



GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis

Volume 7, Issue 1, Jan - June, 2024

ISSN (Online): 2714-2485

**Slow Violence and the Echoes of Ecological Desecration in Imbolo Mbue's
*How Beautiful We Were***

Uchenna OHAGWAM

Department of English & Literary Studies,
Rivers State University, Nigeria

Email: uche.ohagwam@ust.edu.ng

Queen ALBERT

Department of English & Literary Studies,
Rivers State University, Nigeria

Email: queen.albert@ust.edu.ng

(Received: May-2023; Accepted: June-2024; Available Online: June-2024)



This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License CC-BY-NC-4.0 ©2024 by author (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

ABSTRACT

Slow violence is an idea developed by Rob Nixon. As an ecocritical concept, Nixon engages the gains of ecocriticism and postcolonial studies to make a unique blend of the conceptual resources of both theories in order to formulate a new framework suitable for reading, interpreting, and apprehending issues of environmental degradation, environmental humanities, environmental activism, and the environmental justice system. The paper engages Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of narratology and the ecocritical theory and examines the idea of slow violence and its manifestations in *How Beautiful We Were* (2021), a novel by the Cameroonian-American writer, Imbolo Mbue. Mbue's depiction of the exacerbating repercussions of capitalism wrought by oil extraction in the fictional tropical African village of Kosawa triggered this study. The novel is unique owing to the author's ability to tell her story logically and in an engaging manner—through the development of a well-knit plot, realistic setting, true-to-life characters, the handling of conflict, and her skillful use of certain literary elements to achieve the theme of environmental dislocation in the novel. The paper therefore recommends that the appropriate deployment of the techniques of collective reportage, dialogism, in media res, juxtaposition of characters, holophrastic dictions, symbolism, metaphor, irony, and flashback can be applicable in the overall task of portraying a landscape of asphyxiating fumes, a desecrated ecosphere, and the image of the ironic contradictions of capitalist exploitation in contemporary time. The paper found that the use of the right narrative conventions can foster not just an understanding of the story line and plot development of a literary text but also the narrative's preoccupation, and in the case of Mbue's fiction, the theme of environmental injustice.

Keywords: Slow Violence; technique; theme; environment; injustice.

INTRODUCTION: THE CONCEPT OF SLOW VIOLENCE

With the accelerating pace of environmental degradation threatening the long-term survival of human civilisation, the global environmental crisis has become one of the most pressing issues of our time (Goudie, 2001). In response to this crisis, a range of strategies have emerged at local, national, and international levels, aimed at mitigating the impacts of climate change, promoting sustainable development, and protecting biodiversity (Akpan,

et al., 2016). Following this, the hope for remediation, however, takes our minds back to great environmental advocates like Arundhati Roy, Indra Sinha, Wangari Maathai, and Ken Saro-Wiwa, whose writings awaken in us the consciousness of environmental despoliation and the urgency for remediation and sustainable environmental health. Indeed, their works encourage us to rethink what environmental activism truly is. Therefore, slow violence is a form of devastation with consequences that are not immediate. In other words, it is violence with postponed effects.

Slow or gradual contamination, with its attendant large-scale devastating impacts on both human and non-human nature, aside from the attritional ruin on the ecosystem, the socio-political and economic climate are not spared (Mateer, 2017). As opposed to violence that is immediate, sudden, obvious, and existing in space and time, slow violence, as Rob Nixon conceptualised it in his award-winning book entitled *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), embraces not just the violence of postponed effects on the ecosystem but also the litany of hazards imposed on many marginalised communities across the world. In trying to clearly explain this theory, Nixon (2011) hinted:

By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. We need, I believe, to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales (p. 2).

Following this, this work can apprehend Nixon's case in the light of such environmental issues as climate change, toxic drift, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of war, acidifying oceans, illegal oil refining (otherwise referred to as "kpo-fire"), and an array of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes, which have become representational obstacles impeding genuine efforts at seeking, achieving, and sustaining environmental well-being.

