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**INSURGENT ECOLOGY AND THE LIMITS OF HUMAN MASTERY IN WALE
OKEDIRAN'S *AFTER THE FLOOD***

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Abstract

This study reads Wale Okediran's *After the Flood* through ecocriticism and material ecocriticism, arguing that existing scholarship treats the Ogunpa flood either as human failure or as nature's revenge without asking what happens once human interventions enter a material system whose effects exceed intention. Drawing on Cheryll Glotfelty's definition of ecocriticism, Lynn White Jr.'s critique of anthropocentrism, Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's concept of storied matter, Jane Bennett's vibrant matter, and Rob Nixon's slow violence, the study develops the analytical concept of insurgent ecology: the material capacity of ecological systems, once altered by human activity, to unsettle the structures built on top of them without requiring conscious intention on nature's part. Unlike Uche Ken Chukwu and Chris Onyema's reading of the flood as eco-revenge, insurgent ecology refuses to grant the environment an agency it does not have. The analysis moves through three stages: ecological alienation, in which characters fail to recognise environmental limits; ecological exploitation, in which the Ogunpa is treated as a dumping ground with material consequences that exceed intention; and insurgent ecology proper, in which the flood exposes the fragility of technological, spatial, religious, economic, and institutional structures. The study concludes that Okediran's novel does not absolve human beings of responsibility but makes that responsibility more urgent, since human interventions enter ecological systems, whose consequences cannot be fully predicted or controlled.

***Keywords:* Ecocriticism, Insurgent Ecology, Anthropocentrism, Material Agency, Ecological Alienation, After the Flood.**

Introduction

Environmental crisis has become one of the more pressing concerns in African literary studies, since ecological degradation on the continent is rarely separable from questions of development, urbanisation, governance, poverty, and inequality. African literary texts show, repeatedly, that environmental problems are not simply external threats knocking at the door of society; they are woven into the social, political, economic, and cultural structures through which communities live in their surroundings. Literature becomes a space for interrogating the assumptions that shape how people perceive, use, manage, and try to control the nonhuman world. Wale Okediran's *After the Flood* fits squarely within this tradition, and its account of the Ogunpa flood moves well past the familiar plot of a natural disaster striking an unlucky city; it exposes the tangled relationship between environmental degradation and human vulnerability.

The Ogunpa River sits at the centre of that relationship. It is a major geographical feature of Ibadan, yet the people who live alongside it treat it according to what it can do for them right now rather than what it is. The narrator puts this plainly: "the inhabitants of the poorly planned city have found the river useful for refuse disposal" (Okediran 62). That single word, useful, captures an anthropocentric relationship in which the river's worth is measured by its capacity to absorb what people no longer want. But waste does not vanish once it enters the water; it becomes tangled up with rainfall, soil, infrastructure, and settlement, and during the flood the consequences show themselves directly, since refuse dumped into the river "impeded the river's smooth flow" and pushed the flood into "any available space along the river" (8).

Scholars writing on Wale Okediran's *After the Flood* tend to treat its central disaster in one of two ways. Ikechukwu Asika and Chisom Asika read the novel's environmental crises as "largely manmade and avoidable" (Asika and Asika 15). Afan Azhang Kaze's (Douglas Kaze)

shows how the flood narrative pulls nature into contact with family, community, politics, and history, questioning the idea of flooding as a purely “natural disaster” (23-35). Uche Ken Chukwu and Chris Onyema go further, reading the flood as “ecology’s revenge” against human exploitation (Chukwu and Onyema 5), while Emmanuela Obetta and Onyebuchi Ile read the novel as a resource for environmental policy (Obetta and Ile 1), and Emmanuel Inedu situates it within a regional map of Nigerian ecocriticism distinct from the usual Niger Delta focus (Inedu 175).

