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# CORPORATE INGRESSION



A New Approach to Contemporary Anglophone  
Postcolonial Literature

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## A New Approach to Contemporary Anglophone Postcolonial Literature

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis revolves around the development of a new critical approach to contemporary anglophone postcolonial literature in the form of a concept of 'corporate ingression.' This term denotes a globally recurring process of biopolitical (re)structuring of a community by corporate power and its extended cultural influence on society.

Through an analysis of contemporary engagements with similarly explored events over time and space in the form of three novels (Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, Lauren Beukes' *Moxyland* and David Mitchell's *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*), this thesis explores the relevance of the concept of corporate ingression as a new approach to such imaginative works. By reading these texts closely, with and against the grain, I enter into dialogue with their discussion of corporate power as the major structural influence in the societies they explore. I also show that a comparative analysis of these texts reveals similarities between the exploration of the period of early colonialism as acted out by the various trade corporations in existence and contemporary forms of corporate dominance. This research thus concerns various contexts and explorations of corporate power and explores the concept of recurring forms of corporate ingression as a new perspective within literary postcolonial and globalisation studies.

*Oil on Water* (2010) as a political novel explores the complex intricacies of communities structured around corporate power and presents a full account of the stakeholders that are influenced by or connected to the Niger Delta's oil industry. *Moxyland* (2008) as a futuristic cyberpunk novel nuances the destruction implied in *Oil on Water* as a major factor of corporate ingression by exploring corporate power's potential for constructive influence over a community. *The Thousand Autumns* (2010) as a historical novel explores an instance of corporate ingression in which the Dutch East India Company in Japan, despite its significant cultural influence, is subordinate to the host state to its activity. Corporate power is explored as a fallible construction that can be controlled by a strong regime as well as benefited from.

Despite the geographic and temporal distance between the three cases, and despite their exploration of widely differing industries, circumstances and levels of success, the common factors remain recognisable. Critical analysis shows that the contrasts between especially the constructive and destructive corporate activity in the three texts is of great interest, as it highlights the potential of corporate power both for construction and destruction of value. This research also shows how each novel actively resists a binary ethical narrative, instead presenting a set of complex power dynamics within the respective communities.

With this research I show that reading corporate ingression both significantly informs the reading of various postcolonial texts, while also showing that the analysis of these texts reveals that a conventional postcolonial binary approach is insufficient to account for what these works describe and investigate. The concept of a process of corporate ingression as a new perspective on literary explorations of historical, contemporary or futuristic forms of corporate power is thus shown to be a relevant addition to current postcolonial literary scholarship.



# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	9
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## PART 1 — CORPORATE INGRESSION IN THEORY

Chapter 1 – Postcolonialism and Globalisation	
Introduction .....	16
1.1 Global Culture.....	17
1.2 Globalisation and Colonialism .....	21
1.3 Postcolonial Theory and Empire .....	24
Chapter 2 – Introducing Corporate Ingression: An Approach	
Introduction .....	34
2.1 Corporate Ingression Defined.....	34
2.2 Research Aims and Questions.....	35
2.3 Approach and Method.....	36

## PART 2 — CORPORATE INGRESSION AND CRISIS

Chapter 3 – Politics and Activism in Helon Habila’s Oil on Water	
Introduction .....	42
3.1 Politico-Economic Context .....	43
3.2 Literary Context.....	48
Chapter 4 – The Corporate Community in Oil on Water	
Introduction .....	62
4.1 The Presence of Corporate Power.....	63
4.2 Structural Influence .....	67
4.3 Extended Cultural Influence .....	75
Conclusion.....	111

## PART 3 — CORPORATE INGRESSION AND SOCIAL INVESTMENT

Chapter 5 – Genre and Slippage in Lauren Beukes’s Moxyland	
Introduction .....	114
5.1 Genre and Slippage.....	115
5.2 Moxyland in Context.....	131
Chapter 6 – The Corporate Dystopia in Moxyland	
Introduction .....	136
6.1 Corporate Ingression in Moxyland.....	137
6.2 Corporate Social Responsibility .....	164
Conclusion.....	171

PART 4 — CORPORATE INGRESSION AND HISTORY

Chapter 7 – History and Historicity in David Mitchell’s The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet	
Introduction .....	176
7.1 The Novel in Context .....	177
7.2 Exploring the Novel.....	183
Chapter 8 – The Corporate Colony in The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet	
Introduction .....	201
8.1 The Presence of Corporate Power.....	201
8.2 Structural Influence .....	205
8.3 Extended Cultural Influence .....	214
Conclusion.....	238
CONCLUSION.....	241
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	250



# INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of postcolonial studies as a major field within literary criticism, much work has been done to map the politics, developments and idiosyncrasies of the genre of postcolonial literature. Despite the critique that has been directed towards the field, it remains a productive and living area of expertise that continues to develop and evolve in close connection with developments in, among others, the areas of globalisation, environmental and gender studies and with forays into anthropology, history and political science. Though this broad focus and its accompanying methodological indistinctness have been a source of criticism, it is exactly this interest in an overarching perspective on certain major dynamics and processes within human history that is the field's most characteristic and, as others argue, most productive feature. It is this broad interest in the processes and characteristics that result from European global expansion since the 15<sup>th</sup> century that informs the theoretical foundation of this research.

This research is also centred on the close relationship between this expansive postcolonial theoretical foundation and its literary component. What the broad theoretical focus and interest of postcolonial literary studies shows is the field's fundamental preoccupation (and struggle) with the relationship between historical and contemporary reality and literary exploration. As Robert J.C. Young states: "one characteristic aspect of postcolonial writing, be it creative or critical, involves its historical and political agenda" (*Ideologies* 1). An analysis of postcolonial fiction thus inherently involves an analysis of its historical and political subject matter and, not least, its context.

As a result, a notion of literature as an *exploration* of historical reality and the presence of a 'political agenda' in such works suggests a reciprocating role for literature as a source of knowledge and understanding. Postcolonial literature is not merely concerned with a *representation* of its historical and political subject matter, but in major part with the "historical rewriting, reforming and retrieving [of] an historical sensibility through the creative processes of contemporary writing" (Young, *Ideologies* 3-4). This process of "rewriting, reforming and retrieving" describes the progressive action of postcolonial literature as a historical and

political act in and of itself. Critical reading of such literature is therefore more than merely a process of interpretation. As Iain Chambers states: “this ‘style’ of intellectual work reveals a positionality that persistently stymies the universal and ‘neutral’ pretensions of abstract knowledge proposed by the humanities” (255). Rather than pretending to an objective, descriptive stance, the field of critical studies is thus itself an area of creation. Referring to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s famous words on the matter, Graham Huggan explains the field’s view of especially literature as “a vital tool [...] in the continuing struggle to create new possibilities of thinking, as well as living, for previously exploited and dispossessed peoples” (*Travel/Writing* 13). The field of postcolonial studies has therefore remained deeply interested in preserving and cultivating its relationship with literary and cultural studies in order to both map and create an increasing understanding of its political and historical subject matter and agenda.

It is with this approach to postcolonial theory and literature in mind that my research sets out to map and create a better understanding of the structural and cultural influence of corporate power over local communities. As I argue in Chapter 1, within postcolonial literary criticism this area is a largely unmapped part of (post)colonial history and present. Connections exist, I will argue in this thesis, between contemporary anglophone literary explorations of past and present instances of such corporate influence, as well as with futuristic imaginings.

Various genres of fiction, from historical to political to science fiction, and from film and graphic novels to digital games and literature, show instances of interest in the impact of corporate power on a community. Whether historical literature concerning the British Empire (e.g. Amitav Ghosh’s *Ibis* Trilogy), popular conspiracy fiction placed in the present (e.g. the television show *Prison Break*), or the futuristic bioengineering company Tyrell Corporation (in the *Blade Runner* franchise), in each instance, corporate power and imperatives significantly influence the lives of the main characters and the society in which they live. However, this does not only concern the notion of destructive control by an “evil corporation” as suggested by much popular mystery, conspiracy and dystopian fiction. The beneficial influence on and within society of a company such as Stark Industries (of the Marvel universe), largely due to its spectacular technological developments and its affiliation with superheroes, is an example to the contrary.

Rather, it is the notion of extensive influence of whatever kind, and in a particular manner, that connects many popular and literary fictional explorations of corporate power. It is precisely this wide variety of genres and narrative time periods chosen in such fiction that renders this common factor noteworthy, as well as the prevalence of this theme in various forms of fiction. As this research aims to show, similarities are also inadvertently suggested by contemporary fiction in general between instances of corporate influence in various communities throughout time and place—communities connected to colonial and postcolonial history and the present.

This theme in contemporary fiction does not merely reflect a specific imaginary trope, however. The connections between these fictional explorations in fact reflect developments in the public arena, as recent European and global political incidents show. In September 2006, the prime minister of The Netherlands, Jan-Peter Balkenende, made the following statement in parliament: “The Netherlands can do it again! That VOC<sup>1</sup>-mentality, looking across borders, dynamism!” This assertion was made as a call for increased political support for international entrepreneurship in a move towards strengthening the Dutch economy. Despite being met with shock, mockery and outrage in his audience for his explicit referral to the colonial past and controversial colonial practices, as well as critical reactions in the public space continuing to this day, his demand for economically driven political policy regarding global business initiatives in light of the highly successful Dutch East India Company was also welcomed. The political and economic logic behind Balkenende’s words is implied by the context: a drive for expansionism and accompanying economic growth exemplified by European colonial activity.

What Balkenende’s statement highlights is admiration for an imagined, economically golden, colonial past—where the multinational VOC operated under official influence of the state, albeit independent both in economic and political respects. The focus of the celebrations in 2002 of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the VOC on “the early period of the VOC (1602-1620) and its maritime

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<sup>1</sup> “[T]he Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC): perhaps the world’s first true ‘multinational’, and (in the verdict of [...] The Economist) one matched only by the companies of Henry Ford and Bill Gates for its influence on the planet” (Twidle 127).

and commercial aspects, rather than its function as a violent protocolonial state” (Oostindie 134) also illustrates this stance. Such eroticisation of the Dutch golden age in terms of economic power suggests a facet of postcolonial matters neglected in most postcolonial debates that merits a closer look: namely a corporate economic element that can be identified both in past colonial practices (especially before 1800) and in contemporary corporate practices, in connection with political and cultural developments. The question arises how such instances of global and national politico-economic support for (international) entrepreneurship and economic dominance throughout time affect both the local and the global cultural sphere, especially when the environments and communities involved are extensively influenced by a company or companies seemingly driven mainly by economic motives.

Although international entrepreneurship such as was conducted by the VOC may be economically beneficial for a multinational’s country of origin, such corporate activity arguably also has a destructive influence over its host communities. The recent decision by the Italian court in December 2017 to agree to a trial regarding charges of corruption against the Anglo-Dutch oil company Royal Dutch Shell and the Italian company Eni, reveals the problematic practices that may be performed by corporate power. The charge, for which the trial date of 5 March 2018 was set, concerns a deal between these two companies and a Nigerian government official amounting to the sum of \$1.3 billion with which access to a valuable oil field was secured (Reed). Whatever the ruling will be, and regardless of where the ethical responsibility for this particular case may lie, the regular occurrence of such forms of corruption reveals the complex dynamics which the presence of such a major corporate organisation and its resources sets in motion within local political and economic landscapes.

Questions of responsibility, understandably, have arisen in this context, including continuous political debate regarding the role of government with regard to support and regulation of international corporate activity. From a corporate perspective, however, the question of responsibility is not merely raised externally in the form of public litigation for suspect corporate activity as described above, or media attention for violations of human rights by corporate power, but are also addressed in the field of business ethics: a development initiated in the 1990s by

consumer and human rights organisations within business governance theory that is concerned with ethical business practices and corporate social responsibility (Shamir 313). Significant global politico-economic developments such as these, paired with this recent increase in interest within business governance towards ethical business practices and their relevance and form, raise questions on various sides regarding the role and influence of corporate power on a global and local scale: not only on the level of political and economic effects, but also the social, cultural and other impact of extensive corporate power, strengthened by state support, on local communities or on other societies in general.

Such global developments, and their connections to similar historical processes, have been identified and considered in postcolonial and globalisation studies in various ways. Most influential has been a tendency to consider contemporary forms of dominance by political and/or economic forces in especially the former European colonies as an extension or renewal of Imperialism. The term 'neocolonialism' coined by Kwame Nkrumah appears regularly in this context. Though this has proven a productive line of thought in various schools and areas of thought, this research proposes to nuance binary theoretical narratives such as neocolonialism by exploring a particular type of economic, political and cultural influence resurfacing throughout the last 5 centuries: An influence identified in various forms of contemporary fiction as a process that appears less connected to past and present forms of imperialism and more to a seemingly timeless dynamic interaction with corporate economic imperatives.

In order to explore similarly focused cultural and imaginative explorations and their connection to contemporary and historical instances of corporate influence, my research also engages with the multidisciplinary debate that has developed in close contact with postcolonial literary studies and which includes strong ties with globalisation studies. Chapter 1 will therefore give an overview of relevant postcolonial and globalisation scholarship and the areas to which my research adds new insights. Furthermore, this thesis proposes a new perspective, termed 'corporate ingression,' with which to approach imaginative explorations of globalisation with a specific focus on the role of corporate power within local communities and societies central to such fictional explorations. To that end, Chapter 2 focuses firstly on a theoretical foundation of the notion of corporate

ingression to register its potential value for postcolonial literary analysis, and secondly on the approach and method of this research. On this theoretical basis, Parts 2-4 explore the relevance of the concept of corporate ingression for literary analysis through close readings of three contemporary anglophone postcolonial texts: Helon Habila's political novel *Oil on Water* (2010), Lauren Beukes's futuristic cyberpunk novel *Moxyland* (2008) and David Mitchell's historical novel *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010). Each novel explores a local community, each located in a different point in time and place, that is controlled to varying extents by a significant corporate power. The choice and context for these novels are set out in Chapter 2.

This thesis thus argues and presents critical support for the relevance of a concept of 'corporate ingression' as a new perspective on contemporary imaginings of past, present and potential future instances of local corporate influence.

PART 1

—

CORPORATE INGRESSION IN  
THEORY

# CHAPTER 1 – POSTCOLONIALISM AND GLOBALISATION

## Introduction

Postcolonial studies as a field has been characterised in general by Bill Ashcroft as “the struggle of colonized intellectuals to appropriate the discursive tools of imperial discourse and to interpolate their own realities and cultural activities into the global arena” (*Post-Colonial Futures* 25) and concerns not merely the period after decolonisation but spans the period from the moment of colonisation to its effects and workings in the present. Achille Mbembe, in fact, identifies the postcolonial in general as “an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones” (*Postcolony* 16). As a category of time, the ‘postcolonial’ thus spans an immense part of human history and global geography. Taken by its widest bounds, the era spans at least 5 centuries (and remains ongoing) and concerns parts of every continent on earth. As mentioned above, this immensely ambitious lack of concentration of the field has been a source of criticism.

However, despite the problems undoubtedly associated with its broad focus, this characteristic can be directly linked to the development of highly influential theoretical concepts such as ‘orientalism,’ ‘hybridity’ and the ‘subaltern.’ The notion of ‘Third Space,’ for instance, is inherently unbounded in time period or geographical space. This broad focus has therefore created a productive environment from which to view postcolonial reality and the (fictional) ways in which it has been explored, negotiated and created. It is this ambitious temporal and geographical boundlessness from which this research project draws its energy, as I focus on explorations of a particular process of corporate influence recurring throughout postcolonial time and space. In order to develop a literary analytical approach to this process, this research therefore draws on existing theoretical perspectives regarding colonialism, postcolonialism and globalisation.

As During (2000) explains early in his analysis of globalisation in its relation to colonialism, the global economy is a starting point for most theories of globalisation, with its origins lying in the emergence of modern capitalism as initiated by and through industrialisation in Europe. This notion of a continuation of a single (capitalist) world system since the rise of modernity suggests that colonialist practices are part of this system; from early colonial practices to contemporary global processes. This link between past and present colonial practices has also been recognised by David Harvey in his analysis of the new imperial capitalism and his identification of a process of accumulation by dispossession.

Although Harvey argues for the position of processes of accumulation within the context of capitalism as the all-encompassing structure of society, a critical discussion of this or any other notion of an overarching world system would go beyond the scope of this thesis. What is relevant for my purposes, however, is the identification of historically recurring processes which Harvey names accumulation by dispossession, within which the influence of corporate power is a significant factor. I will examine various literary explorations of corporate influence over and within a community as such a form of accumulation by dispossession, and thus explore and compare imaginative discussions of this phenomenon.

To that end, the two major areas of scholarship that form the foundation of my research and the structure of this chapter are recent scholarship on globalisation and the broader context of postcolonial studies it connects to. This chapter does not aim to give a comprehensive overview of these fields, but rather focuses on the developments and ideas relevant for the new approach this thesis proposes while simultaneously addressing certain shortcomings in these fields that this new approach might resolve. These ideas include, first of all, the broader context of globalisation for contemporary culture, followed by various views on the relevance and continuance of studies of (post)colonialism today, concepts of (New) Empire and the role of early modern European expansionism in globalisation.

## 1.1 Global Culture

The strong link between postcolonial studies and theories of globalisation is a logical consequence of global history. A global view of literature is inevitable when

considering the (post)colonial and any such examination must therefore consider the impact of globalisation as a development in not only economy and politics, but also culture. The notion of globalisation goes much further, however, than merely an analysis of (the effects of) colonialism. Its contemporary form places much focus on the recent emergence of the globalised 'informational world' since the 1990s, where an 'industrial society' previously reigned (Featherstone 2). The shift from the term 'society' to 'world' is significant here: it illustrates the nature of contemporary globalisation as spanning the globe geographically, rather than a development connected to the cultural and political notion of society. However, though this significant shift is generally acknowledged as the initiation of postmodern globalisation and the start of the development of unique forms of international connectivity, its links to past 'globalisations,' such as those initiated during colonial expansion, are still relevant.

Globalisation in its broadest sense is considered by theorists as either a development spanning the ages since colonialism (Ashcroft, Appadurai, Huggan) or else a force that has been of global significance since the origin of the world religions two millennia ago (Robertson). Strong voices are heard in defence of (contemporary) globalisation as a feature of modernity, with imperialism as its driving factor (Ashcroft, Appadurai, Huggan). Edward Saïd similarly identifies a causal relationship between the imperialism of the modern era and contemporary globalisation:

Electronic communication, the global extent of trade, of availability of resources, of travel, of information about weather patterns and ecological change have joined together even the most distant corners of the world. This set of patterns, I believe, was first established and made possible by the modern empires. (*Culture* 6)

Yet while most theorists agree that globalisation spans at least the last five centuries, discussions continue regarding this relationship between modernity, postmodernity and globalisation in light of contemporary movements of global power and capital since World War II. Critical theory in the fields of anthropology, sociology and cultural studies has been consistently focused upon recent global developments, partly due to the fact that sociological research into globalisation in its current form was only established in the 1960s, at a time when the

modernisation of the Third World became a topic of discussion in the form of the western narrative of 'the backwards rural' versus 'the modern industrialised global' (Ashcroft, 2009). Thus the "increasing acceleration in both concrete global interdependence and consciousness of the global whole" was clearly on its way (Robertson 8).

Another factor that strongly informs recent versions of contemporary globalisation studies is that, although global developments are often considered in light of their modernist (or other) roots, the current level, scope and characteristics of globalisation present in society are considered unique developments in world history that merit continuous examination, through new forms of analysis and critique. The identification of contemporary global society as an 'informational world' that largely owes its existence to the emergence of significant new forms of information technology has opened up the field of globalisation studies to the effect of the immense amounts of information shared throughout large parts of the globe. Homi Bhabha identifies these highly influential effects as "a kind of global cosmopolitanism" that "configures the planet as a concentric world of national societies extending to global villages" with "relative prosperity and privilege founded on ideas of progress" (*Location* xiv). This notion of and faith in progress is focused on "neo-liberal forms of governance, and free-market forces of competition" as well as the idea of "virtually boundless powers of technological innovation and global communications" (xiv). Although Bhabha identifies constructive results stemming from, for instance, significant technological innovations such as "useful interventions into stagnant, state-controlled economies and policies" and "bureaucratic corruption, inefficiency and nepotism," he also points towards their destructive effects: "the carceral world of call-centres, and the sweat-shops of outsourcing" (xiv).

On the basis of such widespread global developments, one school of thought considers the 'shrinking' of the world through increased communication as part of an increasing homogenisation of culture. The 'McDonaldisation' of culture, a term coined by sociologist George Ritzer (1993), denotes this process of homogenisation through the emergence of hybrid western/non-western cultures that increasingly display similar cultural characteristics. In literary and cultural scholarship Saïd identifies a process of "standardization and homogeneity" as a result of "today's

globalized world draw[ing] together”—also in “lamentable ways” (*Orientalism* xix). In the political arena Robertson (1992) shows that the increase of structures of global capital and global media is also responsible for an increasing interrelation between domestic and foreign (political) affairs that diffuses the notion of the nation as a boundary. Critics argue that the nation-state has thus become an obsolete notion when referring to global society (Appadurai 1996; Ashcroft 2009) thanks to an increase in information sharing, the growing ease with which international borders may be crossed, and the emergence of countless “diasporas of hope, diasporas of terror, and diasporas of despair” (Appadurai, *Modernity* 6).

However, alongside this notion of the increasing global homogenisation of culture lies the insistence upon the continuing importance and assertion of varieties of the local (Appadurai, Featherstone, Huggan, Robertson). As Graham Huggan (2012) argues, referring to Samir Amin (1988): globalisation is “capitalism’s renewed sense of itself as a world system” that, however, “will ‘never be able to reach the level of cultural, political and economic homogenization it is directed at’” (2). Huggan here refers explicitly to the growing influence of capitalism on the global stage that, although it may tend towards homogenisation and the position of ultimate world system, will never quite reach its aim, neither in cultural, political or even economic sense. Contemporary evidence for this claim is given by multiple critics. Mike Featherstone argues: “Only in the most minimalist sense can one speak of a ‘global society’ or a ‘global culture’” given that “our conceptions of both society and culture draw heavily on a tradition which was strongly influenced by the process of nation-state formation” (2). Furthermore, Robertson argues, even though the nation-state as a political formation may be increasingly discounted, this does not mean the demise of the “nationally constituted society” (5). This inescapable relationship between increasing globalisation and the continuing relevance of the local led Robertson to coin the term ‘glocalization’ (Featherstone 25) that denotes the adaptation of as well as reliance on each other of both the global and the local. Critics thus continue to seek the relationship between globalisation and the local and individual and have recognised their co-existent and interdependent relationship as evidenced in, for example, local adaptations of global cultural forms, commodities etc. This also includes an interest in, and focus

on, this relationship in historical terms—thus recognising a connection with the colonial past, as the following section will show.

## 1.2 Globalisation and Colonialism

One may argue, as Simon During does in his article “Postcolonialism and Globalization: Towards a Historicization of their Inter-relation” (2000), that theories of globalisation are increasingly replacing those of postcolonialism. As we have seen since then, however, while the category of globalisation studies has grown rapidly, that of postcolonial studies is by no means obsolete. Rather, a connection between the two has been emerging for quite some time, and has arguably always existed, given the closely intertwined processes of modernity, capitalism, colonialism and, as its resulting effect, globalisation. As During himself states: “in practise, colonialism, postcolonialism and globalism are reductive, often internally divided, names for forces which work, and long have worked, in transaction with one another” (392). Currently, he argues, postcolonial studies have taken a historical approach where globalisation is directed towards the future and newly emerging structures. Debates continue, however, regarding the roots of globalisation and the extent to which colonialism is (still) a part of contemporary processes of globalisation. Various arguments are heard both for and against globalisation as a colonial or colonialist process, which I will attempt to outline here.

Ashcroft et al. (2000) define globalisation as “the process whereby individual lives and local communities are affected by economic and cultural forces that operate worldwide. In effect, it is the process of the world becoming a single place” (90). The nature of this process and the ways local communities are affected by it are the sites of debate upon which the question of globalisation as colonialism rest. As Ashcroft et al. show:

Some analysts [e.g. Albrow] embrace it enthusiastically as a positive feature of a changing world in which access to technology, information services and markets will be of benefit to local communities, where dominant forms of social organization will lead to universal prosperity, peace and freedom, and in which a perception of a global environment will lead to global ecological concern. (90)

while others, such as Ferguson, argue for a rejection of globalisation as

a form of domination by 'First World' countries over 'Third World' ones, in which individual distinctions of culture and society become erased by an increasingly homogeneous global culture, and local economies are more firmly incorporated into a system of global capital. (Ashcroft et al. 90)

Strong arguments are heard, however, from Ashcroft himself, defending globalisation as a site for increased agency and communication, for even the smallest of communities (2001).

On the other hand, Arif Dirlik argues that the influence of historical colonial practices and processes on contemporary globalisation is an exaggeration of "the hold of the past over contemporary realities" and "an obliviousness to the reconfiguration of past legacies by contemporary restructurations of power" ("Rethinking Colonialism" 429). Dirlik points here towards the changes in the capitalist and nationalist world structures (on both a larger and smaller scale) as part of recent processes of globalisation. He warns, therefore, against the extensive use of (classical) postcolonial terminology and theory when speaking of the present, as they "become obstacles to understanding when they prevent us from confronting such restructurations" of global power structures (429).

While the characterisation of globalisation is convincingly argued by the critics mentioned above as a site of increasing forms and possibilities of communication, increased visibility of formerly marginalised communities, and support for those in need, many accompany such analyses with warnings of globalisation as an inherently colonising process. While globalisation is seen by some as creating the opportunity for many minority communities to make themselves heard, others argue globalisation's oppressive force with regard to open and fair discourse and even its perpetuation of and support for colonialist discourses. During, for example, argues:

globalization represents not so much the end of ethnic and colonialist struggles as a force through which these struggles are continually re-articulated and re-placed, and through which the transitivity of relations like colonizer/colonized, centre/local is continually proved. (402)

He explains that contemporary global technologies and communication not only preserve but also rekindle (post)colonial debates. He refers in this context to "the

affirmative power, in a Foucauldian sense, of globalization” (392). In this way, During shows, discourse surrounding globalisation is “reconfiguring the past in its own image and renewing colonial struggles which keep old pasts alive” (392) in the form of unequal access to modernity by some, while simultaneously othering and primitivizing the poor and powerless that remain. Rather, the focus lies on

how distance has been reduced to form a global system with a shared economy, a shared set of technologies and an increasingly fluid, accessible and exchangeable repertoire of cultural modes. (393)

Thus, During argues, the accumulative “ruins that colonialism and globalization have left in their wake” show “how hard it is to disentangle colonialism, anti-colonialism, postcolonialism and globalism from one another” (402).

Dirlik shows this entanglement of the colonial and the global in his analysis of colonialism during modernity:

Modern colonialism did not merely impose Euro-American domination over the world, but also spread globally the ideologies of development generated by capitalism; that colonialism then became the obstacle to the realization in the colonies of the aspirations to development it brought with it was a major factor in fueling anticolonialism. (“Rethinking Colonialism” 442)

This analysis does not merely expose the process that led to anticolonialism, but rather describes the continuous current of global ideology as may now be found in the notion of ‘the right of intervention’ and the spread of democracy, capitalism and thus western (US) ideology in, especially, the Middle East. Taking this analysis as a definition of colonialism, therefore, suggests not the breakdown, but rather the continuation of colonialism into current structures of globalisation.

Dirlik also shows how “[c]apitalism has reinvented itself and opened up to the formerly colonized, who are now participants in its global operations” (“Rethinking Colonialism” 439). Rather than continuous exploitation of the (former) colonies, the power dynamics have shifted to now show formerly colonised cultures as great economic powers on the global scene (take, for instance, the enormously increased economic influence of countries such as China and India). This leads Dirlik to conclude that “the very many fractures of the modern world, including colonialism, have [not] disappeared; rather, they have been complicated

in the postmodern reconfigurations of modernity” (446). Furthermore, the binary of colonial management by a European core of nation-states over its peripheral others is replaced by “the management of chaos” (440).

The repeated references to the past in these arguments suggest the value of a historical approach to contemporary globalisation. The historical roots of colonialism, postcolonialism and globalisation show themselves therefore, unsurprisingly, as of great interest to most theorists of globalisation. Explorations of these relationships of power, between the world political order, the nation-state and the role of capitalism therein, form the basis of my own analysis and development of a concept of corporate ingression which I introduce in the following chapter. The following and last section of this chapter identifies the underdeveloped areas of the field this concept aims to address.

### 1.3 Postcolonial Theory and Empire

While the key concepts within postcolonial studies have traditionally remained within the fields of literary and cultural studies in general, utilising relevant research from areas of historical and anthropological research as well as philosophy and psychoanalysis, more recently, scholars have also realised the potential of an interdisciplinary approach, borrowing from fields such as economics and ecocriticism as productive sites of exploration and insight into postcolonial issues.<sup>2</sup> While the fundamentals of postcolonial critique have been firmly set out and explored largely within the realm of cultural, philosophical and psychoanalytic thought, more recent postcolonial criticism has turned its focus towards other fields through an increasing focus on contemporary globalisation and the notion of an emerging new world order,<sup>3</sup> often with a particular focus on utopianism. As Young states:

‘Postcolonialism’ has come to name a certain kind of interdisciplinary political, theoretical and historical academic work that sets out to serve as a transnational forum for studies grounded in the historical

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<sup>2</sup> See for example a recent contribution (2017) in the form of a ‘postcolonial literary economics’ as proposed by Melissa Kennedy.

<sup>3</sup> In one form or another, this direction has been indicated by the work of especially Arjun Appadurai, Bill Ashcroft, Arif Dirlik, Fredric Jameson, Edward Saïd, Gayatri Spivak and David Harvey, Giovanni Arrighi, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt.

context of colonialism, as well as in the political context of contemporary problems of globalization. (*Ideologies* 1)

However, it is this interdisciplinary and global approach that has also opened the field to criticism. Some critics of the well-established field of postcolonial studies (the strongest voices of which are heard from Latin American literary and cultural studies)<sup>4</sup> pose that the field, championed especially by Homi Bhabha, Edward Saïd and Gayatri Spivak, not only ignores large areas of geography and history (such as Latin America), but that, on the other hand, it is also a dying or irrelevant discourse in the context of contemporary globalisation, where matters of classical imperialism have no relevance or footing.

However, proponents show the continuing importance of the field in matters of contemporary international politics and as an insight into developments within contemporary cultural production. Homi Bhabha himself stresses that “postcoloniality” itself is a “salutary reminder of the persistent ‘neo-colonial’ relations within the ‘new’ world order” (*Location* 9). In his 2001 work, Bill Ashcroft also emphasises the ongoing significance of postcolonial discourse for contemporary and future globalisation, as it “reveals the extent to which the historical condition of colonization has led to a certain political, intellectual and creative dynamic in the postcolonial societies with which it engages” (25). Ashcroft’s position is rooted in the argument that “globalism can be seen as a direct legacy of the process of Eurocentrism begun several centuries ago” (30). This shift from postcolonial studies to its ongoing connections with globalisation, considered from within and without the margins, is also found in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s work<sup>5</sup> as well as Spivak’s most recent theoretical work, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012).

This notion of continuity is supported by various economic and political theorists and most comprehensively by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) and in David Harvey’s concept of recurring accumulation by dispossession (2005)—both centred on the notion of capitalism as the dominant world structure since the 16th century. Although Harvey identifies what he terms the ‘new imperial capitalism’ in

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<sup>4</sup> See for example the work of Walter D. Mignolo and Mabel Moraña.

<sup>5</sup> Especially in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000).

contemporary politico-economic society, he simultaneously argues against the appellation 'new' or 'post-modern' (e.g. 'neocolonialism') to describe what he sees as "nothing more than the revisiting of the old, though in a different place and time" (*The New Imperialism* 182) by showing how the imperialist<sup>6</sup> practices of the last two centuries all show evidence of the capitalist process he calls 'accumulation by dispossession.'

This interest in the role of capitalism in general on colonial and imperial activity has also been present throughout the development of postcolonial studies. Anticolonial writers such as Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre, in debate with Marxist thought, clearly recognised the relationship between capitalist imperatives and imperialism and Marx himself identified the process of primitive accumulation in the colonies as a major factor in the development of capitalism. More recently, Vivek Chibber's work, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (2013), has sparked renewed interest in the field of Postcolonial studies. This scholarly recognition of corporate and capitalist imperatives is mirrored throughout literary history from the imperial centres in the works of Aphra Behn (*Oroonoko*, 1688), Multatuli (*Max Havelaar*, 1860) and Joseph Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*, 1899 and *Nostromo*, 1904). Economic imperatives and corporate priorities are explored in these works and show an early recognition of the relevance of capitalist interests in imperial activity and its influences upon local communities.

Although Harvey's theory of the recurring expansionist nature of capitalism contains the entirety of modernist and capitalist history, his actual analyses do not include any period earlier than the previous century and therefore weaken his insistence upon recurring accumulation by dispossession as an inherent characteristic of the capitalist mode of production since modernity, although he does convincingly show its centrality to contemporary colonial practices. However, Chibber's more general analysis of capitalism's role in colonial expansion does recognise the role of economic reproduction and its accumulative characteristics from the moment of primitive accumulation onward, describing capitalism as an

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<sup>6</sup> While I use the conventional meanings of 'colonial' as the political and economic manifestations of exploitation, including settlement, and 'imperial' as the cultural elements thereof, centred on (European) state power, David Harvey's notion of the 'imperial' concerns the conventional *colonial*.

economic system that tends to quicken its tempo and spread around the world” (110).

A specifically historical perspective on early modernity and colonial practices can be found in the form of Immanuel Wallerstein’s iconic, albeit strongly criticised, World-Systems theory. Wallerstein shows how the rise of the capitalist world-system revolves around the notion of a capitalism-driven globalisation which is characterised by a global network of economic exchange. Wallerstein thus considers the contemporary world system merely a continuation of 16th century globalisation and capitalism. As many critics have shown, however, his approach to the notion of a modern world-system, as is the case with many world-systems theories of global economy, is rather too economic and blind especially to the cultural and social aspects of modern world history (see e.g. Ashcroft, 2001). However, Wallerstein’s *historical* analyses of the eras of colonial expansion remain, and continue to be used, as a valuable source of insight for postcolonial studies.

Counter to Wallerstein and Harvey’s economic view of historic and recurring capitalism as the world system from early modernity to the present, however, lies the notion of the rise of a new political, economic and cultural world order, variously termed ‘New Empire’ (Spivak, 1999) or ‘Empire’ (Hardt, 2000). This notion of a new world order, central to contemporary society since decolonisation, has further opened up the field of classical postcolonial cultural and literary studies to an exploration of its connections to especially the globalised economy and its history. In *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* (1999), Spivak re-examines the notion of the subaltern in the context of contemporary globalisation, in what she terms the New Empire. Caught in a struggle between multinational capitalism and culturalism, the subaltern of the New Empire is the victim of globalisation that is a result of the combined efforts of the increasing power of World Trade Organisations, NGOs, bio-research companies, UN development projects and human rights organisations. However, through the example of the ‘credit-baiting’ of subaltern women, which opens them up to new forms of cultural oppression and economic exploitation, Spivak shows how global development and third-world aid programmes are a continuation of imperialism as a civilising mission, and thus that the modes of oppression of New Empire also go back to the roots of imperialism and capitalism. Although presented as a new form of

imperialism, Spivak's ideas of New Empire are clearly firmly rooted in the idea of a continuous element of colonisation that has its origins in the 'Old' Empire. With the notion of 'New,' Spivak thus merely indicates the new forms the civilising mission has taken under the guise of human rights.

Although Spivak may be considered the initial voice of the notion of a new imperial process in the form of New Empire, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have more firmly established the concept of a new social, cultural, political and economic world structure, emerging after the Second World War. The theoretical concept of Empire, according to Hardt and Negri, distinguishes itself from Spivak's New Empire through its characterisation as a fundamentally new world system and a significant historical shift that sets contemporary globalisation apart from any previous historical period. Although Hardt and Negri admit that the system of Empire is inescapably rooted in history, Empire is the description of a new global sovereign power that has emerged and now regulates and governs the globe in the form of "a new logic and structure of rule" (*Empire* xi). An important aspect of this new structure is the decline of the power of the nation-state and the increase of the power of global systems of economic and cultural exchange. Empire is "a *decentered* and *detrterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" (xii-xiii, emphases in original) where complex systems of "differentiation and homogenization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization" (xiii) of global capital reign. Not only does Empire rule over the global economy, it also establishes itself in juridical terms in the form of the global philosophy of the *right of intervention*—that is, the ethics of international police action in the name of humanitarianism. In summary, Empire is the global concept of a new order or world system that produces new hierarchies and forms of command and thus creates a fundamentally new biopolitical structure of the world.

As this brief overview shows, contemporary postcolonial studies may be characterised by its increasing interdisciplinary approach to colonial history and especially to the (post)colonial present. But although a more comprehensive view of imperial history towards a theory of the present is its explicit aim, this new direction in the field of anglophone postcolonial cultural and literary studies retains various blind spots, such as a main focus on imperial processes no earlier than 1800.

Edward Saïd's theoretical work includes a global historical perspective, as he states in *Orientalism*: "Are we not as a nation [USA] repeating what France and Britain, Spain and Portugal, Holland and Germany, did before us?" (55). Though uniting the various European nations in this one quote, elsewhere Saïd acknowledges a historical distance between, most representatively, Spanish and Portuguese colonial activity and the later increasing dominance of for instance the British and French empires. However, his focus in *Culture and Imperialism* on "modern imperialism" as the instigator of "the globalized process," (xx) rather than non-imperial (or corporate) forms of colonial activity, restricts his analysis. The characteristics of empire most commonly identified in British and French imperialism, and most typically found in the centuries leading up to decolonisation, lead Saïd to the commonalities between the various European-dominated empires as identified mostly during imperialism. However, he pays no attention in his work to the differences in characteristics found especially in the earlier period of colonisation (post-1600), most clearly identified in the early period of Dutch corporate-based colonial activity. A blind eye has thus been turned towards the nuances of European expansion throughout history; the influences, differences and varying characteristics of Dutch, German, Italian and other colonial empires of European origin has consistently played no more than a marginal role in postcolonial studies, despite the dominance of the Dutch East India Company over that of the British for the first centuries of its existence. Though a full discussion of this matter would go beyond the scope of this thesis, what remains relevant is that a related occurrence of generalisations can be detected in much of what is considered canonical in postcolonial theory, thus calling for a more careful approach.

The second, related lapse in existing postcolonial research is defined by the imprecise extrapolation of imperial history into early modernity and the disavowal of the impact of early modern expansionism on imperialism and the present. A general tendency to consider colonial history as a more or less homogenous period of imperial expansion conducted by (mostly European) nation-states ignores the relevance of especially early (pre-1800), corporate-based colonialism to contemporary notions of Empire or New Imperialism. Saïd, despite acknowledging in *Culture and Imperialism* his focus on only "classical nineteenth- and early

twentieth-century European imperialism,” still claims this period as the major source of the “extraordinary global reach” that continues to cast “a considerable shadow over our own times” (4)—thus discounting the impact of early global expansion through corporate power. Hardt and Negri make many such errors in their defence of their theory of Empire as a wholly new world structure, raising questions as to the validity of some of their theoretical claims. Hardt and Negri state that “[t]he sovereignty of the nation-state was the cornerstone of the imperialisms that European powers constructed throughout the modern era” (*Empire* xii) and argue that “[i]mperialism was really an extension of the sovereignty of the European nation-states beyond their own boundaries” (xii). In opposition, they claim, corporate powers in the new Empire “tend to make nation-states merely instruments to record the flows of the commodities, monies and populations that they set in motion” (31). This, however, is a misleading assessment of historical corporate-led colonialism, as the case of the British East India Company, but especially that of early Dutch colonial activity, mainly embodied by the VOC (Dutch East India Company),<sup>7</sup> shows.

The VOC, at its height during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, was more than twice as large and influential as its British counterpart, and, of all similar European corporate entities, was the least dependent on the nation from which it originated. In fact, the Dutch Republic, which Marx identifies as the model state of capitalism in the seventeenth century, only functioned as the breeding ground of the VOC, as Dutch corporate economic power ruled the local colonial sphere rather than the nation-state and merely utilised their political power over national government for the furtherment of Company aims. Although historical accounts and discussions of the period of early colonialism may be found in abundance,<sup>8</sup> even these accounts seem to regularly confuse the period of corporate dominance with

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<sup>7</sup> “[T]he Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC): perhaps the world's first true 'multinational', and (in the verdict of [...] *The Economist*) one matched only by the companies of Henry Ford and Bill Gates for its influence on the planet” (Twidle 127).

<sup>8</sup> See Wallerstein's discussion of Mercantilism at the start of modernity (1980), but also historic accounts of the East India trade such as presented by Femme Gaastra, E.L.J. Coornaert and many other historians.

that of imperial governance<sup>9</sup> while, however, simultaneously focussing mostly on the economic imperatives behind colonisation throughout history—a similar oversight, therefore, but approached from another direction.

Within postcolonial studies Spivak, counter to Hardt and Negri, does draw attention to the corporate nature of early colonialism in the context of New Empire and mentions the (British) East India Company as “the first great transnational company before the fact” (*A Critique* 220). Despite this observation, Spivak does not fully pursue its implications as she, firstly, merely considers early corporate-based colonialism as part of nation-based imperialism’s civilising mission and, secondly, disregards the other European trading companies of which the VOC was, in fact, the largest and most dominant company with a unique corporate structure for its time—similar to contemporary multinational corporate powers. Colonial history in postcolonial cultural and literary theory is often simply equated with imperialism as a civilising mission (see, for example, Spivak and Wallerstein), while the various European East India trading companies (the VOC more than most) initially actively resisted the notion of such an interaction with local and indigenous populations, as these actions would be detrimental to trade relations. Such facts reveal the role economic imperatives played especially within local policy as opposed to the discourse of imperialism as a civilising mission in especially Portuguese and French colonial activity and later Northern European imperialism. Although a full historical overview and analysis would be far beyond the scope of this thesis, the main tendencies of historical interpretation within postcolonial studies are thus clear.

Neglect of these economic and political historical nuances also causes Hardt and Negri to state that in postmodern globalisation in the form of Empire, a unique biopolitics – “the production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political, and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another” (*Empire* xiii) – has emerged, in which a globalised economic market and capitalist system form the centre. A lack of historical perspective causes Hardt and Negri to conclude that this is a unique development in history, as they incorrectly state that “only in the second half of the twentieth century did multinational and transnational industrial and

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<sup>9</sup> Excepting Arrighi’s identification of “three hegemonies of historical capitalism” (in *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*, 1994) through which he does make such a distinction.

financial corporations really begin to structure global territories biopolitically” (31). Although the current scale on which this global biopolitics is developed is indeed unique, an analysis of early colonial communities will show territories equally structured by multinational corporate power in economic, political and cultural respects. Due to the charters the various trading companies received from their respective nations, corporate power was infused with governmental powers, such as the right to mint currency and full judicial authority over the nations’ citizens in the colonies. Through this seemingly conflicting combination of corporate power and governmental authority, the trading companies were in a position to construct their territories economically, politically and even culturally, towards corporate advantage (including an embargo on missionary activity)—in other words, to structure their territories biopolitically, as is claimed to be unique to Empire. However, although Hardt and Negri’s analysis betrays a misreading of history, their central point remains valid: that a significant “rupture or shift in contemporary capitalist production and global relations of power” (8-9) can be identified as Empire finds new ways and greater scales of biopolitical domination. The nature of this rupture, however, must by definition be found through a (more) careful identification of capitalist history.

Another misconception of this concept of Empire lies in the overstatement of its unique and fundamentally new nature. Hardt and Negri argue that, while early capitalist society created surplus value through the exploitation of factory workers, surplus value in Empire is created through the immaterial labour power of an intellectual and communicative nature. The notion of current society as information-driven is a central element of the immaterial value spoken of. However, the assumption of this difference may be questioned by the history of colonisation—where the immateriality of geographical knowledge in particular caused the accumulation of immense surplus value, and where knowledge about, and experience with, unknown cultures created the immaterial but productive colonial strategies that led to very material ends. Much has been said regarding the accumulation of knowledge of other geographies and cultures as a central part in colonial processes<sup>10</sup> and has thus been shown to form a significant immaterial

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<sup>10</sup> Most notably by Edward Saïd in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994).

source of surplus value. However, I must stress that Hardt and Negri's identification of new forms of immaterial labour power does remain valid in an analysis of contemporary structures of Empire—while not fundamentally new, the exact implementations of immaterial forms of labour power take wholly new shapes and on a larger scale. Empire in that sense is indeed new—though arguably 'merely' a new version of the old as claimed in various ways by Ashcroft, Harvey and Spivak.

In conclusion, I suggest that a more focused analysis of the period of early colonialism – as effected by the various corporations in existence (the very first recorded multinational and transnational companies) – reveals similarities and even connections between early colonialism and contemporary forms of corporate (global) influence. An analysis of and comparison between processes occurring in past and present not merely suggests similarities between the two periods and leads to a better understanding of the processes involved, but also raises questions of relevance to contemporary and future postcolonial thought. Though I do not propose to develop a new and overarching theory of world history here, this research does develop a new perspective to the postcolonial debate: By including overlooked aspects of colonial history, a new understanding of seemingly recurring instances of corporate influence over various communities is reached—instances recognised and examined to varying extents in imaginative explorations of corporate power's influence throughout time and place.

## CHAPTER 2 – INTRODUCING CORPORATE INGRESSION: AN APPROACH

### Introduction

In this research I aim to show how contemporary literature engages with questions of historical and contemporary instances of local corporate influence, in the form of internal relationships, following a process which I name ‘corporate ingression.’ Through a close analysis of various imaginings of the dynamics within such communities I thus propose a concept that allows for a better understanding of how literature explores the relationships between the political, cultural, environmental and economic processes that underpin corporate practices and affect communities through time and space. This chapter will therefore first introduce and define the concept of corporate ingression. Secondly, it will outline the aims and questions of this research, and will end by summarising the approach and method through which this research will explore these questions.

### 2.1 Corporate Ingression Defined

Through an analysis of three contemporary engagements with similar events over time and space, I will explore the relevance of the concept of ‘corporate ingression’ in engaging with these chosen fictional works. I will show that a comparative analysis of the three texts I am using as case studies reveals similarities between the exploration of the period of early colonialism as acted out by the various corporations in existence (the very first recorded multinational and transnational companies) and contemporary forms of corporate dominance. I thus engage with various contexts and explorations of corporate power and explore the concept of recurring forms of corporate ingression as a new perspective within literary postcolonial and globalisation studies.

As I will show, corporate ingression concerns relations between the stakeholders within a local community in which not only economic but also governmental power structures are in the hands of economic entities rather than political agents and which strongly informs, and is formed by, the community’s

cultural characteristics. I use the term ‘ingression’ following the OED’s definition of ‘ingress’: “The action or fact of going in or entering” (2017). The process I conceptualise in this thesis concerns the characteristics and effects of such an ‘entering’ of corporate power into a community or society—whether by newly entering a territory or by significant growth within such a territory. Relevant for the notion of corporate ingression is also the connotation of the *ongoing process* of entering: corporate ingression describes corporate activity that occurs as a process rather than as a single act or event with certain effects and repercussions. This thesis thus shows the relevance of the notion of a *process* of ‘corporate ingression’ and its characteristics and influence on especially local communities to approach fictional explorations of past and present developments. To that end, I propose the following definition of corporate ingression:

The globally recurring process of biopolitical (re)structuring of a community by corporate power and its extended cultural influence on society.

By introducing this new term within postcolonial literary studies, I aim to present a constructive new tool to approach imaginative explorations of structural economic and social activity as well as cultural developments in local spheres.

## 2.2 Research Aims and Questions

The aim of this research is thus to carve out a new area in postcolonial literary and cultural studies research. This area will be centred on the notion of corporate ingression as a relevant new perspective on literary imaginings of cultural relations within a local community in which not only economic but also governmental power structures are in the hands of economic entities rather than political agents and which strongly informs, and is formed by, the community’s cultural characteristics. The aim is also to show how literary representations of communities governed by corporate powers explore the power relations within and between the stakeholder groups of these communities and how these are influenced by corporate power. My research thus proposes to assess the validity of the approach of corporate ingression when considering postcolonial literary analysis. The main question I will address is therefore:

1. How does the concept of 'corporate ingression' inform a reading of postcolonial literary (con)texts?

In order to answer this question, this research will focus on the following related questions:

2. What global economic, political and cultural processes can be identified in each instance as represented by fictional texts and how do they relate to a local perspective?
3. How are these processes shown to influence the structural and cultural elements of the local communities and environments presented in the texts?
4. How do these issues compare between the various instances of explorations of these communities separated over time and space?

This research will thus contribute to postcolonial literary theory in the context of globalisation. A greater understanding of the global and local economic, political and cultural processes involved in imaginings of sites of dispossession and exploitation in view of their recurring, historical nature (as I argue) will lead to new and better insights into conflicts in present and future communities. As such, my research will investigate the potential power of such imaginative narratives and illustrate the importance of cultural products and imagination for social debates. My close examination of imaginings of postcolonial resistance will shed light on both ideas of conflict and resolution as presented by the texts.

## 2.3 Approach and Method

The following three parts of this thesis will explore this notion of corporate ingression within literature, taking three literary texts as initial case studies to assess its validity and scope. By applying the perspective of corporate ingression to various literary representations of communities structured around, or significantly influenced by, corporate power, I will examine its validity to approach explorations of the impact and implications of the corporate entities involved upon the various local communities presented. The proposed texts will thus be approached as responses to, and explorations of, matters of corporate ingression in its social, economic, political, and cultural forms.

By reading these texts closely, with and against the grain, I will enter into dialogue with their discussion of corporate power as the major structural influence in the societies they explore. The development of a new literary and cultural perspective concerning imaginative explorations of corporate power's influence over local communities will also allow us to read such literary explorations better and more productively as such a perspective investigates processes hitherto ignored or misunderstood in postcolonial literary theory.

### *2.3.1 Textual Analysis*

I will analyse three cases as explored in three literary texts to show how each corporate ingressional context shapes a community and what cultural and environmental elements play a part in each of their construction, dynamics and conflict. Each text presents a different focus upon corporate ingression and explores varying aspects which I will analyse and compare. Through close textual analysis of these novels, this research will thus identify and compare various authors' engagements with the effects of global or national corporate economic imperatives upon local communities and illustrate the significance and relevance of a notion of corporate ingression to postcolonial literary and cultural theory. For the close textual analysis of the various novels, my research engages in detail with the nature of the explored communities and environments, including the power relations that work within, between and upon the various individuals and groups involved. This research pays attention to the various roles played by cultural, political and economic forces that form these fictional communities. Through its comparative approach this research identifies cultural variations as well as similarities in local manifestations of global or national economic and political drives.

By studying and comparing instances of corporate power's influence over a contemporary community in Nigeria, a futuristic community in South Africa and a historic community in Japan, this research retains a broad and varied global perspective on postcolonial sites and periods. The corporate powers discussed in the contemporary texts hail from unspecified European states (in the case of *Oil on Water*), or are a conglomerate of corporations such as Eskom and various fictional companies and the government (forming 'government inc.' in *Moxylant*) or, lastly, are a highly independent Dutch-chartered multinational (in the case of *The*

*Thousand Autumns*). Each text, however, presents a distinct Anglophone perspective, as the authors hail from Nigeria, South Africa and Britain respectively, and write in English. This choice therefore reduces the scope of my analysis of corporate ingression as a literary perspective to this context. By choosing these three contemporary texts, each with clear ties to Anglophone culture, however, comparisons may be effectively drawn in order to assess certain contemporary global fictional perspectives on the role of corporate power. The conclusions of this research are therefore restricted to only contemporary global Anglophone literature. For a full assessment of the validity of the concept of corporate ingression to world literature in general, further research and comparative literary analysis are necessary, but go beyond the scope of this thesis.

#### ***Oil on Water* by Helon Habila (2010)**

This text from a Nigerian author is chosen for its conscientious portrayal of the various global and local political, economic and cultural forces that drive and influence the local community in the contemporary Niger delta. Corporate influence is represented in this text by the oil industry in Nigeria, where multinational oil companies govern the economic and political landscape of the delta area. Multiple other forces are shown in the novel to play a part in the complex community of the oil region, including militant, religious, journalistic and criminal elements. This first text will therefore add to an understanding of the internal dynamics that make up contemporary communities structured by corporate power, including the strong presence of economic imperatives within the various stakeholder groups. An analysis of this text will provide insight into the significant environmental oppression and its connection to economic, cultural and social factors.

#### ***Moxyland* by Lauren Beukes (2008)**

In this futuristic dystopian novel, set in Cape Town, South African society is explored by its South African author as a function of oppressive political, economic and cultural elements in the form of obligatory use of controlling technological and media devices. Centred on a pervasive online and virtual gaming culture, the four characters all represent various strata within this dystopian society and either benefit from the system or attempt to resist it. With a strong focus on the effects of

media and technology in this fictional community, this novel presents a critique of contemporary technological 'advances' as it portrays a close interrelation between governmental and corporate power to the advantage of the latter in the exploitation of Cape Town's (and South Africa's) population. *Moxyland* thus presents a science-fiction speculation about a future South African society and explores the cultural repercussions from and reactions to corporate power as the major ruling force within the presented community. This second text will therefore function as a case study for the relevance of technology to corporate ingression and will be approached as a thought experiment concerning the potential positive as well as negative effects of corporate ingression upon the construction of a society.

