World Petro-illiterature: An Ecofeminist Reading of Ecological Refugees in Chris Cleave's *Little Bee*

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Introduction

In 1992, Amitav Ghosh wrote an essay entitled "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel." In this piece, Ghosh highlighted the scarcity of works published on the subject of the encounter with oil (138). The situation has changed since 1992 as an emerging body of world literature has turned its attention to the representation of the petroleum industry's impact on people's lives, particularly in the South. In a piece published in 2012 titled "'The Black and Cruel Demon' and Its Transformations of Space: Toward a Comparative Study of the World Literature of Oil and Place," Michael K. Walonen traces the existence of a well-established world literary tradition that criticizes oil's exercise of power and contribution to inequality. However, although Walonen emphasizes the incisive commentary, which petro-texts give on oil's alteration of space and society, he approves Ghosh's claim regarding the continuous absence of a single work that "captures the flow of people, capital, and geopolitical control represented by the oil industry" (Walonen 58). In fact, the critique of British multinationals' control of Nigerian oil together with the displacement, population removal and irregular migration described in Chris Cleave's *Little Bee: The Other Hand of Darkness* (2008) challenges Walonen's approval of Ghosh's observation as the novel highlights the imperial power of petro-capitalism, which turns the periphery into a supplier of resource revenue to fuel growth at the center.

Despite the growing corpus of oil literature which examines "energopower" (Boyer 309), literary criticism has not given much attention to petro-fiction, particularly to the petro-texts that describe the deracination and forced migration resulting from oil politics. In "Conjectures in World Energy Literature," Imre Szeman explains that attention to energy differentials in the world has largely been absent from critical investigations of literature (281). This paper explores this timely and important but under-studied topic through a focus on Cleave's novel in order to argue that Nigerian women have to strive against the petro-violence inflicted on their bodies as well as on the body of the earth. In this analysis of *Little Bee*'s representation of the petro-industry, I argue that oil business's decimation of the Niger Delta

ecosystem cannot be separated from its destruction of female asylum seekers' lives.

The double destruction of nature and women's lives and bodies reminds us of Szeman's ideas in "Energy and Literature" where he explains that investigating the literary portrayal of energy "can open up new ways of analysing literature in relation to the world in which it is produced, particularly because where and what kinds of energy are used and by whom reflect a map of power, control, privilege and dispossession" (228-229). In the same vein, in "Monstrous Transformer: Petrofiction and World Literature," Graeme Macdonald insists on "the necessary 'worlding' of petrofiction and other resource texts" (291) and highlights the unequal power map reflected in petro-literature through a focus on oil frontiers. Macdonald calls oil literature "the fiction of oil frontierism" (297) or "oil frontier petrofiction" (298). According to him, petro-stories conjoin distinct but interlinked "'energopolitical' frontiers" that connect "formal" imperialism with neoliberal hegemony.

Building on Macdonald's conception of world petro-fictions as "texts of resource imperialism" (300), my analysis of *Little Bee* shows that our understanding of "oil frontierism" needs to be expanded beyond sites of extraction and consumption in order to include the spaces of coerced displacement resulting from "petro-despotism" (Nixon 55). In addition to conveying the imperialism of the global political economy, petro-texts reveal the illegalization of the movement of Southern locals who attempt to evade the ravages of petro-capitalism. Petro-borders are, thus, not limited to the borders that transnational corporations cross/violate in order to control the petro-sites that exist on the globe's Southern periphery. Petro-borders encompass the borders ecological refugees have to cross in order to survive the destruction induced by "petro-development" and "petro-modernity." Indeed, while the physical borders crossed by asylum seekers are tangible barriers to movement, the intangible borders violated by capitalist companies are geopolitical gateways to the riches and resources of the postcolonial South. The violence caused by oil politics, the "birthright lottery" (Sachar), and the inability to satisfy the high ceiling of visa requirements to obtain the privileged passports of the Global North have forced many of those displaced by oil interests to migrate without papers.

The intersection between the representation of oil calamities and illicit migration in *Little Bee* places it also at an intersection of the "various genres of petrolic literature" (290). The most appropriate classification of *Little Bee* within these genres is as a work of petro-illiterature, a subgenre that Hakim Abderrezak defines as follows:

> I call the previously unidentified new terrain of writing illiterature so as to make a deliberate compression of illegal and literature, in order to reappropriate illegality, as well as to highlight how the characters of this

> subgenre circumvent anti-immigration laws. Additionally, illiterature draws attention to the issue of clandestine emigration originating from the Global South, particularly African countries. (Abderrezak qtd in Kebsi "Gendering", "Bridging"); (Abderrezak 57).

