"A Human Measurement of Time": Communal Temporalities of Waiting in Goretti Kyomuhendo's Waiting *and Chinua Achebe's* Things Fall Apart

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ABSTRACT: This article considers how the theme of waiting is treated in two African realist novels: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War.* Building on recent scholarship that seeks to understand waiting as more than deferral or failure, the article develops the notion of idleness as an important aspect of waiting. It shows how the novels engage with waiting on both thematic and formal levels, thereby conveying "a human measurement of time" that is grounded in the nexus of community, nature, and storytelling. Specifically, it suggests that the communal temporalities of waiting are indebted to animist storytelling practices, which allow communities to construct themselves through their embeddedness in nature. Comparing two novels in which waiting is a communal strategy for resisting political oppression in the wake of colonialism, the article thus teases out culturally specific modes of temporality and waiting that predated colonialism and which offered—and still offer—a rejection of the binaries of productiveness/idleness, growth/stasis, and failure/success.

> There is no such thing as time or June
> only what you're born into—
> only waiting for the rain, for the flood
> — Natalie Diaz, *Postcolonial Love Poem*[1]

INTRODUCTION

WAITING HAS BEEN A CENTRAL CONCERN in many Anglophone African literary works over the past decades. Some books stress the centrality of waiting by including it in their titles, e.g., Martin Egblewogbe's *The Waiting* (2020), Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War* (2007), Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2004), David Omowale's *A Season of Waiting* (2002), Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*

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[1] Natalie Diaz, "I, Minotaur," in *Postcolonial Love Poem* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2020), 60.

(2000), and, earlier, Niyi Osudare's poetry collection *Waiting Laughters* (1990) and J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). Many other works thematically address waiting. For instance, Damon Galgut's *The Promise* (2021), recipient of the 2021 Booker prize, is structured around a promise waiting to be fulfilled; and seminal bildungsromans like NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) (with its two sequels) follow youths in a state of "waithood," or "waiting for adulthood," where the young protagonists attempt to make a better life for themselves, yet are kept dependent on their families or forced to take up informal employment due to structures of oppression.[2]

These novels speak to a growing recognition of the centrality of politically sanctioned forms of waiting on the African continent, which are the result of state mechanisms that, intentionally or not, are characterized by control, inefficiency, and, very often, a disregard of personal freedom and rights. Anthropologist Alexandra Antohin notes how both colonialism and neocolonial structures have created a "bureaucratization of time," where control over people's time—and specifically waiting—was "used as a weapon of power, keeping people in legal standstill for years that often caused such immense frustrations as to cause surrender."[3] Andreas Göttlich terms this kind of power exercising the "social imposition" of time: "what is imposed in the case of waiting is an alien time structure: the waiter is forced to act in accordance with temporal requirements that are not his own."[4] This is all the more salient in cases where foreign modes of governance entailed a radically different temporal sensibility from the one prevalent in local societies.

As sociologists and anthropologists have noted in recent years, politically inflected forms of waiting are thus prevalent on the African continent and include a lifelong (and often communal) striving for a better future, manifested in unfulfilled "dreams of stability and formal employment";[5] "waithood" in the sense of delayed transitions from one stage of life to the next, such as the inability to get married due to lack of funds;[6] "punctuated" waiting for a specific event to finish (e.g., a war) or to take place (e.g., a visa to be granted);[7] and the micro scale of spending hours and days in seeming idleness, without any immediate anticipation. At the same time, scholars increasingly draw attention to waiting as more than a state of deferred or failed action: instead, they see waiting *also* as a space that enables meaningful activities, which cannot always be measured in terms of formal employment or productivity.

Consequently, scholarship that emphasizes the generative aspects of waiting—that is, what people actually *do* while they wait—is premised on finding its useful byproducts: "It is true that youth wait, but as they wait they talk, play, plan, scheme, hustle and work. In the process of waiting, African youth build relationships that provide a foundation for transforming their lives."[8]

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2 Abiodun Olofinsao, "The Aesthetics of 'Waithood' in Selected African Novels," *Humanus Discourse* 2, no. 2 (2021): 1–22.

3 Alexandra Antohin, "Thinking with the Tabot: The Material Dimensions of Waiting in Addis Ababa," *Material Religions* (blog), June 17, 2015, https://materialreligions.blogspot.com/2015/06/thinking-with-tabot-material-dimensions.html.

4 Andreas Göttlich, "To Wait and Let Wait: Reflections on the Social Imposition of Time," *Schutzian Research* 7 (2015): 60.

5 Michael Stasik, Valerie Hänsch, and Daniel Mains, "Temporalities of Waiting in Africa," *Critical African Studies* 12, no. 1 (2020): 4.

