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## **Our Children Will Fight for the Climate: How Congo-Basin Writers Prophesied Global Youth Climate Activism<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

In the context of climate change and ecological breakdown, this essay suggests that some Congo-Basin writers had prophesied the emergence of global youth/children's climate activism. Specifically, it contends that Congolese writer and former cabinet minister Henri Djombo, Francophone Cameroonian-born, Brazzaville-based playwright, stage director and climate activist Osée Collins Koagne, Gabonese geographer, activist publisher and writer Nadia Origo, and Anglophone Cameroonian writer and environmentalist Ekpe Inyang had literarily predicted youth climate activism that correlates with the current global Youth Strikes for Climate.

Drawing on postcolonial ecocriticism and writers as literary prophets, it uses Djombo and Koagne's co-authored play *Le Cri de la forêt* (2015a), Djombo's play *Les Bénévoles* (2015b), Nadia Origo's novel *Le Voyage d'Aurore* (2014 [2007]), and Inyang's plays *The Hill Barbers* (2010) and *Beware* (1993), among others, to argue that current global youth climate activism was, to an extent, prophesied in Africa through literary advocacy for including children in future climate solutions before emerging in Europe, especially through the Swedish teen climate activist Greta Thunberg and other youth climate activists around the world.

The essay also traces the role of youth in climate activism, partly accounts for the timid participation of African youth in climate protests and highlights the motivations behind youth climate activism for both the young characters in the texts and their writers.

### **Introduction**

This essay suggests that some African writers from the Congo-Basin had textually prophesied the current global youth climate activism. These writers also stress the need to include children or youth in seeking solutions to climate change and ecological destruction. The author will argue these writers had predicted the need to include children in future climate solutions. This is prophetic in the sense that these writers textually acknowledged the importance of children in climate action well before children even started fighting for the climate across the globe. By so doing, the writers prophesied a type of children's climate activism that very much correlates with the current global children's climate movement known as School Strikes for Climate, Youth Strikes for Climate, and Fridays4Future (Fridays for Future). Situated within postcolonial ecocriticism and drawing on scholarship on writers as literary prophets, this essay analyses selected literary texts, mainly four plays and one novel, by four writers from the Congo Basin. These writers include Henri Djombo, a writer and former cabinet minister from Congo-Brazzaville; Osée Collins Koagne, a

Francophone Cameroonian-born, Brazzaville-based playwright, stage director and environmental activist; Nadia Origo, a geographer, businesswoman, activist publisher and writer from Gabon; and Ekpe Inyang, a playwright, poet and a the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) environmentalist from Anglophone Cameroon. Together, these writers are considered as background-informed environmental literary activists. They have all been involved with environmental conservation in their professional lives and/or through their academic backgrounds.

The essay is organized into six parts. The first part traces the importance of youth in climate activism from the United Nations' 1992 *Agenda 21* to Greta Thunberg, Venessa Nakate and other young climate activists. The second part discusses literary prophecies or writers as literary prophets. The third and fourth parts challenge scholars, notably Thierry Amougou, who claim that children are not mobilizing for the climate in Africa and elsewhere in the global South. The author argues African children are mobilizing for climate change and attending Fridays4Future and other marches, albeit timidly compared with the massive turnout of children in the global North. Accordingly, the author highlights there are three possible reasons for this timid participation. These reasons include dictatorial regimes, colonial legacies and what this author calls cultural resistance to the potentials and contributions of children as represented in some of the literary texts under study. The fifth part of this essay demonstrates how the writers under study prophesied the emergence of global youth climate activism in their works by literarily or textually advocating the inclusion of children in future climate solutions and addressing various obstacles to their inclusion. This part establishes connections between some of the child characters in the selected texts and Greta Thunberg, who has arguably become one of the main symbols of global youth climate activism. The final part identifies personal motivations behind some youth activists in the texts under study and links them to the writers' faith in children and youth as important partners in the fight against climate change and ecological degradation.

### **Role of Youth in Climate Activism: From 1992 to Thunberg and Others**

To understand the origins of young people's engagement with climate change and environmental activism, it is first important to briefly review how some key institutional stakeholders in climate change and environmental policy have highlighted young people's role in the fight. The United Nations is an important institution to consider in this context. According to Riikka Paloniemi and Annukka Vainio (2011), as early as 1992, the United Nations in its international programme dubbed *Agenda 21* asserted that young people, who constitute about 30 percent of the world's population, are important stakeholders in achieving sustainable development (398-399). Relatedly, in a 2008 policy review paper, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) considered climate change as a human security challenge for children, stating: "Children and young people can be meaningfully engaged through more participatory approaches to community research and development. There are many excellent examples of children getting involved in local research that would otherwise be impossible to conduct" (5). Chronologically, as Scott R. Fisher (2016) notes,

"In 2009, after years of precarious participation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], youth and children were given official constituency status under the title Youth Non-

Governmental Organizations [YOUNGO]. The official establishment of YOUNGO also expanded youth participation beyond the UNFCCC to more national and local engagement (Keenan 2010). More than ever, youth are involved at all scales in the decision-making and politics of climate change” (p. 229).

Much momentum has accumulated in the direction of youth activism for the climate and environment. Besides garnering much recognition from the international community as important actors in climate change policy and action, youth-led climate commitment has continued to grow in leaps and bounds. Drawing on Keenan (2010), Fisher acknowledges that youth are active in international climate movements because they (youth) understand that as current and future citizens they have a role to play in addressing climate change (Fisher 2016, 229).

Two years after Fisher’s paper was published, on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018, the then fifteen-year-old Swedish child climate activist Greta Thunberg started a solo, sit-in strike in front of the Swedish Parliament every school day for three weeks to protest against the lack of action on the climate crisis. She would post her protest on Instagram and Twitter and her action soon went viral across the globe. On 8<sup>th</sup> September, Thunberg decided to continue striking every Friday until Swedish policies provided a safe pathway to limiting temperature rises to well under 2 degrees C, in line with the Paris Agreement. The hashtags #FridaysForFuture and #Climatestrike spread, and many students and adults began to protest outside their parliaments and local city halls across the world, especially in the global North. Thunberg’s actions not only inspired the Belgian Thursday school strikes but also morphed into a popular children-led environmental movement known as School Strikes for Climate, alternately called Youth Strikes for Climate or Fridays4Future. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, this movement mobilized millions of school-going children/youths across many cities throughout the world to skip classes on Fridays and protest, asking their governments and corporate bodies to concretely address the global climate and environmental crises and save their future.<sup>2</sup>

Greta Thunberg has spoken to world leaders on the need to curb carbon emissions and has addressed the issue of climate change at many high-level gatherings, including COP24, which was held from in December 2018 in Katowice, Poland; the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January 2019 and 2020; the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Commission in February 2019; an audience with Pope Francis at the Vatican in April 2019; and the UK Parliament in Westminster, also in April 2019. In fact, the School Strikes for Climate movement has not only caused the resignation of Belgian Environment Minister Joke Schauvliege (who had falsely claimed that children’s climate protests were ‘set-up’) but has also been positively received by key global figures such as UN Secretary General António Guterres, who, following an unprecedented turnout of approximately 1.4 million young protesters in over 120 countries on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019, remarked that “the climate strikers should inspire us all to act at the next UN summit”.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2019, having witnessed the massive turnout of young protesters the month before, twenty-two renowned scientists across the globe published a letter in the journal *Science* acknowledging that “the concerns of young protesters are justified” and pledging their support for the youth strikes for climate (Hagedorn et al. 2019, 139-140). The letter, which constitutes another high-level endorsement for the children’s climate protests and demands, unequivocally

declares: “Their concerns are justified and supported by the best available science. The current measures for protecting the climate and biosphere are deeply inadequate” (139). Thus, it can be argued that the youth protests are not only scientifically backed but should also serve as eye-openers to climate change denialists and foot-dragging politicians and corporate executives throughout the world. Besides these endorsements, at the time of writing (May 2019), efforts from School Strikes for Climate and other activist groups such as Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion have somehow pushed the governments of Scotland, Wales, England and Ireland as well as the German city of Konstanz to declare climate change as an emergency.<sup>4</sup> It is, nevertheless, still uncertain how such declarations will be translated into concrete action to mitigate the climate and ecological crises post-Covid-19. That notwithstanding, Thunberg’s popularity and recognition continues to grow across the globe. For instance, among numerous awards, three Norwegian MPs nominated Thunberg for the Nobel Peace Prize on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2019.<sup>5</sup> Speaking on behalf of the three nominators, Norwegian Socialist MP Freddy André Øvstegård told news agents that “We have proposed Greta Thunberg because if we do nothing to halt climate change, it will be the cause of wars, conflict and refugees,” adding that Thunberg “has launched a mass movement which I see as a major contribution to peace” (Øvstegård 2019).

