

THREE

GENDERED ECOLOGIES AND BLACK FEMINIST FUTURES IN WANURI KAHIU'S *PUMZI*, WANGECHI MUTU'S *THE END OF EATING EVERYTHING*, AND IBI ZOBOI'S "THE FARMING OF GODS"

Amanda Renée Rico
Texas A&M University

Correspondence:

Amanda Renée Rico, Texas A&M University
amanda.r.rico@gmail.com

To cite this article:

[Amanda Renée Rico, "Gendered Ecologies and Black Feminist Futures in Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi*, Wangechi Mutu's *The End of Eating Everything*, and Ibi Zoboï's 'The Farming of Gods.'" *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies*, Winter 2017, vol. 18, pp. 81-99]

Abstract:

This paper addresses how the works of three female authors and artists from various parts of Africa and the Diaspora — *Pumzi* by Wanuri Kahiu, *The End of eating Everything* by Wangechi Mutu, and "The Farming of the Gods" by Ibi Zoboï — imagine a black feminist future through ecological imagery. My argument is twofold: first, I take my cue from Mutu's assertion that imaginative forms of world-building must connect systemic corruption to consumptive practices. Second, I claim such Afrofuturist works use geographical spaces marked by ecological abuse (poisonous spores, pustules, desert landscapes), displacement (discarded objects) and violence (human limbs) to negotiate the symbolic and material "marking" of black female bodies. Ultimately, I read these works as meditations on new forms of transnational communities that not only survive but thrive in the 21st century and beyond.

The concept of “Afrofuturism,” as it has been conceptualized since the early 1990s by Mark Dery, has come to encapsulate aesthetic works of black cultural production that treat futurist themes concerning Africa and its diaspora. However, little emphasis has been placed on how this ever-evolving genre interconnects gender and ecology. This article addresses how diasporic Kenyan-born filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu’s short film, *Pumzi* (2009), Kenyan artist Wangechi Mutu’s provocative digital film installation, *The End of eating Everything* (2013), and Haitian author Ibi Zoboi’s short story, “The Farming of the Gods” (2010), imagine Africa’s future through a careful examination of traditional images, symbols, and narratives – specifically those relating to ecology.¹ My argument is twofold: first, I take my cue from Kahiu’s assertion that we deconstruct the hegemonic discourses surrounding Africana science fiction or “Afrofuturism” as a purely forward-thinking concept. Second, I claim that the nature-related imagery found in these “Afrofuturist” works illustrate a need for scholars to examine how depictions of the future actively recycle and work through the past – specifically in relation to historical framings of black women’s bodies. Ultimately, I demonstrate how *Pumzi*, *The End of eating Everything*, and “The Farming of the Gods,” open up new ways of imagining and understanding diasporic identity, historical memory, and gender within an Africana context.

This article puts a short film, a brief digital film installation, and a short story into conversation to illustrate the relationship between gender and ecology within female-authored African and Caribbean science fiction film and fiction. Kenyan-born Wanuri Kahiu and Wangechi Mutu offer an Anglophone African science fiction perspective to the topic of gendered ecologies through the short film *Pumzi* and digital film installation entitled *The End of eating Everything*, respectively. Ibi Zoboi’s short story, “The Farming of the Gods,” provides a Francophone Caribbean science fiction perspective through her interweaving of traditional Haitian belief systems linked to land and fertility with a dystopian post-

apocalyptic setting. Like Zoboï's short story, Kahiu's *Pumzi* focuses on the fertilization of land – using specifically the imagery of trees – and metaphorically maps the imagery of fertilization onto black women's bodies. All three of these works also play with the theme of mothering and motherhood by using a black female body to create new metaphorical landscapes that enrich and enliven dying worlds.

My decision to analyze these three works stems from the lack of scholarship on Kahiu, Mutu, and Zoboï despite their notable contributions to the field of Afrofuturism as well as black feminist art in general. More specifically, while Mutu and Kahiu are more widely recognized in popular culture as up-and-coming artists and filmmakers from the African Diaspora, Zoboï – a Haitian author – is rarely mentioned in scholarship or popular culture. Despite her lack of renown, Zoboï's perspective is unique in the sense that she interweaves the post-apocalyptic with the historic. For instance, in a blog post, Zoboï mentioned that her short story, "The Farming of the Gods," was a response to the devastating earthquake that devastated Haiti on January 12, 2010. Similarly, Mutu has described her work as responding to various ecological disasters and humankind's general disrespect for the preservation of the planet. In her numerous interviews, Kahiu also discusses how her films interconnect with ecology and the notion of a post-apocalyptic or science fiction world by claiming that Afrocentric perspectives have always used speculation and science to critique societal ills.