6 Alcinda Honwana, *The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change and Politics in Africa* (Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press, 2012).

7 Jane I. Guyer, "Prophecy and the Near Future: Thoughts on Macroeconomic, Evangelical, and Punctuated Time," *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 3 (2007): 409–21.

8 Stasik, Hänsch, and Mains, "Temporalities of Waiting in Africa," 2.

While this article builds on the recognition that waiting entails a great deal of activity, my aim is to deepen the notion of idleness as an important aspect of waiting.

In this regard, I follow Emrah Karakilic's claim that idleness can function as an ethical-political action that counters capitalism's logic of productivity.[9] Karakilic, building on Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, focuses on how idleness fosters a *meditative life* that foregrounds *subject* production over *object* production. As such, Karakilic's approach takes idleness as an individual practice. I wish to shift this paradigm to foreground idleness as a collective action triggered by waiting, in which storytelling is the key ingredient: simply put, when waiting together, communities make stories, and stories make communities, and both, together, foster a *communal meditative life* or, more accurately, a communal narrative life. Waiting thus becomes a collective manifestation of idleness and its potential to resist capitalist notions of productivity based on the "standardization and precise measurement of production."[10]

My hypothesis is that waiting is not merely a time when social relationships are built, but a sensibility in which communal processes of meaning-making are equally important as, or even more important than, measurable productivity. Therefore, waiting-as-activity and waiting-as-idleness are not mutually exclusive. The act of waiting certainly has important communal functions, specifically in times of upheaval; yet more than that, waiting's inherent sensibility of deferred (or denied) productivity holds a more nuanced, and temporally bound, rejection of the binaries of productivity/idleness, growth/stasis, and failure/success—as long as it maintains it communal aspect of waiting together. It is the latter that I wish to explore through the medium of literature, which offers specific insights into conceptions of waiting through its self-reflexive engagement with both community and storytelling.

I engage in close readings from two novels: Chinua Achebe's 1958 *Things Fall Apart*,[11] a foundational text in modern African literature, and Goretti Kyomuhendo's 2007 *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War* (hereafter referred to as *Waiting*),[12] an influential East African novel. Notably, Kyomuhendo—like Achebe—has become an important literary activist, largely through her role in the Ugandan women writers' collective FEMRITE and the African Writers Trust. Moreover, like *Things Fall Apart*, *Waiting* has gained critical attention for its representation of postcolonial history and trauma in a manner that is entirely focused on the African continent, combining local context with international reach. In Jeanne-Marie Jackson's words, *Waiting* captures a "common direction for the African novel in the postnational period: that of localized historical representation that, to one end or another, is its own reward."[13] Both novels are also works of historical realism. Thus, by juxtaposing them, my aim is to note how the theme of waiting is negotiated through specific narrative dynamics that are tied to the collective dimensions of narrativization.

The two key concepts that I use to engage waiting are *community* and *temporality,* which—as I will show—bring content and form together. In focusing on communality and temporality as two constitutive aspects of waiting, my research is informed by an episode in Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina's memoir *One Day I Will Write About This Place* (2011). Wainaina speaks

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9 Emrah Karakilic, "Idleness as a Micro Ethico-Political Action," *Organization* 28, no. 6 (2021): 1049–58.

10 Mathias Nilges, *How to Read a Moment: The American Novel and the Crisis of the Present* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2021): 45.

11 Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2002 [1958]).

12 Goretti Kyomuhendo, *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2007).

13 Jeanne-Marie Jackson, *The African Novel of Ideas: Philosophy and Individualism in the Age of Global Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

of "human measurement of time" in a pivotal scene where he realizes his destiny of becoming a writer while dancing in a crowd:

> My body finds a rhythmic map quickly, and I build my movements to fluency before letting my limbs improvise. Everybody is doing this, a solo thing—yet we are all bound, like one creature, in one rhythm…. We forget, don't we, that there is another time, apart from the hour and the minute? *A human measurement*, ticking away in our bodies, behind our facades.[14] (my emphasis)

Through the act of dancing, Wainaina describes a temporality that is rhythmic and communal, foregrounded by the repeated use of the words "we" and "body." He thereby challenges the objectivity of metric time ("the hour and the minute"), suggesting in its stead an embodied sense of time that is grounded in the community. In somewhat anthropomorphic terms, Wainaina's "human measurement of time" thus resists the temporal regimes instilled by capitalism, which quantify and objectify time. In Mathias Nilges's words, "Under capitalism, time is no longer primarily a matter of the duality of self and world, of the subjective experience of time and of natural or 'cosmic' time."[15] It is precisely such a subjective temporality that Wainaina highlights in the passage. Importantly, Wainaina's human measurement of time ties temporality to both community and storytelling, as the episode builds up to Wainaina's realization that he himself is a writer. As such, the author's process of self-realization also undercuts the dichotomy of failure and success, as his growing sense of frustration with his own life leads him to recognize his vocation as storyteller.[16]