In an interview hosted by a US-based TV and Internet news programme, *Democracy Now*, which was anchored by Amy Goodman, Rob Nixon was asked to explain his idea of "slow violence," and he responded in these words:

Slow violence...it is violence that typically isn't recognizable as violence because it is not spectacular. It may be seen in media terms as drama-deficient...an example is something like the Agent Orange, where you have a 12-year war in Vietnam, and the casualties are framed up by public perception, but the impacts, the ongoing casualties and public health effects, lasts for decades and generations. So, I think there is something analogous going on with climate change, is that we have the postponement of the consequences. And so, what we're looking at, in effect, is a kind of intergenerational theft of the conditions of life itself (2018, p. 1).

In Nixon's conceptualisation, environmental violence is portrayed as more than just a struggle for physical elements such as space, bodies, labor, or resources—it is also a conflict over time (Nixon, 2018). This perspective echoes the sentiments expressed by William Faulkner (1975), who famously remarked, "the past is never dead. It is not even past" (p. 87). Building upon this, Nixon advocates for the development of fresh understandings of causality. Using certain African nations as case studies, he illustrates how government inaction on climate change can be construed as a form of 'slow violence,' disproportionately affecting the world's impoverished populations.

OVERVIEW OF *HOW BEAUTIFUL WE WERE*

How Beautiful We Were is a 2021 novel written by Cameroonian-American writer Imbolo Mbue. The narrative gives an account of the tragedy of the people of Kosawa, a fictional village in Africa, and how these people fight back against the exploitative practices of an American oil company through the complicity of the local government. The story is told through multiple narrators, the narrative of which covers the period between the 1980s and the 2000s (Nare, et al., 2024). Every chapter is told from the first-person plural perspective of the protagonist, Thula Nangi, and her friends. Other chapters alternate among the perspectives of different members of the Nangi family.

The novel opens by announcing that the end is near, referring to an ecological catastrophe about to demolish Kosawa. What follows is a flashback that explains how the end arrived. Colonial and imperial pursuits influenced Kosawa's country for centuries. Eventually, after the country won independence in 1980, Kosawa was signed over to Pexton, an American oil corporation, after the country's government tricked the villagers into believing the action would bring them prosperity. Pexton has been entrenched for decades, from the time Thula's grandparents, Yaya and Big Papa, were young to the novel's present; its exploitation has yielded almost nothing for Kosawa, although Pexton has greatly profited from its resource extraction. The villagers have repeatedly asked Pexton and the government to mitigate the ecological devastation that Pexton has wrought, but to no avail. A year before the destruction of Kosawa, Thula's father, Malabo, and five other men went to the capital city of Bezam to demand help, but they disappeared.

The story's central conflict is sparked when the village outcast, Konga, whose status is the result of a cultural superstition against mental illness, suggests a new plan: to galvanise a revolution. As events unfold, the villagers decide to have the village medium wipe Pexton representatives' memories of these events, but the plan is ruined when Kumbum dies of illness. Meanwhile, the government sends soldiers into Kosawa to break up the hostage situation; its interests lie with Pexton rather than its own citizens. When the village medium and his twin brother, the village healer, throw spears at them, the soldiers respond with a massacre.

After Austin's article is published, a group called the Restoration Movement tries to help Kosawa, primarily by investing in education. Thula becomes a serious student, bucking traditional gender roles; she goes to college in the United States, where she studies protest movements, develops her leadership skills, and falls in love with the now-exiled Austin. While she is abroad, Thula's friends in Kosawa, growing increasingly tired of waiting for promised changes, destroy Pexton's property. Some engage in violence, while others are framed and arrested. As Yaya grapples with the deaths of her family members and feels it is her turn to go, Thula's mother Sahel and little brother Juba move in with Sahel's new husband in Bezam. Thula returns to Kosawa after many years in the United States with the idea that the real problem is not Pexton but rather the country's dictator. She tries to rally others to the cause, but following a strong, unmarried woman makes many people uncomfortable. Eventually, her efforts culminate in Liberation Day, which is intended to be the start of the country's revolution but actually brings no changes. Juba takes an ideological turn away from his sister, becoming a wealthy and self-involved government official. Thula's more radical friends take the Pexton overseer and his wife, roping an unknowing Thula into their plan. When soldiers come to rescue the hostages, they demand that all the villagers leave Kosawa. During this forced migration, Thula, the hostage takers, and some soldiers die in an explosion. The villagers are not allowed to return to Kosawa, and the dictator burns the town to the ground. The elders mourn all the work they put into saving Kosawa.