Greta Thunberg’s growing popularity as the global initiator and spearhead of children’s activism for climate change and the environment is, however, somewhat problematic and debatable. First, her activism doesn’t go without its own share of criticism. Some right-wing politicians and climate change denialists in the global North criticize and verbally attack her for her activism. Some of them, for instance, describe her as a schoolgirl who has been “instrumentalized” while others accuse her of being a child who is expressing maledictions and accusations.<sup>6</sup> These unfounded denialist accusations aside, it is important to note that Thunberg is far from the sole or pioneer inspiration behind the global youth movement for climate. There are currently hundreds (if not thousands) of young climate activists around the globe, many of whom got into climate activism long before Thunberg launched her solo protests in front of the Swedish Parliament on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018. For example, frustrated by “the inaction of elected officials and the fact that youth voices were almost always ignored in the conversation around climate change and the profound impact that it would have on young people,” 16-year-old American Jamie Margolin contacted many of her friends in the summer of 2017 to do something about the situation.<sup>7</sup> Joined by her friends Nadia Nazar, Madelaine Tew, and Zanagee Artis, Margolin “realized that a national day of mass action, led by youth, would be an ideal platform to ensure that young voices were not only centered in this conversation, but that elected officials and adults would hear their voices loud and clear,” and, by the end of the summer, they had laid the groundwork for Zero Hour, a movement which focuses on the voices of diverse youth in the conversation around climate and environmental justice. In the global North, some other notable youth climate activists worth mentioning (in no particular order) are Louise Perret-Michaux in Nantes, France, who is working with fellow school pupils to setup le Collectif jeunesse nantaise pour le climat (Youth Collective for Climate in Nantes); 22-year-old Luisa Neubauer in Germany, who temporarily suspended her studies in geography to militate for the climate (e.g., organizing #FridaysforFuture protests in Berlin, granting interviews to the press and meeting political leaders); Barbara Pereira, who leads Friday protests in Portugal; 15-year-old Atte Ahokas, who leads Friday marches in

Finland; Adélaïde Charlier, who leads protests in Belgium; India Logan-Riley, who works to center Indigenous rights in the climate movement in Australia; and 16-year-old Isra Hirsi, who was one of the organizers of the first-ever Youth Climate Strike in the US.<sup>8</sup>

With regard to the global South, one of the youngest climate activists so far comes from Africa. Inspired by the story of the late Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai, little Ellyanne Wanjiku Chlystun began her climate activism at the age of four (in nursery school) by planting trees and eventually creating an organization called Children with Nature, based in Kenya, which focuses on harnessing the demographic dividend for the environment, with particular emphasis on tree planting.<sup>9</sup> Other youth climate activists in the global South (in no particular order) include 22-year-old Vanessa Nakate, who is one of the organizers of Friday protests in Kampala (Uganda) and has met Greta Thunberg; Hilda F. Nakabuye, who raises awareness about climate change and plastic pollution and organizes marches in Uganda; nine-year old Ridhima Pandey, who has sued the Indian government over climate change; 12-year-old Shalvi Saksh from Fiji, who addressed COP23 climate delegates in 2017 in Bonn, Germany; 20-year-old Brianna Fruean, who was motivated to engage in climate activism by a powerful cyclone that struck Samoa during her childhood; Marinel Ubaldo, who lost friends and family to Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 and got into climate activism in the Philippines; Winnie Asiti from Kenya, who got her first taste of climate activism when she attended the UN's climate negotiations in Kenya in 2006; Rayanne Cristine Maximo Franca, who fights for women's indigenous rights in Brazil in their struggle for the protection of the Amazon; Oladosu Adenike, who goes by the title "ecofeminist" and organizes Friday marches in Nigeria; and young Remy Zahiga, who is part of the campaign #SaveCongoRainforest.<sup>10</sup> What is the relationship between these young climate activists and environmental literature from the Congo Basin? How do the writers under study fit into current discourses of youth climate activism? To answer these questions, the author will first discuss literary creativity as a form of prophecy.

### **Literary Prophecies, or Writers as Literary Prophets**

The author argues that the four writers under study are literary prophets. To do this, the author first discusses some previous scholarship on literary prophecies or the perception of writers as literary prophets. Prophecy is often construed as the prediction of future events (Frenning 2017, Leavitt 2000).<sup>11</sup> John Leavitt (2000), for instance, contends that "In the modern West, prophecy implies public discourse with a future-oriented social or political message, so that the word can simply mean foretelling the future" (201). According to Jan Wojcik and Raymond-Jean Frontain (1984),

"Prophecy is often thought to be predictive, and often it does make specific predictions that, when they come true, retroactively commission the predictor a prophet. Those who come along later, in the times the prophet foresaw, are the first to look back upon the prophet fondly, as the first person of their times" (p.16).

Although Wojcik and Frontain specify "the prophet's view is generally broader than that of a forecaster," forecasting or predicting the future is a central defining criterion for a literary prophet. Nevertheless, it is important to concede that the role of literary prophets goes beyond mere predictions of the future: they often predict the future

with a redeeming purpose in mind. As Leavitt argues, prophetic, mantic, possessed or shamanic experiences usually aim at effecting some sort of transformation: “We identify such experience with some kind of transformation of the subject’s relationship with his or her own identity or the outside world: they are always, in some way or other, about shifts in the symbolic order, in deictics or in reference, whether to self or to the world” (2000, 8). Acknowledging the prophetic power of writers, Khalilah Watson (2009) contends that “the writer that functions as a literary prophet takes on the task, through his/her writing, by critiquing or providing guidance to the society that he/she quietly observes” (1). Similarly, Wojcik and Frontain, drawing on Herbert N. Schneidau and John E. Becker respectively, underscore two other interesting dimensions of writers as prophets: prophets use language or theatre to debunk cultural myths; they also mount resistance “against the complacency of the mind” (1984, 16). The writers presented in this essay did not only predict the global youth climate activism but also exposed cultural myths such as the underestimation of the potential of children and women in decision-making when it comes to existential issues such as climate change and ecological collapse.<sup>12</sup> In other words, this author considers these writers as literary clairvoyants or soothsayers who foresaw the emergence of youth activism for climate change and rose against cultural resistance (impediments) to this forthcoming movement through the representation and inspiration of the young fictional characters in their texts.

Resistance, it must be noted, is a double-edged term as far as literary prophesying is concerned. As already suggested, writers engaged in this tradition often intend to resist some mental, cultural or societal practices which they deem problematic or obsolete. Writing about the prophetic dimension of writers with regards to African politics, Ifi Amadiume (2003) draws on anticolonial religious prophetic movements to highlight “the role of writers as prophets of resistance, and not necessarily in religion in itself, or religious prophets in particular” (8). Interestingly, however, the very act of prophesying (whether through literature or otherwise) is implicated in anticipations of resistance, that is, possibilities for intended audiences to resist or refuse to heed the prophet’s message or warnings. Amadiume affirms that there is some “shared knowledge/culture between prophet and audience or community,” but this does not usually translate into effortless acceptance of the message of the prophet, irrespective of their source of information (be it God, gods, ancestors or any other shamanic source). Relatedly, Wojcik and Frontain contend that

“Prophecy is writing with an edgy voice in it. We sense a voice as equally distant from the world as our own mind that addresses us earnestly with a message the voice knows we are not going to like. The voice anticipates resistance. It is not content with the status quo; it has clear ideas both about what is preferable and what could come about with the proper adjustments in attitudes of readers like us” (1984, p.13).

Interestingly, they also claim that readers or listeners who happen to like what a prophet is saying could occasionally get “annoyed that others do not and that they have allowed things to get to such a point where silence and comfort are no longer possible” (1984, 16). Such a claim is particularly relevant to this essay given that some of those who read texts or watch plays might not only understand why young people are mobilizing against climate and environmental crises but could also get frustrated that most capitalist politicians and corporate leaders have largely allowed these crises to continue to grow out of hand. Although the author suggests that the African writers presented above prophesied the global youth climate activism, he

also admits that youth climate activism is only timidly growing in Africa. The author must therefore account for the timid mobilization of young people for the climate in Africa.

### **Authoritarianism, Colonialism, and Timid Youth Climate Activism in Africa**

Specifically, what are some barriers to youth climate activism in Africa? Thierry Amougou (2019), a Cameroonian-born economist based in Switzerland, asserts that young people are not mobilizing for the climate in most parts of the global South, including Africa.<sup>13</sup> Without any exception, Amougou concludes that school pupils, students, researchers and politicians are not marching for the climate in Africa, central Asia and Latin America. He explains this as “Parce que la culture technoscientifique et sa construction d’un « climat global » y est moins prégnante, bien que la sensibilité soit bien réelle” (Amougou 2019; see my English translations of all French citations in the endnotes).<sup>14</sup> In response to Amougou’s article, the author argued elsewhere that the School Strikes for Climate movement is, albeit timidly, spreading to some parts of the African continent, including Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>15</sup> Amougou contends that environmental claims in such areas often boil down to indigenous and local people defending their modes of life. Unlike their European counterparts of ‘the climate generation’ who condemn western lifestyles, Amougou continues, these indigenous and local people in the ‘extra-western’ world are fighting to save their ancestral modes of life from capitalist predation. He identifies poverty, misery, inadequate health services, wars and economic hardships as reasons why children in Africa and the global South are not campaigning against climate change:

“I’m 17 years old and it’s the fear of climate change that guides me,” Anuna De Wever says in the media. The fear of this activist, leader of the mobilization in Belgium, has no chance of creating an impact in extra-western regions if young people of her age are rather afraid of sleeping without eating, of not having drinking water, not going to school, of not being able to take care of themselves, or of becoming child soldiers.” (Amougou 2019)<sup>16</sup> How can we defend the global climate together when some young people, babies and their parents are drowning by the thousands in the abyss of the Mediterranean while others demonstrate in Brussels, Paris and Quebec, hand in hand with their parents and teachers? (Amougou 2019).<sup>17</sup>

This reveals how the attention of children, youth and adults alike in Africa – and the global South in general – is divided between meeting their basic needs and engaging in the fight against climate change and ecological breakdown. From a postcolonial ecocritical perspective, Amougou’s argument corroborates what Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier have called “the ‘full-stomach’ environmentalism of the North” versus “the ‘empty-stomach’ environmentalism of the South” (1998, xxi). Similarly, Ogaga Okuyade surmises that “the impact of climate change and global warming on Africa and their health and economic implications for the African people may have received little attention at the level of policymaking because of other pressing postcolonial concerns...” (2016, 477). Such concerns may include poverty and hunger. It is clear that “empty-belly” environmentalism greatly accounts for the timid mobilization of African youth for nature and the climate. Africa’s colonial experience also partly accounts for timid youth climate activism in Africa, given that colonization led to the repression and sometimes the complete destruction of indigenous cultural practices which protected nature and encouraged its sustainable use. African youth climate activism is also silenced by political elites who collaborate



with the multi-nationals that exploit African natural resources. Consequently, much of the destruction of the environment in Africa, including the Central African Congo Basin, Southern Africa, and West Africa, does not result from the local people; it rather stems from excessive levels of extractives undertaken by multinational industrialists from the West.