These readings all matter, but they share a common frame: the flood as either human failure to be corrected or nature’s retaliation to be feared. None of them ask what happens once a human intervention enters an ecological system whose material processes refuse to stay inside the boundaries people set for them. The real question is not simply who caused the flood, but what becomes of responsibility once human decisions feed into a material system whose effects outrun anyone’s intentions.

That shift changes the emphasis considerably. Nature is not merely the victim here; it is materially consequential. Humans created many of the conditions that worsened the flood, but creating conditions is not the same as controlling outcomes. Once refuse, rainfall, water, soil, infrastructure, buildings, and settlements start interacting, the effects run past what any individual actor intended. This study reveals that the novel dramatises entanglement, not a tidy sequence of human action followed by natural response.

Read this way, *After the Flood* steadily undoes human exceptionalism in three stages: ecological alienation, where characters fail to register environmental warning; ecological exploitation, where waste dumped into the Ogunpa and unplanned urban development turn that alienation into material fact; and insurgent ecology, where the flood becomes a disruptive force unsettling technological, spatial, religious, economic, and institutional structures at once. Okediran’s point is that people cannot treat the environment purely as an object of control

because everything they do is physically rooted in the environment they are trying to control. The sections that follow trace this argument through a short synopsis of the novel, the existing scholarship, the theoretical framework with its conceptual clarifications, and three close readings of the novel.

Synopsis of the Novel

Wale Okediran's *After the Flood* is set in Ibadan and fictionalises the Ogunpa River floods, using them as the pivot of a story about a city and the way its people live beside the water (Kaze 23-35). Its central household is that of Sade Lala and her husband Stanley, a civil engineer. The narrative opens on an evening of howling wind and thunder, after a day of gloomy weather reports, and follows Sade, her friend Nana, and a party of guests who keep socialising while the water rises around them. As the storm worsens, the Ogunpa overflows. Refuse dumped into the river obstructs its flow, houses collapse, electricity and communication fail, and a twenty-coach train plunges into the river where a bridge once stood. Families are separated, people drown, and the chief priest of Ogunpa is caught under the walls of his shrine as he performs a ritual to halt the disaster.

The novel moves across more than one flood. After an earlier flood, three artificial lakes are built to prevent a recurrence, and the president declares that there will be no more floods. On the night of a later flood the lakes burst one after another and send a wall of water through the city. Chief Salman, chairman of the city council, is pressed at a press conference about unapproved buildings and corrupt officials, and a commission of inquiry is set up to examine the contract for widening the river. Stanley is arrested and interned, and he is cleared only when a structural engineering report finds that floodwater and debris from other portions of the river wrecked his own work. The close readings below return to these episodes in detail.

Literature Review

Asika and Asika's "Through the Prism of History" establishes that *After the Flood's* environmental crises are "largely manmade and avoidable" (Asika and Asika 15), placing the novel within Nigerian ecological writing and insisting the Ogunpa catastrophe is no unavoidable act of nature. This study builds on that claim, but where Asika and Asika establish responsibility, they do not theorise what happens once a human intervention alters a material system whose processes exceed intention. That gap is where the present argument begins.

Kaze's (Douglas Kaze) "Inundations, Boundaries and Intersections" reads the flood as a narrative event intersecting with family, community, and nation, questioning flooding as a purely natural disaster (23-35). Kaze is right that flooding carries social and political meaning beyond the water itself. This study extends that insight by shifting emphasis toward the material process through which ecological forces disrupt the human structures within which those meanings are produced.

The most directly relevant reading is Chukwu and Onyema's "Environmental Exploitation and Eco-Revenge in Wale Okediran's *After the Flood*," which argues that the flood is "ecology's revenge" against human neglect, with the river "on revenge mission" and the flood "an outburst of bottled anger" (Chukwu and Onyema 5). This captures something true: a sense that something has been pushed past its limit and has pushed back. But it also assigns the environment an intention it does not have. Insurgent ecology, the concept this study develops, does not claim the environment consciously rebels, since that would simply transfer human agency onto nonhuman processes. The river does not decide to flood; it does what a loaded material system does under pressure. Chukwu and Onyema supply a vocabulary of revenge; this study sets that vocabulary aside in favour of a more precise account of how the novel's ecological force operates.

