "second apocalypse" *we* are facing as it points to colonisation as the current situation’s catalyst, while considering the possible end of everything we are used to, including global capitalism: “It is a dialectical apocalypse; any life beyond will be marked by devastation: a living with and through rather than transcendent return” ("Everything Is Changed" 112). From an ecological perspective, the climate crisis that faces the planet calls for adaptability and resilience if *we* (as a species) are to survive, and it is these traits that Africanfuturist novelists explore, while acknowledging that there is no easy fix, no solution without complications and sacrifice. Christopher Palmer, in *Green Planets*, argues that post-apocalyptic fiction casts uncertainty onto everything, both the everyday and the abnormal, but “in this uncertainty new ways of controlling or even defeating the fear of apocalypse become available” (158). Beyond fear, defeatism itself needs to be overcome and Thompson offers imaginaries of resilience and innovation that can be read as ways to face the environmental crisis without simply throwing up *our* hands. In the first book of the *Wormwood* trilogy, the anarchist revolutionary Oyin Da, a central character throughout the three books, whom Kaaro is ordered to find by the Nigeria secret service due to her ‘anarchist’ activities, makes an inspiring, powerful declaration of survival:

> We have more experience than any Western country in dealing with first contact. What do you think we experienced when your people carved up Africa at the Berlin Conference? You arrived with a different intelligence, a different civilisation, and you raped us. But we’re still here.
>
> (*Rosewater* 231)

Nigeria’s experience in resilience and endurance is illustrated by Thompson through Oyin Da’s ability to make do, an often underestimated resource: “Everything we have in the Lijad is made from cast-offs and scraps. She doesn’t look up, but pride emanates from her” (*Rosewater* 232). I read her as an embodiment of survival, using Samatar’s concept of ‘Afrofuturistic bricolage’, through self-sufficiency and endurance. Thompson employs her character to continue circling the debate over survival, returning to it in the closing moments of the trilogy with Oyin Da finding ways to defeat the apocalypse with the help of her 'digital' child, Junior: " … it turns out Junior has learned a thing or two about repairing and maintaining the xenosphere the way the aliens used to. She taught Nike and me, so we take shifts. Either way, oblivion postponed. We Live" (Rosewater Redemption 372). Thompson revels here in this character's ability to survive, depicting her strategy of using whatever methods and materials available. Thompson juxtaposes the loss of Kaaro with the survival of Oyin Da, thus, I argue, acknowledging the perils ahead while suggesting that triumphs are possible.

In the third novel, *Rosewater Redemption,* Oyin Da assumes the reins of narrator, and is revealed to not be human at all, but a data memory within the alien xenosphere, once again raising the question of who is alien. In "'How to Save the World from Aliens, Yet Keep Their Infrastructure': Repurposing the 'Master's House' in The Wormwood Trilogy" Jenna N. Hanchey and Godfried Asante suggest that the figure of Oyin Da demonstrates how Africanfuturism uses colonial infrastructure to resist neocolonialism. They argue that while Thompson destroys the aliens in order to free humans, this is problematic when, as in the case of Oyin Da, existence is dependent upon the alien technology. "Oyin Da's character demonstrates how to exist within complicity and still struggle against colonization" (Hanchey and Asante 12-13). In Oyin Da's words: "this is just another problem to solve. How to save the world from aliens, yet keep their infrastructure…. You know, after the British left, we kept the trains" (*Rosewater Redemption* 90). This ability to conceive solutions regardless of the precarity of the situation is something that Thompson celebrates throughout his narrative, but particularly through the creation of Oyin Da.

After the Flare offers another perspective on African resourcefulness, working within the paradigm of technologically-led process. A large cast of characters works together to ensure that the astronaut stranded by the calamity caused by the solar flare is successfully rescued. Despite setting the novel in Nigeria, Olukuton makes it clear throughout the narrative that this is a planetary crisis, as is climate change, by using the International Space Station as the focus of the calamity. The novel's conclusion shows the technology of the ancient Nok people – now known as Noktech – being used to create a multinational asteroid-mining facility that combines tourism and research, and provides a new way of working called the River. Olukuton uses the metaphor of the river to reinforce the importance of working with the environment, rather than against it. But this is no utopia, there are price hikes, a problem with khat chewing by some of the 'canoe' operators who work in space, but essentially it provides a new normalcy, a life beyond the crisis, with the astronaut successfully rescued.