However, despite Amougou's pertinent and convincing argument, he surprisingly omits the role of repressive regimes in potentially deterring youth and other climate activists from demonstrating for the climate in many of the dictatorships in the global South, particularly in Africa. Violent and intolerant reactions from authoritarian regimes to political dissent in such countries can scare away children and young people who, despite the factors Amougou and Okuyade identify, may want to protest against climate change. A case in point is Cameroon, one of the Congo-Basin countries whose literary works are under study here, where the Biya regime's hostility to political dissent yokes together every form of protest as anti-regime. It is reported, for instance, that approximately 20 militants from the opposition Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM, popularly known in French as Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun - MRC), led by Professor Maurice Kamto, were briefly arrested in Mokolo Market in the second district of the city of Yaoundé on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2019 while they were cleaning gutters and drains.<sup>18</sup> This arrest, it should be noted, was part of many arrests targeting militants and sympathizers of the MRC political party, especially its leader Maurice Kamto, who had been protesting against what they term an "electoral holdup" of their candidate's victory in the highly contested October 2018 presidential election in Cameroon.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it should be noted that youth climate activism is not unrelated to adult climate activism or environmentalism in Africa. Famous adult-led environmental movements such as Ken Saro-Wiwa's Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in Nigeria and Wangari Maathai's Green Belt Movement in Kenya were/are often stifled by authoritarian regimes.

Different forms of governmental hostility to all types of dissent and protest in most African countries constitute what 39-year-old Ghanaian Extinction Rebellion climate activist Muwase Yao Agorkor calls "reactionary violence."<sup>20</sup> Following their rather limited march in Ghana on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2019, as part of the UK-originated Extinction Rebellion global protest week in April 2019, Agorkor expressed the need for the Ghanaian president to guarantee an enabling atmosphere for more climate activists (like them) to express their grievances in the country, regretting that "Because of the reactionary violence here, we cannot hit the streets like you are doing in the UK. It is risky and dangerous. If we did the same thing the government could clamp down on us, so we have to limit the size of our XR group and do smaller activities like holding placards at the lorry stations" (Agorkor 2019). This is true in many Sub-Saharan African countries. Referring more broadly to the west African region where Ghana is located, Agorkor asserts that although in West Africa we have a large community, we must be cautious in our approach due to tense and unpredictable atmosphere. As a result, there are only a few people currently involved in our cause. However, he is convinced when we can peacefully take the streets, our numbers will exceed those in London (Agorkor 2019).

This reactionary atmosphere of violence is confirmed in other regions of the global South, outside Africa, such as Latin America. For example, Roberto Arias, a 62-year-

old physician and activist in Medellín, Colombia, confirms that “Social and environmental activities in Latin America are high-risk. Only this year, so many leaders have been killed in Colombia by paramilitary forces, who protect the unpunished actions of politicians, landowners and mining companies.” As a result, it becomes obvious that, under such hostile political circumstances as illustrated in relation to Cameroon, Ghana and Colombia above, we cannot expect children to march for the climate at all or in any significant numbers in some areas of the global South, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In a rare but closely related event that took place at the time of writing (May 2019), British Police violently arrested over 600 protesters from Extinction Rebellion who were blocking Waterloo Bridge in central London as part of their demonstrations from 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> April 2019.<sup>21</sup> Some might dismiss this as an isolated case in the history of climate protests in the global North, but it is important to note that such action by the British Police might breed wider implications for climate activism around the world, although it is somehow justified as one unnamed Police Officer claimed that “...sitting down on Waterloo Bridge is a serious disruption to the community.” However, considering the UK’s status as one of the models of Western democracies, this action could potentially have a bearing on global climate demonstrations – including children-led School Strikes for Climate, especially by sending wrong signals to repressive regimes in the global South. Most importantly, it is difficult to draw any tangible demarcation lines between youth and adult climate activism, especially since environmental thought requires us to acknowledge the interconnectedness that characterizes life on planet Earth. With this in mind, it is worth noting that sixteen-year-old Greta Thunberg arrived in London by train from France on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to address British politicians and made her first outing at the Extinction Rebellion protest at Marble Arch in London where she addressed protesters.<sup>22</sup> In a speech which “came amid police efforts to forcibly clear Extinction Rebellion protesters from Waterloo Bridge,” Thunberg declared: “And for way too long the politicians and the people in power have gotten away with not doing anything. We will make sure that politicians will not get away with it for any longer.” Thunberg’s colleagues, such as Vanessa Nakate, are also challenging the status quo in Africa, albeit timidly.

### **Can Literature Explain Timid Youth Climate Activism in Africa?**

Aside from hostile political contexts and colonial legacies, many other factors could explain the timid youth mobilization for the climate in Africa as exemplified by the literary texts under study, which all foreground the need to include children in finding climate solutions while addressing the various obstacles to their inclusion – ignoring children’s environmental wisdom and underestimating children in general. One of the factors that could explain why children and other activists are not marching for the climate in the global South, especially in Africa, is what the author describes as cultural resistance to the potentials and contributions of children in addressing environmental problems. To prove this the author used some of the literary texts, thereby partly highlighting their prophetic value – the sense in which literary prophets deconstruct cultural myths (Wojcik and Frontain 1984). Comparatively, there are a few instances in Ekpe Inyang’s plays which expose how adults disregard the potentials and contributions of young people to climate change and ecological destruction. But one notable example is Inyang’s play *Beware* ([1993] 2009), in

which Chief Obon's wife Akwai underestimates their daughter Okum's ability to assist in tackling her father's illness (171-181). In *Beware*, a stubborn man called Obon, who doubles as a village chief, arrogantly rejects advice from wildlife officers and his wife Akwai, who warn him to hunt sustainably. Chief Obon ends up dying because he had contributed to the extinction of a particular monkey and some medicinal plants which could have cured him. When Chief Obon falls sick, he and his wife Akwai do not want their daughter, Okum, to know about his illness (Inyang, 2009, 171). Thus, Okum's parents underestimate the young girl's ability to withstand the news of her father's sickness, and this metaphorically evokes how adults ignore young people's abilities and potentials to contribute to healing nature from the scourge of climate change. The fact that Okum successfully – and promptly – calls upon Village Crier, as instructed by her mother, reveals the young girl's abilities and potentials (2009, 172). Village Crier urges Obon to maintain a positive spirit despite his serious illness, which further suggests that young Okum might usher in some flickers of hope not only for her sick father, but also figuratively for the ailing planet her father has exploited, although her adult parents seem not to recognize her full potential.

While Inyang's plays have fewer instances of adults ignoring or underestimating youthful potentials, Djombo's plays demonstrate this attitude towards children and youth more forcefully. In *Le Cri de la forêt* (2015a; using my pen name Nsah Mala, my English translation of this play was published in 2022 under the title *The Forest Must Scream*), co-authored by Djombo and Koagne, when Le Fonctionnaire (a forest agent) admonishes Chief Kamona and his people that exploiting the forest without replacing the trees will deprive their grandchildren of these resources in the future, Chief Kamona's young nephew Toubouli supports him, adding that only a few skeletal trees still stand in their forest and all will soon disappear (20-21). Toubouli further promises his people that he will study and become a forest agent, but the other adults in the meeting make disapproving noises and his uncle Kamona commands him to stop talking and leave the meeting, wondering who invited the child to participate in "adult conversations" (21). Le Fonctionnaire urges the adults to listen to the young boy's innocent voice and tap wisdom from him, instead of dismissing him (Nsah 2019, 72). In this instance, the unfounded resistance to the child's contribution to the conservation discourse is visibly collective, and such resistance thrives in patriarchal societies which look down on both children and women. This is further demonstrated when Toubouli returns from the city with a PhD in ecology and only his uncle's wife Mamie seems to pay attention to his scientific explanations for the drought in their village (Mballa), whereas Chief Kamona continues to dismiss his explanations, accusing him of misusing his education to disrespect his people (2015a, 49-54, 59). Similarly, some adults repeatedly undervalue the children acting as forest agents, police officers and customs officers in Djombo's children-led play *Les Bénévoles* (2015b; *The Volunteers*). Passenger 1, the first passenger they intercept with dead monkeys and other illegally caught animals at the airport (2015, 15-16), dismisses them as students/pupils and wonders why the government would neglect unemployed people and state-paid agents and commission little kids ("des gamins") to control adults under the pretext of volunteerism (2015b, 13). Passenger 2 also refers to them as little kids (2015b, 33) before asserting – once he learns their ages – that the twelve-year-old female customs officer is the same age as his youngest son (the girl is 12 while the two boys are both 14 years old) (2015b, 39). In addition, Noma, who illegally deforests

and sells both collectively owned family land and state-owned forests for the disorderly urbanization of their village, disregards questions from his young nephew Petit Papa in Djombo's play *Le Mal de terre* (2014, *The Sickness of Earth*) simply because Petit Papa is a child. When Petit Papa informs Noma that he has heard that the disputed land consists of large expanses and asks whether there is no family testament to settle the land matter, Noma warns him:

“My wife is right to say that you are like your father, a speculator! Despite your size, you are only a child, don't forget that. So don't worry about the affairs of grown-ups, you won't understand a thing. Did you get me right?” (Djombo 2014, p. 15).<sup>23</sup>

Instead of replying to the boy and providing him with facts, Noma simply dismisses him as a child. Broadly speaking, by exposing such condescending attitudes towards children in their texts, these playwrights advocate children's inclusion and challenge cultural impediments to their active participation in climate activism in the Congo Basin and beyond. Besides debunking cultural myths, they also resist the complacency of concerned individuals. This partly illustrates how these writers prophesied the global youth climate activism in their literary works.