Chris Cleave's *Little Bee* is a novel that sheds light on the forced "illegal" migration caused by oil, hence illuminating the unequal power dynamics between the globe's Northern core and its Southern periphery. The novel evolves from the juxtaposed descriptions of the lives of the paperless asylum seeker Little Bee and Sarah, an Englishwoman and magazine editor who lives in a prosperous suburb of London. The dual narrative depicts Bee and her sister first encountering Sarah and her husband Andrew on a beach in Nigeria. The sisters run to the beach to escape the soldiers who have burned their village and have been chasing them in order to clear the land for oil drilling. As the sisters seek help from the British, the militiamen catch up with them and offer to spare their lives if Andrew accepts to let them cut his middle finger. Andrew refuses, but Sarah accepts to have her finger cut. Despite this, the soldiers abduct both girls. The older sister, Nkiruka, is gang raped, murdered and cannibalized. Bee ultimately escapes and travels illicitly to Great Britain, hoping to seek asylum there. Bee finds Sarah and stays with her, hoping to regularize her situation and become a British citizen. However, the British authorities discover Bee's paperless status and deport her, despite the threat this poses to her life. Following Bee's deportation, Sarah and her son Charlie travel to Nigeria in an attempt to save Bee by collecting other stories similar to hers and writing a book about the crimes committed by oil companies. In the end, soldiers succeed in catching Bee on the beach while Sarah and Charlie are collecting the stories.

Despite the broader literary acknowledgement of displacement resulting from oil extraction, this paper is the first scholarly study to highlight the connection between the emergent subgenres of illiterature (a subgenre of migrant literature) and petro-literature (a subgrenre of energy literature) using *Little Bee* as an example of a piece of world oil illiterature. This text of world petro-illiterature emphasizes the intersection between resource dispossession, clandestine migration, ecological damage and gendered oppression. This petro-text also registers and exposes the inequalities and injustice created by globalization. The global map of energy and the resulting removal, forced migration and unauthorized border-crossings that are depicted in this piece of energy illiterature expose the inequality caused by globalization and offer a new way of understanding the 'global' in world literature.

Patricia Yaeger invites scholars to create an "energy-driven literary theory" (307) that would probe the relationship between energy resources and literature (305). Analyzing the petro-fiction that represents paperless asylum seekers through the lens of illiterature

picks up on Yaeger's invitation by enriching the emergent field of petro-criticism and deepening our understanding of energy literature. Investigating oil illiterature shows how the global demand for energy jeopardizes the security of those who live on the globe's periphery. World petro-illiterature tells the story of an uneven and unfinished globalization that causes the coerced illicit movement of the most vulnerable groups and destroys the lives of Southern women and children. In this regard, *Little Bee* highlights the connections between environmental devastation and women's subordination because the militias, which oil multinationals used to force the villagers to leave the land of their ancestors, have also abused, tortured and raped the women. These female villagers have been traumatized and displaced so that oil megabusiness drill their land for oil and extract the black gold that lies under their village.

By exposing the implications of oil multinationals' operations on females, this petro-narrative stresses the link between gender and ecology in the era of globalization. In fact, none of the scholarly studies that have focused on this novel so far has followed an ecofeminist approach that emphasizes the link between ecological and gendered oppression in the global era. The studies that have been produced so far have highlighted the theme of rights violations (Swanson Goldberg; Crépau and Holland); the encounter between the self and Other (Tamnes; Savu); the trauma resulting from migration (Khazanovych); imperialism (Neal) and the theme of detention (Hart). Although all these studies, except Khazanovych's, focus on the atrocities committed by oil-drilling operations, none of them offers an analysis of the inextricable link between oil business's devastation of women and the ecosystem.

My article bridges this gap by highlighting the connections between environmental destruction and women's subordination. Accordingly, this paper starts by introducing the geopolitical context surrounding the storyline. Then, the analysis shows how globalization allows British multinationals to invade Nigerian territory and devastate its ecosystem, while preventing Nigerians from accessing the UK. The paradoxes of globalization are explored through an investigation of the contradiction between the punishment inflicted on Nigerian citizens for illicitly entering the UK and the absence of punishment for British companies that destroy the environment and force Nigerians to seek asylum in the UK. The next section of the paper delves into the parallel between capitalism's decimation of the Nigerian ecology and its devastation of Nigerian women's lives. Capitalism's disregard for its destruction of the Nigerian ecological scene is paralleled to its lack of regard for the rape and forced removal of women. My discussion of the intersections between the capitalist exploitation of women and natural resources demonstrates that the British neocolonial and

imperialist search for wealth in Africa necessitates the abuse of both nature and the female body.