> Bracket [the protagonist] felt his stomach beginning to settle in the slow, meandering current. He swiveled his body to watch the Banks slide by and saw a hauler plodding along in the shipping channel with a hunk of ice fifty meters wide in its grappling arms. Behind him, he could hear the dulcet tones of the pilot's voice as she maneuvered the canoe through the River. She wasn't bad, he thought. Wasn't bad at all.
>
> (Olukotun 296)

By using the imagery of the "slow, meandering current," Olukuton entangles his protagonist with the nonhuman, subverting the human–nature divide, while by fashioning the space vehicles as a canoe and river, he points to the importance of the nonhuman environment if humans are to live beyond crisis. *After the Flare* relies on Nigerian ingenuity and the multiplicity of experience and perspective to explore a future beyond the apocalypse and this is what Canavan sees as the true fantasy of apocalypse, "not so much that we will be destroyed but that something might intervene in time to force us to change … [the] fantasy of apocalypse is here unveiled as itself a mode of critique, a crying out for change" (Canavan and Robinson 13). The works studied here not only acknowledge that change is imperative, but explore how change may be possible, providing more than just a cry for change.

But there are no easy solutions and Thompson explores the challenges and sacrifices that need to be faced in the wake of apocalypse, presenting an imaginary of a complex, flawed and compromised society in the *Wormwood* trilogy, a society that requires heroes, albeit flawed ones, in order to find redemption. In the third book, *Rosewater Redemption*, Kaaro makes the ultimate sacrifice, not only of his own life, but also by destroying all the Homians. Thompson does not treat this genocide as a victory, but demonstrates the devastation of this result through Koriko's loss of her connection with the footholder, Wormwood.

> Koriko is on her knees, unprepared for the kind of desolation she
> feels as the signal with Wormwood becomes fainter and fainter the
> further away it goes.
> *Come back.*
> *Stop.*
> *You and I are one. I cannot live without you, footholder.*
> *Wormwood.*
> *Stop moving, please.*
> *We will die.*
> *[I love you. This is what love is.]*
> From Wormwood, silence.
>
> (*Rosewater Redemption* 355)

This scene of utter desolation is heart-breaking even though the reader realises that the complete destruction of the Homians is ultimately what is required in order to save the Earth, humanity's home. Oyin Da instructs Kaaro: "Go to Rosewater, travel to Home, and destroy the data of billions of Homians in the servers. Kill them all, Kaaro. Kill them for humanity… It's the end of the world" (*Rosewater Redemption* 360). Survival is impossible without loss, and the pain of loss is something that Thompson acknowledges, through Kaaro's death and the death of all the aliens waiting on a distant planet, ironically named 'Home' by Thompson, for a long hoped for rescue that does not come, and Koriko's painful separation from Wormwood.

Koriko's loss is mirrored twice in *David Mogo Godhunter*, initially when the gods lose their place in heaven, and later when the Falling devastates the human home on Earth below. The half-human, half-god hero is also required to save his own home, first the building he shares with his foster-father Papa Udi, and later his city: "I want my doubts erased, my world back. I want home" (Okungbowa 248). This focus on home is particularly important from an ecological perspective as this planet is *our* only home and despite the differences in experience, in some way *we* need to come to some sort of reconciliation in order to survive. And finally the gods and humans come to a resolution in their common desire for a home: "'We are home,' Ogun says, standing next to the blackened skeleton that used to be Cardoso House, looking up at the stars… 'Home,' Ogun says again, and we all know exactly what that means." (Okungbowa 348-9) This final sentence is the novel stresses both the importance of home and the trauma of losing one. A prospect humanity faces now.