### **Literary Prophecies of Youth Climate Activism**

Although African children are responding timidly to the School Strikes for Climate movement, the author argues these Congo-Basin writers had prophesied children's climate activism. In fact, in view of the fictional portrayal of young people as climate actors and environmental defenders, the author contends the School Strikes for Climate movement was, not only born in Africa but also in Western cities (global North) where it enjoys massive participation from school-going children. As Watson (2009) suggests, writers who function as literary prophets use their writing to critique and provide guidance to their societies. Accordingly, by predicting youth climate activism, the writers in question are identifying possible ways of combatting climate change in their societies. In this vein, the fourteen-year-old schoolboy acting as the forest agent and the two other children in Djombo's children-driven play *Les Bénévoles* (2015b), for instance, could be read as literary extensions of the young Toubouli in Djombo and Koagne's *Le Cri de la forêt* (2015a). Although Toubouli grows from an ambitious, bold child into an educated adult with a PhD in ecology, who explains the science of climate change and deforestation to his people in the play, the author interprets him as a figurative extension into the fourteen-year-old forest agent in *Les Bénévoles* (2015b).<sup>24</sup>

The outstanding intellectual mastery of environmental problems demonstrated by the young forest agent and Toubouli in both plays reveals striking similarities. While the young Toubouli is attentive to his environment and its problems in *Le Cri de la forêt* – to the extent that he goes to the city and obtains a PhD in ecology (with initial plans to become a forest agent) – the young forest agent in *Les Bénévoles* doesn't only demonstrate impeccable ecological knowledge but reveals to his supervisor that he became interested in environmental issues at a tender age and, ever since, has continued to educate himself on all aspects flora and fauna (2015b, 19, 20, 22, 74). Regarding Toubouli's attentiveness to his community's environment and forests, it is worth noting that UNICEF has underscored children's attentiveness to their surrounding environments in the developing world:

“In developing countries, children are often better in touch with their physical environment compared to their counterparts in industrialized countries and to adults. In most communities, they have a wide range of access: They play along riverbeds, in empty lots and in isolated areas, and have a wide knowledge of the physical environment. This kind of knowledge is invaluable and hard to find in the adult world” (2008, p.5).

This could explain why most adults in *Le Cri de la forêt* (2015a) are only interested in exploiting their forest resources and largely ignorant of the devastation they are inflicting on the forests and their environment. As Martti Nissinen (2005) suggests, prophecy must not only be construed in religious terms but should be extended to include intermediation between prophets and other sources of inspiration. Wojcik and Frontain argue that “Prophets have at least two voices: their own and the authority for whom they speak, be it God or some source that is not divine but equally compelling—a value, a program, a way of life” (1984, p. 9).

In this regard, the author suggests that scientific knowledge (in forms such as the UNICEF report cited above) serves as an undivine authority (muse) for these writers in their roles as literary prophets on the ecological crises. Moreover, during the evaluation meeting/scene the three children volunteers (actors) hold with their supervisor at the end of *Les Bénévoles*, the 14-year-old forest agent speaks in a similar way to Greta Thunberg in terms of boldness and rhetoric power. He assures his friends that they must project into the future and must find women and men sufficiently competent and responsible to act on ecological issues; he also urges his friends to remain optimistic and avoid total desperation (2015b, 79). He further asserts that they have accomplished their tasks as volunteers (having tracked down adults committing various crimes against nature) and that they should expect others to accomplish their missions in their respective domains in order to achieve a change of mentalities (2015b, 80).

Furthermore, two interesting connections can be drawn between Greta Thunberg and the twelve-year-old schoolgirl acting as the customs officer in *Les Bénévoles* (2015b), especially in terms of age and gender. Both of them are teenage, school-going girls who sacrifice or volunteer their learning time (although *Les Bénévoles* takes place on a National Volunteering Day) for the climate/environmental cause. Given that Thunberg was 15 years old in August 2018 when she launched the School Strikes for Climate through her solo protest in front of the Swedish Parliament, one can calculate that she was 12 years old in 2015 when *Les Bénévoles* was published and first staged. In this regard, Thunberg could be understood as a physical embodiment of Djombo’s twelve-year-old, female customs officer (and, to an extent, even the two fourteen-year-old boys acting the forest agent and police officer). Taken together, these child volunteers (including young Toubouli and other children in *Le Cri de la forêt*) as the playwrights’ prediction of the School Strikes for Climate movement. More generally, it would appear that the inactivity or destructive activity (read: unchecked deforestation) of most adults in Mballa village prior to the catastrophic drought that befalls them in *Le Cri de la forêt* somehow transcends into the destructive activity of most adults (read: unchecked hunting) in *Les Bénévoles*. And children (including girls) take the lead to act upon these issues in both texts. Moreover, the fact that Djombo uses generic names such as forest agent, customs officer, and police officer (including supervisor, passenger 1 and trafficker) for adult characters instead of proper names to designate the three child

volunteers in *Les Bénévoles* (2015b) makes the text more universally appealing and further supports the argument that it was conceived to prophesize and galvanize global youth activism for the climate. Such texts, the author argues, reveal their writers as literary prophets and also demonstrate that children (and women) are not only the most vulnerable victims of climate change and ecological breakdown but can also be central players in controlling these crises. As UNICEF (2008) notes, “While children are among the most vulnerable to climate change, they need not be considered passive or helpless victims under all circumstances” (4). Many other researchers acknowledge this double position of children as main victims and inevitable actors in the current climate and ecological crises (Nsah 2019; Bartlett 2008). For instance, Sheridan Bartlett (2008) acknowledges that “Despite children’s disproportionate vulnerability on many fronts, it is an oversimplification to think of them only as victims in the face of climate change. With adequate support and protection, children can also be extraordinarily resilient in the face of stresses and shocks” (502). This further supports my argument that these writers sought to stimulate children’s activism in addressing climate change and ecological breakdown.

Nadia Origo foregrounds the environmental activism of a 20-year-old girl in Gabon who is similar in age to some of the global youth activists. Origo’s autobiographical novel *Le Voyage d’Aurore* (2014 [2007], *Aurore’s Journey*), which reads like a travelogue written in the third person, focuses on a 20-year-old girl called Aurore who, in 2000, travels with two young men—apparently also in their twenties—from the Gabonese capital Libreville to the town of Makokou in the northeastern rainforest province of Ogooué-Ivindo in order to sensitize the local populations to the sustainable use of their forest resources. The novel opens by emphasizing Gabon’s huge ecological and forest potentials, signaled through the (problematic) presence of numerous national parks in the small Central African country (all created in 2002):<sup>25</sup>

“Engaged in the fight for the preservation of one of the most beautiful regions of her country, Aurore, a young 20-year-old Gabonese activist for the environmental association Forêt-Source, left Libreville, the capital of Gabon, in July 2000 for Ogooué-Ivindo, a province in the northeast of Gabon. This small Central African country of 267,667 km<sup>2</sup>, crossed in its center by the equator and more than 70% covered by forest, has around one million five hundred thousand inhabitants. It is certainly no coincidence that there are thirteen national parks there. Forêt-Source has been fighting since 1998 for the protection of the classified forest of Mingouli”<sup>26</sup> (Origo 2014, p. 7).

As the third person narrator explains, Aurore, Gal, and Pilli are young volunteers for an environmental NGO called Forêt-Source, which is a fictional representation of a real environmental NGO named Brainforest Gabon, campaigning against the illegal exploitation of forests and the consequent loss of local livelihoods, for which the young novelist Nadia Origo had volunteered and received inspiration for the novel.<sup>27</sup> On their journey northeast, Aurore discovers the devastation caused by foreign logging companies in Gabonese forests; several train wagons are ready to transport thousands of special species of tree (such as okoumé) southwards for exportation out of Gabon, while local populations are left to wallow in poverty (Origo 2014, 31-33). Although this situation upsets and disgusts Aurore, she and her co-volunteers prefer to sensitize local populations on the need for the sustainable exploitation of forest resources and harmonious living with their natural environment (Origo 2014, 67, 75). Ironically and understandably, they avoid directly confronting the foreign

logging companies, the author argues, for fear of political reprisals from the Gabonese dictatorial regime which grants logging permits to foreigners and tends to consider any NGOs working against their policies as members of opposition parties (Origo 2014, 66). By exposing such contradictions in environmental and forestry management in Gabon, the author suggests, Origo subtly critiques the Gabonese political authorities through her 20-year-old female activist character. The focus on sensitizing local populations and advising them to organize themselves into farming cooperatives in order to receive aid from Forêt-Source should not be read as a form of misplacement of priorities. Instead, the author interprets this gesture as a subtle approach adopted by the novelist to indirectly condemn the government's destruction of the environment while avoiding their repressive measures. Moreover, empowering local communities to become more aware and concerned about the sustainable management of forest resources could eventually galvanize these communities to rise up against the foreign companies ravaging their forests and the politicians who authorize and collude with the foreign loggers.