In an interview with Oulimata Gueye held during the exhibition "Si ce monde vous déplaît," Kahiu asserts that she was told by her director to label her 2009 short film, *Pumzi*, as either science fiction or fantasy since Western audiences separate the genres. While Kahiu ultimately decided to tell – and sell – her story as "Science Fiction," the experience prompted her to argue that

I think science fiction has been a genre in Africa that has been used a lot for a long period of time – way before I was even born...If we think of science fiction as something that is

fictitiously science or speculative fiction within a story then we've always used it. Because we've used Botany; we've used Etymology; the idea of the study of animals to tell stories or the idea of insects to tell stories or the idea of natural sciences using trees – that's all science fiction. (Gueye, 2009)

Kahiu's argument leads to additional questions concerning the relevance of the term "Afrofuturism" as a purely futuristic or forward-thinking concept. Her focus on the interconnections between the science fiction genre and ecology - specifically the significance of ecological imagery within African stories - demonstrates how this genre reinvents nature-based symbols and narratives. In fact, I assert that the primary aim of Afrofuturism is not only to project black bodies and subjectivities into "futuristic" geographies - although that is an important aspect of the genre - but also to reimagine and work through historical memory. Intermingling temporalities like "present," "past," and "future" not only deconstructs strict Western epistemological readings of time in respect to both Africa and blackness, but also provides a more nuanced interpretation of Afrofuturism as a whole.

In *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (2011), Jessica Langer usefully frames the tension between Western scientific discourse's reliance on ideas of technological and cultural "progress" and indigenous modes of knowledge production (p. 9). This tension, which Langer rightly argues is at the heart of postcolonial criticism, is also integral to the Afrofuturist movement. She explains this tension thus:

Works of postcolonial speculative fiction function above all as vehement denials of the colonial claim that indigenous, colonized and postcolonial scientific literacies exist in the past and have no place in the future. They are not the ways of strangers, but of essential participants in traditional, diasporic and world communities. Their traditions and ways of knowing are relevant, applicable, necessary. They belong to the past,

but also to the present, and to the future. (p. 152)

Within Langer's framing of postcolonial speculative fiction, imaginative stories rework existing epistemologies that metaphorically and materially displace black bodies. Furthermore, these stories create a space for black writers, artists, and filmmakers to participate in the production and re-envisioning of history in its past, present, and future manifestations. Within the context of my focal works, Kahiu, Mutu, and Zobo envision Afrofuturist stories as the result of authorial imagination rather than a rigid adherence to genre. Moreover, they conceptualize their stories as an interweaving of influences from the "Afro" world that complicate a fixed, Eurocentric idea of "futurism."

These stories also explore humankind's relationship to the earth insofar as humans play a significant role in creating and maintaining responsible ecological practices due to a heightened recognition of their dependency on the natural environment. Within the context of these focal works, humankind's interconnectedness with the environment feeds directly into various theoretical and activist-related concepts. As discussed below, while many eco-focused theories neglect to consider the layers of racial, sexual, and class-based oppression faced by many women of color, an idea of gendered ecologies – whether that be labeled as African ecological activism or even ecowomanism – prioritizes race, gender, and environmentalism.

In order to fully analyze the interconnections between gender and ecology in this article, I contextualize the debate surrounding specific corollaries of ecocriticism – between ecofeminism and ecowomanism, respectively.² While ecowomanism is most widely recognized as stemming from Afrocentric thought and black feminism in general, many women of color choose to self-identify as environmentalists and/or activists rather than align themselves with "ecofeminism" – a primarily white feminist movement that has historically appropriated the voices and experiences of women of

color. To preface why I employ the term “gendered ecologies” rather than an eco-focused scholarly term, it is useful to provide a brief overview of ecofeminism and its discontents. This preface, I hope, offers insight into why the three focal works are read both within and outside of a scholarly theoretical frame. As Kahiui notes in her interview with Gueye (2009), strict adherence to genre and theory can at times obscure the more practical work being done by black female artists and authors.