Geopolitical context: the Nigerian "oil curse": a neocolonial war about resource control

In the final notes annexed to the novel, Cleave tells his readers that "the interethnic and oil-related conflicts from which Little Bee is fleeing are real and ongoing in the Delta region of that country, which at the time of writing, is the world's eighth biggest petroleum-exporting nation" (269). The reference to real events and the inclusion of realistic elements necessitate an awareness of the geopolitical context surrounding the plot of the narrative. Hence, an investigation of the politics of resource extraction in Nigeria can provide a broader understanding of the capitalist neocolonial forces behind the Niger Delta crisis that is represented in the novel. The abundance of natural resources is striking in Nigeria: off-shore raw oil reserves alone, located mainly in the Niger Delta, represent around 35.2 billion barrels (Paris 85). In addition to this abudance, the oil is of excellent quality as it contains little sulfur. These assets have attracted British multinationals to Nigerian oilfields.

Nonetheless, the Nigerian hydrocarbon deposits have become a "curse" (Iheka 3). In *Le Pétrole Tue l'Afrique*/*Oil Kills Africa*, Henri Paris explains that, far from benefitting Nigerians, "the oil curse" has generated a wide array of problems, including environmental degradation caused by the pollution from the uninterrupted production of oil and gas (Paris 89). International law and its corporate guidelines require foreign oil companies that want to drill a new patch of the Delta to conduct a social and ecological evaluation to determine potential disruption to the local community (Ghazvinian 30). The corporation would be expected to meet with community leaders and listen to their problems after the beginning of the operations. In the case of an oil spill, the corporation would have to pay compensation. However, the promises of development that were made by British companies such as Shell have not been fulfilled. Many Nigerian fishing communities have been disrupted or dislocated by oil spills that have contaminated the creeks from which they earn a living (Turner 75). Others have plunged into brutal conflict with each other over meager compensation payments (Ghazvinian 19-20).

A general climate of impunity infects the Nigerian ecological scene, as devastation of the environment persists unabated and unpunished. When the people of the Delta have protested, the Nigerian government, pressured by British multinationals, have responded with violence as the state receives oil revenues from the oil companies in exchange for delivering "stability" and "order" such as is required for the continuous production of oil (Turner 74). For instance, in 1990,

this alliance between the state and the oil industry (Caminero-Santangelo 133) caused the killing of 80 Nigerians when Shell managers asked the police commissioner to send antiriot police to protect oil facilities. 495 others were injured by Nigerian police forces during what was intended to be a peaceful protest outside of the Shell installation (Ghazvinian 26-27). This pattern of violence persisted throughout the nineties as Shell sought the help of the military junta against civilians whenever they demonstrated against its polluting and devastating oil extraction activities.

Complaints about the mounting ecological problems caused by multinationals continued to escalate. In 1992, a group called the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) exposed Shell's environmental despoliation and human rights violations. It opposed the government's unjust control of "their oil." This grassroots social movement was led by the Nigerian writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was a member of the Ogoni people and whose manifesto *Genocide in Nigeria* presented gas flaring and oil spills in the Niger Delta as a form of genocidal violence as it contaminated the area and destroyed the livelihoods of locals (81-82). Saro-Wiwa's opposition to the targeting of Ogoni people's homeland for crude oil extraction resulted in his execution, along with eight other MOSOP leaders in 1995, by the Nigerian military (Watts "Economies of Violence" 5092).

Despite the richness of the natural resources with which Nigeria is endowed, 70% of the population lives below the poverty line. Since big corporations' sole concern is to duplicate their gains, oil revenues have benefitted big business rather than the country whose land they drill for oil. While oil wealth has also benefitted a class of corrupt Nigerian politicians who cooperated with oil companies (Walonen 70-71), the situation of the poor people whose environment is decimated in searching for black gold has deteriorated, and many Ogoni lives have been destroyed.

It is also worth revealing that Nigeria has an open economy providing free entry to foreign capital and foreign entrepreneurship (Abumer 158). First, foreign private investors are free to choose the field and location in which they want to invest. Second, Nigeria offers a pioneer status exempting new investors from taxes for up to five years to enable their success (Abumer 160). Despite the high involvement of multinational capital in Nigeria and the open access big corporations have to Nigerian resources, there is not an equivalent acceptance of Nigeria's human capital in the UK. Rather, the internationalism of the British firms is met by strong feelings of nationalism and by radical calls for the sovereignty of the state by the British government and far-right politicians. The fanatical patriotism with which the migration issue has been received exacerbates Northern greed, which expects the British economy to grow regardless of its impact on Nigerians.