*Le Voyage d'Aurore* undoubtedly displays more telling than showing and contains very limited dialogue. Nevertheless, following Sule Egya (2020), the author suggests that, by telling more than showing, Origo's style "appears to be a strategy of the novel in producing a sense of urgency concerning the issues it raises or in foregrounding the kind of urgency that over-determines acts of activism" (Egya 2020, 155). Furthermore, *Aurore* embarks on telling and showing the paradisiacal natural features of Gabon in a way that might reinforce the problematic image of Africa as the last Eden on Earth to be persevered while at the same time drawing attention to the importance of nature conservation in Gabon and the Congo Basin. In fact, the word "paradise" and its derivatives are used more than three times in the novel (85, 86, 88-89)—and other Gabonese writers like Moïse Oriand Nkoghe-Mve also deploy the paradisiacal metaphor in describing Gabon's environment (Nkoghe-Mve 2014, 73). For instance, at one point in the novel, *Aurore* does not only marvel at the beauty of Gabonese natural landscapes but also reveals her baffling misconception of the worldview of indigenous people with regard to their environment and nature:

"She had heard of beautiful landscapes in the world; she had seen them on postcards, in books and on television. But such a beauty had never caressed her or touched her Eden gaze so much. So, she realized that maybe such a completely unknown spectacle was playing in another part of the country, so she exclaimed: 'My God! What country are we in, to leave things unknown that nature has so kindly given us?' 'Things' that can be exploited in the long term, if we take good care of them. For her, the worst ignorance certainly came from the indigenes who, living there, did not realize the value of all this wealth that they encountered every day. They had this paradisiacal environment for themselves free of charge but did not know how to appreciate it or how to value it"<sup>28</sup> (Origo 2014, p. 86).

*Aurore*'s observation is problematic because she is an environmental activist and, more than anybody, should be aware that indigenous and local peoples have different conceptions of appreciating and relating to nature than hers, which are apparently tinted by capitalist inclinations towards eco-tourism and thus premised on nature as a resource instead of nature as part of being. That notwithstanding, the author contends that Origo's aesthetics of enchanting and romanticizing Gabon's natural landscapes and forests through the eyes of the young activist *Aurore* could be a helpful strategy in deploying youth climate activism to draw attention to nature

conservation among local and indigenous peoples as well as governmental and other stakeholders. It is for this reason that Aurore is simultaneously keen on both the devastations of the environment and its beauty. While taking photographs of the picturesque waterfalls/rapids they visit, Aurore thinks:

“By taking this photograph, Aurore wanted to engrave this beautiful spectacle. Beauty cannot be told, and she knew perfectly well that by taking it upon herself, on her return from Makokou, to recount what she had seen, she was running the risk of distorting this paradisiacal vision. She therefore gave only these few feelings and already hoped that some of her relatives, upon seeing the photos, would be tempted to travel, just to meet these magnificent rapids of LoaLoa, at about 3km from Makokou”<sup>29</sup> (Origo 2014, p. 85).

Nadia Origo, through Aurore and the other two young ecological activists (e.g., Origo 2014, 31-32), is therefore singing the beauty of nature in an attempt to call for its preservation and to “show us the way to the awareness of our connection with the natural world” (Besson 2019, xiv). Indeed, as the Student Conservation Association of America observes, “...saving the planet is not only about science and statistics; it is about finding ways to open people’s eyes to the beauty around us – and to motivate us to take the actions necessary to protect it.”<sup>30</sup> And this is exactly what Origo does in her novel. The author reads this novel as a prophecy of youth activism for nature and the climate, given that it recounts the actual experience of three young people, especially Aurore, who fight for the sustainable use of forest resources through an NGO. Both Origo’s actual activism and Aurore’s fictional speak to the urgency and necessity of having young people at the center of combating climate change, species extinction, and environmental breakdown. As a metaphor for future optimism, youthfulness is substantially foregrounded in the novel where the adjective “young” (jeune) is mentioned no fewer than seven times (31, 43, 66, 70, 75, 91). In short, the novel narrates youth activism as a means of galvanizing more youth in Gabon and the Congo Basin to engage in climate activism in order to ensure sustainable futures. Origo, therefore, joins other writers like Djombo, Koagne, and Inyang to underscore the role of young people and women like Aurore in addressing the climate crisis and thereby predicting the current global youth climate activism.

Besides the few instances where Inyang’s plays frown at adults who undervalue children’s potential to combat climate change (discussed earlier), his poetry complements his plays by underscoring the role that young people can play in this direction. For instance, in his poem “Green Campaign” (2016), Inyang draws on a workshop he conducted on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as a WWF environmentalist to urge what the poetic persona calls “Enlightened rural children” to “**S**peak out against/**D**estruction of forests”

**U**ntil  
**N**GOs of the South  
**E**nter into  
**S**olar energy deals with  
**C**ompanies  
**O**verseas. (2016, 43)

The poem evokes the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which is pivotal in promoting science and education, and it continues by exhorting foreign organizations with “green views” to go beyond distribution and to train rural communities to use clean energies and technologies and to properly dispose of resulting waste. Elsewhere, the persona in Inyang’s poem



“Still Too Young to Know How” mocks a young man for imbibing foreign education and cultural practices, thereby becoming alienated from his native culture and environmental problems. The third stanza of the poem reads:

“He’s so fond of gas and electric cookers, or microwaves,  
But can’t picture the three-stone stove with fuel-wood  
Spouting out jets of smoke to feed his mum’s lungs;  
He’s still too young to imagine how” (2016, pp. 27-28).

Apart from foregrounding cultural alienation, this excerpt evokes air pollution resulting from domestic smoke in the boy’s mum’s kitchen and also hints at overconsumption of electrical energy in Western societies. The poem further juxtaposes the alienated boy’s fondness for “crackers and wines” with his lack of knowledge about indigenous foodstuffs such as “kola-nuts” and “palm-wine.” While the boy “talks of medicine stores,” he “can hardly identify a herb/Let alone explain its use.” This reveals the boy’s ignorance of his people’s indigenous knowledge practices, which can provide useful alternatives in the face of environmental collapse. At the same time, through the repeated use of the eponymous refrain “He’s still too young to imagine how” at the end of each stanza, the poem invites the young man to embrace his cultural values and remain ecologically alert. Accordingly, just like Djombo and Koagne, Inyang does not only invite inactive African children to participate in climate/environmental activism but also foretells the current global youth climate activism. The writers see beyond the present of their writing; through their literary predictions, they transcend temporalities and imagine possible futures in which children spearhead climate activism and help to avert catastrophic scenarios such as the drought in Mballa village in *Le Cri de la forêt* (2015a) and species extinction in Chief Obon’s village in *Beware*. In this way, the writers fit the definition of literary prophets that emphasizes the ability of literary writers to predict the future and engender transformations.

The writers equally alert adult, patriarchal communities to the possible contributions that children can make to the fight against climate change and environmental collapse – including species extinction. This is particularly the case in Djombo’s and Koagne’s plays in which children undertake concrete actions to combat ecological destruction, such as studying to become a forest agent like Toubouli, joining hands with women and others to plant trees at the end of *Le Cri de la forêt* (2015a), and volunteering to control illegal exploiters of forest resources in *Les Bénévoles* (2015b). Considering the educational and professional backgrounds of these writers (Djombo holds a Master’s degree in Forestry Economics and was a cabinet minister for the environment; Inyang holds a Master’s degree in Environmental Studies and works for WWF; Koagne is an environmental activist through theatre; and Origo holds a PhD in Geography and has volunteered for environmental causes in Gabon), the author argues in addition to their creativity and indigenous knowledge, they are partly inspired by knowledge from scientific publications which recommend involving children in participatory approaches to mitigating climate change and ecological breakdown.<sup>31</sup> UNICEF (2008), for instance, acknowledges that children in developing countries possess enormous local knowledge and innovative potential on environmental issues. As a result, UNICEF (2008) recommends that

This local knowledge and innovation needs [sic] to be respected and legitimized. It is important for adults to acknowledge, disseminate and act on the information generated by children. In this regard, it is important for adult

decision makers to see themselves as mentors and partners of children in this process, rather than as controlling agents (p. 5).