ECHOES OF ECOLOGICAL DESECRATION

Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* (2021) narrates the story of a people whose resources turn out to be a curse rather than a blessing. It seeks to address how the people of Kosawa go about trying to understand, draw attention to, and fight against their

exploitation by Pexton. Pexton is an American oil company that explores and exploits oil in Kosawa. Through all sorts of treachery, divide and rule tactics, and manipulative schemes, Pexton, supported by village elites and the state government, drills oil from Kosawa and pays little or no compensation to the indigenous peoples. Spanning the length of four generations with specific attention to actions between the 1980s and 2000s, the narrative is tragic and riveting.

Technically, the narrative applies multiple perspectives, using the technique of collective reportage, especially from the views of various family members of the protagonist, Thula Nangi—her mother Saleh, grandmother Yaya, uncle Bongo, and brother Juba—in order to give the story credibility. Each of these chapters is interspersed with a chapter from “The Children,” which refers to Thula and her friends and spans the years as they grow up. This form of narrative technique, which can be grounded in the narrative form called collective reportage, finds significance in *How Beautiful We Were* from the theoretical position of Mikhail Bakhtin’s polyglossic theory of narratology.

For Bakhtin (1982), the layering of voices within a text’s narrative is nowhere more obvious than in the novel. This is because the novel’s epic mode permits the writer to embed voices within voices (for example, character speech within narrator speech, narrator speech within authorial speech, etc.) and to orchestrate a dialogue among them (p. 4). In *How Beautiful We Were Particularised*, for example, the layering of character speech within narrative discourse allows Mbue to present a rich diversity of human voices and ideologies on the one hand and, on the other, to collect those diverse, particularised voices and ideologies into a resounding social protest against an alien capitalist society. The dialogic nature of the novel is not limited to the distinction between narrator speech and character speech, however. In *How Beautiful We Were*, at least three levels of voices comprise the novel’s internal discourse. These include: the stratification of the narrator’s voice into two distinct voices; secondly, the undramatized voices and linguistic-ideological communities embedded in the narrative voice; and lastly, the voices of characters, including undramatized voices and communities embedded in character discourse.

Another intriguing technique used in the novel is *media res*. The novel does not follow the more conventional Gustav Freytag’s plot structure; rather, the narrative opens as the end draws near, thereby reinforcing the vision of ecological desecration, which is presented as being out of control and death. The rest of the book then tells the story of how this finalé came about, highlighting how Kosawa’s land and people have been exploited for centuries under the regime of colonial rubber plantations and, more recently, under the systems of neocolonial oil extraction. During the era of exploration and colonialism, the tropical regions were perceived as territories of natural resources (which included indigenous people) that were ripe for exploitation. The extensive extractive industries comprising mining and logging were interconnected with the practices of human exploitation and the cultivation of plantation landscapes. According to this colonialist epistemology, the act of ‘cultivating’ the tropics was a crucial component of a larger effort to cultivate ‘civilisation’, which resulted in the destruction of these regions—their lands, environments, people, and belief systems. The tropics, considered to be inhabited by “savage” indigenous and non-white populations, according to Achilles Mbembe (2001), have been perceived as “extractive landscapes” or waste-dumping spaces that can be “forged through various forms of physical and structural violence” (p. 62). These forms of environmental injustice continue in current times through extraction and industrialization, which are often vindicated as humanitarian imperatives to promote the “otherwise impoverished peripheries.” In so doing, the politics of ‘othering’ the tropics is being reinforced, in turn “normalising and depoliticizing” the appropriation of resources and wealth in the countries of the Global South.