Inedu's "An Ecocritical Reading of Aliyu Kamal's *Fire at my Backyard* and Wale Okediran's *After the Flood*" argues that Nigerian ecocriticism has focused disproportionately on the Niger Delta and oil extraction, reading *After the Flood* alongside Kamal's novel as evidence that different regions face different environmental crises: desertification in the north, flooding in the south-west (Inedu 175-76). This is a useful corrective to the disproportionate focus on the Niger Delta, though Inedu does not develop a theory of material agency; his emphasis stays regional and thematic, which is what this study builds on and extends theoretically.

Emmanuela Obetta and Onyebuchi Ile's "Environmental Consciousness in the Face of Capitalist Realities" reads the novel through ecocriticism and Nigerian environmental policymaking, arguing that it exposes capitalist exploitation and could serve policymakers as a resource (Obetta and Ile 1). This is a productive line between literature and policy, but it treats the flood largely as a critique awaiting legislation. The novel's argument is more radical than a call for regulation: the flood does not simply expose what policy should fix, but the limits of the assumption that policy could ever fully fix it.

Taken together, existing criticism establishes the novel's environmental concern, regional significance, and policy relevance. What remains unexamined, and what this study addresses, is the material process through which human interventions produce consequences that exceed human control.

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Clarifications

This study sits within ecocriticism, with weight on its material branch. Cheryll Glotfelty's definition of ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii) supplies the basic premise: literature is a site where cultural assumptions about nature are produced, questioned, and transformed. In *After the Flood*, the physical environment is inseparable from narrative conflict; the river, rainfall, floodwater, refuse, soil,

buildings, roads, electricity systems, railway, and contaminated spaces all participate in reshaping human existence.

Ecocriticism and material ecocriticism are related but not interchangeable. Ecocriticism, in Glotfelty's broad sense, asks how literature represents, shapes, and questions human relations to the physical environment, and much of it works at the level of attitudes, images, and cultural meanings. Material ecocriticism, the branch on which this study leans, shifts attention to the matter itself. It treats bodies, waste, water, soil, and built structures as active participants whose properties and movements help produce events and the stories told about them (Iovino and Oppermann 1). For a reading of *After the Flood*, the practical difference is that the river and its refuse are analysed as forces with consequences of their own, in addition to serving as symbols of human attitudes.

Anthropocentrism is the first problem. Lynn White Jr.'s "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" ties modern environmental destruction to cultural attitudes that treat nature as subordinate to human purposes (1203-07). His argument has been revised many times, but its basic challenge still holds, and it is useful here because *After the Flood* repeatedly shows an environment valued only for its usefulness. The Ogunpa becomes a convenient waste site because its capacity to carry water is read as a capacity to remove unwanted human material, separating immediate convenience from longer-term consequence.

A simple critique of anthropocentrism is not enough, though, which is where material ecocriticism comes in. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's "storied matter" treats material entities as participants in transformation, not things acted upon (1). In the novel, refuse becomes consequential once it enters the river; water becomes destructive once its movement meets accumulated waste and urban structures; sewage becomes a route through which degradation enters the body. Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* sharpens this by complicating the line between human and material agency: her argument does not require matter to be conscious, only that

material assemblages produce effects exceeding individual intention (21-38). The flood is exactly that: no single person causes it, but human decisions contribute to conditions that rainfall, water, refuse, soil, infrastructure, and settlement then interact to produce. The flood, in other words, has no single author. It emerges from people, water, waste, soil, and buildings acting on one another, and the novel gives that shared authorship a narrative shape. Material agency, the term used throughout this study, therefore means the capacity of nonhuman matter to make a difference to events without consciousness or purpose. Bennett places agency of this kind in the whole assemblage rather than in any one member of it (21-38).