Through their texts, the four writers therefore invite adult characters, and adult audience/readers in the real world by extension, to become receptive to other voices and alternative approaches, especially those emanating from children (and women), in efforts to arrest climate change and environmental destruction. It is probably in this respect that Le Fonctionnaire in *Le Cri de la forêt* rebukes the adults and Chief Kamona for not listening to Toubouli's "innocent voice," asserting that this voice ought to inspire wisdom in adults (2015a, 21). Meanwhile, Sangu Ngoe, the seer in *The Hill Barbers* (2010), is not only able to interpret the gestures of Young Man, who enters amidst war rhythms striking a gong like a village crier (in whose action he sees maturity and a call to action), but also acts upon the child's coded message, passing an injunction accompanied with "a powerful traditional oath" aimed at stopping "the current wave of destruction" on their hills and forests (2010, 60-61). Like the twenty-two scientists who endorse the youth climate movement (noted earlier), the seer understands the plight and implicit cries of children and youth through his interpretation of Young Man's gestures. He actually acts upon the implicit signals from Young Man whom he refers to as a child. He seems to be saying, like the twenty-two scientists, that "young people understand the situation. We approve and support their demand for rapid and forceful action" (Hagedorn et al. 2019, 140). Interestingly, the playwright describes Young Man in the play's cast as "a playful young man who seems to predict events" (Inyang 2010, 1). Unlike Djombo's and Koagne's young characters, who perceive looming environmental catastrophes and act on them directly, Inyang's young characters seem to act less concretely in the face of such events—they mainly motivate adult/elderly characters to act upon their perceptions and predictions. This is not to imply that Young Man is not acting when he strikes the rallying gong; it is just to say that his action is further acted upon by the adults, especially Sangu Ngoe, and that the child is nowhere to be found at the end of the play, when the final decisive actions aimed at controlling unchecked deforestation and hunting in the community are anticipated by the adult characters (Inyang 2010, 71-72). Here lies one of the striking differences between these writers in terms of representing children's climate activism. These differences notwithstanding, let us discuss why these writers believe and invest in children as climate activists.

### **Yes, they can fight for the climate – but why children?**

To understand why presented writers invest in young characters as potential climate activists, it is worth highlighting some of the personal motivations behind the activism of some of these young characters. As it emerges from *Le Cri de la forêt* (2015a) and *Les Bénévoles* (2015b), some of these children's interest in climate activism stems from their childhood exposure and attentiveness to their surrounding environments (as is true for Toubouli in the former play) as well as their personal interests in and curiosity for ecological concerns, such as the case of the young forest agent in the latter play. Besides demonstrating impeccable ecological knowledge in the play, towards the end of the piece, the young forest agent also reveals to his supervisor that his interest in environmental issues began at a young age and that, ever since, he has continued to educate himself on all aspects of flora and fauna (Djombo 2015b, 74). His personal efforts combine with the training he and his fellow pupils receive in school prior to their voluntary action on ecological

destruction on the National Day of Volunteerism to fashion them into committed climate activists (2015b, 8-9, 37).

Similarly, Thunberg has stated that her climate activism started in school when she won a writing competition about the environment organized by the Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet in May 2018.<sup>32</sup> After her article was published, some people, including Bo Thorén from Fossil Free Dalsland, invited her to join a group of other children to do something about the climate crisis; through phone conversations with Bo and other activists, she heard about what she calls “a loose idea of some kind of school strike (that school children would do something in the schoolyards or in the classrooms)” – an idea inspired by the Parkland student protests in the US during which pupils refused to go to school after the school shootings – and she then developed the idea of a school strike, although, at that point, no other young person was willing to join her. She therefore continued to plan the school strike all by herself, without attending further meetings with other young people, until she launched her solo protest in front of the Swedish Parliament on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018. The trajectories of both the forest agent in Djombo’s play and Greta Thunberg clearly show when their activism began, mirroring the trajectories of many other activists around the world, and amounting to what Fisher calls “moments of consciously committing to climate activism” (2016, 235).

It is almost a climate truism that current inaction or insufficient action on climate change and ecological breakdown is compromising the future of children, young people and other more-than-human species on Earth. Nevertheless, it is interesting to trace connections between the literary texts under study and the fact that youth activism is aimed at avoiding such a compromised future. While young climate activists in real life personally warn adults against destroying their futures some activists in the literary texts sometimes reminded by adults about the challenges that climate change and ecological collapse pose for their futures. In Djombo’s and Koagne’s play, for instance, it is Le Fonctionnaire (the adult forest agent) who reminds the inhabitants of Mballa village that their children and grandchildren won’t be able to meet their needs for wood if their forests disappear today. Apparently, this warning strikes a chord in the young Toubouli, who immediately supports the agent, confirms that only few trees remain in their forests and promises to study and become a forest agent (2015a, 20-21). In *Les Bénévoles*, the young forest agent is so forward-thinking that he urges his friends to remain optimistic about the future while they hope to find men and women capable of assuming their responsibilities with honour and dignity, but it is their adult supervisor who overtly reminds them that fraudsters and environmental criminals are not only the enemies of the country but also steal and want to perpetually confiscate their future (2015b, 80-81). Far from complicating the relationship between children and adults in the fight against climate change and environmental destruction, this apparent paradox underscores their necessary complementarity and further speaks to the interconnectedness of humans and the more-than-human world.

Meanwhile, similar to these complementary reminders between children and adults in literary texts, some real-life young climate activists have warned adult leaders against compromising their futures through inaction or destructive action. On 16<sup>th</sup> December 2018, while addressing delegates at COP24 in Katowice, Portugal, Thunberg said: “You say you love your children above all else and yet, *you’re*

*stealing their future in front of their eyes*” (emphasis added).<sup>33</sup> On 18<sup>th</sup> April 2019, six students from Ireland addressed the Oireachtas Climate Committee, where they asked the politicians to “*stop stealing our future*” and to take action on climate change, further urging them to “*stop playing politics with our future*” (emphasis added).<sup>34</sup> More indirectly, the twenty-two scientists who endorsed youth climate protests have restated this notion that business and bureaucratic stakeholders should stop playing politics with our children’s future, which is fast becoming the mantra of School Strikes for Climate. They categorically assert that “Without bold and focused action, *their future is in critical danger*. There is no time to wait until they are in power” (Hagedorn et al 2019, 139, emphasis added). Therefore, one of the main motivations for most young climate activists is to guarantee a livable future for themselves and other species on planet Earth.

Why do writers deploy child characters as climate activists, why do they encourage children’s involvement in the fight against climate change and ecological breakdown? In the Central African sub-region where levels of corruption and bribery are alarming, Djombo’s *Les Bénévoles* depicts children as incorruptible actors in the fight against climate change and environmental degradation. Strikingly, the young volunteer acting as the police officer refuses to be bribed by the transporter who attempts to offer them a twenty-dollar banknote instead of showing them the driving documents they require from him. Worst of all, the transporter is transporting a number of illegally hunted animal parts, including ivory and rhino horns. For all these crimes, the three child volunteers force him to follow them to the police station (2015b, 54, 57, 59). Moreover, during the last meeting between three volunteers and their supervisor, the young forest agent is worried that some unscrupulous individuals might embezzle funds allocated for the conservation of nature and combating environmental crimes (2015b, 78). Accordingly, the author argues that one of the reasons these writers believe in children is that they are incorruptible and can be groomed into better leaders and decision makers for the good of nature and humanity in their societies. Children, it should be added, are not driven by material interests; they seem to be immune to the capitalist interests that are driving some adults to destroy nature and the climate. In fact, children haven’t yet been indoctrinated by capitalism. In this way, the writers perceive children as precursors of a better future. In the face of impending climate collapse, children become a metaphor for hope and system change for the more-than-human future.

The writers encourage humanity to entrust some of the responsibility for protecting nature to children because children often learn faster than adults and have a good sense of intuition. When Inyang describes Young Man in *The Hill Barbers* as capable of predicting the future, he hints at the intelligence and intuitive power of children. His two appearances on stage are highly suggestive of his ability to see beyond the ordinary and immediate. In Djombo and Koagne’s play, young Toubouli quickly understands that the few surviving trees in their community forests will soon disappear if nothing is done to stop the massive exploitation of wood. The same Toubouli, after obtaining his PhD in ecology, returns to their village filled with fresh environmental knowledge and brilliantly explains to Chief Kamona (his unreceptive uncle) how the forests in the northern village contribute to the formation of clouds, thereby providing abundant rainfall and a harmonious ecosystem (2015a, 20-21, 59). In *Les Bénévoles* (2015b), the intelligent, young forest agent lectures the seemingly ignorant Passenger 1, explaining to him that humans are cousins to monkeys (only

separated by chromosomes) and that his children could contract deadly diseases such as Ebola (and Covid-19, the author adds) if they eat wild animals like monkeys (2015b, 19-20). He further informs Passenger 1 that seized bushmeat is no longer offered to prisons and hospitals, as was the case in the past, because of associated health risks (2015b, 22). Moreover, all the writers have once been children and probably use their texts to connect their pasts to their presents and futures, including the futures of their children and/or grandchildren. In fact, when Origo wrote her novel, she was also a youth and could still be considered so today (2021). As Djombo remarked during an informal, post-interview chat with the author in his Brazzaville residence on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2019, “nous sommes des anciens jeunes” (we are former youth). This remark, which arose because a member of the group insisted that young people in Congo-Brazzaville want to do more than they can handle, further suggests the writer’s faith in the potential of young people, especially in matters such as climate change, which he addresses in his roles as writer and former longtime cabinet minister.

### **Conclusion**

This essay has argued that some African writers from the Congo Basin had prophesied global youth climate activism in their literary works. The author concluded these writers did so by advocating for the inclusion of children in future climate solutions and challenging various impediments to their inclusion. In this respect, the author accounted for the timid mobilization of youth for the climate in Africa and highlighted the prophetic power of the writers and pointed out how they depict children (and women) as both victims of and potential warriors against climate change. He established connections between some of the child characters in the selected texts and Greta Thunberg, who has become one of the main symbols of global youth climate activism. Moreover, the author identified instances of cultural resistance to the potential and contributions of children in the fight against climate change as explored by the four writers presented above. These writers employ children as a metaphor for hope in the face of climate change. In this regard, the writers “exemplify how literary fiction can open up our imagination to what it might mean to act on climate change in a set of alternative futures” (Nikoleris, Stripple and Tenngart 2017, 308).