Unless these structural discrepancies are bridged, environmental justice and equity can never be guaranteed. The removal of colonial influences from discussions surrounding environmental injustice necessitates moving away from fixed and hierarchical disciplinary

boundaries, both literal and metaphorical. The imperial-capitalist logic and its extractive ethos are fundamentally rooted in discipline, which establishes the “human” as the dominant force and the non-human as a means of production. Therefore, the concerns pertaining to environmental and consequential epistemic injustice require a fundamental transformation.

In the opening scene of *How Beautiful We Were* (HBWW), it is only when the village madman, Konga (who sees what others cannot see), makes a sudden rebellious move that the villagers are propelled to take a stand, and the story is set in motion. The madman is significant, for it is she who is the focal point of the perspective that inaugurated action and freedom. When the local communities are deprived of their natural resources and the extraction company supersedes or diminishes non-capitalist systems of production, this explicit inequity results in the marginalised people being unable to sustain themselves without capitalism. Simultaneously, these communities are denied participation in the political and economic decisions that result in their environmental degradation and displacement. It was this denial that inaugurated Madame’s position.

In Mbue’s novel, the prolonged occupation of the Pexton oil company in Kosawa destroys the local ecological system and relegates the indigenous people of the village to the status of marginalised anomalies. Pexton establishes a territorial monopoly in Kosawa by appropriating land, trampling the people’s rights on it, and condemning their traditional knowledge of nature’s sanctity. It is as if, by constructing long stretches of oil pipelines that pass over the rivers, farms, and forests, Pexton warps the village’s ecosystems, converting them to mercantile sites for their “operations of capital,” representing an assemblage of extractivism and corporate power. Ignoring the wellbeing of the ordinary Kosawa people, Pexton’s expansionist and extractivist oil projects thwart everyday existence in Kosawa, as their harsh industrialization deterritorializes the place by harnessing a multilevel ecological assault that annihilates even the minimum chance of a healthy habitat.

Thula, the central protagonist, recounts how the increasing construction of oil wells, pipelines, leakages, and excessive waste fills the air and water bodies with unprecedented perniciousness. The air remains permanently heavy with soot, and the water supply is infected with poisonous elements, making it “dirty to deadly” (Mbue, 2021, p. 32) to drink, even though they must, as ordinary Kosawans, have no alternative water source. The availability of a healthy and secure atmosphere for living is considered essential in ensuring an overall satisfactory and livable environment, and a decrease in this quality due to industrial activities can have detrimental effects on the inhabitants. The problem of desecration assumes a worrisome dimension, such as the smell of crude oil making the air unbreathable, the piercing noises from the oil fields disturbing daily activities, the oozing of oil from pipeline breakages damaging farmlands, and most devastatingly, the soaring toxicities from flare stacks hurling chemical hazards on the wind and proving fatal for newborn babies. Fevers, coughing, and infant mortality have become so ubiquitous that the “fact that two children had died in one month” (Mbue, 2021, p. 33), is no longer shocking. Many times, oil spills burn the forests, ravaging the families living there and forcing them to flee their homes and relocate to decrepit places.

However, while oil industrialization continues to plague Kosawa’s ecosystems and the poor over years and decades, the irony is that neither the American overseers who supervise the extraction work nor the government leaders who have granted them land and drilling licenses are affected by the environmental perils. This illustrates how the whole notion of environmental injustice is typically relegated to, and discussed in terms of, those who have been excluded from the positive impacts of development and/or who bear the repercussions and externalities. The Pexton overseers living in the hilltop mansions never experience the screaming flares or the irritating black smoke; as a young Thula innocently muses, “for reasons we couldn’t understand, the smoke always blew in our direction” (Mbue, 2021, p. 33).