Wainaina's sense of failure culminates in the years he spends in South Africa, reading books and hanging out with friends while failing to complete his university degree. But in this moment of epiphany, which takes place shortly after Wainaina returns to his native Kenya, he recognizes the process of waiting that his seeming failure has generated:

> All this time, without writing one word, I have been reading novels, and watching people, and writing what I see in my head, finding shapes for reality by making them into a book…. *Maybe I am not just failing* … Maybe I can help people see the patterns they take for granted.[17] (my emphasis)

The key phrases here are "all this time" and "maybe I am not just failing," through which Wainaina can see what he was actually *doing* in his years of seeming idleness: making stories. Not coincidentally, it is the act of dancing that brings on this realization. By connecting to a human measurement of time, in which communality, rhythm, and storytelling replace metric time and its emphasis on measurable achievements, Wainaina is able to see beyond the binaries of failure/success, linear progress/recursive time, and idleness/productivity.

Retrospectively, the years in South Africa thus emerge as a period of waiting, as if Wainaina was collecting stories that were waiting to be told—and that needed this period of suspended activity in order to be "shaped" into a book. I use the term "waiting" here to note the collective

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14 Binyavanga Wainaina, *One Day I Will Write About This Place* (Minneapolis MN: Graywolf, 2011), 140–41.

15 Nilges, *How to Read a Moment.*

16 Ruth S. Wenske, "Teacherly Aesthetics: Literature and Literacy in Binyavanga Wainaina's Works," *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 58, no. 1 (2021): 61–75.

17 Wainaina, *One Day,* 143, 141.

dimensions of Wainaina's seeming idleness, since both his years in South Africa and his return to Kenya are very much shaped by communal relations. Whether with friends, family, or colleagues, Wainaina is always interacting, "watching people" in his own terms, in a process that shapes his sense of both anticipation and failure. More than seeing waiting as a timespan in which certain "other" things are being done, Wainaina's temporality of waiting thus takes idleness as an important element in and of itself—as long as it is scaffolded by communal structures. Put differently, the payoff of waiting—and waiting within a community—was the book itself, *One Day I Will Write About This Place* (and, indeed, Wainaina's successful career as mentor and activist).

To understand the relationship between waiting, community, and time, I draw insights about waiting both from the social sciences, as noted above, and from literary research. Importantly, I aim to bring together two previous approaches to waiting in African literary scholarship. One is socio-thematic readings, such as Abiodun Olofinsao's exploration of the representation of waithood in three novels, and Ashleigh Harris's analysis of the protagonist's waiting in Chris Abani's *The Virgin of Flames*.[18] The other is a material approach that looks at the way waiting, on an extratextual level, *registers* in the way authors/readers create/consume texts while waiting. This approach emphasizes waiting's generative aspects, even (or particularly) when waiting is the result of sociopolitical structures of inequality. For instance, Ato Quayson discusses the phenomenology of waiting as the "free time" characteristic of the informal economy in Accra, Ghana.[19] In his reading, free time registers in unique discourse ecologies—texts in the public space—which partake in shaping the temporalities of urban life.

Notably, these readings focus almost entirely on urban contexts, where the phenomenology of waiting is primarily tied to the "long histories of uneven development and the patterning of extreme poverty, [which] has taken sophisticated forms in African cities."[20] Nevertheless, Harris and Quayson both emphasize how waiting takes on both materiality and meaning through social processes. That is, unlike the common conception of urbanization as a process of individuation, African cities remain fundamentally shaped by communal relations, which in turn shape their modes of waiting. This, again, is in dialogue with sociological research on urban modes of waiting, such as AbdouMaliq M. Simone's influential framework of "People as Infrastructure," which foregrounded the centrality of social networks to the functioning of African cities.[21] Like current research on waiting and idleness, Simone traced what people actually *do*, beyond (or at the same time as) the explicit or formal activities that are visible from the vantage point of capital-driven modernization, highlighting the social dimension of this *doing*. I am tempted here to paraphrase Simone's title to call my reading of waiting "people over productivity," in recognition of the centrality of communities, and communality, in providing a counterbalance to the overwhelming

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18 Olofinsao, "The Aesthetics of 'Waithood'"; Ashleigh Harris, *Afropolitanism and the Novel: De-realizing Africa* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 74.