Rob Nixon's "slow violence" adds a temporal dimension. Nixon describes slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight" (2). The spectacular flood is preceded by quieter deterioration: refuse piling up, inadequate drainage, construction that ignored planning regulations, urban expansion that increased exposure. These conditions look ordinary until the flood makes their accumulated effects visible at once; disaster, on this reading, is a process, not a moment.

All three positions reject a rigid separation between human and nonhuman worlds, and together they produce the concept of insurgent ecology. The term is not a theory in the established sense; it is an analytical term for the moment when interconnected material forces exceed, disrupt, and expose the limits of anthropocentric arrangements. It is not the same as "eco-revenge," Chukwu and Onyema's term for the flood, which assigns the environment intention: the river punishes, the flood retaliates. Insurgent ecology does not. It names the material capacity of ecological processes to unsettle systems human beings have built and assumed they control. In the novel, the Ogunpa becomes insurgent when its obstructed waters move past the spatial limits assigned to them; the flood becomes insurgent when it enters buildings, destroys infrastructure, cuts communication and transport, disrupts commerce, contaminates the environment, and threatens bodies.

Two points of clarification follow. First, insurgent ecology does not describe an environment with motives. The word insurgent is borrowed as a figure for effect: as an insurgency unsettles an established order from inside it, altered ecological processes unsettle the structures built on them, whatever anyone intends. Second, the concept has two parts that the analysis keeps apart. One is the human intervention that alters a system, such as dumping refuse or building on a flood path. The other is the material response, which exceeds what the intervention was meant to achieve. Responsibility stays with the first part, and the unpredictability belongs to the second.

None of this lets human beings off the hook. Human decisions help produce the conditions in which disaster develops; the point is that once those decisions enter an ecological system, their consequences cannot be fully controlled. The analysis that follows moves through three stages: ecological alienation and the anthropocentric imagination, ecological exploitation and the material agency of the Ogunpa, and insurgent ecology and the limits of human mastery, running from perception to material consequence to material disruption.

Ecological Alienation and the Anthropocentric Imagination

The crisis in *After the Flood* does not begin with the flood itself. It begins with a way of imagining the relationship between human society and the environment. In Okediran's Ibadan, the environment is rarely recognised as part of the conditions of survival, and natural processes get judged by how well they fit human plans. Call this ecological alienation: a disconnection between social life and the material systems that support it. The alienation is not only psychological; it shows up in how people settle, dispose of waste, build, use technology, and manage institutions.

The opening establishes the disturbance before the characters grasp what it means. The narrator writes: "It started with a howling wind and claps of thunder. The quiet and placid

evening suddenly gave way to a heavy storm" (1). But the storm has been preceded by information: "all day long, the weather reports had been depressing" (1). The inhabitants have both direct environmental evidence and technological warning. Their problem is not missing information; it is how they read it. Sade's reaction is telling. On hearing the storm has arrived early, she asks, "Oh, what luck! Why should this happen now of all times! I thought the weatherman said the rain wouldn't get here till midnight!" (1). Her first concern is her plans, not the danger. That is anthropocentrism in its ordinary form: it does not require anyone to declare human beings superior to nature, only the everyday assumption that human plans should not be disturbed by environmental processes.

The novel develops this more sharply in the car ride to the party. Sade voices the fear that the rain will produce "another Ogunpa River flood" (18), and Nana's reply is the clearest statement of anthropocentric confidence in the novel: "Relax, Sade. How can this light rain cause a flood? Your house is well-built and safe. You know that" (18). Nana does not deny that floods happen; she denies that this rain could cause one, resting her claim on a material premise, that a well-built house is a safe house, which the flood will later dismantle. Sade herself half-recognises the danger, noting that her husband has "taken special precautions to avoid the place getting flooded," while adding that "the house isn't far from the river" (18). Two kinds of confidence operate at once here: Nana's folk confidence in "well-built" houses, and Stanley's professional confidence as a civil engineer. Both prove inadequate.

