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Characterization and Presentation of Capitalist Environmental Destruction: A Critical Reading of Austin Bukenya's *A Hole in the Sky* (2013) and Okiya Omtatah's *Voice of the People* (2007)

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Drama,
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Capitalism.

This paper investigates how playwrights employ characterization to illuminate acts of capitalist environmental destruction in Austin Bukenya's *A Hole in the Sky* (2013) and Okiya Omtatah's *Voice of the People* (2007). The central idea is to examine the presentation of environmental destruction and the critical responses as dramatized through character articulation. The paper is premised on Ecofeminist and Eco-Marxist theoretical frameworks. The proponents of Ecofeminist theory are Karen J. Warren, Vandana Shiva, Greta Gaard, Carolyn Merchant and Ynestra King, whereas those of the Eco-Marxist framework are John Bellamy Foster, Herbert Marcuse and Paul Burkett. Ecofeminists argue that there is a close interrelation between women and nature. The theorization is that there is an interconnection between women and nature, particularly regarding their nurturing abilities, exploitation, and liberation. The paper contends that the twin-exploitation aspect of ecofeminism portrays acts of domination wrought by patriarchy and capitalism. Eco-Marxists expound on the exploitation aspect by linking ecological destruction to unbridled capitalism. The article uses qualitative methodology whereby the plays were purposively sampled and thematic analysis was done to examine the articulation of characters in depicting environmental destruction. The study establishes that playwrights have appropriately used their characters to illuminate environmental degradation. The depiction of characters as either conservationists or agents and orchestrators of environmental destruction helps the playwrights present capitalist oppression, repression, and expansionism.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to explicate how characterization conveys capitalist environmental destruction and the critical measures to address the same in Austin Bukenya’s *A Hole in the Sky* (2013) and Okiya Omtatah’s *Voice of the People* (2007). The paper argues that characters are presented and catalogued into three categories: conservationists, eco-destructors, and animist characters. In the two plays under study, characters in various categories present acts of ecological destruction and show agency in addressing this environmental injustice. The article undertakes a multi-species critical approach to explore characters’ behaviours, actions, and attitudes to understand how they communicate acts of environmental degradation. Further, the paper centres on characterization as an aspect of form in order to examine how it conveys the theme of capitalist environmental destruction. Based on the Eco-Marxist argument that unrestrained capitalism enhances environmental destruction, we advance the capitalist discourse by delving into ways in which destruction has been presented in the plays through capitalist repression, oppression, and capitalist expansionism.

CHARACTER ARTICULATION OF CAPITALIST DESTRUCTION**The Conservationists**

In this article, conservationist characters refer to those who perceive environmental destruction from a conservation standpoint. Their actions and words are informed by environmental conservation sensibilities and the repercussions of ecological destruction on their survival. In *A Hole in the Sky* (2013), Bukenya presents Kibichi, Kiwiti, Kitavi, Kijani and Nguvu Kikongwe,

members of one family, as conservationists. In *Voice of the People*, Nasirumbi and Indondo are presented as conservationists. These characters possess eco-activism abilities revealed through their activism against environmental destruction. Bukenya’s *A Hole in the Sky* (2013) is a story of an already ruined ecosystem that continues to suffer capitalists’ inherent expansion and an insatiable demand for profit and wealth accumulation. Omtatah’s *Voice of the People* (2007) narrates the impacts of modernity and the expenses of an urge for human development and enrichment of the environment.

In the opening scene of Bukenya’s *A Hole in The Sky* (2013), we are introduced to Kibichi’s family. Tajeer’s gang arrives at their home to displace the family to pave the way for the *jatropha* project. To Kikongwe and Kibichi, the event triggers the memory of the destruction of Lake Riziki. Their flashback paints images of oil exploration conducted on the lake by Tajeer and his investor friends, ultimately resulting in an ecocide. The following dialogue illustrates the incident:

“KIKONGWE: *Then Tajeer’s friends flew their planes over the lake and said there was oil beneath its waters. And before you could say ‘maji ya ziwa ...’*”

KIBICHI: *Men with heavy boots, steel hats, steel eyes and steel drills descended upon the lake. They tore through its brilliant waters, pierced its fragile floor, and clutched through its deepest secrets. They sucked out the dark slime to the surface and threw out a cheer, celebrating that they had struck oil! They even lit a fire over the slime that floated on the waters of our lake just to prove how hot their find was.*

KIKONGWE: *Hot indeed, and it burnt out our lives and our livelihoods by the sacred lake. The fish were there, floating on the*

slime, but they were dead and black. The water was neither drinkable nor navigable. We were finished. We just had to move, or stay there and die, like our lake" (Bukenya, 2013, p. 4).

Lake Riziki's tragic extinction results from capitalists' quest for oil exploration that would earn them wealth and profit. Tajeer's sanction shows that he reserves a capitalist mind. Mugo Muhia, in *The Subdued Nature: reading Henry Ole Kulet's Vanishing Herds through Eco-Marxist Lenses* posits that "In the hands of capitalists, nature suffers domination, fatally subjugating its ecological capacity to support life" (Muhia 2020; 134). By appropriating Muhia's assessment, we argue that the play reveals the consequences of the dislocation capitalism created between human beings, the natural environment, the non-humans, and their habitats. Capitalism destabilized an eco-balance that existed between the lake, water creatures, and humans. Lake Riziki ceased to be a source of livelihood to humans and a home to water creatures.

Bukenya crafts his conservationist characters from the family unit, pitting them against business associates led by Tajeer. The playwright then assigns them names that denote specific traits they embody. The playwright communicates to the reader through this appropriation. Translated to English, Kibichi means 'green' whose actions allude to the need for re-greening. At the opening of the play, when Tajeer's men approach his family, he stands firm, clutching his panga, ready to confront them. This resistance symbolizes an advocacy for conservation and re-greening. As the head of the family, Kibichi's name encompasses a plurality of nature. He steers the family towards conservation by giving his children names that denote nature; he instils the culture of conservation and resistance against pollution and exploitation. We argue that Bukenya's adoption of the family units represents his personal view on the need to advocate environmental conservation from basic units of society. This seems to be a favourable approach to environmental

conservation and restoration of degraded ecosystems.