The contradictions of globalization

The ending of the novel exemplifies the paradoxes of the global era as the imprisonment and ultimate repatriation of Bee reflect the host country's rejection of ecological refugees. Bee's non-belonging to Great Britain is stressed when the officer who handcuffs her tells she is "… a drain on the resources. The point is you don't *belong* here" (Cleave 246). This denouement evokes the opening of the novel, which highlights the contradictory mobility rules in the era of globalization. The contradiction between borderless economics and the border control imposed upon the movement of Third World people is highlighted from the first sentence of the novel: "MOST DAYS I WISH I was a British pound coin instead of an African girl. Everyone would be pleased to see me coming" (Cleave 1). The positioning of this sentence at the beginning of the narrative underlines the double standard with which people and money are treated, thus alluding to the hostility and contempt with which immigrants are met. The personification technique used in the second paragraph of the novel emphasizes the ease with which trade and investments move: "A pound can go wherever it thinks it will be safest. It can cross deserts and oceans and leave the sound of gunfire and the bitter smell of burning that is behind" (Cleave 1).

The comparison between the British obsession with financial security and its disregard for the security of humans is stressed throughout the novel. The third paragraph of the narrative underlines the uneven power dynamics that govern the flow of capital and people: "Of course a pound can be serious too. It can disguise itself as power or property, and there is nothing more serious when you are a girl who has neither. You must try to catch the pound and trap it in your pocket, so that it cannot reach a safe country unless it takes you with it" (Cleave 1). This early reference to African girlhood introduces the junction between these geopolitical dynamics and gender issues. Bee's definition of herself as a "girl who has neither" illuminates the juncture between gender, ecology and political economy: as a poor girl from a postcolonial country, Bee cannot be given access to Great Britain despite the gendered socio-environmental injustice inflicted upon her. While wealthy Nigerians can be granted visas that allow them to travel to Europe easily, the world does not care about poor ecological refugees' right to safety.

The recurrent personification of the British pound reveals the power of the English currency as the attribution of human characteristics to the pound indicates its weight in the global economy. It also mirrors the unequal exchanges between Europe and Africa. The protagonist Bee explains how the British pound "speaks with the voice of Queen Elizabeth the Second of England. Her face is stamped upon it

and sometimes when I look very closely I can see her lips moving. I hold her to my ear. What is she saying? *Put me down this minute, young lady, or I shall call my guards*" (Cleave 2). The imagined disdainful attitude of the Queen reflects the British rejection of ecological refugees whose movement has been prompted by the actions of British oil multinationals. The invocation of the guards echoes Great Britain's scornful response to paperless asylum seekers, a response consisting of stigmatization, criminalization, incarceration and deportation.

Bee's inability to disapprove of the Queen's order bespeaks Nigeria's continuous submission to its previous colonizer. The characterization of the Queen is replete with hints of British imperialist history: intending to imitate the Queen's grammar and voice so that she can pass the control of frontier police officers, Bee decides to answer in "a voice as clear as the Cullinan diamond" and to say "*my goodness how dare you*?" (Cleave 2) when asked to show her ID. While the British Crown is currently in possession of the Cullinan Diamond – the largest gem-quality diamond ever found – the diamond originated in South Africa. Bee's reference to it is a reminder to readers of the history of British exploitation of African land, resources and people as the Empire expanded its territory and enriched its treasury. This brings forth the imagery that represents Bee as "a victim rescued from the flood, coughing up the colonial water from her lungs" (Cleave 8). This additional reference to the history of colonization exposes the British neocolonial machinery whose destruction of the environment has displaced female minors like Little Bee.

The contradictions of the global era are further manifested when we contrast the difficulty and criminalization of Bee's illicit migration to the UK to the ease with which Sarah and Andrew travel to Nigeria. The British couple decides to visit Africa as a getaway from the stress of their busy professional lives in London and to improve their conjugal relationship. The couple's marriage has cooled down after the birth of their first child, and Sarah has been cheating on Andrew. The idea of a vacation in Nigeria is suggested to Sarah via an advertisement package she receives at her magazine. Thus, Sarah and Andrew are in the Delta as tourists invited specifically to increase international recreational travel to Nigeria.

The couple's exoticizing and uninformed gaze at Nigeria and Nigerians accentuates the inequalities of globalization, particularly with regard to the right to movement. Multiple tourist-board advertisements had arrived at Sarah's magazine that spring, but the Nigeria package, which was emblazoned with the question: "FOR YOUR HOLIDAY THIS YEAR, WHY NOT TRY NIGERIA?" triggered Sarah's interest. The tourist board which produced the advertisement described Ibeno Beach as an "adventurous destination" (Cleave 99). In addition to this description, the envelope

included two open-ended airline tickets and a hotel reservation. The free tickets and accommodation were part of Sarah's payment for advertising trips to Nigeria in her magazine, which targets well-off British people. The simile, which shows that the whole trip seemed "as simple as turning up at the airport with a bikini" (Cleave 99), explains why Sarah has chosen Nigeria over the former Soviet states, which "were big that season" (Cleave 99). This simile also reflects the spatial inequality that allows the British to go to Nigeria whenever they want without a visa, while criminalizing the Nigerians who try to do the same.