The party scene develops this collectively. Despite the worsening flood, the guests remain "convinced that the flood was only temporary" and "continued their merry-making" (9). This matters because ecological alienation is not just ignorance: the characters have warning and direct evidence, and still hold their social world apart from the environmental crisis happening around them. When the water reaches the party's own building, the guests shift the party to the second floor, reasoning that the flood "would soon recede." Their confidence survives its own

refutation twice. That self-chosen division eventually fails completely. Water seeps into the very spaces where the characters have tried to carry on normal social life, and the line between inside and outside, society and environment, becomes rubble. The novel does not simply assert that human beings depend on nature; it makes it impossible for them not to.

The same alienated relationship appears more materially in how the Ogunpa is treated. The narrator observes that “the inhabitants of the poorly planned city have found the river useful for refuse disposal” (62). The word “useful” is the tell: the river is understood not as a complex ecological system but as a function, and refuse moves from human spaces into the river, creating the appearance of distance between consumption and consequence. Once waste is out of sight, the problem looks solved, until the flood shows how false that is.

Urban development intensifies the alienation. Ibadan is “the second largest city south of the Sahara with a population of about five million people and an annual growth rate of five per cent” (49), and the problem is not growth itself but how expansion happens. Chief Salman, chairman of the city council, admits at the post-flood press conference that “many houses are not approved before people start building them” and “many streets are left unpaved thus adding more silt into the river during the flood” (49). A reporter presses further: “What about your council officials who take bribes and approve building plans close to the river against government regulations? ... And the narrow bridges and culverts which your corrupt officials built all over the place” (49). Salman denies none of it. The built environment that looks like mastery, the houses, bridges, and culverts, is the same built environment that produces the flood.

The collapse of buildings is the clearest instance of this contradiction. Okediran describes a city “where the streets were narrow and many dilapidated buildings stood in utter defiance of planning regulations,” where “houses here, most of them of mud, were collapsing like sand castles as the destructive tongue of the Ogunpa river licked them off the ground” (8). The sand-castle comparison does the work: structures that look permanent turn out to be materially

fragile. The image of the river's "destructive tongue" begins the novel's move from passive environment to material agency; the river is personified, but the image does not depend on the river having intention, only on giving imaginative shape to the physical force of water. Chukwu and Onyema read the same passage as evidence that the river "is on revenge mission" (Chukwu and Onyema); here, it reads as evidence of material force, not intention.

Technology initially looks like an alternative source of security, but the flood reveals that it is itself environmentally dependent. When electricity and communication fail, people lose the systems through which they were trying to manage the crisis, and the collapse of technology becomes part of the novel's critique of human exceptionalism. The same pattern shows up in the link between environmental degradation and health: the inhabitants treat the river as an external space for refuse and sewage, which the novel connects to outbreaks of cholera and typhoid when potable water is scarce (63). Environmental degradation returns to the body, and what society imagined as "outside" becomes internal through disease.

Ecological alienation, then, is a failure of recognition. Weather, rivers, waste, infrastructure, and society get treated as separate worlds, and the flood shows they are not. The novel's challenge to the assumption of a clean separation between social life and environmental process is the point: the flood is not an event that merely happens to Ibadan, but a consequence of how the city was organised and how its people related to their environment. What begins as a crisis of imagination becomes, by the novel's end, a crisis of material existence, and that shift is what the next section takes up directly.

Ecological Exploitation and the Material Agency of the Ogunpa River

If ecological alienation is the failure to recognise dependence on the environment, ecological exploitation is the set of practices that turns that failure into material fact. Treating

the Ogunpa as a dumping ground is central: the river is made to carry away what the city does not want, while the wider consequences stay outside immediate attention.