***The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* by David Mitchell (2010)**

This historical novel by British author David Mitchell is chosen for its well-researched perspective on the VOC (the Dutch East India Company) from the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth century, specifically upon the company's activity in, and trade with, Japan. This last text therefore functions as a case study for the historical event of corporate ingression. The influence of the company's presence in Japan is portrayed in economic, political and cultural respect through the perspective of both a company employee and a female Japanese character, whose lives within the local community are inextricably interwoven with the presence of the VOC. The portrayal of Dejima (the trading post to which the company's activities were restricted, with limited access to the mainland) and its interaction with the mainland of Japan shows a unique perspective on early corporate ingression through Dutch mercantile activity: the settlement did not present the typical characteristics of a colony, but was rather characterised as a factory on foreign soil, dependent upon continuing good relations with the contemporary Japanese nation-state and its officials. This text therefore simultaneously exposes a gap within post-colonial literary studies with regard to colonial history and representation, and explores the theoretical corporate ingressional construct my research proposes by engaging with (1) the presence and influence of corporate power, (2) its biopolitical structuring of Dejima as a community and (3) the extended cultural influence the presence of corporate power exerts over Japan.

The order in which these three texts are analysed in this thesis is deliberately non-chronological in terms of the narrative time in which they are set. Rather than suggest a linear development throughout history, this thesis discusses and compares the three cases through their particular themes and as separate instances of corporate ingression rather than through their relative temporality.

The first text explores the complex intricacies of communities structured around corporate power and presents a full account of the stakeholders that are, or could potentially be, influenced by or connected to corporate power. As an explicit exploration of the internal dynamics of such a community, *Oil on Water* thus forms an appropriate case through which to analyse the details of a process of corporate ingression as explored in fiction. *Moxyland* is placed second, as it nuances the destruction implied in *Oil on Water* as a major factor of corporate ingression by exploring corporate power's potential for constructive influence over a community. Though its narrative is placed chronologically before the other two texts, *The Thousand Autumns* is analysed last in this thesis as it explores an instance of corporate ingression in which corporate power, despite its significant influence, is subordinate to the host state to its activity. In these last stages before bankruptcy, and controlled politically and economically by Japan, corporate power in the form of the VOC is explored as a fallible construction that can be controlled by a strong regime as well as benefited from.

# PART 2



# CORPORATE INGRESSION AND CRISIS

## CHAPTER 3 – POLITICS AND ACTIVISM IN HELON HABILA’S *OIL ON WATER*

### Introduction

On 10 January 2006, militant forces boarded a boat in an oil field in the Niger Delta in Nigeria, and kidnapped four foreign oil workers (Aghedo 143). The militants responsible – members of the Movement for Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) – had two demands. The first was directed at the multinational oil companies operating in the region: they were told to leave the area completely. The second demand was addressed to the Federal Government of Nigeria: the state was to actively develop the communities in the Delta (Eweje 30). Since then, the number of similar incidents rose immensely, with up to 1,128 persons in total having been kidnapped between January 2008 and January 2009 alone (Aghedo 143). The majority of victims were foreign oil workers or their family members, held captive in exchange for ransom. In 2008 over 1,000 deaths were reported in connection with militant activity, leading to the evacuation of many oil workers from the region (143).

Despite fears for the safety of its employees, however, multinational corporate activity in the oil-rich region remains present—as do the violent incidents. As Iro Aghedo shows, though various solutions have been attempted, including the granting of amnesty to the militants in 2009, the kidnappings continue. The major factors in the perpetuation of this crisis are the continued human rights violations and environmental impact due to the oil industry in the area (143); factors that remain reflected in the demands of the various militant groups such as the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Niger Delta Vigilante Service (NDV) and the MEND (143).

Despite appearances, however, the situation in the Niger Delta is not simply a matter of a desperate local population reverting to violence to curb the harmful activities of the oil industry and call for attention to their plight from the Nigerian government. The Niger Delta as a (local) community reveals, with closer research, a much more complex interplay of various forces, in which corporate, government

and militant power are but a few. This complex dynamic is explored by Nigerian author Helon Habila in his 2010 novel *Oil on Water*. His productive engagement with the various global and local political, economic and cultural forces that drive and influence this local community explores the nature and repercussions of these forces on social, economic and political levels.

As I will show in this second part of my thesis, the novel explores this interplay of forces that make up the Delta community as centred most significantly on one specific factor: the presence of multinational corporate power. The strong presence of corporate imperatives in the region, I argue, is shown in the novel to take shape in the biopolitical and socio-economic structure of the Delta as well as in its significant cultural influence in the community as a whole. In these two chapters I will demonstrate, through a close reading of *Oil on Water*, how the novel explores the presence and impact of a process of corporate ingression in the Delta's society. Through such a reading it is possible to reach a clearer understanding of the impact of such corporate dynamics in the specific instance of the Niger Delta.

To this end, this chapter will analyse the context of the novel in both a politico-economic and literary sense, to show its relevance as a case study in support of the concept of corporate ingression for postcolonial literary analysis. The next chapter will analyse the novel as an exploration of corporate ingression by means of a discussion of the presence of corporate power, the role of the multinational corporate presence in the construction of the community, and the extended cultural influence it exerts over life in the Delta.

### 3.1 Politico-Economic Context

Given the novel's exploration of the contemporary political, economic and cultural situation in the Niger Delta, and my choice of this novel through which to analyse the concept of corporate ingression, some politico-economic context regarding the present state of matters is needed. In connection with *Oil on Water* (2010), this overview will also reveal how Habila adds to our understanding of the political, social and economic circumstances relevant to the Delta community's particular circumstances.

On the level of Africa as a continent, various particularities are of significant influence in shaping the economic and political landscape of the continent in

general, and the various nations within it (such as Nigeria) in particular. One of the major characteristics of the economic situation in Africa is, as Dietz et al. show, that

most of the continent's dynamic sectors, such as minerals, gold and precious stones, and tourism and biofuel development are to a large extent influenced and controlled by external interests. (3)

The natural resources to be found in various parts of the continent are a major factor in contemporary foreign interests and investment in Africa. Although extraction of minerals in particular has formed a part of the continent's history for a significant period of time, particularly during the colonial era, a more recent interest in the agricultural potential of land has created new developments in the continent's economies. As Saskia Sassen states, the "extent of land acquisitions in the Global South over the last few years, by multinational corporations and governments of rich countries, marks a new phase" (226). Sassen does not mean to suggest that foreign acquisition of land in Africa is a new development in and of itself, but rather that it is "a recurrent dynamic that tends to be part of imperial realignments in modern times" (226), of which the current extent and nature is unique: "One key feature is that [...] [r]ather than imperial grab, the mechanism is foreign direct investment (among others)" (227). Whether this is indeed unique, and the development's connection to imperial processes, I have already questioned in Part 1, and will readdress in Part 4 of this thesis. Relevant here, however, is that such foreign direct investment in the global south in particular is indeed characteristic of the contemporary African economic landscape. Although the fact of foreign investment in Africa suggests a mutually beneficial arrangement, in effect it actually causes the depletion of the environmental commons, as well as being founded on the unequal distribution of the wealth connected to it.

Nigeria is an excellent example of such environmental and socio-economic exploitation, as it is rich in oil mineral resources which have, since 1938, attracted significant investment activities from many of the largest multinational oil corporations (Eweje 34). In 1938, when Britain was the ruling colonial power in Nigeria, an oil mining license was granted to Shell/BP, although mining activities only started in 1953 (Diongue et al. 4). Corporate power and colonial power thus cooperated in the origination of the oil industry in Nigeria. In the 50s, ten years before Nigeria gained independence, the multinationals Mobil, Safrap, Philips and

Agip also obtained licenses (Diongue et al. 4), over time joined by others, creating an industry led (as per 2010) by Shell, Mobil, Chevron, Elf and Agip (Eweje 33). The activities of these various multinationals in Nigeria are officially undertaken in “joint partnerships” between the companies and the government-led Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), as the NNPC’s website states. As the NNPC explains, they are “responsible for the management of the exploration bidding rounds for oil and gas” and partner with the multinationals under “Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs)” (NNPC). As per 1999, Nigeria possessed “proven reserves of 35 billion barrels of oil,” ranking it “as the world’s sixth largest oil producing nation” (Eweje 34). Although this number has since decreased, in 1999 “oil play[ed] a fundamental role in the nation’s economy, accounting for over 90% of export earnings” (34). This history of a major oil industry as the main source of export earnings has thus significantly shaped the economy of Nigeria in general, and the (oil- and gas-rich) Niger Delta area specifically. As of 2008, the Delta “contributes over 40% to Nigeria’s GDP, about 90% of total annual earnings and about 80% of the national gross income” (Akinola 55-56), making it one of the most important regions contributing to the country’s wealth through its natural resources.

Yet this significant amount of wealth is not shared with the Delta population. On a political and social level, “many of the elites and bureaucracies of oil- and mineral-rich countries are controlling the economic rents for their own benefit” (Dietz et al. 3-4). As a result, Dietz et al. show, economic growth has

not been inclusive, and, with a few exceptions (Botswana is always mentioned), benefits have not been passed on to the broader population. Poverty hence still remains deep in the region. (4)

Nigeria is no exception to this but rather, as Sassen shows, is “the most noted case” where its government has “been weakened and corrupted” and “expanded shares of their people become destitute” (222). Despite the country being resource-rich, the benefits do not reach the general population, generating instead an “expanded space to criminal networks, and greater access to land and underground water resources to foreign buyers, whether firms or governments” (222-23). Sociologist Samson Akinola explains that “the proliferation of large corporations and multinational firms throughout” Nigeria’s economy has thus “led to a centralization and monopolization of wealth and other types of material and symbolic resources,

making it impossible for citizens to practice democracy in economic society or any other public terrain” (61). Sassen shows that this centralisation of wealth and power is due to the “dominant dynamic” for the general population that is “to a good extent, the opposite of the Keynesian period’s valuing of people as workers and as consumers” (222). As criminal activity promises much greater reward than lawful capitalist productivity, illegal activity logically rises.

Akinola summarises these social and political “challenges in the Niger Delta arising from structurally-defective pattern of governance” in four points<sup>11</sup> (58):

1. No spreading of wealth to the people
2. nepotism and corruption
3. failure of political representation
4. disconnect and exclusion leading to
5. widespread crisis and violence

Although the factor of destruction of the Delta environment could be said to be included in the fifth point, as it contributes to the crisis of destitution and is a leading factor in the violence, I show in Chapter 4 that the environmental degradation of the Delta area is so significant that it warrants more attention on its own. Each of the five points above also features in the novel, informing its exploration of the Delta’s “challenges.” What the novel also shows, as does Akinola, is the interconnected nature of all these points, creating a complex dynamic of interdependency. Akinola shows how the “politicization of criminality” in the Delta creates a network of problems as a result of the “divorced nature of the people from the governance process” (60). Politics in the Niger Delta has become a “winner-take-all” and a “do-or-die affair”—creating a politics of warfare that “invariably, scare most citizens away from the political space” (60). Concretely, Akinola explains that there have been “several cases where politicians employed and armed gangs, thugs and hooligans to intimidate opponents or rig elections” (61). Problems arise as politicians cut these thugs and gangs loose after winning the elections, without removing the weapons and ammunitions from their possession. The result:

Without jobs and any means of surviving, these thugs later transformed themselves to either militants fighting for emancipation

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<sup>11</sup> The original fourth point I have separated into 2 separate points (4 and 5), as disconnect and exclusion can be considered challenges in their own right.

of Deltans or untouchable criminal gangs who harass their fellow citizens on a regular basis. (61)

These groups, in possession of weapons handed to them by their previous employers, then become active in “oil theft, vandalization, kidnappings and violent crime” (61). Another result is that the “strong connections” these groups have with various politicians “give these gangs greater leverage” (61). The conclusion is therefore that “insecurity in the region [is] not a simple conflict between the government/oil companies and insurgents as the line between militancy and criminality is now blurred” (61).

Habila illustrates the blurring of the line between militancy and criminality in *Oil on Water* through the figure of ‘the Professor’ — the leader of the militant gang the protagonist comes to deal with. According to the Major, who oversees military operations in the Delta, the Professor (or ‘Ani’) was originally “a backstreet thug” whose career followed closely the path described by Akinola:

he became a party thug in the pay of his local government chairman, who was up for re-election [...] his politician godfather had reinvented himself as a pro-environmentalist and won a seat in the senate. But they parted ways when Ani was bought by a rival politician, who paid him to kill his erstwhile godfather; the assassination attempt was foiled, and his godfather called the police on him, and that was when he moved into the swamps and joined a rebel group that specialized in kidnapping foreigners for ransom. (96-97)

This passage thus explores a particular (fictional) case of the developments Akinola describes wherein the relationship between political and militant power is revealed. It simultaneously illustrates the “Party patronage, clientelism, godfatherism and winner-take-all predominating the political system in the region” (58). The violent side of the political landscape in Nigeria at the time is here revealed as part of the Professor’s history. The existence of an ‘industry’ of mercenary violence specifically in order to influence political developments is illustrated here, including the (seemingly unintended) result of the growth in militant power. This case thus shows the potential for escalation of such mercenary political activity, as the hired thugs are still prosecuted for their ‘work’ and left to their own devices by their former employers. While I do not aim here to discuss the location of ethical responsibility in a situation such as this, this case does show a

chain of repercussions that leads to militant activity: an undeniable, though complex, relationship clearly exists between political corruption and militant activity as explored by this passage.

This relationship, however, is but one part of the total complex of interconnecting and negotiating sources of power that form the Niger Delta community. Dietz et al. in more abstract terms also demonstrate the results of Africa's particular economic engagements wherein "relations of power and opportunities are constantly negotiated and re-negotiated, at local, national, international and transnational levels" (6). As they show in more general terms, these particular relations of power and opportunity have created "mutual and conflicting interests and engagements" not only for Africa on the global stage, but also "within and among African nations, regions, communities and organisations" (6). It is exactly these conflicting and overlapping relationships within the local Delta community, as described by various critics, that are central to *Oil on Water* and to the effects and dynamics which are explored throughout the novel, as I will discuss in Chapter 4.

## 3.2 Literary Context

### 3.2.1 *Anglophone African Literature*

While presuming to introduce a text like *Oil on Water* by alluding to any kind of overarching 'African' context can be a methodological and political pitfall, a wider context, as critics show, can be of use and is even necessary in many instances of literature produced on the African continent. As is suggested in the preface to *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, a volume that for such reasons deliberately makes use of the term "African Literature," Nigeria's literary development "has been in many ways emblematic of the cultural transitions that accompanied the political process on the African continent in the second half of the twentieth century" (Irele and Gikandi xii). Meanwhile, very similar processes of literary development took place in other (former) African colonies — albeit "with varying degrees of achievement and interest" (xii). Although it may be dangerous to generalise the developments that have been taking place all over the continent, certain similarities caused by, for instance, the shared experiences of

(post)colonisation, albeit in geographically and culturally widely varying parts of Africa, have been shown to play a major part in the creative productions of each of these cultures and nations. The *Cambridge History* therefore refers to the “political and ideological background to the emergence of modern African literature” in the form of pan-Africanism and African nationalism as an underlying commonality in the majority of anglophone literature produced on the African continent (Irele and Gikandi xiv).

The modifier ‘anglophone’ used here is of particular relevance, as Irele and Gikandi show in the preface to *The Cambridge History*:

European languages began to be employed effectively as means of the expression of African responses to the historical, social, and cultural implications of the colonial dispensation, for the representation of indigenous modes of life and the articulation of a new sense of identity, derived from the traditional, precolonial folkways and heritage of cultural values. (xii)

Alongside French and a few other European languages, English has proven to be one of the major tools used for literary expression as defined above—Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* is part of this literary context.

Another factor in this particular context, which places *Oil on Water* in a more specific position, is that African literature (in the *Cambridge History*’s definition thereof) is “focused on the two modes of existence, oral and written, in which this literature has been manifested” (xiii-iv). More specifically:

imaginative expression in Africa can be identified in two broadly distinct modes: on one hand, that associated with an indigenous oral tradition, and on the other, that deriving from the conventions of the literate cultures with which the continent has been in contact for the best part of the preceding millennium. (xv)

It is the latter mode of imaginative expression that is relevant to contextualising Helon Habila’s novel *Oil on Water*, as it has been placed (problematically) by the independent publishing community in the predominantly European conventions of the detective novel (the *Independent*) or the coming-of-age narrative (the *Daily Mail*). Irele and Gikandi do not mean to suggest that imaginative expression in Africa is performed either in an ‘original’ indigenous oral form, or as a ‘copy’ of European literature. The use of the term “deriving” in this context would suggest a view of

part of African literature to be (merely) a derivative of 'originals' from the literate cultures in question. However, the particular imaginative expressions produced on the African continent present much more in the way of unique implementations than the term 'derivatives' would imply. That this second mode of imaginative expression in Africa reveals a strong relationship with those cultures with which the continent has had close contact remains obvious, if only through the use of languages such as English, as is the case in *Oil on Water*. However, this also does not mean that "African literature's main preoccupation is to subvert the colonial metropolis," Evan Maina Mwanga shows (2). Rather, "it is an art of positive self-affirmation that is also not blind to internal causes of malaise within African societies" (2). As I will show in my analysis of *Oil on Water*, the particular (African) context in which it is produced, and Habila's particular position as a writer of Nigerian origins, reveal a perspective that is unique to Anglophone literature and thus render it incompatible to assimilation into a generalised category of global Anglophone literature, or into the paradigm of 'writing back' to the colonial centre.

### 3.2.2 Anglophone Nigerian Literature

#### **Nigeria's Generations**

Many critics define the various literary expressions from Nigeria into three generations, following Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's "three stages" within African literature (Hewett 76). Various labels have been proposed to name these three generations, based on ideology, temporality or subject-matter. Sula Egeya, for instance, proposes categories of "pre-independence," "post-independence" and "military" generations (50), based on the historical developments of Nigeria as a nation. In all cases, however, the consensus seems to be that literary production in Nigeria mainly takes the form of "response[s] to critical national issues," whatever shape they may have taken in the author's lifetime.

However, the notion of a national-generational classification of Nigerian writing has also been problematised by various critics (e.g. Harry Garuba, Hamish Dalley) as no longer a useful framework in which to place Nigeria's authors. Garuba points to the "inadequacy of the generational marker, cluttered as it has become with [...] associations and connotations which show up its inconsistencies of usage" (52). These inconsistencies, played out on the levels and types of social

commitment, stylistic characteristics and the age of the authors in question, render such a categorical placement of any Nigerian author fraught with difficulties, a full discussion of which goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

Another related critical note to any attempts to define contemporary African literary production in general is suggested by critics such as Madhu Krishnan who warn against generalisations of literary trends in terms also relevant for Nigeria specifically: “While both diverse and nuanced in its content, in its transnational reception African literature has been positioned as a unified body of sociocultural representation” (16). As such, on the global stage, Nigerian literature also functions as representative of this supposedly unified continent of Africa. As Krishnan states: “As a literary class, African literatures in English have been met with a worldwide popularity eclipsed only by writing from the Indian subcontinent” (13), a popularity that is largely based on a notion of African writers as

public representatives, called upon to comment on African politics, culture and current affairs, and taken as sagacious experts in representing Africa for a European and American audience today. (18-19)

Critics of African literature are thus advised to be (or remain) vigilant against what Krishnan sees as a problematic “ease with which these authors and their work are received as embodying authentic or ethnographic truths about Africa” (19). This analysis of the reception of African (and Nigerian) literature suggests such creative production from the continent is taken more as generally representative than as in any way contributing something unique to the literary landscape. A result of this, as Krishnan shows, is that

diversity and nuance are under the constant threat of erasure through marketing, media interventions, and the increasing pressure on writers to focus on contemporary prize culture. (17)

This does not mean that Irele and Gikandi’s analysis of African letters as distinct in its development and implementation is irrelevant or assimilative—but to further engage in this critical discussion of (the reception of) African letters would go beyond the scope of this work. Relevant, however, remains the warning against placing this distinction in a commoditising or exoticising context and thus both ignoring the value of the varieties of expressions of African letters in their own right,

as well as adding to the pressure on the African literary landscape to assimilate to a perceived authentic and ethnographic 'truth' about Africa.

Habila himself, as Heather Hewett shows, uses a "rhetoric of difference" that also "surfaces in other statements made by young Nigerian writers when speaking of their generation" (78). Given that, as Hewett states, "many critics have designated the third generation in Nigeria as those writers who published their first work in the mid-1980s" (77), this is understandable. If anything, it seems a fourth generation of Nigerian writers has now emerged that does not seem interested in generational classifications. Hewett suggests that

younger writers are not only setting themselves apart from earlier generations (most of all the first) but also attempting to redefine Nigerian literature through their craft, both in their choice of subject and style. (78)

Hewett also warns, however, that "we should also maintain a healthy scepticism regarding claims of absolute difference" as such statements, rather, are "indicative of the greater struggle over the canon and, more generally, over the meanings of 'Nigerian literature' and 'Nigeria'" (78).

### **Environmental Focus**

Of note is the transgenerational nature of Nigerian literature that deals explicitly with environmental themes. As Uzoechi Nwagbara shows, earlier poets and writers (born in Nigeria in the 40s and 50s) such as Niyi Òsundare, Tanure Ojaide, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Odia Ofeimun, and Nnimmo Bassey already explore in their work "the commodification of socio-economic relations, environmentalist concerns and the impacts of global capitalism on Nigeria's politics and environment" (61-62). Ken Saro-Wiwa's political and activist role against the then military regime ruling Nigeria of course forms the quintessential example of a connection between national crises and the author's work. What *Oil on Water* shows, then, is the cross-generational interest in ecocritical engagement. Habila (born in the late 60s), engaging with contemporary developments (including the environmental) in the Niger Delta, thus continues the discussion of the national crisis that is the continuing pollution and degradation of the environment.

This environmental factor is present in the description of almost every scene

in the narrative, creating and perpetuating a constant image of the Delta as a polluted, decaying dystopia of nature, the most relevant examples of which I will discuss here. The reader is not immediately introduced to this image as the initial mysterious, foggy idyll of the Delta on the first pages is only later disrupted by a sub clause, offhandedly mentioning the presence of “a dead fish on the oil-polluted water” (5). This detail turns out to be a prefiguring of a much more desolate scene when Rufus and his travel companions visit a number of abandoned villages: “Something organic, perhaps human, lay dead and decomposing down there, its stench mixed with that unmistakable smell of oil” (9). Here death and oil are again paired, suggesting a correlation between the two. The causality that links these two elements is later confirmed by the Doctor’s account of his experiences and experiments on the effects of the pollution on the population of the Delta.

The visible effects of pollution of the ground and water and its likely connection to the dead and decomposing object in the well are introduced more explicitly on the same page: “The patch of grass growing by the water was suffocated by a film of oil, each blade covered with blotches like the liver spots on a smoker’s hands” (9). This film of oil would have covered the grass due to the polluted water nearby and illustrates the all-pervading nature of oil pollution as a suffocating layer over the entire area. The pollution of the water returns regularly throughout the narrative during Rufus and his companions’ travels over the water of the Delta as they see first-hand “the scum on the surface of the water as it washed against the boat, leaving a bubbly film of oil on the wood” (73).

It is not just the oil itself, however, that pervades and pollutes the landscape. Secondary effects such as the installation of flares at oil wells to burn off the escaping gases also play a part. *Oil on Water* uses the image of the flare in the landscape to two distinctly different effects, however: on the one hand, the presence of the flares is presented as an idyll and the language invokes an almost romantic image of candlelight: “We watched the flares shake in the wind, wavering and dimming, but always regrouping to shine on again” (61). On the other hand, the novel also presents the detrimental effects of the presence of hundreds of flares throughout the Delta: “I went and sat on the hill to stare at the water and the faraway gas flares that emerged suddenly from pillar-like pipes, holding up their roof of odious black smoke” (139). Thus, in both scenes we find Rufus

contemplating the landscape, but with two distinct perspectives: the beauty that can be created by advancing technology versus the destruction that can be its result.

The novel illustrates how the impact of the badly regulated oil industry in the Niger Delta is a very visible form of pollution and the regular references in the novel to burst and leaking pipes and oil spills in the Delta serve as an explanation for its extent. Interesting here is the comparison drawn with “liver spots on a smoker’s hands,” (9) suggestive of not only a slowly dying and decaying subject, but also of self-inflicted illness. Rather than serve as a condemning account of the oil industry in the area as the sole cause of the severe environmental degradation of the Delta, *Oil on Water* thus also points towards the responsibility of the victim (in this case Nigeria and its population) for its own diseased condition.

A few lines further, this suggestion of agency is repeated with regard to Zaq’s alcohol-dependency:

Zaq seemed to have lost even the energy – and the will – to lift the bottle to his mouth; it lay neglected by his feet, the piss-coloured liquid in it sloshing back and forth with the movement of the boat. (9-10)

Throughout the narrative, Zaq is presented as continuously preoccupied with and dependent on whisky, and never far from a bottle of the liquid. This passage is an early reference to his alcoholism, but signifies more than merely a character trait. By describing the whisky in the bottle as “piss-coloured liquid,” a reference to petrol is made, given its similarities in colour and fluidity. This comparison resonates with the notion of self-inflicted harm as introduced by the mention of “liver spots.” The suggestion evoked by Zaq’s addiction to “piss-coloured liquid” is a reference to Nigeria’s addiction to the similarly coloured liquid petrol, or oil.

The industry’s presence as a major factor in the crisis does not escape the novel’s condemnation, as the material reality of oil and corporate power asserts itself through the description of the travellers’ visit to another island where they hoped they would be able to find refuge for the night:

It turned out this wasn’t a village at all. It looked like a setting for a sci-fi movie: the meagre landscape was covered in pipelines flying in all directions, sprouting from the evil-smelling, oil-fecund earth. The pipes criss-crossed and interconnected endlessly all over the eerie field. We walked inland, ducking under or hopping over the giant

pipes, our shoes and trousers turning black with oil. (34)

Rufus, Zaq and their guides seem to have found a major pipeline hub through which the oil is transported across the Delta. This island clearly belongs (at least in effect) to the unnamed oil company, which is later confirmed by the helicopter's presence and the travellers' capture by the military. The atmosphere Habila creates in this passage is, as he writes himself, that of "a sci-fi movie." This explicit invocation of a dystopian futuristic landscape, paired with the use of the descriptions "evil-smelling," "oil-fecund" and "eerie," suggest the presence of a destructive, polluting and evil power that has gained control over the entire area. This sense of all-encompassing destruction and infection is strengthened by the description of the pipes crossing and connecting "endlessly" over the field.

The passage is not just a vivid description of a dystopian landscape as seen from a distance, however, but continues to describe the practical reality of the oil industry's presence up close. The dystopian scene thus morphs into mundane reality and brings home the environmental destruction as a crisis of the present; not a potential horror projected into the future. The notion of Rufus and his companions "ducking" and "hopping" as they cross the field immediately detracts from the more abstract and distant science fiction-like scene we were introduced to in the sentences before. The reader is invited to imagine four figures clumsily making their way through and over a smelly, pipeline-crossed field covered in oil and is thus forced to confront the reality of the futuristic dystopia that is not situated comfortably in a distant and merely potential future, but is real, mundanely dirty and uncomfortable, and which can be found in actuality and in the present. This is the tone in which Habila presents the environmental challenges: not only as a backdrop to the narrative, but as a constant presence in the narrative, rendering them a major theme in the novel.

### **Representation and Exploration**

While the generational markers may (superficially) distinguish between Nigerian writers dealing with independence, post-independence, militarism and a not-yet-defined fourth generation, the field of ecopoetics shows an overarching relevance that defies the generational classification. Rather than setting himself apart, Habila thus adds his own voice (however stylistically and politically distinct) to those of

previous generations. However, though the environment and pollution form a significant part of the novel, if not the entire setting, *Oil on Water* deals with many more contemporary social, political and economic developments in the Delta area, so that the novel defies/escapes the classification of eco-fiction as too restrictive.

Given this point, and the warnings against commoditising and exoticising literature from the African continent as representationally ethnographic, I do not engage further with *Oil on Water*'s global, continental and national status as literary production, but rather with its individual status as a fictional *exploration* rather than *representation* of contemporary developments (including the environmental) in the Niger Delta specifically. My analysis of the novel will also reveal the too-narrow perspective an interpretation of the work as (merely) representative brings and will focus mainly on the novel's relevance to the notion of corporate ingression. Relevant to my thesis, therefore, are the literary, stylistic, political and other characteristics specific to Habila's own work in general, and to *Oil on Water* in particular.

### 3.2.3 Helon Habila and *Oil on Water*

Although I will refrain from using the above tri-generational framework of African literature, certain commonalities of contemporary Nigerian fiction writing are relevant descriptions of elements of Habila's writing as well. Judging by the subject matter of *Oil on Water* and Habila's more recent book *The Chibok Girls* (2016), that deals with the Boko Haram kidnappings in April 2014, it seems clear that the novelist is indeed preoccupied with exploring or discussing current critical national issues. Political and military power as themes in *Oil on Water* are thus to be expected. However, Habila also explores the deeper developments and mechanisms that significantly shape the Niger Delta as a community through the perspective of a journalist: the protagonist and narrator of the novel. The media therefore form a third major perspective driving the narrative, in close connection to its military engagement, as I will show below. The themes of political and military engagement as well as media influence, as I will show in the next chapter, not only form the centre of Habila's fictional exploration of critical national issues, but also form a characteristic of corporate ingression in this context.

## Political Engagement

When asked in an interview whether he “feel[s] compelled to inform” his (western) readers on these political circumstances, Habila answered:

I just want to entertain them. It just happens that, because my stories are set in a certain country, and because the country has a kind of troubled history, I can't avoid the political background creeping into the story and sometimes dominating the story. To do anything else would be lying, escaping reality. And if it happens to inform people of political situations, then it is all good. (Zerzan)

This statement suggests that any political elements in Habila's novels are merely a side-effect of writing fiction set in Nigeria. This is supported in the case of *Oil on Water* specifically, when Habila states that he “did not want to make it too much of a political novel.” However, Habila's supposedly nonpolitical stance is balanced by his own claim that he did aim

to carry the reader into this landscape that's being destroyed and show the people who are also being destroyed [...] I wanted to draw attention to the environment and the people who are living on that land and who are really suffering. (Zerzan)

While matters of authorial intent go beyond the scope of this thesis, what seems clear from both bibliographic evidence and Habila's own words is that his novels encompass political content and aims—whether these are their major focus or not.

## Military Engagement

*Oil on Water's* regular references to Nigeria's military government in the past in the context of the reporters' rebellion against it, corresponds to Egya's identification of contemporary (or third generation) interest in writing the military. In the case of Habila's novel, this takes the form of flashbacks and embedded narratives of the past lives of various characters. The presence of military power in the Delta and its oppression of various groups and individuals throughout the rest of the novel, however, also recalls the period at the end of the previous century when Nigeria was completely under military control. Rather than placing the novel in a supposed tradition of third-generation Nigerian writing, however, these recollections place it explicitly in a distinct and distinctly contemporary context. The military, despite its strong influence over the Delta, is no longer the ruling power in the area, and in

contrast to Zaq's experiences as a reporter during the military junta's, Rufus is not officially hunted down for his writing. Habila's own professional experience within the world of the media lends weight to Rufus' perspective on the situation in the Delta.

Through the character of Rufus, Habila explores a subculture within press culture that cultivates a romanticised view of the past where writing the truth was inherently dangerous under military rule and, therefore, more valuable. The novel's flashbacks and recollections of a past in which Zaq and his colleagues were in constant danger of arrest, capture and even death, recalls nostalgia for adventure rather than relief that this is no longer the case. The notion of adventure, rebellion and dissidence as a reporter's ideal is revealed most clearly through the character of Beke Johnson (Zaq's editor)'s recollection of Zaq at the height of his fame as a reporter:

He wrote fiery, fearless anti-military pieces that even our editor was hesitant to publish. Zaq left us and was immediately wooed by all the prominent papers [...] He did some of his best work then. This was the late eighties, remember, most of us had to maintain two or three addresses just to stay a step ahead of the military goons. (124)

The adjectives "fiery" and "fearless" connote and denote pride, supported by the fact of the prominent papers "wooing" Zaq for his self-endangering anti-military pieces. Beke here suggests that such an anti-establishment stance was common among reporters in the eighties, where "most of us" needed to stay out of the hands of the "military goons" apparently tasked to enforce some form of gag order.

Rufus's own language also reflects the nostalgia such stories of past glory in the face of military dictatorship instil in him as a reporter. This becomes clear in the form of a daydream, where Rufus imagines himself returning from his assignment:

I saw us reaching Port Harcourt before noon to a hero's reception from our colleagues and editors; I saw my story on the front pages; and, finally, I saw myself being restored to my rightful place as a reporter. In the weeks to come we'd get drunk for free in our various press clubrooms as we added yet another detail to the already overwrought tale of our daring adventure. (78)

Rufus here directly connects his "adventure" to its potential impact on his career. His report of the battle between the military and the militants on the island

apparently holds the potential for career-advancement by promoting him from a mere photographer for his newspaper to his “rightful place as a reporter.” The media’s extensive interest in reporting the violence thus directly influences the careers of their members in a positive manner and thus ensures their continued efforts towards reporting such events. Furthermore, this passage’s invocation of heroic epic imagery reveals a romanticising stance towards the danger involved by revering those directly connected to it. By using words such as “hero” and “adventure,” Rufus’s experiences are presented as heroic deeds in which the reporter has overcome great dangers and returns triumphant and victorious to his fellow warriors (“colleagues and editors”) who gather together (in the press clubrooms) to listen to the tale of his daring heroics. The use of the adjective “overwrought,” however, adds an ironic note to the passage that undercuts the previously epic tone. The protagonist thus seems to make fun of his own portrayal of reporting true events as heroic and thus weakens the notion of the media as an objective, truth-seeking and independent force for good, battling against military oppression. Instead, the role of the media and individual reporters in the crisis is explored in the novel as one of (involuntary) complicity rather than of heroic dissidence.

### **Media**

This romanticisation of activism continues in the novel, reflected by Rufus’s drive to find that one great story that will lead to promotion and fame within the reporter community. The continuation of Rufus’s daydream supports this connection between violence, romanticism and fame:

I had a draft of my story in my head, and trapped for posterity in my point-and-shoot Sony digital camera were images of the gutted bodies half hidden in the bushes, the thatchless, burned-down huts, the bullet-broken palm trees, and the spectacular fire throwing up a cloud of smoke over the tall trees. I must have been lulled to sleep by the movement of the boat. (78)

Although his daydream includes the (literal) images of fire, destruction and “gutted bodies,” his being “lulled to sleep” suggests these do not trouble him deeply. In this context, Rufus considers these images from the point of view of the potential they hold to illustrate his reporting of the events that may lead to personal fame. The use

of the word “spectacular” to describe the fire serves to further his daydream rather than trouble his sleep, and denotes Rufus’s appreciation of the photographs purely for their aesthetic and narrative value and indirectly for his personal ambitions. Rufus has thus “trapped” the violent reality in order to present it to “posterity” as part of a published piece that will make him a hero—a daydream that lulls him to sleep as he is gently rocked by the boat that has brought him his ‘scoop.’

When we remove ourselves one step further from the narrative, we see not only how Rufus’s motivations are presented with irony, but also how Habila presents the media in general and even his own novel with ironic force. As the protagonist is a journalist himself, the perspectives and aims of the media are a significant theme in the novel. The public views of the media in the novel are summarised by the perspective taken by Zaq on the matter of the kidnapping of Mrs Floode:

I think luck is on our side: here we are, pursuing what is almost a perfect story. A British woman kidnapped by local militants who are fighting to protect their environment from greedy multinational oil companies. Perfect. A good story for any paper. (134)

The explicit use of the phrase “a good story” suggests the creation of a narrative rather than the objective portrayal of facts (or, indeed, any empathy for the fate of the woman involved). Questions arise here regarding veracity and journalistic ethics as this passage presents a portrayal of the creation and communication of a devised narrative, considered particularly suitable for use in “any paper.” Habila thus has the media in his novel present a picture of a struggle within the community of the Delta where oil companies exploit the local environment, thus oppressing the local population; where the militants attempt to remove the companies by force; individuals become victims trapped between the violence; and where the media seemingly heartlessly report this to the world as “almost a perfect story.” At one remove, however, we also find an ironic stance towards the novel itself. Given that the novel’s narrative is centred on exactly this narrative of a “woman kidnapped by local militants who are fighting to protect their environment from greedy multinational oil companies,” the statement that it is “a good story for any paper” simultaneously suggests it is also a good story for any novel—an ironic metatextual comment that subtly foregrounds the author and questions his own imperatives in

writing this narrative. As I will show in Chapter 4, this metanarrative characterises the novel, as the motives of each character are consistently problematised.

## CHAPTER 4 – THE CORPORATE COMMUNITY IN *OIL ON WATER*

### Introduction

Although the political *status* of the novel could be debated, the political *nature* of *Oil on Water* has never been denied: Habila's novel discusses in detail the contemporary political and cultural issues as they appear in the Niger Delta on a local and individual level. The novel's clear critique of the cultural, environmental and social impact of the oil industry in Nigeria, more specifically in the Delta area, renders the title of the novel particularly relevant: "Oil on Water" refers simultaneously to Nigeria's major export product as well as its destructive capacities in and around the water of the Delta. The image of oil as it floats on water is evoked—its chemical properties causing the fluid to spread on the surface rather than mix with the water underneath—indicating a metaphorical incompatibility between nature and industry or even nature and capitalism, following the expression that 'oil and water do not mix.' The title thus seems to suggest that foreign corporate power in the Nigerian Delta is like oil floating on water: not a homogenous mixture, but rather one element covering and suffocating the other. The element essential to human life—water—is thus stifled as a result of the exploitation of oil as a global commodity.

The novel, however, does not merely concern the destruction of nature in the Niger Delta. *Oil on Water* also shows the direct impact of environmental degradation on the lives and culture of the local population as it describes the experiences of various groups and communities connected to the area: the local fishermen and agricultural population, the militant gangs, the military, the media, (local) politics, religious groups and persons employed directly or indirectly by the oil companies. In this manner the novel explores the perspectives of various stakeholders and stakeholder groups connected to the oil industry in the area—posing in effect as a form of stakeholder analysis of the oil industry in the Niger

Delta.<sup>12</sup> The multinational companies themselves or those who manage their activities, however, do not feature in the novel. Except for one explicit reference to the “ABZ Oil Company”<sup>13</sup> (61), ‘Oil’ in a corporate sense remains in the background as an invisible but all-controlling player. Habila explicitly mentions his intentions to this effect in an interview, where he explains this framing of both corporation and government at the periphery of his narrative: “The big people—the oil companies and the government—they are in the background. You have a sense that they are there, always pulling the strings” (Zerzan). As such, the novel is a comprehensive portrayal of the *impact* of corporate power on individual lives as they navigate their relative positions, rather than a comprehensive politico-economic account of the situation in a global-economic context.

As I will show here, *Oil on Water*’s exploration of the presence of corporate power and the oil industry in the Niger Delta is best described in terms of corporate ingression; where corporate power (re)structures a community and has an extended cultural influence over its society. The next section will therefore show the extent and nature of the unspecified yet constant presence of corporate power in the novel, followed by a discussion of the novel’s treatment of the (re)structuring of corporate territory by the oil companies and finally an analysis of the cultural influence of corporate power on the extended Delta territory as explored in *Oil on Water*.

## 4.1 The Presence of Corporate Power

The presence of corporate power in the Niger Delta is first introduced in the novel indirectly through a reference to both the apparent racial division between the

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Stakeholder’ is a widely used term originating from business management to denote those parties with a ‘stake’ in the activities of a business or organisation (see R. Edward Freeman, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*).

<sup>13</sup> ABZ Oil and Gas Ltd, UK-based and part of ABZ Group Limited, which “specializes in the design, engineering, and manufacture of onshore and offshore cabins, containers, baskets, and air conditioning and refrigeration units. The company focuses on providing a range of products and capabilities to service the oil and gas sector internationally.” ABZ is therefore not one of the major oil companies, but rather a service partner in the oil industry in general.

Source:

<http://www.bloomberg.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?privcapId=26961156> (22-02-2017)

representatives of corporate power and the Nigerian population as well as the tragic accidents that appear to accompany the oil industry's presence in the Delta: "No, it was not a pipeline accident, as I told the white man, as I wrote in my published piece. But it might easily have been one, like in countless other villages" (3). The use of the phrase "the white man," immediately recalls colonialism and imperialist notions of racial superiority through, firstly, its properties as a synecdoche, representing the 'white other' such as the employees and representatives of multinational oil corporations, diplomatic representatives of countries with a predominantly white population (both featured in the novel), and arguably even the international public in general. Secondly, imperialism is evoked through the phrase's associations with the notion of 'the white man's burden' as an ideological ground (or justification) for a dominant presence in a 'non-white man's' context or territory. Although the accident referred to in this passage is apparently not directly related to the pipelines owned by the oil corporations, the choice of language clearly suggests that 'the white man' (in this case representing the multinational oil companies) is very often responsible for similar accidents. In this single sentence on the first page of *Oil on Water*, the problematic effects of the presence of multinational oil corporations in the Niger Delta on local and individual life, and the personal suffering that is the result of the omnipresent and dangerous "pipelines and oil rigs and refineries" (7), are introduced as the tone in which the novel presents the relationship between corporate power and the Delta as a (local) community.

This relationship, however, is not presented as merely a victimiser-victim dynamic between corporate power and the villages spread out through the Delta. The presence of militant groups in the area, directly targeting the oil companies, is quickly shown to be a significant factor in the construction of this community-in-crisis and provides an important condition for the plot that concerns the kidnapping of the wife of a British oil engineer by such a militant faction. The situation is further complicated by the presence and activity of the military whose official task it is to ensure peace and safety in the area. In practice, however, its relationship to the other stakeholder groups and presences in the community is more complex. As the protagonist, Rufus, suggests: "the oil companies pay the soldiers to keep the

militants away” (35). Rather than an independent force for peace, the military is thus presented as merely another factor in the complex politics of the Delta area.

These power dynamics are also a result of the relationship between the oil companies and (local and national) political forces as is suggested in various instances where “the oil-company men had started visiting” local villages, “accompanied by important politicians from Port Harcourt” (38) to buy the oil-rich territories owned by the members of these communities. The interdependence between the oil companies and political power is made explicit in a later paragraph where the narrator refers to “the oil companies and the politicians who worked for them” (61)—a relationship which in this case leads directly to military intervention in the villagers’ protest and the eventual sale of the community’s land to the unnamed oil company in question. This relationship is even presented as an inseparable unity by the Professor (the leader in the novel of one of the most influential militant gangs in the Niger Delta) as he promises: “We will make it so hot for the government and the oil companies that they will be forced to pull out” (208-209). Though mentioning the government and the oil companies separately, by uniting both using “they,” a complete interdependence is suggested: if one is forced to leave, so is the other—the government cannot continue their presence in the Delta without the oil companies, and vice versa. It is also made clear that the government is considered part of the problem rather than the solution: government power needs to be removed to reach what is, to the Professor, a desirable situation. The context of the novel suggests that not only does “government” here refer to the above-mentioned politicians who are in the employ of the oil companies (whether officially so or not is not specified in the novel), but also to the presence of military power, which is effectively in the employ of the oil companies, as I will show in more detail below.

Although this close connection between government and multinational oil companies is a continuous theme throughout the novel, the situation is presented as being more complex than a close cooperation between both parties. In certain situations, the oil companies act deliberately independently from (local) government and politics. Specifically, in the case of the regular kidnappings of foreign employees of the oil companies, the latter are left to deal with the situation however they please, while the local police force in the rural and urban context of

the crisis are notable for their absence. The logic behind the (lack of) action by this latter group in the Delta is a passive response to the conflicts and especially the kidnappings: “usually the police prefer to stay out, leaving the oil company to handle things its own way, which is what it prefers” (199). This results in the general policy that “the oil company always pays the ransom” (200) and, in the case of the kidnapping of Isabel Floode, that the reporters who are to verify she is alive and well, do so by virtue of the oil company’s material support.

Such exclusion of government influence is exemplified when Rufus and his colleagues “left the oil-company jetty” (65) in a new boat, a guide with “a gun on his waist and [...] the semblance of a military uniform” which, we are told, is standard company security attire: “There were men wearing similar uniforms all over the oil-company premises” (66). Those present to see the reporters off are clearly connected to the relevant oil company or the British embassy, rather than the (local) Nigerian government, comprising “the kidnapped woman’s husband, James Floode, and two other white men” (65). The particular strategy concerning communication with the kidnappers is also arranged by the company itself: “The oil company had decided to replace two Port Harcourt reporters with two from Lagos” (66). Why these reporters are replaced is not made clear, but the company is here clearly presented as taking responsibility for the (successful) resolution of the matter.

Simultaneously, any external and objective assessment of the companies’ actions, despite their extensive presence in the Delta and its influence in economic and safety matters, like the policing of its actions by local law enforcement agencies, is presented as non-existent. The multinational oil companies’ effective implementation of power over possible (political and social) counterforces to its activities is presented in *Oil on Water* through the figure of Dr Dagogo-Mark—an independent medical professional, though the reader is introduced to him in the company of the military for whom he works at that time. We are told multiple times that the Doctor has saved the Major’s life, although the particulars of the incident are never revealed. However, parts of the Doctor’s history, in particular his experiences with the oil companies, are narrated for the protagonist by the Doctor himself, and reveal the strategies that corporate powers in the novel employ in concealing the impact their actions have on the local environment and on the health

of the Delta's inhabitants. After realising the extent of the effects of the oil industry on the local population and having taken samples and collected relevant data, the Doctor confronts the unnamed oil company with the results. He tells Rufus that the company offered "money, and a job" in return:

The manager, an Italian guy, wrote me a cheque and said I was now on their payroll. He told me to continue doing what I was doing, but this time I was to come to him only with my results. I thought they'd do something with my results, but they didn't. (92)

By thus keeping those persons who could pose a threat to the company's activity close, and even rendering them effectively (financially) dependent on the company, corporate power seeks to disarm any counterforces from independent sources and thus to envelop every possible factor that may influence their lucrative presence in the Delta. As I will show in more detail in the next section, *Oil on Water* thus explores the situation in the Delta as a complex interplay between multinational oil companies and other parties through corporate power's presence and control of government forces, the local population in general and even individuals specifically.

## 4.2 Structural Influence

As indicated in the previous section, the presence of multinational oil corporations in the Niger Delta is not presented as a straightforward binary dynamic of good versus evil. Nor does *Oil on Water* suggest that the situation is based on, or is similar to, a neocolonial version of the coloniser-colonised relationship more typical of the imperialist period of colonialism. As I will show, *Oil on Water's* exploration of the presence of corporate power and the oil industry in the Niger Delta is better described in terms of corporate ingression; where corporate power (re)structures corporate territory and extends a cultural influence over connecting territories.

To show that the novel explores a biopolitical (re)structuring of the Niger Delta's community, I will demonstrate how the Delta area and its connected areas (such as Port Harcourt) are presented in the novel as being influenced and structured by corporate power. To this end, I explore the novel's discussion of the Delta community's structure through three themes: government and politics, police power, and industry and employment as the three areas most closely connected in the novel to corporate power.

#### *4.2.1 Government and Politics*

Corporate economic influence is especially visible in the activities of those few politicians featuring (indirectly) in the novel. Local and national politicians are shown in the novel to exert active support for the oil companies' activities and plans in the Delta. This close cooperation between political and corporate power is deliberately suggestive of corruption and reveals government influence in favour of the oil industry and thus the heart of the Delta society's structure. It is also reminiscent of past colonial practices, where influence exerted over and through existing ruling structures aided the process of colonisation. Critics often speak of a process of 'neocolonialism' (a term coined by Kwame Nkrumah) to describe contemporary capitalist developments in former colonies. As I have argued in Part 1 of this thesis, the similarities of past and contemporary forms of exploitation thus suggest a recurrence of the process of corporate ingression.

The specific impact in the novel of the cooperation between corporate and political power on the local population of the Delta area is made clearest through the narrative of Chief Ibiram—the leader of a village visited by Rufus and Zaq on the ninth day of their travels through the Delta. Chief Ibiram tells the reporters that the oil companies, accompanied by politicians (as discussed above), visited them to offer buying the community's oil-rich land, at that moment predominantly used for agriculture. He also reveals that this has been common practice in surrounding villages as well. While this already reveals the relationship between the oil companies and (local) politics, Chief Ibiram's story shows that this cooperation does not end there.

Chief Ibiram tells Rufus and Zaq that when the previous chief (in the name of the village) refused to sell land to the oil companies, the latter became persistent in other ways: "far off in the surrounding waters the oil-company boats were patrolling, sometimes openly sending their men to the village to take samples of soil and water" (39). The village decided to keep them at bay "by sending out their own patrols over the surrounding rivers, in canoes, all armed with bows and arrows and clubs and a few guns" (39). This situation quickly escalated, however, as these patrols were then used as "the excuse the oil companies and the politicians who worked for them needed to make their next move" (39). It is clear that the oil workers were trespassing on the villagers' property to take soil samples, despite

the village's clear refusal to cooperate with the company. The canoe patrol was meant as a "desperate measure" (39) to keep the oil workers away from the village's territory and eventually led to a physical confrontation between the two parties:

One day the patrol came upon two oil workers piling soil samples into a speedboat. There was a brief skirmish, nothing too serious – one of the oil workers escaped with a swollen jaw, the other with a broken arm – but the next day the soldiers came. (39)

As soon as this conflict broke out, the oil company and the politicians had their excuse to order the military to police the situation and restore peace to the area. The chief of the village was arrested and incarcerated, but the villagers still did not sell their land to the oil company.

As a result, (national) politics were again inserted into the equation, this time embodied by influential politicians who visited the village from Nigeria's capital:

A politician, who introduced himself as their senator, came all the way from Abuja and assured them that their situation was receiving national attention, it was in the papers, and he was going to fight for them to see that their chief was returned safe and sound. With him were two white men, oil executives. The villagers chased them away. Others came, but they were all liars, all working for the oil companies, trying one way or another to break the villagers' resolve. (40)

Although these political figures presented themselves as allies to the village's cause, Chief Ibiram's evidence clearly reveals them to be advocates of the company. While the official narrative is one of support and understanding, the continuous presence of oil executives as companions to these politicians disavows their words as merely a strategy to "break the villagers' resolve." It is particularly interesting here that the senator's show of support takes the form of (merely) referring to the media when he assures them that they are receiving "national attention" and that their situation is "in the papers." By referring to the public attention given to their situation as somehow helpful or comforting to the village, it is suggested that the media function, firstly, as an effective operation that in and of itself can work towards a resolution and, secondly, that the media are somehow connected to the senator's "fight [...] to see that their chief was returned safe and sound." The latter function suggests that either the senator truly had significant influence over the media (a journalistic-ethical conflict in and of itself that is, however, not supported in the

novel by any evidence), or that he was merely utilising empty rhetoric to present himself as an advocate of the village. The media's general ideology of supporting the plight of the Delta inhabitants, however, simultaneously includes a critical stance towards the corruption of political figures such as this senator who invokes the media as an ally (a topic I will discuss further below). Ultimately, however, Chief Ibiram distrusts the senator, as his accusation of the politicians shows: "they were all liars." He is clearly of the belief that the politicians are "all working for the oil companies," a belief that seems to be supported in the novel by the consistent accompaniment of the politicians by oil executives.

#### *4.2.2 Police Power*

The exertion of force in the Delta is a role taken up in the novel by both the military and militants, who continue the violence for various reasons and with varying aims. The militants exert what they consider necessary force towards the oil company and those directly connected to it in order to undermine the oil industry and thus its effects on the environment. Secondly, the militants exert force against the military in reaction to the latter's policing of their activities. The military (represented by the Major in the novel), considers the militants' violent activism a wholly criminal matter and as such aims to eradicate it through the use of necessary force.

Although Nigeria's military presence in the Delta is thus presented as a supposedly independent police power, with peace and safety as its sole aims, military power does not escape corporate influence. The novel presents the army as working closely together with the oil companies, showing that they are being paid to keep the militants away from the oil rigs, refineries and pipelines. An example of this is included at the beginning of the novel, as Rufus, Zaq and their guides (Tamuna and his son Michael) find themselves on an unpopulated stretch of shore on the edge of a field completely covered with active oil pipes. Their boat's motor has malfunctioned and they spend the night on this piece of company territory. The following morning, they prepare to leave but are joined by a helicopter that follows their movements:

I saw the huge oil-company logo on its side. From an open window a guard leaned down, his eyes covered in huge goggles, his machine gun poking through the open window [...] The helicopter followed us, a disinterested bee, watching from a distance. (42)

What logo is displayed on the helicopter, or to which company the helicopter belongs, is not specified in the narrative. The distance this evokes is extended by the image of the goggles, hiding the guard's eyes, and the gun as the only form of 'communication' between the helicopter above and the boat below. The description of the helicopter as a "disinterested bee, watching from a distance" adds to this distancing effect the notion of the helicopter and its passengers as a single (living) being rather than a collection of individuals (at the very least a pilot and the guard) being transported by a piece of inanimate technology—thus dehumanising the corporate power behind the helicopter and its passengers. The invocation of the image of a bee also inserts irony into the passage: Its referral to a natural creature which is necessary for the propagation of plant life is in stark contrast with the helicopter as an 'unnatural' object, intruding in the Delta as an accomplice in the destruction of life.

The distance between the four men on the water and the material embodiment of corporate power in the air is soon countered by the disappearance of the helicopter and the appearance of the military (though not yet identified as such) close by: "two speedboats appeared from behind the very mangrove bush we were making for, their massive bows bearing down on us" (42). From what passed before, the reader might expect these boats to be in some way directly connected to the departing helicopter, and thus to the oil company in question. This makes the eventual identification of the new arrival more meaningful: "They circled us, guns trained on us. Now we could see the men clearly: they were soldiers, three in each boat, all armed" (43). Rather than more company logos and guards, as one would expect, it appears that the disappearance of the helicopter immediately led to the appearance of the soldiers, thus indicating close cooperation between the oil company and the military. This is reinforced by the style of the narrative which, again, evokes a sense of distance towards the newcomers:

The names of the boats were printed on their sides [...] They kept circling slowly, coming close enough to peer into our boat. The man

with the loud hailer spoke again, his metallic voice sounding so impersonal, so threatening, in the suddenly cold air. (43)

The use of “they” in the second sentence of this passage, corresponding grammatically to the verb “to peer,” would suggest the plural pronoun refers to the soldiers. The previous sentence, however, implies that the “they” refers to the boats rather than its passengers. This device, due to its personification of the military’s inanimate mode of transportation rather than referring to its animate passengers, again signifies the dehumanisation of power. This effect is further established by what follows, although what comes next is direct human communication by an individual on one of the boats. The impersonal effect of the hailer due to the metallic quality and increased volume it adds to the man’s voice, including the necessarily one-sided nature of the communication, again effects an impersonal interaction between both parties, with the military immediately being presented as the superior power by the description of “their massive bows bearing down on us” (42).