Lagoon offers the solution of a shared home, in a conversation between the president and the alien:

> "We do not want to rule, colonize, conquer or take. We just want a home. What is it *you* want?"
>
> He paused. "To be alive again."
>
> "I will make it so."
>
> (Okorafor *Lagoon* 220)

A shared home is precisely what this planet is, not just a resource for humanity, but a joint abode for all things, from fungal spores to swordfish.

Conclusion

Greg Garrard surveys the history of apocalypse as a concept in *Ecocriticism* and argues that "[a]pocalyptic rhetoric seems a necessary component of environmental discourse. It is capable of galvanising activists, converting the undecided and ultimately, perhaps, of influencing government and commercial policy" (113). The problem with imagining a dystopia is that it can promote inaction through despair and fatalism, and Garrard asserts that "only if we imagine that the planet has a future, after all, are we likely to take responsibility for it" (116). The novels studied here combine narratives of post-apocalyptic worlds and imaginaries of futurity to provide these visions of possibility that inspire (some) hope and provide an antidote against complete despair.

Africanfuturism's focus on Africa provides a distinctly African view of present life and future possibilities, with a view from the Global South, not *of* the Global South, providing new imaginaries of how to survive in a world where rupture is no longer confined to fiction. The novels of this study, as they tackle the 'after' of an apocalyptic event, from invasion by aliens or gods, to a solar flare destroying much of the planet's technological infrastructure, raise the question of humanity's responsibility, uneven though it may be, for the current climate crisis being wrought upon the planet.

Through imaginaries of life boats and sanctuaries, the narratives interrogate isolationism versus collaboration, and the difficult decisions that *we* face – *we* as humans who call this planet home. The planetary challenge of environmental change requires resilience and adaptability, traits developed in Africa through 'living the apocalypse', if *we* are to save *our* home. By naming the alien planet 'Home', Thompson's warning draws direct parallels between the alien's devastated planet and Earth, but accompanies this ominous forecast with a celebration of Oyin Da's resilience and innovation: we can survive! The focus on safeguarding *our* home, this planet, is crucial if the narratives are to act against the apathy of the seemingly overwhelming problem confronting *our* planet. The conclusions are surprisingly optimistic, with *Lagoon* and *David Mogo* reaching a compromise with the invaders, and ending with hope that change will benefit all. The narrative in *After the Flare* fashions a new way of living in space, bringing African knowledge to the world, rather than suggesting a complete rupture with the status quo as is seemingly advocated by the aliens in *Lagoon*. In the *Wormwood* trilogy, Oyin Da's survival provides some light in a narrative that forecasts a very bleak future that requires the most drastic of actions to ensure survival. The theme of hope, even the mere glimpse of it, as in the *Wormwood* trilogy, allows the novels to promote change and provide encouragement, for without these imaginaries *we* as a species may flounder in despair.

In conclusion: imagining a connected planet beyond apathy and despair

In her definition of Africanfuturism, Okorafor insists that it is one word "so that the concepts of Africa and futurism cannot be separated" and so it is in the novels I have chosen to read. They are all focused on Africa and African concerns, with the Global North playing little more than a walk-on role in the *Wormwood* trilogy and playing the damsel in distress in *After the Flare*. And all of them ponder possible futures for a country (and continent) in crisis that not only faces a potentially life-altering environmental crisis along with the rest of the planet but has already lived through a total societal subversion resulting from colonialism. The novels interrogate the role of colonialism and capitalism in the environmental changes and entrenched inequalities that are evident in this current geological age of the Anthropocene so influenced by humankind's activities, with Thompson directly comparing the invasion by the Homians with the European colonialisation of Nigeria. All the novels reflect this complicated reality that they interweave with varied fictional universes that include mythical and fantastical elements, exploring possible ways out of this predicament, while keeping Africa as the focal point. The authors use realistic imaginary, as do writers such as Helon Habila, to capture the reality of the early 21st century in Nigeria – Makoko, with its whiff of faeces in *David Mogo: Godhunter*; oil spills in *Lagoon*; political corruption in the *Wormwood* trilogy and *After the Flare* – and from this reality, they project their imaginaries of a different way of life.