Indeed, the writers are background-informed environmental literary activists. In other words, they combine their professional/educational experiences with literary craftsmanship to raise awareness of ecological and climate change issues in the Congo Basin, particularly foregrounding the importance of young people and children in tackling these issues, which seriously threaten their future. In the words of Wojcik and Frontain (1984, 9), their prophetic “message is full of promise” because it “contains a sting and points out that the present state of affairs is not so good” for our climate and natural ecosystems. The condemnation of the status quo in these texts suggests that the writers understand climate change as culturally induced, implicated and constructed. Consequently, climate change mitigation requires some amount of cultural deconstruction, disruption, and modification.

Nikoleris, Stripple and Tenngart draw on Michael Hulme to assert that “climate takes shape in cultures and can therefore be changed by cultures” (2017, 308). It is worth noting that the four writers suggested significant ways of diverging from much of eco-

literature, especially climate fiction (cli-fi), which often imagines dystopian and catastrophic or post-apocalyptic futures for the climate. To a large extent, they did not focus on depicting what Adeline Johns-Putra (2016) describes as “a disastrous climatic event, either depicting such an event dramatically or setting the action in its dystopian aftermath” (270). Instead, these writers from the Congo Basin foreground youthful optimism by prophesying youth climate activism. By showcasing the potential of children in combating climate change, these writers did not only predict the future of youth climate activism but also foreground the necessity of involving such neglected (or vulnerable) people in designing preemptive, resilient approaches to tackle environmental collapse. They provide “lessons to their readers on how to cope with, adapt to, or mitigate against climate change” (Johns-Putra 2016, 274). It is in this sense that these writers’ literary prophecy of global youth climate activism becomes more relevant in the face of looming climate and environmental breakdowns.

The fact that such literary prophecy comes from the Congo Basin in Africa is further significant considering the demographic dynamics of the African continent. Given that approximately 60% of the African population consists of young people below the age of twenty-five, children’s climate protests and other forms of activism on the continent, albeit timid at present, should fall on more attentive ears.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is excerpted from the author’s PhD dissertation, entitled “Can Literature Save the Congo Basin? Postcolonial Ecocriticism and Environmental Literary Activism”, which was defended at Aarhus University (Denmark) on 11 March 2022. The author acknowledges his doctoral supervisors at Aarhus, the anonymous reviewers and editor of this journal for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> For details on the origins of School Strikes for Climate, see Fridays for Future at <<https://www.fridaysforfuture.org/about/>> accessed 16 April 2019; School Strikes for Climate at <<https://www.schoolstrike4climate.com/about/>> accessed 16 April 2019; Dave Keating, “In Belgium, Students Are Striking for Climate – And They’ve Forced a Minister to Resign,” *Forbes*, 7 February 2019, <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davekeating/2019/02/07/in-belgium-students-are-striking-for-the-climate-and-theyve-forced-a-minister-to-resign/#6a2379dd3fc7/>> accessed 16 April 2019; “How Greta Thunberg’s school strike became a global climate movement,” *The Local*, 14 March 2019, <<https://www.thelocal.se/20190314/how-greta-thunbergs-school-strike-became-a-global-climate-movement/>> accessed 16 April 2019; Isabelle Gerretsen, Sarah Lazarus, Yoonjung Seo, “Global Climate Strike: Meet the teenagers skipping school to fight for a greener planet,” *CNN*, 15 March 2019, <<https://edition.cnn.com/2019/03/14/world/global-climate-strike-teenagers-school-walkout-greta-thunberg-intl/index.html/>> accessed 16 April 2019; “Climate strikes spread worldwide as students call for action,” *BBC*, 15 March 2019, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-47581585/>> accessed 16 April 2019; among others.

<sup>3</sup> See Dave Keating (2019); Daniel Boffey, “Belgian Minister resigns over school-strike conspiracy claims,” *The Guardian*, 5 February 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/05/belgian->

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environment-minister-joke-schauvliege-claimed-children-climate-protests-a-set-up/> accessed 16 April 2019; “The climate strikers should inspire us all to act at the next UN summit,” *The Guardian*, 15 March 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/15/climate-strikers-urgency-un-summit-world-leaders/>> accessed 16 April 2019; “Largest Worldwide Student Climate Strike Ever,” *News for Kids*, 18 March 2019, <<https://newsforkids.net/articles/2019/03/18/largest-worldwide-student-climate-strike-ever/>> accessed 16 April 2019; Damian Carrington, “School climate strikes: 1.4 million people took part, say campaigners,” *The Guardian*, 19 March 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/mar/19/school-climate-strikes-more-than-1-million-took-part-say-campaigners-greta-thunberg/>> accessed 16 April 2019.

<sup>4</sup> See Climate Emergency Declaration, <<https://climateemergencydeclaration.org/category/news/>> accessed 14 May 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Damian Carrington, “Greta Thunberg nominated for Nobel peace prize,” *The Guardian*, 14 March 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/14/greta-thunberg-nominated-nobel-peace-prize/>> accessed 16 April 2019; “Greta Thunberg nominated for Nobel Peace Prize for climate activism,” BBC, 14 March 2019, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47568227/>> accessed 16 April 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Aditya Chakraborty, “The hounding of Greta Thunberg is proof that the right has run out of ideas,” *The Guardian*, 1 May 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/01/greta-thunberg-right-environmental-activist-attacks/>> accessed 14 May 2019; “Greta Thunberg’s controversial protest,” *Euro Topics*, 14 February 2019, <<https://www.eurotopics.net/en/211145/greta-thunberg-s-controversial-protest/>> accessed 14 May 2019; Corry Morningstar, “The Manufacturing of Greta Thunberg – For Consent: The Inconvenient Truth Behind Youth Co-Optation (Act II),” *Wrong Kind of Green*, 21 January 2019, <<http://www.wrongkindofgreen.org/2019/01/21/the-manufacturing-of-greta-thunberg-for-consent-the-inconvenient-truth-behind-youth-cooptation/>> accessed 14 May 2019; Brendan O’Neill, “The cult of Greta Thunberg,” *Watts Up With That?*, 22 April 2019, <<https://wattsupwiththat.com/2019/04/22/the-cult-of-greta-thunberg/>> accessed 14 May 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Zero Hour, <<http://thisiszerohour.org/who-we-are/>> accessed 14 May 2019; also see the seven portraits of a global youth striking for the planet - “7 portraits d’une jeunesse mondiale en grève pour la planète,” *Ouest-France*, 15 March 2019, <<https://www.ouest-france.fr/environnement/climat/climat-7-portraits-d-une-jeunesse-mondiale-en- greve-pour-la-planete-6262922/>> accessed 14 May 2019.

<sup>8</sup> See “7 portraits d’une jeunesse mondiale en grève pour la planète,” *Ouest-France*, 15 March 2019, <<https://www.ouest-france.fr/environnement/climat/climat-7-portraits-d-une-jeunesse-mondiale-en- greve-pour-la-planete-6262922/>> accessed 14 May 2019; “12 Female Climate Activists Who Are Saving the Planet,” *Global Citizen*, 18 April 2019, <<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/female-activists-saving-planet/>> accessed 14 May 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Children with Nature, <<https://childrenwithnature.org/about/>> accessed 14 May 2019; also see ; also see the seven portraits of a global youth striking for the planet - “7 portraits d’une jeunesse mondiale en grève pour la planète,” *Ouest-France*, 15 March 2019, <<https://www.ouest-france.fr/environnement/climat/climat-7-portraits-d-une-jeunesse-mondiale-en- greve-pour-la-planete-6262922/>> accessed 14 May 2019.

<sup>10</sup> See “7 portraits d’une jeunesse mondiale en grève pour la planète,” *Ouest-France*, 15 March 2019, <<https://www.ouest-france.fr/environnement/climat/climat-7-portraits-d-une-jeunesse-mondiale-en- greve-pour-la-planete-6262922/>> accessed 14 May 2019; “12 Female Climate Activists Who Are Saving the Planet,” *Global Citizen*, 18 April 2019, <<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/female-activists-saving-planet/>> accessed 14 May 2019; and Angely Mercado, “Uganda’s Young Climate Activists Are Going on Strike,” *The Nation*, 14 March 2019, <<https://www.thenation.com/article/ugandas-young-climate-activists-are-going-on-strike/>> accessed 14 May 2019; In January 2020, Associated Press sparked outrage in a racial act which removed Vanessa Nakate from a photo with Greta Thunberg and other white western youth activists taken at the World Economic Forum in Davos (Switzerland) (“Outrage at whites-only image as Ugandan climate activist cropped from photo,” *The Guardian*, 25 January 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/24/whites-only-photo-uganda-climate-activist-vanessa-nakate>> accessed 4 August 2021).

<sup>11</sup> The author was unable to find more recent research on writers as literary prophets.