This power dynamic characterises what follows, as the four men are forced to abandon ship and swim to the military boats, ensuring the boat’s destruction:

One of [the soldiers] leaned over and casually shot a round at the overturned boat. We watched as it slowly sank out of sight. I turned away from the horror on the old man’s face as he watched his boat sink beneath a sea of bubbles. (43)

By declaring the old man’s livelihood dispensable by destroying it, the soldier not only illustrates the military’s dehumanised and all-encompassing power, but by extension also that of the oil corporation. By explicitly connecting the corporation with military power these passages not only convey the close relationship between the two parties, but also convey to the reader the notion of the oil company as an omnipotent, impersonal figure that sees all, can do all, but can never be seen or reached itself. Corporate power is God in the Delta, and the military its angels—ruling over life and death as the Delta’s inhabitants struggle to either appease it or escape it (the latter to no avail).

#### *4.2.3 Industry and Employment*

The third area that is revealed in the novel to be restructured by the presence of corporate power in the Delta is that concerning industry in general and

employment in particular. The most extreme example is the effect of pollution on the main industry of the population of the Delta, as illustrated in the novel: “There are fishing communities all over the islands, and by morning these waters will be busy with boat traffic” (76). Akinola’s study supports this as he cites the data regarding industry in the Delta (as per 2008):

About 95% of the people live in small rural settlements with less than 5,000 in population and 85% of this people depends on informal enterprises (fishing, canoe carving, subsistent agriculture, blacksmithing, etc) as their primary sources of livelihood.

Although it is the main source of income for the population yet remaining in the Delta, the fishing industry is a dwindling source of income due to the decreasing quality of life in the water, as Rufus and Zaq’s guide describes: “we used to catch crabs [...] No crabs here now. The water is not good” (26). Another source of income for the remaining population in the novel is religion:

The shrine was the main industry, and after it came fishing. Sometimes outsiders visited the shrine and took pictures of the sculptures. Sometimes they rented a room for the night in the tenement compound. (141)

This island, Irikefe, also functions as a major transportation hub from and to where ferries and other boats sail with either products or passengers. Nevertheless, the village on the island is “without any form of industry to attract outsiders. Almost every house was a family home” (141), rendering the shrine the main activity on the island, and the tenement house the only major source of income for the village next to fishing.

Aside from the dwindling forms of legal economic activity in the Delta, the oil industry has also caused new (illegal) sources of income to emerge for the Delta’s population from the theft and sale of fuel as Rufus’s father tells us:

I buy from little children. I buy cheap and I sell cheap to the cars that come here at night [...] It’s not a bad business, really [...] They come to me with their little gallons and I don’t ask them where they get it. (64)

The location of the village where the sales are made (at a junction of two roads) as well as the dependence of the majority of the population on fossil fuel for

transportation creates opportunities that appear hard to resist. “Oil bunkering,” as it is locally known, therefore continues to be a major form of crime in the Delta (Aghedo 138). As the novel shows, this is not a dependable source of income for the perpetrators themselves, however, as the illegality of the business eventually causes such enterprises to fold: “We get by, we give the police a little something to look the other way, but sooner or later they’ll get greedy. They’ll arrest us, or take over the whole business themselves” (64). This prediction suggests the speaker has known this to happen before, and reveals that a significant black market for fuel has emerged as part of the local economy. Police corruption appears part of the equation and renders the economy a more or less stable equilibrium that ensures the continuance of (this) criminal activity.

A more obvious source of employment – the oil industry – does not appear to alleviate employment issues. Whether this is due to the immense increase in unemployment due to the environmental impact of oil (as discussed above), a policy of importing (skilled) labourers, or perhaps both, is not made clear in the novel. Rufus does not mention details, but in his autobiographical narrative he mentions his home town, whose inhabitants “all worked for the ABZ oil company,” but now the town, “once awash in oil money,” was soon forced to watch “in astonishment, as the streets daily fill up with fleeing families” (61). The sudden drop in employment and wealth in the town lead to the criminal activity discussed previously. Another result is revealed when Rufus tells us he would later encounter “an old classmate, a half-forgotten neighbour, destitute on the backstreets of Port Harcourt” (61). Far from bringing economic advantage and stability, poverty and precarity accompany corporate ingression here.

The precarity of the position of local labourers, including those who are highly skilled and educated, is further explored in the novel through the character of Salomon—Mr and Mrs Floode’s driver. Mrs Floode relates how she found out that her seemingly uneducated, Pidgin English-speaking driver was in fact “a university graduate who, like a lot of young men in the Delta, had been forced to take a job far below his qualifications while he waited for that elusive office job with an oil company” (183). Salomon’s difficulty in gaining employment suited to his education reveals a job market that is obviously volatile, with unemployment being a serious problem and criminal activity a tempting solution. As I will show below, the latter

also includes the much more rewarding kidnapping ‘industry’ as a solution many disillusioned men take to nonetheless reap some reward from the otherwise detrimental corporate presence in the area.

The multinational oil industry’s vastly superior economic power is thus of major influence in structuring the novel’s exploration of the Delta community. The novel discusses how, through the perpetuation of the oil industry in the Delta by governmental power in the form of both political support and exertion of force, the resulting pollution and the displacement of the local population exacerbates the development of unemployment and creates sources of criminal activity. Corporate power thus pervades and ingresses the entire community of the Delta and its economic structure.

### 4.3 Extended Cultural Influence

As I have already partly shown, the oil companies that operate in the Delta are presented in *Oil on Water* as a significant influence on, if not the controlling factor in, (local) politics and military and economic action. The novel’s discussion of these three factors guiding the structure of the Niger Delta’s society, as analysed above, reveals the whole of the Delta community to be in a state of controlled crisis. However violent and dystopian this situation may seem, especially from the perspective of the rural population, the complex interplay between these stakeholder groups, further complicated through media and potential global intervention, is nevertheless presented as a dynamic equilibrium from which there seems no escape, and which, against the odds, does not seem to break down into full chaos. Instead, the result of corporate ingression of the territory is a situation in which widely varying forces hold each other in check in the novel, creating an undesirable but nevertheless continuous and dynamic level of struggle. I will show in the following section the extended cultural influence that corporate ingression in the Delta exerts on the life and culture(s) of the community as presented in the novel. This influence takes the form of general crisis and violence, (forced) mobility and displacement of the population and the internal and external dynamics that characterise the various (sub)communities and their interactions.

### 4.3.1 Violence and Crisis

As shown in the previous chapter, *Oil on Water* is a fictional representation of a local community in crisis that addresses and explores the factual and cultural repercussions of the situation on a complex community. As a form of summary with regard to the crisis situation described in the novel, Habila ends the fifth chapter of his novel with the Major's words: "There's a war going on! People are being shot. In Port Harcourt oil companies are being bombed, police stations are being overrun, the world oil price is shooting through the roof" (59). The Major's assessment of the situation is presented on an increasing scale and level of crisis; from local to national to global issues. The effects of the global impact are left to be imagined by the reader, but it is clear this would be a complex interplay of causes and effects that influence various parts of the world in various ways: both politically and economically.

Another summary of the crisis from a global perspective is given in the form of a BBC news fragment Rufus sees as he interviews Mr Floode regarding his wife's kidnapping:

Isabel Floode, a British woman, had been kidnapped by rebels in the Nigerian Delta, an attempt to make contact was spoiled by an unplanned military intervention, and now it was doubtful if Isabel was still alive. Some oil companies had already stopped sending expatriate workers to the region, and were even thinking of shutting down their operations because the cost was becoming higher than they could bear, and this possibility was already causing a tension in the oil market, with prices expected to rise in response. (106)

The event of Isabel Floode's kidnapping serves here as an illustration of 'larger' concerns, namely oil company policy and the changes within the oil market. Whatever the circumstances that first initiated the crisis, the current equilibrium is based on the oil company's presence and activities in the Delta—economic activity that is punished and exploited by the militants through sabotage, kidnappings and threats. The militants thereby generate the financial means to subsist and continue their violent activities. The news fragment also reveals that it is the resulting financial burden "becoming higher than they could bear", rather than the fate of its employees, that motivate oil corporations to consider "shutting down their operations." The profits from the extraction of oil, however, seem to continue to

motivate corporate presence in the Delta, while (the nature of) corporate activity continues to lead to militant activity, according to the novel. The volatility of this crisis and its potential repercussions are in turn presented as of global interest, with effects on the oil market, stock markets and – as is predictable with oil – global political tensions as a result.

The novel's main focus, however, remains fixed on the local, where the crisis is at its most violent. In the novel, we are confronted with the casualties (“people being shot”) and damage directly related to the continuous power struggle between the various parts of the local community. The constant sense of danger in which the Delta is locked is illustrated through the reporters who attempt to navigate the area in order to find and interview Isabel Floode. Zaq warns:

What of the soldiers? – Somewhere in these waters, still patrolling, trying to find the hideout. And I think we should be heading away [...] We don't want to be caught in a crossfire between the soldiers and the kidnapers. (73)

The Delta has become a war zone as the military and the militants engage each other in battle: this is the “crossfire.” On the first day of their trip in the Delta to interview Mrs Floode, the group of reporters encounter such a battlefield in the form of an abandoned and smouldering village where they were to have met the kidnapers and the kidnapped woman. The bodies of men wounded and killed in a fight between the militants and the military are found in the bushes, and the scene is rife with “signs of carnage” (70) as “the smoke rose like a tornado into the sky, high over the savaged, seared trees” (68). The corpses are described in gruesome detail: “the torn stomach [...] Undigested food mixed with blood [...] flies hovered and descended” (70) and the horrors of battle are described by the particulars of the wounds and position of the corpses:

The face was squeezed in a grimace of pain, the mouth open in a voiceless howl; he must have seen the gun raised and pointed at him just before the bullet ripped into him. He looked young, not more than twenty. There was a trail of blood that started from the body and disappeared into the grass, indicating how he must have dragged himself after being hit, only to collapse where he now lay. Not far from him, two more bodies lay in a bush, bloody, broken and twisted. (70-71)

The reporters conclude that someone “must have informed the soldiers about this meeting” (69), suggesting a snitch in the militant group responsible for the meeting. The bodies found are those of militant fighters, killed by the military for their complicity in kidnappings and sabotage. By describing one of the dead men as “young” in combination with the explicit description of the probable circumstances of his death, the terror and horror of the violent crisis between the various groups in the Delta is brought home to the reader. By describing the scene in graphic detail through the eyes of the reporters after the actual fact of the struggle, the novel circumvents any description of an exciting or even heroic moment of fighting and instead focuses only on the bloody aftermath of the violence. The exact circumstances, nature and order of events are not described in the narrative, suggesting their irrelevance in the context of the effects of such violence: the senseless destruction of (young) life, whatever the cause.

As seen before, however, the militants are not considered the innocent victims in this situation, and their own harmful (criminal) activity is illustrated on that same island as the reporters are stranded there later that day: “Keeping our new and spacious boat was not a surprising thing for the militants to do” (77). Whatever the reason or justification for the theft of property, the militants’ actions in turn cause violence and suffering. Their position in the Delta furthermore illustrates their status as gangs rather than rebels and freedom fighters. This is supported by Mr Floode’s account of the kidnapping: “So far we’ve had over a dozen ransom demands by different groups: the Black Belts of Justice, the Free Delta Army, and the [...] AK-47 Freedom Fighters” (31). Although notions of freedom or justice feature in each of their names, including war-terminology, the fact that there are multiple groups who all wish to actively be part of the violence speaks for a more complex situation. A sense of distinction and even rivalry is presented as part of a militant culture when Rufus speaks to the Major’s prisoners. A prisoner belonging to an unnamed militant group answers Rufus’s question whether he is part of the Professor’s gang: “No. I have never met the Professor. We’re a different group, the four of us. That man is with the Professor” (149). Although they are all prisoners of the Major, being tortured for the same activity, group distinctions are apparently still relevant. The novel thus presents militant power as a segregated community of rivalling groups who perpetrate their activities independently but are all targeted

by the military—a gang culture in which the local population is unwillingly implicated and which suffers the greatest consequences.

The tenuous position the local population holds is further explicated by the priest Naman, “it’s no secret that these islands and villages are under [militant] protection” (137). The term “protection” in this context denotes ‘protection racket’ rather than true protection as it means the villages and local inhabitants are then indebted to the militants for whatever the latter demand, as Naman tells Rufus later: “usually they came for food, or for medical supplies, or for clothes; once they attempted to abduct a woman worshipper” (153). This exploitation of the local population to cater to the militants’ needs is part of an enforced pledge: “[the Professor] gathered everyone into the worship hut and said he wanted all the worshippers to swear allegiance to him” (154). Thus, the militant gang has influence over, and can organise, matters in the Delta as it wishes. As it happens, that includes the momentary beneficial treatment of the stranded reporters: as Naman says, they have “been instructed to take care of you for the night” (81). The later explanation of the shrine’s allegiance to the Professor implies that this instruction stems from the militants. Both protection and violence, as long as it serves their purposes, are thus part of militant activity, reminiscent of the military’s own unethical activity as discussed above.

But the local population is not merely a third independent group stuck between military oppression and militant exploitation. As the novel shows, the relationships between the various stakeholder groups and especially individuals across the Delta area severely complicate the narrative. Zaq explains this to Rufus, when the latter remarks on the likely innocence of a man arrested by the military:

[S]urely only an innocent man would be so unruffled, so confident?  
Zaq looked at me and shrugged. – Guilty of what, and innocent of what? Some of the militants actually come from villages like this, so how can you stop these people from fraternizing with them? (14)

This passage explores the reality of the blurred boundaries between the different subcommunities. The Delta crisis is thus not merely one of separate conflicting groups, but also one of individual experiences and personal relationships that interact with the social, economic and political reality, with violence as one of its results.

Such a case of personal connection transcending that of different stakeholder groups is presented in the reaction of Rufus's childhood friend and brother-in-law after being fired from his job: "He had been full of anger before he left, the kind of anger that often pushed one to blaspheme, or to rob a bank, or to join the militants" (100). Rufus's short, almost nonchalant recital of the possible but escalating effects of anger ends with a summary of the likely outcomes of such individual struggle: "some of them were now in the forests with the fighters, some of them had made millions from ransom money, but a lot of them were dead" (100). But it is not only those individuals who choose militant life who are affected by these choices. This blurring of boundaries causes military violence to be directed to the local population as well as to the gangs themselves. "Innocence" as a fluid concept, suggested by Zaq, causes the population to often be considered an accessory to the criminal activity, resulting in their harsh treatment by the military:

They are here! The soldiers are here! They came out of the sheds and houses and passages, wielding whips and guns, occasionally firing into the air to create more chaos. A man ran out of a hut and came face to face with a soldier; he raised his hands high in surrender as, in a single motion, the soldier reversed his rifle and swung the butt at the man's head. The man fell back into the doorway and the soldier moved on to another target. (12-13)

Instead of a controlled arrest of the blacksmith, who eventually appeared to be the target of the raid, this narrative, focalised initially through the point of view of the villagers, shows how the entire village is victim to violence and chaos. This brutal treatment results in a further separation between the local population and the military, as the villagers' fears about the military are confirmed. This distrust and fear of the military are also revealed in Rufus's frustrated search for information from a villager:

when we urged him to ask his brother if he had heard anything of the missing woman, or if he knew where we could make contact with the militants, he had shaken his head and said 'no' without the usual diffidence to his voice. I guess he didn't want to get his family involved in our quest for the militants, and if what happened to Karibi was an indication of what also happened to informers, then I respected his decision. (33)

External aid for the local population is therefore also effectively hampered as loyalties are confused and cause deep mistrust between the official authorities (the military) and those communities who “had borne the brunt of the oil wars” (33). The novel thus explores the consequences of these communities being “caught between the militants and the military” so that “the only way they could avoid being crushed out of existence was to pretend to be deaf and dumb and blind” (33). These two almost indistinguishable forces – the military and the militant gangs – are the sources of constant and consistent levels of violence and crisis in the Niger Delta, forming the volatile setting through which the novel’s characters (attempt to) navigate.

#### *4.3.2 Mobility and Displacement*

*Oil on Water* shows how both economically-driven mobility as well as refugees fleeing for their safety have become common due to the crisis in the Delta, and explores individual situations where members of the local Delta population are forced to move to urban areas to find jobs rather than to suffer the violence that is rampant in the rural areas. Not all succeed, however, in this desire, as the following shows:

They all worked for the ABZ oil company, and now the town, once awash in oil money, watches in astonishment as the streets daily fill up with fleeing families, some returning to their hometowns and villages, some going on to Port Harcourt in the hope of picking up something in the big city. (61)

The novel presents the major causes for such fleeing communities, which are more complex than a mere lack of employment opportunities, in the words of a local fisher, recounting how Chief Ibiram and his village have left for Port Harcourt: “Chief Ibiram don go. E no dey here any more. E say e no wan stay here any more, because of so so fighting and because of bad fishing” (175). This account makes a connection between the ‘fighting’ and the environmental impact of the oil industry. When Tamuno asks Rufus and Zag to take Michael back to Port Harcourt with them because “he no get good future here...I fear say soon him go join the militans, and I no wan that” (36), Habila is highlighting the limited number of options available to the younger generation in the Delta; the traditional forms of industry in the Delta

are dwindling and the only other alternatives are either to migrate to the city or become a member of a militant gang.

Most village communities, however, seem to choose the first option as we read that Rufus, Zaq and their guides visit many abandoned villages, which Rufus photographs for his future writings. As a result, “The village looked as if a deadly epidemic had swept through it” (8). The novel mentions many such villages, and creates the impression of an abject, dystopian and dead environment where all life either perishes or flees.

Added to this forced movement based on violence and environmental destruction is the movement imposed on villages as a result of land sold to the oil companies, enforced by the sale of land and facilitated by the companies’ political connections. Corporate presence and practices thus influence the mobility and industry of the population: through its environmentally harmful practices, its indirect (and sometimes direct) role in the violence, and its active displacement of the population.

The novel discusses the reality of the mass displacement of the Delta’s population through the experiences of Chief Ibiram and his village: “We left, we headed northwards, we’ve lived in five different places now, but always we’ve had to move. We are looking for a place where we can live in peace” (41). The village still attempts to find an alternative location within the Delta to continue their previous way of life but have instead become involuntary nomads and even refugees. In answer to Rufus’ question as to whether they are happy at their current location, Chief Ibiram answers: “I say how can we be happy when we are mere wanderers without a home?” (41). Eventually the village’s situation leads them to flee the Delta entirely and join the migrants to the city, but at the cost of the community’s unity, as articulated in the text through Chief Ibiram’s perspective:

My people could get some sort of work in Port Harcourt. His voice was hopeful, but his eyes were pessimistic, cloudy. Gradually the community was drifting towards the big city, and sooner or later it would be swallowed up, its people dispersed, like people getting off a bus and joining the traffic on the city streets. (178)

The dispersal and displacement of villagers is shown to be the direct result of corporate power and its ingression into their traditional ways of life.

### 4.3.3 Stakeholder Dynamics

A major strategy the novel implements to explore the impact of corporate power on the Delta community as a whole in the form of corporate ingression is its presentation and discussion of the various stakeholders in the Delta as a collection of interconnected groups. The novel does not attempt a comprehensive account of all stakeholders to the oil industry in the Niger Delta. As discussed above, government and corporate power are significantly present only through their absence, and global stakeholders or stakeholder groups such as NGO's, suppliers and customers are merely mentioned or referred to indirectly. The novel, rather, identifies and represents the five stakeholder groups that together construct the *local* crisis dynamic: the military, the militant groups, the civilian population, the expat community and the media. Although, as I will show, the boundaries between these groups are often blurred, the novel discusses the motives and ideologies that distinguish them as separate agents in the Delta's crisis.

To clarify *Oil on Water's* exploration of the dynamics between and among the Delta's various stakeholder groups, I will refer to Figure 1 below. This stakeholder

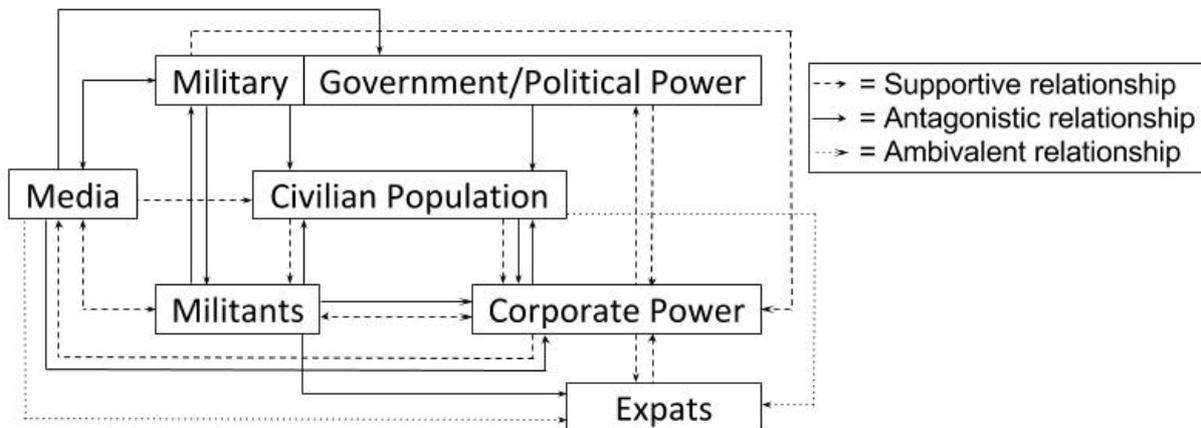


Figure 1

diagram or collaboration graph visualises the extent and nature of the power relationships between and among the stakeholders. The complexity of the crisis and dynamics within the Niger Delta is illustrated in this diagram, as the various stakeholder relations and their nature can only be visualised as a complex web of arrows. By analysing each of these connections as they feature in the novel – in the form of antagonistic, supportive and ambivalent relationships – I will explore these complex interrelations and interdependencies to explicate the novel's engagement

with the influences of corporate power as part of the dynamics of corporate ingression on the community as a whole.

### **Media**

Apart from exploring the local population's exposure to violence and displacement resulting from a community in crisis, *Oil on Water* illustrates the extended effects of corporate ingression and the influence of economic imperatives within other groups and on other areas of Nigerian public life as well. The logic of capitalist accumulation is revealed in the novel in various contexts—not only in the form of accumulation by dispossession by the oil industry, but also as part of media activity. While the accumulating activity of the oil industry is clearly presented in the form of the depletion and destruction of the environment and the enforced dislocation of the local population, the ideas of supply, demand and value are mentioned more explicitly through Rufus, Zaq and those others representing the media in the novel. This is especially noteworthy given the absence of any passages describing the motives of the one group the reader would expect to be ruled by economic imperatives: corporate power.

The media as a stakeholder group forms a significant presence in the novel, as I have indicated in Chapter 3. The protagonist, Rufus, acts (partly) in his function as a journalist, and the novel includes embedded narratives describing his career development. The second major character in the novel is Zaq, a veteran reporter and Rufus's inspiration as a young writer. Together they travel through the Niger Delta in pursuit of the 'perfect story.' The duo's motivations, and that of the media in general, however, are revealed in the novel to be more suspect and complex than this plot-summary would suggest.

The flashbacks regarding Rufus's career illustrate and analyse the process of his becoming a journalist and its relation to the crisis explored in the novel. Rufus, after writing a piece on his family's tragedy, "posted the story on the internet" where "it had been quoted and reproduced over and over on websites" (135). Rufus's subsequent remark – that he had "of course" used this piece when applying for a job as "part of my CV" (135) – implies that he is using the suffering of his own family and the local population to further his career. The phrase "of course" suggests furthermore that this appropriation of suffering is common practice.

Financial motivation is revealed to be a significant factor in the journalists' professional motives, as Rufus shows when he returns to Zaq on Irikefe:

I briefed him on my interview with Floode and handed him his money. He opened the envelope and let the money fall out all over his lap, then he looked at me and shook his head, laughing drunkenly. – That is what I call good journalism. (118)

Though Rufus, when receiving the money from Floode, was unsure whether to accept it, this passage shows he has overcome his qualms. A number of factors are brought into the narrative to explain Rufus's choice to accept the money despite his protestations, such as his sister's financial troubles. Zaq's unveiled pleasure at the financial windfall, however, is not mediated through such factors. Zaq apparently does not consider the payment to pose an ethical dilemma, but rather accepts it immediately as a bonus (albeit quite unexpected). He does not present it to himself or Rufus (or the reader) as a personal reward from Mr Floode to himself, but states openly that the money is a by-product of "good journalism." Good journalism here is apparently judged by its financial rewards irrespective of the act or quality of reporting—suggestive of bribery and corruption.

Zaq's editor further exemplifies this opportunistic way of thinking as he tells Zaq to "take our subscription form when next you meet them" (32). When Zaq protests against this line of thinking, his editor explains:

How often does the oil company come knocking on your door, asking for a favour? We're talking petro-dollars here, and a major scoop! Come on. I can imagine the headlines already. This will be the making of us. Our circulation will hit the roof. (32)

The editor, Beke Johnson, views the kidnapping and their being chosen as the newspaper to cover it as a "big opportunity;" a situation to be welcomed. For Rufus, too, the dramatic potential of events surrounding Isabel Floode's kidnapping is seen as an opportunity to get his story on the front cover so that even "the most indifferent reader" is compelled "to stop and pick up the paper" (147). Both editor and journalist are shown to be exploiting the crisis situation for their own ends.

Rufus, himself straddling his loyalties to the media and to his Niger Delta roots, observes of the other journalists: "I was sure the whole adventure – or rather misadventure – was now to them nothing but a memory, anecdotal currency to

trade for a drink on a lazy day in the press clubroom” (5). Though all the journalists experienced and witnessed the same events, it is only Rufus and Zaq who are prepared to continue to look for Isabel Floode, while the other journalists return to Port Harcourt. The use of the term “currency” reflects the notion of the media as a business or industry, where dramatic stories are products of value to be sold to the highest bidder. A further distinction is made between the other journalists and Rufus and Zaq specifically, when they are referred to as “the journalists” by Rufus: “One of the men gave a shout from behind a tree, and when we went to him we found the journalists in an excited huddle, cameras flashing” (70). It is revealed that the object of their excitement is the discovery of the bodies of two young militants. The scene is presented in abject detail, but “the journalists” are described as a single entity excited by the discovery of a spectacular scene of violence with which to illustrate their stories. Though Rufus thus presents the other journalists as somehow separate from his own position and perspective, he too joins in taking photos of the scene and is similarly preoccupied with finding that “perfect, inevitable headline” (147).

Rufus’s conversation with the Professor demonstrates that the militants are aware of the media’s interest in the violence and kidnappings and attempt to use it to their advantage (in support of ransom demands) and to give voice to their cause. The media are, as I have shown in Chapter 3, more than willing to present the militants’ cause, as shown in the inherent bias of their account of the kidnapping: “A British woman kidnapped by local militants who are fighting to protect their environment from greedy multinational oil companies” (134). The fact that (financial) support is still given to the media by the oil companies in the form of payment for their services and material support for their visits to the militants suggests that, despite being described as “greedy,” corporate power is still dependent on the media for their activities. Though supposedly a separate, distinct and above all objective reporting power, the media are thus shown to be as much complicit in driving the crisis as the rest of the community. Ideologically and publicly, however, their narrative of good versus evil, and capitalist greed versus struggles for freedom, still seeks to suggest that they present an objective, external view.

Like the oil companies, the militants, too, place importance on media coverage as a means to facilitate ransom negotiations and simultaneously generate publicity for their cause. Less publicly accepted or even known is the media’s material interest in such stories and, by extension, their role in the perpetuation of the situation. As shown above, the media’s ideological and materially driven activities effectively support militant goals and thus facilitate the kidnappings and sabotage by rendering them visible. Though the novel does not show clearly whether the media does so deliberately, or with a political agenda of their own, *Oil on Water* does clearly suggest that the media are an involved and active party in the Delta’s continued crisis.

In Figure 2 below (presenting a section of Figure 1 as seen above) these relationships and dependencies are summarised by visualising the various connections – both supportive and antagonistic – between the media and the other stakeholder groups. Here we see the supportive relationship with corporate power in return for the media’s cooperation in mediating with the militant groups in cases of kidnapping and gain the scoop they desire. The second relationship between the media and corporate power is an antagonistic one whereby the media portray the oil companies as “greedy multinationals” and thus besmirch the latter’s reputation—both locally and globally. This perspective on the crisis is simultaneously reflected in the ideological support for the militants who gladly cooperate with the media in return. The media’s preferred narrative is also in support of the civilian population as well as antagonistic towards corrupt governing and political power, as visualised below.

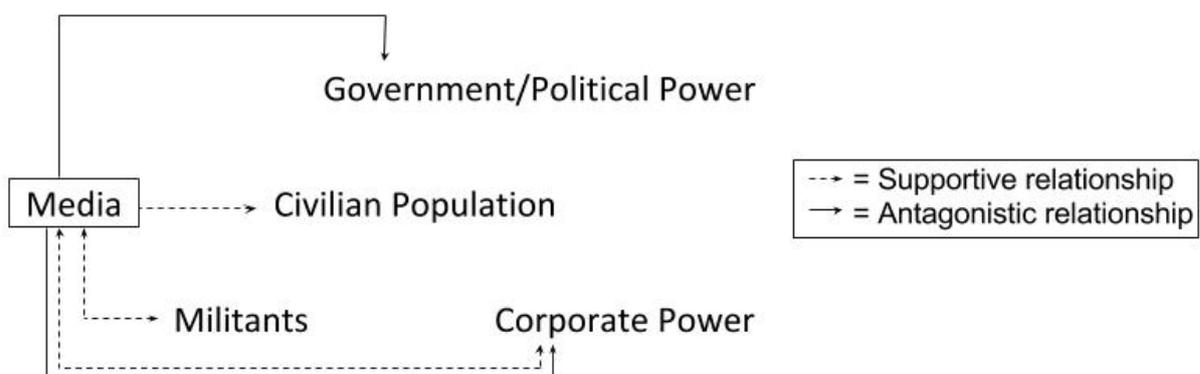


Figure 2

## Military

The passages that describe Rufus and Zaq's communications with the Major and his subordinates present a different picture from the official depiction of the crisis by the media. In one of these conversations the Major effects an explicit attack on the media's narrative that directly challenges their assumptions:

[O]ne of your plans on this trip is to interview the Professor, yes? Well, what do you know about him? I'll tell you what you know: he used to work for an oil company, and one day he grew disgusted with the environmental abuse and he became a militant to fight for change. That's what the papers say. Well, that isn't true. (96)

This view of the (in)famous militant leader, the Professor, supports the above "story" that the media like to present: where the militants are in a righteous struggle with the "greedy" multinational oil companies—as freedom fighters rather than terrorists. The Major, however, claims that the truth is rather different and reveals more about the "real" Professor:

A secondary-school dropout, a backstreet thug and bully who went to jail for the first time at fifteen [...] became a party thug in the pay of his local government chairman [...] was convicted of murder at the age of twenty-two and sent to prison for life [...] broke out of jail at thirty [...] his godfather called the police on him, and that was when he moved into the swamps and joined a rebel group that specialised in kidnapping foreigners for ransom. (96-97)

This narrative, firstly, depicts the Professor as a life-long criminal rather than a successful oil employee who became a militant from conviction. Secondly, it seems the Professor became a rebel out of necessity (as a fugitive) rather than through any drive to fight injustice. Thirdly, he is presented as having an interest only in the economic benefits of joining a rebel group, as is suggested by his choice of a group 'specialised' in making a livelihood from ransom demands. This narrative is presented by the Major, who functions in the novel as the representation of the military perspective as no other member of the military is given voice. As such he functions as a synecdoche for the military as a whole.

The military perspective (re)presented by the Major can be summarised as a view of the militants as criminals and terrorists; exploiting, blackmailing and

destroying innocent parties and property while it is the task of the military to eradicate this source of unjustifiable violence through use of necessary force in order to return peace to the Delta. It is thus the militants who are considered the source of the unrest, as is shown by the exclusive interest the military shows in the militants. The military's narrative is thus one of peacekeeping and policing activity in opposition to the chaos and violence perpetrated by criminals in the Delta. It is this narrative upon which the military's position within the Delta community is positioned, illustrating the group's position towards its enemies and the other stakeholders within the community.

While a pragmatic, economically-minded and legally justifiable case could be made in favour of the military's general policy (based on the importance of curbing acts of sabotage as illegal means to raise issues as opposed to the democratic means that are – technically – available in Nigeria), the novel consistently discredits the Major's words and actions, and thus his military's narrative, by revealing the Major's personal motivations and many of his actions in an unfavourable light. The first day Rufus, Zaq and their guides spend in the Major's custody they are exposed to his cruel methods in dealing with his militant prisoners. The prisoners (excluding Rufus and Zaq, but including Tamuna and Michael) are lined up, kneeling on the ground, as petrol is poured over their heads in a "brutal anointing" (55). The Major's motivation for this form of punishment is revealed when he speaks to his prisoners:

"What, you can't stand the smell of oil? Isn't it what you fight for, kill for? Go on, enjoy. By the time I'm through with you, you'll hate the smell of it, you won't take money that comes from oil, you won't get in a car because it runs on petrol. You'll hate the very name petrol."  
(55)

The Major apparently believes all his prisoners are militants, or closely connected to the militants, and (thus) deserving of this treatment. The reader knows, however, that Tamuno and Michael are not part of militant activity, rendering them acknowledged innocent victims. This speech also suggests that the Major believes that the militants' aim is ultimately to take over possession of oil and reap the financial rewards from the industry. Whether this is true or not, it is in contrast with the narrative the militants mainly present in the form of fighting against pollution and the lack of fair distribution of wealth. The Major, in any case, follows his own

view of the situation to the extreme, and acts accordingly. The corrosive liquid is painful to the skin, and the peeling skin of the prisoners reveals that this form of torture has been inflicted on them repeatedly. Despite the Major's seeming sense of logic and professional purpose (whether misguided or not), a less professional image is invoked through the doctor's observations to Rufus:

Look at the soldiers, look at their eyes, all feverish with excitement and expectation [...] of the day when the Major will strike a match and throw it at the bowed, petrol-soaked heads. One day it will happen – see how the Major's hands shake with the temptation. (55)

The military are here presented as a collection of individuals who share the Major's brutalising attitude and want him to go even further in his cruel treatment of the 'militants.' The reader's judgment of the character of the Major and the military's actions is thus coloured throughout the novel by the doctor's assessment and infuses the Major's voice with a sense of extremism, regardless of how reasonable his words may seem.

This image of the "mad Major" and his "demented patriotism" (150) is supported by one of his prisoners, who tells Rufus from experience what would be happening while they remain locked up:

[R]ight now the soldiers will be in line, shoulder to shoulder, all twenty of them, one sergeant, two corporals, and the rest privates, all standing at attention, and he'll be telling them why they must hate the militants, why they must fight to keep the country safe and united. (150)

Apparently, the Major presents this speech every day, reminding his soldiers of their patriotic duty and 'brainwashing' them by making it appear that they are on the 'right' side of the conflict against the militants. The Major is here shown to not merely (synecdochally) represent the military's biased perspective and position within the crisis, but as an individual is actually the source of the group's ideology.

The Major's explanation of his use of extreme violence in the Delta forms part of a justifying narrative that becomes clear later in the passage as he states: "It's my job to pursue them [the militants] to their swamp hideouts. I capture them, and most times it's easier to shoot them than to capture them. Saves time, saves the government money" (96). The character of the Major as a part standing for the

military whole is made explicit here by the character’s use of first-person pronouns for activity most likely conducted by the soldiers under his command rather than only by him personally. His reign of terror, supported by pragmatic and economic factors, lies at the heart of The Major’s view of *his* “job” to police the area—his personal ideology and sense of responsibility apparently informs the policies and actions of the military. Interesting here is that the presence of the oil companies as a factor is not included in his narrative. Without the presence of the oil industry the violence might not exist, but the Major does not acknowledge corporate power as an immediate factor in causing or exacerbating the violence. Corporate social responsibility is apparently not considered a factor here, and thus by extension the oil company functions as a victim of the “rebels, terrorists and kidnappers” rather than as an active party in the conflict.

Omitted from the Major’s narrative is the obvious fact that the military’s actions effectively benefit the oil company more than any other party. While the Major’s narrative does not include any reference to this effect as a conscious policy, the results of his general strategy to combat violence in the Delta by attempting to curb the power of the militants, combined with the lack of clear action (military, political or otherwise) against the company’s negative effects in the area, reveal an overall policy in favour of corporate power. The close connection between political power and corporate power presented in the novel suggests that this is effectively a matter of corruption, where the corporation’s influence over (national) politics includes effective control over, or favourable treatment by, the country’s military power.

As visualised in the diagram below, the Military’s position in the Delta community is thus one officially connected to government and political power, but unofficially and most effectively in support of corporate power by displaying a

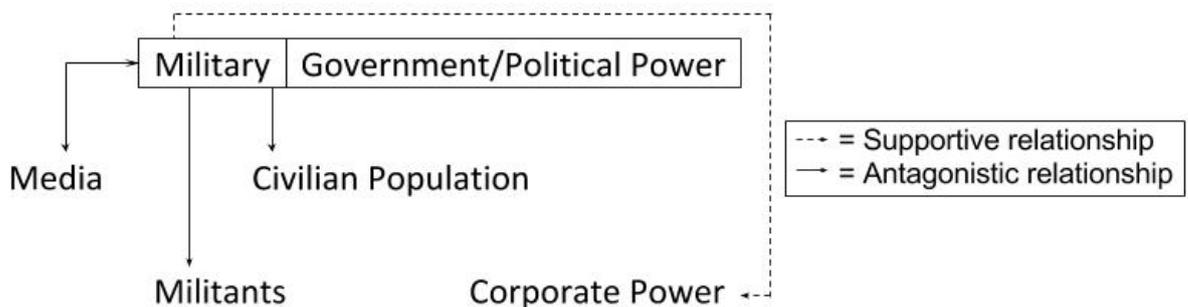


Figure 3

violently antagonistic relationship with the militants, which includes the maltreatment of the civilian population. The relationship between military and media is one of mutual distrust and dislike, as the military considers the media potential threats to its official narrative and treats them as antagonists, as the media consider the military to be on the wrong side of the struggle and therefore represent the militants as the victims of the struggle.

### **Militants**

In contrast to the narrative presented by the military in the voice of the Major, the perspective of the militants, or at least the militant group led by the Professor, presents a different picture: “We are not the barbarians the government propagandists say we are. We are for the people. Everything we do is for the people” (209). Both denying and justifying the group’s actions, the Professor presents himself as a leader and protector of “the people.” This tone of martyrdom and revolution is how the Professor tells Rufus about the group’s beliefs and aims in opposition to the other stakeholder groups. Similar to the Major, the Professor functions in the novel as a synecdoche—his narrative, ideology and actions standing for those of the entire group of militants.

This narrative is centred on the notion of both victimhood and freedom fighting, as his advice to Rufus reveals:

“Write only the truth. Tell them about the flares you see at night, and the oil on the water. And the soldiers forcing us to escalate the violence every day. Tell them how we are hounded daily in our own land [...] Tell them, we are going nowhere. This land belongs to us.” (209-210)

In its echoes of the novel’s title and the status of this image as “only the truth,” the environmental impact of the oil industry as a major theme in the novel is underlined as a main justification for the militants’ actions. Additionally, by emphasising how the militants are the indigenous people and that the “land belongs to us,” the Professor is implicating both the military (“the soldiers”) and the oil companies (“the flares,” “oil on the water”) in their dispossession and in the escalating violence.

The Professor does not claim innocence for all militant forces in the Delta, however:

“I am aware that, out there, there are criminal elements looting and killing under the guise of freedom fighting, but we are different. Those kind of rebels, they are our enemies. That is why I am letting you go, so you can write the truth.” (209)

His narrative includes condemning other militant groups as “enemies,” thus replicating the vocabulary of the military. This passage also serves to distance himself from other militant groups—illustrating the fragmented nature of militant activity in the Delta. Whether the Professor’s group also engages in (violent) conflict with other militant groups is not made clear, but important for the Professor’s narrative is the notion of his being a lone voice of truth and force for freedom and equality.

However, his professed qualifications as a militant leader include the use of military terminology: “I am a soldier, I know how to fight, and I will never stop fighting till I achieve my goal” (208). Here the Professor invokes the status of a soldier despite his condemnation of the military’s activity in the Delta. By placing himself on an equal footing with the military, he suggests that the struggle is one of force against force, revealing the narrative of a soldier and warrior rather than a saint or martyr whose goal is peace. The group’s plans reveal that they regard themselves as soldiers fighting a civil war:

“We are going out on an operation; you may have noticed the whole camp getting ready. By this time tomorrow, one of the major oil depots will be burning. I want you to write about it, tell them I am responsible. I can’t tell you more than that, but I can tell you the war is just starting.” (208)

His use of the personal pronoun “I”, to stress that he is personally “responsible” for actions perpetrated by the militant gang in general, echoes the Major’s language and renders the character of the Professor similarly synecdochally. By using terms such as “operation,” “camp” and “war,” the Professor also expresses his account of a struggle for freedom for the people in military terms. As he tells us later, however, he considers the other party responsible for forcing him to escalate the violence: he thus suggests he is a reluctant party in the violence. Although each group presents a conflicting narrative, the novel presents the Professor’s and Major’s positions in a highly similar fashion: each posing as the leader and representative of a group

whose main activity, or even purpose, is violence. By portraying these similarities in narrative and language as well as action, the novel problematises the justifications of each group—suggesting they share more similarities than differences as actors in the crisis, despite presenting ideological opposites.

The Professor's official narrative of seeking truth and freedom in service to 'the people' is also internally problematised by his physical and personal stance as described by Rufus: "The Professor was lying in a hammock [...] There were about a dozen men around him, all armed, all looking distrustfully at me" (207). The effect of this representation of the Professor's manner of receiving Rufus is not that of a friend of the people but rather that of a gang leader or dictator: menacing, and intended to express power. This image of the militant group as a gang or the local mob is taken to a more explicit level near the end of the novel, when Rufus, the escaped Isabel Floode and Chief Ibiram's people are on their way to Port Harcourt. They are suddenly stopped and surrounded by the Professor and his militants, who then threaten Chief Ibiram's people for concealing and helping the hostage. The Professor says:

"She came to you, then you should have known what to do. Tell me, what should you have done when my prisoner escapes and comes to you? I can't hear you. Louder! – I should have come to you. I am sorry. This will not happen again. – You are right, it will not happen again. To make sure it doesn't I will take one of you with me. Just as insurance. When we are sure you haven't gone to the government soldiers to betray us, he will be released. You decide who." (187)

The Professor here explicitly invokes the power he holds over the local population—a power shown here to be based on violence when the passage ends in the death of Tamuno and the imprisonment of Rufus, Mrs Floode and Salomon.

The Professor's actual power in the situation emerges again when he threatens Rufus, warning him to "be careful, whatever you write, be careful. I am watching you. I have people everywhere" (209). Though the Professor repeatedly entreats Rufus to write only the truth, his threat warns Rufus that he is controlling this "truth." The Professor's menacing show of power is revealed again when Rufus is ordered to deliver a threat to Mr Floode:

“Take this envelope to her husband: it contains more of her hair. Tell him his wife is safe, but after two days, if we don’t hear from him, we can’t guarantee her safety any more. We are getting impatient.” (209)

The deadline of two days, added to the point that they “are getting impatient,” reveals the Professor’s control over the situation, as opposed to his initial presentation of his group as innocent victims of the military. The Professor thus presents his militant group as a form of policing power with regard to Big Oil: their violent activities are aimed towards curbing and eventually removing the oil industry’s activities. To that end they use what they consider ‘necessary force.’

However, the various militant groups also recognise the economic potential of their activity through blackmail and ransom and thus find themselves in a lucrative position. As Rufus explains, the militant gangs “always returned to the pipelines and oil rigs and refineries, which they constantly threatened to blow up, thereby ensuring for themselves a steady livelihood” (7). The use of the word “threatened” is key here, as the militants do not aim to actually destroy corporate property: “So why haven’t the militants bombed the pipelines here? – Because the oil companies pay them not to do so” (34). Having secured a reputation for the actual destruction of property the militants have recognised the more desirable results that can be gained from trading inaction for capital gain.

Their livelihood extends to the income generated by the kidnapping of oil employees or their dependents:

The Professor needed to raise money quick quick to pay for a consignment of guns he was expecting from overseas [...] His assignment was simple: take some of the boys, and enough guns and boats and everything you need, go to one of the oil companies in Port Harcourt and kidnap one foreign oil worker and bring him back. (193)

This passage makes explicit the underlying financial imperatives driving many kidnappings. To finance the struggles against the military and the multinational corporations, the militants resort to kidnapping for ransom. Such kidnappings, despite the rhetoric used, are not purely in order to make corporate power see the error of their ways, but rather for financial gain. This mundane imperative for kidnapping foreign oil workers is mirrored in this passage by its tone, that renders the assignment more in the style of a shopping list than a militant operation. The

“boys” are to kidnap “one foreign oil worker” and “bring him back” with which the traditional ‘recipe’ for kidnappings may be followed. The political aims of the militants are thus closely intermingled with financial imperatives leading to a (potential) conflict between ideological narrative and the nature of their activity: do they act in order to remove corporate power, or do they act to generate income (thus rendering themselves dependent on the *continuing* presence of corporate power)? While the Professor’s words and ideas suggest he does not act purely for personal gain, Rufus is told that “he loves the media, he loves talking about his war for the environment” (205). The suggestion that the Professor “loves the media” and “loves talking about” his environmental battle implies that he is driven more by a sense of self-importance and self-aggrandising motivations than by moral outrage, and that he exploits the media in order to promote his own self-sacrificing image. The novel demonstrates, then, the mixed motives and subterfuges that underlie the militants’ supposedly ideological battle against both military and corporate power.

How the militants could have come to gain significant enough support to keep up their numbers by attracting new members – despite the dangers inherent in their activities – is clarified by Salomon’s narrative where the escalation of Mrs Floode’s personal situation into her being kidnapped is described. This narrative, centred on Salomon and his partners’ role in the kidnapping, serves in the novel as an illustration and exploration of the circumstances and ideas that could lead to militant activity and the development of militant gangs in the Delta. The notion of necessity and martyrdom is introduced as a factor in these passages, where the reader comes to understand the logic behind the violence, the kidnappings and other forms of extortion. The situation described in the novel starts with Mrs Floode finding out that the housemaid (Salomon’s fiancée Koko) is pregnant as a result of her affair with Mr Floode. With the help of Salomon, her driver, she decides to stay in a motel owned by his uncle. When Salomon tells a friend (Bassey) about his troubles, the latter contacts a befriended police officer named Jamabo, “who came up with the kidnapping idea” (199). The officer immediately jumps at the opportunity and tells the other two that “as a police officer he had seen many cases of kidnapping and it is like plucking money off a money tree” (199). The idea is also presented as a minor version of kidnapping, as Mrs Floode “would remain in the

motel room, we'd treat her well, and we'd let her go as soon as we had the money" (200)—a situation similar to what the victim originally intended.

Another, highly relevant, argument posed by Salomon's friend concerns the notion of justice and repayment:

"[T]he money wasn't even coming out of his pocket: the oil company always pays the ransom, and Bassey said that if you thought about it carefully, you'd realize that the money came from our oil, so we would be getting back what was ours in the first place." (200)

What convinces Salomon, however, is not the idea of monetary gain but Jamabo's argument that "technically it wasn't even kidnapping" as he would just be "collecting payment for all the pain these people caused me, a refund for all my investment in Koko" (200), while Mrs Floode would be safe and comfortable in her motel room. Of interest here is the notion of Salomon having "invested" in Koko—an investment that failed with her breaking her engagement. While the passage does not specify the exact nature of this investment, the notion of Salomon's time and/or money and/or emotions having been lost by Mr Floode's actions both removes Koko's own responsibility and wishes in the matter as a factor, and reduces her to an item of monetary value. A similar process is found in the discussion regarding the amount of ransom to be demanded, as Jamabo explains:

"Last week, a foreign family was kidnapped, a man and his wife, their company paid three million ransom for them. Cash. This woman is worth nothing less than that, but if they decide to negotiate we can go down to two million." (202)

Mrs Floode's value is determined in comparison with other, similar 'products' and their 'market value,' already considering the negotiating process and the potentially lower 'demand' for their 'supply'—thus applying capitalist logic to the kidnapped woman's life, safety and freedom. Salomon's position on the subject, however, is more emotionally involved than that of Bassey and Jamabo, as his motivation mainly stems from anger towards Mr Floode: "[T]hat was what convinced me. The Oga had insulted me badly, he'd taken away my pride, my dignity, my manhood, and all the time I was serving him honestly, diligently" (200). A sense of justice, or even revenge, for various injustices done is therefore what drives Salomon's complicity in the kidnapping.

Each of the three men represents a different type of argument: Jamabo's argument and reason for his actions is simply the financial reward for kidnapping; Bassey considers the notion of justice being done for the oil company's supposed theft of natural resources; and Salomon is convinced by the idea of repayment for his suffering and loss of value (his "investment" in Koko). They thus represent corruption, anger and revenge in various forms, including justification by the latter two through a notion of claiming justice. The eventual conclusion, however, is boiled down to two factors: "This was the chance of a lifetime. And, like Jamabo said, it wasn't a real kidnapping" (200), thus prioritising the financial gain while appeasing their consciences through their method.

These arguments and the logic behind them quickly become irrelevant, however, as the situation escalates. We are told how Jamabo quickly relinquishes his previous argument: "this is not a real kidnapping, I said. Isn't it? He asked. My friend, kidnapping is kidnapping" (202) and later: "we will get the same prison sentence regardless of how much we ask for. You are a kidnapper already" (202). Once the kidnapping is established as a fact, Jamabo thus drops all pretence regarding the technicalities of the nature of the deed and reveals his manipulation of Salomon's vulnerabilities. Jamabo's next actions follow the new narrative of a "real" kidnap and he treats Mrs Floode accordingly by ensuring their possession over her by moving her to a second location, within the Delta itself. After escaping and being caught again and eventually finding herself in the custody of the Professor, she has in actuality become the kidnapped subject she initially pretended to be.

In the militants' official narrative, reflected in Salomon, Bassey and Jamabo's motivations, this group is in a struggle with corporate power and the military in defence of the rights of the local, civilian population. In reality, however, as visualised by Figure 4 below, the militants' violence towards corporate power and the military is to the detriment of the civilian population, while their further activities are founded and dependent on the continuation of corporate activity in

the Delta. *Oil on Water* thus reveals the militants' conflicting imperatives in reaction to corporate influence in the area.

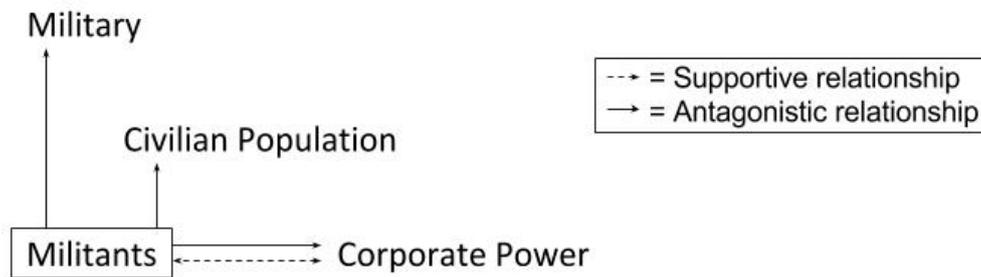


Figure 4

### Civilian Population

The position of the civilian population in the Niger Delta is most poignantly explored in Chief Ibiram's narrative concerning the Oil Company's interest in the village's property. As I have shown, corporate power and political power worked closely together in favour of corporate plans. The narrative also includes a discussion of the village's struggles in which its position within the Delta's society is explicated, showing the dilemmas and developments such communities deal with on a political, economic and social level.

The narrative shows, through Chief Ibiram's narration, the destructive effects of the oil company's actions on the local villagers. Chief Ibiram narrates how, as happens with many such villages, his predecessor was visited by "oil-company men [...] accompanied by important politicians from Port Harcourt" (38) with whom he held many long conversations on behalf of the village. The original location of the village is presented as a natural idyll:

Once upon a time they lived in paradise, he said, in a small village close to Yellow Island. They lacked for nothing, fishing and hunting and farming and watching their children growing up before them, happy. (38)

Though this fairy tale idyll might be a greatly exaggerated description of the reality, it does describe the past in which local industry thrived and the environment was not yet polluted. This description thus serves as a recollection of a past in which the oil industry had not yet pervaded the area. The narrative soon introduces these

developments, as Ibiram relates the changes they observed in other village communities, including:

“the gas flares that lit up neighbouring villages all day and all night, and the cars and TVs and video players in the front rooms of their neighbours who had allowed the flares to be set up. Some of the neighbours were even bragging that the oil companies had offered to send their kids to Europe and America to become engineers, so that one day they could return and work as oil executives in Port Harcourt. (38)

This account shows how the multinational oil companies managed to gain the rights from the local population to source gas on their land in exchange for short-term gain: a sudden and dramatic increase in wealth as well as the hope for their children’s future employment with them.

Many of the local people are understandably tempted by these promises. When Chief Malabo calls a village meeting, he tells the people that the oil company “had offered to buy the whole village, and with the money [...] they could relocate elsewhere and live a rich life” (38-39). Understandably, the village is tempted by this offer: “with the flare in the next village burning over them every night, its flame long and coiled like a snake, whispering, winking, hissing” (38). This description of the flare as a snake recalls the temptation of Eve in the garden of Eden, as well as the detrimental results of falling into temptation. By doing so, the local population promotes the spread of corporate power throughout the Delta.