Nguvu Kikongwe represents an elderly generation. His Swahili name, translated to English, means 'a strong elder'. The character's name signifies his sapient ecological consciousness, which is evident through his recognition of everything green as a shrine. He says, "I do have shrines, *Nyanya*. Many of them. Every green and growing thing is a shrine to me, a mark of the presence of the Creating and Sustaining Love" (Bukenya 2013; 87). Throughout the play, Kikongwe seems to be aware of nature's sustaining value, and he holds knowledge of herbal medicines that he uses to cure ailments. Consequently, his successful treatment of Tajeer led to a significant development: Tajeer decided to halt the *jatropha* project and instead focus on re-establishing the indigenous forest that had once thrived, thereby granting nature its liberation (Bukenya 2013; 105). Kikongwe represents an older generation whose knowledge of the importance of nature to human beings transcends every other character. Bukenya presents the old man as a figure who uses his knowledge to guide the young generation, teaching them ways of living in harmony with nature. Kikongwe's culturally inculcated norms and ecological consciousness allow him to oversee the development of the character Tajeer from antagonism to a possible hero and advocate for environmental conservation.

Similarly, Bukenya employs the characters of Kijani and Kitavi to present a critical commentary on capitalism. The characters adopt conservationist attitudes by opposing Tajeer. Their dependence on the natural ecosystem as a source of livelihood is diminished due to Tajeer's interference. This ignites in them a fighting and confronting spirit. Kijani says, "I am going over to Tajeer's mansion. I am going to tell him and his friends that what they are doing is stupid, dangerous, murderous, and suicidal" (Bukenya 2013; 17). Kijani points out that whatever Tajeer is doing in his quest for wealth and profit is suicidal to the environment, creatures and human beings and hence must be opposed. Kijani

strongly opposes Tajeer's actions, and this vow to confront eco-destructors represents his conservationist attitude. Although the character is a child, Bukonya deliberately points out that environmental destruction affects everyone. The imperative to resist and protect the environment is not constrained by age; even the youngest members of society speaking out against environmental destruction can have a significant impact. Kijani and Kitavi represent the youngest members of society who still have a long life ahead of them, and advocating for nature conservation ensures their long survival.

Nasirumbi, the protagonist in *Voice of the People* (2007), Indondo, and The Mothers' Front members are portrayed as eco-activists seeking to counter Boss's plot. They embody an eco-activist mindset exhibited through their engagement in activism to oppose the invasion of Simbi forest. Omtatah portrays Nasirumbi as a strong-willed character and an exemplary leader of The Mothers' Front. As the play begins, she confronts Boss outrightly and opposes his environmentally destructive plans that are camouflaged in a development and economic sustainability agenda. We realize that even though The Mothers' Front membership comprises only women, their actions, objectives, and achievements are exemplary. Seemingly, Omtatah uses these women to illustrate women's environmental conservation abilities and deconstruct patriarchal structures that view women as inferior.

Nasirumbi and The Mothers' Front are portrayed as proactive environmentalists whose conservation agendas are reflected in their reforestation projects and firm opposition to Boss's scheme. To oppose Boss's destruction, they use media to advance their activism outreach. Working with Indondo, the Editor of a local daily newspaper, they write a letter headlined *Ogres Invade Simbi Forest* to reveal Boss's ill plans of transforming Simbi forest into a wealth-generating enterprise. The letter informs the people of Boss's character and exposes him as a capitalist seeking enrichment through nature's destruction.

In the second sequence, Sibuur confronts Indondo, the newspaper editor, for publishing sensitive information about their project. His arguments are grounded on the need to hive off the forest for development. Sibuur says, "Mr. Indondo, that project is vital. Tourism will boom. Jobs! Hundreds of jobs will be created. The target is poverty alleviation" (Okoit 2007; 27). From their dialogue, we become acquainted with Indondo's contribution to the manifestation of resistance against environmental destruction. His editorial role allows him to sensitize the public. His sentiments are a testament to an environmental conservationist. As Sibuur advocates for the resort's construction, Indondo counters him with an argument about environmental protection. The playwright narrates:

INDONDO: *Poverty?*

SIBUOR: *Poverty alleviation!*

INDONDO: *Can you define poverty?*

SIBUOR: *Well, the World Bank defines poverty as a pronounced deprivation of well-being.*

INDONDO: *Then how can you eradicate poverty simply by increasing economic growth, trade, consumption, and the exploitation of resources? Can you win against poverty?*

SIBUOR: *Don't be silly! Real money will pour into this country. The construction phase alone will employ hundreds.*

INDONDO: *Poverty is more than just material deprivation. Poverty is also about being excluded from the decision-making process. (He pauses, then firmly as he moves closer to him) The Voice of the People is the people's Voice, and it must be heard (Okoit 2007, p. 27).*

Indondo demonstrates a strong commitment to protecting Simbi forest by actively supporting The Mothers' Front advocacy through his newspaper. The newspaper symbolizes the people's Voice in the play. It is a tool Omtatah deploys to show the strength common people possess and their contribution to matters affecting their well-being.

The people realize that Boss's regime is repressive, hence depriving them of their freedom of speech. They, therefore, resort to using the newspaper as their platform.

The Eco-Destructors

The paper argues that environmental destructors are characters who exhibit destructive traits against nature, geared towards generating wealth and power. We reason that these characters are guided by the principles of capitalism to engage in the commodification of natural resources. In *A Hole in the Sky*, these characters are Tajeer, Mwekezi, Taiku, and Jasirimali, and in *Voice of the People*, they are: Boss and Sibuur. Through these characters' actions, the playwrights highlight acts of environmental destruction on the natural ecosystem.

