

Echoes of Native Landscape from the Diaspora: A Thematic Analysis of Helon Habila's *Measuring Time*

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Abstract: The status of African writers in the diaspora as genuine writers of African literature has often been debated in the Humanities of African scholarship. This stems from the premise that literary works emerging from the continent of Africa often emerge from the crucibles of the social, cultural, political, historical and even economic experience of the African society, and an individual who does not reside on the continent should not have a first-hand experience of these experiences to engage with them in his art. However, the creative works of writers of African descent in the diaspora have exhibited exceptional vigour, originality and commitment to the course of the African experience; hence, the creative works of Africans in the diaspora are and should be rightly considered as part of the corpus of African literary materials. This paper however, takes a different perception to examining whether, aside the social, cultural, historical, political and economic milieus which conditions the imaginative works of African writers in the diaspora, the natural environment of native homeland can also influence the writings of Africans in the diaspora. From the analysis of the selected novel, *Measuring Time*, it is discovered that the novelist is able to handle themes related to the environment of his native land, in its diverse manifestations and this further affirms that the African writer in the diaspora needs to be accorded the same recognition as writers of African literature. This paper concludes that being away from the shores of other lands does not limit the creative African writer in the diaspora from portraying the environmental realities of his land of origin.

Key Words: Diaspora, Africa Diaspora, Novelist, Natural Environment

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I. INTRODUCTION

The rapport between literature and the society has existed for ages. Throughout the several historical periods of man's existence, literary artists have employed their art in the service of depicting the happenings in the society. Hence, among the several duties of the literary artist, engagement with issues of societal pertinence using his creative works is regarded as one of his prime tasks. The society is therefore a viable source of raw material for the literary artist's creative enterprise and it is his duty to use his art to serve the course of issues in the society and on this note, Achebe (1975) expressed that an African creative writer who avoids the big political, social and economic issues of his society ends up being completely irrelevant. In corroborating this view, Sesan (2013: 71) maintained that: "Literature in Africa is the encyclopaedia of the collective African cultural, social, economic, sociological and political experiences of the continent." African writers are therefore expected to record and reflect these collective experiences in their literary texts.

These views make lucid the fact that being committed to the issues in ones society is a literary artist's passport to finding relevance on the African terrain. From the time that literature existed predominantly in oral form to the contemporary time of the written form, different crops of literary artists have emerged. There are those creative literary artists in Africa who worked and lived in Africa and there is a crop of writers who live and work in countries and continents other than Africa and yet their works are regarded as corpus of works emerging from Africa. This crop of writers can be regarded as African Diaspora Writers. These writers, who largely began emerging in the late twentieth century, have depicted unprecedented image of Africa and the world. Similarly, these writers of African descent use their locations not only to envision and rewrite about Africa but the world at large and they marshal the resources at their disposal to reflect, redefine and acquire new political, social and sexual identities in their art.

Therefore, these African writers in the diaspora write about Africa from other lands and the authenticity of their writings, in terms being a truthful portrayal of events in a land where they do not reside, has proven to

be a contentious issue as some critics have rejected such works. This is perhaps born out of the fact that “anyone who seeks to write about the African diaspora is almost certain to get entangled in the exercise of definition” (Alphers, 2001: 1) as a result of the polemics associated with the phrase “African diaspora”. While the phrase appears straightforward as an all encompassing term that describes those group people of African descent who unintentionally or intentionally, either through slavery, imperialism, work or educational purposes, permanently reside in countries and continents other than Africa, a closer look reveals “objections that one might raise regarding the applicability of the term itself to the African experience” (Alphers, 2001: 2). The contention hence arises from the fact that “diaspora” can hardly be counted to be a part of the experience of the native people. Hence, Africans in the diaspora may possess African heritage but may not form part of the contemporary experience on the African continent per time. This explains why Martin, (1993: 441) contends that:

...the term diaspora be deleted from our vocabulary, because the term *African diaspora* reinforces a tendency among those writing our history to see the history of African people always in terms of parallels in white history. . . we should do away with the expression *African diaspora* because we are not Jews. Let us use some other terminology. Let us speak of the African dispersion, or uprooted Africa as somebody suggested, or scattered Africa.

It is on the basis of the above that Zhai (2014: 12) launches a staunch attack on creative works of diasporic writings when he avers that such writings:

... mostly adopt a contradictory and critical attitude to their native culture and society. They tend to observe from a distance and assume a self-assigned role as a critic of their native country, a role that keeps changing from a native informant in their host society to something else when the essential identity alters.