In “The Nature of Race: Discourses of Racial Difference in Ecofeminism,” Noel Sturgeon defines ecofeminism as “a contemporary political movement operating on the theory that the ideologies which authorize injustices based on gender, race, and class are related to the ideologies which sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment” (p. 260). As a third-wave feminist movement, ecofeminism has historically included race as a key marker of which environments will be targeted for destructive corporate practices. At its root, ecofeminism’s foundational tenants examine how the subordination, exploitation, and appropriation of women – especially the treatment of ethnic and racial minorities in the Global North and South – interconnects with the treatment of the natural world. Ecofeminism’s goal is to refashion new discourses of care, responsibility, and justice that open up new ways of understanding how humanity – and women in particular – is positioned in relation to nature. In contrast to more academic approaches, accounts of global activism, such as the Chipko Movement – a forest conservation movement in India that began in 1973 – have given way to more critical race-based approaches on the intersection between gender and ecology.

While scholarship remains sparse on ecofeminism’s more diverse counterpart, ecowomanism, scholars like Rosemary Radford Ruether (2004), Barbara Boswell (2011) and Melanie Harris (2016) add a black female perspective to the debate on ecofeminism’s essentialist undertones.³ African women’s activism in environmental issues also plays a significant part in creating what

scholars like Barbara Boswell refer to as “African ecofeminism.” For instance, 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai’s Green Belt Movement has been championed by scholars like Janet Muthuki as a model for reconceptualizing ecofeminism from an African perspective by building “an alliance between women and nature in asserting the political agency of both” (2006, p. 12). In fact, in her article, “Rethinking Ecofeminism: Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement in Kenya,” Muthuki (2006) considers Maathai’s Green Belt Movement as African ecofeminist activism due to the ways in which the movement works through environmental issues, highlights gender relations, and challenges patriarchal structures within an Africa-focused context. The concept of an African ecofeminist activism also interconnects with the idea of ecowomanism, which is a theoretically-based Afrocentric adaptation of ecofeminism. Per Melanie Harris, ecowomanism “centers on the perspectives of women of African descent and reflects upon these women’s activist methods, religious practices, and theories on how to engage earth justice” (2016, p. 5).

An ecowomanist approach is unique in that it links social justice with earth justice by recognizing the overlapping and intersecting modes of oppression at work between both women of color – specifically black women – and the environment. It is also a useful term for conceptualizing paradoxical and problematic connections between black women and the earth. According to Harris: “In addition to honoring the beautiful connection that black women have with the earth, as the earth (earthlings) and as shared creators, black women have a particular historical experience of suffering with and as the earth” (2016, p. 6). Harris’ reference to black women’s experiences of “suffering with and as the earth” relate specifically to the transnational histories of colonialism and slavery where black women’s bodies were raped, sold, and objectified for profit. Harris’ reading of the “beautiful connection” between black women’s bodies and the earth could be read as romanticizing epistemologies that link black female femininity to primitive earth-based knowledges. However, many science fiction narratives by

women of color - including the three I discuss in this article - use an ambivalent tone to discuss the positive and problematic connections between black women's bodies and the environment. This ambivalence signifies that female characters' bodies can play a positive role in repopulating and rebuilding natural environments while these same characters suffer physical and epistemic violence from outside forces.

Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi*, Wangechi Mutu's *The End of eating Everything*, and Ibi Zoboi's "The Farming of the Gods" include depictions of the future that actively recycle and work through the past in ways that open up new ways of imagining and understanding diaspora, ecology, historical memory, and gender. More specifically, stories of girls in the future in magical and post-apocalyptic worlds draw from earth-focused images, symbols, and narratives that speak to trauma associated with (re)membering the past in both its symbolic and material manifestations. Ecological imagery holds particular significance in reading these visual and verbal texts due to its paradoxical diasporic connections that stem from Africana modes of knowledge production. From the sacred Nigerian grove of Osun-Osogbo to the lynching trees of the American South, ecological imagery holds a unique complexity for Africana historical memory – especially in relation to black women's bodies.

In "From the Same Tree: Gender and Iconography in Representations of Violence in *Beloved*," Sandy Alexandre explains the paradoxical nature of tree-related symbolism within Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as illustrative of both lynching iconography and a site of rootedness. Within the context of gender violence, Alexandre notes that from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to British Romanticism, tree imagery has been used to conflate female bodies with nature, leading to narratives where "women are turned into trees to deflect salacious attention and sexual violence away from their bodies" (p. 917). In respect to violence against black women's bodies, Morrison's *Beloved* envisions tree imagery as a kind of

palimpsest that, as Alexandre describes it, is “still legible as masculine but clearly overwritten by a black sorority of sorts” (p. 922). Interpreting tree imagery as palimpsestic is indeed helpful for interpretations of Africana works of cultural production since many - including Kahiu’s *Pumzi* - fashion imaginative narratives where tree-related symbolism challenges, engages with, and works through trauma linked to gender violence and diaspora.