19 Ato Quayson, *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 244.

20 Harris, *Afropolitanism and the Novel*, 74.

21 AbdouMaliq Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg," *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (2004): 407–29. Simone's article traces the "economic collaboration among residents seemingly marginalised and immiserated by urban life" (407), using the example of inner-city Johannesburg to describe how networks of people function as infrastructures. By highlighting the structural-social dimensions of informal practices, Simone counters the conception of informal practices as lawless chaos.

dominance of capitalist notions (and rhetoric) of productivity that are encapsulated in notions of idleness and waiting.

It is this focus on communality that I take as the starting point for my investigation. Even though my own focus is on novels set in rural surroundings, my argument—like Quayson's—is that the specific forms of waiting observed in African societies also *register* in narrative forms in unique ways. This is not simply because literature reflects social structures—an obvious yet reductive truism in the case of African literature[22]—but because complex social constructions, such as temporality, become encoded in specific narrative forms.

In dialogue with Nilges's recent call to think more carefully about the way conceptions of temporality register in narrative form, I take literature as a prime site for exploring how phenomenologies of waiting encapsulate societies' relationship with time.[23] In Nilges's words, "thinking and knowing time requires narrative. Time is inseparable from the stories we tell about it and through it … the novel seeks to give us ways of knowing and speaking to the new forms of time that govern our lives."[24] The act of waiting is not only defined primarily through the passing of time, but—as I will show—is inflected by "the stories we tell about it," to use Nilges's words—and, let me add, the stories we tell *through* it. Indeed, Nilges's use of the word "we" suggests that a collective identity is at stake in any investigation of time. As Ayelet Ben-Yishai notes, narrativization "is a cultural practice through which a commonality—society—converges around what it considers real and, in so doing, constitutes itself."[25] That is, "we" is not a delineated identity, but rather an open-ended one, created through storytelling; as such, it requires not only community, but also time.

Therefore, my focus is on novels where waiting is a theme but also where extratextual acts of waiting have influenced the narrative form. I thus extend Quayson and Harris's argument to suggest African phenomenologies of waiting are the result not merely of uneven modernization, but of an interplay between community making, temporality, and storytelling, which straddles the gap between the urban and the rural. By noting how characters' structures of waiting are echoed in narrative form, I explore how waiting reflects—and, importantly, also creates—meditative communal practices, which are grounded in specific African epistemologies of storytelling.

WAITING IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

I start my close readings with Chinua Achebe's seminal novel *Things Fall Apart,* which outlines the basic tenets of waithood (community, temporality, and storytelling). While Achebe's influence on the African canon—as well as world literature more broadly—cannot be overstated, my point is not that all consequent works are influenced by him, but rather that modes of waiting speak to fundamental questions that have engaged writers of modern African literature from its inception to the present.

The two novels I discuss, *Things Fall Apart* and *Waiting,* are both set in rural communities in times of political upheaval, albeit in divergent contexts. Achebe's novel is set in Nigeria, West

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22 See Ato Quayson, *Calibrations: Reading for the Social* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Madhu Krishnan, *Contingent Canons: African Literature and the Politics of Location* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

23 Nilges, *How to Read a Moment.*

24 Ibid., 14.

25 Ayelet Ben-Yishai, "Walking the Boundaries in Victorian Fiction: Realism as Communal Epistemology," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 37, no. 3 (2015): 197–214.

Africa, at the turn of the twentieth century, when British colonialism becomes a felt presence. Kyomuhendo's novel is set in Uganda, in East Africa, during the guerrilla war of the late 1970s that ousted President Idi Amin. The two novels' temporal timeframes likewise differ, mirroring the intensity of the conflict described: *Waiting* is limited to several short months of intensive warfare, while *Things Fall Apart* moves along slowly through years of the protagonists' lives, as if to highlight the slow violence of colonialism. Yet, in both novels, the characters experience multiple temporalities of waiting that are equally important to their fictional lives and to the development of the plot, as they mirror the conflicts they are caught up in.

Waiting, as an element that is simultaneously structural and thematic, is central in *Things Fall Apart*. The novel has myriad acts of waiting that move between the ongoing waiting that is part of cyclical time and the "punctuated" event-specific waiting of linear time. Cyclical waiting in the novel is primarily tied to its agrarian setting, as the community rests from its hard work while waiting for the next rains in the season between harvest and planting.

This waiting entails social activities and lighter communal tasks and is largely portrayed positively. Yet the protagonist Okonkwo has no patience for it: "He was always uncomfortable sitting around for days waiting for a feast or getting over it. He would be very much happier working on his farm."[26] Okonkwo's inability to participate in the clan's cycles of waiting encapsulates his tragic personal flaws that lead to his untimely death. If, as Quayson claims, Okonkwo was "defeated by certainty,"[27] a central part of this defeat is Okonkwo's rejection of the uncertainty of cyclical time and its generative periods of waiting.