In the opening scene of Bukenya's *A Hole in the Sky* (2013), the ensuing dialogue between Tajeer and Kibichi's family when he (Tajeer) seeks to uproot them from their land tags him as an eco-destructer. While Kibichi and his family solely depend on the natural environment as their source of livelihood, Tajeer and his gang's interests are vested in clearing forest land to plant *jatropha*, which is described in the play as "a plant used to produce biofuel and oil for machines, cars and lorries" (Bukenya 2). Tajeer and his henchmen are portrayed as capitalists with interests in generation of wealth through projects that are injurious to the environment. As eco-destructors, they perpetuate acts of violence against the environment and people in their quest for power. Presented as selfish and callous, these characters abuse their positions of power and neglect the problems of common people. They are presented as selfish and callous.

Through Tajeer's character, Bukenya reveals the extent to which nature has suffered capitalists' degradation and the impacts of technology on the environment. Tajeer is portrayed as an orchestrator of the destruction of Lake Riziki (Bukenya 2013;4), blocking of streams to find space for the construction of a field station (Bukenya 2013; 8), sawing down of trees for

timber, charcoal, and sawdust (Bukenya 2013;13) and the eviction of people and clearing of land for the *Jatropha* project (Bukenya 2013; 2). Through Hatibu's words, we understand Tajeer's perception of nature. Hatibu says:

HATIBU: No, no, no, Mzee. It wasn't like that at all. It's just that, with all this modern technology, you know, we don't need to depend on water from streams. We can pump all the water we need right from the depths of the Earth or have it piped right down here from the Great Lake. That's what we are already doing (Bukenya, 2013, p. 8).

This excerpt illustrates a looming eco-catastrophe – the death of the Great Lakes. This demonstrates technology's inverted significance to human life. While it enhances production in a capitalist system, it also extensively devastates the ecosystem. Bukenya demonstrates Hatibu and Tajeer's capitalist positions as instigators of ecological destruction. He exposes the capitalist inclination to exploit something inherently beneficial to humanity for their selfish interests. Through this depiction of technology, Bukenya alerts the reader of its negative and positive impacts; he calls for this awareness.

Furthermore, Bukenya's naming strategies are worth noting to establish their representation of the eco-destructive characters. We argue that names assigned to characters justify their traits and actions and reveal their identity. Blommaert, Lamidi Temitayo and Romanus Aboh, in *Naming as a Strategy for Identity Construction in selected 21st century Nigerian Novels* posit:

"Beyond the level of language that signals identity, there is the manifestation of personality either as an individual or a member of a group. This is a form of social identity where individuals use linguistic items such as naming strategies to identify with the people they consider as theirs or members of their group. Here, names are constants of identity with which people surround themselves according to their social identities" (Lamidi T. Aboh, 2011, p. 35-36).

Therefore, names reveal traits that signify a character's identity and social position. The

shared traits and attributes among characters situate them in specific identity groups. Bukenya and Omtatah have labelled selected characters' names that denote their eco-destructive nature.

Loosely translated, the names Tajeer, Taiku, Jasirimali, and Mwekezi mean Rich, Tycoon, Entrepreneur, and Investor, respectively. These meanings correlate with their identities as business associates. For these characters, Lake Riziki and other natural resources are enterprises for accumulating wealth. Bukenya presents these characters as blinded by the desire for power and ignorant of the sustainability of nature. As their names suggest, they are driven by the need to occupy certain societal positions, and the playwright ensures that they depict these positions and play their roles.

Similarly, in *Voice of the People* (2007), Boss is the Head of State and a symbol of power and authority. As the Head of State, he is tasked with protecting the State's natural resources. However, his capitalist attitude and thirst for wealth make him advocate for an invasion of the Simbi forest. Tajeer and Boss are responsible for creating an investment-enabling environment for their foreign investors, notably Taiku, Jasirimali, Mwekezi in *A Hole in the Sky* (2013) and Mr. Fix in *Voice of the People* (2007).

Boss's actions in Omtatah's play mirror a capitalist need for environmental destruction. When Nasirumbi questions him about his position on the plot to hive off Simbi forest for the construction of a resort, he, as the Head of State, does not display a firm disposition for Simbi's protection. His sentiments align with capitalist thought. He insists that the resort will create job opportunities and spur the country's economic growth. However, the truth behind their development agenda is revealed when Indondo removes a dossier on the secret plan hatched by Boss and Sibuur. Their intention appears to lean towards individual gain. This is evident when Sibuur says, "Whether people like it or not, we are going to build a modern tourist resort where Simbi stands. We have the power, and we have decided.

You parrots have no chance pitted against businessmen like me" (Okoit 2007; 35).

Boss and Sibuur's capitalist mindset illustrate how nature suffers destruction through privatization and self-interest, which, according to Jahan and Saber, are pillars of capitalism (Jahan and Saber). Unmistakably, they plan to hive off Simbi and convert it into private property from where they would generate wealth, profit, and more capital. The self-interest pillar is manifested through their determination to pursue their own enrichment with a disregard for people and the environment.

Animist Characters

In this section, we critique characters who exhibit animist sensibilities and embody traits and actions that convey acts of ecological destruction. It is imperative to note that these characters only appear in Bukenya's *A Hole in the Sky* (2013). They fall under the categories of Cosmic characters, Mythical and Legendary characters, and creatures. The cosmic characters presented are Space, Earth, Fire, Air, and Water. In the mythical and legendary category are Saro Wiwa and Wamiti Maua. The creatures include Monkey, Impala, Zebra, Hornbill, Grasshopper, and Lion. We argue that the playwright creatively incorporates these characters to explore the effects of environmental destruction on creatures and cosmic Space.