Kahiu’s *Pumzi* relies heavily on ecological imagery as a site of rootedness. Asha, the film’s female protagonist, seeks to escape her sterile and inorganic post-apocalyptic compound in order to both literally and figuratively “root” herself in a natural environment. Set thirty-five years after *The Water Wars*, viewers are introduced to a world ravaged by unbridled human consumption where the only remaining life on earth is contained in concrete compounds where human inhabitants are heavily monitored, used to produce clean energy for the community, and restricted from access to the outside world. As the film opens, a translucent screen projects images of the protagonist’s dreamlike state, which include a joyful Asha running toward a large tree situated in the middle of a barren desert landscape. Her attempts to touch the tree are, to her disappointment, interrupted as the screen replaces her dream with the message, “Dream Detected: Take Your Dream Suppressants.”

Compliantly, Asha quickly awakens to swallow her required dosage of medication, but the image of the tree continues to haunt her waking life. Shortly after taking the suppressants, a mysterious package containing a germinating seed arrives at the museum where Asha works as an archivist of now-ancient biological matter. Despite being told to destroy the seed, Asha defies her superiors and escapes the compound. Exhausted and fatigued from the unforgiving sun and sand, the protagonist again sees the tree of her dreams in the distance; however, upon arriving at its location, she finds only the long-dead frame of a once thriving, massive tree. Refusing to give up her dream of reviving the outside world, Asha uses her ration of water, bodily fluids, and clothing to shade and

water the germinating seed. The end of the film illustrates that the protagonist's bodily sacrifice eventually produces the tree of her dreams by transposing a blossoming tree onto Asha's prostate body.

Within the context of the film, a sense of "place" is literally and figuratively rooted in how nature interconnects with corporeality, as demonstrated through the transubstantiation of Asha's body into a tree. Kahiú herself has described *Pumzi* as a call for human beings to "mother" the earth rather than deplete its natural resources for profit. The protagonist's intense emotional connection to the germinating seed coupled with her self-sacrificial impulse to give it life are also illustrative of an underlying "mothering" trope. This idea finds numerous dysfunctional echoes in other "Afrofuturist" works, such as the two other focal works – Mutu's unsettling digital video installation *The End of eating Everything* and Zoboí's "The Farming of the Gods" – which both include representations of how consumptive practices and the abuse of natural environments disrupts mothering practices. Within the context of *Pumzi*, Asha's decision to sacrifice herself so that the outside world can grow might represent a similar imperative for humans to privilege environmental concerns over the depletion of natural resources for monetary gain.

The fact that Asha's body is marked as both black and female, however, problematizes a strict ecocritical reading of the film - especially when considering the ways in which black women's bodies remain epistemologically linked to discourses that engender racial and sexual displacement, with one of those discourses being the naturalization of socio-spatial geographies that determine where black female bodies belong and do not belong. Within the context of African folklore, however, the transposition of Asha's body with a tree could imply a transferal of her spirit to the tree, which is a common theme across cosmologies from the continent. In this reading, Asha's spirit, while forever fixed to the tree, continues to engage with human life in meaningful ways - including rites associated with fertility, initiation, and religious customs (i.e. the

significance of fig trees to Kenyan peoples, which are called *mugumo* by the Kikuyu and *oreti* by the Maasai, who consider them as symbols of the ancestors, life, and fertility. Additionally, according to Yoruba belief systems, the Iroko tree is inhabited by a vengeful spirit who causes misfortune to those who cut it down).

While in Kahiu's *Pumzi* black female bodies are rooted to the earth, Wangechi Mutu's *The End of eating Everything* shows a starkly different critique of how black women's bodies interconnect with the environment – particularly in reference to consumptive neoliberal practices. Mutu's digital film installation entitled *The End of eating Everything* was commissioned by the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University and completed in 2013 as a collaboration between the artist and female African-American singer/songwriter, Santigold.⁴ As Trevor Schoonmaker (2013) has noted in his essay, "A Fantastic Journey," both Mutu and Santigold use their art to "dismantle, cut, and paste materials to create eclectic, polyphonic, multicultural mash-ups that bring the aesthetics of the Southern and Northern Hemispheres together, as well as those of the planet and outer space" (p. 46). Her first stint with animated video, Mutu brings her trademark pastiche-like collages to life in order to create a narrative that functions as a social critique of race, gender, consumption, and environmental abuse.