Hence, the view of Zhai reveals that since the diasporic literary writers write from a distance, their works could be hugely subjective, unsettled and fluid. However, a deeper look into the arguments – against incorporating diasporic writings into mainstream African literature and totally neglecting such works of African writers in the diaspora, reveal that the arguments are hasty critiques. The points of view of these scholars are based upon the fact that such works do not adequately capture the African experience. However, there hardly exists an occurrence, happening or event that can be termed “African”. This stems out of the fact that the African experience is as diverse as the countries that make up the continent and even more. For example, the event of colonialism is not uniform across the continent. Even so, Egypt and Ethiopia are examples of countries that never experienced colonial rule. Would it be fair therefore to say the experience of Egypt and Ethiopia should be excluded from the discourse of African literature on the ground of colonial experience? The experience of colonialism is just one out of several instances which proves the fluidity of the term “African experience”. This explains why Alphers (2001: 27), in discussing about African diaspora, asserts that,

we must include in our definition a comparative dimension that looks both within that of the African experience and beyond to those of other global diasporic communities. Part of this comparative dimension should also recognize the differences among different African diasporas as well as the similarities between them. No less fundamental is acknowledgement that there can be no serious appreciation of African diaspora without locating it within a number of larger global processes of change from ancient to modern to contemporary times.

Therefore, the writings of Africans in the diaspora should not be termed unauthentic or unreceptive of the African experience, if such a phrase exists, rather it should be placed alongside such works of writers who live on the continent. This is because the thematic preoccupations of such works of writers in the diaspora can hardly be severed from those on the continent. A few examples, from the works of Dambudzo Marechera, Chimamanda Adichie, Taiye Selasi, would suffice based on the thought of Wa Thiong’o (1982: xv) who reflects that “literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society”.

In Dambudzo Marechera’s *The House of Hunger: Short Stories* (1978), the social and economic aspects of the Zimbabwean society are depicted. Written when Marechera was in Oxford in the United Kingdom, the novel captures the oppression, alienation, power lust, social marginalization and poverty. Actual locations, such as Rhodesia (which later became known as Zimbabwe) and the period of Ian Smith’s rule are depicted and commentary made on them in the novel. Hence, the novel falls among the category of disenchanting African writers who reveal the oppressive nature of post-colonial Africa, with all its crippling and dehumanizing facets and this is done away from the shores of the continent.

Another prominent African writer in the diaspora is Chimamanda Adichie. In *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), Adichie chronicles domestic violence, political oppression, the link between traditional African and Catholicism; these imaginative recollections about the Nigerian society are made from outside the continent of Africa, yet Adichie is able to touch upon the core of issues facing the contemporary African society. The events of the novel are set in places like Aba and Enugu, which are actual locations in Nigeria and this accentuates that the novel discusses about the socio-political fabric of Nigeria. Similarly, Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007) narrates one of the most critical moments in the history of Nigeria’s existence as a country – the Biafran War. The novel discusses themes such as effects of war, ethnic bigotry, displacement and hunger.

Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013) is another evocative novel, which was written in the diaspora about occurrences in Africa. The novel is preoccupied with the effect of the war and crisis that a host of countries in Africa are confronted with. Selasi, who has both Nigerian and Ghanaian origins, creatively chronicles the aftermaths of the political unrest in Ghana in the 1980s, which resulted in many Ghanaians and Africans, leaving the shores of Africa. This is the case with the main character of the novel, Kwaku Sai, who travels to America and later returns. This displacement also accounts for the breakdown in many families and to a large extent the poverty that many homes face. Hence, written from the comforts of her home in Rome, Selasi captures the dilemma of Africa and Africans due to the crisis that plagued the Ghanaian society at that time and which continues to plague several countries of the continent.

The above are few instances of how the writings of Africans in the diaspora are conditioned by the social, political and economic forces in the African society. Therefore, despite being away in other lands, writers in the diaspora use *facts* from their native land and imaginatively engage with them in their creative enterprise. Having discovered that writers from the diaspora can be and are equally conditioned by the social, economic and political spheres of their native land, such writers can also be conditioned by the natural environment of their native land. Therefore, African writers in the diaspora can equally use their works to engage with issues of environmental pertinence with such vigour and commitment they portray socio-political and economic issues.