Thula’s expression above is born from a tone of grief and regret, and it is emblematic

of the environmental injustices and the perpetuation of racial capitalism, resulting in the prevalence of “environmental racism,” which describes the strategies employed by dominant environmental/extractive corporations practiced in areas populated by people of colour. This disparity is not only epistemological; it is also grounded in character juxtaposition. Juxtaposition is a literary technique that refers to the placement of contrasting ideas next to each other, often to produce an ironic or thought-provoking effect. Writers use juxtaposition in both poetry and prose, though this common literary device looks slightly different within each realm of literature. While it functions particularly through the medium of discourse in poetry, it also functions both as a language device and a medium of character stratification in prose. In *How Beautiful We Were*, juxtaposition is used to build tension and highlight an important contrast between the people of Kosawa and Pexnton’s expatriate workers.

Through the anthropocentric “othering” of the environment of Kosawa, which equally translates into the othering of the people, environmental racism is grounded and perpetuated through racial injustice in the decision-making process regarding environmental policy and the inequitable implementation of environmental regulations. There is a systemic practice of installing toxic waste facilities in communities of colour, which is officially sanctioned and results in the presence of hazardous substances in these areas, thereby posing a severe risk to their inhabitants. The functioning of global capitalism has always thrived on devaluing blacks and non-whites, and discriminatory environmental policies have played a decisive role in corroborating culturally and socially constructed differences.

Environmental racism is closely linked to environmental injustices, highlighting that even in “meta-economic” neoliberal capitalist times, political and economic disparities persist despite structures and practices not being overtly racist (Pulido, 2016). Poor communities of color, such as those in the village of Kosawa, suffer more acutely from environmental disasters compared to African elites residing in urban areas like Bezam. Ordinary Kosawans are seen as expendable, the ‘surplus’ within state structures, whose lives are deemed inconsequential in the broader web of profit and productivity (Harvey, 1989). Consequently, neither the state nor dominant power groups address the social inequality resulting from the exploitation and segregation of these impoverished communities, forcing them to live near pollution sources. This harsh reality underscores the persistence of environmental racism as a crucial component of the broader system of oppression.

The Pexnton company stays heedless of the frequent oil explosions, waste, and breakages, and on request for replacement or repair, the logic that is conveniently supplied is “why should Pexnton replace it when the cost of its negligence [is not to be] borne by the poor fellows of Kosawa??” (Mbue, 2021, p. 28). On another occasion, after repeated complaints, the Pexnton supervisors take the river water to test the pollution level, and weeks later they confirm that “the water was fine, but for the sake of caution, it would be best if they boiled it for thirty minutes before giving it to their children” (Mbue, 2021, p. 35). However, quite contrarily, the village leaders who serve as the mouthpieces of Pexnton are provided with water purifiers and sometimes with bottled water too. Their children, when they fall ill, are given appropriate medical coverage and treated by good physicians. The Pexnton overseers and the village leaders acquire the benefits of Kosawa’s natural resources and exercise their authority over the poor masses, stripping these poor members of the community of their right to the basic amenities of life—clean water to drink and air to breathe. The ordinary Kosawa people’s lives and deaths are of no substantial value to the Pexnton company agents, which demonstrates how the drive for extraction reiterates the machinery enmeshed in forms of contemporary racialized capitalism and empire.

Another key technique employed in the novel is irony. Irony skirts the whole narrative, especially the oil activities of Pexnton. It will be imperative to state here that Pexnton comes to Kosawa, flaunting itself as a benevolent organisation and showcasing the benefits of oil exploration and rapid industrialization for the benefit of Kosawans. Before this, Kosawa

village was lush with numerous trees and a bountiful ecosystem, and the people, with their traditional livelihood of farming and hunting, possessed a profound interconnection with nature. This directly contrasts with reality, which is the deliberate despoliation of Kosawa land and people by Prexton. This marked difference is foregrounded in the novel by the symbolic representation of time past and time present. The temporality narrative movement is captured in the title of the novel, *How Beautiful We Were*. “Were,” which is the second person plural/singular past tense, is used here to mark a movement in time in order to symbolically connote how in the past nature was seen by Kosawa people as holistic and as an interconnected continuum of humans and all natural objects that exist in harmony, but now contrasts with the toxicity that Prexton represents. This toxicity is ironic given the initial assurance given to the poor villagers of Kosawa that they have arrived to “bring something called ‘civilisation’” and “prosperity” to Kosawa (Mbue, 2021, p. 221).