It is noteworthy that Sarah and Andrew travel to Nigeria despite a warning issued by their government. Just as large corporations care about their investments in Nigeria while disregarding the safety and development of Nigerians, the British government cares about its own citizens, while ignoring the security of the peoples whose natural resources have made the British economy prosper. The UK's nonchalance and carelessness for exploited peoples in the Commonwealth has resulted in Bee's repatriation despite the certainty that rape and death awaits her in Nigeria. Bitter irony emerges to the surface as we compare this denouement to the preamble of the novel, which informs its reader that "Britain is proud of its tradition of providing a safe haven for people fleeting[sic] persecution and conflict."

Sarcasm intensifies as we learn that this quote is taken from a book issued by the UK Home Office to assist those seeking to pass the British citizenship or settlement test (UK Home Office 23-29). The test itself is called the Life in the UK Test and candidates are advised to use this book in preparation for the test because it includes official practice questions and answers. The importance of the preamble to the text and the ugliness of the benevolent British chimera are stressed when Cleave refers to the epigraph in his final notes: "The novel begins with a quotation, complete with the original typo, from the UK Home Office publication *Life in the United Kingdom* (2005), fifth printing" (270). The second reference to the Home Office book highlights the hypocrisy of the British government that tries to market its image as a human rights protector while being indifferent to the threats menacing African lives. Irony reaches its climax in the novel as the British authorities put Bee on the plane in order to deport her, particularly because the flight attendants begin to show a safety film as the plane starts to roll backwards:

> They said what we should do, if the cabin filled with smoke and they also said where our life jackets were kept in case we landed on water. I saw that they did not show us the position to adopt in case we were deported to a country where it was likely that we would be killed because of events we had witnessed. They said there was more information on the safety card in the seat pocket in front of us. (Cleave 249)

The reference to safety is reminiscent of Saro-Wiwa's argument: "The environment is man's first right. Without a safe environment, man cannot live to claim other rights" (quoted in Westra 155). The novel's discussion of the violation of child refugees' rights demonstrates that environmental rights need to be understood in the larger context of the right to security. This evokes Swanson Goldberg's reading of *Little Bee* as a novel of human rights, particularly her assessment of the global distribution of safety and harm. Swanson Goldberg emphasizes the indivisibility of rights and argues that civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights cannot be separated from the right to safety (60-61). In fact, the sarcastic atmosphere reigning in this passage indicts the British system, which neglects the right to security by transgressing the non-refoulement principle and repatriating asylum seekers to places where their lives are endangered (Crépau and Holland 2-5). Under international law, countries are prohibited from returning asylum seekers to a country in which they have a well-grounded fear of persecution.

Despite the forced displacement resulting from British multinationals' destruction of the Nigerian ecosystem, the British immigration system tags the Nigerians who seek asylum in the UK without visas as "illegals." From the standpoint of the British government, the sovereignty of their nation-state and the so-called "illegality" of these paperless asylum seekers necessitate their repatriation. Rob Nixon's description of "displacement without moving" is useful here. This is "a more radical notion of displacement, one that instead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging, refers rather to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable" (Nixon 19). What *Little Bee* describes is a triple-displacement: a displacement from the natural resources that lie under the land Bee's community inhabited; a displacement from the village and country in which Bee was born and lived; and a displacement from the country where she has sought refuge. The oil-fueled turmoil generates loss of places of belonging and hoped-for shelter.

Bee's memories show that the misleading official and capitalist narrative of "village petro-modernization" has transformed the communal space in which her family and neighbours lived to a site of extraction. The circularity of Bee's story of displacement, which starts and ends in Nigeria, incarnates Nixon's notion of "displacement without moving" because the official repatriation decision returns Bee to a village whose landscape represents a distorted version of the one she knew. The space to which Bee is sent back has been emptied not only of its natural resources, but also of its inhabitants. The land on which Bee's village used to exist has been excavated, her family and community have been cleansed, and the oil that lay beneath it has been

taken to fuel the means of transportation on which the unprecedented speed of the global era relies. Yet neither this speed, nor the ability to move are accessible to this character whose land produces petroleum. The novel ends with Bee's displacement in her own village. This "displacement without moving" illustrates why environmental rights need to be advocated within the larger framework of human rights. An exploration of the impact of petroleum's destruction of nature on women will further illustrate this.