The tone of the digital film installation is dark, melancholic, and grotesque yet also fantastical and distinctively post-apocalyptic. A faint, eerie wind-like sound acts as score and soundtrack for the installation, and colors are muted. As the film opens, viewers are introduced to the central character – a tumorous, cyborgian creature with Medusa-like hair that floats in what appears to be a grey sky. Its head, which resembles Santigold, is attached to a massive body-like mass made up of discarded machinery, severed limbs, infected spores, and flailing tentacles. The only other organisms in the film are a flock of black birds that swarm around the creature's head. As the birds fly around her head, the creature sniffs the air predatorily, soon after voraciously biting into the flock to consume as many

birds as possible.

With blood and birds scattering across the filmic frame, Mutu's creature grows until it eventually implodes in circles of smoke. As the fog lifts, so too does the mood as the sky lightens and the creature explodes into hatchlings of small squid-like creatures with Santigold's talking head. Ultimately, these smaller, brighter creatures replace the consumptive singular entity. Within the context of the film's diegesis, these creatures can be read as survivors representing rebirth in the wake of an apocalypse. Moreover, given the installation's content and title – *The End of eating Everything* – Mutu seems hopeful about the prospect of working through humankind's abuse of the planet.

Like Kahiu's *Pumzi*, Mutu's decision to use a black female body as a metaphorical marker for environmental abuse requires careful examination. In one sense the cyborgian singular creature appears powerful and attractive as Santigold's face is beautifully accentuated with strong eye makeup and her skin appears radiant. However, her body is amorphous and diseased. This seemingly paradoxical imagery calls attention to how multilayered histories of colonialism, slavery, and neoliberalism have exploited, dismembered, and abused black women's bodies. Moreover, by making the creature's body amorphous and like a land mass, she invites a parallel reading between black female bodies and the earth.

Mutu openly uses her art as a critique of socio-cultural stigmas surrounding black women and their bodies; however, she also prioritizes the connection all humans share as a species to protect one another as well as the planet. As she states in an interview with Schoonmaker (2013), "There is this connection – this deep connection – that we all share because we all come from the same place" (p. 46). This relationship, however, is far from symbiotic. In fact, much of Mutu's work plays with the idea of dichotomies and power relationships – male/female, white/black, Africa/Europe, human/animal, hand/machine – in ways that challenge what we

perceive as real and/or imagined. According to her,

I have different themes, and I mash them all together. One of the things that I'm focused on is finding new ways to interpret the female portrait by questioning those qualities we look for when we identify something as 'woman,' or even 'beautiful.' What do those words *mean*? And how are they particular to, and part of, different histories? We sort of assume that we are saying the same things and so run the risk of ignoring, of negating, the existence of people when we homogenize them. (p. 102)

In *The End of eating Everything*, Mutu does indeed “mash” a variety of themes together in paradoxical ways (for example, many of her images are both grotesque and beautiful, haunting but also hopeful). Additionally, she makes the inanimate animate by splicing the humanness of Santingold's face onto an earth-like landmass.

Like much of Mutu's art, the political nature of *The End of eating Everything* is both subtle and overt. The intersection among the variety of themes she deconstructs in her works comes together through the fantastical, the surreal, and the speculative. One might call her a diasporic African ecowomanist; however, this label would hardly do her or her work justice. While academics tend to focus on labeling – and in a sense homogenizing – the work of others so as to make it more accessible and pliable for theoretical models, artists like Mutu play with genre and imagery in ways that defy definition. More specifically, to refer to her as “Afrofuturist” or “ecowomanist” distracts from the ways in which her “futuristic” images actually speak to historical memory or how ecological imagery in her works critiques humanness. Here I return to my reading of works like Mutu's as representing “gendered ecologies” primarily because the content and form of art like *The End of eating Everything* speak to a wide variety of popular and scholarly issues that rarely fit neatly within theoretical models. If nothing else, Mutu's work addresses the ways in which science fiction, art, literature, and film – and those

who create these works – always highlight particular historical moments.