The novel is explicit about Ogunpa's place in Ibadan. The narrator writes: "River Ogunpa, the principal river in the city of Ibadan runs across the city. The river is to Ibadan what River Seine is to Paris and the Thames to London" (62). The comparison places Ogunpa inside the city's identity, but the qualification follows immediately: "this is where the comparisons end," because Ogunpa "is not a big navigable river" and, apart from one dammed segment used for fishing, "it really serves no other useful purpose" (62). The phrase "useful purpose" repeats the anthropocentric logic already established: a river is valuable only if it does something for people. The people living there do not read the relationship any other way. Instead, they use the river as a refuse site, on the assumption that once something is out of sight, it is out of existence. Okediran undercuts that assumption by showing the material activity of what was discarded.

The narrator makes the refuse-flood link explicit: "Different kinds of refuse which the inhabitants of the city had dumped into the river bed, also impeded the river's smooth flow" (Okediran 8), immediately after "As the angry flood flowed towards the city and sewage channels, it became more violent" (8). The flood is described as already violent, and human refuse is then added to it, increasing its violence and forcing it outward. Refuse does not stay separate from the river once deposited; it becomes part of the material conditions through which the flood develops.

This is where material ecocriticism earns its keep. Iovino and Oppermann's emphasis on entanglement lets refuse be read as part of a dynamic assemblage rather than inert matter, and Bennett's vibrant matter draws attention to the capacity of material arrangements to produce consequences beyond individual intention. The residents who dump refuse into the river do not intend a flood, but the refuse does not stay identical to the object they discarded; once it enters the river, it becomes part of a system involving rainfall, water, soil, drainage, buildings,

roads, and settlement. No single element explains the disaster; its force comes from their interaction.

The urban landscape intensifies this interaction. The narrator locates the flood in “the overcrowded heart of the city where the streets were narrow and many dilapidated buildings stood in utter defiance of planning regulations” (8). Narrow streets restrict movement, poorly built houses collapse, and inadequate planning leaves little room for water. By the time the water reaches “the southern limits of the city where Sade Lala’s house was situated,” the narrator notes, “the speed of the flood had become overwhelming” (9); the river gains force as it passes through the material obstacles human settlement has placed in its path. Houses “most of them of mud” collapse “like sand castles” as the “destructive tongue of the Ogunpa river” removes them from the ground (8), reversing the expected relationship between construction and environment: buildings are normally how humans impose order on space, but here water shows their permanence depended on ecological stability all along.

Consequences continue after the flood. The river is already contaminated, and Okediran explicitly links “refuse and sewage dumped into the river” to outbreaks of cholera and typhoid when potable water is scarce (63). The aftermath is worse still: the devastated environment contains “raw sewage and remains of dead animals and human beings continuously emitting a foul odour even a week after the disaster” (63), and rescue workers need gas masks to breathe. Technology no longer signifies mastery; it becomes a defensive mechanism for surviving inside a damaged environment.

The crisis is economic too. One victim cries, “I’m ruined, I’m finished, I’m dead ... Ten thousand bags gone!” (46-47), and at the urban scale the flood “flattened completely the high density commercial nerve centre of the town” (143). The phrase “commercial nerve centre” matters because commerce needs stable buildings, roads, transport, electricity, communication, and physical access; destabilise the environment and the economic system goes with it.

The link between ecological crisis and governance becomes explicit in the aftermath. When a reporter asks why Ibadan should have the worst flood record in the country, Chief Salman admits the council has “problems coping with the fast rate of development and urbanisation” (49) and confirms the flood could have been anticipated: “That was why we’ve always reminded the inhabitants of the city not to dump refuse into the river so as not to obstruct its flow” (48). He does not address the reporters’ questions about corruption directly; the novel simply lets the questions stand. The government’s response follows the same pattern: a commission of inquiry is established “to investigate the execution of the contract for the widening of the Ogunpa river” (148), and contractors are required to report to the police, some of whom were already trying to flee the country (148-49). Three major floods in ten years, and the response each time is another investigation. Obeta and Ile read this as a call for better policy (Obeta and Ile); here, it reads as evidence that the crisis exceeds the reach of policy, because the material consequences of human intervention do not stay within the institutional boundaries built to manage them.