The impact of capitalism's decimation of the Nigerian ecology on women

The deportation of Bee reflects clear connections between the masculine domination of women and exploitation of nature. Her displacement proves that the "petro-despotism" (Nixon 55) characterizing crude oil megabusiness oppresses women and the planet. The gang rape of Bee's sister and the trauma resulting from witnessing it symbolize the twin crises of female subordination and environmental destruction. According to Susan Brownmiller, "rape is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (33). This claim applies perfectly to Bee, who has become haunted by the memory of "*the men*" after the rape of Nkiruka. The fear of "*the men*" stems partly from the fact that Bee and her sister have witnessed the massacre of the people of their village so that oil companies can use the land upon which the village is built. The fact that the sisters have seen what has been done to their village has necessitated their murder, as oil companies do not want any witnesses who might threaten to expose the story. Bee and her sister run away from their pursuers and ultimately encounter Sarah and Andrew. When Sarah and Andrew ask the scared sisters about who is hunting them, they answer as follows: "The same men who burned our village. The oil company's men" (Cleave 107).

Until this point in the narrative, the white couple is completely unaware of the oil conflict and think that the place was "unbelievably peaceful" (Cleave 102). When the couple hear the barking of the militias' dogs, Andrew thinks the locals are hunting. Sarah is surprised because she thought locals used elephants to hunt. This initial tourist gaze at the Ibeno Beach, whose description at first reminded Sarah of her honeymoon in Cuba, is subverted by the reality Sarah discovers after her encounter with Bee:

> The tourist board that sent the freebies noted that Ibeno Beach was an "adventurous destination." Actually … It was, *I now know*, bloated with the corpses of oil workers. To the south was the Atlantic ocean. On that southern edge, I met a girl who was not my magazine's target reader. Little Bee had fled southeast on bleeding feet from what had once been her

> village and was shortly to become an oil field. She fled from the men who would kill her because they were paid to" (Cleave 99-100, emphasis added).

The encounter between Sarah – the British tourist who travels to Nigeria in search of a vacation getaway – and Bee – the Nigerian girl who travels through fields by night and hides in jungles and swamps at daybreak for six days to escape her pursuers – exposes the privileges of English citizens who, unaware of the ravages created by British multinationals, travel to ex-colonies for vacation. This first encounter shocks Sarah as it allows her to understand that the barking they heard was not that of the locals hunting for lunch, but that of the men who were hunting the fleeing women and children and burying their bodies under rocks and branches. This encounter also appals Sarah because the militiamen catch Bee and her sister before her eyes.

Despite the sisters' attempts to flee the hunters, these militiamen succeeded in capturing them. Sarah's testimony tells us that the gunners have indulged in wine drinking before starting their mission to kill and rape. The characterization of the principal hunter focuses on the erection that can be seen under his tracksuit trousers. This detail foreshadows the sexual assault that is inflicted upon Nkiruka and that is told from the perspective of Bee. This foreshadowing combines with the use of auditory and olfactory imagery to describe the smell of urine and the sound of splashing on the dry leaves in the preceding scene, hence exacerbating the sense of imminent danger. Suspense is heightened as the militiamen push Bee under the boat on which they intend to rape her sister, asking her to listen:

> They raped my sister. They pushed her up against the side of the boat and they raped her. I heard her moaning. I could not hear everything, through the planks of the boat. It was muffled, the sound. I heard my sister choking, like she was being strangled. I heard the sound of her body beating against the planks. It went on for a very long time … Near the end I heard Nkiruka begging to die. I heard the hunters laughing. Then, I listened to my sister's bones being broken one by one. That is how my sister died … When the men and the dogs were finished with my sister, the only parts of her that they threw into the sea were the parts that could not be eaten. (Cleave 130-132)

This passage describes the barbarism and the savagery with which sex is forced upon Nkiruka so that the destruction of villages by British oil corporations is not revealed.

The gang rape reflects what Heather M. Turcotte calls "petro-sexual politics" (200). Not only do these petro-sexual politics emphasize the centrality of sexuality to the representation of petro-violence, but they also demonstrate that gender violence is part of a larger political economy of violence that creates the conditions for fostering and facilitating petro-politics (Turcotte 200-201). The characterization of Nkiruka highlights her emotional shock as she starts to shout out verses from the scriptures followed by songs she

used to sing with Bee when they were young and, later on, by additional screams. Both the screams and the words that preceded them reflect the intersection of the aggression inflicted on both the body of this young woman and the body of the earth. Therefore, this rape scene reminds us of Andree Collard's argument that "in patriarchy, nature, animals and women are objectified, hunted, invaded, colonized, owned, consumed and forced to yield" (1).