Chief Malabo’s village does not immediately comply, however. The oil company apparently recognises the need to speak to the Chief rather than the individual inhabitants, and the Chief answers as the representative of the village community in its entirety: “on behalf of the whole village he had said no” (39). Malabo’s reasoning is given:

This was their ancestral land, this was where their fathers and their fathers’ fathers were buried. They’d been born here, they’d grown up here, they were happy here, and though they may not be rich, the land had been good to them, they never lacked for anything. What kind of custodians of the land would they be if they sold it off? (39)

Not only does he refer to their ancestors, their tradition and history as a people and their responsibility as custodians of the land to convince the villagers to stay—Malabo also refers to reality, which appears less promising than it has seemed:

And just look at the other villages that had taken the oil money: already the cars had broken down, and the cheap television and DVD players were all gone, and where was the rest of the money? Thrown away in Port Harcourt bar rooms, or on second wives and funeral parties, and now they were worse off than before. Their rivers were already polluted and useless for fishing, and the land grew only gas flares and pipelines. (39)

The narration emphasises the very short-term nature of the other villagers' gain and the destructive effects of the promises of material benefit to long-term social and environmental welfare.

Malabo's advice initially succeeds in restraining the village from selling out to the oil company so that, when oil-company boats start to trespass on the village's territory, "the village decided to keep them away by sending out their own patrols over the surrounding rivers" (39). The chief's influence slowly wanes, however, and the narrative figures this in a continuation of the Edenic imagery: "the snake, the snake in the garden wouldn't rest, it kept on hissing and the apple only grew larger and more alluring each day" (39).

As I have discussed in section 3 of this chapter, the village is eventually forced off their land through the intervention of corrupt politicians and enforced cooperation:

They had a contract, they said, Chief Malabo had signed it in prison before he died, selling them all of his family land, and that was where they'd start drilling, and whoever wanted to join him and sell his land would be paid handsomely, but the longer the people held out, the more the value of their land would fall. (40)

The result of the threats and extortion is predictable: "They sold. One by one" (40). A small group refuses, however: "we decided to leave, ten families. We didn't take their money. The money would be our curse on them, for taking our land, and for killing our chief" (40). This group is all that is left of the village and continues to search for a new home under Chief Ibiram's leadership.

This narrative serves as a summary of the hopeless situation of many such village communities in the context of the Niger Delta, visualised in Figure 5 below. These communities are either tempted or forced into selling their land to corporate power. The latter uses political and governmental power to persuade or extort cooperation, and rather than being represented by these politicians or defended by local police forces, the population is targeted by both to the benefit of the oil companies. Situations such as this are prefigured in the novel as Rufus visits one of many such abandoned villages: “A square concrete platform dominated the village centre like some sacrificial altar” (8). The platform is covered with equipment, identifying it as a representation of the oil company’s presence in the village. Its description, however, prefigures the sacrifice communities such as this make in exchange for wealth but also ultimate abjection. Despite some attempts at resistance directed towards the corporate presence, the village community’s relationships with the much more powerful government and corporate power prove to be to their detriment. As a result, many youths from the Delta join the militants, and thus strengthen (and complicate) the relationship between the local population and the militants.

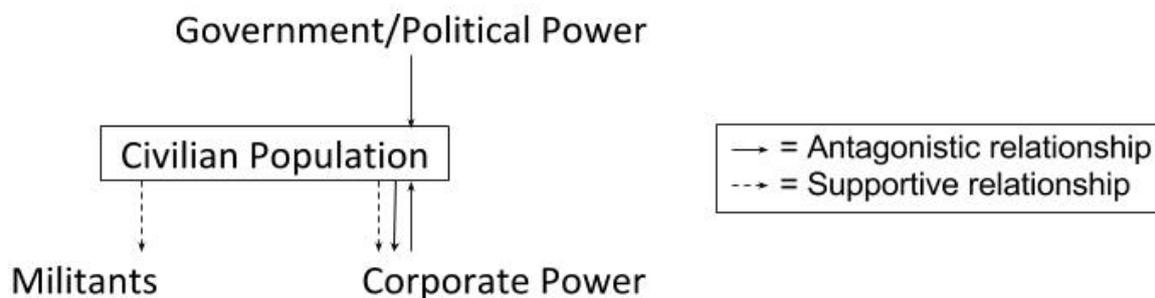


Figure 5

Though the plight of the civilian population is explored in these narratives as mostly one of hopeless dejection, what the fictional communities of Chief Ibiram’s village and the island of Irikefe also illustrate is the resistant nature and resilience of such communities. Social theorist Akinola identifies such effective self-organising arrangements that have emerged in response to the Delta’s crises and the government’s failure to provide security and stability or even basic political representation:

The local people through self-organizing arrangements, shared strategies and problem-solving interdependencies are more effective in responding to community needs and aspirations than governments and their agencies. (58-59)

Irikefe as a community, led by the shrine as its apparent centre of organisation, illustrates the functions Akinola identifies at the core of such “community development associations” (68):

- (a) infrastructural development;
- (b) settling of disputes;
- (c) promotion of community relations;
- (d) maintenance of socio-cultural functions;
- (e) local governance of the community. (69)

Irikefe’s characteristics as a fully functional and self-supporting community where infrastructure, governance and social structures are implemented internally and locally by the community itself, are illustrated by the various encounters, adventures and discussions Rufus has on the island and with the community’s members. The Priest Naaman tells Rufus and Zaq that together with his fellow priests “together we represent the entire community” (158). They exert their authority most clearly when they confine Rufus and Zaq on the island in response to their disturbance of Isabel Floode’s (empty) grave: “please remain in your hut. The elders will hold a meeting and decide what is to be done” (159). The community is clearly governed internally by these elders, as no external source of authority or justice is requested. The elders’ authority also extends to the rest of the community regarding infrastructure, community relations and socio-cultural functions as revealed by the organisation surrounding the burial of the head priestess: “there will be no ferry to take you off the island. There will be no movement or activity till after the burial. The whole community will be in mourning” (160). The village community’s self-sufficiency and self-governance on a day-to-day basis are not interfered with by external authorities, illustrating the village’s effective status as a functioning community development association (CDA) and a unity that defines itself as separate to any other governing unit. Later it is revealed, however, that the island is not entirely autonomous, but is under the ‘protection’ of the militants—an arrangement that, however, does serve to render the community independent from

acquisition by the oil companies, but in the power and under the mercy of the militants.

Despite such community's failures as represented in the novel, Akinola identifies the potential of such communities. CDAs such as shown in the novel by the community on Irikefe form one of two types of "self-governing community based institutions" (68) that Akinola identifies as having emerged in the Niger Delta in successful response to the crisis of representation. The other type is "Town Development Unions (TDU)" that "[rally] community members together in addressing community problems"—centred on a village or town community (68). This second type is explored in *Oil on Water* through the village community led by Chief Ibiram. As I show above, his community, having been displaced from its geographical home, travels and settles as a unity in the novel, and responds to threats and problems without reference to external authority. In response to the failure of state authority, this village community has developed itself more or less autonomously in the Delta to navigate this crisis of corporate ingression, functioning as a small source of potential and hope in the novel.

### **Expat Community**

That it is considered "almost perfect" that it is a *British woman* who is kidnapped (134), combined with the notion of the local militants as revolutionaries or rebels rather than terrorists, suggests the view that the wife of a foreign oil employee is not considered an innocent victim, but rather deserves her fate in some way. This "good story for any newspaper" (134) does not seem to include much empathy for her plight, possibly due to her direct connections to the "greedy multinational oil companies" (134). This suggested lack of empathy is supported by the passage describing Rufus's proposal to his editors:

I told them I'd write it not as a kidnapping story only, but I'd try to find out what kind of woman the hostage was: if she had children, if she regretted coming to Nigeria, if she had any message for her husband. Things like that. The three men waited to hear more, but I remained quiet. – Is that all? I could see the editor was trying hard not to snigger. – Well, sir, there is also the effect on the international price of oil (50)

Various ideas on the situation become clear in this passage. Firstly, the editors' reaction "Is that all?" to Rufus's suggestion that deeper insight into Mrs Floode as an individual would be of interest suggests that the 'British woman' herself is irrelevant to the story, or at least of very little value to the media. In an attempt to save face, Rufus eventually adds the idea of including a discussion of the effect of the kidnapping on the international price of oil. Though a reaction by the editors to this perspective on the story is not included in the passage, the fact that Rufus considers this point of view of potential interest to the editors above a focus on the woman's personal experiences and views reveals the media's preoccupation with crises in the oil industry in general and less with (local) collateral damage in the form of individual suffering by foreigners such as the British Mrs Floode.

Mrs Floode's treatment in the novel illustrates an ambivalent and dubious relationship between the media and foreign individuals connected to the oil industry. This dual treatment also figures in the local population's reaction to Mrs Floode's presence: various local communities (such as Irikefe) refuse to harbour Isabel Floode when she flees imprisonment, while others (such as Chief Ibiram's village) protect her despite the danger and violence directed to them.

This struggle between support and antagonism is reflected in Rufus's own ambivalent feelings towards Isabel Floode. Rufus narrates how, until he met Isabel Floode, he "had only thought of her as a subject, if I thought of her at all" (174). As discussed above, the kidnapping and the victim involved have only been valued for their narrative potential as a 'good story.' Rufus, when he meets her, is then confronted with her humanity: "perhaps because of my weakened state, I found myself trying to imagine what must have gone through her mind" (174). It is revealing that Rufus needs to have become "weakened" to feel empathy for Mrs Floode: empathy is clearly a reaction that Rufus finds surprising in himself, and not a function of his 'healthy' self. One page later, Rufus considers a different perspective:

Maybe fate wanted to show her first-hand the carcasses of the fish and crabs and water birds that floated on the deserted beaches of these tiny towns and villages and islands every morning, killed by the oil her husband was helping to produce. (175)

When observing the carcasses and the deserted beaches outside the window, his thoughts thus turn in a different direction and he considers Isabel Floode's position deserved. Rufus now considers the blame that lies at her husband's feet and by extension her own responsibility rather than her suffering by the hands of the militants.

Rufus's view of Mr and Mrs Floode as parties to the oil industry and thus to the pollution and death in the Delta is evident more often throughout the novel than his capacity for empathy. When meeting with Mr Floode, Rufus considers the Floodes' presence in "one of the many colonial-style buildings on the Port Harcourt waterfront, where most of the wealthy expatriate oil workers lived" (104) that is in sharp contrast with Rufus' own living arrangements:

I could take his money and walk out and nothing would happen. Wasn't he in my country, polluting my environment, making millions in the process? Surely I was entitled to some reparation, some rent money from him? (111)

Though he eventually does not follow through on this thought, his process reveals a frustration with the presence of foreign oil workers in Nigeria: representations of the corporate presence in the region that seems to reap all the (financial) benefits from an industry that is destroying the Delta and its inhabitants.

Rufus's feelings towards the inequality between the local population and the expat community is summarised when he leaves the house, and this different life, behind: "I avoided his eyes as I left him to his cocktail, his split-unit air-conditioning, his beautiful maid, his BBC-news, his stubble, his double-gated seafront house" (112). These passages illustrate how outrage overrules Rufus' empathy for the individual suffering by the Floodes and other victims of kidnapping. This relativistic approach to the various sources of suffering in the Delta is also reflected by the Professor, of whom Rufus asks whether Isabel Floode is still alive:

Is that all you want from me, to tell you whether some foreign hostage is alive or not? Who is she in the context of the war that's going on out there, the hopes and ambitions being created and destroyed? Can't you see the larger picture? (148)

Individual suffering as a result of activism, revenge and opportunism is thus considered subservient to the ideals and outrage of the militants. Isabel is

considered a minor sacrifice in service to the war for the Delta. Apparently most relevant for the militants is the “larger picture” whereas the individual, especially a foreign individual, is collateral damage.

Apart from the professional relationship with their employer, the expat community does not have any other ally in *Oil on Water*, rendering this stakeholder group in effect segregated from the Delta community and vulnerable to antagonism. Their potential suffering is merely taken as collateral damage in the form of ransom money by the oil companies, while the other groups in the region either ignore their presence or humanity or are explicitly antagonistic. This significant separation from the other stakeholders is reflected in the description of the expat community’s physical distance from the rest of the Delta community. Rufus narrates how the Floode residence “was hidden behind a tall, barbed-wire-topped wall, and I passed through two gates and about half a dozen security men talking to each other on radios” (104). Though a necessity for the security of the inhabitants of the compound, the physical separation between inside and outside in the form of the wall, the barbed-wire and the guards, places the expat community in a world of their own. The wealth and luxury that Rufus finds in the compound further increases the difference and distance between the expats and the other groups in the community. I do not mean to suggest here, however, that this distinction overlaps with a racial divide, despite this being the case between Rufus and Floode.

The expat community’s state of segregation, whether deliberate or not, is also illustrated by Mr Floode, who tells Rufus: “I haven’t been here long, you know. This is my second year in the country and I’m still trying to understand the place and the people. I think Nigerians are very nice and hospitable” (105). Though living in Nigeria for more than a year, Floode has clearly had little contact with the Nigerian population outside of his compound. Though his driver and maid and likely other servants are members of the local population, the class divide clearly curbs interactions. His stance is also that of an outside observer rather than an unfamiliar participant in the community as is revealed through his observation to Rufus: “a lot of you chaps do marry rather early, isn’t that so? A few of the workers I know, very young, but they always talk about their families. Children and all” (105). The generalising tone of his observances, as well as the use of words such as “you chaps” and the distancing “they” and “their,” reinforce this stance. Despite Floode’s

relationship with his maid Koko, he still has difficulties “understanding the place and the people.”

Rufus represents the experiences and stance of the local population in general towards the expat community as he narrates: “I wasn’t used to talking to people like him, and I was nervous” (105). His use of the phrase “people like him” echoes Mr Floode’s othering perspective. This comment also implies Rufus’ nervousness is a result of the expats’ segregation from Nigerian society, as he is not “used to” talking to foreign oil employees. Rufus adds a more menacing tone to his perspective, however, as he observes Floode:

I loved the way his face turned meat-red, and the way he used his glass to cover his mouth, which had suddenly tightened, I loved the debate in his eyes: to kick out this nosy African or to tolerate him. (109)

Rather than present the wealthy foreigner as antagonistic towards the local population, in a stereotype of a colonial dynamic, Habila presents this dynamic as Rufus’ assessment of the situation. Whether Rufus’ assessment is accurate or not, Rufus is here made to illustrate the dynamic of mutual distrust that characterises the expat community’s presence in the region.

This mutual distrust is further developed in the passage as a matter of misunderstanding, as Floode argues his opinion on the militant activities in the Delta: “Our pipelines are vandalized daily, losing us millions... and millions for the country as well. The people don’t understand what they do to themselves” (107). Rufus’ simple answer: “But they do understand” (107), followed by an explanation of the complex situation and a defence of the local population in the Delta, seems to be convincing: “You argue rather well, I must give you that” (108). However, the compliment does not go further than to commend Rufus’ debating skills, suggesting Floode may not understand, but is also not interested in truly understanding the local Other.

Lack of understanding between the expat community and the local population also features in Mrs Floode’s position as she communicates informally with Salomon for the first time:

He looked and sounded different. He was wearing a jacket – a bit tight around the shoulders – and it gave him a more formal air than the

uniform ever did; and he wasn't speaking the usual pidgin English that she found so irksome and that had always had to be explained to her. Today he spoke a grammatically faultless English, and even the accent was modified, easy to understand. Later she discovered that he was actually a university graduate. (182-83)

Cultural differences and prejudices are shown here also to be artificial, and not just a matter of arrogant foreigners keeping the inferior locals at a distance. Salomon's reasons for concealing his education are not made clear, but his previous choice to not aid Mrs Floode in communicating forms an act of deference towards the expat that is then echoed by her own sense of difference towards Salomon, despite her previous attempts at building a relationship with her driver. Another perspective on the matter is that Salomon was not willing to adjust his language to accommodate Mrs Floode, as pidgin English might be his main language.

What these passages illustrate is the novel's problematising of a binary or colonial dynamic between black and white or local and foreign. Although matters of power dynamics, segregation, antagonism and othering all feature in Rufus' interaction with Mr Floode, the details of the conversation as well as the restrictions, personal antagonism and dangers foreigners encounter in the Delta community problematise a simple reading of the dynamics. The novel's exploration of the complexity of the relationships between the various stakeholders in the Delta in general supports this stance.

As visible in the graph in Figure 6 below, the position of the expat community is not as privileged as their wealth and Rufus's perspective on the community suggest. The possibility of being kidnapped and held for ransom is a constant factor in the community. Though the employees are warned of the possibility by their employers, and although there is no doubt the oil companies will negotiate with the militants, the inherent danger and the reported incidental accidents and deaths create an unstable and insecure environment, however luxurious it may be in a

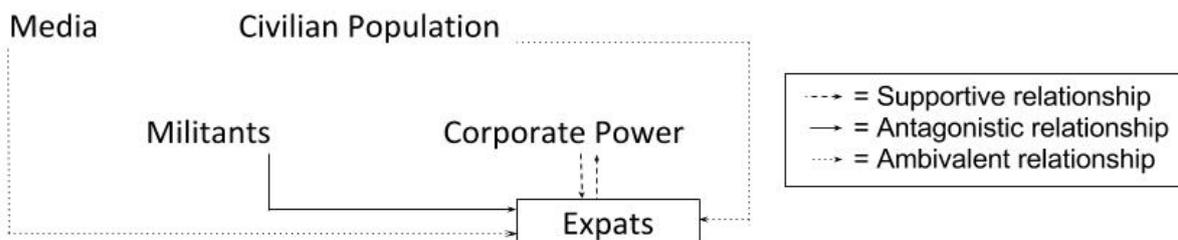


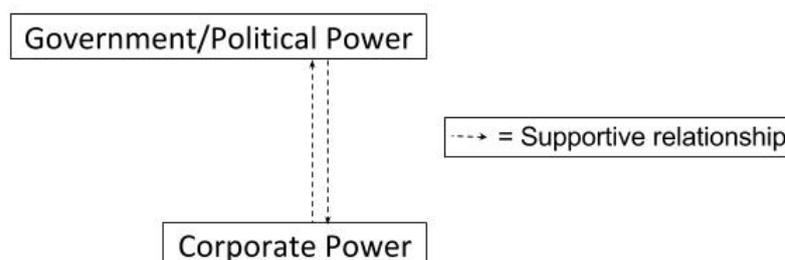
Figure 6

material sense. In effect, the expat community is not merely segregated, it is in fact imprisoned in a gated community. It is exactly this luxurious, segregated environment that conceives antagonism, however, as the novel illustrates through Rufus and Salomon and his partners and the ambivalent position the various stakeholders take in the matter.

### **Corporate Power**

It is highly significant that the novel does not represent the positions of the two stakeholders who might be considered the most powerful: the oil company and government/political power. Though the former is represented by the presence of employed individuals and security forces and the latter group is represented by the occasional appearance of politicians in the various embedded narratives throughout the novel, corporate and political thought, investment and activity are not given explicit voice. As I have shown above, the omnipresence of corporate power is established throughout the novel despite the lack of direct narrative focus. Political power, however, appears only in embedded narratives and in direct connection to corporate leaders, suggesting the former is subordinate to the latter. Though government action as presented in the novel in flashback narratives is included, at the time of the main narrative it is non-existent apart from what may be indirectly inferred from military and political activity (or lack thereof). This exclusion of representations of government is highly suggestive as it is thus presented as an irrelevant or at least powerless factor in the crisis.

As visualised in Figure 7 below, in combination with the above-mentioned political activity the novel thus presents a situation where political/governmental power is effectively steered by corporate power which is, in turn, the most powerful party in the Delta. However, as I have shown, the militant gangs remain powerful



*Figure 7*

enough to curb corporate influence to a significant extent, rendering the Delta a volatile but more or less stable equilibrium in which crisis is the order of the day.

## Conclusion

As these two chapters show, *Oil on Water*'s exploration of the reality of the present socio- and politico-economic situation in the Niger Delta demonstrates how the marginalisation, unemployment and poverty of the population as well as the pollution of the environment are directly connected to the presence and influence of corporate power in the region. My analysis of the novel through the notion of corporate ingression maps the novel's engagement with the effects of the presence of corporate power in the Delta in the form of its restructuring of the community and the extended cultural influence corporate power exerts over the Niger Delta. The presence of corporate power and the oil industry is explored in the novel as the main source of the dynamic equilibrium formed by and between the various stakeholders in the Delta, through its significant influence on the structure of Nigerian government and politics, its policing power and the Delta's society in general. The community and its internal struggles are characterised by crises of violence between stakeholders and mobility and displacement of the population. Furthermore, this situation extends its influence throughout the community into its sub-communities or stakeholder groups and their various (biased) narratives, which are shown in *Oil on Water* to support and often drive antagonism towards each other.

This analysis of *Oil on Water*, placed in context, shows the relevance of a concept of corporate ingression in considering the novel's exploration of the underlying structures and processes of a contemporary community strongly influenced by corporate power. It reveals, too, Habila's exploration of these themes through intricate and ambivalent techniques that resonate with the complexities and ambivalences of the relations within and between the various stakeholder groups of the Delta region of Nigeria. Rather than a straightforward narrative of 'evil corporation' versus 'innocent victims,' Habila confronts the reader with an ethically complex dynamic in which matters of responsibility and agency are problematised and explored through a variety of characters and communities.

Habila's novel functions as a fictional but politically and ethically committed portrayal and exploration of the various global and local political, economic and cultural forces that drive and influence this local community, including the accompanying ethical complexities. The concept of corporate ingression, I suggest, aids and increases an understanding of the novel's exploration of the causes, effects and mechanisms that lie at the root of the continuing Niger Delta crisis. The following two parts of this thesis will continue to explore the use of corporate ingression as an approach to such processes as explored in two further fictional narratives set in the past and the future respectively.

# PART 3



## CORPORATE INGRESSION AND SOCIAL INVESTMENT

## CHAPTER 5 – GENRE AND SLIPPAGE IN LAUREN BEUKES'S *MOXYLAND*

### Introduction

While Habila's novel explores a contemporary social, environmental and political crisis in Nigeria, Lauren Beukes's work of science fiction, *Moxyland*, concerns a potential future society in which social crises set in South Africa in 2018 (10 years into the future after *Moxyland*'s publication) are explored. In both cases, these crises are explored in connection to a (biopolitical) structuring of each society on the foundation of, and significantly influenced by, corporate power, as I have shown in the previous chapters to be the case in *Oil on Water*. Where the latter is thematically concerned with the link between environmental issues and corporate power, *Moxyland*'s narrative is centred on the impact of technological development and the role of corporate (capitalist) power in connection with political and social control through technology. There is a consensus among scholars, therefore, that *Moxyland* positions itself as a politically engaged novel, posing "a challenge to global capitalism," taken "as the perceived agent of socio-political decay in South African society" (Visagie 97). As Andries Visagie further argues, this critique of global capitalism, in connection with technological advances (or "technological capitalism") is also revealed in "recent developments in South African history since the fading of the national optimism and euphoria that characterised the presidency of Nelson Mandela from 1994 to 1999" (97). Visagie thus shows how the novel, despite its futuristic setting, addresses contemporary debates and topical critiques of South African society. Cheryl Stobie agrees that the novel takes a critical stance towards (then) present-day South Africa, arguing that *Moxyland* "delineates a highly technological and materialistic alternative society which mirrors and intensifies the structural violence of the present" (371).

Visagie, referring to David Harvey's theory as discussed in Part 1 of this thesis, summarises these political and socio-economic features of the novel: "Beukes presents the readers of her cyberpunk novel with a technological dystopia as the outgrowth of a capitalist logic based on accumulation by dispossession" (97). It is this political and economic framework that lies at the basis of how the political

and socio-economic circumstances of the novel's premise lead to a fictional and futuristic form of corporate ingression. However, by reading the novel not only with, but also against the grain, I will show that its exploration of extensive social and political control by corporate power uncovers a potentially constructive element to the dynamic that in part counteracts the novel's dystopian characteristics. This chapter will therefore discuss the context of the novel and its setting along the lines of, first, its literary genre and political subject matter, while the next chapter will show how *Moxyland* forms an exploration of corporate ingression as it may feature in the (near) future—exploring the novel's engagement with complex current (and potential future) political, economic and social dynamics.

## 5.1 Genre and Slippage

As an established SF and cyberpunk text, *Moxyland* still requires an analysis of its particular place within (and between) these genres. For, although its core characteristics render its position as science fiction and cyberpunk mostly unproblematic, its particular implementation of the genre(s) begs more consideration in order to lay the groundwork for a textual analysis. To this end, this section will first address the various subfields of literature relevant for *Moxyland* as a literary work: science fiction, utopia and cyberpunk. Secondly, it will outline in more detail the themes discussed by the novel that are directly related to these genres, namely the (omni)presence of technology (in the context of science fiction) and the presence and activity of corporate power (in the context of cyberpunk). Both this chapter and the next will show how these genres and themes are essential to a corporate ingressional reading of *Moxyland*.

### 5.1.1 Science Fiction

Science fiction (SF) as a genre has grown rapidly since its formal recognition a century or so ago. While a complete history and description of the genre lies outside of the scope of this thesis, the status and characteristics of science fiction as a major category of contemporary fiction, especially in popular culture, is relevant for the (cultural) context in which *Moxyland* has appeared. One of the most significant of

these characteristics is repeatedly referred to by Fredric Jameson as some form of “seeing the present as history”—the creation of an analytical distance between a reader’s reality and their perception thereof. A consensus appears to exist among scholars of SF that the genre invariably presents such a distancing effect, which Darko Suvin has famously termed *cognitive estrangement*; an effect that has reached the status of the “*formal framework of the genre*” (Suvin 18, emphasis in original). In his seminal work, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Suvin describes the genre’s attitude of *estrangement* as “confronting a set normative system [...] with a point of view or look implying a new set of norms” (18). The term “cognitive” here “implies not only a reflecting *of* but also *on* reality” (22, emphasis in original). This effect of estrangement in the genre therefore does not merely create “a static mirroring of the author’s environment,” but rather forms a “creative approach tending toward a dynamic transformation” (Suvin 22). SF’s main characteristic as a genre is thus the effect of creating a distance between the reader and their perception of their environment, causing a cognitive reaction, or reflexive stance, towards the reader’s own reality.

This psychological and especially political potential of SF’s use of cognitive estrangement has been theorised by many critics, following Brecht’s notion of the *verfremdungseffekt*. Umberto Eco (quoted by Suvin), concludes how cognition through “a full metaphor, reorganizing the logical space of our conceptual frameworks, increases understanding of ‘the dynamic processes of reality’” (352). It is exactly this distance, or “escape,” that creates “a better vantage point from which to comprehend the human relations around the author” (Suvin 101). This is a practical effect, rather than “a mystical insight or magical transfer,” and takes the form of a hypothetical scenario that, while remaining connected to the reader’s reality, makes it possible for the reader to reflect on the scenario and, ultimately, to transpose this reflection onto reality (Suvin 352).

SF, or cognitive estrangement specifically, thus forms a type of hypothesis through which to analyse (the potentials of) reality. Or, as Suvin explains: “the SF universe of discourse presents syntagmatically developed possible worlds as models (more precisely as thought-experiments) or as totalizing and thematic metaphors” (361). In the case of *Moxyland* its hypothetical distance from, but simultaneous connection with, South Africa’s (and, more specifically, Cape Town’s)

past and present, creates the cognitive estrangement characteristic of SF, and is conducive to reflection on South Africa's potential future.

This simultaneous distance and connection in the narrative between its subject matter and context is developed in an understated manner throughout the novel. The entire narrative of *Moxyland* takes place in Cape Town around the year 2018—10 years in the future, given the novel's publication date of 2008. Though a futuristic text, its near-future placement creates a sense of urgency and realism, as I will discuss further in the context of the novel's cyberpunk characteristics. However, subtle, but apparent throughout the narrative, are technological advances and social differences relative to the time of publication that create the distancing effect for the reader that is typical of SF. Though only 10 years into the future, the social and technological landscape of Cape Town differs significantly from Beukes's contemporary situation: SIM cards (and phones) are a mode of identification, a necessity for participation in society, and a means of policing citizens' behaviour. Though multiple other developments feature in the narrative, it is this particular use of technology that creates the novel's "*imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment*" (Suvin 20, emphasis in original)—a formal device, characteristic of SF in general.

Suvin comments in detail and problematically on the "esthetic [sic] quality" of SF texts (368) and the relationship between quality and the formalistic and thematic characteristics of such texts. His sometimes-harsh judgments of certain SF texts and fantasy novels have led scholars to criticise many of Suvin's points, but have not extinguished his influence on literary scholarship of SF and analyses of its forms. One such form is what he names the "axiomatic premise" of all SF: the *novum* (79). It is this *novum* that gives the "alternative imaginative framework" of SF its shape, thus Suvin names it the genre's "axiomatic premise" (79). In the case of *Moxyland*, this premise or alternative framework is the reshaping of the social environment of Cape Town by, especially, the developments and uses of SIM cards (and mobile phones). It is this *novum* that is presented as the

true novelty that deals with or makes for human relationships so qualitatively different from those dominant in the author's reality that they cannot be translated back to them merely by a change of costume. (Suvin 99)

Alternatively, merely translating the human relationships contemporary to Beukes's publication of the novel 10 years into the future ("a change of costume") would not automatically generate the society explored in *Moxyland*. The rather short difference in time, in fact, places more emphasis on the technological developments that are invasively present in *Moxyland's* universe. Readers are thus made to imagine their lives to have changed significantly within a decade. Some new developments (often functioning as novum in SF narratives) must have taken place over 10 years to create the rather distinct society of the novel. The significant presence of the increased and altered usage of SIM and phone technology suggests its status as the novel's novum, more than any other technological advancements which in and of themselves would not change the structure of society. These additional technological advancements in themselves, however, immediately place the novel in the realm of science fiction as they are introduced in quick succession in the first pages of *Moxyland*. The unfamiliar uses of technology thus introduce an alternative society as the setting for the novel.

The initial narrator (Kendra)'s first descriptive passage on the first page of the novel immediately introduces unfamiliar characteristics to a familiar city: "The corporate line shushes through the tunnels on a skin of seawater, overflow from the tide drives put to practical use in the clanking watery bowels of Cape Town" (7). This passage introduces an unfamiliar mode of transport in an unfamiliar part of Cape Town (the "clanking watery bowels") that immediately places the otherwise familiar city into an unknown future. Though the contemporary reader will be able to imagine the technology and engineering involved with traveling over a skin of water (hovercrafts, for instance, move similarly across water) as well as the tunnels and tidal control involved, their implementation on the scale of urban public transport is unfamiliar. The term "corporate line" is also introduced to the reader, only made comprehensible in combination with the phrase "shushes through the tunnels," which indirectly denotes transportation. The adjective "corporate" here also hints at a distinction between corporate (transport) lines and non-corporate lines, suggesting a change in social structure within the city as well as in technological innovations. This single sentence thus introduces multiple changes to what a reader might know/expect of Cape Town at the time of publication, causing a sense of estrangement from the very first page of the novel.

The language of this passage simultaneously evokes the image of a living body with skin and bowels. On the surface – the *skin* of seawater – the reader may imagine the elegant “shushing” of a sleek object – the corporate *line* – moving efficiently through the city’s tunnels to its destination. The “shushing” sound caused by the movement over the seawater is then explained as the movement of unwanted excess fluid – *overflow* from the tide – that is banished to the “clanking watery bowels” of the city. By thus presenting in one sentence a transition from elegant surface to abject interior symbolises the novel’s constant transition from the grace and elegance of *Moxyland*’s futuristic surface to its hidden abject core—reminiscent of the Gothic trope of the subterranean presence hidden from view. Kendra’s own narrative echoes this movement as the reader follows her transition from “shiny brand ambassador” (having become a living advertisement for an energy drink) (7) to terminated experiment “put [...] out to pasture” (299).

The context of Kendra’s observations is significant, as the passage describes her travelling through Cape Town to some (initially) unknown destination. More familiar to her than to the reader, the surroundings in and between which Kendra travels are revealed in a manner similar to travel literature. The reader discovers and is introduced to a new culture and environment, piece by piece, through the eyes of a traveller. This introduction into a “new” and future society – grafted onto contemporary Cape Town – is continued through references to new forms of technology. Kendra narrates how she passes “between the rows of filter trees [...] sucking up sunlight and the buffeting wind to power the building” (9)—suggesting an advanced form of solar and wind energy collection. While the fundamental technology of capturing sun and wind energy would not be unfamiliar to the reader, this particular form of “filter trees” signals a future technological (and aesthetic) advance.

Kendra’s interaction with other people on this trip introduces forms of specific biotechnology that set the stage for further developments in the narrative. An example is the verification of her allowed access when some official conducts “a cursory scan of my phone, verifying my bioID, the temporary access pass” (9). While (smart)phones were already being used to receive and display access passes at the time of publication of the novel, the notion of a bioID would not yet be familiar to the reader. Though biological identification methods such as fingerprinting and iris

scans did exist at the time of publication, none of this was used as a common form of identification. Beukes thus initially plays with the familiar and unfamiliar simultaneously, showing potential social and practical extrapolations of contemporary technological developments, seemingly easing the way for the reader to accept more unusual phenomena.

This effect of estrangement through unfamiliar forms of the familiar is soon extended to more futuristic and less realist forms of technology—thus shifting the narrative to a more speculative realm. More exotic technology is introduced at the lab where Kendra is injected with “nano”—“designer robotic microbes” (13) that will effect multiple changes to her body, both visible and invisible. The use of these robotic microbes is presented as a mainstream phenomenon in the novel’s futuristic society as Kendra refers to the more widely used “biotech creams,” comparing it to her own treatment: “the average nano in your average anti-ageing moisturiser acts only on the subdermal level. Mine, on the other hand, is going all the way” (12). Though her particular treatment is clearly still in an experimental phase, the narrative makes clear that developments in nanotechnology have been part of mainstream society for a longer period of time and are constantly increasing in impact: “They’ve been using the same tech in animals for years. Cop dogs, the Aitos, you know, guide dogs, those helper monkeys for the disabled” (12-13). This extremely advanced and effective use of nanotechnology is much less familiar to the contemporary reader, who has likely encountered some form of solar energy or hovercraft technology in daily life, but not the use of a host of miniscule robots as described in *Moxyland*—a technological development unlikely to be reached within 10 years. The unfamiliar is thus enhanced by the (unrealistic) futuristic, placing the novel irrevocably within the realm of science fiction, alternating between the characteristics of extrapolative and speculative SF.

While the biotechnological experimentation with humans is not yet widely implemented in *Moxyland*’s universe, animals are shown to have been comprehensively altered in Beukes’s Cape Town. Toby’s narrative, following Kendra’s, includes the description of his mother’s pet, draped around her neck: a “mutacute [...] an albino tiger slothmonkey scarf” (17). Hybrid creatures, featuring characteristics of multiple species, have thus become commercial objects

(“mutacutes”—cute mutations), forming the ultimate example of issues of bio-ethics that pervade the novel.

The continuous developments that render Beukes’s futuristic Cape Town still a transitional place also present Kendra as still a transitional subject. *Moxyland* places Kendra as one of the first humans to be ‘enhanced’ by nanotechnology developed by a biotechnology company and accompanied by health ‘benefits’ such as “specially cultivated germ-eating bacteria or whatever new innovation Inatec’s come up with specially” (13). This merging of technology and biology is symbolised in the moment Kendra signs the contract for her treatment:

The bio-pen I signed with (here, and here, and here) had microscopic barbs in the shaft that scraped skin cells from the pad of my thumb to mix with the ink. Signed in blood. Or DNA, which is close enough. (11)

In this case, it is technology claiming biology in a subtle but still violent way, connoting the almost imperceptible changes and violations that *Moxyland*’s society perpetrates on its subjects and their bodies.

This invasion into society’s biological reality is perpetuated in its social reality through intrusive forms of communication via technology. Apart from the bioID, through which subjects are identified based on their physical characteristics such as DNA, communication in a seemingly more innocent and public sense is also introduced. The first is Toby’s coat, called a “BabyStrange” (15)<sup>14</sup>, which can record images and video as well as displaying both on its fabric. Toby’s use of this expensive item of clothing is to display offensive images—mainly, it seems, in order to shock his mother. His narrative also includes a discussion of so-called “warez,” cheap merchandise containing audio chips that “[chirp] their own self-importance, jingles, promos, sound-effects, celeb endorsements” (16). Neologisms such as ‘warez’ continue throughout Toby’s narrative, and perpetuate the futuristic theme of the novel, as I will discuss further below. Though slightly futuristic in its unfamiliarity to most readers, the narrative presents warez as already “outmode” (16)—a trend “outlawed almost as soon as it hit” (16) due to the inconvenience of shopping among countless noise-producing products. This particular example of

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<sup>14</sup> Perhaps referring to the T. Rex song of that name, the first two lines of which read “I see you walking/I see you talking” (1972).

semi-futuristic technology becoming a trend, then being banned, describes a process on the product market that most contemporary readers would be familiar with (e.g. microbeads, laser pointers etc). By introducing an unfamiliar piece of technology within familiar societal structures, Beukes presents a society that *could* conceivably exist in some not-too-far-off future.

Advancements such as these are thus introduced in the novel in two opposite ways: by phrases describing unfamiliar technology informing unfamiliar social and economic constructions, but presented as though familiar to the reader (e.g. SIM identification, the corporate transportation line and the Aitos). The second is the introduction of unfamiliar technological advances within familiar social constructions, but explained at length as an unfamiliar phenomenon (e.g. warez and filter trees). The resulting sense of estrangement suggests a pervasive and normalised impact of certain forms of technological advancement on the futuristic Cape Town society. It is the first manner of presenting technology that introduces the relevant developments as the *novum* of the novel. The more matter-of-fact mention, often without explanation, particularly of those developments within Cape Town society, render these changes the most significant markers in the shaping of its society. It is, after all, those advances that are no longer perceived as novel by its subjects (in this case *Moxyland's* narrators) that will have had the most pervasive effect on a society.

It is this *novum* of technology-shaping-society as well as the other new developments informing the futuristic alternative to Cape Town that thus firmly place *Moxyland* in the realm of SF, as the genre “is predicated [...] on the category of *potentiality*” (Suvin, xlv). It is the *potential* of technological advance to create an alternative society to the contemporary one that informs the proposition of Beukes’s novel as well as that of many other works of SF. This potentiality and the genre’s generally explicitly experimental or speculative nature is what creates the cognitive estrangement that renders such texts potentially highly political: “SF sees the norms of any age, including emphatically its own, as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to a *cognitive* view” (Suvin 19). This cognitive view promotes a critical, potentially more objective, distance towards the norms of the reader’s own time as well as that of potential other ages and environments.

### 5.1.2 Utopia

While the above analysis and the novel's critical reception show *Moxyland* to be a clearly science-fictional text, its connection to utopian literature is as explicit, if more problematic. While my analysis will show that *Moxyland* forms a critique of both contemporary (South-African) society as well as future visions of this society, I will also argue that it is exactly within this critical element of the novel that a meta-critical process takes place. Despite critics characterising *Moxyland* as variously "a techno-dystopian critique of global capitalism" (Visagie 103) and a "critical dystopia" (Stobie), I would argue that this placement of the novel ignores the slippage that problematises the novel's genre throughout the narrative, even as utopian literature seems inherently a genre that defies boundaries:

There are, of course, differences about what belongs within the constellation of ideas, concepts, and literary genres that hover around utopia, but there is something like a consensus that there is such a constellation. (Sargent, "The Three Faces" 2)

The perspective on *Moxyland* in terms of dystopia, thus placing it at a single point within the "constellation" of utopian literature, however, ignores the complexity of the novel's approach, which this chapter will tease out. To this end, I will first discuss the terms "utopia," "dystopia" and related terminology in connection to *Moxyland*. Secondly, I will show how the novel utilises the effects of slippage to explore its subject matter, employing characteristics of SF and utopia to (in)form its discussion.

Although I discuss the utopian elements of *Moxyland* separately here, a strong connection exists between utopian and science fiction literature. Darko Suvin argues that "utopia is not a genre but the *sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction*" (76). As does science fiction, Suvin claims, utopias serve to create a sense of estrangement in the reader. Lyman Tower Sargent, however, "specifically reject[s] Darko Suvin's contention that utopias are a sub-genre of science fiction" ("The Three Faces" 11). Rather, he suggests that "utopian literature should be treated as a subset of a broader phenomenon" (3). This broader phenomenon concerns utopianism as a social and political mode of thought which Sargent defines as "social dreaming" (3); the "result of the human propensity to dream while both asleep and awake" (4) rather than merely a strategy for cognitive estrangement.

In the context of utopian literature, Sargent proposes a comprehensive analytical framework through which such literature and its utopian characteristics may be viewed, certain core characteristics of which are relevant for my discussion of the novel. A Utopia (literally “no place”) – and its variants Eutopia (“good place”) and Dystopia (“bad place”) – is primarily identified by its “non-existence combined with a *topos* – a location in time and space – to give verisimilitude” (Sargent, “The Three Faces” 5). While, arguably, all fiction concerns a non-existent place, Sargent here seems to refer to a place not recognisably existent in contemporary society. In any case, *Moxyland*’s place of choice has a clear connection with reality, yet problematically so. Though *Moxyland* is set in Cape Town – a city with a location in space existing and recognisable in contemporary South Africa – its particular location in time (10 years ahead of publication) renders the city a non-existent place: it does *not yet* exist, after all. The specificity of *Moxyland*’s Cape Town in time and space, however, renders the fictional society realistic—even more so given its temporal proximity to the present. Central to utopian fiction, however, is especially the fictional aspect: “utopia as a literary genre [...] refers to works which describe an imaginary society in some detail” (Sargent 7). The description of a *society* is also of importance in a work of utopian fiction. The described environment

must be a society—a condition in which there is human (or some equivalent) interaction in a number of different forms and in which human beings (or their equivalent) express themselves in a variety of ways. (Sargent 7)

Of importance, therefore, seems to be the idea that utopian fiction concerns the presentation or exploration of a fictional structure of human (or equivalent) interaction and its characteristics, including some notion of its positive or negative qualifications. This latter characteristic incidentally points to the connection with the genre’s political tendencies.

*Moxyland*’s society, as Stobie shows, “delineates a highly technological and materialistic alternative society which mirrors and intensifies the structural violence of the present” (371). The novel thus presents a potential future that is an “intensified” mirror version of contemporary Cape Town/South Africa, thus forming an indirect critique of its contemporary version. Visagie provides a more

detailed description of the technology and materialist-driven society by arguing that:

Beukes represents a future South Africa in 2018 as a capitalist dystopia where government aggressively promotes the interests of the corporate elite to the detriment of freedom in the rest of the country. (103)

As I will show, however, government in *Moxyland* is presented as indistinguishable from this “corporate elite” and thus explores an even more complex construction of society than Visagie’s analysis suggests. My analysis, through the perspective of corporate ingression, will therefore add another dimension to the argument that will clarify the underlying structures of *Moxyland*’s society. What is clear, however, is that the society explored in *Moxyland* is one centred on technological advances, corporate power and extensive police control, together forming a seemingly dystopian society.

An additional and related characteristic Sargent identifies in utopian fiction is that the utopian place “must be recognizably good or bad or at least would be so recognized by a contemporary reader” (5). A dystopia or negative utopia specifically, Sargent defines as

a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived. (“The Three Faces” 9)

This second quality of utopian fiction as clearly either “bad” (dystopian) or “good” (eutopian) is less straightforward, however, as “perfection has never been a characteristic of utopian fiction” (Sargent 6). This functions similarly for a dystopia, where pure imperfection does not occur, as I will show to be the case in *Moxyland*. In its more complex form, this non-binary characteristic of utopian (or dystopian) fiction takes the form of what Sargent names “utopian satire” to describe “those works where satire overwhelms the other elements and in which there is no simple good/bad distinction” (8). Sargent adds the idea that a utopian satire concerns a fictional society “that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of the contemporary society” (9). Sargent stresses the point of the importance of authorial intent for the genre, arguing that it “is necessary to examine

the question of whether or not the author meant to write a eutopia, a dystopia, or any of the other proliferating varieties” (12) for, though scholars remain “aware that authors do things they do not intend,” in the case of utopian literature “the consideration of intent must be included” (13). In the case of *Moxyland*, the author’s intent is made explicit in various media, including the author’s official website, where the novel is described as a “dystopian corporate-apartheid political thriller” where “corporate-apartheid” refers to segregation based on professional status rather than race, as I will discuss further below. I will show, however, that although *Moxyland* seems to fall within the categorisation of dystopian fiction, the novel also functions as a utopian satire and slips between the purely eutopian, the purely dystopian and the purely satirical.

### 5.1.3 Slippage

Though not entirely good or entirely bad, *Moxyland*’s universe is also not a neutral place. The first chapters of the novel, in fact, present a society that at first glance seems idyllic, but which includes unsettling social structures. In the first scenes, Kendra travels through clean, technologically advanced and environmentally sustainable spaces. This passage is reminiscent of travel literature, and thus Thomas More’s *Utopia* itself, through its description and discussion of the scenery – landscape and cityscape – from the perspective of the protagonist. This trope suggests a more or less ideal, idyllic society and invokes the image of a eutopian reality in which Kendra moves comfortably, though unfamiliarly. The ‘false notes’ that are inserted in these very same passages, however, mar this imagery and in addition to a sense of estrangement, a sense of suspicion is invoked in the reader.

In what shape these suspicions may be justified is suggested by the details of Kendra’s permitted presence on the corporate line: “elevated status is not part of the program. Only allocated for the day, to get me in and out again. Wouldn’t want civilians hanging around” (7). Again, a divide is suggested between those of “elevated status” and (mere) “civilians.” By using the word “civilian,” military terminology is invoked, with its connotations of power and – especially in an African context – military dictatorship. By naming the less privileged, non-corporate, class of society “civilian,” the corporati are suggested to hold the status of command and absolute power. A distinction between a corporate upper class and civilian lower

class is thus established, revealing something like a “corporate-apartheid” as referred to above. In the first pages, Kendra thus moves from civilian to “corporate space” (8) in exchange for her cooperation in an advertising scheme that involves nanotechnology being inserted into her body and a glowing tattoo created on her wrist. Only by surrendering her body to the advertising company is she allowed to enter the corporate space. Her experiences there are consistently uncomfortable, as she realises “just how out of place” she is (8):

It’s enough to make me duck my head as I pass the station cop at the entrance – behaviour the cameras are poised to look for, not to mention the dogs. The Aito sitting alert and panting at the cop’s feet spares me a glance over its snout, no more, not picking up any incriminating chem scents, no suspiciously spiked adrenaline levels or residue of police mace. (8-9)

Though permitted to be there, Kendra clearly feels a lack of belonging, and even fear of being found out not to belong. She is extremely aware of her own – potentially suspicious – behaviour and the impossibility of hiding any part of otherwise private reactions from the genetically enhanced dogs. Her fears prove unfounded, however, which simultaneously suggests that the apparatus of control may not be perfectly effective, or ultimately so: either the cameras and dogs did not detect what Kendra felt to be her suspicious behaviour, or they registered and (correctly) interpreted her behaviour as harmless nervousness. This uncertainty for both Kendra and the reader reinforces the suspense surrounding Kendra’s visit to the corporate space, underlining/emphasising the sinister tone of the narrative.

In contrast to this sinister, dystopian atmosphere in the novel there is the understated lack of racial division in *Moxyland’s* Cape Town. As Visagie concludes: “*Moxyland* is utopian in the sense that it represents a vision of South African society that has overcome the racial divisions that at present still dominate political discourse in South Africa” (105). Typical contemporary minorities are presented in the novel alongside typically dominating social groups without a clear distinction between social and economic status. The complete lack of racial discourse in the novel is revealing, and supports Visagie’s identification of the novel’s positive utopian characteristics. Eutopia is also invoked through the benefits of (bio)technological advances. Part of corporate power is formed by biotech companies (such as Inatec) that are shown to continuously develop new

technologies successfully eliminating disease. However, the eutopia of *Moxyland* is again problematised by revealing that these beneficial technologies are simultaneously used for financial gain and social control.

The notion of a sinister form of control is also invoked by the novel's use of language. The abbreviation of words into "chem" (chemicals), "nano" (nanotechnology) and the corporatised term "government inc." raises associations with Orwellian newspeak and the control of meaning and society through language. The irregular use of such terms and the fact that these terms mostly refer to new forms of technology or consumer products (such as "warez" (16) and "mutacutes" (17)) speaks against too close a similarity, however. A strong link between abbreviated terms and popular language or slang also questions the notion of corporate control over language. Toby's popular style of speech contrasts with Kendra's more mainstream tone and reveals the existence of various styles of language in *Moxyland's* society. Though invoking newspeak, *Moxyland* simultaneously negates this effect by presenting new language in the context of street culture and in contrast to more mainstream uses of language. Freedom to choose a type of speech thus still exists in *Moxyland's* society, however much it is influenced by technology and consumerism.

*Moxyland's* reality is shown to be more complex, too, in Lerato's case, where her initially hopeless status as a vulnerable orphan of parents with AIDS is shown to be utilised by a corporate entity to exert complete control over her life. From a young age, she is raised and trained by a corporation which then claims returns for their investment through a contractual obligation. Seemingly eutopian social structures in which responsibility is taken by corporate power over vulnerable parties are thus revealed to serve as effective biopolitical control over society's various members. These complexities show that the novel utilises utopian satire as well as dystopian elements to present a complicated society where ethics, economy and technology are in a continuous internal struggle.

This struggle within *Moxyland* places the novel in the context of what Visagie identifies as current "theoretical debates about utopian and dystopian literature" that are "dominated by the fraught relationship that this literature has developed with capitalism" (97-98). *Moxyland's* own "fraught relationship" with corporate power and its fictional society's political and economic structure thus reveals an

exploration of these topics from a critical point of view. Yet some of the corporate elements of *Moxyland*'s society remain in place as positive developments, albeit with a warning regarding their potential side-effects. *Moxyland* is clearly also a dystopia as it "question[s] the nature of eutopia and what price should be paid to obtain it" (Sargent, "The Three Faces" 22) rendering Beukes's *Moxyland* "a novel with serious critical intent" (Visagie 103)—a "techno-dystopia" where "art and technology meet in 'creative' manners that nonetheless contain the 'risks of terror'" (Alexander 157).

#### 5.1.4 *Cyberpunk and Corporate Power*

Related to the genres of science fiction and utopia is lastly that of cyberpunk—a genre that is typically stated to have emerged in the 1980s. The term 'cyberpunk' is used by various critics to place *Moxyland* in the literary landscape: "*Moxyland* is a cyberpunk nightmare" (Visagie 103), "true to the conventions of cyberpunk, it presents the network – and being 'on the grid' – as entrapping while at the same time opening up circuits of resistance" (Samuelson 814) and, according to Stobie, "typical of later cyberpunk and critical dystopia, Beukes offers the sense of multiple nodes of protest" (373). As these critics show, the genre of cyberpunk and the themes of protest and resistance are closely connected, as well as related to the characteristics of the critical dystopia. Sean McQueen explains: "*Cyber* is itself derived from the Greek word for control" and cyberpunk as a "real-life practice" as well as a "subgenre" of fiction is thus concerned with the real-life or fictional phenomenon of "control societies" (4). Especially in its earlier stages (1980s to 1990s), McQueen argues, "cyberpunk dealt in mass-media technologies and the conjunction of gritty, urban experiences with virtual reality" (5). This conjunction is exemplified later in the novel with the introduction of the real-life online game played by various characters in the novel that makes use of the actual city of Cape Town as its 'playground'—the ultimate conjunction of the urban and the virtual such that the boundary between the two becomes blurred.

As the first edition of *Moxyland* was published in 2010, it would seem to fall outside McQueen's definition of early cyberpunk. However, *Moxyland* shares many of its characteristics. Beukes's novel and its positive reception therefore suggests that the genre of cyberpunk is far from dead or outmoded. The novel addresses

many of these characteristics of cyberpunk fiction as central themes: mass-media technologies such as the popular “streamcasts” utilised by Toby, as well as the all-pervasive use of SIM technology are the first examples in the novel. Toby’s narrative includes an account of the arrest of Tendeka, introducing the use of phone technology by police to punish and subdue individuals: “the cop isolates his SIM from all the others in the room with the scanner” (27), setting off a “bleep” warning to Tendeka’s phone. This seems to be protocol, generally followed by a second warning. In this case, however, the policeman

doesn’t bother to register a second warning. He goes straight for the defuser. Higher voltage than necessary, but when did the cops ever play nice? Tendeka drops straight away, jerking epileptic. (28)

“Defusing” suspects by administering an electric current through the subject’s phone is a recurring event in the novel, effectively incapacitating those who create trouble and exerting physical control over those who don’t “play nice by society’s rules” (28).

Specific to cyberpunk is also that it is “fully as much an expression of transnational corporate realities as it is of global paranoia itself” (*Archaeologies* 419), as Fredric Jameson shows. It is this corporate presence as a central theme within cyberpunk narratives that characterises the genre, which Jameson therefore terms “corporate fiction” (352) and “the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself” (419). According to Tom Moylan, a connection exists between the emergence of cyberpunk fiction and the development of “[m]ultinational corporations based in and supported by powerful nation-states” that have “transformed themselves into truly transnational corporations able to reduce the role of the nation-state” (81). Cyberpunk thus combines a (critical) discussion of contemporary political-economic developments with its expression of late capitalism to create a genre centred on the role of corporate power in (a fictional) society. Often situated in the near future (as is *Moxyland*), cyberpunk is thus often relevant to contemporary political-economic discourse. The connections in *Moxyland* between politico-economic and social developments at the time of publication, corporate power, the society of control and utopian elements thus form the scene for the experiences of the novel’s four characters.