This is exacerbated when Okonkwo is sent into seven years in exile—the first interruption to the cyclical rhythm of life—a time he spends anxiously anticipating his return home. As Will Harris notes, Okonkwo fails the moral test of his waiting-in-exile by refusing to listen to the lessons that his uncle tries to teach him.[28] When his uncle Uchendo attempts to instruct Okonkwo on how to handle his exile, the old man describes the value of waiting: "If you allow sorrow to weigh you down and kill you, they will all die in exile…. These are now your kinsmen."[29] In other words, Okonkwo needs to recognize that he is "not just failing," because exile has given him a new community. Rejecting his uncle's advice, Okonkwo's destructive certainty—or rejection of uncertainty—echoes his impatient waiting for the dry season to end and exacerbates his sense of disconnect from the community, both at home and in exile.

The shift from cyclical routines to linear time is further stressed by the arrival of the British, which causes a seemingly irreversible break in the clan's way of life through its twin conceptions of civilization and progress, scaffolded by capitalist notions of linear time and measurable productivity. These temporal changes include, for instance, the shift from sustenance agriculture to money-based trade and from lunar Igbo cosmology to metric time and the Christian calendar. Describing such changes, Giordano Nanni argues that European imperialism was "premised on the exclusion of alternative technologies and rituals of time,"[30] so that temporal controls, as well as ideological conceptions of time, were key to foreign dominance. Metric time ("clock time")

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26 Achebe, *Things,* 26.

27 Ato Quayson, "Self-Writing and Existential Alienation in African Literature: Achebe's *Arrow of God," Research in African Literatures* 42, no. 2 (2011): 36.

28 Will Harris, "Okonkwo in Exile: Lessons from the Underworld," *CLA Journal* 47, no. 1 (2003): 103.

29 Achebe, *Things,* 108.

30 Giordano Nanni, *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 145.

was but one of the many forms of colonial temporal impositions[31] which had far-reaching mate-rial effects as well as a strong ideological traction: "By employing European standards to evalu-ate African time-reckoning, calendrical and forecasting technology, the African mind could be portrayed as inferior."[32] While the temporal dimensions of colonialism are the theme of Achebe's second novel, *Arrow of God, Things Fall Apart* addresses questions of temporality more subtly through its negotiation of cyclical versus linear waiting as two temporal modes that are grounded in the community—and the way it practices its collectivity.

Ostensibly, in the novel, European ideas of linear progress overtake the rhythmic and com-munal structures of Igbo life. Yet the two kinds of waiting in *Things Fall Apart* show how linear and cyclical waiting—and time—are complementary. For Okonkwo's inability to wait and to tackle uncertainty manifest both in his reluctance to participate in the clan's seasonal periods of waiting and in his despair with his punctuated waithood in exile (as, for instance, Okonkwo cannot marry off his daughters while in exile or take further clan titles).

By contrast, Okonkwo's clansmen successfully wait—both for the rains to come and for the British to leave—showing, as sociologists of waiting have argued, that "practicing patience and perseverance is one way by which people in Africa engage with politically imposed forms of waiting ... [and] a form of resistance to power; for example, by waiting until domination fades or disappears."[33] As scholars such as Syed Hussein Alatas, Mike Donaldson, and James C. Scott have argued, one way of resisting colonial dominance was indeed to reject foreign temporalities.[34] Specifically, notions of productivity that were temporally bound—such as arriving for work on time, working fast, or separating social activity from labor—were often purposely ignored as a way of rejecting imperial control: "It was a form of strike, secret, collective, and steady. That was their only means of resistance; indeed it was a camouflaged resistance at that."[35] In *Things Fall Apart*, the focus is not so much on productivity in the context of labor but, rather, on suspend-ing any overt resistance against the British. Nevertheless, the clan's opposition to colonialism manifests in their maintenance of their indigenous conceptions to cyclical and linear time and, thus, their ability to suspend action and embrace uncertainty when faced with the unprecedented arrival of the British.

Indeed, waiting proves to be the crucial difference between Okonkwo and his clan, cul-minating at the book's ending when Okonkwo kills a court messenger during a clan gathering. Okonkwo then realizes the contrast between his desire to take immediate action against the British and the clan's seeming indifference: "He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew

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31 As Nanni notes, forms of temporal colonialism also included the calendar, Christian holidays, the work/leisure distinction, formal schooling, permanent settlement of nomadic tribes, Western agricultural and legal practices, etc. Against European modes of time reckoning, Nanni argues that local customs were conceived as bad timekeeping, since "colonial timetables, rituals, clocks and bells always remained prone to their observers' tardiness, sluggishness, dissent, defiance, resistance and procrastinations (4)."