The Pexton company portrays itself as the agent who will regenerate Kosawa’s cultural stagnation through economic revival, but offers the direct opposite. Additionally, the representatives assure everyone that they are in Kosawa for only a short period and will leave as soon as their task of industrialization is over. Using the technique of flashback, Mbue uses Thula’s grandmother, Yaya, to mournfully recollect that long ago, when “rubber was needed in Europe,” the Kosawa people were “beaten and starved and made to work” in the rubber plantations, highlighting how “colonial ecological violence” as a process disrupts indigenous eco-social relations. Those who witnessed the horrors of rubber plantation workers could do nothing but “remain standing” as the Europeans established themselves as powerful superiors to the villagers (Mbue, 2021, p. 224). The Europeans decline the Kosawan worldview of indigenous sociality and spirituality, pressuring them to “integrate into [their] lives the principles” of the European order (Mbue, 2021, p. 224). To ensure their continuing authority, upon leaving the country, the Europeans chose the Bezam people as the ones who could “intelligently” foster the civilizational values and thus be the rightful owners of the “young country” (Mbue, 2021, p. 224). This placed the Bezam people above the Kosawa people and continued the dualistic colonial world view, as well as providing a way to create a hierarchical division between African tribes. This polarisation illustrates how Europe employed an imperial or ‘global linear’ way of thinking to divide and control the planet, thereby forming a hierarchical structure (Karmakar & Rajendra, 2023). The conflict between Kosawa and Prexton is therefore a metaphor for demonstrating how the racialization of the planet compounded the racialization of people and reveals how the global linear thinking of Europeans partitioned the world according to European needs and, by the same token, reinforced the distinction between Western and non-Western civilisations and cultures.

Using the holophrastic title of “Your Excellency,” Mbue imbues an irony in the actions of the government in order to show the correlation between the activities of an institution and its multiple motivations, objectives, and principles—the principles that the institution upholds, such as fairness or social parity. Ironically, “His Excellency” exemplifies the racial and hierarchical government in Bezam and its failure to uphold its institutional ethos, following in the footsteps of the white European colonialists, and later colludes with Pexton’s mercantile obsessions. Without discussion or agreement with the ordinary people of Kosawa, the government grants Pexton ownership of Kosawa land. It is only years later that a few men accidentally learn from the village leader that “men with the tales of prosperity came to see [them] because Pexton wanted them to do it for the sake of propriety and because a man in the government, a man familiar with our customs, had suggested it” (Mbue, 2021, p. 229). Hence, the government, with its vices, emerges as a repressive institution that complies with capitalist ethics by decimating the Kosawa people’s experiences of “slow violence” and environmental injustice by obstructing their ability and credibility to voice them. The institutionalised blindness of the government to register the decay and dehumanisation wrought by rampant mining and pollution makes them culpable not only for oppressing their citizens but also for suppressing the indigenous epistemologies

that have valued the sacredness of land and its relation to humans, ecology, and spirits. Malabo and Bongo try to speak about how the unabating oil industrialization has been impoverishing land, creating livelihood insecurities, pushing people towards poverty, magnifying the resource scarcity for the poor, and forcing mass migrations, all of which are endangering Kosawa's existence. The denial of Kosawa's agency is representative of the eradication of the African indigenous testimonies and values that have been the foundation of collective social resilience in African communities.

It is in the interests of the ecosystem, that eco-crits (scholars in the field of ecocriticism) like Imbolo Mbue and others across the global south, with special emphasis on African writers, have remained truly committed to the demands of bringing to global knowledge the massive environmental devastation on human lives and the physical environment by multinational oil corporations through oil spills, gas flares and other ecologically-destructive practices. Aside the ugly manner and effect of oil exploration activities on the flora and fauna, the hazard on human lives is not only alarming, but has remained unchecked (Ohagwam 2018; Ohagwam 2020; & Ohagwam 2021).