## 5.2 *Moxyland* in Context

The last – but not least – relevant factor for an analysis of *Moxyland* in the context of corporate ingression is its position within the literary and socio-political landscape. These two sites of context cannot be separated in the case of *Moxyland* (if at all), if only given the novel's status as a critique of society, as I have shown above. The novel's critical stance and its use of genre can only be fully understood in its South-African context and South-African history. As Stobie argues, *Moxyland* “can be seen as [an] apartheid allegor[y]” and as a

post-apartheid stor[y] which extrapolate[s] the effects of apartheid beyond the present to an imaginative realm which disorients and confronts the reader's conceptions of self and other, law-abiding citizen and criminal, sameness and difference, equality and freedom. (379)

These highly political concepts are introduced in the first pages of the novel, as I have shown above, in more or less subtle terms: the distinction between the corporate and non-corporate subject and the pervasive sense of control and potential guilt (as seen in Kendra's discomfort during her trip) are introduced as false notes in the fictional society that recall apartheid experiences of segregation and control. The connection between Cape Town's actual past and *Moxyland's* fictional near-future society is made inescapably explicit in Tendeka's narrative that follows the reader's introduction to the characters of Kendra and Toby:

Don't be fooled by the cosy apartment blocks lining the highway, it's all Potemkin for the tourists. You just need to go a couple of blocks in to find the real deal, the tin shacks and the old miners' hostels and the converted containers now that the shipping industry has died together with the economy. All the same shit they've been promising to fix since the 1955 Freedom Charter or whatever it was. And despite the border patrols, the sprawl just keeps on spreading. You can't keep all of the Rurals out all of the time. (42)

The reference to the 1955 Freedom Charter<sup>15</sup> in the context of a continuing problem places *Moxyland's* society as a continuation of real time. By referring to “the same

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<sup>15</sup> The Freedom Charter was “a statement of principles adopted by the African National Congress (ANC) in 1955 at Kliptown, Johannesburg. The Charter called for democracy, equal rights, the sharing of national wealth through publicly-owned monopolies in critical

shit they've been promising to fix since" the Charter, as well as the fact that this "shit" has still not been fixed in this fictional future version of Cape Town, reveals the passage to be a politically engaged critique of contemporary Cape Town/South Africa. The reference to a fake Potemkin village is also a topical reference to a practice familiar in South Africa/Cape Town where the visible, outer layer of the country or city is merely a superficial veneer hiding the uglier aspects of society for tourists. The narrative here suggests that it is likely that society will not have improved in this respect in the ten years between the novel's publication and its narrative time. The narrative thus engages actively with South African historical and contemporary developments. As Stobie argues:

Beukes uses individual characters to display attitudes towards such indictments on the South African nation-state as the profusion of street children, illiteracy, Aids, unequal access to services including medical services, and one of the highest disparities between the rich and the poor in the world. (373)

Kendra's narrative reveals the unequal access to medical services while Toby's perspective is one of privilege. Toby increasingly encounters Tendeka's world, however, which is one characterised by street children, illiteracy and poverty. Lerato, though a member of the privileged corporate class, represents the role that AIDS continues to play in the shaping of this futuristic society. Visagie, expanding on the point Stobie makes, connects these themes in the novel with contemporary South African developments, showing how *Moxyland*, together with writing by other contemporary South African authors, explores relevant social and economic challenges, specifically naming:

Corruption in the African National Congress (the ruling party since 1994); deterioration of basic services such as the supply of clean water and electricity; the fact that South Africa now numbers among the six most violent societies in the world; the AIDS pandemic with an infection rate of 18 per cent, contributing significantly to the low life expectancy of 51 years; and the alarming gap between rich and poor. (96)

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economic sectors, the removal of racial restrictions and the distribution of land to those who work it" (Digital National Security Archive).

As my analysis will show, the confluence of corporate and government power as an ultimate form of corruption, the segregation of the so-called Rural, the effects of the AIDS pandemic and the violent forms of control all form *Moxyland's* version of these contemporary challenges.

It is the connection between this critical stance towards its (real-life) context and contemporary South African society and the (potential) effects of technology for its structure that again renders *Moxyland* a cyberpunk and science fiction text:

[Beukes] also points to the potential benefits as well as dangers associated with technology, such as cell-phones, the Internet and virtual games. These dangers include manipulation, collusion and control. (Stobie 373)

This politically engaged, technologically involved and SF-shaped critique and exploration is, as Phoenix Alexander shows, part of “so-called developing-world science fictions of writers such as Ghosh” where “something like the Internet generates [...] an epistemological and generic uncertainty” (165-166). “Something like the Internet” or, one could say, the *novum* of such a science fiction text, thus creates the setting for the fictional society wherein an “epistemological and generic uncertainty” is explored. The social uncertainty generated by *Moxyland's* *novum* thus resonates the uncertainty in contemporary society that the novel explores. Novels such as *Moxyland*, Visagie argues, clearly “respond to realities that preoccupy many third-world societies but at the same time they sniff out the likely implications of global financial, ecological, and terror risks” (108).

Visagie goes further, and places *Moxyland* in the context of many other South African texts that “are couched in an aesthetic that takes its premise from local tensions produced by racial discrimination and inequalities in the allocation of material resources” (108). Stobie draws a connection within the arts in general and argues:

In twenty-first-century South Africa, authors, artists and film directors, varied in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality, are engaging strongly with an established strand of critical dystopianism in South African cultural products. (370)

The critical dystopian elements of Beukes's work thus form “part of this substantial tradition” that, according to Stobie, has emerged “from the national mood slump of

the Mbeki and Zuma eras” (370). Rather than being an outmoded genre, the novel’s context shows cyberpunk to be a relevant framework for its subject matter: its engagement with contemporary tensions in South African social and political spheres and especially its economic focus render science fiction and cyberpunk an apt framework. As Louise Bethlehem shows, *Moxyland* “cannily circulates within, rather than merely depicts, the flows of consumption, transaction and exchange that the city offers,” (524) thus engaging with the effects of global economic developments on South Africa and Cape Town. Simultaneously, its “pointed emplacement in contemporary youth culture shows affinities with other satirical performances in South Africa” such as “the provocations of the contemporary counter-cultural band, *Die Antwoord* [*The Answer*]” (524). Therefore, as Stobie explains, “the effects of various techniques enable the reader to view the texts as central examples of critical dystopias” or, as I have shown, of the science fiction and cyberpunk genres—yet with “specific siting in a South African writing history and local socio-political issues” (370).

Although much more could be said regarding *Moxyland*’s context in a literary and global sense, what is of relevance to my analysis of the novel in the context of a notion of corporate ingression is the manner in which it problematises, discusses and explores South Africa’s present and future. As critics show, Beukes’s “futuristic urban setting” explores the effects of a combination of “forms of digital technology with the biopolitical regulation of social relations in an unsettling reprise of the apartheid groundplan” (Bethlehem 522). My analysis will show further, however, how technology and (bio)political regulation are not merely combined in *Moxyland*, but rather inextricably interwoven with corporate power. I will also show that *Moxyland* is not merely an “unsettling reprise” of apartheid through its depiction of regulations of social relations, but also an exploration of the ambivalent nature of this (bio)political structuring of its society. The futuristic setting in which Beukes has chosen to frame these issues works to enable readers “to see the present as history” and functions as “an articulated thought-experiment” (Suvin 365). In this sense, following Suvin, the potential connection with texts such as *Oil on Water* becomes clear: “Every text of fiction in the wider sense [...] implies a possible world whose tenor is some different possibility of human relationships” (368). Whether futuristic or contemporary, what connects these texts is the exploration of the

common relationship the fictional societies have with corporate power, as I will show in the following chapter. It is this notion of *Moxyland* as a critical exploration, with characteristics of science fiction, cyberpunk and utopia combined with its “specific siting” in both a geographical and socio-political sense, that informs my analysis of the novel.

## CHAPTER 6 – THE CORPORATE DYSTOPIA IN *MOXYLAND*

### Introduction

Mentioned by multiple characters in the novel, the term “government inc.” is used for state power, with “inc.” referring to “incorporated”—indicating that government in *Moxyland* is a corporation as well as a governing mechanism. Whether this term is used as slang in the novel or as official terminology is not made clear, but *Moxyland* includes various examples of state and corporate power having effectively merged in a powerful alliance. In the case of a piece of technology disturbing the public space – commercial products that broadcast audio fragments for advertising purposes – one of the novel’s main characters, Toby, claims: “It was only a matter of time before the multinationals made it illegal” (16). Through whatever mechanism, the multinationals apparently possess the power to create law. Toby’s choice of words suggests this is more than just an extensive amount of influence: that the multinationals “made” the technology illegal denotes a confluence of state and corporate power to the extent that the two are indistinguishable. Though one could argue that Toby’s assessment is perhaps merely an expression of a particular political view or of paranoia, the theme persists throughout the novel, showing that *Moxyland* indeed explores a society ruled by corporate power. The notion of “government inc.” simultaneously invokes South Africa’s political reality by referring indirectly to the “demands and seductions of big business” in the ANC government where “[a]ll too often a connection with the ruling party is embraced as an entry point to the procurement of lucrative business deals and a variety of financial benefits” (Visagie 97) as the scandals surrounding Jacob Zuma’s connection to the Guptas illustrates. *Moxyland* thus presents a potential extrapolative scenario in which this relationship between corporate power and government has found its ultimate form. No details of this potential relationship are narrated, however, which adds to the dystopian atmosphere of invisible and sinister powers controlling and ruling the social landscape. On the other hand, the more positive elements of corporate power are also represented,

such as the facilitation of advanced health care, education and social advancement—albeit problematically.

This chapter will analyse *Moxyland's* exploration of a society greatly influenced and even ruled by corporate power—a construction that, as I will argue, reveals potential for destructive as well as constructive developments. To assess the novel's exploration of a process of corporate ingressions, the following section will analyse the presence of corporate power in *Moxyland's* Cape Town, its effect on society's construction and its extended cultural influence. The final section of this chapter will discuss *Moxyland's* exploration of the (potential) effects of corporate power and corporate social influence on a community such as that located in Cape Town specifically and South Africa more generally.

## 6.1 Corporate Ingression in *Moxyland*

Though this section will discuss the 3 factors of corporate ingressions separately – analysing, first of all, *Moxyland's* exploration of the presence of corporate power, secondly, its (re)structuring of society and, thirdly, its extended cultural influence – the novel's complex structure and style resists such a strict divide. For the purposes of my argument, I will retain the tripartite structure, as these three elements are clearly present in the novel, though some overlap in theme will occur in my discussion. The conclusion to this chapter will form an overview of my argument, as well as a comparative discussion with *Oil on Water*.

### 6.1.1 *The Presence of Corporate Power*

The presence of corporate power in *Moxyland* is introduced from the first page of the novel as a significant part of society. As mentioned previously, the first indication of a corporate presence is the mention of the “corporate line”—a transport service Kendra uses to visit the biotechnology company “Inatec Biologica” (12). Advanced biotechnology such as bio-sig pens, biotech creams and nanotechnology are also mentioned in Kendra's first narrative, introducing a pervasive presence of, and connection between, technology and corporate power. The second major branch of corporate power is also introduced in the first pages of *Moxyland*, though more indirectly. Kendra describes herself as an “art school

dropout reinvented as shiny brand ambassador” (7), suggesting the pervasive presence of advertising in *Moxylant*'s society. This subtle reference to a potential advertising industry is reinforced by the reference to “blaring adboards”—presumably audio-enhanced advertising boards. Later in Kendra’s narrative the existence of “ad agencies with big name biotech clients on their books” (11) suggests a significant advertising industry in cahoots with the extensive biotechnology industry. These two industries (biotechnology and advertising) are revealed later in the novel as the two major industries present in, and in control of, *Moxylant*'s society. Other companies and industries are included as part of *Moxylant*'s society, though these present a background to the narrative, rather than a major presence in the plotline. Corporate power is not merely present in an economic sense in *Moxylant*, but is revealed to have an extensive presence in social, political and cultural areas of life. These instances of corporate power in the novel are mainly fictional, although many non-fictional examples of existing corporations are also given, such as Eskom, Pfizer and Cisco. The extent of, and influence exerted by, this corporate presence forms the subject of the following sections.

### *6.1.2 Structural Influence*

The second factor revealing a process of corporate ingression in a community is the (re)structuring of that community by the corporate power(s) present. This community in the context of *Moxylant* concerns the entirety of the society described in the novel. The focus of this subchapter is *Moxylant*'s exploration of the fictional Cape Town’s (bio)political structure and the role of corporate power in this construction.

#### **Government Inc.**

A relevant non-fictional corporate presence in the novel is Eskom—currently the largest provider of electricity in South Africa. Vorster and Marais summarise: “Eskom, a state-owned utility, generates 95 per cent of electricity used in South Africa. It is one of the single largest contributors to South Africa’s gross domestic product (GDP)” (31). Eskom’s position as South Africa’s largest provider of electricity is not surprising given its status as a state-owned utility—a construct familiar in many nation-states for utilities such as power and water. However

familiar a construct, the close connection between the company and the state is highly relevant here, as it resonates with the sinister theme of “government inc.” (84) in the novel. The position of government power – a major part of a society’s construction – appears to be inextricably linked in the novel to corporate power and seems to be completely controlled by the latter. The extent to which “government inc.” controls *Moxyland’s* society becomes clearest near the end of the novel, when the reader discovers more of the nature of Lerato’s job at the advertisement agency Communique.

Lerato’s work involves crisis-management of public communication:

monitoring the datalines, killing the most damaging of commentary before it gets out, because anything is allowable when it comes to national security, and the government is a big Communique contract. (249)

This explanation is given in the context of an instance of crisis-management where Communique employees are tasked to remove certain types of communication regarding the attack perpetrated by Tendeka and his gang. The largest client of Communique is thus the government, for which the company apparently provides censoring services, “killing the most damaging of commentary.” The use of the verb “killing” causes the damaging public commentary to appear as a live organism—a dangerous animal to be hunted and killed “before it gets out.” Communication is treated here as an autonomous entity that could escape and run amok if not violently halted. The government’s rationale for this policy is given as “national security” for the sake of which “anything is allowable.” The rhetoric of fear for safety in the political space as a reason for reducing and influencing privacy and free speech would be familiar to a contemporary (South African) reader—both for its reference to the apartheid government’s violent censorship regime and current developments nationally and worldwide with regards to political and governmental responses to various threats of terrorism.

*Moxyland* here presents a scenario in which this logic has been thoroughly implemented in society. Relevant is the choice of the word “allowable” rather than “allowed,” creating the suggestion that ethics (in this matter) are malleable: censorship *can be made to be allowed* rather than *is* or *is not allowed*. The issue this phrase therefore poses is not whether such censorship is an ethically sound practice

or not (government has apparently already stepped beyond this fundamental issue), but rather if it is possible to render it sound. It seems clear from the text that the government indeed has such power, aided or driven by corporate resources such as those provided by Communique.

In practice, however, it appears impossible to fully censor any and all communication regarding the attack:

There's no way to contain this one, only spin it. We're shutting down large parts of the network with service errors to try and keep it contained. Later, we'll blame this on an underground cable being damaged by the bombs. (250)

Communique's power to control public communication is limited, which leads to the company implementing a more active approach in the form of a "spin" of the facts. Not only is there a "clean-up marathon" (250) to remove as much "damaging" commentary as possible, there is an additional plan to contain the chatter by halting communication altogether. By removing the platforms for communication, government (through the ironically named entity, Communique) aims to control the flow of information and speculation, adding onto this the falsehood that the network errors are service errors as a result of "an underground cable being damaged" by the attack. The cause of the crisis is thus not only utilised as a justification for extensive censorship, but also as a cover-up for the extent and manner of this censorship. In the name of national security, government and corporate power thus control public narrative, a familiar scenario from the former apartheid state.

Here we discover that it is not only the biotechnology companies that are pervasively present in *Moxyland's* society, but that it is the advertising agencies who present the closest (ideological) relationship with government and who are the major corporate power controlling public space. This is supported by the manner in which the advertising industry is mentioned as a side note by Kendra: "Even ad agencies with big name biotech clients on their books don't tend to have in-house doctors" (11). In the form of an example, Kendra offhandedly reveals the hierarchy in the corporate world, where ad agencies "with big name biotech clients" are apparently in the top tier. The logic behind this could be that the success and financial resources of the major biotechnological corporations create the superior

status of the advertising agencies responsible for their public image. The fundamental source of power therefore seems to lie in the success of biotechnology in *Moxyland's* society, although the public and ideological power lies in the hands of advertising. Yet whatever the exact construction or historical developments at the root of the structure of corporate power in *Moxyland's* Cape Town, the novel explores a mutually beneficial relationship between government and corporate power, with corporate power being mainly represented by biotech companies and ad agencies. It is this "cooperation" that forms the basis of the structure of *Moxyland's* society, from which the other characteristics of the community stem.

### **Segregation**

Though *Moxyland's* society presents the incorporation of many constructive and beneficial (as well as destructive) technological and medical advances as a result of corporate development, revealed through the narratives of Kendra and Lerato, the socio-economic situation at the time of the novel is less than beneficial for the general population. Tendeka explains how "the shipping industry has died together with the economy" (42) and Kendra describes a photograph of "a car bomb set off by a bunch of right-wing students in Stellenbosch, who thought they could do a better job than government inc. with the drought and the superdemic" (84). Though the latter statement concerns an event in the (fictional) past, before the initiation of the quarantine, the theme of physical and biological hardship continues through the vague and subtle references to the quarantined "Rural" areas. In addition to the 'death' of the economy, the novel paints a bleak picture of the situation, within which it seems government inc. attempts to create order, through whatever means necessary (such as quarantine and segregation, aggressive police power and censorship).

It is the development of physical and ideological segregation (harking back to apartheid) that most defines, in a practical sense, *Moxyland's* society and the day-to-day lives of its citizens. The "corporate space" (8) Kendra travels to is presented as a separate social and economic eutopia, with all the (bio)technological and financial advantages available for its members, but unattainable for the other members of society. The secrecy of corporate space, which later reveals itself as a sinister apparatus for control, first presents itself in a familiar light, in the form of

“legal restrictions on documenting corporate space,” explained as a result of corporate power being “sensitive round these parts. All the proprietary tech” (8). Secrecy around proprietary (research and development of) technology would be a familiar construct for the contemporary reader. The extent to which it is implemented in the corporate area Kendra visits is extreme: “my pass isn’t valid for walking rights” (9)—rendering Kendra dependent on navigating the area by car and under supervision. This control is also exerted in more subtle ways, revealed when Kendra narrates being addressed by a receptionist: “Would I mind checking in my camera and any other recording devices? I don’t have to worry about my phone; they’ve got app blockers in place to prevent unauthorised activity” (9). ‘Regular’ activity such as phone usage is from that moment considered “unauthorised” and therefore subject to corporate control.

It thus appears that *Moxyland’s* society has a tripartite structure: The Corporate, the Civilian and the Rural. The otherwise sparse and subtle references in the novel to the Rural serve to spark curiosity or suspicion in the reader as they are left to speculate on the reason for the quarantine – the mysterious “superdemic” (84) – as well as the state of life there. The term ‘rural’ to denote this third ‘space’ or class suggests a frugal, isolated and underdeveloped existence (reminiscent of the Bantustans of the apartheid era), implying that the tripartite structure of *Moxyland’s* society is hierarchical and classist: The Corporate forming the upper class, the Civilian the middle class, and the Rural the lower class. The corporate and the rural, in contrast to the civilian class, are thus suggested to fall outside of ‘regular’ society as they are apparently, by elimination, non-citizens. In the case of the rural this denotes a group of outcasts, while the elite corporati are apparently ‘above’ society.

### **Police Power**

The third major factor in the construction of *Moxyland’s* society is the police-state theme invoked throughout the entire novel. The policing and control of society through genetically engineered animals (the Aitos) and the use of phone technology (the electrocution of subjects) is a significant dystopian theme in *Moxyland*. The latter, especially, plays a “special part” in *Moxyland’s* regime, as it explores the mobile phone “regulat[ing] inclusion within the body politic in *Moxyland*, enabling

both social and economic liquidity” (Bethlehem 527). Phones are not only used as an electrocuting device, but are also the only means of identification and financial and social activity. Basic necessities such as groceries and travel are impossible without an active SIM. “Disconnection,” a punishment doled out in temporary or even permanent form, is therefore “tantamount to social death” (Bethlehem 527). This dystopian logic is articulated by Toby as: “You can’t play nice by society’s rules? Then you don’t get to play at all. No phone. No service. No life” (28). Police power thus utilises not only corporal punishment but also severe social restrictions to ensure control. Instead of incarceration, which would in a material sense create the same restrictions (no travel, no commercial activity, no phone), *Moxyland’s* police utilise a social variant to incarceration that removes subjects from social life, without removing them from social space. The social and cultural effects of such invasive forms of police control will feature further in the following section.

### *6.1.3 Extended Cultural Influence*

These three major influences on the construction of *Moxyland’s* society (government inc., segregation and police power) are also explored in the novel through their extended influence upon its society’s cultural constructions and expressions. In particular, the influence of segregation and police power, and the resulting processes of resistance, are explored through the varying perspectives of the novel’s four protagonists. This subchapter will therefore analyse the novel’s treatment and exploration of these subjects in order to unearth the processes that are potential to a society such as *Moxyland’s*.

#### **Segregation**

The impact of the segregation of society into its three tiers – the corporate, the civilian and the rural – is made clear through Kendra’s trip into corporate space, where she experiences the discomfort of not belonging. Corporate space is uncomfortable, unfamiliar and out of reach for civilians such as Kendra; it is also a secretive space that is kept as invisible as possible as an exclusive, secluded area for the privileged in the form of “corporate havens” (9). Aside from the connotations with corporate ‘tax havens’ where corporations circumvent regular taxation, the use of the word “haven” also denotes safety, rest and a sense of home. The

“corporati” (16) or “corporates” (94) enjoy a privileged and secluded life, although, as becomes clear later in the novel, this turns out to be much less idyllic than Kendra’s initial narrative suggests. The effect of the (economic) segregation of the fictional South Africa of Beukes’s novel also inherently involves a major cultural shift. An example of this is the instance of illegal artefacts from the Rural that appear in the office of a high-placed corporati: objects from the lowest tier in society have gained a certain cultural (and material) value in the other tiers. This reveals not only a practical, material divide between the classes, but also a cultural divide and fascination with each other as a result. Simultaneously, the corporate class is reviled by the lower classes, as Toby’s language towards Lerato shows: “corporate bitchmonkey” (61). While Toby himself receives a trust fund and the two remain friends, this effect is negated into a normalised level of difference, negating the significant dystopian atmosphere this class divide could have created.

Bethlehem’s analysis of the novel supports the notion of a new form of segregation, as she concludes that “Beukes has transposed the racial stratifications of apartheid into an economic register” (527). Bethlehem connects this stratification to that of the apartheid era, arguing that *Moxyland* recalls the segregation of society under the apartheid regime, though in a different form. A connection also exists, however, with contemporary South African society regarding which “many argue that the neoliberal post-apartheid state” has caused a stratification along economic lines, as in Beukes’s novel (527). *Moxyland*’s three classes thus can be seen to resonate with contemporary developments towards a more capitalist-driven societal structure. Although socio-economic segregation continues to exist, where the majority of South Africa’s lower class is still formed by its black population, the newly emerging power elites and black middle class serve to increasingly blur the apartheid lines—though replacing them with others. *Moxyland*’s version of Cape Town in 2018 thus explores a semi-eutopian society in which race no longer significantly informs class divides. Destructive elements in this context remain, however, in the form of economic segregation within which no upward mobility seems to exist. *Moxyland*’s society thus shows the marks of unbounded neo-liberal policy, where capitalist principles are followed to an extent where corporate power has become dominant and social structures are subordinate to it.

The apparently fundamental segregation of society is nuanced, however, by Kendra's description of the office of her corporate contact:

His office on the seventeenth floor is colonised by an assortment of hip ephemera, a lot of it borderline-illegal. The most blatant example is the low-fi subtech on his bookshelf, a cobbled-together satellite radio smuggled in from the Rural in defiance of the quarantines, which probably only makes it more valuable, more flauntable. (10)

A certain tolerance towards rebellion seems to be indicated here, as the possession of illegal outdated materials is flaunted in the form of collector's items; souvenirs from a dangerous place. This passage implies the possibility of alleviating control over human life through corporate power by presenting an instance of rebellion. It is telling that this passage is introduced by a reference to colonisation. An ironic form of reverse-colonisation is indicated here, where the corporate-class office, on the seventeenth floor of a luxury high-rise building, is "colonised" by objects from the Rural. "Borderline-illegal" objects and outmoded technology from the lowest tier of society thus form highly desirable collector's items that invade and 'colonise' the corporate space. The scene thus symbolises a reversal of roles that points to a more complex society in *Moxylant* than one strictly divided into a hierarchy of isolated socio-economic levels.

This complexity is also explored through Lerato's backstory. Her 'rise' from orphaned AIDS baby and rural citizen to a successful member of corporate society serves to reveal another side of corporate power that shows itself to be open to membership based on merit as opposed to a closed elitist ruling class based, stereotypically, on purely biological ties or personal connections. The impression of an egalitarian society is thus evoked, where the deserving receives (just) rewards—suggesting those in a lower social position may also aspire to achieve a higher social rank.

The manner in which Lerato (whose family background signifies her as a 'black' South African) rose to corporate status reveals a convoluted process, however, in which corporate power plays a complex role. Lerato narrates how she remembers a "patchwork of broadcast images" that represent her past family life:

Green hills and sky and a threadbare chicken with long scrawny legs scratching through dust that would never yield a juicy maggot, let

alone mielies. It's all cliché, a communal sepia-toned memory that all us Aidsbabies have in common. (141)

This “sepia-toned” patchwork of images invokes a type of typical abject imagery associated with poverty and hardship in an unyielding part of the country's geography. Lerato's family history continues in this familiar abject tone, referring to their struggle with AIDS before a major change in her situation: “I was only seven at the time. The baby of the family after Zama and Siphokazi, and Tebogo, who succumbed even before our parents” (141). The change in her seventh year of life turns out to have been “a kickstart into corporate life” (109) when Lerato and her sisters enter the “Eskom Energy Kids” skills institute (154) which she refers to as “the Eskom orphanage,” adding cynically: “let's not cop to the PC term of ‘trade school,’ even if they are cultivating proprietary workforces” (140). In the fictional past (and present) of *Moxyland's* South Africa it seems that Eskom, as well as other large corporations, provide education through “skills institutes” to orphaned children—mainly victims of the AIDS epidemic. What follows for Lerato is a ‘career’ in the corporate world, due to her superior skills:

Within a year, I'd been handpicked to go over to Pfizer SA Primary in Cape Town, and suddenly the story sums in class were focused on medication doses rather than wattage, and the school didn't have the same level of desperation. There weren't girls selling themselves at the side of the road to truck drivers for tuck money.

Though companies such as Eskom provide orphaned children with a home and a future, the circumstances at such schools are clearly less than ideal. Lerato manages to upgrade to a more prestigious and comfortable level, though certain similarities remain: story sums in class appear in both institutes to focus on subjects relevant to the “parent company” (141). Though such a subtle invasion of the curriculum invokes dystopian notions of brainwashing, the example is representative of Beukes's ambiguous stance in *Moxyland*. By presenting a familiar educational tool (the story sum) as the subject for the insertion of a particular subject by the parent company to its dependants, this insertion is rendered relatively harmless—a story sum is inherently subject to cultural predisposition, after all. A feeling of unease is still invoked, however, given the aim of the skills institutes, rendering the example at least suggestive of blurred ethical boundaries. Pfizer's fictional South African

Primary school (“Pfizer SA Primary”) thus presents its students with a pharmacology-related education, suggesting that it attempts to raise these children as specifically skilled potential employees. Functioning as parents (“parent companies”) to these children – providing food, shelter and education – these skills institutes appear to be “cultivating proprietary workforces” for the company’s future use. One potential future for such children is exemplified by one of Lerato’s sisters, who is “fermenting in her dead-end job at Eskom, never having graduated beyond our first parent company” (141). Despite the contempt Lerato apparently feels for such a career, Lerato’s sister still belongs to the ‘corporati’ and thus to the privileged class of society, with access to superior (health) care, wealth and comfort.

For Lerato, however, a life of corporate success follows as she rises within the ranks:

At fourteen, I had my pick of bursaries at secondary institutions run by Telkom, Cisco, Wesizwe and New Mutua. I knew I wanted to get into media, and by then I knew how to negotiate, how to play the system. No more fucking around in squalid dorms with the hordes. When I took up New Mutua’s scholarship, I demanded a private room, and it was great for two years. (142)

Although this passage concerns Lerato’s education in her teens, the tone and terminology connote the job market with its negotiations of salary (or bursary in this case) and benefits. The list of corporations Lerato considers includes non-fictional companies (Telkom, Cisco and Wesizwe) as well as one fictional example (New Mutua). Beukes has clearly chosen to steer clear of providing a perspective on existing corporations (though still mentioning them) as the novel only offers details of the fictional corporations *Communique* and *New Mutua*. By naming the two fictional corporations in the context of non-fictional companies, *Communique* and *New Mutua* gain the position of corporate entities that *could have been* real and may be considered similar to, and even representative of, companies such as Telkom and Cisco. The two fictional corporations are involved in Lerato’s life as two parties interested in her worth as an employee:

*Communique* got me through a Pluslife chat room [...] one of my online friends made me a proposition [...] By the end of the day, *New Mutua* knew all about it and I was being forcibly evicted, marched out by security guards with Aitos, not even allowed to go back for my

phone. Looking back, it's obvious that my new friend ratted me out to make sure I didn't change my mind. I never learned his real name. Headhunters are only as effective as their anonymity. (142-143)

At age 16, Lerato is aggressively sought after by a rival company and poached by a head hunter. As a participating item of trade, Lerato precociously (to current standards) undergoes an educational development that mostly resembles a professional career. Rather than functioning as homes or responsible institutions, the skills institutes function through contracts, negotiations and evictions. As well as her affiliations, Lerato's education and rights themselves appear to be subject to negotiation:

Technically, I still had another four years of training to go before officially entering the workforce, but Communicque was willing to let me skip two, provided I waive the gap year that all skills institute grads are legally entitled to. (142-143)

Lerato's case reveals the potential pressure that may be put by a corporate power on their teenage employees/students to perform as preferred by the company. In this case, it seems to have been mostly beneficial (at least in a material sense) to Lerato, who is thus allowed to 'graduate' sooner and start a promising career at Communicque. This 'benefit' is explained through a comment Lerato makes to another headhunter: "Compared to scrabbling for opportunities with three thousand other Aidsbabies, believe me – corporate life is a breeze" (154). Despite what appears to be great pressure to negotiate and perform, Lerato considers her current position desirable above the alternatives. Her position, however, is one where her selfhood is subordinate to her skills—both from the perspective of corporate interest, as well as her own.

Her career and personal life are so intertwined in her own perspective that her professional goals greatly influence her behaviour with regards to personal relationships such as those with her sisters:

I probably had some kind of familial obligation to tell them when I realised that only the brightest and most productive get out – to better companies that pay a premium for the privilege. But [...] I didn't need the competition. (142)

Though Lerato adds other reasons not to include her sisters in her own corporate success, the last, competition-driven reason, is revealing. Though this reasoning could render her an unlikeable character who is (merely) selfish, her reasoning continues to unveil a sense of competitiveness in the corporate sphere that corresponds to the circumstances at the skills institutes and other situations described in Lerato's narratives. This process of social mobility as exemplified by Lerato thus not only reveals another instance of corporate influence over social space, but also its influence on human interaction (as well as furthering segregation): Lerato's ambition and compliance with the pressures of corporate life shape her choices and their effects on herself and those around her (not least her relationships with her family).

Though initially a greatly sought-after employee, Lerato also experiences a devaluation of her skills:

Good programmers are as easy to score as a blowjob on Lower Main Road, and just about as cheap. You really have to distinguish yourself if you're going to make any progress. It was easy getting noticed at nineteen, but I'm getting on, and if you haven't cracked management by twenty-eight, your chances of doing so decrease exponentially for every year you add to your CV. (110)

While this passage, coupled with Lerato's corporate upbringing, may suggest pressure to continue to build her career, her narrative simultaneously nuances the suggestion of brainwashing and extensive external control by revealing Lerato's own ambitions. One such revelation occurs during a meeting with her manager, to whom she discredits a co-worker: "I know, I know, it's heartless. But if I'm stuck in Communique for the duration, I can't afford to be coupled with someone who might hold me back" (144). Lerato's underlying ambitious motives are shown most clearly in her assessment of her roommate: "I've still got a few years, but I'm not ending up like Jane. Rather be a startling failure than a benign success" (110). Though it appears to be possible to remain a "benign success" without threatening her own corporate status, as exemplified by both her sister and Jane, Lerato continues to be driven towards advancement, suggesting her negotiation of the corporate sphere is a personal choice rather than a necessity or an enforced decision. *Moxyland* thus includes personal agency as a factor in *Moxyland's* society rather than depicting complete control by government inc. and corporate power over their subjects.

However, *Moxyland's* ruling power actively creates the circumstances within which these choices must be made, thus restricting agency to a limited set of options. The role corporate power has in this process of government and the nature of its restrictions towards its subjects (by “defusing” and “disconnecting”) is where the major ethical challenges within *Moxyland's* societal structure rise.

### **Police Power**

As Bethlehem notes, the SIM card as form of identification and instrument of extensive police control resonates with the apartheid regime’s use of the passbook and takes it one step further: “As a kind of digital passbook, the armed cellular phone renders infringement and retribution simultaneous” (528). Apartheid’s use of the passbook as a means of identification and police control for ‘non-White’ citizens only is taken to its ultimate conclusion in *Moxyland*:

It closes the infinitesimal gap that the passbook left open between the policeman and the black South African subject, or between the apartheid state’s interpellation of the racialized body, on the one hand, and incarceration or the extraction of labour which followed as the consequence of “pass offences,” on the other. (528)

Technology and police power are thus seen in the novel to enhance each other to the extent of effectively restricting, incarcerating and physically punishing the policed subject almost immediately after the offense and without trial or even a means of protest—an extrapolation of apartheid practices. The result of a blocked SIM is illustrated by Tendeka after his encounter with the police, when he attempts to enter an underway stop: “My phone won’t scan. Or rather, it does scan and blocks me outright in response to the police tag on my SIM” (39). This police tag is the technological implementation of the “temporary disconnect” Tendeka has received. Apart from a disconnect and defusing, police also have the option of further measures of control: “At least the fucker didn’t mace me, else every biogen dog in the city would be trailing me like I was a bitch in heat” (39). The use of biogen dogs (the Aitos), trained or modified to recognise a maced subject, form a further option for surveillance and control of those persons considered by police to be a danger.

Regulation of the use of this power is clearly common knowledge: Toby’s knowledge of the two-part warning procedure that should have been implemented

in Tendeka's arrest reveals the existence of regulation that suggests some form of concern for the rights of citizens. However, these rights and regulations are effectively ignored when the police so choose, as Tendeka is treated with more force than officially permitted: "Anything over 200 [volts] requires extra paperwork to justify the use of potentially lethal force, but that doesn't mean the cops don't push the limits" (28). Within certain hard legal bounds (mostly adhered to, apparently, because of the inconvenience of extra paperwork), disciplinary means are used at will and at the (in)discretion of individual cops. Corruption apparently extends beyond political boundaries and creates a society in which the policing of its subjects not only in its official form violates certain human rights, but also creates a reality in which these official bounds are, to a certain extent, ignored. Thus, the basic rights of Cape Town's citizens are disregarded by its police power who effectively but inhumanely oppress those who do not conform.

Yet *Moxyland's* society of control not only concerns police power as exerted over citizens by government-authorized police forces. Again, the confluence of government and corporate power is exposed, as it is revealed that corporate rights and profits are defended by similar force. In this context, Lerato introduces the reader to the "Pluslife chat room"—the chat room that forms part of the online game "Pluslife" (referring to the popular 2003 online virtual world 'Second Life'). She describes the game's communication features as initially a platform for "music sharing and flirting, before the record labels started imposing criminal sentences and meshing their crippleware with defusers" (142). Rather than describing a process in which record companies move through the appropriate legal channels to ban illegal file sharing, Lerato's statement reveals corporate power's immediate influence over criminal procedure and punishment. The record companies themselves apparently possess the power to implement law and punitive measures over *Moxyland's* society, utilising the same defusing technology as the police—electrocuting users of illegal products.

A scene in which Kendra encounters a woman being defused in front of a shop reveals the extent to which the use of this technology has been normalised. A shop owner logged a defuse to a shoplifter, who as a result is "having a seizure on the pavement" (134) with "her dirty bare feet drumming the concrete" (134). The shop owner's defence of his actions reveals the system behind certain civilians

being allowed to defuse other civilians: "It was legitimate, okay? Bitch started pulling down the merchandise, falling around. *Dronkie* [drunkard]. She's been in here before, causing shit. Stealing shit" (135). Apparently, the shop owner has permission in certain circumstances to legally defuse misbehaving shoppers. He continues by referring to a quota of defusings he has been permitted, which he has apparently exceeded: "I'm logging one crisp every coupla days. And now I gotta pay extra cos I'm over the limit? It's not fair. It's not my fault you can't take care of this rubbish. Now I gotta do your job?" (136). The complaint that his having exceeded the limit is, in fact, a result of criminal activity exceeding what his quota of "crisps" can suppress, and that it is the responsibility of police to reduce crime to a manageable quota, is worded in such a manner that it is apparent that the system is a normalised response to minor forms of crime. Civilians are thus made to be complicit in implementing violent control, exemplifying the ambivalence of the system. By giving businesses the means to punish criminals, they can now successfully defend their property and protect the safety of their customers. This system provides a means to lower crime rates and increased public safety. By, again, closing the gap between infringement and retribution, justice can be served swiftly and effectively. What this passage also reveals, however, is the significant potential for mistakes and abuse and the lack of recourse for the suspect of the crime for legal defence. Whether or not a defused suspect has the option of issuing a complaint after the fact is not mentioned. However, given that retribution for the crime has already been implemented, this would still enable an unjust process.

The potential for escalation is also revealed in this scene, in the form of an Aito's reaction to the behaviour of an onlooker:

suddenly, the Aito lunges forward, leaping over the woman's body, shouldering me aside, and grabs one of the street kids who has gotten too close, fastening its mouth like a bear trap on his arm and crashing him down to the street in one movement. There is a branch-crack of bone, followed by the inevitable screaming. (136)

The Aito was apparently trained to respond to certain types of behaviour, in order to control a situation. This passage reveals, however, that this may result in excessive force for what seems to be innocent behaviour. The reaction of the "citicop" who joins the scene, again explores the reversal of justice that

characterizes *Moxyland's* society: "Don't worry your little head, sweetness, he'll get the medical attention he needs" (137). Whatever the causes of the injury, the fact that the effects (the medical injury) can be reversed – or at least resolved – seems to render the causes of the injury irrelevant. The logic behind the swift implementation of retribution seems to be based upon the notion that it is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. The fact of the existence of injustice, excessive violence and harm to innocents is apparently irrelevant, or a regrettable but necessary by-product, as priority is given to swift resolution. Extreme policing force is thus presented as a recognised part of *Moxyland's* society.

In line with the novel's ambiguous tone, however, certain factors in this scene problematise this reading. It is clear from the moment of Kendra's arrival at the scene, that certain matters of the situation do not accord with protocol. Firstly, the shop owner defused the shoplifter based not on the evidence of the situation at that moment, but on an extrapolation of her previous behaviour. This defuse was also an illegitimate use of force, as the shop owner had already reached his quota. Secondly, Kendra notes the presence of the Aito, but registers surprise at the absence of a cop: "There's no sign of his operator" (133). Apparently, the biogen police dogs are under regular circumstances always accompanied by an "operator" – the citicop – presumably to include a measure of control over the animal. The cop's absence, therefore, is unusual, or at least not protocol. The Aito's excessive behaviour, we can presume, could have been curtailed by its operator. The dystopian excesses of this passage (injustice and police violence) are thus nuanced by revealing failures of protocol, suggesting that, with the correct implementation of the protocols, such excesses would not have been perpetrated. The failures of protocol are all human failures, however.

This passage thus notes the importance of considering the human factor when implementing rigid and dangerous systems of control. On the abstract level of policy, the implementation of a tough response to crime – including providing individual means of protection of body and property, as well as including means of regulation (the presence of operators and quota) – may seem an effective way to battle crime. What this passage especially reveals, however, is that reality and individual subjects cannot be fully controlled by protocols, rendering this reversal of justice problematic. When implemented successfully and to the letter, the system

and protocols may seem ethically sound: as long as guilt is sufficiently determined and excessive force is avoided, this process seems just. However, this passage explores the reality of society, including human failure, revealing the moment where eutopia becomes dystopia.

Such escalation of protocol finds its ultimate expression in a scene at the Adderley Street underway. Here a group of gamers playing in “realspace” (including Toby), a group of protesters (including Tendeka) and a crowd of bystanders form a chaotic scene of violence and panic in which police force escalates to the point of releasing a virus to force the crowd to disperse and seek medical attention. The chaos is instigated and exacerbated by the game played out in the underway, where Toby and his gang’s mission is to identify and incapacitate a terrorist gang (another group of gamers). The players possess a .44 Magnum revolver, adjusted to shoot pellets of harmless purple fluid. The gamers appear to mistake innocent bystanders for fellow gamers, however, causing panic amongst the crowd. Once the chaos reaches its peak, policemen accompanied by Aitos and an announcement over the station’s audio system appear on the upper level, requesting the crowd to disband. This seems to be effective, as “the crowd [...] start disassembling peacefully and in an orderly fashion so as not to piss off the cops or, more importantly, the dogs” (213). The means and level of police control thus seems to be appropriate and effective for the conflict at hand.

An unexpected development sparks a new level of panic, however, as “the lift doors open and it becomes obvious the msg [message] hasn’t reached the lower floors” (213). Out of the lift bursts Toby’s teammate Doyenne:

splattered with dye [...] grinning like a berserker, rabid with battle lust [...] She grins wider and launches into the painfully over-quoted line from *Sleepers Phoenix* – ‘Hi-de-ho, neighbours! I regret to inform you it’s time to die!’ before opening random fire on the crowd. (213-214)

Doyenne’s enthusiastic participation in what she still perceives to be a game leads her to play the role of a violent criminal or terrorist so realistically that the crowd panics:

Chaos breaks out in shockwaves [...] People drop to the ground, screaming, unaware that it’s a game [...] Others, caught in the panic,

surge towards the exits. And then in one convulsive move, *everyone* drops to the ground, twitching, phones crackling as the defusers kick in. (214)

Regardless of the many innocent bystanders in the crowd, police implement harsh measures to diffuse the situation by incapacitating every single person present. The protesters themselves, however, appear to be unaffected: “Your weapons are useless. We defy your attempts to regulate society. We’re voluntarily disconnected! Voluntarily disenfranchised! You cannot control us!” (214). By voluntarily relinquishing the only means to belong to society, the protesters aim to simultaneously rob the police of their power over them. As Toby notes, however, this “only means that when they call the dogs in, they’re going to be more savage than usual” (215). Toby observes how the police adheres to “strict by-the-book procedure” which means “Verbal warning. Defuse. Dogs. It never takes more” (215). Again, the existence of procedure and predictability is invoked, suggesting police power adheres to the strict boundaries of this power.

Yet again, individuals appear not to adhere to predictable behaviour themselves, causing an escalation in an otherwise controlled situation: “Even the most defiant bloody-minded idiot tends to shut up and give up when facing down those [Aitos’] teeth. Well, except for Doyenne” (215). Toby’s teammate, despite being attacked by two Aitos, is “still laughing, still pumping slugs into the crowd and swearing soldier, clubbing alternately at the dogs’ heads with her free hand” (215). Another teammate decides to come to her aid as “two pellets explode across the second dog’s flank” (215). The protesters, too, do not surrender to the dogs, but turn out to be well prepared: “Tendeka and his ragtag regiment yank out pangas. The first dog to reach them goes down with a meaty thwack” (216). This unprecedented behaviour creates a conflict among the cops themselves as they appear “locked in a screaming match, because this shit is way outside the bounds of procedure. People aren’t supposed to attack the dogs” (216). Though initially rendered helpless by the unexpected resistance, the cops are meanwhile instructed from some external source to retreat with the Aitos and leave the station. The “defuse” of the crowd is also lifted, leaving people shocked, confused and relieved, though some realise that the withdrawal of the police “can only signify heavy shit to come” (217).

What follows is a more sinister form of crowd control, in the form of a spray filling the station with what seems to be a chemical. An announcement over the PA system reveals that in accordance with “statute 41b, Extreme Measures, of the National Security Act,” the crowd has been “exposed to the M7N1 virus” which is “only fatal if you do NOT report to an immunity centre for treatment within 48 hours” (219). As Bethlehem identifies, this passage is “reminiscent of the ‘purple rain’ tactics of the South African security forces under apartheid” (529) that made it possible to identify perpetrators after crowd dispersal by the indelible purple dye sprayed over the crowd. Beukes here not only invokes apartheid tactics, she extrapolates them to a new and more effective, but also much more sinister, level. The crowd instantly disbands as all seek to find one of the vaccination centres for treatment as quickly as possible. Their presence at the vaccination centres is simultaneously a convenient way to identify and detain those involved in causing the chaos. Those who do not choose or dare to appear at a vaccination centre will die as a result of the virus. Each person present at the station will thus become subject to police investigation or will be effectively ‘removed’ from society. Though not a part of “strict by-the-book procedure” or at least public knowledge, this tactic was apparently well prepared as the virus was already present at the scene, including the preparation of a vaccine and the vaccination centres. As I will discuss further below, this scene is revealed to be part of a grander scheme in which the powers that be create such violent incidents themselves in order to justify increasingly extensive force and measures of control.

Control and power in *Moxyland* thus illustrate the unjust physical restriction and harm of human subjects by police power and corporate power, validated by the (merely symbolic) government, based on a logic of national security, and enabled by technological advances. The social and cultural effects of this extensive implementation of police control measures are summarised by “skyward\*”—the screenname of Tendeka’s contact and mentor who guides his rebellion against corporate power (and by extension government inc.):

corporates [...] corrupting govts with their own agendas, politicians on their payroll, exacerbating the economic gaps, building social controls and access passes and electroshock pacifiers into the very technology we need to function day to day, so you’ve got no choice

but to accept the defuser in your phone or being barred from certain parts of the city because you don't have clearance. (126-27)

This passage reveals the major part technology plays in enabling the police-state's functioning. *Moxyland's* advanced technology is effectively implemented to control bodies, space and thus also behaviour. The role of corporate power is inextricably linked to this process, as this passage shows how power is exerted through technology and technology is controlled by the companies developing and producing that same technology. Government and politics are merely puppets, rendering corporate power omnipotent. The source of power (technology), its implementation (police power) and the means of regulation (government) are thus all located in the same hands, with as a result that all aspects of the lives of the subjects of *Moxyland's* society are influenced, regulated and controlled by corporate power.

### **Resistance**

The major plotline of the novel, which connects the four disparate characters, is the organised rebellion against government inc. into which all are drawn, whether willingly or not. Tendeka is manipulated by skyward\* to perpetrate increasingly violent terrorist attacks; Lerato facilitates the technological aspects of Tendeka's activities by hacking various systems; Toby joins various of Tendeka's activities for his own gain; and Kendra is repeatedly an unwitting and unwilling witness and victim of the terrorist attacks in the novel.

The ultimate control exerted by corporate power (within both symbolic and real boundaries) is revealed to spark rebellion in those oppressed by its physical and psychological control and violence. As I have shown in the previous chapter, the novel, through the genre of cyberpunk, explores themes of protest and resistance in the context of capitalism and corporate power. In the narrative, this rebellion is embodied most explicitly by Tendeka. He is the centre of organised terrorism led by the mysterious character skyward\*, who forms part of "future\*renovate, some anti-corporate community in Amsterdam" (252). More such groups exist in *Moxyland*, "with dubious titles like WorldChanger or Guerrilla Corporatista" (253). The main aim of such groups and their individual members, such as Tendeka, is to "wreak some havoc on capitalism" (90) by attacking and protesting corporate activity as

well as small-scale and large-scale “corporati” based on the logic that “[e]very capitalist enterprise propagates the system that fucks people over, keeps the poor and the sick down and out of sight” (91). Terrorist activity is thus focused against both the abstract idea of ‘capitalism’ and what the activists see as its practical embodiment: any form of corporate (or government inc.) enterprise.

This activism takes the form of semi-peaceful protests such as their presence at the Adderley station, but also more violent attacks such as the bombing of the vaccination centres and the violent ‘murder’ of a genetically engineered creature exposed as art (with the message “Death to corporate art” (176)). To these ends, Tendeka increasingly endangers those around him, including the street children he is responsible for, though initially stating that he “wouldn’t expose the kids to unnecessary risk” (164). For a later mission, however, he justifies using these street children for the purpose of a protest, arguing: “The point is that the kids are homeless already. As long as we don’t get caught, they have nothing to lose. They can’t be disconnected because they don’t have phones” (164-165). This increasing level of danger to which he exposes himself and those around him is part of what seems to be the inherent increase in necessary force to gain results: “We make a move, they up the stakes” (95) is the complaint towards government inc. and corporate power. The terrorist resistance movements and corporate power are thus locked in an increasingly violent conflict as neither party is prepared to back down.

While Tendeka and his gang act out increasingly violent missions, corporate power and government inc. react with increasingly suppressive counterforce, with “the Minister of Safety and Security swearing to step up measures against terrorism” (184). Tendeka’s partner, Ashraf, warns Tendeka that his actions are exacerbating this vicious cycle: “Did you see the fucking cams in the gallery? Do you know the licence you’ve given them to crack down?” (184). Increasing violence from terrorism thus justifies harsher control from government inc., sparking more frustration and anger from resistance groups which in turn will invite more repressive forms of police power etc. This cycle in the case of Tendeka ends in his own death, as he succumbs to the virus unleashed in the chaos at the Adderley station. His death becomes the last (improvised) stage in his mission as it is recorded by Toby, who has promised to publish Tendeka’s last speech on his

streamcast: “I’ve been infected with the M7N1 virus as an act of government-corporate censorship. Repression. This is human rights violation taken to its worst. They are wilfully killing their citizens” (289). Motivated by skyward\*, Tendeka thus aims to create a shocking video that will change the world: “That’s the only way to expose it, for the outside world to know it’s real” (272).

Part of skyward\* and Tendeka’s strategy included the bombing of the vaccine centres set up to treat those infected by the virus at the Adderley station: “The bombs will focus attention on this thing. It’ll stop people getting the vaccine. They’ll die. In the limelight” (272). These deaths will thus illustrate his argument that government inc. is “wilfully killing” its own citizens. Tendeka’s actions have evolved into the deaths of himself and innocent others, in an increasingly desperate attempt to gain attention for the repression acted out by government inc. In this attempt to draw attention to governmental violence and corporate power’s role in it, Tendeka himself perpetrates violent and repressive action that harms his fellow citizens. While a full discussion of the ethical issues surrounding such terrorist or rebellious action would go beyond the scope of this analysis, this escalating cycle of violence encapsulates *Moxyland*’s ambiguous stance towards its subject matter. The resistance movements placed in the narrative as a counterforce against the dystopian society of control become a source themselves for the violence against innocent bystanders—exploring a form of complicity in the increase of police measures as they indeed give them “the licence [...] to crack down” (184).

Even those belonging to the privileged corporate class, represented by Lerato, are shown to rebel against the system as Lerato’s narrative reveals how far she is willing to go to continue to be successful:

I figure my options are pretty limited within Communique. But with the penalties for inter-corporate poaching running into hundreds of thousands, it’s going to be difficult to persuade another corporate that they need me, when they can get fresher and younger talent straight out of the skills institutes for much, much less. Unless I have something to sweeten the deal. Like a backdoor, say, installed in their rival’s security software. (110)

The aims of such skills institutes to produce a workforce beneficial to its parent company apparently result in a lack of loyalty towards its older students once they no longer create the value they were raised to engender. It does not appear that job

insecurity is a factor, suggesting that ‘once a corporate, always a corporate’ is the rule of thumb, as exemplified by Jane and Lerato’s sister. However, personal development and ambitions do not seem to be an option for the older talent given the influx of the younger, “fresher,” workforce: “my options are pretty limited within Communique.” Therefore, although Lerato is not in danger of losing her job or corporate status, her ambition drives her to ‘play the game’ and do her utmost to ‘win’—to the extent of breaching her contract with Communique by compromising the company’s security: “Call it market research. ‘Corporate espionage’ is so over-dramatic” (111). Again, this is where *Moxyland*’s ambivalent characteristics are exemplified, as a large part of the novel’s plot rests on Lerato’s voluntary illegal activity: “Aiding and abetting a hack job on corporate property? [...] That’s goodbye plush apartment and cushy job. Firing offence, no written warning required” (63). No career strategy is served by her hacking, and given the danger to her status it appears the illegal activity is rather a personal drive for excitement and adventure. Lerato’s choices are driven by rebellion against the ‘system’ for its own sake, symbolised by a passage describing a genetically modified butterfly as part of a gift from a colleague:

A monarch alights on my keyboard, flexing its wings, flashing the striations of velvety orange and black. Strayed too far from the nest, little guy. They don’t like that around here. I crush it delicately under my thumb. (111)

The cause of her part in the rebellion seems to be a matter of rebellion against her parent company for personal and more psychological reasons. Further analysis could be done on the motivations of this character, but relevant here is her inherent drive to ‘stray from the nest’ through hacking Communique’s systems for various goals. As the plot to her narrative reveals, her straying from ‘the nest’ has repercussions: her symbolic crushing of the butterfly prefigures the later scene in which she is confronted by company officials with her crimes and forced into a life of corporate servitude. This scene thus summarises Lerato’s story, and reveals that she is aware of the risks she is taking.