The Ogunpa, then, is neither an innocent victim nor an independent destructive force. Its material agency is relational: human actions modify its conditions, and the river’s changes interact in ways the people who introduced them cannot fully predict. That reading avoids two extremes, nature as completely passive or nature as a conscious actor, the second of which Chukwu and Onyema adopt when they describe the flood as “ecology’s revenge instrument against man’s failure in his pristine role” (Chukwu and Onyema). Their reading humanises the flood; this one does not. The flood does not act. It happens, and in happening, it exposes what the next section examines directly: the limits the flood places on human mastery itself.

Insurgent Ecology and the Limits of Human Mastery

The ecological crisis in *After the Flood* reaches its conceptual peak when the Ogunpa stops appearing as an exploited resource and becomes a material force capable of disrupting the systems through which human beings organise their world. The flood's significance lies not in the number of buildings destroyed but in what it exposes about the fragility of human arrangements: electricity fails, communication collapses, rail transport becomes lethal, religious authority proves incapable of controlling the crisis, commercial spaces are destroyed, and contaminated environments threaten bodies. The flood becomes a crisis of mastery.

It first demonstrates its insurgent character by refusing to stay inside the spatial boundaries assigned to the Ogunpa. Discarded materials “impeded the river’s smooth flow” and pushed the flood “into any available space along the river” (8). The phrase “any available space” marks the failure of human spatial organisation: the river no longer conforms to the boundaries built around it, occupying space according to material possibility rather than human planning. The “destructive tongue” of the Ogunpa “licked” mud houses from the ground (8), an image of a force that cannot be reduced to passive nature; the river does not need intention to be disruptive, only the capacity to move and exert force.

The destruction of electricity and communication extends the disruption into technological modernity. The storm damages power lines until “the destruction of electricity and all communication facilities plunged most of the city into pitch blackness” (41), a failure that represents a breakdown in the systems through which people coordinate movement, access information, and respond to emergencies. The social consequences are immediate: the narrative records “the wailing agonies of mothers who could no longer trace their children” (8-9) and “piercing screams of the drowning” heard “in the dark night of horror” (9). Darkness, here, is not a metaphor; it is the material condition that makes rescue impossible. “Parents could not help

their drowning children, neither could children save their parents from the rampaging monster” (8-9).

The railway disaster pushes the critique further. Because communication has failed, “there was no way the train driver could have been forewarned of any imminent danger” (Okediran 40), and the bridge he expects to cross has become “a twisted entanglement of steel and masonry” in the river (40). The “twenty-coach train” glides into the “gaping frothy waters of the angry river” while passengers scream (41), reversing the hierarchy between technology and nature: the machine does not control the environment but becomes vulnerable to it, since the railway depends on tracks, bridges, communication, and stable terrain that the flood has already destroyed. The “angry” river should not be read literally; the description gives imaginative form to the force of water, not to intention. Chukwu and Onyema treat the same word as evidence of “an outburst of bottled anger” (Chukwu and Onyema); here, it is figurative language doing figurative work, and the difference between those two readings is the difference between eco-revenge and insurgent ecology.

The flood challenges religious authority with similar precision. Frightened residents run to the chief priest of Ogunpa and plead, “Baba, please help us! Stop this madness” (9). As he performs the ritual, “a bolt of lightning rang out and the thatched roof of the mud hut caught fire,” and “another clap of thunder rang out and the mud walls of the shrine collapsed on the frail chief priest” (9). The crowd reads the lightning as divine anger, a moral category projected onto the weather, but the novel itself never confirms that interpretation. What it shows is a material event striking a material structure as spiritual authority is invoked to control it. The priest is not being punished; he is being exposed, placed within the same ecological field as technological and institutional authority. The novel is careful, throughout, not to oppose modern technology and traditional spirituality: electricity fails, railways break down, and the shrine burns, because nature does not distinguish between modern and traditional authority.