CONCLUSION

Pexton's encroachment in Kosawa and their self-declared mission of development testify to the teleological meta-narratives of progress and advancement that uphold idealised visions of a glorified future used to disseminate the commercial agendas of capitalism. In this regard, it is instructive to note that resource extraction or exploitation projects are often portrayed and labelled as development projects with promises of ample opportunities for financial and social advancement. While the ordinary Kosawa people remain bewildered listening to such grand stories of socio-cultural transformation and infrastructural development, as they had "never witnessed or considered [such] a possibility," the men from Pexton repeatedly attest that soon the villagers would "sing songs of gratitude to the Spirit every morning for having put oil under [their] land" (Mbue, 2021, p. 72). This rhetoric illustrates how capitalism and its agents subscribe to a mythical discourse of developmentalism—claiming that the impact of environmental malignancies on the ordinary people is for their collective good. This make-believe or fairy-tale goes thus: that this unspectacular violence cannot operate as a "major threat multiplier," and this becomes an exponential factor in "proliferating conflicts in situations where the conditions for sustaining life become increasingly but gradually degraded" (Nixon, p. 3). In addition, this false narrative entangles the processes of cognitive, social, and ecological production, thereby obliterating the existing epistemic agency of the poor and unleashing what Rob Nixon terms "slow violence."

Interestingly, this article has shown how Imbolo Mbue deploys certain techniques to make an essential intervention into the historical development of African states and further highlights the theme of neocolonialism in Africa. In the novel, the setting, characters, events, and, centrally, the conflict were significant and indicative of the reality that most places in Africa continue to reel under colonially inherited ways of thinking and resource appropriation; sadly, these converge to foster ecological and socio-political injustices and oppression, thereby extending the gaps in the political economy between the temperate countries of the Global North and the tropical countries of the Global South.

REFERENCES

- Akpan, I. F., Udofia, S. E., & Thomas, N. (2016). Innovative use of ICT in science teacher education for sustainable national development. *Journal of Nigeria Association for Educational Media and Technology*, 20(1), 37-44.
- Bakhtin, M. (1982). *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Texas: U. of Texas Press.

- Faulkner, W. (1975). *Requiem for a Nun*. New York: Random House.
- Goudie, A. (2001). *Human impact on the natural environment*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.
- Harvey, D. (1998). *The Limits to Capital*. University of Chicago Press.
- Karmakar, G., & Rajendra C. (2023). Extraction and environmental injustices: (De)colonial Practices in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*. *ETropic: Electronic Journal of Studies in the Tropics*, 22(2): 125-147.
- Mateer, J. C. D. (2017). *Neoliberal water management in Northwestern India: impacts and experiences of the shifting hydro-social cycle* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press.
- Mbue, I. (2021). *How Beautiful We Were*. Canongate Books Ltd.
- Nare, M., Moopi, P., & Nyambi, O. (2024). Global Coloniality and Ecological Injustice in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* (2021). *Journal of Black Studies*, 55(4), 349-372.
- Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Mass., Harvard UP.
- Nixon, R. (2018). Government Inaction is Slow Violence. Interview with Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now!* <http://democracynow.org/rob-nixon>.
- Ohagwam, U. (2018). The Niger Delta crises in the Niger Delta Novel: Reflections on Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. *Journal of Arts & Humanities*, 7(11), 11-17.
- Ohagwam, U. (2020). Grappling with slow violence in Isidore Okpewho's *Tides*." *Kiabara: University of Port Harcourt Journal of Humanities*, 26(1&2), 34-39.
- Ohagwam, U., & Dick, T. (2021). Slow violence and the politics of alienation in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*. *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies (JOLLS)*, 10(2), 81-87.
- Pulido, L. (2016). Flint, environmental racism, and racial capitalism. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 27(3), 1-16.