Toby’s involvement in the resistance and in Tendeka’s activities is shown to be mostly for the purpose of his ‘streamcast’ named “Diary of Cunt” (24). This online

audio-visual diary is a “weekly round-up of Toby’s astounding life” (24) as he himself narrates. This life includes

good drugs, good music, sexploits with exceptionally beautiful girls, regular skirmishes with the motherbitch, and, most recently, some para-criminal counter-culture activities compliments of Mr Steve Biko-wannabe. (24)

Toby’s motivations for joining Tendeka (“Mr Steve Biko-wannabe”) and his gang are represented as being mostly for the purpose of exploiting them for their value as material for his purposefully scandalous streamcast. Toby’s reference to Steve Biko, a well-known activist during and against the apartheid regime, links Tendeka’s activities to apartheid activism but simultaneously ridicules him as an insufficient copy—a ‘wannabe.’ His contempt for the resistance movement is continuously revealed through the mostly sarcastic tone in which he speaks the ‘language’ of resistance: “Let every multinational conglom quake in fear, for the people have spoken! Dredge humanity is banding together, taking a stand for freedom, truth, equality – and the right to buy Fong Kong brands” (60). By adding the clause “and the right to buy Fong Kong brands” to the grandiose language of the remaining statement, Toby ridicules the resistance manifesto and minimises it to a matter of minor consumerist interests. Rather than presenting major concerns regarding corporate power’s ultimate influence over government’s social and economic policy, Toby reduces the matter to an issue of the free selling and buying of cheap Chinese-made counterfeit products.

For Toby, it seems the resistance movements are an interesting subculture (though defining itself as a “counter-culture”), to be exploited for his own popularity. It appears he is not alone in this stance, however, as he attends events organised for this purpose: “a protest party. It’s the new theme night at Replica. Insurrection Saturdays. Awesome DJ playing” (62). Apparently, insurrection and resistance have become a popular cultural expression that concerns entertainment and fashion rather than any drive for real change in society’s construction.

The ultimate example of Toby’s superficial stance towards *Moxyland’s* seemingly dystopian society is revealed in his reaction to witnessing Tendeka’s death: “it’s huge, and my exclusive eyewitness is piggybacking off it beautifully” (184). He records Tendeka’s last moments with his coat, supposedly for the

purposes of a live stream as Tendeka's last act of resistance, but in actuality to upload it as an exciting piece for his vlog. Toby's indifference towards Tendeka's message and any stance towards *Moxyland's* society is summed up by his plans for the footage: "I have the total sony exclusive on the untimely and grotesque death of a terrorist. Or a martyr. Depends on who's paying" (303). Toby thus intends to cash in on the recording regardless of its use for or against Tendeka's views. Important for Toby is merely the monetary value Tendeka's death represents as he intends to sell the story to the highest bidder.

Toby's plan to sell Tendeka's story simultaneously reveals that there is indeed a market for such a thing. The narratives surrounding the events at the art gallery opening illustrate this, as various perspectives and interpretations of Tendeka's activities there are presented. One news source states that it concerned an invasion, where "animal-rights actives hacked apart enfant terrible Khanyi Nkosi's controversial and grotesque bio-mod creature" (185), despite Tendeka having clearly stated his anti-corporate agenda. The various reactions include

the Minister of Safety and Security swearing to step up measures against terrorism to arts critics alternately decrying it as a tacky publicity stunt or lauding it as bold political theatre that outstrips any performance art done previously. (184)

The arts critics' reaction, in particular, reveals the potential of Tendeka's act for media exploitation. Their varying interpretations are based upon the assumption that it was a deliberate performance, organised by the gallery or other stakeholders of the gallery opening. This assumption is first countered by what the reader knows regarding Tendeka's plans, which were seemingly organised external to anybody connected to the gallery. In Kendra's narrative, however, the reader is forced to question this interpretation, when Kendra realises that the security footage of the gallery contained audio (196). Unusual for security footage, the presence of the audio recording in addition to the regular video suggests that something more sinister is behind the events at the gallery. The response given by Kendra's boyfriend and sponsor to her discovery confirms this suspicion: "Jonathan grins. 'Don't be so naïve, my darling, of course it did. We had it specially installed'" (196). Jonathan's nonchalant confession reveals that there was prior knowledge of Tendeka's activities, and that action was taken to exploit the event afterwards.

Whether this knowledge was a result of a leak, or something more sinister, is not revealed, though the novel's plot suggests this moment is a clue towards the realisation that skyward\* is more than meets the eye.

The exploitation of subversive activities for financial gain is presented as a regular part of society in a further example given by Tendeka, who explains the term "subvertising:" "what Levi's did when those kids in Brazil hacked their storefronts. Turned it into a challenge, a hacksibition, appropriating street culture for their own twisted purposes" (94). Again "street culture," linked to anti-corporate sentiments, is presented in the novel as a popular cultural expression utilised by corporate power for the purposes of advertising, as a means to connect to a target audience. *Moxyland* thus shows that the effect of re-appropriations of anti-corporate messages by corporate power is that expressions of resistance are disempowered, driving individuals such as Tendeka to express anti-corporate views more explicitly and violently.

Yet not only does corporate power in the novel disempower resistance through reappropriation, *Moxyland* also explores the potential of corporate power to influence and control resistance in more sinister ways. In the later stages of the novel's plot, it appears that skyward\*, who steers Tendeka's protests and attacks, is, in fact, not a likeminded activist based in Amsterdam. When working to remove any digital evidence of Tendeka's terrorist involvement, Lerato discovers that "the IP address for skyward\* comes back to Communique's corporate pipeline" (255). It appears that Tendeka's anti-corporate agenda and activities have been guided by that same corporate power he aims to bring down. Lerato herself, when confronted by the leaders at Communique with her criminal activity, is given the choice to either leave the building through the window of the 31<sup>st</sup> floor of the company's skyscraper (another reference to the apartheid regime's way of ridding themselves of activists), or choose to become part of the deception of society's anti-corporate resistance movements: "You'll be running several identities, posting, inciting, organising – whatever is required. Let's just say you're on the up. Heading skywards" (296). Lerato is thus to become a version of skyward\* and in turn lead and mislead terrorism and resistance in order to justify increasingly repressive forms of control: "any action is justified in a state under terrorist threat [...] You just have to create your own terrorists" (296).

What the theme of resistance in *Moxyland* thus explores is not only a human tendency to resist (police) power as part of the ways to deal with societies of control, but a more complex potential for conflict: Beukes also explores the potential of ultimate power formed by a construction such as *Moxyland's* government inc. to control and manipulate any countermovement to its ultimate power—not only to disempower such counterforces, but to strengthen its own almost omnipotent position. As Lerato realises: “It makes perfect sense. The process has to be managed. Fear has to be managed. Fear has to be controlled. Like people” (296).

The dystopia of *Moxyland* thus seems complete: every major factor of society and human action is constructed, structured and controlled by corporate power—including the potential for resistance and revolution. Extended cultural influence by corporate power over *Moxyland's* society is thus not only extensive, but also sinister: Not only does corporate power spark forms of resistance, but continuous influence is exerted over its forms—both to minimise its effects through re-appropriation as well as to guide it in order to manage the inevitable. As my analysis of the novel shows, however, the novel does not allow for such a straightforward dystopian reading. Segregation, police power and resistance all reveal different perspectives and interpretations, and are explored through varying experiences in the novel by various characters: Tendeka’s escalation of violence, Toby’s narcissism and Lerato’s egotism each offset corporate power’s strategies of repression and control. Yet even government inc.’s dystopian methods themselves are offset in the novel by corporate action towards social investment, as I will discuss in the following section.

## 6.2 Corporate Social Responsibility

The major theme in the novel that problematises a simple reading of *Moxyland* as a critical dystopian text is the form of constructive social influence acted out by various corporations—most notably the non-fictional company Eskom. Lerato’s narrative is based mostly on contact with fictional corporations, rendering the novel’s mention of non-fictional corporations highly relevant. Apart from summing up a number of companies such as Cisco and Wesizwe, Beukes’s inclusion of Eskom and Pfizer as significant influences in Lerato’s development warrants a closer

analysis. These two corporations function in her past as “parent companies—both a reference to their effective status as “parents” to Lerato (who is, as has been mentioned previously, an AIDS orphan) as well as a reference to the business term defined by the OED as an “organization or company which owns or controls a number of subsidiaries.” By utilising this term to denote Eskom and Pfizer and their respective skills institutes, Beukes invokes its connotations of ownership and control that also resonate with Lerato’s adult experiences as a corporate subject.

Though seemingly a futuristic, dystopian theme that many cyberpunk narratives have in common, Beukes herself, in her epilogue to the novel, identifies similarities with contemporary reality: “South Africa’s national energy provider, Eskom, *has* announced its intentions to open up its own proprietary university (not, as yet linked to an AIDS orphanage)” (313). Though the author’s observation is written in the context of a summation of “real-world correlations develop[ing] *since* the novel made its debut” (313, my italics), such as a real bio-engineered piece of art, transgenic dogs and subliminal advertising, this correlation between *Moxyland’s* fictional universe and (contemporary) reality is highly relevant. By exploring a potential extrapolation of the increasing trend in contemporary corporate governance towards social involvement, Beukes investigates a form of the (re)structuring of society by corporate power and its pervasive socio-cultural influence in reality by extrapolating this trend. This last section will therefore analyse this matter separately, given its complex and overarching nature.

Whether as a deliberate strategy by the author or not, the novel in effect explores the ethics of contemporary developments of corporate governance that are highly relevant for the notion of corporate ingression. Corporate governance is the concept of “the creation and implementation of processes” within the corporate organisation in order to “optimise returns to shareholders while satisfying the legitimate demands of stakeholders” (Mason and Simmons 78). Increasing importance is placed within corporate governance on the demands of stakeholders, as scholars conclude that “[v]iewing corporate governance through a stakeholder lens broadens traditional shareholder-centric and hub-spoke approaches,” facilitating “consideration of a wider range of corporate governance issues” (Mason and Simmons 78). Traditionally, corporate governance has been focused mainly on the demands of those holding shares in the company (the *shareholders*), rather than

including the wants and needs of those directly and indirectly affected by corporate activity (the *stakeholders*). Currently, the influence of stakeholder theory on management practices has affected “company director duties to include formal consideration of stakeholder perspectives and agendas” leading to “a heightened awareness of CSR [Corporate Social Responsibility], business ethics, and business practices” (Mason and Simmons 78).

Various scholars have concluded that this is a result of public responses to recent economic crises:

Following the global financial crisis, organisations are increasingly expected to not only self-regulate by complying with legislative requirements, but to also act in a morally and ethically defensible way by considering stakeholders whose interests are affected by the organisation. (Vorster and Marais 33)

Mason and Simmons similarly conclude that the discovery of corporate malfeasance in the 1990s as well as the more recent banking crisis,

prompted calls from sections of the business community, politicians, and the general public for more timely, comprehensive and rigorous methods of corporate governance that accord with [...] principles of inclusivity, materiality, and responsiveness. (78)

As a result, theories and practices such as CSR, along with similar developments in corporate governance such as the prevalence of ‘TBL’ (Triple Bottom Line) and ‘sustainable business practices,’ have received increased attention from various directions (business, government, NGO’s, media, etc.) with a general focus on organisational justice as a consequence. Corporate governance, it has been concluded, should not only include a focus on profit and shareholder demands, but also include policies to account for and benefit the various stakeholders in the company such as, for instance, its employees and their families and the natural environment—leading to a triple bottom line of ‘people, planet and profit’ as it is more colloquially termed (Vorster and Marais 32). This does not merely concern “the identification of stakeholders and their interests and expectations” but includes developing procedures and a “concern with creating value” for the identified stakeholders (Vorster and Marais 36). This value is created by, among other approaches, forming processes that involve “establishing governance

structures, policies, objectives, targets, management systems and processes” as well as procedures to monitor the performance of these processes (Vorster and Marais 36).

In South Africa specifically, this development has led companies (both private and state-owned) to become answerable to the ‘King III’ guidelines (named after Supreme Court of South Africa judge Mervyn E. King): “a best-practice governance framework that emphasises good business ethics” (Vorster and Marais 33-34) and encourages a productive relationship between a company and its stakeholders. In effect, this means that “decisions made by the board of an organisation must be in the best interests of the organisation” whilst simultaneously considering “the legitimate interests and expectations of

stakeholders” by acting sustainably and “delivering on the three TBL value components” of people, planet and profit (Vorster and Marais 34). In their study of Eskom specifically, Vorster and Marais have identified the state-owned company’s stakeholders and visualised the relationships in a map, included in Figure 1. Apart from the shareholders (in this case the South African

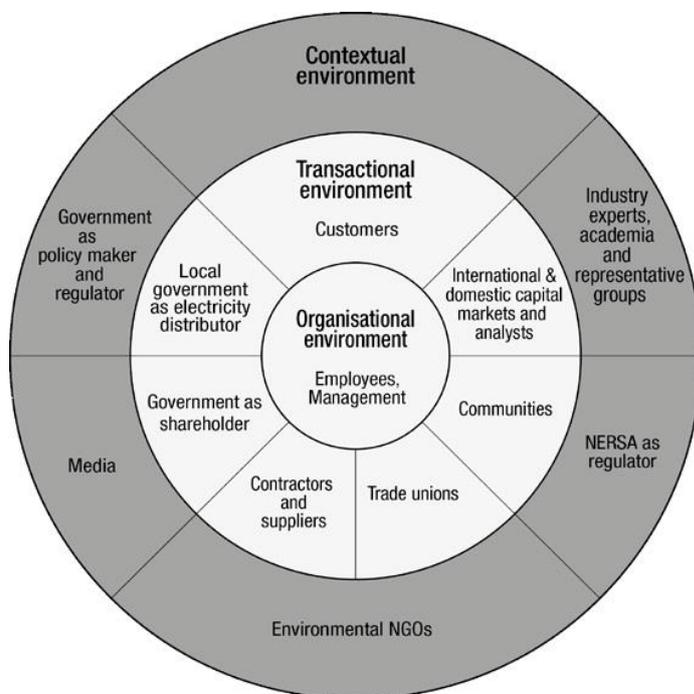


Figure 1: Eskom Stakeholder Map (Vorster and Marais 39)

government), this map shows other groups and entities affected by Eskom’s activity, such as its employees, customers and the environment (represented in this case by environmental NGOs) as well as the media and regulatory institutions. Given the scale and scope of Eskom’s activity (providing 95% of South Africa’s energy needs), this stakeholder map concerns a major part of South African society (customers alone forming the vast majority of the country’s population). As a result of Eskom’s major presence as a corporate entity within South Africa, Vorster and Marais observe and conclude that “Eskom, [...] through employment creation and

skills development, has a massive local social impact” (Vorster and Marais 31). Economically and socially speaking, therefore, Eskom’s presence is significant. Certain factors of the company’s social policies are relevant here, as they resonate with *Moxyland’s* exploration of the potential effects of significant corporate social involvement.

As Beukes herself reveals in her epilogue, a connection exists between Eskom’s actual social programs such as the intention to open a proprietary university, and *Moxyland’s* depiction of the AIDS orphanages and skills institutes as organised by various corporations in the novel’s fictional society. Currently no proprietary university exists, although Eskom awards bursaries to applicants “as a major contribution towards broadening the national skills pool” (Eskom). As Eskom explains on its website, this bursary programme “has been developed to enable Eskom to meet its business objectives regarding future skills requirements, thereby giving structure to the skills pipeline.” Eskom thus sponsors students to develop skills that are beneficial to Eskom’s future “business needs.” Though as yet only aiding students at a later age (post-secondary education), Eskom creates a proprietary workforce similar to *Moxyland’s*, where the students are financially bound to the company in question. In the case of Eskom’s current bursary programme, students are bound “to work-back obligation equal to contract duration” after completion of the course. For a two-year education, students are thus bound to a two-year contract with Eskom in order for the company to gain the benefits of the skills these students acquire through its programme. Due to the high university fees in South Africa, (academically successful) students thus gain the opportunity for a higher education they would otherwise not be able to afford. Indeed, this programme is not unique to Eskom: the online publication BusinessTech lists many other South African companies (such as British American Tobacco and SABMiller) that offer similar bursaries and many other (types of) scholarships worldwide are made available by various companies.<sup>16</sup>

Closer to *Moxyland’s* exploration of corporate involvement in social health issues such as the AIDS epidemic, companies such as Eskom currently (as per 2009)

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<sup>16</sup> E.g. the Coca-Cola Scholars Program (<http://www.coca-colascholarsfoundation.org/?pid=388>) and the AISES Google Scholarship (<http://www.aises.org/scholarships>).

also provide workplace HIV/AIDS programmes: “The South African Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS (SABCOHA) is working with a number of organizations, including Eskom Holdings Limited (South Africa)” (George et al. 296). The aims of such programmes are, George et al.’s study shows, “to limit the incidence of new infections among staff and the surrounding community” by “changing behavior and increasing the use of preventative measures” and “to manage the impact of existing infections on the company, staff and community” by “improving medical care and support to PLWHAs [People Living With HIV/AIDS]” (295). The rationale behind such programmes are the “profound and wide ranging financial impacts” the HIV/AIDS epidemic has upon South African businesses due to the resulting instability and decrease of the available workforce (293). The implementation of antiretroviral treatment (ART) programs for HIV-infected employees enables them “to remain productive, which generates indirect savings through the saving of recruitment, training and absenteeism costs” (George et al. 297). As “the costs of not intervening would soon outweigh the costs of treatment” (297), many companies implement ART programs independent of government funding. Some companies take further (voluntary) steps in order to

raise their corporate responsibility profile in the area of HIV/AIDS by choosing to take a leadership role in mobilizing the businesses community, getting involved in advocacy at a regional or national level, or supporting social programs. (George et al. 295)

In the case of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa, we see how negative social circumstances actively promote a further increase in CSR activity within corporate governance. This theme of corporate responsibility and social investment returns regularly in *Moxyland*, also independent from HIV/AIDS issues, as it appears that various of Tendeka’s projects for street children are of interest to corporations seeking social investment ventures: “Some corporate sell-out buddy [...] says he can get the project into his company’s CSI [Corporate Social Investment] program, no problem” (40). Social programmes and advocacy thus form part of *Moxyland*’s society, and though he initially protests, even Tendeka considers agreeing to “corp financing” for the purpose of sponsorship for a graffiti project (94).

The connection between financial loss and gain that furthers such social programmes as organised voluntarily by corporate power is immediately clear

here. In a non-fictional context, however, studies also suggest that such “maximisation of shareholder value” by recognising the impact of social circumstances on a company’s profits “may well entail company directors pursuing a wider range of social and economic objectives that are consistent with CSR” (Mason and Simmons 78). CSR and similar corporate strategies for actively pursuing social advancement for company stakeholders are thus strongly and often inextricably linked to creating shareholder value. As *Moxyland* shows, corporate-organised social programs such as sponsored skills institutes are not merely a philanthropic enterprise, but always also benefit the company in question (in this case through the creation of a proprietary workforce).

Relevant, ethically, therefore is the nature of the motives behind such corporate social involvement. Though creating value for stakeholders, the benefit for shareholders remains a major factor, raising questions of (the relevance of) motive and (the notion of) true value in the context of social programs organised by corporate power. Terminology such as “business ethics” and “organisational justice” are (and become) suspect, especially in light of thought experiments such as posited by *Moxyland*. As I have shown in the previous chapter, cyberpunk builds upon, and uses, (part of) society’s prevalent mistrust of corporate power to engage ethically with society. Citing various studies, Mason and Simmons recognise part of this issue, as they discuss how theorists of the stakeholder systems model acknowledge “the paradox that society is demanding more of business while simultaneously trusting it less” (80). Mason and Simmons do not investigate this distrust or its source, however, but do engage with the ethical issues involved. They conclude (pragmatically) that:

Ethical principles are compatible with profit seeking aims, as long-term, sustainable business performance necessitates regard for the organisation’s impact on wider society and the environment. (81)

According to Mason and Simmons, therefore, the aims and benefits of CSR to business and society are aligned, creating value for both. They also conclude that “organisational justice dimensions [...] represent strong rationales for stakeholder viewpoints to be recognised as key measures of the equity of CSR systems” (80). *Moxyland*, however, shows that this equation, which seems to include all viewpoints

(both share- and stakeholder demands), excludes factors important for a truly equitable society.

Within *Moxyland's* society, stakeholder and shareholder requirements are comprehensibly met, when measured according to the above (triple bottom line) criteria: economic value ('profit') is created for the shareholders through successful business practices, environmentally sustainable practices (solar panels, water energy) are described ('planet'), and social value is created for stakeholders such as those suffering the results of the HIV/AIDS epidemic ('people'). Eskom's (and other companies') skills institutes are described to function as a chance for AIDS orphans to gain opportunities otherwise out of reach, introducing a seemingly constructive development into the alternative South African reality (exploring stakeholder value). The narrative also reveals, however, that these skills institutes function as a proprietary training opportunity through which the company gains cheap, skilled and pliable labour (shareholder value). Including the environmentally sustainable technological investments, the triple bottom line seems to be met in all respects. As Lerato's narrative shows, however, it is exactly these social measures that, though creating materially favourable circumstances, generate an unfavourable and even dystopian atmosphere in which personal agency seems to be a meaningless concept. The advantages and privileges that are connected to a life within the corporate segment of society are counterbalanced by extensive monitoring of and the pressures exerted by corporate power over the lives of its employees. It is this extended cultural and paternalistic influence of corporate power over *Moxyland's* society that the novel explores that reveals insufficiencies in the ethical model found in contemporary corporate governance theories.

## Conclusion

Though *Moxyland* invites further extensive analysis in various relevant ethical and literary areas, my analysis of the novel shows its complex relationship with not only South Africa's socio-cultural, economic and political struggles, but also global developments in these areas. As I show in this chapter, *Moxyland* clearly explores a process that can be defined as corporate ingression by presenting a society in which corporate power's significant presence actively constructs and structures the community, and presents an extended cultural influence on all aspects of society.

Thus, not only does the novel explore and reveal a potential dystopian future in which such processes may construct a new form of society, it also resonates with contemporary developments such as explored through *Oil on Water*. *Moxyland* is thus not merely a work of Science Fiction, but also a thought experiment that extrapolates contemporary processes of capital, politics and culture, as well as technology, into a potential future. *Moxyland*, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, thus encourages reflection not only on South Africa's potential future, but on that of contemporary global reality in general.

Read alongside *Oil on Water*, we can see two different sides to a similar process, with corporate involvement in the community as a common theme. As I have argued, both novels explore the process of corporate ingression in reality—*Oil on Water* by investigating the influence of the oil industry on the Nigerian Delta, and *Moxyland* by exploring the potential development of corporate power's influence in general on South Africa. In both cases, the novels explore how corporate power forms an extensive influence in social, economic and political respects as it to varying extents either influences or supplants government in such a manner as to effectively form the major governing power in the societies explored: *Oil on Water* reveals how contemporary reality includes examples of potential or developing "government inc.'s," while *Moxyland* explores a society in which this process has reached a state of near-conclusion.

A major difference exists between these two (semi-fictional) societies, however, in the extent of corporate engagement with ethical social practices. In the case of *Oil on Water*, lack of corporate investment in the community is explored as a destructive impact on the community (though it is not considered solely responsible for the crisis). The unnamed oil companies in the Niger Delta of the novel are shown not to engage in any way with their environmental and social impact on the local community specifically, and Nigeria in general. By influencing the corrupt (local and national) government, corporate power in *Oil on Water* is seen to evade any form of corporate social responsibility or local ethical business practices and is thus central in its complicity to the Delta's crisis. The oil industry is thus shown to construct and influence society and culture by (involuntarily) perpetuating the crisis and ignoring its environmental and social impact.

In the case of *Moxyland*, extensive Corporate Social Responsibility or Investment in the community is explored as a problematic, though potentially constructive, development. Corporate power in *Moxyland*, as opposed to that in *Oil on Water*, does engage with its environmental and social impact by implementing (environmentally) sustainable business practices and corporate social investment programs. Varying stakeholders of (for instance) the national company Eskom, receive access to clean energy, support for social programs and, most significantly, education and a secure future for the most vulnerable through the AIDS orphanages and skills institutes. On the basis of these points, it would seem that *Moxyland* presents a counterexample or eutopian alternative to the Niger Delta's crisis. The novel's significant dystopian and cyberpunk characteristics, however, also reveal the ethically problematic side to corporate social involvement: Corporate power in *Moxyland* is shown to construct and influence society and culture with its own gain as the driving force. Both its destructive and constructive activities – engaging with its economic and social stakeholders through extensive forms of social control and police power as well as creating educational and material opportunities for the unfortunate and utilising environmentally friendly energy sources – are, however, engaged in for the sake of their economic value.

Although the methods of corporate power in *Moxyland* and *Oil on Water* are widely diverse, it seems the logic of economic value and its connected drive for the decrease of the nation-state as an autonomous source of political power in both cases lead to actual and/or potential dystopian societal structures. However, *Moxyland's* experimental approach to an extrapolation of contemporary developments with regard to corporate social involvement opens up interesting theoretical approaches to ethical capitalist enterprise that include the potential for optimism. As Stobie concludes, Beukes, through *Moxyland's* cautious eutopian themes, “invites her readers to join her in dreaming new horizons of hope” (368).



PART 4



CORPORATE INGRESSION AND  
HISTORY

CHAPTER 7 – HISTORY AND HISTORICITY IN  
DAVID MITCHELL'S *THE THOUSAND AUTUMNS*  
*OF JACOB DE ZOET*

## Introduction

In the year 1627 an emissary of the highly successful Dutch East India Company (VOC) was sent out to confirm an as yet tentative diplomatic relationship with Japan in the name of the VOC's governor-general and his headquarters in Batavia (current-day Jakarta). With much pomp and circumstance, Pieter Nuyts and his large retinue presented themselves to the shogun, prepared to overwhelm the Japanese with the company's wealth and power and thus secure the already profitable relationship with the East Asian archipelago. As historian Adam Clulow – an expert on early modern Japanese history – shows, however, Nuyts was chased out of the country a month later and robbed of his large retinue and his company pride (1). In the years and decades following, a tentative trade relationship was developed which eventually continued for over two centuries. For although Japan in the Tokugawa period (from the 17th to the 19th century) is infamous for its isolationist regime and secluded foreign policy (*sakoku*), this did not mean that Japan was hermetically sealed against any external influences: whether economic, political or cultural. (Trade) relations with China and Korea continued throughout this period, ensuring an ongoing connection to the global East. Neither was Japan excluded from European economic, political or cultural activity during that time: albeit highly regulated and restricted, contact with and knowledge of Europe was continuously pursued through the selective trading relation with the VOC—stationed and effectively imprisoning its employees on the artificial island post of Dejima in the harbour of Nagasaki.

It is this relationship between Japan and the VOC that David Mitchell explores in his historical novel *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010) by interweaving both historical and fictional events that occurred in Japan between 1799 and 1815. In this novel, the voice of Jacob de Zoet is offset by a variety of other voices—each of which presents their own role within Tokugawa Japan and Dejima.

Through these widely varying voices, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* explores the historical corporate community and its encounter with Japan, problematising the conventional coloniser-colonised binary view of the historic period of European expansion in early modernity. Through an analysis of the novel and its relationship with historical records, I will show how Mitchell upends the conventional notion of European expansion and domination over the global East and replaces it with a view of the relationship between the VOC and Japan that presents the latter as an economically, politically and culturally dominant world player—a pre-existing powerful culture in which the VOC played a supporting role. Suited to recent scholarly changes in the view of the role of East Asia in the colonial era, the novel questions conventional colonial historiography through an analysis of the relationship between the Dutch corporation and the Japanese nation-state. Central to this discussion, I argue, is the corporate element present in this Euro-Asian relationship, on which all political, economic and cultural encounters are centred, with Dejima as its base. Through an analysis of the text, I aim to show how the concept of corporate ingression pervades Mitchell’s exploration of Japan’s relationship with European culture, with Dejima as the ‘corporate colony’ at its heart. This chapter will therefore first give an overview of the novel’s context within Mitchell’s global and historical writing in general, followed by the relevant historical context to the novel and the novel’s presentation of the subject matter in *The Thousand Autumns* in particular. The next chapter will then build upon this analytical foundation to explore the novel’s engagement with an instance of corporate ingression as featured in historical Japanese-Dutch relations.

## 7.1 The Novel in Context

### 7.1.1 Author and Genre

Published in 2010, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* is David Mitchell’s fifth novel and the first work in his “adventurously heterogeneous” (Harris 3) oeuvre that can be clearly identified as historical fiction. Shortlisted twice for the Man Booker Prize, and a New York Times bestselling author, David Mitchell has established himself as an influential postmodern writer, who continues to write unconventional narratives. But although history has featured regularly in his other

works, *The Thousand Autumns* is of an indisputable historic nature and seems therefore to deviate even more from the dynamic narrative style of his previous publications. This unusual style, firmly established as unconventional and postmodern, has fascinated scholars, reviewers and readers alike, and has been characterised by Paul Harris as creating “a complex dynamical tension by developing disparate stand-alone storylines and weaving these narrative threads into tapestries by turns intricate and fragile” (3). But not only have his individual novels been identified as unconventional units built from connected storylines—the novels among themselves have also been shown to interconnect and form one large, loosely unified universe. Mitchell himself states in an interview:

In the same way that my novels are built of hyperlinked novellas, I’m sort of building what I’ve taken to calling in a highfalutin way the ‘uberbook’ out of hyperlinked novels. (Alter)

Though seeming at first glance to be quite distinct from his other, more contemporary-focused work, *The Thousand Autumns* has been argued by Claire Larssonneur, in support of Mitchell’s statement, to still form “a part of Mitchell’s larger house of fiction” (146) with the characters and their stories therefore fully contributing parts of this larger fictional universe. This universe, as Harris shows, reveals humanity to be “caught in a labyrinth of its own construction” where “the power of predacity has won in the past and, in the glum glimpses he gives us of our future, it continues to win out on the global level, with local pockets of resistance” (5). Therefore, the narratives of Jacob, Orito, Uzaemon and Penhaligon, and Mitchell’s story of Tokugawa Japan as a whole, are to be taken as part of his complex global narrative of exploitation and resistance, though, as I will show, each narrative operates in its own particular way.

Though global in scope, *The Thousand Autumns* plays out the majority of its scenes within the geographical boundaries of Tokugawa Japan, and thus finds itself doubly connected to Mitchell’s oeuvre as a whole. Larssonneur notes in her research of the work, “What is remarkable about *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* is the depth of his indebtedness to Japanese culture” in, as many other critics note as well, “a very Mitchellian fashion” (142). Yet a clear distinction from his other Japan-centred novels has also been recognised, causing this novel to be identified as functioning as a separate unit with its own particular strategies and techniques.

This distinction lies precisely in its uniquely historic character and the centralised focus on a European character and influence: Jacob de Zoet and the VOC.

The novel, instead of being focused on a Japanese protagonist alone (as with many of his previous novels, excepting *Cloud Atlas* (2004)), is centred on the life of Jacob de Zoet, a Dutch clerk of the VOC, and his love-interest, the Japanese midwife Orito. Harris summarises:

The historical novel *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2011) faithfully evokes Dutch contact with Japan in Nagasaki Harbor at the turn into the 19th century, before turning into a romance-thriller. (3)

Here Harris introduces the issue of genre in Mitchell's novel, as what initially seems a straightforward historical narrative (though with its own unique characteristics) with Jacob de Zoet at its centre, becomes a story of love and capture and rescue in which Jacob seems to be sidelined. As with many of Mitchell's novels, *The Thousand Autumns* is seen to be "heavily in conversation with the theoretical applications of Genre" (Hooks 53). However, as Rose Harris-Birtill argues, Mitchell achieves unity by centrally portraying an overlapping theme: a "paradigm of a powerful confining circularity [...] the limiting outer boundaries of Dejima and Mount Shiranui that confine Jacob and Orito" (60). It is this seemingly uncomfortable coupling of narratives that is a central point playing out in Mitchell's novel. Larsonneur argues:

Mitchell revisits the confrontation of East and West through a continuous to and fro movement between two very distinct cultures but also between the past and the present, and between fiction and history. (146)

This interest in cultural interaction, explored partly through the question of genre and fictionality, is considered central in all of Mitchell's work: "Mitchell's body of fictional work has elicited a continued interest in how cultures and history affect language and cross-cultural relations" (Larsonneur 136) and his literary politics have caused him to be defined as

a global writer, a writer who fully addresses what globalization entails: the coexistence of a variety of distinct societies, irreducible one to another yet overlapping. (Larsonneur 146)

It is within this critical context that I will discuss the novel and its strategies and politics. I will, however, go further than existing scholarly and popular focus on the novel in directing attention to various major characteristics of *The Thousand Autumns* that have been hitherto neglected.

Although many of the cultural themes in Mitchell's work have been considered in detail, especially by scholars such as Larsonneur and Harris, and though the common narrative and style characteristics of Mitchell's oeuvre have been analysed extensively, the particularities of metanarrative and paratext in *The Thousand Autumns* have been ignored or at most underplayed (as in Larsonneur's analysis). The inclusion of seven illustrations throughout the text is a significant aberration both in the context of Mitchell's work and in that of the contemporary novel as a genre, yet has not hitherto been noted as such in existing scholarship. Similarly, the relevance and significance of the novel's editorial content (or paratext) have been overlooked. Additionally, there has been little focus on the unusual nature of the cultural interactions in the novel when considered in light of post-colonial history. Similarly, the particularities of the VOC as opposed to other major European expansionist forces have been largely ignored (as also discussed in Part 1 of this thesis) and as such the relevance of Mitchell's fictional exploration of the interaction between the company of Dutch origin and a major political force in Asia at the time has been overlooked. The following sections will therefore first address these gaps in scholarly analysis, paying particular attention to the issues named above, to create a foundation for further analysis.

### *7.1.2 Historical Background*

Although colonial history is typically seen as an era in which European nation-states expanded in search of new geographies to exploit, the first few centuries of western European colonialism was practised by public corporations rather than nation-states, as I discuss in Part 1 of this thesis. Contact with the various cultures the colonists encountered was therefore at least theoretically on the basis of a corporate connection rather than a nationalist one, although diplomatic relations were always established through referral to a monarch or other national authority. Japan's contact with the Dutch from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, was therefore conducted directly through a major trading company rather than the

nation from whence it hailed. Only in the nineteenth century did the corporations, after declaring bankruptcy, become the responsibility of the state, through which colonisation officially became a more national and therefore imperialistic endeavour. These characteristics of trade relations before 1800 also form the basis for the contact between the VOC and Japan, as Mitchell's novel explores.

Though the historical facts regarding the trade between the Dutch and Japanese may be found in any account of the period, historical reality has proven to be more difficult to characterise. A view of the VOC as at first a purely corporate multinational organisation is, as Clulow shows, a misleading perspective: "While it is true that the company never possessed a grand design for empire, it was also never just a conglomerate of merchants eager to buy cheaply and sell dearly" (13). Clulow explains:

A study of the letters written by senior personnel based in Asia gives little sense that they thought of their employer as a limited organization that should concentrate its attentions purely on trade and avoid other entanglements. Instead, they saw it as a composite body with a route to profit that ran most directly through the expansions of Dutch power in Asia (13-14).

The presence of the VOC in Asia and, more specifically, Japan, was therefore never merely geared towards setting up profitable trade relationships in its simplest form. As Clulow explains: "the company was, from the beginning, as much a political and military creature as it was an economic one" (14). As the incident with Pieter Nuyts shows, the VOC expected to overwhelm the Japanese with a sense of their superiority and thus dominate the potential trade relations.

Though the ultimate goal of this diplomatic mission and many following was only to secure profitable trade, the local stance taken by the Company spread an influence that went further than the mere commercial. As Clulow explains, following historian Jurrien van Goor, the VOC can "best be described as a hybrid organization that successfully combined the attributes of both corporation and state" (12). This involved something else than merely presenting the company as a representation of the Dutch nation. As I also discuss in Part 1, at the birth of the united corporation in 1602, the VOC received a royal charter that gave it the (Dutch) monopoly over trade in the East. As Clulow discusses, this charter included an article stating the three main powers given by royal decree to the company:

the right to conduct direct diplomacy with any ruler it might encounter, the right to maintain (and of course deploy) military forces, and the right to seize control of territory (by building fortresses and strongholds). (12)

The strong language of this article was initially justified by the VOC's position in Asia relative to other European powers: "the Dutch East India Company [...] was rapidly emerging as the most influential European enterprise in Asia" (1) and "arguably the most formidable of all European overseas organizations active in Asia in the seventeenth century" (2). However, the company's actual encounter and experience with Asian cultures in general, and Japan specifically, strongly deviated from this tale of success. Many Asian cultures proved a more formidable opponent in the global market than expected:

impressive states like Ming China, Mughal India, and Tokugawa Japan [...] occupied central positions in an increasingly interconnected global economy. The size and power of such polities filled Europeans with trepidation. (7)

First encounters such as that between the Japanese and Pieter Nuyts described above were therefore a common occurrence and served to unsettle previously successful strategies. Clulow concludes:

In the absence of real leverage, [European powers] were forced to rely on negotiation, petition, and appeal to carve out what was at best a limited space for their operations within an extant political order. (6)

This tenuous relationship characterised much of the period in which the VOC dealt with Japan as a trading partner, in which almost servile behaviour was expected of the merchants in return for little reward and no hope of creating a colonial settlement. As Clulow shows, it is "important to move away from Eurocentric or Americentric versions of history to understand exactly how Europeans adapted to find a place in Asian-dominated political orders" (10). In the case of the VOC in Tokugawa Japan, Clulow relates, the "Dutch East India Company officials were compelled to accept a set of new rules for proper conduct, as well as a new political vocabulary, and to abandon established practices" (21) in order to create a productive trading relationship.

However, the VOC was not a meek subordinate force to Japanese dominance: rather, “the Dutch were, particularly in the early years of the Japan factory, a violent and disruptive presence in Tokugawa Japan” (Clulow 16). Many conflicts between the Dutch company and Japan are recorded until finally a number of significant conflicts “prompted the company to abandon its usual prerogatives and remake itself in order to meet Tokugawa expectations” (16). However, rather than taking the conflicts as failures of diplomacy, Clulow argues that these moments were “productive, functioning to set the rules for subsequent interactions” (9) given that “such skirmishes were, in many cases, directly responsible for creating a system capable of regulating relations between European enterprises and Asian states” (9). Although this regulation was of a peculiar nature, in the form of the strictly enclosed island or peninsula trading post of Dejima, the result was (to a varying extent) a continuously productive relationship which neither party was willing to forgo, despite various difficulties. It is this unique cultural, diplomatic and economic relationship between the Dutch company and Tokugawa Japan that is the focus of *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* and through which the particular dynamics of a colonial corporate power’s influence over a local community is explored. Theme, narrative and paratext together will inform the following section’s introduction to my in-depth analysis of the novel in Chapter 8, with particular attention to the corporate element involved, as I will argue for the interconnection of all these matters in *The Thousand Autumns* as a unique postmodern text that explores an alternate perspective on historical colonial interaction.

## 7.2 Exploring the Novel

The novel’s community, represented by both VOC personnel and various Japanese citizens, is a mixture of historic and fictional characters who move within the context of Tokugawa Japan and the island of Dejima from 1799 to 1817. These characters all play a role in the narrative that both refers to the historical period as well as exploring this particular historic point in time and space. Mitchell’s references to, in particular, the account of Hendrik Doeff (published in 1833), on whom Jacob de Zoet is modelled, show a close interaction with history that goes further than merely the foundation for a work of historical fiction. As Claire Larssonneur shows, “one can hardly overlook the source and view [*The Thousand*

*Autumns*] as a mere work of fiction” (138), yet it also surpasses the genre of fictional history writing:

The text of the novel draws its strength from its multifaceted identity as an original work of fiction based on memoirs, strewn with embedded devolved testimonies and paying tribute to a legacy of writings. (Larsonneur 139)

By interweaving extensive historic research with the fictional, and drawing on a “legacy of writings,” I argue that Mitchell experiments with representing the situation at Dejima at the time, as well as with exploring the potential conflicts, encounters and consequences that may have arisen on a cultural level from the relationship between Japan and the VOC. By thus engaging and experimenting with the notion of historicity and historiography, as I will argue in this chapter, Mitchell questions historiography as a genre and increases awareness of our perception of history and the role of authenticity in historical representations in shaping our view of the past. Mitchell thus builds a foundation of doubt in his text that, I will show in the next chapter, creates a productive space for new insights into (colonial) history.

### *7.2.1 Historicity and Fictionality*

The importance of character choice and representation as a theme in the novel becomes clear once various characters are historically identified. Not only is Jacob de Zoet himself based upon the person of Hendrik Doeff, but, as Larsonneur shows, characters such as Doctor Marinus, Aibagawa Orito and Captain John Penhaligon are also modelled on historical figures (Philipp Franz von Siebold, Ine Kusumoto and Captain Fleetwood Pellew respectively). However, while these characters represent historical figures, Mitchell’s choice to place them together in time is an anachronism that reveals the novel’s experimentation with the encounter between the various European and Asian cultures.

In the scene described in the second chapter of the novel, a subtle introduction to the position held by the Europeans in Japan is expanded by a historical overview of the status of the VOC and its global situation in general, positioning the scene within the context of historical events. In the first paragraph, Snitker refers to the company’s financial difficulties, the Dutch Republic’s precarious political position and the loss of multiple colonies by the VOC to the

British. His rant also includes an explanation of their presence on an American ship as the neutral party and source of transport through which the VOC is still able to function globally. It is explained later that it was this American ship that transported Vorstenbosch and De Zoet from Batavia to Nagasaki for company purposes as had become a regular occurrence at that time. This insertion of an American voice into the passage presages what the novel continues to portray throughout—namely the presence of multiple nationalities under the flag of the VOC: Dutch, German, Irish and Malay. To refer to the company's presence simultaneously and identical to a 'Dutch' presence is a misrepresentation found in many historical accounts, but not in Mitchell's well-researched novel.

This introduction of both historical and fictional characters in the first two chapters, as well as the references to historical reality at the time, reveal the theme that characterises the novel as a work of historical fiction that, together with the theme of materiality, raises questions of historicity and authenticity. From a theoretical point of view the genre of historical fiction, though immensely popular, presents a complex area of study that has been explored by not only literary critics but also philosophers and historians.<sup>17</sup> However, a full account and discussion of this topic would go beyond the scope of this thesis. For the purposes of this discussion I will therefore draw on the work of two critics who present two complementary approaches to the use of historical fiction as a means to gain further knowledge lacking in conventional history writing.

The seemingly contradictory term that glues together the historical and the fictional calls the problem of 'truth' to the fore, for while history is generally regarded as the study of actual events, fiction is considered a product of the imagination—inherently untruthful. However, as Adhikari shows in a discussion of history and story within the context of historical fiction, theoreticians of historiography currently accept the inherent failure of history writing to capture objective, factual truth. Rather, the historian will always to a varying extent be a "storyteller" of the past as he or she inserts imagination into the act of history telling (44). Therefore, the writer of historical fiction can be seen as a member of, rather

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. György Lukács, Paul Ricoeur and Hayden White as well as Jerome de Groot.

than an antagonist to, the historian's guild in attempting to understand the past. Adhikari cites Wilhelm von Humboldt who explains:

[the truth] is only partially visible in the world of the senses; the rest has to be added by intuition, inference and guesswork [...] The truth of any event is predicated on the addition [...] of that invisible part of every fact and it is that part [...] which the historian has to add [...] Differently from the poet but in a way similar to him, he must work the collected fragments into a whole. (44)

In the case of the historical fiction writer, these historical fragments are chosen (though perhaps more selectively and through a different process) and woven together into a – to the writer – more or less satisfactory narrative, adding “invisible parts” to the historical facts.

From this viewpoint, the task of the historian and that of the writer of historical fiction seem to coincide, which leads Adhikari to conclude that “If both are guilty of restructuring the past, they should come together as friends rather than act like foes” (45). However similar the fundamental task of both writers of history may be, the differences between the genres are nevertheless significant. Adhikari identifies a major difference as follows:

Sociohistorical upheavals may be explored by history, but some fundamental human feelings and attitudes that persist through the ages despite the other changes are not recorded by history. (54)

While the actions of individuals feature as a part of historiographical writing in and on every period of history, fiction has the unique freedom of presenting the subjective and emotional experience of any individual in any historic point in time. Not only can significant figures in history thus be portrayed in a personal light—the (possible) experiences of historically insignificant and/or fictional individuals can be explored by historical fiction. This process Adhikari argues to be a productive addition to historiography, where the unconventional historian brings “fictional justice” to historical events (46). Historical fiction or “literary history” is thus “a cross between conventional (scientific) history and pure fiction” where the reader may experience the possible personal experiences of historical characters and find “the human meaning of historical events” (43).

A similar empowering theory regarding literary history writing is found in the work of Birgit Neumann, who presents historical fiction as a form of 'memory media' (*Gedächtnismedien*). While the category of memory media conventionally refers to material objects such as photographs, historic documents, film material, various types of artefacts etc., Neumann expands this definition by arguing for the inclusion of historical fiction. Of media in general she shows that

Medien [haben] keinen abbildenden, sondern einen aktiv gestaltenden, *wirklichkeitserzeugenden* Charakter, deren zu vermittelnde Information je nach historischer, sozialer und kultureller Kontextualisierung different interpretiert wird.<sup>18</sup> (196)

Given this inherent nature of all forms of media to *create* reality rather than merely represent it, as dependent upon the medium's context and interpretation, Neumann argues for the dissolution of the boundary between conventional historical media and unconventional (i.e. literary) historical media. Echoing Adhikari's argument that any writing of history inserts imagination, but adding to this the role of the audience, Neumann unsettles the notion of authenticity with regards to conventional memory media in favour of literature as another authentic medium for (historical) remembrance. She argues: "Medial perpetuierte und rezipientenseitig aktualisierte Erinnerungen gehen immer über die Vermittelte Information selbst hinaus"<sup>19</sup> and memory media specifically "verkörpern Angebote an die Rezipienten, sich auf die Aktualisierung einer bestimmten vergangenen Episode einzulassen"<sup>20</sup> (197). This *above and beyond* effect of media in general, and the invitation memory media specifically extend to the audience to mentally activate certain past events, Neumann shows, is also a central effect of historical fiction.

Thus, having argued for literature as an authentic medium for both representing and actualising the past, Neumann continues her analysis of the genre, converging with Adhikari's argument at the point where literary history writing

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<sup>18</sup> "Media do not represent, but actively shape and *generate* reality. The information that is being mediated is interpreted differently according to historic, social and cultural contextualisation [by the recipient]" (my own translation from the German).

<sup>19</sup> "Memories that are immortalised and actualised by the recipient always go above and beyond the mediated information itself."

<sup>20</sup> "embody invitations for the recipients to engage in the actualisation of a particular past event."

may be considered to add something valuable to history representation that conventional historiography lacks. As Neumann shows, literature is “nicht nur ein Medium der kulturellen Selbstwahrnehmung, sondern auch und vor allem ein Medium der Reflexion dieser Selbstwahrnehmung”<sup>21</sup> (198). It is literature’s potential to *reflect* on its subject matter that, for Neumann, creates a productive site for engagement with (historical) reality. As Adhikari shows, literature’s potential to present “fundamental human feelings and attitudes” is an integral part of the way this effect is rendered to the reader. Literature, Neumann shows, has the potential “sich von ihren inszenierten Inhalten zu distanzieren und diese entweder impliziet, d.h. qua narrativer Darstellungsmittel, oder aber in expliziten Kommentaren zu problematisieren”<sup>22</sup> (198)—in line with Brecht’s *verfremdungseffekt* and Suvin’s *cognitive estrangement*. This possibility of *distance* towards its own subject matter and the option to either explicitly or implicitly problematise reality gives literature its power and positions it “mit subversiver Gegenmacht zu bestehenden Gedächtnisversionen aus”<sup>23</sup> (213). It is this subversive role of literature that, according to Neumann, lends literary history writing a power above and beyond conventional memory media, where both its position within a cultural and historical context as well as its capacity for staging alternative realities, give literature its potential “kreative ‘Antworten’ auf soziokulturelle Herausforderungslagen und Fragestellungen zu offerieren”<sup>24</sup> (204).

This notion of literary history as a rich foundation for a fuller exploration of, as well as reflections upon, historical reality and contemporary sociocultural debates is one that may be used as a critical concept in the analysis of historical fiction such as Mitchell’s *Thousand Autumns*. As I will show here in a more detailed analysis of the novel, Mitchell draws our attention to the limits of conventional and current historiography and shows how “[h]istory is limited in its vision and reach; [while] literary history illustrates and establishes an intrinsic relationship between people’s inner and outer existence” (Adhikari 54). By presenting a historically

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<sup>21</sup> “not just a medium of cultural self-awareness, but also, and above all, a medium for reflecting this self-awareness.”

<sup>22</sup> “to distance itself from the embodied content and to problematise the content either implicitly through narrative means or in explicit commentary.”

<sup>23</sup> “with subversive counter power against existing versions of memory.”

<sup>24</sup> “to offer creative ‘answers’ to sociocultural challenges and issues.”

accurate portrayal of history, yet going above and beyond the conventional in various self-reflexive ways, Mitchell both answers the call for literary historical reflection and explores it as a genre.

### Historicity

The notion of the constructedness of historical accuracy is addressed in the novel through various means. A sense of veracity is achieved in the narrative through the inclusion of known historical events such as the internal struggle of the VOC with corruption; the event of the VOC's bankruptcy in 1600; the attack of Dejima by an English ship and the Japanese policy of isolation at the time are but a few. Claire Larssonneur shows how "didactic passages, embedded in the casual conversations of shipmen and traders" serve to "sum up the context" (141). An immediate example of this is found in the very first paragraph of the second chapter where, as part of Daniel Snitker's protesting monologue in defence of his corrupt behaviour, he sums up the VOC's and Dutch Republic's precarious position:

Amsterdam is on its knees; our shipyards are idle; our manufactories silent; our granaries plundered; The Hague is a stage of prancing marionettes tweaked by Paris; Prussian jackals and Austrian wolves laugh at our borders: and [...] we are left a maritime nation *with no navy*. The British seized the Cape, Coromandel and Ceylon [...] and that Java itself is their next fattened Christmas goose is plain as day!  
(10)

Two pages later we find a concluding remark in the context of the taxation of an Oriental style figurine stating that "Europe is at war and markets are unsettled" (12).

These early passages thus serve as a quick introduction to the reader of the historical context in political, economic and military terms—a common strategy in historical fiction. Yet as Larssonneur shows, these passages serve as more than mere supporting information to the narrative:

Beyond their sheer information value, these didactic passages open up the narrative: for Dejima is an artificial island cut off from the rest of the world, a blank spot in time and space, and these passing remarks reintroduce echoes of the world abroad. (141)

While these fragments of historical ‘fact’ thus seemingly serve as support to the reader who may not be familiar with the period’s political intricacies, they can also be seen to function in support of Mitchell’s global agenda as an author. The connection between the local Japanese context and global developments thus continues to be foregrounded in the text, reminding the reader of both the isolation of Dejima, but also of the inescapable influence of the world abroad on its everyday functioning.

Another means with which the historical accuracy of the novel is suggested, as already pointed out above, is through many of the characters featured and mentioned in the novel. By comparing the characters in the novel to one of Mitchell’s main named sources (Hendrik Doeff’s memoir) and known history of the VOC in Japan, Claire Larssonneur has identified various historical figures in various disguises throughout the narrative. However, extending this reading, the clear reference to historical figures simultaneously reveals most strongly the deliberate elements of fictionality with which these characters and the events in their lives are coupled.

### **Paratext**

The historical period that forms the setting of the novel (1799-1817) is not only denoted by information dispersed throughout the narrative, but also specifically by the headings that separate the 5 parts and 41 chapters of *The Thousand Autumns*, as is the location in most passages. Apart from the suggestion of veracity that such explicit references to historical moments in time cause, these headings also make it possible to historically verify the claims presented in each case. As Larssonneur shows, the headings given in the table of contents and throughout the novel reflect a subgenre of the historical narrative: “The titles of chapters build up a systematic succession of specific times and places, [in] the way of chronicles” (141). This systematic build-up can also be considered a feature of a diary or journal style, but in any case, refer to actual times or events. This particular paratextual characteristic is reminiscent of genres of writing that are informed by real events, thus creating the suggestion of veracity from its association with such genres. The power of editorial content in the positioning of a novel is thus displayed and continues in *The Thousand Autumns* as an important device to that effect.

Another means used to suggest historical accuracy in *The Thousand Autumns*, also making use of paratext, is the inclusion of an author's note before Part 1 and the Acknowledgements included at the end of the novel, which both strongly support the historical foundation of the narrative. The author's note contains a short explanation in two paragraphs of various historical facts and places mentioned in the novel and begins as follows:

The port of Batavia on the island of Java was the headquarters of the Dutch East Indies Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or VOC in Dutch, literally 'United East Indian Company') and the point of embarkation and return for VOC ships sailing the Nagasaki run. (xi)

The remainder of the note contains a list of information in a similar style and elucidates points of geography, calendar notation and the order in which Japanese names are chosen to be represented. Rather than leaving this information to be inferred by the reader from context, or from explanations incorporated into the narrative, Mitchell (or perhaps the editor, or Mitchell as editor) chooses to explicitly inform the reader of these points. The result is both an immediate positioning of the narrative in a historical and geographical context, as well as suggesting to the reader the historical veracity of the context presented to them. This latter suggestion is a subtle effect caused by the introduction of the notion of choice on Mitchell's part regarding calendar notation and name order. Rather than suggesting a fictional world with one overarching perspective (the author's) on its cultural and temporal reality, the presenting of choice suggests the external existence of varying perspectives from which historical reality can always be viewed. While historical facts (in this case, for instance, the fact that it was the VOC and the Japanese who interacted at that point in time and space) are non-negotiable, the perspective the author takes on the facts at various points is. In contrast, a point in a completely fictional time and place, including the time and place itself, may be chosen without any restrictions on the part of the author, and is therefore generally considered moot: facts that are conventionally revealed to the reader throughout the text. While not all works of historical fiction include such a note as this, the inclusion of such a note does explicitly fix the narrative within the genre of historical fiction and signals this to the reader.