With the idea that works of cultural production speak to and across historical memories, I transition to my third and final focal work – Ibi Zoboi’s short story, “The Farming of the Gods.” While Zoboi’s work has been largely overlooked in both academic and popular literary circles, her work has found a home in the field of Afrofuturism – specifically in an anthology entitled, *Mothership: Tales from Afrofuturism and Beyond* (2013), which includes science fiction themed stories by Africana writers. Like Mutu’s artistic style, Zoboi’s writing is both straightforward and disorienting, apocalyptic yet also familiar. Told in first person, the story’s narrator, Inno (short for ‘Innocent’) is a Haitian living in a post-apocalyptic, desolate Haiti that has not seen the birth of a child for over ten years. Given this phenomenon, scientists – described as white and Western by Inno – experiment with using a lava-like substance from deep within the Earth’s core to impregnate the story’s main female protagonist and Inno’s wife, Marisol, in order to repopulate the country. While Marisol does conceive, her “babies” are far from human. Instead, they are deformed, amorphous beings with multiple limbs that are conceptualized as “seeds” that provide nourishment to the charred land.

In a 2012 blog post, Zoboi comments that “The Farming of the Gods” was written in response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti – referred to as “Goudougoudou” by Haitians for the onomatopoeic sound the earth made that day. As she describes it, the story takes place “decades after Haiti’s devastating earthquake” when “the precious land and its vital resources, the people and their ability to bear children, and their religion are all held within the hands of foreign scientists and doctors” (Zoboi, 2012). Like in *Pumzi* and *The End of eating Everything*, women’s relationship to land has both real and imagined elements. One of the ways in which human bodies – specifically women’s bodies – are linked to the earth is through the notion of physical contact with soil. Innocent recalls a memory of

his mother “crouched down over the ground...digging with her bare hands the remains of her two children” (Zoboi, 2013, p. 54). This movement is echoed by Marisol when she is preparing to be initiated by Ayizan-Freda, a Voodoo deity, as Haiti’s first mother in over ten years. The generational connection between these two women is intensified by their connection to the land in respect to both death and rebirth. However, the interconnections between death, rebirth, and ecology in relation to black women’s bodies are problematized in this story through Zoboi’s use of the science fiction genre.

What this genre makes available is the ability to create unsettling parallels between nature and the human body. Indeed, the imagery of Inno’s mother burying her children in the ground is juxtaposed with Marisol’s conception through an earth-based magical substance. When Marisol gives birth to three amorphous “babies” or “seedlings” with multiple limbs, those once buried can be read as reborn. However, rather than rebuilding the human race, these seedlings instead rebuild the natural ecosystem. For example, Marisol’s most prized baby, Mango, refuses to latch onto Marisol’s breasts for nourishment and instead “only wanted to feed on dirt” (p. 59). Once Innocent “put Mango down on the ground...he would roll his little deformed and discolored body” and then “something would sprout from that very spot” a few moments later (p. 59).

The destruction and rebuilding of the natural environment through black women’s bodies is rooted in particular historical contexts. In “Sin, Nature, and Black Women’s Bodies,” Dolores S. Williams (1993) draws connections between America’s “contribution to the abuse and exploitation of the natural environment today with the dominating culture’s historic abuse and exploitation of African-American women’s bodies in the nineteenth century” (p. 24). From abusive strip mining to the practice of using “breeder women” to produce more children (read: economic ‘units of production’) during slavery, Williams argues that the exhaustion of the “earth’s body” is directly linked to the exhaustion of black women’s bodies (p. 25).

Within the context of “The Farming of the Gods,” the exploitation of black female bodies through experimental reproductive practices by white scientists has significant historical echoes. Moreover, the fact that Haiti is chosen as a setting for this tale also echoes the centuries of abuse and exploitation by the West of the country’s population and ecological resources. Zoboï calls attention to this reality in her story through her use of white, faceless, and exploitative scientists who use Haitians as test subjects for their experiments. Moreover, the asymmetrical power relations found in the relationship between Haiti and the West are mirrored in this story through Zoboï’s use of surreal images and speculative plotlines. Indeed, the author uses science fiction imagery, through her scientist characters, to highlight paternalistic forms of “aid” in times of crises. Forging a link between aid and enslavement, such critiques stem from the use of Haitian women’s bodies to repair ecological abuse, in becoming reproductive units that bear offspring for economic production to benefit Western economies.