Harry Garuba, in *Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture and Society*, posits that "Animism is often simply seen as belief in objects such as stones or rivers for the simple reason that animist gods and spirits are *located* and *embodied* in objects: the objects are the physical and material manifestations of the gods and spirits" (Garuba. H; 267). From this assumption, we argue that animism signifies a correlation between objects and gods and spirits, with the former believed to be an embodiment of gods and spirits. Edward Tylor conceptualizes animism as "the characteristically religious belief in spirits" (qtd in Harvey 01). This interrelation is exemplified in

AHTS through Wamiti Maua, a spiritual allusion to Wangari Maathai and Saro Wiwa, an apparition of the Nigerian environmentalist Ken Saro Wiwa.

The representation and Saro Wiwa in the play appear through a sentimental succession created by the playwright that allows us to visualize Ken Saro Wiwa's agitation against oilmen's environmentally harmful oil activities in Nigeria. Bukenya narrates:

SARO: (*Inset, with a pronounced Nigerian accent*) Now you have killed the fish. What shall we eat? You've blackened and poisoned the water. What shall we drink? You say you're making money, but we don't see even a penny of it. We can't eat your money; we can't drink your oil (Bukenya, 2013, p. 5).

The analogy to Ken Saro Wiwa's lifetime environmental activism is echoed by Saro Wiwa's actions in the play. The environmental consequences faced in Lake Riziki are parallel to those of the Ogoni region in Nigeria, which is the epicentre of Ken Saro Wiwa's environmental activism. Therefore, the playwright relays the theme of capitalists' environmental destruction through Saro Wiwa's actions and the environmental impacts of oil exploration. Using a historical character as a source of content contextualizes the play in the discourse of environmental activism. Bukenya gives credence to people whose efforts changed the course of environmental conservation by giving credit to Ken Saro Wiwa through the character Saro Wiwa.

The legendary Wangari Maathai has also been represented through trees and flowers, which is translated to the name Wamiti Maua. This spiritualism is evident through the rekindling of her memories during her consecration, where Kijani is referred to as 'Wamiti Reborn' in the play's last scene. Tajeer refers to Kijani as his 'healing spirit' before dressing her in a green robe and offering her a green branch to symbolize the power and authority to lead in the re-greening of the wretched Earth. Kijani's leadership mandate reflects Wangari Maathai's leadership in The Green Belt Movement, an environment conservation group she famously led in Kenya.

Additionally, the subsequent dialogues during the consecration are ritualistic. Kiwiti's mother says, "Hold out the green branch, Kijani, lover of all that lives and blossoms. Fear not. You are Wamiti Maua reborn, the eternal buckle of the green belt around the kanzu of Father Earth" (Bukenya 2013;110). Kiwiti's words signify the rebirth of Maathai's spirit in her daughter Kijani. These textual representations illustrate how animist spirituality plays out in the play. Kijani's crowning symbolizes hope to human and non-human characters. Cosmic characters, Earth, Water, Air, and Fire, express their hope in her ability to return them to their initial ecological State:

EARTH: Wamiti Maua reborn! With a promise to mend my kanzu and cover the shame of my wretched frame in green.

WATER: Wamiti Maua reborn! With a promise to unclog my seas, lakes, ponds, and streams, dredge the sludge and the silt from my wells and pools and rivers to protect my springs and restore the fresh crystal purity with which the Creating Love endowed me.

AIR: Wamiti Maua reborn, with a promise to restore breathing space to all Love's creatures and free me from venomous smokes, gases and smog that make me a conveyor of disease and death instead of a sustainer of life.

FIRE: Wamiti Maua reborn! Fierce, fearless, fiery fighter for all that is green and fresh and full of life, flaming light in frail female frame! I will constantly burn with you and be a bright torch to light your path as you lead your people and planet to their glorious green destiny" (Bukenya, 2013, p. 111-112).

Kijani's crowning and recognition as Wamiti reborn represent the rekindling of Wangari Maathai's memories and contribution towards the wretched Earth's resuscitation. Wamiti Maua's connection with nature is portrayed through this spiritual representation as her traits resemble those of Maathai. The green branch is arguably a symbol of Maathai's spiritual mantle passed onto a character who embodies her spirit in the play. Through the incident, Bukenya supports Maathai's efforts, and the mantle symbolizes a

promise of continuing her work, which he preaches through his play.

A play-within-a-play in *A Hole in the Sky* (2013) demonstrates the actions of the legendary character – Wamiti Maua. The subsequent dialogue with Loggers, Saw-Man, Axe-Man, and Panga-Man represents acts of capitalist destruction from two different perspectives: eco-destruction and eco-activism. While the Loggers, Saw-Man, Axe-Man, and Panga-Man are portrayed as eco-destructors clearing forests for charcoal, timber, firewood, poles, and Space for building housing estates, Wamiti Maua is represented as a conservationist pleading with them to spare the forests (Bukenya 2013; 36-37). The prefixes ‘saw, axe, and panga’ creatively support the idea of cutting and the suffix - ‘man’ denotes a responsibility for destruction by human beings. Bukenya’s naming of these characters by tools usually used for tree-cutting presents a picture of the infamous destruction of the ecosystem to meet capitalistic demand for wealth and profit perpetuated by human beings. The loggers are responsible for hoarding these trees for sale. However, Wamiti Maua calls for nature’s conservation and protection against these ecological destructors in the play.

Bukenya has also personified cosmic characters referred to as ‘Elements’ to voice capitalists’ ecosystem degradation. These characters reveal an animist sensibility grounded on the traditional beliefs that spirits exist in the cosmos. The voicing of these characters represents a call for a holistic environmental conservation responsibility. Hosted by Space, they hold a meeting to discuss nature and the planet’s ecological State. (Bukenya 2013; 24). Space speaks about the junk and the ever-deepening hole as the two main problems causing harm to him. As Space narrates, junk is a build-up of satellites, capsules, rockets, and space crafts that are fired into the Space for space research, exploration, and stations (Bukenya 2013; 26). Space informs us of the huge damage that gases emitted back from these space activities pose. They create holes in the umbrella-like shield between the Space and the sun.