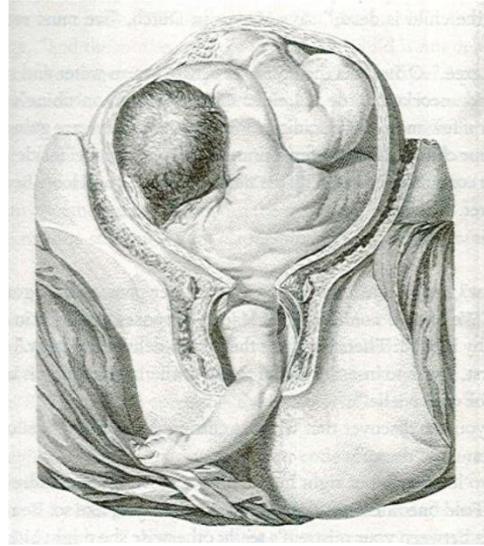
Enclosing the narrative, the acknowledgements that follow the closing scene effectively form the bibliography of the novel, where Mitchell's historical sources are listed in the form of thanks to various individuals and research sources. While not unusual in this form, the acknowledgements and author's note effectively form the frame around the narrative. Both are mentioned in the table of contents, while the section about the author, which is found before the title page, is not. Though the inclusion and placement of these sections of the novel differ among the various editions of the novel, such a framing is found in each instance. The table of contents in each case therefore acknowledges the author's writing as 'content,' but not the editorial information. As such, both the note and the acknowledgements are presented as part of the entire 'contents,' placing the importance of both on a similar level to the narrative as the parts of the book themselves. The historical setting of the fictional narrative is thus foregrounded as an integral part of the content of the physical book and presented to the reader as the framework within which to view the narrative.

### *7.2.2 Genre and Authenticity*

If "Mitchell saturates the novel with the features of the genre" (141) of historical fiction and historiography while simultaneously questioning it, the novel also "comes as a paradoxical travel narrative/biography" (136-137) according to Claire Larssonneur, and includes characteristics of other genres of writing as well: "his writing, pleasing as it may be, never gives itself to the reader at once and this is where it departs from documentation or historical records" (146). The novel moves from historical fiction, featuring Jacob de Zoet as protagonist, to a romance-thriller with elements of the gothic "in taking a turn to secreted altars in underground chambers where sacrificial blood rites take place" (O'Donnell 126), with Orito as the heroine.

The first scene of the novel introduces the fluidity of the novel's genre through its own movement between a historic and a scientific text. In an ultimate display of simultaneous horror and scientific detachment, the description of a birth in the first passage evolves into a medical curiosity (as I will further discuss below). Relevant here is how the medical tone is enhanced by the insertion of a print of an engraving from a historical anatomical text, introducing an unexpected factor of

materialism to the reader. The image (see Figure 1) shows a partial drawing of a woman, with a foetus curled up in a profile drawing of the womb with its left arm protruding from the mother's vagina. Reminiscent of a medical reference work as well as a realist portrait of both mother and child, the image reflects the realistic, the abject and the scientific nature of the description of the birth. The unusual presence of an illustration in a literary novel recreates Mitchell's work into what seems almost a scientific historical account of the period in Japan. The added sense of veracity that this direct referral to scientific history evokes is what renders the historicity and genre of the novel thematically significant—supported by the contention among literary critics.



*Figure 1*

Identification by Harris of elements of the romance-thriller in the novel's genres is not echoed by Larsonneur, who chooses rather to juxtapose the historical with the travel narrative: "The other genre at stake here is of course travel writing" (141). Larsonneur argues that "the strength of the [travel] prohibition" for the inhabitants of Dejima "fuels desire" for travel while "references to iconic journeys abound in the narrative" (141), causing the theme of (non-)travel to form a significant element of the narrative. She refers here especially to the account of Uzaemon's travel to the shrine in an attempt to rescue Orito and identifies a mainstay of travel writing: "the pleasure derived from foreign onomastics and the mouthing out of a map through a list of names" (142). The first passage dedicated to Uzaemon's journey characterises this point, as the scenery and locations he passes are described and listed:

He passes the bridges of the Nakashima River, whose names he recites when he cannot sleep: the proud Tokiwabashi Bridge; the Fukurobashi, by the cloth merchants' warehouses; the Meganebashi, whose reflected double arches form round spectacles on bright days; the slim-hipped Uoichibashi; the matter-of-fact Higashishinbashi; upstream, past the execution grounds, Imoharabashi Bridge; the Furumachibashi, as old and frail-looking as its name; the lurching Amigasabashi; and, last and highest, the Ôidebashi. (321)

The foreign names interspersed through the English and the picturesque descriptions create an idyllic framework for Uzaemon's journey that suggests he is on a pleasure tour rather than a rescue mission. The historical, scientific, gothic and other features of the novel thus intermingle to create a mosaic pattern of constant transferral, rendering the matter of genre unfixed.

### **Illustrations**

In addition to the image in the first passage of the novel, Mitchell's novel includes various other images, interspersed throughout the text at varying points in the narrative. These seven images portray drawings or engravings from various sources. These visual interruptions of the otherwise textual narrative are an unusual and therefore important characteristic of the novel as illustrations are not found widely in contemporary adult fiction, except in the works of, most notably, W.G. Sebald and Michael Ondaatje, both of whom similarly use illustrations to problematize or draw attention to issues of historical authenticity. The contemporary reader would normally expect illustrations either in fiction published for a non-adult audience or in a non-fictional context.

At work here is a singular strategy which produces an uncanny effect upon the reader, as Maya Barzilai explores in her research on W.G. Sebald's work. A rather unique characteristic of Sebald's work is his particular use of photographic images interspersed throughout his texts:

Disrupting the linear flow of the narrative, often without any immediate explanation, the black-and-white images seem to arrive out of oblivion, unannounced and, at times, unjustifiable from a purely story-oriented perspective. (Barzilai 214)

As Barzilai shows, this disruptive use of images in Sebald's work creates an uncanny effect for the reader, where the "shadows of reality" (Sebald's own poetic description of photography) cause an "alienation or distancing" (211). In the case of Sebald's images, Barzilai argues, this distance is created "through the act of photography" where "the subject or scenery is captured and defamiliarized, turned into an object for contemplation" (211). The act of turning a scene in reality into a contained picture on paper thus re-imagines the past in a form that renders the

scene inherently different from the original, though still recognisable as its original—therefore answering to the characteristics of Freud’s ‘the uncanny.’ A photograph also, Barzilai points out, “induces a belief that the object is alive by attesting to its reality” (211-12), causing Carolin Duttlinger to conclude in her critique of Sebald’s oeuvre that it is characterised by a “literary use of photographs as historical testimonies” (163).

As Mitchell’s images include only one or two photographs (or scans), and those of drawings, something different may very well be at play here than with Sebald’s use of photography. However, I believe various parallels may be drawn, as both situations display the unexpected use of illustrations in a fictional, though historically based, contemporary novel. Though Sebald makes use only of photographic material as opposed to Mitchell’s use of drawings and engravings, the notion of disruption of the flow of the narrative is one that characterises both authors’ use of images. In *The Thousand Autumns*, the images similarly arrive unannounced and unexpectedly, though, in contrast with Sebald’s work, the illustrations are all directly relevant to the narrative on the pages within which they are inserted, as I will discuss further below.

A second parallel I wish to draw is the use of images as historical testimonies. Though Mitchell’s images are not photographs of individuals to prove the existence of (a form of) the subject, the inclusion of a (scan of) an object clearly created by human hands attests to the materiality of the object mentioned in the narrative. Barthes notes of the materiality of drawings that “we might say that the line, the hatching, the shape, in short the graphic event, is what permits the surface or the canvas to exist, to signify” (*The Responsibility* 193). It is the effect of drawings rather than photographs that attests to these objects’ reality and their ability to signify their existence and historicity. Of course, no actual proof exists to attest to the reality of the narrative and the accompanying object, which are quite clearly presented as fictional presences. However, their mere existence and inclusion into the narrative poses the suggestion of authenticity. Lilian Furst’s analysis of photographic illustrations in fiction points us towards the nature of this process: “Assuming a link between text and photograph, readers are driven to pay especially careful attention to both in order to ascertain the connection” (225). Not only does this incite “more active participation in the construction of the text (that is, words

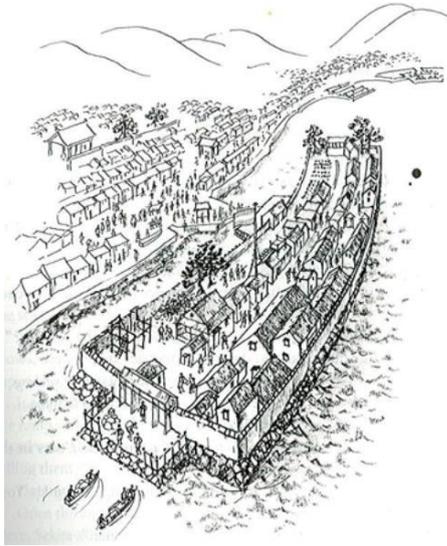
plus images)” in the reader, it also presupposes the level of authenticity to be shared between the two types of media that make up the entire narrative (225). Apart from the general effect created by including the images throughout the narrative, the images themselves each present a certain ‘rhetoric’ (in Barthes’ words) that cannot be ignored. In line with the field of semiotics, Barthes identifies the characteristics of images (photographs, cinema, art) in light of their rhetorical properties. For Barthes, images emit utterances in similar, albeit unusual, ways as textual language does: images are works of codification as much as language. In the case of Mitchell’s textual images, I argue, it is their particular placement within the novel, and the choice of these particular images that forms their meaning within *The Thousand Autumns*—a narrative perpendicular to the novel’s main narrative, as Barthes puts it, forming “the epitome of counter-narrative” (57). To reveal this counter-narrative and its connection to the question of genre in the novel, I will discuss certain of these images in more detail.

To return to the first image included in *The Thousand Autumns* (Figure 1): what seems at first glance to be a conventional work of fiction (though of a historic nature) is suddenly suspended in genre limbo after the first few pages, when the reader is confronted with the rather explicit scientific engraving showing a foetus in an unusually difficult position during birth. The inclusion of this somewhat bizarre image suggests that the text is not generically straightforward: here is a fictional text that includes an image taken from a non-fictional source—namely the medical text written by the Scottish obstetrician William Smellie in the mid-eighteenth century that Orito refers to in the narrative. It could be argued that the narrative in which the image is included borrows from the engraving its authenticity, becoming seemingly ‘more authentic’ in turn. This particular strategy is repeated twice more, as the third and fourth image included in the text also originate from authentic scientific sources.<sup>25</sup> The theme of (historic) authenticity is thus evoked as a counter-narrative to the chapter, in the form of an atemporal sidetrack to Orito’s scene.

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<sup>25</sup> Resp. William Cheselden’s *Osteographia, or the Anatomy of the Bones* (1733) and Robert Hooke’s *Micrographia: or, some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses: with Observations and Enquiries Thereupon* by R. Hooke (1665).

The remaining four images in the novel are quite clearly created purposely for the novel. Apart from the list of illustrations included in the publication information, which mentions Jenny Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell as the illustrators, the images themselves are so closely connected to the surrounding narrative that there is little doubt these objects were drawn specifically for the novel. The second

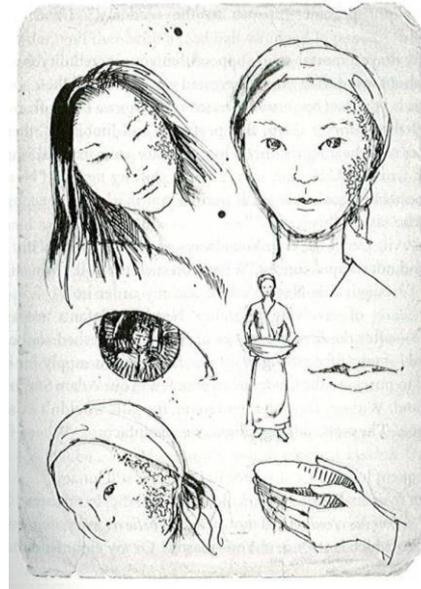


*Figure 2*

image (Figure 2) displays a sketch of Dejima, inserted in the narrative where Jacob is portrayed as sketching the factory while being transported in a rowboat by Japanese oarsmen. In effect, the reader is shown the sketch at the ‘same time’ as he is showing it to the oarsmen, as it is included after the statement “Jacob shows them the page” (18). There is thus a link between narrative and image, where the image serves as teasing archaeological ‘proof’ of the scene and even of Jacob’s existence. This textual presence, in the form of the sketch, draws the

reader into performing the role of witness, like the oarsmen. Mitchell thus plays with the notion of witnessing and presence in order to problematise methods of historiographical proof. The image itself reflects on its own materiality and veracity by displaying two clear ink blots within the boundaries of the drawing. Without these ‘blemishes,’ the image would appear as any hand-drawn, traditional illustration, functioning to illustrate and support the narrative. In contrast, the quite prominent ink stains draw the attention of the reader to the imperfect process involved in the creation of the image, one that is subject to chance and accident. The fallibility of the artist (and here the writer is included) is thereby foregrounded, again drawing the reader’s attention to questions of authenticity.

In the seventh and last image included in the novel (Figure 3) we find the artist similarly foregrounded as in the drawing of Dejima, but in a much more powerful way (349). Here we find similar ink stains and impurities among the sketches of Orito and thus a similar evocation of the authenticity of the image and, by extension, the overarching counter-narrative. Much more striking in this image, however, is the foregrounding of the medium on which they appear. As opposed to the sketch of Dejima, we are shown an image (photograph or scan) of the paper fragment itself, including the borders of the page. As in the previous sketch, the narrative explicitly introduces the object where the reader's introduction to the image is through the powerful character of



*Figure 3*

Enomoto, who is showing a page from Jacob's notebook to Uzaemon: "Enomoto unfolds a sheet of European paper and holds it up:" (349). The image is included on the page directly below this description and reveals the photograph or scan of the slightly crumpled, stained and dog-eared piece of paper on which we find seven sketches. The indirect way in which Jacob's sketch is shown to Uzaemon (mediated through Enomoto) is thus neatly reflected by the additional level of representation—literally framed by an extra layer of materiality. Thus, although both images of Jacob's sketches are supposedly taken from his notebook, the first image is solely of the sketch and reminiscent of a traditional illustration of fiction while this second image portrays the paper itself and is suggestive of the picture of an archaeological artefact. It is therefore less the subject of the sketch than the materiality of the page that renders the presence of this image relevant. The existence of this image again serves to 'prove' Jacob de Zoet's existence: as stated in the narrative, such pictures were drawn (by him), and to support the claim of its existence we are shown the image in all its realistic and fallible glory. And if this image truly exists (as the explicit depiction of the paper on which the images are drawn attests), the implication is that the artist must therefore also have existed.

Thus, the narrative has been lent further support for its veracity by the inclusion of archaeological ‘evidence:’ tangible proof of the material reality of history.

The unusual collection of images in the novel, as I demonstrate through the three illustrations discussed above, thus adds a complex layering of seeming internal contradiction to Mitchell’s narrative—effectively working to consistently suspend the reader’s judgment regarding the status of the novel. Although much more could be said regarding Mitchell’s use of and choice of illustrations, this analysis has shown how fictionality and authenticity in Mitchell’s use of images are layered one on top of the other. However, they are ultimately not in contradiction with each other, as it is exactly the questioning of the use and existence of both that lie at the heart of the narrative—both visual and textual.

### **Authenticity**

By opening the collection with an authentic scientific engraving, the reader is asked to consider a historical medical text, suggesting an *objective* and distancing but ‘authentic’ perspective. The very last image included renders the *subjective* ‘truth,’ or fictionality, of the narrative real. Similarly, the inclusion of the very personal sketches of Orito by Jacob could be seen to suggest that these characters are historically authentic. The personal is thus presented as historical, claiming the same level of authenticity as Smellie’s scientific work. However, Mitchell is not content to restrict himself to this single authenticating strategy, but chooses rather to question this notion of authenticity by suspending the status of the images and thus also the narrative. His strategy is therefore not to suggest or claim historicity for his characters and narrative, but instead to question historicity itself: to what extent is material evidence proof of historical authenticity?

The issue of genre and historicity is thus introduced to the reader early in the narrative and is continued throughout the text. Part of what the reader is exposed to, however, is not merely the problem of genre and level of fictionality. This problem includes the question what kind of ‘proof’ man-made images can offer us: to what level are images of events proof of historical veracity? Mitchell thus suspends the authenticity of historiography itself by questioning the methods of history writing in his use of those same methods in his novel.

The first two scenes situate the novel as a historical account of the cultural encounter between the Dutch and the Japanese. As discussed above, the inclusion of scientific detail and medical images in the first passage suggests a certain detached veracity while the personal accounts of the happenings inserted by the various characters lend this passage a sense of including witnesses' accounts. Within the presented historical context of Japanese medicine influenced by communication with Dutch mercantile activity the reader is given an idea of the possible cross-cultural implications this particular colonial context may have given rise to. Stereotypes of the uneducated colonised other are immediately dispelled by the introduction of the Japanese medical professionals who, with great authority, use scientific knowledge to accomplish an impressive medical feat. However, the extensive use of the Dutch language and European science suggests a more one-way cultural exchange that is to the benefit of Japanese culture and indebted to European influence. Yet, as I will discuss in the following chapter, Japanese language and culture asserts itself throughout the passage and suggests a new, hybrid form of culture that retains the old and inserts whatever is new and beneficial. This unsettling of conventional coloniser-colonised binary relations, and the novel's explicit discussion of historicity and authenticity, thus set the stage for the novel's more complex exploration of cross-cultural exchange and both its potential and historic effects. The connections between this exchange and the process of corporate ingression will be the focus of the following chapter. By approaching *The Thousand Autumns* through the concept of corporate ingression, I will show how the novel explores similar cultural, political and economic dynamics as found in *Oil on Water* and *Moxyland* and thus creates an important new perspective on colonial reality as acted out by the Dutch East India Company.

## CHAPTER 8 – THE CORPORATE COLONY IN *THE THOUSAND AUTUMNS OF JACOB DE ZOET*

### Introduction

The cultural interaction between Japan and the (mostly Dutch) European influences brought into the country by the VOC is, as shown above, immediately introduced in the first chapter of the novel. As Larsonneur shows, the back and forth influence of both cultures on each other is further explored in a literal back and forth movement on the level of the chapter structure: “[the] headings alternate between Japanese and Western references, effectively building up a to-and-fro motion between the two cultures” (141) which the first two chapters set in motion. As a historical analysis of the period of *sakoku* in Japan shows, this back and forth movement is reflected in the relationship between the VOC and its hosts. While the VOC was able to retain a unique trading post in the East, throughout a period in which Japan was almost hermetically closed to the outside world, the Japanese were in the position to benefit from the information and knowledge the VOC brought with them as well as from the trade benefits.

I will argue in this chapter that the notion of corporate ingression strongly illuminates the novel’s engagement with this unusual and complex dynamic between the VOC and Japan. The following sections will therefore firstly discuss the novel’s exploration of the presence of corporate power, secondly the structural influence of the community by the VOC in various ways, and thirdly the extended cultural influence that the activities of the VOC exerted in Japan. Lastly, this chapter will explore the connections between the instances of corporate ingression as explored in *The Thousand Autumns* and in *Oil on Water* and *Moxyland*.

### 8.1 The Presence of Corporate Power

The historical facts of the VOC’s presence in Japan are, as I have shown above, represented throughout the novel in the form of “didactic passages” (Larsonneur 141), given voice by various characters. Such passages include the economic, political and social implications of the historical circumstances both on a global

scale and on the local conditions at Dejima—thus exploring the nature of the presence of corporate power in this particular location in time and place.

The chief economic reason for the VOC's presence in Japan, despite the immense difficulties and restrictions accompanying the trade relations, is voiced in the novel by Chief Vorstenbosch:

“Without Japanese copper, Batavia cannot mint coins. [...] Without coins, the native battalions shall melt back into the jungle. There is no sugar-coating this truth, de Zoet: the High Government can maintain our garrisons on half-pay until next July. Come August, the first deserters leave; come October, the native chiefs smoke our weakness out; and by Christmas, Batavia succumbs to anarchy, rapine, slaughter and John Bull” (39)

The main commodity driving the necessity for the VOC's trade with Japan (copper) is therefore not an item of direct value, but rather a means for the company to continue colonial activity elsewhere (“the jungle”—referring to the company's presence in the Indonesian archipelago) and maintain its seat of power at Batavia. Vorstenbosch's dire predictions for the future of the company if trade with Japan does not continue illustrate the desperate position the VOC holds towards Japan. The chief explains in the novel how this uneven power dynamic, in which Japan holds the higher ground, has characterised the relationship between the company and Japan throughout its history:

Vorstenbosch unlocks his desk and takes out a bar of Japanese copper. “The world's reddest, its richest in gold and, for a hundred years, the bride for whom we Dutch have danced in Nagasaki. [...] This bride, however, grows skinnier and sulkier by the year.” (38)

However lucrative the beginnings of the VOC-Japan trade may have been, the historical period in which *The Thousand Autumns* takes place is characterised by a century's history of subordination to Japan's superior bargaining position. As a result, Jacob de Zoet is warned by his chief of his prospects as a resident of the trading post at Nagasaki: “There's no gainsaying that Dejima is a dull posting. The days when a man could retire on the profit from two trading seasons here are long, long gone” (38). Driven by the necessity of accumulating copper, but hampered by an uneven power dynamic, the atmosphere on Dejima is one of desperation and

depravation as the “dance” necessary to seduce an increasingly “skinny and sulky” bride becomes progressively more humiliating.

In the second chapter of the novel, this interaction between Japan and Europe is presented from the perspective of an employee of the Dutch company. This passage presents a scene where a trial is held by an official of the VOC over the former chief of Dejima. In the very first sentence of this scene, the reader is confronted with a racist European discourse: “How else [...] is a man to earn just reward for the daily humiliations we suffer from those slit-eyed leeches?” is the complaint heard by Daniel Snitker (10) as he refers to his encounter with the Japanese in and around Dejima. Yet the use of the term “humiliations” to refer to cross-cultural communication introduces the frustrating (for Snitker) reality of inferiority and servility the company is forced into by Japanese political and military power. The VOC’s ‘humiliating’ relationship with Tokugawa Japan, introduced in the novel’s second chapter, emerges as a political-economic theme throughout Mitchell’s novel.

Historian Adam Clulow places this relationship in its historical context, as he relates:

[I]t was the company and not the Tokugawa state that found itself hollowed out as it was stripped of its ability to act and forced to accept a circumscribed position within the Japanese order. In addition to making declarations of loyalty, the VOC was compelled to actually discharge its duties as vassal, sometimes in extremely disconcerting ways. (19)

The position held by the VOC towards the Shogunate was thus a tentative one, where the company was compelled to make concessions on various levels to retain their profitable foothold in Japan. *The Thousand Autumns* illustrates this through varying examples—from the obligatory yearly state receptions at Edo, to “the exorbitant price the Company is obliged to pay for charcoal and faggots” (171) at Dejima. As Clulow summarises, the shogunate “[succeeded] in fencing in the company, constraining its activities and transforming it into an obedient servant that was willing to supply the shogun with military service” (its duty as a vassal).

As Clulow shows, this obedience also extended to providing the Shogun with “a steady flow of intelligence concerning events across the world” (18). Reports by the VOC on the political and economic state of Europe and the colonies were

delivered to the Shogun on a yearly basis as part of the trade agreement between the company and Japan. Mitchell illustrates the type and use of such information and its consequences for Japanese policy in Chapter 16 of *The Thousand Autumns* in the context of a (fictional) scholarly debate of the (non-fictional) Shirandô Academy in Nagasaki where Japan's position on the global stage is discussed:

[N]ew machines of power are shaping the world. What we learn from Dutch reports *and* Chinese sources is a grave warning. Peoples who do not acquire these machines of power are, at best, subjugated, like the Indians. At worst, like the natives of Van Diemen's Land, they are exterminated. (224-225)

Japan's political strength, critical stance and lack of subservience to this seemingly superior European technological power are also illustrated in this debate: "Batavia is a ditch, and whatever the Dutch tell us, Holland is a pawn. France, England, Prussia or the energetic United States must be our teachers" (223). In these passages, Mitchell shows Japan's historic willingness to embrace foreign technology to strengthen their position against the Western colonising efforts. The Tokugawa state was thus in a comfortable position in relation to the VOC in which they were able to "draw selectively on technology, information, and goods without accepting any of the more damaging side effects that generally accompanied European incursions into Asia" (Clulow 19).

A second stream of knowledge that was accessed by Japan through the presence of the VOC was of a scientific nature, leading to the Japanese scholarship of *Rangaku*. However, this knowledge flowed in a much more uncontrolled and voluntary way than the agreed upon military and political reports mentioned above. Goodman identifies the cause of this restricted and uncontrolled flow in various factors:

the Neo-Confucian philosophical commitment on the part of educated Japanese, by the prescribed confines imposed by an overweeningly powerful government, by the unsystematic method by which information from the West entered Japan and by the mercantile preoccupation of the Dutch who never saw themselves as cultural intermediaries. (2)

Yet although these limitations restrained the influence Western science and thought had upon Japanese society, it remained a major part of the interaction between East

and West and a significant part of the role the VOC played as Japan's only window to the West. The company's presence in Japan was thus very much predicated upon its value to Japanese political and scientific knowledge (as I will discuss further in the context of the company's extended cultural influence), and only in a minor sense on its potential for economic value. This uneven dynamic, in which the VOC was exploited for its value as a window to the West, while receiving only sparse economic value in return, forms the setting of the novel and the basis for the structural influence of the company over the local community of Dejima.

## 8.2 Structural Influence

The presence of the VOC in Japan, despite its humiliating and inferior position and restricted access during the period described in *The Thousand Autumns*, thus resulted in various forms of interaction and influence between corporate and local state power, which Mitchell explores. As I have shown, these influences are found in the novel through references to the particular relationship between the VOC and Japan and the human subjects of both powers, but also, as I will show here, through the impact of the company's activities on the structure of life on the island of Dejima specifically, as I will show in the following analysis.

### 8.2.1 *The Corporate Colony*

One of the very first interactions between individuals connected to the VOC and their Japanese hosts presented in the novel illustrates the friction and conflict that existed between the two parties and its impact on life on Dejima. In this scene, the new Chief of Dejima – Unico Vorstenbosch – sets first foot on Japanese land (or, rather, artificial Japanese-made land rented by the VOC) with his “silk surtout” bulging with “sections of ‘unicorn’ or narwhal horn, valued in Japan as a powdered cure-all” (18). He accompanies his arrival on Dejima soil with an explanation for his obvious attempts at smuggling:

“It is *this* buffoonery” — the incoming Chief raps his knuckles on his garment's sewn-in bumps, — “that I intend to eradicate. ‘Why,’ I demanded of that serpent Kobayashi, “not simply have the cargo placed in a box, legitimately; rowed across, legitimately; and sold at private auction, legitimately?’ His reply? ‘There is no precedent.’ I put

it to him, 'Then why not *create* a precedent?' He stared at me as if I'd claimed paternity of his children." (18, emphasis in original)

Strict laws and rules, enforced by Japanese officials and agreed upon by the VOC at the time of its settling on Dejima, restricted trade in an extensive manner. As this passage illustrates, no leeway was given for changes in policy or altered interpretations of existing laws. Thus, though all parties involved were fully aware of this secret trade being continued, the secrecy was elementary to Japanese deniability towards the letter of the law. Vorstenbosch's intent to eradicate this "buffoonery," as we find out later, thus meets with unyielding resistance that, rather than strengthening his resolve and leading to a change in policy, leads Vorstenbosch to rather 'work the system.'

But it was not only free trade that was severely restricted. Religious restrictions were also implemented: "Captain Lacy ordered all Christian artefacts placed in a barrel to be nailed shut, surrendered to the Japanese and returned only when the brig departed from Japan" (16). Due to Japan's antagonism towards foreign religions as part of *sakoku*, any and all religious expressions and artifacts were banned from Dejima. Even the ship the *Shenandoah*, merely anchored at Dejima, is not exempt:

The *Shenandoah's* sailors grumbled that they'd sooner surrender their testicles than their crucifixes, but their crosses and St Christophers did vanish into hidden nooks when the Japanese inspectors and well-armed guards carried out their search of the decks. (16)

Though this restriction gives rise to concealment rather than compliance, this example introduces the extensive structural control by the Japanese, supported by the VOC, over activity on the island.

Mitchell's representation of the island of Dejima itself poses an interesting take on Company life. Rather than leading a privileged life of freedom and, for the chief employees at least, wealth and power, those foreigners living on Dejima are, in effect, prisoners. As it is forbidden for foreigners, as part of *sakoku* policy, to set foot in Japan except on very rare occasions, the small island is effectively an internment camp for those connected to the Company. The details of the island's dimensions and geography, described in *The Thousand Autumns* through Jacob's

eyes in historically accurate detail, reveal the reality of the employees' effective incarceration:

Dominating the shorefront is his home for the next year: Dejima, a high-walled, fan-shaped artificial island, some two hundred paces along its outer curve, Jacob estimates, by eighty paces deep, and erected, like much of Amsterdam, on sunken piles [...] he counted some twenty-five roofs: the numbered warehouses of Japanese merchants; the Chief's and the Captain's Residences; the Deputy's House, on whose roof perches the Watchtower; the Guild of Interpreters; a small hospital. Of the four Dutch warehouses, the Roos, the Lelie, the Doorn and the Eik, only the last two survived [...] The Land-Gate connects Dejima to the shore by a single-span stone bridge over a moat of tidal mud; the Sea-Gate, at the top of a short ramp where the Company sampans are loaded and unloaded, is opened only during the trading season. Attached is a Customs House, where all Dutchmen except the Chief Resident and the Captain are searched for prohibited items (17)

Jacob's sketch of these items (discussed in the previous chapter), illustrates all these details and show how small the VOC's territory is. The additional geographical features of the island such as its being surrounded by the water of Nagasaki's bay and the two (usually closed) gates further reveal its prison-like nature. All buildings on Dejima serve a directly functional purpose and suggest a rather frugal life for its inhabitants. There is no mention in this passage of a bar or inn or other place dedicated to entertainment whereas there is the additional presence of Japanese merchants' warehouses and the Guild of Interpreters. Though seemingly an innocent and practical enough addition to the island, these latter two buildings and the Japanese presence allowed, are shown in the novel to be more menacing than they sound.

As we are told in a summation of all the people present on the island at the moment of Jacob's and Vorstenbosch's arrival, a significant part of these are there to spy and report on the activity on Dejima, as historical accounts also suggest having been the case: "The small square bustles with more than a hundred merchants, interpreters, inspectors, servants, spies, lackeys, palanquin bearers, porters" (24). The presence of the interpreters, inspectors and spies is partially explained by the practicalities of interaction. No Dutch person is allowed to learn the Japanese language, as part of *sakoku* policy, and as Van Cleef narrates: "Any interpreter caught teaching us could, feasibly, be charged with treason" (21). As

official translators are assigned to aid with communication, interpreters are necessary companions to any conversation, as well as the additional necessity of Japanese inspectors, in charge of assessing if any activity takes place that does not adhere to *sakoku* policy or the official arrangements between Japan and the VOC. Therefore, in the case of Jacob's first conversation with a Japanese visitor (Ogawa Uzaemon), he "finds himself surrounded by Interpreter Ogawa, his servant, [and] a pair of inspectors" (29).

Apart from the impracticalities of large numbers of men needed for any cross-cultural interaction on Dejima, the element of secrecy and the threat of spies adds another layer of discomfort and even fear to the presence of the Japanese, as the novel shows, in everyday encounters. When Jacob encounters Hanzaburo – his personally assigned interpreter – being accosted by inspectors, Junior Clerk Ponke Ouwehand suggests as much: "They'll be ordering your boy [...] to open up your turds to see what you shat" (32). Though a source of comedy in the novel, the relentless presence of spying eyes and ears is also oppressive. The constant and invasive check on all activity on Dejima increases the restrictions already imposed upon the Company's employees by their geographical isolation. As the cook of Dejima, Arie de Grote, states: "'The Shogun's hostages' is what the natives dub us an' that's the size of it, eh?" (26). The VOC's stance towards its relationship with the Japanese – the company's tolerance towards Japan's invasive economic and social control over Dejima and its inhabitants – makes the men powerless to work change in their positions and thus renders them ultimate hostage-prisoners.

But not only the company's employees and slaves are subject to the oppression of inspectors and spies. The Japanese translators are also considered suspect, as a passage in which Captain Lacy critiques the Shogun shows:

The interpreters look uneasy: no informer is fluent enough in Dutch to understand Captain Lacy's treasonous talk, but there is no guarantee that the Magistracy has not recruited one of the four to report on his colleagues' reactions. (55)

This passage – together with other references in the novel to *sakoku* – also introduces the structural influence such antagonism towards foreign influence exerted over Japan's own society. It was this antagonism, and the resulting *sakoku* policies, that guided Japan's strict prohibitions—not only regarding foreign visitors,

but also its own residents' freedom in communicating and visiting other cultures and societies. The novel thus also points to the indirect effects of the VOC's presence beyond Dejima's boundaries in not only keeping the company inside, but also the Japanese outside. Though a full analysis of *sakoku* policy and its effect on Japan and its residents as a whole would go beyond the scope of this thesis, relevant here is the clear restriction and control exerted not only over the foreigners at Dejima, but also those Japanese individuals in contact with them and the Japanese people as a whole.

The dynamic within Dejima, between and among its residents and visitors, is thus regulated by fear and control from Japanese state power. In addition to the restrictions on communication between the two separate groups on Dejima, this tight control and inspection of the VOC's adherence to by then centuries-old rules and agreements includes hiding the identity of (in this fictional case) four inhabitants of Dejima. Though the presence of (personal) slaves of various origins is considered acceptable, with regards to the company's employees the regime is strict: only Dutchmen are allowed to enter and inhabit Dejima. Despite these regulations, historical accounts reveal the almost constant presence of at least one non-Dutch foreigner as employee of the VOC at Dejima. The resolution to this contradiction is explained, when Jacob asks: "Don't the Japanese suspect some of our men aren't Dutch?" (24). Van Cleef answers by explaining that they "account for Twomey's bastard accent by saying he hails from Groningen" (a northern province of the Dutch Republic) (24-25). The necessity guiding this deception is the basic fact that the Company's ranks were strengthened considerably by non-Dutch employees. An explanation for this is given by Van Cleef: "When were there ever enough pure-blooded Dutch to man the Company?" (25). This rhetorical question suggests that it was pure necessity that drove the Company to hire men outside Dutch borders.

The Dejima of *The Thousand Autumns* thus includes within the employee ranks a Prussian, Peter Fischer; an Irishman, Con Twomey; "somebody's natural son, with a generous glug of mestizo blood," (24) named Ivo Oost and Dr Marinus' employed assistant, Eelattu, who was "born in Colombo on the island of Ceylon" (28). Though the latter two can pass for slaves, the dangerously (Catholic) non-Dutch Europeans Fischer and Twomey are inherently suspect and thus are forced

to pretend they are of Dutch origin (and of the Protestant faith). Including the slaves of various origins (Malay, Ceylon, South Africa), the novel accurately portrays the men on Dejima as a variety of nationalities and identities. As such, questions of nationality, identity and loyalty with regards to this group of men would result in a complex analysis that is beyond the scope of this research. Nevertheless, the single common factor that binds these men together and on that particular island at that time is the corporate power that has brought them there: the VOC. Though for the employees it was a voluntary act to become an employee of the company (though a consideration of contemporary socio-economic factors would problematise this notion), it is the VOC's chosen activity in Japan and its accepted subordinate position and relationship to the archipelago that drives these main aspects of life on Dejima. The VOC's presence in Japan and its corporate imperatives are significant not only in shaping the economic interactions at the trading post, but also in extensively structuring the cultural and political activities of those individuals on Dejima.

### *8.2.2 Justice and the Company*

The second chapter of the novel introduces the reader to the European perspective on the cross-cultural encounter in the context of VOC officialdom, thus in part explaining the use of the Dutch language in the previous chapter. It also introduces the character after whom the novel is named: Jacob de Zoet. The chapter is, however, set on board an American vessel under an American flag, anchored in the bay of Nagasaki. The “neutral bottom” (10), Captain Lacy of the *Shenandoah* (Snitker here uses the maritime term ‘bottom’ for a ship as a derogatory term for its captain), serves in this particular passage as a witness to legal proceedings conducted by Chief Vorstenbosch—elected overseer of the VOC trading factory Dejima, with Jacob de Zoet as his clerk. This chapter introduces the power of the VOC over the lives of its employees and its effect—not on Japanese culture but rather internally on the Dutch and international individual lives connected to it. The conventional colonial binary is unsettled by the novel's refusal to introduce the VOC as an invading force or oppressive power over colonised cultures, but, rather, portraying it as a corporation bent on profit and a strict internal corporate culture. Again, we find in this chapter the historically accurate portrayal of the official corporate policies of

the VOC at the time coupled with fictional personal narratives that now encourage the reader to question the notion of justice in the context of corporate power.

A historical element central to this passage is an elementary part of the plot: the existence of widespread corruption within the VOC at the time, leading to its eventual bankruptcy and dissolution in the year 1800.<sup>26</sup> The scene on the *Shenandoah* is centred on Daniel Snitker who is accused of corruption and dereliction of duty while acting as chief on Dejima. The trial is led by his replacement, Chief Vorstenbosch, witnessed by Captain Lacy, and recorded by Jacob de Zoet. While historically accurate, the scene presents an unsettling account of the implementation of justice where the victim passes judgement on the perpetrator, albeit under guise of government power. The specifics of position are made explicit in Vorstenbosch's verdict, where he states his position as

acting chief-elect of the trading factory of Dejima in Nagasaki, acting by the powers vested in me by His Excellency P.G. van Overstraten, governor-general of the Dutch East Indies. (11)

The position of governor-general of the Dutch East Indies was a governmental post, created by the company to govern its colonies. The governor-general wielded many governmental powers in the colonies, including that of enforcing the law, given to him as part of the royal charter given by the Dutch state to the VOC. In practice, the position of governor-general was always awarded to company officials, causing an inherent bias in the colonies' government towards the company's aims. While supported by state law, the appointment of Chief Vorstenbosch as judge of the affair was both a realistic representation of historic reality as well as an example of the result of this bias. Vorstenbosch would have been commanded by his superior company officer to judge the misconduct of his predecessor according to Dutch law, yet under the authority of the governor-general: the company's man. Although technically an extension of the Dutch judicial system, Vorstenbosch's verdict is inescapably coloured by his position as company employee.

The verdict Vorstenbosch brings down on Daniel Snitker pronounces his guilt on three counts: "gross dereliction of duty," "[f]ailure to have the factory's

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<sup>26</sup> This matter was such a public scandal that the acronym 'VOC' in popular usage came to mean 'Vergaan Onder Corruptie' (perished under corruption).

three senior officers sign [...] bills of lading,” “[t]heft of company funds to pay for private cargoes” and “attempted bribery of a fiscal comptroller” (11-12). These illegalities are considered on the basis of their effect of “cheat[ing] the company in a hundred ways” (11) and the trial is supposed to make an example of Snitker “to every parasitic chief fattening himself on the company’s dugs” (13), as Vorstenbosch puts it. As the injured party of this trial is the company itself and the judge is a company-appointed official, the principles of natural justice<sup>27</sup> are obviously ignored, and Snitker’s protestations against the “drumhead trial” (10) are shown to be well founded. The outwardly legal and official seeming proceedings are thus a clear demonstration of the VOC’s power over all its dependants, though supported by Dutch law. The practical implications for the accused are shown in the official sentence pronounced over the corrupt ex-chief:

Item the first: Daniel Snitker is stripped of office herewith and all [...] pay backdated to 1797. Second: upon arrival in Batavia, Daniel Snitker is to be imprisoned at the old fort to account for his actions. Third: his private cargo is to be auctioned. Proceeds shall recompense the company. (12-13)

Not as part of the accused’s sentence but rather as an afterthought, Vorstenbosch adds that Snitker “shall work his passage back to Java as a landsman and be subject to common discipline” (13) rather than travel as a prisoner. Thus, the employee is sentenced by his employer not only to recompense the company for financial damages incurred (by backdating his pay to the moment of his taking the role of chief), but also by robbing him of his freedom and any (legal) possessions he might currently hold. Furthermore, he is to work his passage on the ship that is to take him to his prison as any paid sailor would, without recompense. With no option for appeal available to him apart from what he might accomplish in Batavia in person (which, historically, is rather little), Snitker’s punishment and fate is decided by the all-powerful company, rendering the notion of justice rather problematic in this context: while law is strictly adhered to, for the modern reader the overwhelming proof of bias rings as unjust.

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<sup>27</sup> “Principles, procedures, results, etc., which are instinctively felt to be just and fair, even if not formally enshrined in law” (OED).

However, Mitchell complicates this matter by presenting this victim of natural injustice unsympathetically and by suggesting that Snitker is indeed guilty—rendering the verdict satisfactory as just punishment for his crimes. Therefore, while the means of reaching this verdict are unjust, the result may be felt to be justice served. The unlikeable, racist, character we are introduced to at the outset of the chapter thus, though guilty of various crimes (as the evidence shows), is rendered a victim of the company’s power to mete out justice outside any judicial system, overturning conventional notions of good, evil and justice in colonial context within the span of 4 pages. What remains is the power of the VOC that condemns a guilty man through an unjust system. By presenting the accused as an unsympathetic character with undeniable guilt, his position as victim is unsettled and the reader is left sympathising with the verdict and sentence, though not with the legal process that led to it. The question of justice and injustice is here reduced to the question of whether means can be justified by ends, where a lack of natural justice leads to a just conclusion.

This matter is further complicated by the corporate element involved in the sentence. All measures lead to financial benefit for the company, including pragmatics such as Snitker’s voyage to prison: his sentence may save the company the salary and keep of an employed sailor, effectively rendering the verdict an act of accumulation by dispossession. Ethical issues abound here, and in this way Mitchell introduces the complexities and internal workings of this corporate power in a colonial context. Yet this complex dynamic does not lead to a discussion of the maltreatment of other cultures and non-VOC dependant individuals, but serves rather as a demonstration of a form of injustice towards, and structural oppression of, the company’s own employees.

The fear among the employees at Dejima of the company’s power over their lives, as a result of the extensive legal powers it holds, is illustrated by Arie Grote, who is concerned what the repercussions may be if Jacob de Zoet finds evidence of corruption in Dejima’s books:

“Strikes *me* [...] that it all rests on what the Chief *does* about any ... *irregularities*, eh, spotted durin’ this *piecin’ together*. Whether it’s a ‘Naughty-Boy-Now-Sin-No-More’, or a firm but fair canin’ of one’s *derrière*, eh? Or ruination an’ a six-by-five-by-four in Batavia gaol...” (34, emphasis in original)

It is thus accepted among Dejima's inhabitants that the company's authority over them extends as far as corporal punishment and incarceration, based upon one individual's (Chief Vorstenbosch's) discretion. As there are no means to appeal any such punishment, the biopolitical power of the company over its employees is absolute, rendering the men (though indeed guilty of corruption) in effect more slaves than freemen.

As a result of both Japanese state power controlling economic, political and cultural activity on Dejima, as well as the VOC's extended corporate and legal power over its employees, the residents and visitors in general of the trading post are thus subject to complete biopolitical regulation and subjugation. Such a view of life at Dejima, however, uncovers only a part of its dynamics, as the extended cultural influence of this oppressive construction reveals a more complex interaction.

## 8.3 Extended Cultural Influence

### *8.3.1 Resistance*

As a reaction to the extensive biopolitical control exerted over the residents of Dejima by both the VOC and Japan, both the company's employees and Japanese visitors (translators and medical students) exercise forms of resistance. Though this does not take the form of structural resistance against the loci of power, or have the potential in any other way to change the fundamental power dynamics, illegal activity going directly against Japanese and company regulations appears throughout the interactions between the characters in the novel. The major form of resistance towards company regulations is also displayed at Snitker's trial, in which his illegal trades and corruption are revealed. Snitker is not the only criminal present, however: "everyone present violates the Company rules on private trade" (34), Jacob de Zoet realises. He himself is approached in secret by the cook, who reveals the extent of his dealings in an attempt to recruit Jacob as a new client:

"it ain't just gems and coins I deal in, let me tell yer. Just yesterday,' he whispers, 'I earned a select client aboard the *Shenandoah* a box of purest camphor crystals for some ratty bagpipes what you'd not fish from a canal back home" (26)

A major smuggling ring apparently thrives below the surface of Dejima's legal trading activities. VOC regulations are thus blatantly disregarded by company employees, sailors and even chiefs of the trading post as all attempt to augment their salaries through illegal forms of personal trade.

It is indeed this widely performed illegal activity that brought Vorstenbosch and De Zoet to Dejima, as they are tasked to weed out the various forms of corruption. Its widespread prevalence among the island's residents poses a problem for Vorstenbosch, however: "Snitker's incarceration is my statement of intent, but should we mete out the same treatment to every smuggler on Dejima, there would be nobody left but the two of us" (19-20). Although Vorstenbosch does not intend to persecute all smugglers, his presence does effectively curb the illegal activity. The Chief's task of combating corruption on Dejima is, of course, ironically offset by his own defiance of Japanese regulations concerning personal trade, discussed above. As he considers these regulations "buffoonery" (18), however, this seems to resolve any ethical inconsistencies for Vorstenbosch.

Such resistance towards Japanese trade regulations is as widespread as internal corporate corruption, as the personal trade popular among Dejima's residents is also curbed through strict inspections by the Japanese—as the experienced Grote explains:

"for every jewel or ducatoon sewn into coat lining, eleven get seized by the Sea-Gate, and only a one slips through. They're best poked up yer fig-hole an' by-the-by should *your* cavity, eh, be so primed, Mr de Z., I can get you the best price of all..." (26)

Items of economic value are not the only objects smuggled past these inspections, however. As Vorstenbosch and Jacob arrive at Dejima their persons and belongings are searched for religious items, as well. Although they are given a chance to relinquish such objects voluntarily, "the de Zoet psalter was not amongst them" (16). Throughout his narratives, Jacob's presence at Dejima is shown to be continuously affected by his fear of detection, as the omnipresent inspectors and spies sustain the level of risk he has taken. Jacob's continuous anxiety illustrates the atmosphere of life on the trading post, and the fear that dominates any interaction between the Japanese and the foreigners.

As a result of the known presence of spies among the Japanese, the company's employees actively antagonise the interpreters present to aid communication and secretly gather information for the Japanese. Ouwehand is portrayed as taking a rebellious stance towards these spy-interpreters:

“I tormented my first snoop into an early grave three days ago, so the Interpreters' Guild sent this hat-stand [...] I call him 'Herpes' after how closely he sticks to me. But I'll defeat him in the end. Grote bet me ten guilders I can't wear out five by November.” (32)

Though these methods are ineffectual as a means to end the extensive surveillance, Ouwehand and his colleagues have devised something like a game to cope with the constant scrutiny. Resistance against Japanese regulations is thus unproductive in a structural sense, but successful in fostering a culture of rebellion and defiance. What the repercussions may be if they are detected with any illegal objects or conducting illegal activity, is unknown:

*I am an officer of the Dutch East Indies Company, Jacob reasons. What is the worst punishment the Japanese could inflict on me? Jacob doesn't know, and the truth is that Jacob is afraid.* (16)

But it is precisely this element of the unknown that the novel explores as a source of continuous discomfort, and a breeding ground for continuing antagonism between the cultures.

Resistance and rebellion are not only explored in the novel as a characteristic of Dejima's foreign residents. Various Japanese officials are described as defying their own state power as well. As Vorstenbosch's scribe, Jacob discovers a 'mistake' in an interpreter's translation of a letter from the Shogun—a mistake that could lead to great personal profit, but which goes directly against Japanese state authority, as Jacob points out: “Mr Iwase, refresh my memory: what *are* the penalties for wilfully mistranslating a Shogunal order?” (104, emphasis in original). Theft and smuggling also flourishes among the Japanese at Dejima, as many possibilities arise for personal enrichment especially during trading season: “‘I saw you,’ van Cleef snatches a guard's sleeve, ‘you damned *thief!*’ A shower of bright red nutmeg berries spills across the floor” (54). This incident illustrates the distrust and resentment that characterise the interaction between the various cultures and characters explored in the novel, as it is taken as an opportunity for a minor form of

revenge: “Grote, frisk whoever looks suspicious – aye, just as they frisk us” (54). Apparently, such incidents occur regularly and among every participant of the trade, as Van Cleef explains:

“the infernal coolies’ll spirit away a bag of sugar in a blink without they’re watched like hawks. As will the guards – and the merchants are the slyest bastards of all: yesterday one of the whoresons slipped a stone into a bag which he then ‘discovered’ and tried to use as ‘evidence’ to lower the average tare” (25)

Trade activity on Dejima is thus explored in the novel as a flourishing source of unethical and illegal behaviour in which most participants, of whatever origin, attempt to ‘outsmart’ the two authorities and each other for personal gain or, in the case of Jacob’s Psalter, to defy the restrictions of *sakoku*.

More subtle and altruistic forms of defiance against the array of controls and restrictions are also explored in the novel, most notably through the relationship between Jacob and the interpreter Ogawa. Ogawa continuously defies regulations in order to protect and stay in contact with Jacob: “*Ogawa knew about my Psalter, Jacob realises, all along*” (108, emphasis in original). As Ogawa warns Jacob, discovery of the psalter in his possession would result in exile for Jacob, while he himself as the original inspecting officer would be “not so lucky” (108). Ogawa and Jacob’s growing friendship is in itself also a defiance of *sakoku* as their meetings are continuously overshadowed by the possibility of “accusations of fraternisation” (91) by the omnipresent spies. Such interactions, and those between Jacob and Orito, are constantly conducted on the edge of (il)legality, as their conversations almost inadvertently lead to knowledge of each other’s culture and language being shared in both directions. The novel ends with a passage set 12 years after Jacob’s arrival at Dejima, revealing Jacob to have become fluent in Japanese despite the ban on foreigners learning this protected language.

The novel thus defies a binary narrative of oppression versus resistance, or state power versus criminal activity. Rather, these examples explore a dynamic of consistent and continuous disruption and defiance that occurs among all stakeholders, and is directed towards the two major sources of power (VOC and Japan) and each other, irrespective of race and class (despite the racist discourse used). Rather, due to the extensive structural influence by the VOC and Japanese

regulations over Dejima, the common factor driving interpersonal and cross-cultural interaction seems to be personal gain and direct defiance of the prohibitions exerted by both the company and its host state over all individuals concerned.

### *8.3.2 Science and Knowledge*

Although Jacob de Zoet is seemingly the protagonist of the novel, he is not the first character to whom the reader is introduced. The first chapter of the novel is dedicated to a Japanese character: Aibagawa Orito, a female midwife or gynaecologist, involved in the difficult birth of the child of a Nagasaki high official. A relationship between Japanese and Dutch culture is immediately established in these first pages as Orito repeatedly refers to Dutch medical literature as the foundation for her treatment. The extensive influence of Dutch scientific knowledge on Japanese culture is thus immediately presented as a constant factor within areas of Japanese (medical) science. As historian Grant Goodman shows, the presence of a primarily Dutch culture as representative of European scientific progress gave Japan the scholarly field of Dutch studies or *Rangaku* that greatly influenced Japanese knowledge and practices of science and medicine. Part of this major influence on Japanese scientific culture is the way the Dutch language was central in the communication of this knowledge.

The physical circumstances of the scene are imbued with references to Japanese culture. The central figure (the mother in labour) is the concubine of the magistrate and the passage repeatedly refers to the power relations between the various persons involved, creating a clear picture of the established hierarchy and resulting subtleties of interpersonal communication. The midwife is summoned to attend to the difficult birth as the magistrate's orders are that no man may examine his concubine, as the following exchange between the doctor and the chamberlain relates:

"I wanted to examine the child's presentation myself, but..." The elderly scholar chooses his words with care. "But this is prohibited, it seems." "My orders are clear," states the chamberlain. "No man may touch her." (3)

The care with which the doctor addresses the issue shows the far-reaching authority of the magistrate's command and thus the deference that all present owe this high official.

In a description of the surroundings, the reader is asked to imagine "a rice paddy beyond the garden, a cacophony of frogs," a "muslin curtain," (3) and a "moth the size of a bird," (9) all subtly suggestive of a non-European and oriental place that provides the setting for the night-time scene of the birth of a high official's son. We are warned of what is to come, however, by the use of the rather crude word "detonates" to describe the sounds of the night and the mention of the "stale and sticky" furniture on which Orito is forced to kneel (3). Less subtle are the references to beliefs unfamiliar to a western reader. An account of a seemingly high-ranked doctor's response to this difficult birth reveals both a cultural and political context that is both specific and universal:

"After the baby stopped kicking, [Dr] Uragami ascertained that, for geomantic reasons discernible to men of his genius, the child's spirit is reluctant to be born. The birth henceforth depends on the mother's willpower." *The rogue*, Maeno needs not add, *dares not bruise his reputation by presiding over the stillbirth of such an estimable man's child.* (4)

While the doctor's refusal to aid with the birth as soon as the child was at risk of being stillborn is due to a universally understandable concept of the fear of repercussions from a higher authority (a "lethal reluctance to lose face" (5)), his stated reasons (or excuses) for not attending are less familiar to a western reader, alerting us to the distance created by a cultural subject-matter that differs from that associated with that of the language in which this scene is portrayed. The referral to the child's 'spirit' and the science of geomancy as valid reasons for refusing continuing treatment portrays a mystical context presented as the opposite of the pragmatic-sounding physical science referred to by Orito and Dr Maeno.

The chamberlain's message to the magistrate informing him of his child's death invokes a similar mystical language: "Inform His Honor that a son was stillborn. Dr Maeno and his midwife did their best but were powerless to alter what Fate had decreed" (8). In both a counterattack and addition to Doctor Uragami's refusal, the chamberlain invokes Fate as a cause for the terrible event—this time in an attempt to preserve Orito and Maeno's position.