Conclusion

I read the concept of gendered ecologies in these three works as theorizing a black feminist future that re-envision the way we view life itself in order to restructure our way of looking at the world. These works demonstrate a need to look at African and Caribbean science fiction to reimagine not only our future but our present. As Matthew Omelsky (2014) claims, imagining a “present-as-past through the optic of the future opens up the possibility of a restructured present and shift in the normative modes of social thought. It engenders a new politics of our historical moment” (p. 48). In other words, how do these works use the idea of gendered ecologies to speak to contemporary concerns facing African and Caribbean women? All three critique various forms of ecological abuse and its relationship to African women’s lived realities. Moreover, by using the genre of Afrofuturism, Kahi, Mutu, and Zoboï engage how black feminist futures are actively bound to

environmental activism. Derived from Mutu's assertion that imaginative forms of world-building must connect systemic corruption to consumptive practices, I read Kahiu's *Pumzi*, Mutu's *The End of eating Everything*, and Zoboi's "The Farming of the Gods" use of geographical spaces marked by ecological abuse (poisonous spores, pustules, desert landscapes), displacement (discarded objects) and violence (human limbs) to negotiate the symbolic and material "marking" of black female bodies. Ultimately, however, these works speculate about new forms of transnational communities, which position women as agents of change and producers of knowledge, who not only survive (apocalyptic disaster), but are instrumental to the reconstruction of the future.

References:

- Alexandre, Sandy. (2001). From the same tree: gender and iconography in representations of violence in *Beloved*. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 36(4), 915-940.
- Boswell, Barbara. (2011). Re-memory and an African ecofeminist poetic of healing in Malika Ndlovu's poetry. *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*, 16(2), 32-41.
- Dery, Mark, ed. (1994). *Flame wars: the discourse of cyberculture*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Gueye, Oulimata. (2009). Africa and science fiction: Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi* 2009. Retrieved from *YouTube.com*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWMtgD9O6PU>.
- Harris, Melanie L. (2016). Ecowomanism. *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, 20(1), 5-14.
- Kahiu, Wanuri. (2009). *Pumzi*. Kenya: Inspired Minority Pictures.
- Langer, Jessica. (2011). *Postcolonialism and science fiction*. Houndmills, Basingstoke Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Muthuki, Janet. (2006). Challenging patriarchal structures: Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement in

- Kenya. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 69, 82-91.
- Mutu, Wangechi. (2013). *The end of eating everything* [animated video on 8-minute loop, edition of 6]. Durham, North Carolina: Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University.
- Omelsky, Matthew. (2014). After the end times: Postcrisis African science fiction. *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 1(1), 33-49.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. (2004). *Integrating ecofeminism, globalization and world religions (nature's meaning)*. Latham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Schoonmaker, Trevor. (2013). A fantastic journey. In Trevor Schoonmaker, Wangechi Mutu, Kristine Stiles, and Greg Tate (Eds.), *Wangechi Mutu: A fantastic journey* (pp. 21-50). Durham, NC: Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University.
- Sturgeon, Noel. (1997). The nature of race: discourses of racial difference in ecofeminism. In Karen Warren and Nisvan Erkal (Eds.), *Ecofeminism: women, culture, nature* (pp. 260-278). Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- Williams, Dolores S. (1993). Sin, nature, and black women's bodies. In Carol J. Adams (Ed.), *Ecofeminism and the sacred*. (pp. 24-29). New York: Continuum.
- Zoboi, Ibi. (2012, June 22). The farming of the gods [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://ibizoboi.net/2012/06/the-farming-of-gods>
- Zoboi, Ibi. (2013). The farming of the gods. In Bill Campbell and Edward Austin Hall (Eds.), *Mothership: tales from afrofuturism and beyond* (pp. 51-59). College Park, MD: Rosarium.

Endnotes

¹ Wangechi Mutu's *The End of eating Everything* is a digital film installation commissioned by the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University that includes animated video with color and sound on an 8-minute loop.

² I am working from multiple dictionary-specific definitions that describe ecology as both 1) a branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and their physical surroundings and 2) a political movement that seeks to protect the environment.

³ Here I have chosen to use the term "black female" perspective rather than "black feminist" since many female scholars of color self-identify in various ways, including theoretical frames like African Feminism, STIWANISM, and Womanism.

⁴ Santigold, an African-American signer and producer, collaborated with Mutu on the creation of *The End of eating Everything* by agreeing to 'star' as a diseased, flying planet-like creature who inhabits the animated film's desolate and bleak landscape.