The disruption reaches the body directly. After the flood, the environment contains sewage, animal remains, and human remains, and rescue workers need gas masks simply to breathe (63); the crisis cannot be contained as an external problem once it enters through breathing, drinking, and exposure. Economic life is exposed the same way: the flood “flattened completely the high density commercial nerve centre of the town” (143), a “nerve centre” whose destruction stops economic circulation the way damage to a vital organ stops a body, and the individual lament “I’m ruined, I’m finished, I’m dead ... Ten thousand bags gone!” (46-47) captures the human cost in a single breath.

Two moments in the flood sequence carry this argument especially well. In a three-storey brothel, “commercial sex workers and their patrons could be seen running up to the third floor just before the whole building gave way” (143): their escape route is the very building that traps them, a material demonstration that flight within a compromised structure does not save anyone from it. By contrast, a five-year-old boy survives when, as “the flood washed away the house, he had clung to his wooden bed and ridden on it. Two kilometres from his house, he came across higher ground and was rescued” (143-44). He is not saved by any human system, technology, or institution, only by a wooden bed that happened to float. His survival demonstrates the same principle that produces the flood: matter does what matter does.

The collapse of the artificial lakes is the clearest evidence for this claim, because it plays out on material grounds rather than theoretical ones. Built after the first flood specifically to prevent a recurrence, at a cost of two hundred million naira, the lakes prompted the president to declare that “there will be no more floods” (118). On the night of the second flood, the system initially works as intended, the lakes “holding out well” (141), until, just before midnight, “an explosion reverberated right through the city. The first lake, now full of water and sediment, for some strange reason, suddenly burst its concrete banks,” sending a wall of water through the city, “sweeping nearby houses and roads away” (142). Each lake then amplifies what the

previous one released: by the second lake “its fury had become unspeakable,” and by the third “the water was at its most destructive” (142-43). The narrator’s summary is exact: “Ironically, the lakes which had been constructed to save the people had turned out to be the chief culprits in the disaster” (143). The phrase “for some strange reason” registers the gap between how the failure is experienced and how it can be explained: sediment reduces capacity, reduced capacity increases pressure, and pressure eventually exceeds design tolerance. None of that requires the lake to have intention, only that a material system was loaded beyond what it could bear.

The aftermath consolidates the point. When Stanley is arrested and interned, the structural engineering report clears his portion of the work, finding that “it was actually the pressure of the flood water and debris from the other portions of the river that wrecked my own work” (165): one contractor’s work failed because another’s had already failed upstream. The failures are chained, not independent, illustrating the same principle at every scale, refuse in one part of the river affects water flow elsewhere, pressure on one lake affects the next, and pressure on that lake affects houses further downstream. Human decisions enter a material system and propagate through it according to its own logic, not theirs. This is what insurgent ecology names: not a river that decides to rebel, but a material system whose logic cannot be reduced to the purposes for which human beings organised it. Recognising this material agency does not absolve human beings of responsibility; if anything, it makes responsibility more urgent, since human interventions enter ecological systems whose consequences can become extensive and hard to predict. The novel’s environmental lesson is not that humans are powerless before nature, but that human power is relational rather than absolute, and the Ogunpa’s significance lies in its ability to reveal the consequences of trying to separate social life from ecological process in the first place.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, Wale Okediran's *After the Flood* presents ecological crisis as the outcome of a deeply entangled relationship between human practices and nonhuman material processes. Through the Ogunpa and the flood, the novel exposes the limits of anthropocentric assumptions and reveals the vulnerability of technological, spatial, economic, religious, and institutional systems. Insurgent ecology helps explain this material reversal: nature does not consciously rebel against humanity, but ecological forces exceed the boundaries imposed on them and destabilise human arrangements. The novel's final point is that environmental exploitation cannot be separated from human survival, because the environment humans try to control is also the material condition of their existence.

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