In chapter one, I investigate how Africanfuturism's inclusion of myths and ancient African history allows the novels to extend their time period without sacrificing pace and tension, providing a narrative structure capable of supporting the temporality of the environmental catastrophe. The *Wormwood* trilogy adds time leaps to this methodology to trace the slowness of the violence perpetrated on the landscape and population. These are stories are epic proportions, not just in the links they provide between the 'olden' times of the Nok, Mami Wata and the Trojan horse, and the present, but also in their central concerns: the survival of the planet. The juxtaposition of the ancient with the imagined future allows the authors to incorporate tales based on the eons of time during which humanity has slowly but fundamentally altered the planet. The first chapter also examines the imagery used to reveal this alteration, in particular, the *Wormwood* trilogy's xenosphere that paradoxically both illustrates the interconnection of all things and the infiltration of a way of thinking that elevated humanity above the nonhuman. Extensive use of the imagery of putrefaction, toxins and oil spills is used to portray the environmental devastation and to question whether the planetary narrative of the Anthropocene is indeed a homogenous one, suggesting instead that the Global South's experience is indeed significantly different, both in terms of pollution and entrenched inequality.

The epic theme of survival is not confined to humanity but includes the nonhuman and the very matter than makes up the planet, garnering the ancient respect for the Earth and its ability to sustain life, channelling it into a futurity dominated by African concerns. In chapter two, I reveal the significance the authors give to the entanglement of the human and nonhuman. Haraway's term 'Cthulhucene' may be a more fitting label for the time setting of the novels, where "human beings are not the only important actors", but instead, they celebrate "multispecies stories" in "precarious times" (Haraway "Tentacular Thinking" 11). And here, the planetary narrative interrogated in chapter one is examined from a different angle to include all things, not just humanity – undermining the centrality of 'Anthro' in the Anthropocene. Thompson's creation of Koriko provides a powerful example of the integration of human and nonhuman, although Thompson does not make this portrayal one dimensional, instead showing both the terrors and wonders of an entangled world. Okorafor's use of the nonhuman, including both animals and mythical creatures, also overturns the human-centred view of an Earthly narrative.

Through my analysis in chapter three, I believe I have illustrated how Thompson's *Wormwood* trilogy rejoices in the complexities of a post-apocalyptic world rather than offering simplified answers, discarding binaries in favour of multiplicities that are often messy and convoluted. Thompson circles the difficult problems facing Nigeria, and the Global South as a whole, but still celebrates its energy and innovative resourcefulness, for instance in his creation of Oyin Da. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the ability she exemplifies, to make do and circumvent societal regulations, can result in monstrosities and immorality. Meanwhile, the superbeing and demi-god are used as representational strategies by Okorafor and Okungbowa of the resilience and strength needed to find alternative ways of being that may provide a more equitable and environmentally harmonious society, instead of one based on extraction and capital expansion. These imaginaries of alternative futures offer the ultimate subversion of the Capitalocene, allowing readers to hope. Of particular importance is how the novels expose the need for humanity to collaborate in order to overcome the difficulties the planet faces, dismissing 'lifeboat' solutions as temporary at best, and illustrating how by refusing to work together *we* are unlikely to create any permanent solutions to save *our* home. The importance all the novelists give to the concept of home underlines not only that this planet is *our* only home, but moreover, it does not belong to humanity alone, and by elevating the human over the nonhuman we are agents in its devastation.