It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the work of another notable African writer in the diaspora, Helon Habila. One of Helon Habila's novels to have attracted immense critical reception is *Measuring Time*. Since an African writer in the diaspora can engage with issues in his land of origin, this paper examines, from a nature-oriented perspective, Habila's *Measuring Time* (2007), to discover how the novelist discusses environmentally related themes as an example of the diasporic novelist's imaginative reconstruction of his native landscape from foreign soil.

Synopsis of Helon Habila's *Measuring Time*

Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* is a narrative about myriad of events which mirrors different epochs of Africa in settings such as the imaginary Village of Keti and actual places like Bauchi, Jos, Kano, all in Northern Nigeria and African countries like Libya, Liberia, Mali, Chad and South Africa. The actual geographical settings accord the novel a real-life feel. The plot of the novel centres on the experiences of two brothers, Mamo and Lamamo, who are twins and have contrasting physical dispositions. While Mamo, the eldest, is sickly, melancholic and critical, LaMamo is a strong, extroverted and assertive character. Their father, Lamang, a business man turned politician, does not show love to them even after losing his wife during the birth of the twins and as a result, the twins resent their father.

Propelled by the desire to become famous, the twins decide to join the military – a desire which is inspired by the return of Uncle Haruna, one of the twins' uncles, many years after he fought in the civil war. Though Haruna later commits suicide, the heroic perception of him by the villagers makes an impression on the twins. However, the hand of fate strikes as Mamo is unable to commence his martial adventures due to a recurring attack of the sickle cell anaemia. Unable to make the journey, which LaMamo and Asabar, his cousin, embark upon, he returns home and buries himself into the study of books.

Mamo secures admission into the university but the anaemic attack limits his stay in the university as he misses an entire semester examination and is consequently withdrawn. After returning home, Mamo secures a job as a History teacher at the community secondary school. Due to his voracious consumption of books and historical materials, Mamo gains a good command of the English Language and the history of his people. He writes an essay about the history of Keti Village and the positive reviews the essay attracts gets the attention of the entire village consequent upon which he gets a job as the palace secretary and is commissioned to write a book on history of the people of Keti. In the process of writing the book, Mamo stumbles upon hitherto covered secrets in the palace.

Asabar, who had chickened out of the military adventure, returns to Keti and becomes the youth leader of the Victory Party and later the New Victory Party. Being a thug during an election, he engages in electoral violence and from one of such electoral malpractice of snatching election boxes, he is shot by the police leading to him being confined to a wheel chair for the rest of his life. In the run up to the elections, Lamang, for whom Asabar works, abandons the Victory Party for the New Victory after he feels a tinge of betrayal. Lamang dies from the trauma of losing the elections he tried to rig painstakingly.

LaMamo returns to Keti, having lost one of his eyes from his martial exploration, and could hardly recognize the village due to the crises that ravaged the town. Spurred by the neglect of the masses, the selfishness of the traditional rulers and the dilapidated state of the village, he leads an angry group of youths to the palace. The aftermath of the protest sees LaMamo lose his life.

Nostalgia about Native Landscape

While it is expedient to note that *Measuring Time* is a creative work inspired by the socio-political and historical realities of the writer's homeland, the novel portrays a strong message of how the natural features of one's motherland continues to hold prominence in the minds of her children, regardless of how far into other lands they may have emigrated. As expressed by Sedikides et al (2008), nostalgia is associated with a yearning for the past, its personalities, and events, especially "good old days" or "warm childhood" (304). In the novel, there are vivid evocations of the past as they relate to the natural environment. The characters of LaMamo and Mamo embody this theme.

At a very young age, Mamo and LaMamo take pleasure in climbing trees, playing on grasslands and running on the hills of Keti village. There is an instance in the novel when both boys hatch a plan to kill a dog, hoping to use its rheum as a passport to the realm of invincibility. However, when the dog chases them, they run onto a tree. It is as a result of constantly being on trees that LaMamo falls off it and sustains a fracture in another instance. The narrator, in describing the landscape of Keti, narrates, "the hills circled the village in a horseshoe from west to south and the scrubby vegetation that covered the hilltops and the stunted trees that slanted on the slopes" (79). This description reveals a landscape that is blessed with several elements of nature. Hence, when, at different times, Mamo and LaMamo leave the village, these natural features remain fresh in their minds with a huge tendency for them to always associate the natural features in the foreign lands to the ones at home. LaMamo, on his military adventurism, frequently writes to his brother and in every letter about a new foreign location he encounters, he always vituperates about how the allure of his home environment fills him. In his first letter, he expresses: "I have included a sketch of the camp and the desert here, and the hills in the distance. The view of the hills reminded me of the hills at home." (68). The nostalgic reflections become even more detailed in another of LaMamo's letters, in which he writes:

The rubber plantation is many miles big and it stands in the valleys created by two big hills, there are miles and miles of rubber trees. The house stands at the foot of the hills, the one north I must say how it reminds me so much of the hills at home. In the evening, the birds and small animals can be heard calling to each other and a mist descend over the trees making everything look so peaceful. (132)

The above instances reveal a strong recollection about the environment of native land from other lands. The incidence of LaMamo's nostalgic recollection could hence be regarded as a microcosm of the novelist's sturdy attachment to the natural environment of his land of decent. Due to LaMamo's constant recollections about home, he cries out "I am tired of fighting, I want to go home" (135). At the end however, LaMamo returns home to a gory sight of burnings. The hills which he had revered all through his personal exile from home had been set ablaze and on account of this, he laments, "this wasn't what I dreamt of returning coming back to. I told Bintou about the green hills and the farms and the valleys" (286).

Mamo, on the other hand, travels to the city in search of Zara, his lover, and the environment of the city appears a sharp contrast to the one he had grown accustomed to in the rustic village of Keti. The narrator recounts Mamo's experience in the city, "a car passing outside backfired, causing him to instinctively raise his hands to his ears. He always found the city too loud, too busy; and now after his fourth day, his nerves were almost in tatters" (140). The remembrance of a serene native land can be put forward as the reason for Mamo's disillusionment with the hustle and bustle of the city. This explains why he stayed in the city only for four days and returns to Keti, without seeing the person he had gone in search of. Hence, an evocative yearning of one's past in terms of being re-united with natural elements is not an illusion and this is one of the ideological standpoints of the novel.

Dependence of Humans on Nature

The waves of scientific inventions and innovations have cut the strong ties between man and nature and this has led to the debate whether man is, after all, different from nature, an extension of nature or even nature himself. These are questions that have continued to raise opposing ideological answers. This debate is outside the scope of this paper. However, the view of Harold Fromm is succinct to this subject matter of the dependence of man on nature. According to Fromm (1996:38), the powerful mind of man, "while it may wander at will through the universe and be connected to the heavens at one end, is connected at the other to the earth". Habila's *Measuring Time* presents instances of how man's needs the nature he so wantonly exploits to survive in different ramifications.

It can be deduced from the narrations in the novel that human culture is dependent on nature to find full expression. One of the several aspects of culture is norms and beliefs. In the novel, certain cultural practices are depicted and these norms, practices and beliefs may not have found realization without a lending hand from nature and its elements. When Mamo explains to Zara that, "I am a twin. And this place where we stand was the evil forest where twins used to be dumped" (35), it shows that the practice of dumping twins into a designated forest which is termed "evil forest", had existed in Keti village and. As portrayed in the novel, this practice may never have been possible if there was no forest in the village as the people may not have been able to live, in their homes, with the continuous cry of such abandoned children and ultimately the stench from the carcass of

such dead children. Hence, the “evil forest” which is a place “where twins are dumped to die” (206), preserves the traditional and superstitious belief that twins are a bad omen and that ensures that the practice of throwing such twins away continues. Subsequently, Reverend Drinkwater, the first missionary in the village of Keti, “set up his mission in the evil forest where the villagers used to dump their twins” (201). Thus, whether being regarded as “evil” or “good”, which is only a matter of perspective, natural elements enables certain cultural practices of humans to thrive.

Away from beliefs and practices, nature supplies humans with food among other necessities of life. Hence, humans live off nature. Among the people of Keti, the staple profession is farming and hunting. Mamo’s father, Lamang is a livestock farmer who later becomes a politician while his aunt, Aunty Marina is a crop farmer. These two professions, among others, generate food for consumption, whether directly or indirectly. No doubt, certain seasons may not provide as much yield, as evident in the season of drought experienced in Keti, natural elements - fields and farmlands, still provide a foundation for the livelihood of man.

There is also a portrayal that humans can find solace, comfort and escape from the harsh realities of life in nature. This is depicted using the characters of Mamo and the American that LaMamo meets on his military escapades. During one of the political meetings in Lamang’s house, Mamo finds the house uncomfortable and as such, “to escape the noise, Mamo had taken a chair and a book to the flame tree in the backyard” (96). This could be seen as a retreat to nature to find serenity and calm. It is from such serene places that Mamo is able to write about the history of Keti, which herald his fame in the village and beyond. For the American who is shot during battle and reels in pain, he asks to be brought outside “to look at the hills and trees and to feel the air of the mountain” (135). This instance reinforces the comforting power of nature.