<sup>12</sup> The author occasionally refers to children and women because it has been proven that they are the people most affected by climate change and ecological destruction and who are often left out in climate action, especially in the Global South (see Nixon 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Thierry Amougou, “Pourquoi la jeunesse africaine ne se mobilise pas pour le climat,” *Le Monde*, 24 March 2019, <[https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/03/24/pourquoi-la-jeunesse-africaine-ne-se-mobilise-pas-pour-le-climat\\_5440625\\_3212.html/](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/03/24/pourquoi-la-jeunesse-africaine-ne-se-mobilise-pas-pour-le-climat_5440625_3212.html/)> accessed 15 April 2019.

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<sup>14</sup> “Because techno-scientific culture and its construction of a ‘global climate’ is less present there, although the sensitivity is very real.” (Amougou 2019) All French to English translations are mine.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Toah Nsah, “Comment expliquer la timide mobilisation de la jeunesse africaine pour le climat ?” *The Conversation*, 1 July 2019, <<https://theconversation.com/comment-expliquer-la-timide-mobilisation-de-la-jeunesse-africaine-pour-le-climat-118935>> accessed 25 June 2020.

<sup>16</sup> « J’ai 17 ans et c’est la peur du changement climatique qui me guide », déclare Anuna De Wever dans les médias. La crainte de cette militante, chef de file de la mobilisation en Belgique, n’a aucune chance de faire tache d’huile en régions extra-occidentales si les jeunes de son âge y ont plutôt peur de dormir sans manger, de ne pas avoir d’eau potable, de ne pas aller à l’école, de ne pouvoir se soigner ou de devenir des enfants-soldats. (Amougou 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Comment défendre ensemble le climat global quand certains jeunes, bébés et leurs parents se noient par milliers dans les abysses de la Méditerranée tandis que d’autres manifestent à Bruxelles, à Paris et à Québec, main dans la main avec leurs parents et enseignants (Amougou 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Romain Nono, “Yaoundé: Une vingtaine de militants du MRC interpellée puis relachée ce mardi,” *Le Bled Parle*, 05 March 2019, <<https://www.lebledparle.com/actu/politique/1106892-yaounde-un-vingtaine-de-militants-du-mrc-interpelles-puis-liberes-ce-mardi#!/ccomment-comment=1463/>> accessed 15 April 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Maurice Kamto and many militants of his MRC party were brutally arrested and detained by the Yaoundé authorities during peaceful protests in late January 2019. Kamto and (some but not all) party militants were released in October 2019 (many militants were still jailed in 2021). See Ruth Maclean, “Cameroon arrests opposition leader who claims he won 2018 election,” *The Guardian*, 29 January 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/29/cameroon-opposition-leader-maurice-kamto-claims-won-2018-election-arrested/>> both accessed 15 April 2019 and “Cameroon opposition leader Maurice Kamto walks free from jail,” *The Guardian*, 5 October 2019 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49947652>> accessed 4 August 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Jessie McDonald et al., “From India to Ireland: a week of Extinction Rebellion actions,” *The Guardian*, 24 April 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/24/from-india-to-ireland-a-week-of-extinction-rebellion-actions>> accessed 26 April 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Taylor and Damien Gayle (a), “Police begin second wave of arrests in London climate protests,” *The Guardian*, 16 April 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/apr/16/more-than-100-people-arrested-in-london-climate-change-protests-extinction-rebellion>> accessed 16 April 2019. Also see, Matthew Taylor and Damien Gayle (b), “Battle of Water Bridge: a week of Extinction Rebellion protests,” *The Guardian*, 20 April 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/20/battle-of-waterloo-bridge-a-week-of-extinction-rebellion-protests/>> accessed 24 April 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Vikram Dodd, Damien Gayle and Matthew Busby, “Humanity is at a crossroads, Greta Thunberg tells Extinction Rebellion,” *The Guardian*, 21 April 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/21/extinction-rebellion-london-protesters-offer-pause-climate-action/>> accessed 24 April 2019.

<sup>23</sup> “Ma femme a raison de dire que tu es comme ton père, un spéculateur ! Malgré ta taille, tu n’es qu’un enfant, ne l’oublie pas. Il ne faut donc pas t’occuper des affaires des grandes personnes, tu n’y comprendras rien. Est-ce que tu m’as bien saisi?” (Djomo 2014, 15).

<sup>24</sup> Although Henri Djombo is the more studied of these four writers, there is no available literary scholarship on all their environmental texts under study, except two articles by this author.

<sup>25</sup> The author characterizes the presence of numerous (13) conservation national parks in Gabon and by extension the Congo Basin mainly because these parks are modeled on fortress conservation, which often results in violence and other forms of injustice against local and indigenous people. Although all the 13 Gabonese national parks were created by presidential decree in 2002, they all rely on fortress conservation with heavy repercussions for local and indigenous people, and with roots in the mythic idea of an African Eden perpetuated by Western media such as *National Geographic* and in the French colonial creation of hunting reserves, especially the Lopé National Park (see Laurence Caramel, “Forêt d’Afrique centrale : le pacte vert de Lee White,” *Le Monde*, 6 October 2021, retrieved from <[https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/10/06/lee-white-un-britannique-au-service-de-la-foret-d-afrique-centrale\\_6097288\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/10/06/lee-white-un-britannique-au-service-de-la-foret-d-afrique-centrale_6097288_3212.html)> on 8 October 2021). The author engages with and challenge this fortress model of conservation elsewhere (see Nsah in “Conserving Africa’s Eden?” or Chapter Seven/Six).

<sup>26</sup> Engagée dans la lutte pour la préservation d’une des plus belles régions de son pays, Aurore, jeune gabonaise de 20 ans, militante de l’association environnementale Forêt-Source, est partie de Libreville, la capitale du Gabon, en juillet 2000 pour l’Ogooué-Ivindo, une province du Nord-Est du Gabon. Ce petit pays d’Afrique Centrale de 267.667 km<sup>2</sup>, traversé en son centre par l’équateur et



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couvert à plus de 70% par la forêt, compte environ un million cinq cent mille habitants. Il n'est certainement pas au hasard si on y dénombre treize parcs nationaux. Forêt-Source lutte depuis 1998 pour la protection de la forêt classée de Mingouli." (Origo 2014, 7)

<sup>27</sup> In a 2008 interview with José Khemal, Nadia Origo declared that her inspiration for the novel came from her adventure or experience as a volunteer within an unnamed association/NGO (see José Khemal, "Propos d'Écrivains : Nadia Origo," 2008, retrieved from <<http://azokhwaunblogfr.z.a.f.unblog.fr/files/2008/09/interviewdenadiaorigo.pdf>> on 20 September 2021). Following this hint, this author (Nsah) interviewed Nadia Origo via email in August and September 2021 (questions sent on 30 August and responses received on 15 September), in which she revealed the name of the NGO for which she had volunteered as Brainforest Gabon and that their journey actually took them to the Ogooué-Ivindo province.

<sup>28</sup> "Elle avait entendu parler de beaux paysages dans le monde ; elle en avait vu sur des cartes postales, dans des livres et à la télévision. Mais une telle beauté ne l'avait jamais autant caressée ni effleurée de son regard d'éden. Alors, elle réalisa qu'un tel spectacle totalement inconnu se jouait peut-être dans une autre contrée du pays, alors, elle s'exclama : 'Mon Dieu ! Dans quel pays sommes-nous, pour laisser inconnues des choses que la nature nous a si gentiment offertes ?' Des 'choses' durablement exploitables, si on en prenait bien évidemment soin. Pour elle, la pire des ignorances provenait certainement des autochtones qui, vivant là, ne prenaient pas conscience de la valeur de toute cette richesse qu'ils côtoyaient tous les jours. Ils avaient pour eux et gratuitement cet environnement paradisiaque mais ne savaient ni l'apprécier ni comment le valoriser." (Origo 2014, p. 86)

<sup>29</sup> "En faisant cette photographie, Aurore voulait graver ce beau spectacle. La beauté ne se raconte pas, et elle savait parfaitement qu'en prenant sur elle, au retour de Makokou, de raconter ce qu'elle avait vu, elle courait le risque de dénaturer cette vision paradisiaque. Elle ne livra donc que ces quelques sentiments et espérait déjà que certains de ces proches en voyant les photos, seraient tentés d'effectuer le voyage, juste pour aller à la rencontre de ces magnifiques rapides de LoaLoa, à environ 3km de Makokou." (Origo 2014, 85)

<sup>30</sup> The Student Conservation Association (SCA), "Green Jobs for Humanities Majors," retrieved from <<https://www.thesca.org/connect/blog/green-jobs-humanities-majors>> on 23 September 2021.

<sup>31</sup> By suggesting that science partly acts as a muse for these writers, this author does not intend to overlook their creative ingenuity and the significance of indigenous knowledge in their writings. On the contrary, as this author has argued elsewhere in relation to Ekpe Inyang, these writers should be understood as reconciling or hybridizing western scientific knowledge and their respective indigenous knowledge systems (see Nsah 2018).

<sup>32</sup> Greta Thunberg, Facebook post, 11 February 2019, <<https://www.facebook.com/gretathunbergsweden/posts/773676963000126/>> accessed 15 May 2019.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Rasmus Hougaard, "The True Meaning of Leadership – Taught by our Children," *Forbes*, 15 March 2019, <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/rasmushougaard/2019/03/15/the-true-meaning-of-leadership-taught-by-our-children/#3d8a02244c9c/>> accessed 24 April 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Staines, "'Stop stealing our future' – Students tell politicians to take action on climate change," *Newstalk*, 18 March 2019, <<https://www.newstalk.com/news/students-climate-action-842406/>> accessed 24 April 2019.

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