The patriarchy depicted in *Little Bee* needs to be understood in the context of a neoliberal structure that calls for free-market capitalism and champions a *laissez-faire* absolutism in the name of development. The social Darwinism that underlies this market fundamentalism has not generated the promised growth and prosperity. Oil companies argue that oil extraction leads to the development of the oil-producing countries. However, the human rights violations resulting from the operations of oil firms are an illustration of what Vandana Shiva calls maldevelopment: "a development bereft of the feminine, the conservation, the ecological principle" (4). Shiva shows how maldevelopment does not see a river as a communal resource that meets the needs of the local community, but rather as a resource to be dammed and put to technological use. Similarly, British oil companies view Nigerian villages not as sites of community, but as sites of extraction and transportation.

As a matter of fact, Michael J. Watts explains that the Ogoni people were disappointed by the promised oil modernity and petro-development: "the paradox of Ogoniland is that an accident of geological history – the location of more than ten major oilfields within its historic territory – ushered in, not petrolic modernization, but economic *underdevelopment* and an ecological catastrophe" (Watts "Petroviolence" 13, emphasis added). This underdevelopment shows how the oil industry destroys the intimacy locals have with their place. Oil industry's blind sense of entitlement and the helplessness before petro-power by those whose space and land have been invaded result in forced irregular migration. This uprooting of populations reveals that the gendered imperial nature of the scramble for African oil needs to be juxtaposed to the criminalization and illegalization of the movement of the asylum seekers who escape what Steve Learner calls the "sacrifice zone" (2) of modern capitalism. These sacrifice zones, where global oil capital strives to maintain or increase its regular oil supply, are represented by the ever-expanding extractive spaces where ecological degradation is permitted and forgotten together with the spaces of detention wherein immigrants are imprisoned when they migrate "illegally" to flee this devastation.

This transnational zone of capitalist exploitation reminds us that the consumptive "petrotopia" (LeManager 74) of neoliberal modernity relies on cheap petroleum from territories beyond the western metropolis. This evokes Michael Watts' description of the global oil

economies as economies of violence where the violent law of the corporate frontier sacrifices people's blood for oil ("Economies of Violence" 5089). The corporate frontier keeps expanding in search of excavation and industrial sites where profit can be maximized. *Little Bee* unveils petro-development's false promises of prosperity and wealth for the South and exposes the myths that were painted by oil interests. The novel's focus on the ordeal of Little Bee and the tragedy of Nkiruka highlights the destructive impact of petro-capitalism on rural Nigerian women and girls.

This text of petro-illiterature shows how industry enables capital accumulation instead of safeguarding the lives of citizens, landscape and animals. In addition to illustrating the environmental dangers of the corporate profit-drive, world oil illiterature sheds light on the situation of the stranded children refugees whose deracination represents the cost of energy securitization. Not only has this maldevelopment impoverished Nigeria by destroying its resources, but, in the case of Bee's village, it has exercised a horrific cleansing during which rape has been used as a tool to clear the land for oil exploration. This genocide highlights the "connection between patriarchal violence against women, other people and nature" (Mies and Shiva 14). While petro-maldevelopment, environmental destruction and exclusion from ancestral land affect the whole population, which is pushed out of its village, the impact of these calamities is stronger on already vulnerable groups, mainly women and children. As an underage girl, Little Bee faces the double-marginalization of gender and age. For a female ecological child refugee like Bee, exiting the land in which her people have been cleansed becomes a survival strategy: a matter of life or death. It is for this reason that she stows away on a ship heading for the UK, hoping to seek asylum there.

Investigating the rape scene shows that Nkiruka is not the only victim, because the "ear-witness" Bee is another sufferer. Bee is severely traumatized and cannot recover from the panic attacks that paralyze her. Hearing the killers penetrate and then murder and cannibalize Nkiruka is a hideous experience that causes agoraphobia in Bee. The act of eating Nkiruka's flesh conjures up the colonial ideology, which presented cannibalism as a "proof" of the "savagery" and "barbarity" of the Africans who "eat each other."

Turcotte criticizes the widespread framing of petro-violence as "ethnic conflict" (202). However, this racist colonial misrepresentation of Africans benefits oil megabusiness as it whitewashes oil multinationals' responsibility of the atrocities that were inflicted on women like Nkiruka. This misportrayal of African rituals and traditions misrepresents what happened as "'Africans" were fighting other "Africans.'" For this reason, Turcotte warns against misrepresenting the Delta turmoil as another "inter-ethnic conflict." In

fact, she warns that such misrepresentations, which construct the Niger Delta as a homogenous, dehistoricized, and "terrifying" place, follow a larger traditional colonial strategy that racializes African bodies in order to mark them as violent. This creates a geopolitical disconnect that situates petro-terrorism as a Nigerian problem that has no connection to the West (204). Such construction "allows" the UK to justify its repatriation of displaced characters like Bee even though she risks facing her sister's fate.