As a counterpoint to the orientalist atmosphere of the scene and the mystical language used in an interpretation of the events, there is the more extensive use of scientific language that not only inserts a European voice into the proceedings but also displays a pragmatic, direct and even gory approach to the difficult birth. The birth itself already poses a crude scene, seemingly designed to shock the reader out of the previously described idyllic oriental atmosphere set out in the very first lines of the chapter. The reader has been warned, however, by the words “stale and sticky” (used to describe the futon that lies at the centre of the scene) of the abject side of the birth chamber and the terms “sweat-drenched” and “bloodied” serve as the precursors to the (literal) unveiling of the woman and child: “Orito lifts the bloodied sheet and finds, as warned, the fetus’s limp arm, up to the shoulder, protruding from Kawasemi’s vagina” (3). Dr Maeno’s question to Orito, however, changes the focus from the graphic horror of the scene to a more objective, scientific approach to the situation in the use of the word “presentation” (3) to describe the birth as a medical curiosity. The references to the Scottish Doctor William Smellie that follow this dialogue and the use of the medical terms “Prolapse of the Arm” and “transverse breech position” (both in Dutch, though translated for the reader) slowly change the discourse of the chapter from a narrative to a scientific account, albeit interspersed with personal and cultural references. The scientific nature is brought to a climax when Orito recalls the passage in Smellie’s *Observations* relevant to the medical emergency at hand:

*If the transverse lie is convex, recalls Orito, where the fetus’s spine is arched backward so acutely that its head appears between its shins like a Chinese acrobat, she must amputate the fetus’s arm, dismember its corpse with toothed forceps, and extract it, piece by grisly piece. Dr. Smellie warns that any remnant left in the womb will fester and may kill the mother. If the transverse lie is concave, however, Orito has read, where the fetus’s knees are pressed against its chest, she may saw off the arm, rotate the fetus, insert crotchets into the eye sockets, and extract the whole body, headfirst. (5-6, italics in original)*

This account presents in grisly detail the medical realities of the mother and child’s condition as well as a significant counterpoint to the mystical elements in the passage. Medical language and pragmatism, though interspersed with Orito’s comments on the grisly nature of her work, rule her thoughts and reveal necessity and objective thinking as the major factors driving the passage to its conclusion.

### *Rangaku*

Not only the language, but also the subject matter, of this passage thus introduce Western scientific discourse within a Japanese cultural context. Their relevance is more than merely a historical or narrative curiosity, as many historical analyses of the role of the VOC in Japan have shown. As already mentioned in the context of cultural interaction, the communication of European scientific progress (mediated through the VOC and the Dutch language) gave Japan the scholarly field of *Rangaku*. While '*Rangaku*' literally means 'Dutch studies,' its meaning was broader: "namely all of the knowledge and techniques from the West transmitted through the medium of the Dutch language" (Goodman 6). While this included some texts that originated in the Dutch Republic, the majority of scientific knowledge (mainly from the fields of medicine or astronomy) was in the form of Dutch translations of originals in other Western languages (mostly German and English).

Although the interaction between Japan and Europe through the mediation of the VOC could have sparked an exchange of Eastern and Western thought in all fields of scientific and philosophic theory and knowledge, *Rangaku* remained a restricted field among Japanese scholars of mostly scientific and medical technology and data. Goodman shows how this variety of knowledge was gathered in an isolated manner mostly from textual sources rather than through personal interaction, and purely mono-directional as "there was only the most marginal and superficial interaction between the Dutchmen actually in Japan and Japanese Dutch studies" (232). This inconsistent and unpredictable contact between the Japanese and their source of Western knowledge caused even that little contact to be an incomplete and inaccurate source of Western learning. The result was that "the Japanese never knew such 'original classics' as the *Principia* of Newton or Vesalius's anatomy or the works of Boerhaave" (244), and that those texts they did receive "were overwhelmingly translations which they, in turn, had had to translate" (233). The novel illustrates this point through Ogawa's inspection of Jacob de Zoet's copy of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*: "I bought the Dutch edition in Batavia.' Ogawa looks surprised. 'So Adam Smith is not Dutchman but Englishman?'" (30). This added a further layer of translation (English to Dutch) through which the original text was mediated, necessarily adding a level of incomprehension through which the content was viewed.

Another cause of the constrained and limited scientific partnership is that this relationship was never actually acknowledged as such, as neither the VOC nor the Japanese ever officially or deliberately pursued the sharing of scientific knowledge. Goodman explains:

[N]either the Japanese nor the Dutch ever viewed their bilateral relationship as anything more than a mutual economic convenience. That is, there was never intended by either side to be any cultural dimension to their discourse. (231)

Instead, the scientific knowledge gained by Japanese scholars through the VOC may thus be considered an object of personal trade rather than a mutually beneficial educational activity or cultural exchange. As this activity was never officially acknowledged as a part of the VOC's relationship with Japan, no particular effort was taken to benefit from it. As Goodman shows:

Even the role of the station doctor which has frequently been identified as significant for Dutch studies [...] was completely a chance one since the physician was assigned to Deshima as the caretaker of the Hollanders' health, not as a medical instructor for the Japanese. (232)

Thus, despite existing collaboration between the scholars and the company's employees, any change in personnel was one which could either be beneficial or detrimental to continued study but never quite predictable. The result was that only a handful of individuals connected to the VOC made a significant contribution to *Rangaku*, particularly Titsingh, Thunberg, Doeff and Von Siebold (232).

Other practical circumstances also intervened in the process of dissemination of knowledge, as Ogawa's narrative shows:

"I am *rangakusha* – scholar of Dutch Science. Four years ago, I borrow *Wealth of Nations* from Chief Hemmij. I began translation to bring," Ogawa's lips ready themselves, "'Theory of Political Economy'" to Japan. But Lord of Satsuma offered Chief Hemmij much money so I returned it. Book was sold before I finish." (30)

As the field of *Rangaku* and the communication of western scientific knowledge were never officially supported or organised, their processes were subject to chance and circumstance, as this passage illustrates.

## Regulation

Yet, however much the practical circumstances limited this exchange, and however external *Rangaku* may have been to the official relationship between the company and Japan, this particular new school of learning was still considered influential enough to warrant the attention of the shogunate. Though, on the one hand, the authorities “recognized the potential value of practical scientific knowledge obtainable from Europe,” the shogunate on the other hand also felt it necessary to “rigorously [curb] any inquiries into European history, philosophy, law, literature or religion” (6) specifically. The major cause of this rigorous restraint on scientific inquiry was the fear of “any repetition of what was seen as the disruptive effect of the introduction of Christianity in Japan” (6). Many of Japan’s *sakoku* policies were, as both Goodman and Clulow show, geared towards the eradication of the Christian influences previously brought into the country by especially the Portuguese. As a result, “No aspects of Japanese political, social, economic or intellectual life were left unregulated in the attempt to create stable and durable institutions” (223).

The Japanese authorities did not, however, consider stability and durability merely from a political or economic point of view, but also concerned themselves with the spiritual welfare of Japanese society. The resulting policy was the active promotion of “a combination of the Chu Hsi brand of Neo-Confucianism for the elite and of popular Buddhism for the masses” in the hope to “devise a system which would satisfy the country both philosophically and spiritually” (223). In the case of the scholarly population of Japan the stratagem of “encouraging and giving support to scholars of Chu Hsiism” was in order to “promote a spirit of learning while paradoxically discouraging free inquiry” (3-4). By thus providing scholars with an established (Neo-Confucian) framework from which to view the world, the shogunate attempted to restrict the influence of external thought to matters more material or technological. As stated above, many, if not most, *Rangakushi* were dependent on the official authorities for patronage as

The mainstream scholars of things Dutch were principally government employees (interpreters, Banshowagegoyo, etc.) or independent translators or researchers acting in a purely technological context, and a goodly portion of these men held some kind of official appointment such as fief physician or physician attached to the shogunate itself. (229)

Therefore, the scholars were “unlikely to bite the hands that were feeding them” (230) and restricted themselves mostly to the purely technical and medical aspect of Western science, aided by the existence of an accepted and mostly satisfactory official philosophy. Thus, as Goodman concludes, while *Rangaku*, “as the Bakufu [or: shogunate] quite understandably recognized, could well have nurtured criticism of the state structure,” it “utterly failed to do so” as “[b]oth rigorous government supervision and intense government cooperation together with what was, in effect, self-supervision greatly diminished the potential for critical thinking in *Rangaku*” (229).

This effective restriction of critical thinking is, again, illustrated in the sixteenth chapter of Mitchell’s novel, where he explores both sides of the scholarly interaction. The scene depicting a debate between scholars at the Shirandô Academy not only reveals the knowledge that was imported into Japanese society through the VOC, but also the prevailing policy of rejection of critical thinking regarding the established political and philosophical equilibrium. A scholar, Yoshida Hayato, is described in this passage holding a lecture on the political and military status of Japan at that time. Apart from being a literary device common to historical fiction, where such a monologue or dialogue serves as a way to impart information to the reader, the lecture and the debate that follows in this passage also illustrate (what may have been) the mindset of scholars at that time, including a fear of criticism of the Tokugawa regime. While Yoshida’s lecture is filled with statements that undermine the state’s policies, Uzaemon’s thoughts reveal their reception by the audience. Through use of this third-person limited narrative perspective, where Ogawa Uzaemon features as the protagonist, the effects of the restrictions on critical thought regarding the Japanese state’s structure is explored. Yoshida’s ideas form the introduction to the chapter, where he states:

I conclude [...] this widely-held belief that Japan is an impregnable fortress is a pernicious delusion. Honourable Academicians, we are a ramshackle farmhouse with crumbling walls, a collapsing roof and covetous neighbours. (222)

While these and similar words are portrayed as being mostly received with support – “the scholars grizzle in agreement” (222) – his continuation of the theme by

building up the critical tone of his speech is met with increasing discomfort. Yoshida's following statement includes the citation of a scholar, Hayashi Shihei, who, as "Uzaemon remembers, *died under house arrest for his writings*" (223, italics in original):

we shall understand that our "impregnable fortress" was a placebo and nothing more; that our seas are no "impassable moat" but, as my far-sighted colleague Hayashi Shihei wrote, "an ocean-road without frontiers which links China, Holland and Edo's Nihonbashi Bridge." (222-223)

As a result of this bold move, "Some in the audience nod in agreement; others look concerned" (223). The full implication of Yoshida's stated position is revealed in the discussion that follows his lecture, when he suggests a new policy where scholars are sent to Europe or the United States

to study the arts of industry. Upon their return, let them spread their knowledge, freely, to the ablest minds of all classes so we may set about constructing a *true* "Impregnable Fortress." (224)

Another scholar answers to this that "the Separate Nation decree forbids any subject to leave Japan, on pain of death" (224) in answer to which we read "*Not even Yoshida Hayato dare suggest, thinks Uzaemon, the decree be annulled*" followed by "Hence the decree,' Yoshida Hayato is outwardly calm, 'must be annulled'" (224, italics in original). The next thought revealed to the reader is the question "*Should someone not save him [...] from himself? He's dying, the young interpreter thinks. The choice is his*" (224, italics in original). The immense danger Yoshida has put himself in by critiquing the decree so boldly is explained by the reaction of the other scholars: "'Yoshida-san,' calls out Haga the druggist, 'is naysaying the Third Shogun...' '...who is not a debating partner,' the chemist agrees, 'but a deity!'" (224). As shown above, Yoshida's explicit rejection of a deity's decree could lead directly to a death-sentence. Nevertheless, his verbal rebellion is also met in this scene with support: "'Yoshida-sama,' counters Ômori the Dutch-style painter, 'is a visionary patriot and he should be heard!'" (224). Though this passage is a fictional representation of what may have occurred, it does illustrate the various historical factors discussed by historians regarding Japan during the period of *sakoku* as it

includes the philosophical and political elements relevant to Japan's contact with the West.

As an extension of this fictional representation of political factors at play, Mitchell continues and ends this academically-focused narrative with a scientific interaction between the members of the academy and Dr Marinus. For, despite the practical difficulties and official discouragement, Western scientific knowledge had a small yet significant impact on Japanese technological and medical development. As Goodman shows:

despite the limitations under which Dutch studies evolved under the shogunate, the *Rangakusha* had not hesitated to identify as superior and as worthy of adoption those European techniques which they were able to know in some depth (234).

Even the shogunate, highly motivated to expel any Western philosophical or spiritual residue from its territory, recognised the significant value of Western science to the advancement of the Japanese economy, welfare and military defence. Through the medium of Japanese translations of Dutch translations of European scientific sources, the scholarly thought of the West was thus transmitted and had an indelible, albeit limited, impact on Japanese scholarship. Therefore

in any overall view of the Dutch impact on Japan, consideration must be given to the effect of knowledge of the West on the thought processes of those men who espoused that knowledge. (190)

This effect is visible in the cultural, linguistic and scientific aspect of the interaction between East and West in that period. Part of the cause of this increase in interest in Dutch studies, Goodman argues, is the increase of scholarly activity "throughout a prosperous and peaceful Japan" where "new currents of thought, centred principally in the major urban areas, began to emerge" (4) thanks to "the gradual shift in the economic base towards the cities," "the emergence of the vitality of the *chonin* [townspeople]" and "the increasing stultification of the Bakufu-nurtured Neo-Confucian ethos" (223). These newly emerging currents of thought were dominated by the schools of "Shinto revivalism (*kokugaku*), critical Confucianism (*kogaku*) and Western 'scientific' study (*rangaku*)," though, as stated above, orthodox thought in the form of Chu Hsi Neo-Confucianism remained the official school of thought in Japan (4).

## Dissemination

It is this newly emerged interest of, at first, the Nagasaki interpreters who were exposed to European thought, later of the Edo and next other Dutch scholars, that led to the acquisition of medical knowledge and technology and “provided a special impetus to the advancement of Western medical science in Japan” (230). *Rangaku* was advanced and knowledge disseminated especially through the physician scholars. Not only did Japanese physicians have the time and income to “delve into Western learning,” their patronage by various high-placed Japanese officials and even the shogunate itself, though accompanied by pressure to adhere to the accepted philosophical mode of thought, “amounted to official protection and support” (230). This protection, support, and the wealth and social status connected to the profession rendered a career as a physician incredibly desirable as a method of social advancement as “in the Tokugawa social order to become a physician of any kind was a rather speedy way for an ambitious young man to earn money and to advance himself socially” (230). Thus becoming “disciples and students of *Rangakusha* teacher-scholars or of *han* private schools where Dutch studies were part of the curriculum” (224) caused physicians especially to become increasingly familiar and interested in Western learning.

This process is illustrated in *The Thousand Autumns* through the second lecture presented at the Shirandô Academy in the sixteenth chapter, where a scholar named Sugita Genpaku (a historical figure) summarises the progress of *Rangaku* up to that point. While the first lecture and discussion regarding the global political and military position in Japan were held amongst the Japanese scholars only, this second lecture is held in the company of Dr Marinus and Jacob de Zoet and includes only scientific matters—in accordance with the strict separation discussed above.

Sugita’s lecture shows the explosive growth of *Rangaku* among Japanese scholars by introducing the start of this process as an obscure interest of only a few interested physicians: “Just thirty years ago [...] there were just three of us Dutch scholars in all Japan and a single book” (227). The passing of the years is made explicit as “Sugita’s fingers loop his stringy white beard” (227). This chapter portrays the historical figure of Sugita as he discusses that “single book,” the translation of which, together with two colleagues, is his well-known known

contribution to *Rangaku*: “The book [...] was Kulmus’s *Tafel Anatomia*, printed in Holland” (227)—the Dutch translation of a German medical text. Its obscurity at that time, the not yet widely-established nature of *Rangaku* and the difficulties in obtaining and translating such a text are illustrated in Sugita’s fictional lecture:

I desired [the *Tafel Anatomia*] with my whole being, but I could no more pay the asking price than swim to the moon. My clan purchased it on my behalf and, in so doing, determined my fate. (227)

As a rare and valuable object, this volume and the knowledge it contains is thus presented here as an object for investment rather than a source of leisurely reading or a curiosity to be collected. Sugita’s clan, the reader must conclude, seems to have purchased the book as an investment in his future: Sugita was to consider it his life’s work to study and translate it and gain a desirable position in doing so, dependent on the value that may or may not be extracted from the book. As shown above, the profession of physician was a desirable position due to the accompanying status and financial stability, a social construct also supported in the novel, and as such the investment in this work was a smart move in providing Sugita with a unique asset in the field, if it proved worthwhile.

### **Influence**

The result of Sugita’s investment is also included in this fictional account, where the importance of the translation is illustrated: “‘A few of you may have heard of our *Kaitai Shinsho*?’ His audience savours the understatement” (228). The importance of this work to *Rangaku* and its influence on Japanese scientific thinking is illustrated in this passage by an account of the process involved in the analysis and translation, (as I will discuss in the next section) of the anatomic work. As Sugita narrates in the lecture:

“[Dr] Maeno and I took the *Tafel Anatomia* to Edo’s execution grounds [...] where a prisoner named Old Mother Tea had been sentenced to an hour-long strangulation for poisoning her husband [...] We struck a bargain. In return for a painless beheading, she gave us permission to conduct the first medical dissection in the history of Japan on her body, and signed an oath not to haunt us in revenge... Upon comparing the subject’s inner organs with the illustrations in the book, we saw, to our astonishment, the Chinese sources that dominated our learning were grossly inaccurate. There were no ‘ears

of the lungs'; no 'seven lobes of the kidneys', and the intestines differed markedly from the descriptions by the Ancient Sages..." (228)

This step towards a different method of gathering medical knowledge already indicates a turn towards empirical research that was unique in the history of Japanese medicine. Comparing known Chinese sources and new Western sources with empirical data signifies an important change in both scientific method and mode of thought similar to the start of anatomical research in Europe that cannot be underestimated. By overcoming the spiritual boundaries traditionally placed on researching the (dead) human body the material reality became open to observation. Simultaneously, this passage marks the separation between the spiritual and the material in Japanese thought by marking scientific thought as outside the spiritual realm and subject to observation and experimentation, leading to the rejection of ancient Chinese sources and the acceptance of Western learning. This result is made explicit by Sugito's lecture where he concludes:

*My Tafel Anatomia, however, corresponded with our dissected body so precisely that Drs Maeno, Nakagawa and myself were of one mind: European medicine surpasses the Chinese. (228, emphasis in original)*

Though this may seem a logical conclusion, difficult to be refuted and easy to accept, such a fundamental change of thinking was not immediately acceptable: "To say so nowadays, with Dutch medical schools in every city, is a self-evident truth. Thirty years ago, such an opinion was patricidal" (228). This comment thus suggests a philosophical and even political struggle with regards to Western learning that renders its ultimate acceptance as a superior system of knowledge an impressive feat, despite its limitations. Sugito's lecture in *The Thousand Autumns* thus serves to emphasise to the reader the historical influence that the importation of Western knowledge held in Japanese scientific development, through which established Chinese medicine was fundamentally displaced by unfamiliar European knowledge.

But not only did the increasing importance of Dutch studies expand the practical knowledge of these scholars—historically their studies also caused them to personally develop "a kind of cult of Hippocrates with a great number of portraits of Hippocrates appearing in the possession of these same doctors" in an echo of the Hippocrates movement in Europe (225), illustrating the cultural influence their

exposure to Western learning created. According to Goodman this effect did not seem, however, to be a direct result of the European Hippocrates movement, but rather a separately emerging cult as it was “long after the ‘Return to Hippocrates’ movement in Europe was over” (225). This example suggests that, though the study of Western thought exposed Japanese scholars to its cultural influence, this influence was not a direct reflection or copy of the development of thought in Europe itself.

Goodman exposes this disparity in scientific and philosophic development between Europe and Japan and explains that much of the rather restricted theoretical influence of Western thought on Japanese scholarship lies in the nature and status of Japanese thought itself at that time. The reason for the selective interest displayed by the *Rangakusha* (Dutch scholars in Japan) for mainly quantitative knowledge is more complex than the practical and political difficulties already discussed above allow and is revealing of Japanese attitudes towards Europe and European scholarship at that time.

The political restrictions namely, were in many ways a reflection of the scholars’ attitudes themselves:

even its most devoted practitioners viewed it [...] as a utilitarian technological supplement to a well-ordered, harmonious, intellectually “satisfying’ ethical system derived from Chu Hsi Neo-Confucianism. (8)

As this ethical system also encompassed political and economic theories that were concordant with this philosophy, the philosophical, political and economic theories from the West had no great foothold within Japanese scholarship. *Rangaku* therefore never led to major critique of the rather different Japanese societal structure and the scholars who did “make some rather critical jibes at certain elements of Tokugawa thought or society or who raised questions about such Bakufu policies as defence or *sakoku*” became pariahs as they “were either considered to be so eccentric as to be ignored or were the victims of official punitive action” (229). *Rangaku*’s focus on technology and medicine – a focus supported by both the *Rangakusha* and the Tokugawa government – is therefore telling of the extent to which “the ‘Wisdom of the East’ was fully sufficient unto itself” (229-230).

Another factor, Goodman explains, that effectively restricted any major Western philosophical influence on the established Japanese philosophy was the inherent dichotomy between the two modes of thought. On the one hand, there was the Neo-Confucian “credo” and its view “that heaven and man were in harmonious unity, that nature must be honoured as one would honour a friend and that man must be as one with nature” (228). On the other hand, there was the Western enlightenment philosophy that aimed “to conquer nature in any way appropriate to the betterment of mankind” and “to achieve that conquest by experiment, analysis and deductive reasoning” (228). Instead of creating a complex model that incorporated both philosophies this conflict was circumvented by creating an “artificially constructed spirit-material dichotomy” (228) where the spiritual was theorised within a Confucian framework and the material was satisfactorily explained by European scientific knowledge. The significant Japanese thinker Arai Hakuseki, though confirming the relevance of Western science to Japanese scientific development, “emphasized the need for a separation of the concrete and the abstract” (190-91). It was this division, where Western science covered the concrete and Eastern science the abstract, that was “adopted wholeheartedly by the Tokugawa government” (191). This (officially) established dichotomy between the material and the spiritual is echoed in the fictional debate depicted in *The Thousand Autumns*, where it is argued against Yoshida’s controversial views that they are external to the academy’s interests: “‘Our society of scholars,’ Haga stands up, ‘debates natural philosophy—’ ‘-and not matters of state,’ agrees an Edo metallurgist” (224). Whereas matters of state were clearly closely connected to spiritual matters and were thus not to be debated, illustrated by the invocation of the divinity of the Shogun, matters of material importance – namely natural philosophy – formed the sole extent of the academy’s official pursuits.

However, this separation of spirit and materiality was not merely a solution for combining two conflicting modes of thought or a result of political pressure—it was also supported by a strong belief in the superiority of Eastern spiritualism:

a country like Holland which did not know the Sage, whatever its technical competence, remained identified as “barbarian” in the Chinese sense of the term, and therefore its humanistic heritage, if any, was not worthy of serious attention. (230)

This notion of European or Dutch barbarism was a consistent factor in Japanese-Dutch interaction and therefore naturally extended to the Japanese view on Western learning. Another scholar, Hashimoto Sanai, wrote “They have machines and technology; we have righteousness and filial piety” (Goodman 228), thus applying an almost Cartesian dualism in his view of Eastern and Western philosophy. Therefore, although “the weaknesses of this dichotomy became evident to some *Rangakusha*,” as Western science was persistently “diffused throughout Japanese society” (191) and however influential this technology may have been for the history of Japanese scientific enquiry, Dutch scholarship never rose beyond “technology without ideology” (228). As Goodman states: “for Japan perhaps the greatest deficiency of *Rangaku* was its valuelessness” (228) in a spiritual sense. Thus, the influence of *Rangaku* on Japanese society was almost solely of a technological nature and the result of scientific development through selective learning.

As a result, the main considerations of the Dutch scholars’ choice for medicine and astronomy especially were also practical and based on “certain pressing societal needs, namely the prolonging and saving of lives,” “the correction of the calendar to improve the agricultural cycle” (6) as well as “the building up of coastal defences” (190). These priorities are reflected in *The Thousand Autumns* where we can see the performance of *Rangaku* at work as Mitchell explores what this scientific interaction would have meant on a daily basis for both Japanese and European individuals involved.

### **Exploration in the Novel**

As shown above, the shared medical knowledge from Europe is first integrated into the novel as part of Orito’s practice as a midwife, when she quotes from Smellie’s text and successfully implements its directions. With midwifery’s importance to the novel as the profession of one of its protagonists, it is not surprising that the medical element of *Rangaku* is best represented in the novel while the other main disciplines of astronomy and defence play a relatively minor role. The character of Dr Marinus who, as shown above, is based upon the unique person of Dr Siebold, is a second source of detailed medical information in the narrative and provides the reason for Orito to visit Dejima regularly and meet Jacob.

Dr Marinus's role as a character in the novel is to portray a representative of the various individuals connected to the VOC who were influential to *Rangaku*, as he forms the major source of scientific learning for the Japanese characters throughout the novel. His position as scholar aside from his daily service as company doctor, is most clearly exemplified in the chapter already discussed above, where the reader receives an insight into the Shirandô Academy's (mainly) scientific interests. In the latter part of this rather academically-focused chapter, I will show here, Mitchell demonstrates what form the scientific interaction between Japanese and Western scholars may have taken, and illustrates in what way knowledge was, and may have been, transferred between individuals. Central to the passage is the struggle between science and humanity or the personal, revealing the fundamental subjectivity of seemingly factual discourse, and the point of interaction between the German lector and his Japanese audience: not the scientific, but rather the human and the personal form the connectors between the two cultures.

In this passage, the interaction is in the form of a lecture given by Dr Marinus to the members of the Academy, aided by three translators, including Uzaemon, from whose perspective the passage is written. Dr Marinus' seminar is on the topic of scientific development, and starts with the invention of the lens and its significance to the growth of scientific research as an introduction. By relating the history of the lens and its use in military, medical and scientific contexts worldwide, Marinus illustrates how "Science moves" (232): "The lens and its cousin the polished mirror, and their mathematical principles, have evolved a long way throughout time and space" (231). Marinus stresses in particular the possibility of studying what cannot be seen thanks to the microscope and telescope:

astronomers may now gaze upon a newly discovered planet beyond Saturn, Georgium Sidium, invisible to the naked eye. Zoologists may admire the true portrait of man's most loyal companion... *Pulex irritans*. (231)

At this point in the narrative a picture of a *Pulex irritans* (a flea) is inserted (Figure 6)<sup>28</sup> as the reader is told that “[o]ne of Marinus’s seminarians exhibits the illustration from Hooke’s *Micrografia*” (231). The reader is thus actively included in the lecture and, simultaneous to the Japanese scholars (and Uzaemon in particular), introduced to the scientific knowledge Marinus imparts. Similar to the first chapter, where medical details and an image are included in the narrative, this section transforms the narrative into a scientific account that includes specific knowledge not directly relevant to the plot. However, the choice of this image of a flea rather than an illustration of a microscope or more obscure miniscule life form reveals an additional layer of meaning that subtly undermines the objectively scientific genre it seems to suggest by connecting the Anglophone reader as well as the Western and Japanese characters through its universal familiarity. The flea is *every man’s* “most loyal companion”—whether from Europe, Japan or elsewhere, emphasising a commonality among humans, whatever their national identity.

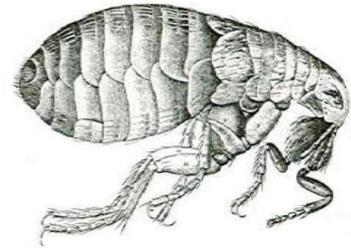


Figure 6

The additional inclusion of Uzaemon’s personal thoughts and practical matters of translation throughout Marinus’s discourse immediately unsettles its scientific nature, however. Disruptions of the monologue abound and take various personal forms such as “De Zoet is watching from the side [...] *He may have been a worthy husband for Orito*” (231) as well as the more impersonal “Uzaemon does his best to translate this, but it isn’t easy [...] Goto Shinpachi anticipates his colleague’s difficulty and suggests ‘distribute’” (232). Matters of science, language and plot are thus interwoven into a complex whole that serves to suggest that objective historic discourse is impossible—the personal will always inform the seemingly factual.

The separation of the material and the spiritual is thus presented as futile, as it is argued that scientific development has an inescapable effect on human experience. Marinus illustrates this as he suggests:

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<sup>28</sup> Originally from Robert Hooke’s *Micrographia: or, some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses: with Observations and Enquiries Thereupon* by R. Hooke (London 1665).

were [a] fellow to fall asleep tonight and sleep for a hundred years, or eighty, or even sixty, on waking he shall not recognise the planet for the transformations wrought upon it by Science (233)

Many works of (science) fiction have explored this idea – for instance H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* – that the impact of science on humanity and culture is fundamental and any attempt at separation of these is futile. The Tokugawa regime’s historical attempt at restricting the pursuit of Dutch scholarship merely to its technological and medical applications is thus argued in the novel to be an impossible feat as the concrete and scientific irreversibly influences the abstract

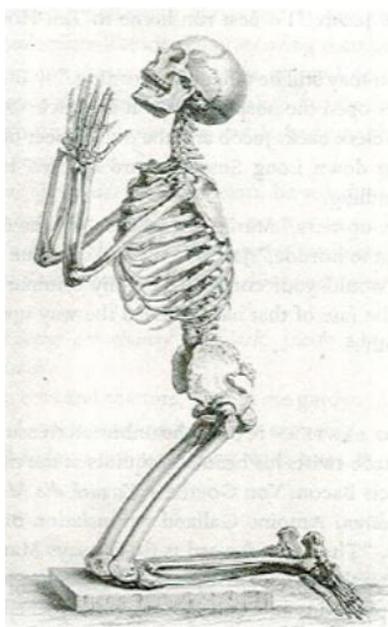


Figure 7

and spiritual realm of humanity. Another (literal and figurative) illustration of this spiritual element displayed in *The Thousand Autumns* is included in the novel in the form of the engraving of a skeleton (159), portrayed kneeling in prayer or supplication on a slab of stone (Figure 7).<sup>29</sup> This image is included in the narrative when Dr Marinus invites Jacob, while both are sheltering from a typhoon, to look inside his copy the *Osteographia* by William Cheselden: “See who’s waiting inside for you” (159). The *Osteographia* is an anatomical work published in 1733 where the skeletons of various species are accurately portrayed and staged in different

positions. The choice to include a human skeleton kneeling in prayer is an appropriate double of Jacob himself, whose faith is a theme that returns consistently throughout the narrative.

Cheselden’s engraving, however, directly challenges Jacob’s Christian world views as “the devil plants a seed” (159). Jacob’s immediate reaction to “contemplat[ing] the details” of the image is one of doubt:

*What if this engine of bones, the seed germinates, is a man’s entirety...  
Wind wallops the walls like a dozen tree-trunks tumbling.  
...and Divine Love is a mere means of extracting baby engines of bones?*  
(159)

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<sup>29</sup> From William Cheselden’s *Osteographia, or the Anatomy of the Bones* (London 1733).

The included description of the wind “walloping” the walls of Dr Marinus’ study is figurative of Jacob’s faith being shaken as he considers the possible implications of science’s discovery of the workings of the human body—the engine of moving parts that supports human life. The following short interaction reveals his thoughts:

‘Doctor, do you believe in the Soul’s existence?’

Marinus prepares, the clerk expects, an erudite and arcane reply.

‘Yes.’

‘Then where...’ Jacob indicates the pious, profane skeleton ‘...is it?’

‘The soul is a verb [...] not a noun.’ (159)

This passage reveals, on the one hand, the idea of immense factual knowledge that may be gathered regarding the material aspects of reality, but simultaneously foregrounds a notion of the spiritual and suggests its unknowability. Even Dr Marinus, the supposed “Delphic Oracle” (161) of natural philosophy in Japan, admits to the unchartable existence of the soul. By invoking the question of the soul in this context the informed reader is not only reminded of the Cartesian dualist philosophy that had emerged by that time, but also of the fact that this question may still be asked and not answered differently in this century. Thus, both the importance and simultaneously the insignificance of *Rangaku* is brought to the fore in this single passage. While the VOC’s presence thus gave Japanese scientific development an incremental boost, Western science was powerless to answer the fundamental questions of humanity.

### 8.3.3 Language and Voice

Central to any of the cultural interaction represented in the novel is the presence and problem of language. The figure of the translator continuously makes an appearance in any conversation between the various Dutch and Japanese characters and forms a necessary bridge between the two cultures. Even in those few passages where translation by a third party is not necessary (as with conversations between Jacob and Orito), the difficulties of communication are continuously present and strongly inform the interaction between the characters, both linguistically and culturally. The ‘language’ of culture and the (accompanying) problem of cultural translation are also closely woven into these encounters, as I have shown in previous sections.

As the first chapter of the novel demonstrates, however, the Dutch language could in some ways be considered a *lingua franca* among Japanese doctors/scientists specifically, as both medical professionals maintain communication with each other in Dutch throughout the passage. The use of Dutch in this context comes as a surprise to the uninformed reader, however, as the setting of the first chapter suggests a wholly Japanese context. No Dutch characters are introduced and the chapter heading would suggest a traditional Japanese scene: “The house of Kawasemi the concubine, above Nagasaki / The ninth night of the fifth month” (3). Names introduced in the first passage are clearly of Japanese origin: Kawasemi, Orito, Aibagawa, Maeno and we may safely assume that such characters would in historical reality communicate in Japanese. However, the use of English titles already causes a distance to appear between the scene and the reader. By adding ‘Miss’ and ‘Dr’ to the various names, Mitchell immediately makes us aware of the cultural distance between readers of English and the characters in Japan through the inherent interpretation of culture caused by this use of another language. Mitchell does not leave it at this, however, but quickly introduces another language: Dutch, though always in an English translation. In the first instance, he does this by showing the language as a means of communication between the midwife, Orito, and Dr Maeno as Orito uses a Dutch medical term to denote the specific position of (Miss) Kawasemi’s as yet unborn baby.

The Dutch medical language serves as a western voice in a wholly Japanese context. While ‘translated’ into English for the reader’s benefit, Dutch is used by the doctor and midwife both as a way to discuss matters in private while in the company of the concubine and her housekeeper, and as the only way to refer to particular medical details that do not have Japanese equivalents (such as ‘forceps’). The omniscient narrator even terms this language their “code tongue” (4). The abjectly human scene of this bloody birth is thus encrypted by the Dutch language and creates both a scientific and cultural distance between the medical experts and the patient and her servant. Rather than merely another or more practical tool of communication the Dutch language here is presented as a code—at a remove from the human Japanese reality and as a metaphor for the encoding of one culture into another.

These translated moments of Dutch “code,” their meaning clear to the reader, are countered on the last pages of the chapter, however, by Japanese words and references that are not explained for the benefit of the uninformed reader. The meaning of the reference to “*konnyaku* jelly” (8) may be inferred from the context, but the substance named “*yakumoso*” (9) and the time of day named the “hour of the dragon” will be unfamiliar to many readers, as may be the honorific suffix “*san*” which has replaced the English “miss” from earlier in the chapter. The clarified Dutch “code” is thus replaced by unglossed Japanese colloquialisms and thus explicitly situates the unfamiliar reader as an outsider and the familiar reader as the privileged omniscient witness. Cultural interaction and the importance of language both in the success and failure of such interaction is thus a continuous theme throughout the novel. Both the extensive cultural impact in the form of, and through, language is explored in the novel, but the text also reveals where communication can break down, affecting the relationship between such strongly disparate powers such as the VOC and Japan.

## Conclusion

As I have shown above, the company’s presence in Japan, both historically and as depicted in Mitchell’s novel, is not simply one of an oppressive colonising power that works to economically, militarily and culturally subjugate and exploit a seemingly inferior and barbaric realm. It is the unsettling of such binaries that characterises the novel’s representation of the Dutch East India Company. This characteristic is explored through a questioning of history, history writing and authenticity simultaneously. By unsettling the methods and status of historiography and witness accounts, the novel actively questions our conventional interpretations and narratives of the past. By combining an alternative historical account with a questioning stance towards forms of history writing, *The Thousand Autumns* thus also unsettles its own status—simultaneously exposing nuances of history, as well as its own subjective nature as a work of (historical) fiction.

Keeping the novel’s self-reflexive and -critical stance in mind, however, the novel remains a productive exploration of a neglected period and part of history with regards to the impact of corporate power upon a community, as my analysis has shown. Whatever the initial intentions of the Company may have been, and

however successful as a conquering power it may have been in its colonies initially, in Japan the VOC functioned as a mere vassal to the shogun, with a trade agreement that was clearly to the relative disadvantage of the company. Yet despite this lack of direct economic and political power over Japan and its strict geographical seclusion, the presence of the VOC exerted extensive influence over the country's culture especially through language, science and knowledge. As I have shown, the development and prevalence of *rangaku* in Japanese society was of great influence, and *The Thousand Autumns* explores this through its various characters—especially in the sharing of medical knowledge and through language exchange.

Of interest is also the novel's exploration of corporate ingression's structural influence over life on Dejima. Though the VOC extended hardly any direct influence over Japanese subjects, its control over its employees was extensive, as the novel's passage concerning Daniel Snitker explores. Furthermore, the VOC's permissive stance towards extensive Japanese influence over life and activity on Dejima heavily curtailed the freedom of the company's employees. In terms of sustainable business management, as I discuss in Part 3 of this thesis, the VOC thus took no social responsibility for its employees' wellbeing. The quality of life of the inhabitants of Dejima (major stakeholders of the VOC in Japan) is ignored, and the presence and treatment of its slaves not considered relevant. Rather, the company considers the demands of the Japanese (its business partner and customer) as of more concern than its employees, as the former posits its demands as the criteria under which the VOC is permitted to trade. Many of these demands, however, lead to the abject reality on the island, revealing the conflict of interests between the company's stakeholders—its customers versus its employees. The choice the company makes is clear, as it caters to all Japan's demands for seclusion and control for the island of Dejima and its inhabitants. As Japan is in the position of power, as opposed to the VOC's employees, the company, rather than exerting political influence over the Japanese, permits the latter to exert control over its activities and dependents as the only means to remain its trading partner.

In effect, the small community of Dejima is ruled and controlled biopolitically, strongly guided by Japanese demands, by the logic of the imperatives of corporate power. Similar to *Moxyland's* depicted society, though on a much smaller scale, the lives of the characters in *The Thousand Autumns* are constructed

directly and indirectly by corporate power and its drive for profit. This corporate (bio)political construction of the community is, as also found in *Moxyland* and *Oil on Water*, created with significant support from state and government power. Both the Dutch government's official support in the form of, among others, a charter for the VOC to act on its behest, as well as the company's extensive negotiations and agreements with the Japanese government, create a situation that enables the company's influence over the construction of the community of Dejima, and extended cultural influence over Japanese society. As opposed to the power of oil over Nigerian state power, as explored in *Oil on Water*, however, the VOC had no significant influence over Japanese policy. Rather, it is Japanese policy that extensively influences the company's local activities, revealing the potential for a significant political power to counteract (corporate) colonial dominance. The novel also explores, however, the modes of resistance exercised both by the VOC's employees as well as Japanese residents towards the various forms of control exerted by these two sources of power. Although the forms of resistance were ineffective in regaining biopolitical power for its perpetrators, it does reveal a form of dynamic equilibrium similar to that found in *Oil on Water*: control and resistance perpetuate each other and keep each other in check.

Apart from exploring a historical instance of corporate power's cultural and structural influence over a society, *The Thousand Autumns* simultaneously exposes an unexpected form of exploitation in a colonial context. Rather than exploiting a cultural and geographical other for material gain, as the conventional colonial narrative predicts, the specific situation at Dejima reveals corporate power's equal willingness to exploit – not the other – but its cultural and geographical own, however much influenced by Japan's political and economic inaccessibility. Conventional postcolonial theory is thus inadequate to describe a dynamic such as that explored in *The Thousand Autumns*. Dispossession and exploitation are guided by a corporate logic that considers trade, profit and influence of importance over its least significant stakeholders—in this case, its own employees. *The Thousand Autumns* thus explores a form of corporate pragmatism that reveals an alternative colonial pattern, where power relationships such as a coloniser-colonised binary are problematised, and where a much more complex and multi-directional process of corporate ingression can be clearly identified.

# CONCLUSION

This thesis revolves around the development of the concept of ‘corporate *ingression*’—the result of the research which I initiated with a hypothesis of a process of recurring ‘corporate *colonialism*.’ With this latter hypothesis, I have aimed to explore and describe what I first identified as a recurring dynamic of *colonialist* exploitation by corporate power as explored in literature. In contemporary situations, such as the crisis in the Niger Delta explored by *Oil on Water*, I identified certain specific characteristics which also appeared to be present in early colonialism as acted out by the first multinational trading companies in general, and the Dutch East India Company (VOC) specifically. Following the thread of literary explorations of the effects of corporate power on and within certain societies and communities, I recognised these characteristics in explorations of fictional futuristic societies such as those found especially in cyberpunk literature. Supported by various sources within political, economic, historic and cultural scholarship, the notion of a recurring process of ‘corporate colonialism’ was born.<sup>30</sup> My research design thus took the form of a comparative analysis of instances of Anglophone literary explorations of communities structured around, and significantly influenced by, corporate power. However, the results of this analysis rendered it necessary to define the complex politico-economic, social, historic and cultural processes identified in these texts more accurately, supporting Saïd’s statement that “Texts are protean things; they are tied to circumstances and to politics large and small, and these require attention and criticism” (*Culture* 409). As I found much more complex and multi-directional interactions between various stakeholders within such communities than is suggested by the term ‘colonialism,’ I thus renamed the discovered recurring phenomenon ‘corporate *ingression*.’

‘Colonialism,’ in its meaning of a foreign power dominating, settling and exploiting a country, culture or community of any kind, became an uncomfortable term for this process. After all, my research revealed that this process also includes instances of corporate power providing significant support and constructive

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<sup>30</sup> Which I have developed in the article “Justice and the Company: Economic Imperatives in the *Journal* of Jan van Riebeeck (1652-1662)” (Van Kralingen, 2017).

contributions to a country, culture or community. In addition, the complex interactions between various stakeholders within such a community and their relationships with corporate power as explored in the texts resist a definition of binary power relations suggested by the term colonialism. By examining fictional and literary explorations of the impact and implications of corporate power upon various local communities, I have identified strong similarities in the form of direct and indirect structural and cultural influence of such corporate power within these communities. Rather than a form of colonialism, the process identified better fits the term 'ingression' by forming a description of the dynamic of an entering or growing presence of corporate power in a community and its 'ingress' into the various social, cultural, economic and political aspects of such a community. I therefore define the concept of corporate ingression as explored by imaginative texts as *the globally recurring process of biopolitical (re)structuring of a community by corporate power and its extended cultural influence on society*.

My analysis of three explorations of corporate power's extensive influence over a local community through this definition of corporate ingression has shown that each text includes a comparable engagement with dynamics between the fictional communities' stakeholders. The application of corporate ingression as a new perspective to literary analysis thus forms an effective framework to understand varying imaginative explorations of corporate influence over local communities—even communities separated by time and space. By investigating Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland* and David Mitchell's *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* as explorations of the dynamics of corporate power within a local community, I have created a clear evaluation of the influences and effects of corporate power on such varying communities as these are recognised and represented in literary works. I have thus shown that imaginative explorations of corporate power within colonial and postcolonial contexts are best approached by a perspective that answers to the complex dynamics of a community influenced by corporate rather than state or imperial power.

My analysis of *Oil on Water* investigates how the crisis in the Niger Delta, including its destructive effect on local society and its population and environment, is connected directly and indirectly to the presence of the oil industry in general, and corporate power specifically. I have shown how the novel studies corporate

power's influence over the Nigerian government and politics, driving its extensive use of police power and perpetuating the dynamic equilibrium that exists between the various stakeholders. *Oil on Water* describes and explores the complexities of the interactions between the relevant stakeholders, and the participation of, and agency exerted by, various groups such as the militants and the media. These interactions, raising ethically complex questions, are discussed in the novel as greatly influenced by corporate power, thus exploring a process answering to the definition of corporate ingression and the complicated internal interactions that characterise it. As opposed to *The Thousand Autumns*, however, *Oil on Water* does not include any references to the oil companies' home states, though a politico-economic analysis of the oil industry in Nigeria would reveal relevant relationships between the home states of the oil companies and the latter's global activity. For the novel's purpose of a detailed exploration of the dynamics within the Niger Delta, however, such an inclusion of factors of international economic and political relations would be less constructive, explaining the novel's lack of global focus despite acknowledging the oil industry's ties to matters of global economy.

In an unexpected manner, David Mitchell's *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* presents its own nuanced exploration of corporate power. Though globally a major colonial force, the Dutch East India Company (VOC)'s presence in Japan exhibits a considerably different dynamic from its more exploitative colonial activities in, for instance, the Indonesian archipelago. Though the novel depicts the company in the process of bankruptcy, and as such not the economic force it was at the start of its contact with Japan, this latter stage of the VOC's relationship with Japan renders it possible to investigate the impact of this relationship on both parties and the unique qualities of this interaction. Rather than become a corrupt dependent of the company, a dynamic suggested by *Oil on Water*, Japan remains an autonomous force, completely capable of resisting unwanted interaction with the VOC (and the West) while benefiting in various significant ways from an influential interaction with the company. Through providing Japan with western political, scientific and technological information and resources (in part as an aspect of its trade agreement), the company's presence exerted a significant influence over its business partner's society and culture.

Though not discussed at length in the novel, the VOC's home state forms a more significant presence in *The Thousand Autumns* than in *Oil on Water*. The relevance of the company's ties to, and significant influence over, its home government and political arena is continuously present in the novel in the form of, for instance, its biopolitical power over its employees. The charter received by the company from its home state forms the foundation for its extensive power over its dependents, as revealed by the stakeholder dynamics explored by *The Thousand Autumns*. Similar stakeholder groups to those in the Niger Delta may be identified in the exploration of Dejima's community in *The Thousand Autumns*. The relationships between host state and police power and its population, as well as corporate power and its employees and forms of resistance also present a complex interaction of stakeholders that defies conventional colonial binaries. Though its forms differ – resistance in the case of Dejima concerns defiant and illegal activity conducted by the company's employees and Japan's academic civilian population rather than a distinct militant movement – it is this exploration of a complex and significant influence by a corporate power over a community that renders the two distinct imaginative cases similar.

My analysis of *Moxyland's* futuristic exploration of corporate power identifies not only a politically engaged work of science fiction, but, more importantly, a powerful thought experiment that considers the potential effects of contemporary developments in the areas of capital, politics, culture, technology and business governance. In this text, I have identified a potential, futuristic recurrence of the process of corporate ingression, where corporate and government power have become a single source of power. This seemingly dystopian future is founded on an extrapolation of a development within business ethics—namely the increasing prevalence of some form of corporate social responsibility in business governance. Beukes characterises in her novel the potentially constructive as well as destructive effects of increasing corporate influence in contemporary social developments.

As in *Oil on Water*, *Moxyland's* corporate power compels an excessive use of police power and exerts an extensive influence over state or government activity to the extent that the Cape Town of Beukes's novel appears to be a dystopian police state ruled by government inc. However, the novel also problematises such an easy

condemnation of corporate power. As opposed to the oil industry in the Niger Delta, *Moxyland's* representation of corporate power engages with active environmental and social investment programs and thus shows how such power may exert an extensive constructive influence over otherwise vulnerable communities such as members of the civilian population living with HIV/AIDS. The novel presents corporate power's potential for significant advancement of society in various ways through a supportive relationship between the ruling power and its population. Beukes's novel thus explores a side to corporate power's structural influence that reveals the potential of corporate resources for constructive ends. "New horizons of hope" (Stobie 368) appear, though systematically offset by severe reminders of corporate power's potential for dystopia. These ambivalent and complex connections between *Moxyland's* stakeholders, where constructive and destructive, supportive and antagonistic relationships function simultaneously, thus again render a concept of corporate ingression useful to describe them.

Despite the differences between the three texts chosen for this thesis, the similarities are present, too, supporting the concept of corporate ingression as the common dynamic in each widely varying situation. Each separate analysis has shown that the novels explore their respective instance of corporate power as the major factor in the construction of the society in which it is active. The company or companies in question are shown to exert significant cultural influence over these societies, even in the case of the VOC's subordinate position in Japan. However complex, the main conditions under which corporate ingression functions in each novel are similar: corporate imperatives, supported by, or exerted in cooperation with, state power (locally or externally), successfully accumulating value through a form of dispossession. The VOC, as investigated through *The Thousand Autumns*, is supported by Dutch state power and is through those means able to accumulate value (though not entirely successful) through slave labour and by exploiting its employees. The oil industry in the Niger Delta, supported by the Nigerian government, is able through those means to accumulate value mainly by exploiting the environment. Government inc. in *Moxyland*, effectively exerting state power in its own right, is able to shape society in such a manner that a reduction of freedom and safety of its members coincides with an increase in consumerism and thus economic value for itself.

Taken as such, these novels seem to pose an ethically straightforward narrative of corporate activity driven purely by the logic of their respective bottom lines and not by ethical considerations towards its stakeholders. The power dynamics would thus seem to follow a conventional coloniser/colonised or corporate/citizen binary. Yet the immense amount of influence and command these three corporate powers represent are simultaneously explored as potential sites for increased social value (though on corporate power's terms). The resources and power of government inc., for example, make it possible for vulnerable individuals and communities to gain access to a life otherwise not possible. The resources and power of the VOC, despite its subordinate position in Japan, made cultural interaction and dissemination and sharing of valuable medical and technological value possible. These two novels thus complicate the ethical narrative. In contrast, however, the similarly powerful and resource-rich oil industry in Nigeria does not create any cultural, technological or other value for the country's citizens. Yet despite the oil industry's economically, environmentally and socially unethical behaviour, *Oil on Water* also does not present a straightforward ethical binary. Instead, its comprehensive exploration of the complex interactions between the various stakeholder groups in the Niger delta exposes unethical behaviour on the part of the supposed 'victims' of corporate power as well. Each novel thus actively resists a binary ethical narrative, instead presenting a set of complex power dynamics within the respective communities.

The contrast, particularly between the constructive and destructive corporate activity in the three texts, is of great interest, as it highlights the potential of corporate power both for construction and destruction of value. As Mitchell's exploration of the VOC's relationship with Japan discusses, in contrast with the company's historical activity in many of its colonies, the political resistance of the Tokugawa regime was highly successful in gaining economic and cultural value for its state while effectively restricting the VOC's activities. A detailed historical analysis of Japan's relationship with corporate colonial power, such as that found in Adam Clulow's work, may reveal more clearly the potential for communities or states to thus resist destructive corporate-driven processes. The distinct case presented in *Moxyland*, however, warns against the failures of resistance, as acted out in a dystopian futuristic society in which corporate and government power have

united to a single source of power. When interpreted as the extrapolation of a situation such as explored by *Oil on Water*, *Moxyland* explores the dystopia that may be created by a conglomeration of corporate and state power and the powerlessness of those who attempt to resist it. This dynamic is explored similarly in *The Thousand Autumns*, where the VOC holds ultimate biopolitical power over its employees on Dejima, and allows Japan as its host state to similarly exert full control over the individuals and activities at the trading post. *Moxyland* not merely echoes this dynamic, however, it also explores the potential of the combination of state power and corporate resources for creating significant social value—albeit with multiple warnings against the potential dystopian effects.

Despite the geographic and temporal distance between the three cases, and despite the widely differing industries, circumstances and levels of success, the common factors remain recognisable. The concept of a process of corporate ingression with its constructive and destructive elements as a new perspective on literary explorations of historical, contemporary or futuristic forms of corporate power is thus proven a relevant addition to current postcolonial scholarship. This thesis has thus laid an important foundation for further research in the field of postcolonial literary studies from a historical, economic and sociological perspective as the concept of corporate ingression is shown to generate a richer understanding of various imaginative texts exploring these themes. An analysis of, for instance, Amitav Ghosh's historical *Ibis* trilogy, various narratives included in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* or Margaret Atwood's futuristic novel *Oryx and Crake*, through this concept will create a deeper understanding of these works and the processes explored in them. Not all novels featuring a corporate power as a major source of power for its fictional universe are relevant to such a reading, however. Frank Herbert's *Dune* saga, or Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*, for instance, feature corporate power (CHOAM and the Australian mining industry respectively) as a major source of power structuring the communities presented in these novels. However, their imaginative explorations of these communities do not include any discussion of the stakeholder dynamics involved in the corporate power structures. As such, postcolonial or cyberpunk texts such as these fall outside the scope of an analysis through the characteristics of corporate ingression. I therefore do not propose an all-encompassing postcolonial or literary theory – for after all, “no one

theory can explain or account for the connections among texts and societies” (Saïd, *Culture* 409) – but rather identify a new perspective to certain colonial and postcolonial as well as speculative texts. Reading corporate ingression thus forms an analytical tool through which to better understand processes of corporate influence explored in a variety of historical, contemporary political and speculative texts.

The relevance of the concept of a recurring process of corporate ingression also opens up further avenues of research outside of postcolonial literary studies into various fields of scholarship towards a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the global past, present and future. Firstly, further research on the distinctions as well as the transformation between the processes of early (pre-1800) and late (post-1800) colonial activity as acted out by European corporate and imperial power respectively, will reveal further implications for our understanding of past and present processes of globalisation in general and forms of colonialism specifically. Secondly, by evaluating the recurring nature of processes of dispossession such as embodied by corporate ingression and explored and recognised by various authors, we may come to a better understanding of globally occurring instances of these processes. Thirdly, by reading not only literature but also historical accounts and texts concerning instances of corporate power’s influence over local communities through the perspective of corporate ingression, a much better understanding may be reached of the complexities of the resulting dynamic relations within such communities as explored within such texts. As I have shown (2017) in a textual analysis of the historical accounts of Jan van Riebeeck’s command at the Cape of South Africa from 1652 to 1662, analysing the economic and corporate imperatives stated in this document and their reported impact on the structure of the community, uncovers complex processes that do not adhere to classical colonial binaries. In-depth archival research into corporate communities in the early colonial past in comparison with similar historical and contemporary occurrences may therefore discover the underlying processes described by corporate ingression at the heart of these historical developments.

The identification and literary exploration of reoccurrences in historical and contemporary contexts of a process of corporate ingression presents a significant and greatly different perspective on colonial and postcolonial dynamics. With this

research I have shown that this new perspective both significantly informs the reading of particular texts, while also showing that the analysis of these texts reveals that a conventional postcolonial binary approach is insufficient to account for what these works describe and investigate. My analysis of these texts through the concept of corporate ingression thus simultaneously supports and strengthens a new literary approach to historical, contemporary and potential future processes.

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