The characterization of Space and his sentiments in the play epitomize the reality of the extent of harm posed by emissions and other orbital debris. Reports and research by various space agencies reveal an exponential rise in space junk over the past years. According to a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) report released on January 27, 2021, there exists millions of orbital debris today – “at least 26,000 of which are the size of a softball or larger, over 500,000 which are the size of a marble and over 100 million are the size of a grain of salt” (NASA, 2021; 2). The Space Agency cites an increase in Space launched objects, space explosions and collisions as the main causes of these shards of hazardous debris. Furthermore, the European Space Agency (ESA) Annual Space Environment Report dated May 27, 2021, presents a similar picture of space pollution, reporting that; “Ever since the start of the space age on October 4 1965, there has been more space debris in orbit than operational satellites, hence posing a problem for the near-Earth environment on a global scale” (ESA 8). These space bodies’ reports reveal a worrying orbital debris trend and a looming crisis owing to the ever-deepening amount of space junk. The reports further call for an urgency in the cessation of activities harmful to the Space.

Air narrates his ordeal as resulting from dirty emissions into the atmosphere. Air says, “... They say they have to burn all dirty things – oil, coal, wood, and what have you to warm their houses, cook their food, run their machines, move their cars, work their factories, and fly their planes” (Bukenya 2013; 29). Similar problems also afflict water. As factory emissions drift into the air, causing air pollution, water bodies form the best dumping grounds for factory wastes and dirt. Water says, “... While their factories belch smoke in Sister Air’s face, the pipes under them are draining their waste muck into my ponds, my rivers, my lakes, and my seas...”. (Bukenya 2013; 32-33). These harmful emissions are born out of capitalists’ establishment of factories in the desire to earn profits and create wealth. In capitalist societies, factories and processing plants are established and owned by the rich and capitalists,

who can access the money required to establish such industries. Hence, only the wealthy can be linked to these establishments. This brings us to the conclusion that capitalists are squarely responsible for these forms of pollution, as presented in the play.

Equally, Earth laments about being stripped off through the destruction and clearance of vegetation covering it. She says "... They have stripped me of every piece of cover that I had: tree, shrub, weed or grass. Wherever they see a bit of green on me, they rush to cut, slash, uproot and burn, never stopping to think where that which they grab came from" (35). Through this lamentation, Earth highlights the issue of destruction wrought on her by human beings to pave the way for their profit-generating activities, such as farming and the establishment of structural projects. Earth's lamentation also represents the helplessness, emptiness and devastation posed by environmental destruction. Capitalists' quest for wealth-generating establishments makes her lack meaning and the ability to defend herself, rendering her desolate.

Capitalists' environmental destruction in Bukenya's *A Hole in the Sky* (2013) has also been relayed through creatures or animal characters: Monkey, Zebra, Impala, Hornbill, Grasshopper, and Lion. The playwright personifies these characters as active participants in the ongoing debate about the impact of capitalist invasion on their habitat. This deliberate anthropomorphic crafting of characters illustrates the animist thought that all organisms are rightful owners of nature. The playwright achieves credibility by demonstrating first-hand narrations of the effects of environmental destruction through wildlife.

We critique these creatures' dialogues and actions and interpret them as 'speaking and acting' against existing challenges. Huggan and Tiffin contend in their analysis of Barbara Gowdy's novel *The White Bone* that "Foremost among these challenges is the Western approach to the reading of fictional animal tales featuring animal characters. Stories about animals have generally been written for children or, in cases such as

George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the animals have been read as stand-ins for human beings" (Huggan G. & Tiffin, H 2015; 149). Therefore, we interpret animal characters and their actions in their animate nature and not as human metonyms or an allegory of human beings and traits.

Through the Creatures' narration, we learn and experience the woes Tajeer and his foreign associates created. The demand for timber and charcoal leads Tajeer to instruct Msumeno and his colleagues to cut down the forest. Kitavi says, "They took it away. I heard people say Msumeno and his gang came, sawed down all the trees and took them away. They said Tajeer and his friends from overseas wanted them for timber for their furniture and buildings". (Bukenya 2013; 13-14). Msumeno's actions are akin to those of the Saw-man, Axe-man, and Panga-man. Bukenya writes:

SAW-MAN: *We are not here to gaze at mountains. We need timber to make furniture and build our homes.*

AXE-MAN: *We need charcoal and firewood for our stoves.*

PANGA-MAN: *And poles for our huts. You just don't understand.* (Bukenya 2013; 36).

Under Tajeer's instruction, Msumeno's actions seem to go beyond the need for timber and charcoal to the ruthless destruction of the non-human species. Tajeer's perception of natural resources as commodities opposes the animist thought that spiritualizes every living thing and object with a view to realizing their traditional significance and advocating for their conservation. Garuba emphasizes nature and object's spirituality by arguing that "within the phenomenal world, nature and its objects are endowed with a spiritual life both simultaneous and coterminous with their natural properties. Thus, The objects acquire a social and spiritual meaning within the culture far in excess of their natural properties and use value" (Garuba H. 2003; 267). Tajeer's ignorance of the significance of nature's spirituality and his focus on its economic value for wealth's sake paints him as the ultimate capitalist. This depiction advances

the playwright's portrayal of the effects of capitalist greed on non-human beings.