32 Nanni, *Colonisation,* 125.

33 Stasik, Hänsch, and Mains, "Temporalities of Waiting in Africa," 5.

34 Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1977); Mike Donaldson, "The End of Time? Aboriginal Temporality and the British Invasion of Australia," *Time and Society* 5, no. 2 (1996): 189; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 14.

35 Alatas, *Myth*, 131. As Alatas notes, idleness, tardiness, and a lack of productivity—concepts often associated with waiting—were negatively associated with indigenous temporalities through the "myth of the lazy native," yet they were in fact modes of resistance.

because they had let the other messengers escape." [36] But what Okonkwo interprets as inaction is, in effect, a form of waiting, as the clan's reaction to Okonkwo's attack shows:

> In that brief moment the world seemed to stand still, waiting. There was utter silence. The men of Umuofia were merged into the mute backcloth of trees and giant creepers, waiting. [37]

More than inaction, waiting in the quote above entails vigilance and silence while acting together as a community, emphasized by the repeated word "waiting." Equally important, waiting is described in terms that equate people with nature: the men of Umuofia "merge" into trees and creepers to forge one interlinked collective, signaling not merely the men's stasis but also their rhythmic synchrony with living things. Much like Wainaina's "human measurement of time," the act of waiting here is premised on the physical proximity of people to one another and to nature; it is both a synchronic ("brief moment") and diachronic ("waiting") togetherness. As such, the juxtaposition of men and trees, which is a recurring simile in Igbo folklore, emphasizes how the cyclical nature of growth relies on waiting: people, like trees, may grow while seemingly idle.

If, as Nilges claims, modern temporality "becomes an abstract measure of capitalist relations, and this conception of time overwrites the temporality of natural rhythms and subjective experience," [38] here we have an Igbo temporality premised on the subjective enmeshment, to borrow Timothy Morton's term, [39] of the community in nature's rhythms. Of course, it would be anachronistic to claim that Okonkwo's rejection of waiting was inflected by capitalism or its notions of productivity. Instead, we may think of his rejection of rhythmical, slow, and communal modes of waiting as foreshadowing his inability to tackle the colonizers' regimes of progress. In other words, it is not that linear waiting is antithetical to cyclical waiting but, rather, that the two depend on each other.

My claim that the community's waiting in *Things Fall Apart* functions, and succeeds, as a form of resistance to the British may seem unsupported by the text, as the plot culminates with Okonkwo's suicide. Yet the novel's ending suggests otherwise when, in a metafictional paragraph, the narrative voice shifts to the British district commissioner, who imagines how he will write about Okonkwo's death: "The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him [Okonkwo]. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate." [40] As Simon Gikandi notes, this is an ironic reversal, since "Achebe—the African writer who has appropriated a Western narrative practice—writes the colonizer's words and hence commemorates an African culture which the colonizer thought he had written out of existence." [41] By drawing the real author into the story, the reader is allowed a moment to reflect on the materiality of the novel itself: we see that Igbo traditions *did* survive and are now being told from the point of view of the Igbo themselves; that the strategy of waiting did, in fact, yield results; and that Igbo history and cosmology are constantly evolving.

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[36] Achebe, *Things,* 146.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Nilges, *How to Read a Moment,* 45.

[39] Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

[40] Morton, *Hyperobjects;* Achebe, *Things,* 148.

[41] Simon Gikandi, "*Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction* (London: James Currey, 1991), 50.

To conclude this part, the metafictional sensibility with which *Things Fall Apart* ends is important because it corresponds to the waiting in the novel, demonstrating how the community's perseverance on the plot level relates to the novel's own historical trajectory and its written form. By self-reflexively asking who gets to *write* history, *Things Fall Apart* draws attention to the (extratextual) waiting that enabled it. As Sarah Nuttall writes, stories "are like seeds that can lie dormant for a long time," having a capacity for "metaphorical dormancy, for remaining alive (with new meaning) while apparently dead."[42] This dormancy consists of the roughly fifty years that separate the events described (the turn of the twentieth century) and the novel's publication (1958). The way stories "wait" to be told—especially in their transition from being *told* to being *written*—is thus another aspect of the temporal cycles of waiting through which communities make sense of, and work against, histories of oppression.

Thus, much as the introduction of written literature into oral societies has commodified stories (that is, printed books are commodities in ways that oral stories are not), I would suggest that literacy has likewise quantified time: the written form of stories creates a heightened attention to the temporal suspension entailed in writing stories down and to the potency of this suspension. The next section traces the function of metafiction in more detail by foregrounding storytelling as a *communal and temporal* practice, in which idleness functions as a space for the community to constitute itself and thus survive external calamities.