Similarly, the novel brings to the fore the curative virtues embedded in the elements of nature. Using the character of Kopi, one of the village elders, the narrator explains that Kopi “is a hundred years old, but his memory is phenomenal” (258) perhaps because he knows, “every medicinal herb”. This reveals the curative power of nature and its elements.

These several instances accentuates that humans depend on nature for several aspects of their lives ranging from cultural elements such as norms, beliefs and practices, food, means of livelihood, comfort, escape from harsh realities, and preservation of health among several other benefits which enhances the survival of man.

The Natural Environment and the Woman

The connection between the woman and nature is another thematic preoccupation in Habila’s *Measuring Time*. The novel depicts that the woman has a close affinity with nature and its elements than the man. The close connectedness of the woman to nature stems from the fact that she shares similar traits with nature in terms of her biological and gender roles. For example, the woman is a paramount source of life as all humans on earth today came through a woman. In terms of gender, the woman is also oppressed by the force of patriarchy and sexism among others. This is also similar to the way nature is exploited continuously. Hence, the woman and nature are both victims of exploitation.

In describing the close affinity between the woman and nature, the narrator uses the characters, Agnes Drinkwater and Heather Drinkwater, the two daughters of Reverend Drinkwater; and Zara, Mamo’s one erstwhile lover. When Mamo first encounters the Drinkwater sisters, they: “were in the garden, side by side, bent over the lower beds, removing weeds, watering the yellow and white African orchids and red rose that blossomed luxuriantly in the heat, their colours appearing loud and sudden against the dull brown earth” (207). This reveals how the sisters meticulously tend the garden, which is nature. The next time he visits them, Mamo finds, “the sisters in the garden, having afternoon tea” (267). It can be deduced that they spend nearly the whole time enjoying the company of nature and its elements. The closeness of these two women to nature bemuses Mamo and he “tried to imagine what it would be like to live in such seclusion, with only trees and birds for company” (208). Due to this close ties between the sisters and natural environment of Keti, they desire to remain in Keti but their brother, Michael Drinkwater asks them to leave. The desire of Michael wells up a melancholic feeling in Agnes and this is narrated thus:

“It’s not our idea,” she said with a sad sigh. “Michael thinks we need to return to Iowa soon, for health reasons.”

She spoke softly, staring into the garden at the flowers. In the corner of his eye, he saw her sister reach out to take her hand. (211)

The fact that Agnes and her sister express sadness at their impending departure from a natural environment, which they have tended and tilled shows how close they are to nature. That Michael is the one that suggests they leave represents how patriarchy denies women of full happiness and in long run, nature is affected. This is because once the likes of Agnes and Heather are out of the picture, nature remains uncared for rather it becomes exploited. For example, all through the narration, Mamo plans on cultivating a garden but he keeps procrastinating till the story closes. This is in contrast to the Drinkwater sisters who, not only have a garden but nurtures it. This shows that women are more in tune with nature.

Another instance of the woman's rapport is presented using the excerpt below:

Zara was pensive as she walked around the room; she finally went and opened the window, pulling aside the drapes. "it is hot today:

"I can turn on the a.c if you want, he said, going to the fridge to take out a bottle of orange juice.

"No let's leave the window open. Come, see the hills from here, aren't they lovely?" (270)

The "he" in the excerpt above is Mamo. While Mamo prefers to stay in a room with an artificial source of ventilation, Zara, a woman, is depicted to prefer natural air as evident in her opening of the window and even urging Mamo to enjoy nature's beauty. Zara's preference for nature further buttresses the fact that the woman shares a close relationship with nature.