As the play advances, the creatures narrate their ordeal, which reflects a hideous picture of the annihilation of the ecosystem. Their tribulations include those of killing, poaching of tusks and horns and displacement from their natural habitat. The narration evokes feelings of empathy in the reader. Readers understand Bukenya's purpose of appropriating animist characters through the dialogue below. The change in narration reveals the hidden realities of environmental exploitation, one the playwright could not have achieved by limiting the play to human characters. The creatures allow us to visualize crude human actions on nature, hence bringing meaning to Bukenya's play. They narrate:

IMPALA: *I saw them kill Elephant, and hack off his tusks with a saw.*

ZEBRA: *I saw that too. Elephant was trumpeting loudly, angry at the deafening noise that the men's saws made as they mowed down the trees. Then a short, stocky fellow aimed a gun at him and shot him three times. Bang! Bang! Bang! Between the eyes.*

MONKEY: *I heard Elephant's howl, but I didn't get to see him. I was busy leaping from tree to tree. Each one I landed on seemed to be already swaying under the merciless grating of the saws. When there were no more trees, I just took to my paws and ran.*

ZEBRA: *The men who killed Elephants said they would make necklaces out of his tusks, for the wives of rich men to wear.*

LION: *Rhino is also dead. I saw a man hack off his horn. Said it would make a lovely handle for his dagger (Bukenya 2013; 14-15).*

In line with the above description, it is important to note that however limited the creatures' voices may appear, their dislocation and annihilation are positively impactful to the purpose Bukenya aims at achieving. He reveals the ecological repercussions posed by the depletion of forests for timber production, construction, and agricultural expansion. More importantly, the playwright reveals how Tajeer and the Poachers embody

unrestrained capitalism accountable for the ecological destruction and poaching of wild animals. Through animal characters, the playwright breaks down the hidden realities of capitalist domination over nature and people to the reader.

CAPITALIST REPRESSION AND OPPRESSION

This section delves into capitalist repression and oppression to further understand the significance of capitalism in environmental exploitation. We ground our approach on Karl Marx's conceptualization of State Apparatus, particularly Repressive State Apparatuses. Louis Althusser, in *The Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, postulates that "the State is explicitly conceived as a *repressive* apparatus (Althusser L. 2014; 70). The State in its repressive legal dimension, comprises the police, courts, prison and army and its activities are advanced by the state and administration (Althusser L. 2014; 70). We note a correlation between capitalism, the State, and the repressive state apparatuses in both plays. Althusser defines the State as "a repressive 'machine' that enables the dominant classes (in the nineteenth century, the bourgeois class and the 'class' of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class to subject it to the process of extorting surplus value (that is to capitalist exploitation)" (Althusser L. 2014; 70). Althusser envisions the interrelation between capitalism and the repressive state apparatuses due to how capitalists utilize state structures in their economic pursuits. By extension, nature suffers repression and oppression because she is seen as a commodity in a capitalist system.

In the two plays, repressive structures have been used to intimidate human beings and exploit the environment. In *A Hole in the Sky* (2013), Kiwiti's statement at the beginning of the play reveals a repressive structure in play. She says, "No, no, Kibichi, please. Don't get violent. It won't help. Remember, they've got all the money and the power. And the men with guns and heavy boots are on their side" (Bukenya 2013; 1). This

statement exposes Tajeer's abuse of power by using people who hold high positions in government to push for the *Jatropha* project. He sends Jumbe, a local government representative, Mlinzi, a security officer and Hatibu, his son, who is a lawyer, to deliver his message and instruct Kikongwe's family to leave their land to pave the way for the project. Jumbe, Mlinzi and Hatibu are Tajeer's agents of intimidation and exploitation used to forcefully evict Kibichi's family.

Kibichi's family undergoes the first displacement from their home near Lake Riziki after these capitalists destroy the lake during their oil exploration activities (7). These oppressive evictions characterize Tajeer's domination over commoners in his quest for wealth-generating activities. Additionally, Mlinzi's and Hatibu's response to Kikongwe and Kibichi's conversation about Saro Wiwa illuminates capitalists' use of state power and the law to intimidate and repress those who oppose their encroachment plans. Bukenya writes:

MLINZI: *That Saro Wiwa was just a trouble-maker. He was inciting the people against a law-abiding international investor.*

HATIBU: *Which is in direct contravention of the country's law on incitement, as set out in Sections 94-96 of the Penal Code. Section 96, which criminalizes incitement to violence and disobedience, and states clearly"* (Bukenya, 2013, p. 5).

First, Hatibu and Mlinzi abuse the law by trying to justify what they do to Saro Wiwa is lawful. Secondly, they use the law to threaten and warn Kibichi's family against resisting eviction, as they could also suffer a similar fate. Finally, under the guise of law, the duo demonstrates the consequences of not operating within the confines of the law, regardless of whether what is interpreted as law is genuinely lawful. From an eco-Marxist point of view, Hatibu and Mlinzi interpret Saro Wiwa's actions as ironic because he leads an opposition against wanton environmental destruction that benefits a few people at the expense of the majority, nature, and its inhabitants.

Althusser posits, "the state is *its* state, the bourgeoisie's state, in the sense that the bourgeoisie *holds* power and exercises it by way of Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatuses" (80). This assumption is effective in the interpretation of Tajeer, who, through his state agents, wields power over Kibichi's family by illegally evicting them. Jumbe says, "Anyway, let bygones be bygones. We're now focused on *jatropha*. You realize, Ndugu Kibichi, that you have seven days – maximum seven days – for you and your family to vacate this area so that Bwana Tajeer and his investor friends from overseas can start preparing the land for planting" (Bukenya 2013; 6).

Additionally, Mlinzi threatens that "if you fail to move, we'll just have to uproot you or let Tajeer's tractors flatten you and your hut" (6). It is evident through the family's resistance that the land isn't Tajeer's, but his forceful need to acquire it proves a capitalist oppression of people to allow for the exploitation of the environment. Tajeer is confident in his social standing among the upper class and his influential connections within the government, enabling him to wield power over human and non-human entities. Such unlawful evictions and demolition threats engineered by capitalist structures are sufficient pointers to their exploitation and oppression of vulnerable beings and the environment. Mlinzi's cruelty towards Kibichi's family reflects an exploitative trait. A state agent, he is Tajeer's tool for the execution of wealth-enriching but environmentally harmful activities. Here, Kibichi's family vulnerability is akin to nature's inability to resist destructive invasions. This is evidenced by Lake Riziki's vulnerability to oil exploration and replacing indigenous forests with exotic trees and farmlands, as narrated by Nguvu Kikongwe in his long trek in search of Tajeer's herbal medicines (Bukenya 2013; 90).