Science fiction has a long history of destabilising and critiquing the world as *we* know it and Africanfuturism is no different: it is the literature of activism. It is worth recalling the dystopian example given by Darko Suvin, wherein he relates a story about how for twenty years three hundred jumbo jets carrying mostly women and children had crashed every day without any news coverage, only to reveal in a narrative twist that while the story was fiction, in reality the same number of deaths had in fact occurred from hunger with the same lack of coverage (233-4). The cognitive estrangement of Survin's jumbo jet example encapsulates the shock at the initial narrative followed by deeper horror upon uncovering the kernel of truth. The dystopian perspective of the *Wormwood* trilogy does just this. It is not a tale of aliens destroying a faraway planet and conquering Earth intent only on their own survival, but humans destroying this planet with little to no regard for the daily extinction of nonhuman species, and potentially our own. The technique of cognitive estrangement developed by science fiction, a genre that has its roots in colonialism, shocks the reader into a realisation that humanity's domination over the nonhuman mirrors the arrogance and devastation of colonial powers. All four novelists discussed here engage with the reality of Nigeria in the early 21st century, and beyond the confines of an academic dissertation, their works make an impact on real readers, encouraging an engagement with the climate crisis. Africanfuturism may not have much impact in Makoko where residents are living a daily apocalypse of hunger and fear, but for many readers these novels provide inspiration that despite the difficulties that need to be faced, even the most morally ambiguous of *us* can make a difference. By making his world saviour a thief and a liar, a man who ignored an injured dog until the very end of *Rosewater* when treating it served his own purposes, Thompson creates an everyman that offers elements of hope. Okorafor's multi-cast – from a marine biologist to a soldier facing court martial and a part-time secretary/prostitute – and Olukuton and Okungbowa's uncertain misfits fulfil a similar purpose, painting the familiar in a strange and chaotic setting, imagining what any of *us* will or could do in the coming catastrophe and the difficult decisions that will need to be faced. Whether *we* will face a post-apocalyptic world or not remains to be seen, but the impact of literature on hearts and minds must surely be a contributing factor in how *we* survive the coming decades. The need to influence behaviour becomes ever more critical with Nigeria again facing devastating floods in October 2022 (Spooner and Fatade), but beyond signalling the problem, the narratives offer solutions to the defeatism that often results from the magnitude of the issue. I believe this study demonstrates the range of Africanfuturist concerns, with their postcolonial discussions extending to interrogate the way the planetary environmental crisis is experienced significantly differently in the Global South, and offering perspectives that focus specifically on African issues and alternative ways of being, providing imaginaries of new possibilities. The outlook presented is grim, but presents enough hope to counter apathy and despair.

Finally, a short note on Thompson. I have focused this dissertation on his work to unravel the careful way in which he queries complex, overlapping issues, never providing straight-forward answers, but rather asking the reader to consider them, with him, from all angles and then, like Kaaro, his guardian of Yoruban-speaking peoples *and* lands (Rosewater 37), be prepared to make difficult, profoundly uncomfortable decisions, all the time comparing his work with other examples of Africanfuturism's excellence. Thompson's oeuvre has grown since the *Wormwood* trilogy with his 2021 *Far from the Light of Heaven* including a space station called

Lagos, ancestors disguised as ghost-like aliens, and a ‘green’ planet that dispenses with capitalism; as well as a contribution to a 2022 anthology *Tomorrow's Parties: Life in the Anthropocene (Twelve Tomorrows),* where the most marginalised citizens of Lagos are displaced onto an island of plastic waste where they find a way to live in harmony. It seems he concurs with Okri that everything he writes “should be directed to the immediate end of drawing attention to the dire position we are in as a species” (Okri). I believe the *Wormwood* trilogy is particularly successful in this, undermining accepted beliefs about *our* role on this planet, and imagining new ways of being beyond both the Capitalocene and the Anthropocene through cooperation between humans and renewed respect for the nonhuman.

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[i] Part of the title of this thesis – 'The end of the world as we know it' – refers to a 1987 song recorded by the American rock band R.E.M. entitled, in full, "It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)". It has since entered the parlance of popular culture to reflect the coalescence of apathy and angst that has characterised much of the late 20th and early 21st centuries and is used in this way in *David Mogo: Godhunter*: "The end of the world as we know it does things to people. Everyone forgets who they were, abandons their past life and tries to align themselves with the new state of things…" (Okungbowa 249).