The fact that Bee hears, rather than sees, the attack accentuates its horror and explains the phobia she feels at the sight of males throughout the narrative. The fear is particularly seen in the detention center where Bee has tried to make herself undesirable by cutting her hair very short, declining to shower, wearing loose clothes that hide her curves, and binding her breasts with a cloth in order to appear flat-chested. The devastating impact of the rape scene on Bee's psychological equilibrium stresses the intersection between gender, ecology and political economy because it evokes the sexual assaults committed against citizens so that they leave their land for British oil corporations. This shows the link between the exploitation of the planet and the female body, hence conveying the "parallels between what Spivak calls the 'silencing of woman' and the occlusion of the environment" (qtd in Itheca 16). The gendered and ecological oppression resulting from oil business complicates our understanding of which groups of people get to enjoy the freedoms fossil fuels offer and which groups are sacrificed in order to ensure these freedoms. This discrepancy is inextricably tied to the question of which bodies live on and are evacuated from the industrial site, and which bodies consume the petroleum excavated from these sites. This inequality incites the reader to question the normalization of a globe wherein those who live in the North are relieved from having to think about the ecological and bodily destruction connected with resource extraction. Moreover, the British government's detention of the Nigerian female refugees who flee their country as a result of environmental destruction and lack of safety caused by British oil corporations reflects the connection between the exploitation of nature and the domination of women. *Little Bee* shows us that both are caused by a patriarchal capitalist structure willing to ravage earth and abuse women in order to be able to drill the land for oil.

Conclusion

World petro-illiterature demonstrates that demands for constant petro-flow ignore the safety and security of those whose land is excavated for oil. By shedding light on the business conduct of the petroleum industry, oil illiterature makes the reader think about those who suffer for petroleum. World energy illiterature interrupts what most of us see

as the normalcy of energy's presence in our daily lives, thus making us think about the global imperial resource war that marks our petro-world. The energy needs of people across the globe generate a constant demand for petro-flow. World texts of petro-illiterature allow us to see that oil represents a defining humanitarian and environmental concern in the global era.

This article has illuminated these concerns by exploring the links between the damage done to the Niger Delta's ecosystem and the brutality inflicted on female refugees. The analysis has shown that women have to strive against both the petroviolence exercised on their bodies as well as on the body of Earth. The tension built in Cleave's "illegal" immigration petro-narrative conveys female asylum seekers' struggle against a combination of patriarchal, capitalist, imperial and ecological forces. This text of petro-illiterature has enabled an understanding of crude oil mega business's destruction of the Nigerian ecology. It has also unveiled female trauma and agony in the era of globalization. By giving expression to asylum seekers' problems, fears, frustrations and aspirations, the novel has exposed the plight of the Nigerian women and girls who suffer as a result of the conflict caused by the imperial quest for resources. The representation of the journey to Britain has disclosed the intersection between the forces of gender inequity and the unequal laws of neoliberalism. It has also shown that social and gendered justice cannot be separated from ecological justice.

The analysis has also demonstrated the role oil illiterature plays in reporting the conspiracy between Northern capitalists and the Southern corrupt politicians who facilitate and conceal their crimes. Therefore, I would like to conclude by juxtaposing two statements uttered by Sarah at the beginning and towards the end of the narrative because their juxtaposition underlines the importance of oil storytelling. The first statement reflects Sarah and Andrew's unawareness of the oil conflict caused by Shell's greed: "That season in Nigeria, there was an oil war. Andrew and I hadn't known. The struggle was brief, confused and scarcely reported. The British and Nigerian governments both deny to this day that it even took place" (Cleave 99). Sarah's second statement is uttered in the narrative's final chapter when she realizes that finding stories similar to Bee's represents the only exit strategy: "As soon as we have one hundred stories, you will be strong … We need to collect the stories of people who've been through the same things as you. We need to make it undeniable" (Cleave 253). Sarah's first statement conveys the determination of the powerful to erase the atrocities of the petro-political alliance from memory. It shows that the silence imposed on the disastrous ramifications of oil politics by politicians and the media explains the importance of world energy illiterature. Sarah's second statement indicates that stories name and record the corporate crimes which multinationals want to hide. This statement bespeaks that

world petro-illiterature exposes the sacrificing of locals and the environment. Yet, unfortunately, the literary genre of energy literature, particularly its sub-genre, energy illiterature, has not received much critical attention. Literary criticism needs to focus more on the statelessness, forced migration and clandestine border-crossings caused by the scramble for natural resources, particularly in the Global South.

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