WAITING IN GORETTI KYOMUHENDO'S *WAITING*

Goretti Kyomuhendo's novel *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War* follows a small community in Hoima, northwestern Uganda, as they wait for the 1979 war to end. As noted in the novel's epilogue, Kyomuhendo herself is from Hoima and lived there during Amin's regime.[43] Consequently, as in *Things Fall Apart,* the temporal distance between the book's publication (2007) and the time of the novel's setting (1979) is evidence of the survival of the communities that went through the war and their agential role in telling their side of the story, albeit decades after the war's end. If such extratextual hindsight demonstrates how stories "wait" to be told, the novel itself also thematizes the temporalities of various kinds of narrativization practices, especially in the tension (and time) between oral and written narratives. In other words, waiting—as the timespan between events unfolding and being turned into stories—is a fundamental aspect of the shaping of communal history, and this, I argue, is key to the community's ability to maintain its collective integrity.

As its name suggests, the novel explicitly interrogates the communal function of waiting. The story is told from the point of view of thirteen-year-old Alinda, who spends the period of insurgency with her family and a few neighbors who join together to form a mutually supportive collective. Their purpose is, literally, collaborative waiting: for instance, Alinda's brother sits in a tree from morning until evening to scout for approaching soldiers while the community members leave their homes at night to sleep together in the bush, where they are not as likely to be discovered.

This waiting is carved up between fear and anticipation. The villagers live in fear of Amin's marauding soldiers, who are retreating to the north, while also anticipating the arrival of the Liberators—Ugandan exiles and the Tanzanian army—who are expected to win the war. This

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42 Sarah Nuttall, "Pluvial Time/Wet Form," *New Literary History* 51, no. 2 (2020): 470.

43 Kyomuhendo, *Waiting,* 113.

creates an ongoing state of suspended life, where adults do not work and children do not go to school, and even daily tasks are neglected due to the uncertain future: "none of us has the will to keep our yards clean when we don't know if we will survive."[44] Scholars have consequently read the novel's engagement with waiting as an interrogation of war, post-independence violence, and trauma; in Nick Mdika Tembo's words, "Kyomuhendo utilises waiting as a narrational trope in a clear attempt to come to grips with the lingering traumatic memories that engulf the local inhabitants of Hoima."[45] Noting the interrelationship between waiting and war, my argument is nonetheless that waiting in the novel is *not* primarily a reflection of trauma or powerlessness, nor merely a temporal space that forges new social relations,[46] but rather an expression of a potent communal agency in the face of systematic oppression. Here I follow Lynda Gichanda Spencer's claim that "Kyomuhendo's depiction of resilient female characters reveals that … it is possible for communities to transform themselves into spaces that accommodate and support diverse identities,"[47] suggesting that the social transformations that happen during wartime, including the renegotiation of gender roles, need to be read as an agential communal practice.

As I will explain, in *Waiting* this agency manifests in the correspondence between the physical acts of waiting that the characters undergo on the plot level and the thematization of waiting through embedded stories that compare the community's ordeals to cycles of waiting in nature. In a nutshell, I argue that the two kinds of waiting that I described in *Things Fall Apart*—ongoing cyclical waiting and punctuated linear waiting—are evident in the tension between *Waiting*'s linear structure, which anticipates a resolution in the form of a (happy) ending, and the many embedded stories within it that reject any clear-cut resolution in their indeterminacy and animate descriptions of nature. Moreover, these embedded stories foreground a "human measurement of time," which offers an alternative to productive-driven capitalist temporalities through communal structures that create and recreate themselves through storytelling practices. It is noteworthy that, unlike in *Things Fall Apart*, the significant acts of waiting-as-storytelling in *Waiting* are all performed by women, as is the writing of the novel itself. While I do not go into the gendered aspects of waiting, it is evident that women are central in the triad of community-nature-storytelling.

Central in this regard is the ambiguity that riddles the novel, which echoes the fundamental uncertainty that drives the plot: Which soldiers will arrive in the village, and what will they do once they get there? Exacerbating this unknowable future is a recurring questioning regarding the distinction between good and bad, for instance around the rival soldiers and Liberators: "People had vacated the city in fear of both the advancing Liberators and the fleeing soldiers. No one knew what each group was likely to do to the civilians."[48] On a smaller scale, the individual characters also oscillate between good and bad, which runs parallel to the distinction between

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44 Ibid., 66.

45 Nick Mdika Tembo, "Reading the Trauma of Internally Displaced Identities in Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting*," *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2–4 (2017): 91.