In Omtatah's *Voice of the People* (2007), Boss and Sibuur demonstrate acts of repression through their heinous plan to silence Nasirumbi and Indondo for opposing their invasion of Simbi forest. Boss orders Sibuur to crush and silence them for opposing and sensitizing the public about

their secret plan (Okoit 2007; 41). Sibuur exerts his power when he pulls out a gun to threaten Indondo when he realizes that the latter has the blueprint of their plans. Another demonstration of repressive structures power is when Boss says, "... To be on the safe side, Dalangi has to silence the busybody. As the paper's owner, he either does my bidding or Boss finishes him" (Okoit 2007; 42). This sentiment reflects the absence of regulatory measures within the State to monitor and control the oppressive tendencies of capitalists' government. Boss's leadership symbolizes a repressive structure schemed at environmental invasion for personal gain. His abuse of power signifies Althusser's claim that he is a bourgeoisie who holds power and uses state apparatus to repress and oppress people and nature.

In his concept of Aesthetics of Proximity, Iheka explains the interconnection between humans and non-human others in African Literature (Cotzee 2018; 23). He delves into the multi-species presence dimension of proximity, where he gives agency to both human and non-human beings. Guided by this form of interconnectedness and agency, we engaged a multi-species approach to capitalist oppression and repression. We moved away from a sole analysis of human characters in relation to this form of repression and argued that the destruction of the ecosystem and its non-human occupants also amounts to a form of capitalist oppression and repression. Various instances in the texts represent this form of oppression and repression. The opening scene of Bukonya's *A Hole in the Sky* (2013) introduces us to the destruction and complete extinction of Lake Riziki and the creatures in it (Bukonya 2013; 4). Tajeer's thirst for forest land to start the *Jathropa* project necessitates the dumping and blocking of streams for the construction of a field station (Bukonya 2013; 12), clearing of forest for timber, charcoal, twigs, and sawdust (Bukonya 2013; 13) and the displacement and killing of wild animals for tusks and horns (Bukonya 2013; 14-15). All these are forms of destruction forcefully meted upon natural resources and wild animals to generate wealth. They record instances of

extinction, threatening of other natural spaces, displacement and killing of wild animals, thereby posing as acts of repression.

CAPITALIST EXPANSIONISM: INSATIABLE THIRST FOR PROFIT AND WEALTH ACCUMULATION

Joel Kovel, in *The Enemy of Nature*, questions the root cause of capitalists' unrestrained environmental destruction. He argues, "One way of seeing this is in terms of an economy geared to run based on unceasing accumulation" (121). He identifies how Eco destruction is inevitable because of economic regimes guided by the principle of "grow or die" (Kovel J. 2007; 121), where individual capitalists must grow their markets and profits or lose their place in capitalism. According to Kovel, the continuous accumulation of growth explains capitalist environmental destruction. Similarly, Marcuse avers, "It is inherently expansionist and therefore encroaches on natural space, therefore subjecting nature to violence of exploitation" (qtd in Muhia 130). Marcuse identifies capitalists' expansionist mindset as one poised towards endless accumulation of wealth and profit. As a result of these unceasing capitalists' quest for profit, rampant environmental encroachment materializes.

Furthermore, Paul Burkett, in *Marx and Nature: A Red and Green Perspective*, acknowledges that environmental crisis is a product of capitalism. He outlines two types of environmental predicaments caused by capitalism, postulated by Karl Marx as "crises of capital accumulation, based on imbalances between capital's material requirements and the natural conditions of raw materials production and a more general crisis in the quality of human social development, stemming from the disturbances in the circulation of matter and life forces that are generated by capitalism's industrial division of town and country" (Burkett P. 1999; 107). Therefore, the first kind of environmental catastrophe infers that ecological crisis results from an imbalance caused by capitalists' excessive pursuit of capital. Burkett points out the correlation between ecological

crises and capitalism, highlighting the ecological ramifications of capitalists' incessant demand for the acquisition of wealth.

Bukenya's *AHTS* and Omtatah's *VOP* demonstrate the harmful effects of unbridled capitalism on the ecosystem. The plays grapple with the issue of capitalists' quest for capital, profit, and wealth accumulation at the expense of environmental destruction. Bukenya underscores capitalists' accumulation through the antagonist in his play. Tajeer and those of his ilk greedily pursue wealth without regard for the environment; they view natural resources as a source of capital and profit.

Bukenya's play, *AHTS*, opens with Tajeer's bid to evict Kikongwe's family to create Space for the *jatropa* project. This comes after they suffer a similar fate on the shores of Lake Riziki. The latter eviction is to pave the way for oil exploration, and when Kiwiti says she thought that oil could only be explored from the ground, Kibichi responds by saying, "Not any more now. These days they go for it everywhere, and will do anything to get their hands on". (Bukenya 2013; 3). This depicts Tajeer's greed, a trait demonstrated through his capitalist expansionist mentality. As Kavel points out, Tajeer's value term subsumes everything into the spell of capital, going through a kind of wheel of accumulation, from production to consumption and back (Kavel J. 2007; 153). Tajeer's actions are in tandem with Kovel's assumption of capitalist production as a continuous, endless means of production that rotates from production to consumption and back continuously. These continuous acts are profit-driven. It further illustrates that capitalist expansionism knows no bounds, as even the most delicate sources of livelihood are rendered meaningless for wealth's sake. Additionally, Kikongwe and Saro's dialogue exposes Tajeer as a ruthless expansionist:

KIKONGWE: *Hot indeed, and it burnt out our lives and our livelihoods by the sacred lake. The fish were there, floating on the slime, but they were dead, and black. The water was neither drinkable nor navigable.*

SARO: *Now you have killed the fish. What shall we eat? You've blackened and poisoned the water. What shall we drink? You say you're making money, but we don't see even a penny of it. We can't eat your money; we can't drink your oil (Bukenya, 2013, p. 4-5).*

This excerpt points out that Tajeer's oil exploration activities turn eco-cidal as they destabilize the lake, a habitat for water creatures. In essence, the capitalist conquest of oil in the lake has resulted in its eventual extinction and inability to sustain lives. Lynda Wainaina, in *Impacts of the Southern Bypass Road Construction Through Ngong Forest on the African Crowned Eagle, Nairobi County*, points out that "in the more recent decades, some of the most serious (forest) fragmentation has been caused by urban sprawl: new development that consumes land at a rate faster than that at which population is growing" (Wainaina L. 2014; 14). It is, however, worth noting that apart from urban developments, commercial agriculture, herding, and charcoal burning are also reasons for forest fragmentation. Based on Wainaina's postulation, environmental spaces and occupants suffer loss and extinction because of infrastructural development. Omtatah's *Voice of the People* reveals how Simbi forest has suffered loss and a looming extinction owing to capitalists' doings. In addition to Boss's quest to build a resort on the forest land, the forest has already been encroached upon, leading to the development of a suburb and a town within its borders. The playwright writes:

SIBUOR: *Have you forgotten that this suburb, everything in it, including this expansive office block owned by The Voice of the People, are on what used to be the greater Simbi Forest?*

INDONDO: *It's not just this suburb, but the entire town. The town expanded as the forest receded (Omtatah, 2007, p. 31-32).*

In the above dialogue, Sibuur and Indondo express how Simbi's previous and continuous invasion threatens its survival. The excerpt also presents a looming environmental apocalypse begot by endless development projects that, to a greater extent, are initiated by capitalist agents for

economic gains. Capitalists' expansionism in the environmental sector manifests itself through acts of corruption for profit and wealth gain. John Girling, in the preface to *Corruption, Capitalism and Democracy*, argues, "Corruption is the illegitimate reminder of the values of the marketplace (everything can be bought and sold) that in the age of capitalism increasingly, even legitimately, permeate formerly autonomous political and social spheres" (Girling J. 2002; vii). Girling's statement highlights corruption's presence in the capitalist system and accentuates the enormous extent to which the vice is rooted. It alludes to the fact that it is a malpractice geared towards self-enrichment.

Bukenya and Omtatah's plays mirror corrupt malpractices and their impacts on the ecosystem. Bukenya's *AHTS* reflects how graft and political interference have marred various government institutions and have had far-reaching effects on different sectors, including the environment. A meeting between Tajeer and his colleague investors, Taiku, Mwekezi and Jasirimali, reveals how this unethical conduct has led to environmental destruction. As they dialogue about the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report, we realize what crippled the National Environment Management Agency (NEMA), a government body mandated to oversee environmental protection and conservation. Tajeer reveals that political interference has curtailed the employment of professional environmentalists and, hence, the employment of unqualified personnel who are not knowledgeable and can be manipulated. The dialogue between Taiku and Tajeer exposes how corruption in this environmental body breeds environmental destruction:

TAIKU: *How's that? I thought they always appointed experienced professional environmentalists.*

TAJEER: *That's the way it should be. But you can't always rule out political interference and other shenanigans. That often works to our advantage. If those guys knew and insisted on absolutely safe operations: minimal atmospheric emissions, a*

hundred per cent effluent treatment, zero water blockage and pollution, zero erosion potential, minimal noise pollution and the like If they insisted on all this, very few of the factories and other businesses operating in this country would be licensed.

TAIKU: *But I think some of our colleagues sometimes push the bottom line a bit too low. Like the guys who had a really toxic factory-built bang in the middle of a residential area. You wonder how they got away with that.*

MWEKEZI: *You mean the fellows in Bhopal? I suppose they caught the NEMA out there napping or the NEMA chose to nap, or maybe NEMA was induced to nap.*

TAIKU: *But how can you afford to nap about the health and life of thousands of people? (Bukenya, 2013, p. 45-47).*

This dialogue illustrates the impact corruption - the employment of unqualified staff - has on the environment. These environmental ramifications are witnessed because this personnel are the sole decision-makers and hence, any decision based on ignorance and corruption yields environmental destruction. Moreover, Omtatah in *VOP* reveals how corruption rooted in the judicial system benefits the political class and undermines environmental protection efforts. While Nasirumbi and The Mothers' Front go to court to seek official orders demanding Simbi forest's protection, they are dismissed on the basis that they lack legal obligation. Nasirumbi and Indondo's ensuing conversation reveals unethical cases in the judicial system.

INDONDO: *On the contrary, that verdict was written long before you presented your case.*

NASIRUMBI: *What do you mean?*

INDONDO: *The judge, like anybody with the hunter's meat in his mouth, will not say or do anything against the hunter.*

INDONDO: *Boss is the law. The courts are his puppets (Omtatah, 2007, p. 47-48).*

Therefore, when contextualizing the textual evidence, it becomes evident that some legal loopholes and malpractices weaken Nasirumbi and The Mothers' Front efforts in environmental

protection. Ironically Boss, the head of State, is granted a green light to continue his 'development' of Simbi forest.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated how capitalist environmental destruction, as a theme, has been conveyed in the plays under study using characterization. Grounding our analysis on the ecofeminist and eco-Marxist theories, we explicated the correlation between ecological crises and capitalist systems of production. Through a multi-species critical analysis, the paper critiqued how some characters presented undertake acts of capitalist-driven environmental destruction, repression, oppression, and capitalist expansionism in the plays. The paper concludes that characterization conveys acts of capitalist environmental destruction.

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