Environmental Pollution and Degradation

Any discourse on the environment without an elucidation on the menace of environmental despoliation may appear inadequate. As a result, Habila's *Measuring Time* also comments on the debacle of environmental pollution and degradation. As man continues to seek for avenues to satisfy his needs, several natural elements bear the brunt. From the depictions in the novel, two factors are understood to be the contributory forces of contaminated and ruinous state of the natural environment – violent conflicts and the need for basic amenities. The clash of interest which often plummets the society into riots and war, in the long run, accounts for the despoliation of nature and its elements. Aside the human elements of existence, the non-human elements of the environment are gravely affected by these violent and bloody altercations. In one of his letters to Mamo, LaMamo details how the environment is polluted due to wars. He recounts: "All the houses are empty, it seems so much fighting has been done here, the village is empty, and it smells of dead bodies, we even saw half-buried corpses in the bush. He showed us his house, it has been burned down by fire..." (129)

The stench from the carcasses permeates the atmosphere, hence polluting the environment, all of which are as a result of war. Back in the village of Keti, a riot breaks out between fanatical religious adherents and the aftermath of the riots is the pollution and degradation of nature. In a bid to bring the perpetrators of the riots to order, the police, in the novel, set the hills ablaze. This is captured thus: "The police had set the hills aflame to flush out rioters who were still hiding there from capture and brutalization by the police. Mamo was seated on the veranda watching the hills burn" (285).

While the instances of fire depicted above reduces the quality of natural elements, the smoke emanating from the several burnings contaminates the air in the environment thereby leading to respiratory diseases often contracted by man. This is seen when Mamo is unable to breathe properly due to the smoke and the dust generated by the religious riots.

Aside the debacle of war, which reduces the quality of nature, the quest for survival by man also accounts for the defacement of nature. As recorded in the novel, the people of Keti employ crude means of obtaining food. For example, "hunters would set it [the hills] ablaze to chase rabbits and squirrels and monkeys that lived there. They'd chase them to the summit with their hounds; late in the evening, they'd return with their kill in sacks" (79). Similarly, the need for shelter also adversely affects the make-up of the natural setting. This is captured thus: "A huge piece of the groove had been cleared and now a concrete structure, already at lintel level, had replaced most of the trees" (303) and also "More than half of the village's trees have been lost in the last ten years – cut down for building or for firewood, or lost to drought. In the next ten years most of the remaining trees will be gone...." (309).

The above reveals how the human race lives to the detriment of nature due to extreme measures employed by man to get contentious issues "settled" by violent means and also to meet his need. In essence, the wanton activities of man accounts for the depletion of the natural elements of the environment.

The Contingency of Nature

The views of some ecocritical scholars such as Christopher Manes and Lynn White Jnr. who believe that nature is silent or has been forced into silence by humans is contested in Habila's *Measuring Time* by detailing the theme of the unpredictability of nature and its elements and how it exerts some measure of control upon man. According to Manes (1996: 15), "nature is silent in our culture (and in literate societies generally) in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative." While this view of Manes appears succinct because man continues to invent and reinvent at the detriment of nature, he is hardly able to outwit nature because nature, in its own way, acts and controls. In *Measuring Time*, Mamo is afflicted with the hereditary disease of sickle cell anaemia and the change in season which brings about different types of winds affects Mamo. For example, "in November, the cold dry harmatan wind began to blow. The wind, blowing from the Sahara, always had a way of sucking the vitality out of him, making him fall ill more frequently than in other seasons" (29). Hence, the state of the natural environment influences the state of health of humans per time. A silent and inactive force should not be able to do this.

Similarly, during the wars depicted in the novel, the contingency of nature comes to play. As recounted by the narrator, "the enemy didn't attack till early in the morning when the shadows and mist had started lifting from the trees" (44). This reveals how nature, at certain intervals conditions the actions of man. To further reinforce the unpredictable and dynamic nature of the elements of nature, the narrator narrates about Mamo thus: "on good days, he walked to her [Aunty Marina] farm and passed the hours under a tree reading a book or sleeping, but often he left her early before the fresh invigorating morning air turned hot and painful and hard to breathe" (117).

No doubt, the exploitative proclivities of man lead him to exploit the natural space, but this does not plunge nature into dormancy nor silence. Thus, nature is a dynamic and fluid force and it had existed before mankind came into existence, it has been witness to mankind's progress and will probably outlive man.

II. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it has been buttressed that the corpus of creative works regarded as African literature are largely, but not limited to the works of those writers who reside on the African continent but also of those writers of African descent who live and work in other parts of the world. It is also known that the social, political, historical and economic aspects of the society which influence the writings of those writers in Africa also condition the writings of those in the diaspora. However, African writers in the diaspora, beyond socio-political issues, are also conditioned by the natural environment of their native land. This is evident in the selected novel, *Measuring Time*, as the novel engages with issues of environmental pertinence and not just with social-political issues as is popular in African diasporic writings. Therefore, being away from the shores of the African continent does not impede the African writer in the diaspora from depicting issues regarding the natural environment of their homeland.

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