46 Both Tembo and Spencer have noted the generative aspects of the community's waiting, which is mostly evident in the relationships that the characters build during the war: both father and Nyinabarongo, as well as Uncle Kembo and the Lendu woman, enter into familiar partnerships, while Bahati the liberator is adopted into Alinda's family. Spencer further shows how these relationships allow the women in the novel to step out of their traditional (gender) roles during wartime and take on agential positions in the community.

47 Lynda Gichanda Spencer, "Visible Wars and Invisible Women: Interrogating Women's Roles During Wartime in Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War*," *English in Africa* 42, no. 2 (2015): 109-28.

48 Kyomuhendo, *Waiting*, 11.

insider and outsider: "the old man" from another village becomes part of Alinda's collective in spite of his past as a brutal murderer, and the foreign Lendu woman, who is treated with utmost suspicion, also joins the collective and is finally allowed to act as their healer. Both the characters and the community thus operate within an ongoing tension between good and bad, prejudice and tolerance, in a manner that undercuts dichotomies.

On a narratological level, this ambiguity is reflected in the fact that many characters are not named but only called by their communal roles, e.g., mother, father, old man, and the Lendu woman. As scholars have noted, the indeterminate naming in the novel signals "the large-scale movements of refugees, the permeability of borders, and the intensity of conflict across the Great Lakes region,"[49] which destabilizes the characters' identities. Further, the sense of precariousness is enhanced by the child-narrator's perspective that facilitates "fluidity in the narrative; the space is open for one to continue re/thinking issues of transformation—individual, communal, and national."[50] Through these various levels of indeterminacy, scholars argue that the narrative reflects the state of political uncertainty—"post-colonial chaos" in Emilia Ilieva and Lennox Odiemo-Munara's terms[51]—that constitutes the novel's immediate engagement with waiting.[52]

Yet I believe that the novel's multilayered open-endedness is *not* synonymous with an utter lack of predictability and coherence. Instead, I read this ambiguity in the context of waiting, arguing that the rejection of clear-cut identities (and the binary oppositions that define them, such as foreign/local, good/bad) allows for the seeming chaos to re-emerge as a "human measurement of time." Put differently, by not being pinned down by their names, the characters are defined by communal relationships that are open to *change*; and this change, even when exacerbated by political uncertainty, is indicative not merely of chaos, but of flexibility, of future-oriented hope that the community generates through their collective process of narrativizing the events around them.

The temporality of change is foregrounded when the characters themselves conceptualize the passing of time, offering their own metafictional reflections on waiting. Through this, to use the formulation of anthropologist Morten Nielsen, the novel engages in "internal doubling" in its oscillation between a linear plot and frequent interruptions of smaller embedded stories (I call these micro-stories), which, I argue, show how the future might exist "both as failure on a linear scale while also serving to open up the present in potentially productive ways."[53] Echoing Wainaina's recognition that he is "not just failing" precisely at the moment when he shifts to a collective temporality, the novel rejects the dichotomy of failure and success by questioning the interrelated categories of good/bad and insider/outsider in the community—but also, by self-reflexively engaging with the construction of community through storytelling.

The links between community, waiting, and storytelling are evident in the novel's first paragraph, in which the family is preparing for their nightly ritual of leaving home to sleep in the bush.

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49 Marie Kruger, *Women's Literature in Kenya and Uganda: The Trouble with Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 130.

50 Emilia Ilieva and Lennox Odiemo-Munara, "Negotiating Dislocated Identities in the Space of Post-Colonial Chaos: Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting,"* in *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore*, ed. Jennifer Wawrzinek and J. K. S. Makokha (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 189.

51 Ilieva and Odiemo-Munara, "Negotiating," 183.

52 Tembo, "Reading," 98–99.

53 Morten Nielsen, "A Wedge of Time: Futures in the Present and Presents Without Futures in Maputo, Mozambique," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 20 (2014): 178.

Tendo, Alinda's brother, is sitting in a mango tree scouting for soldiers while the family has dinner underneath when the following micro-event takes place:

> [The tree's] leaves trembled despite the lack of wind, and one wafted slowly down from the branch and fell before us.
>
> "It's announcing a visitor," Kaaka said, picking up the leaf and turning it slowly over in her hand. "A visitor who comes from far away, and has no intention of returning—like the leaf."[54]

Ostensibly, the falling leaf is a natural occurrence, yet the fact that the leaves tremble though there is no wind suggests that it is also a meaningful event. Kaaka, an old lady who has lived with Alinda's family for years, is quick to recognize its importance, demonstrating how nature, and those people attuned it its rhythms, create narratives—and thus coherence—in events that seem random.

Kaaka's story emphasizes that the community's waiting is both linear (waiting for the visitor's arrival) but also cyclical, as visitors are expected to leave in a coming-and-going sequence. As such, the novel itself seems to do exactly what Kaaka's story is doing, only on a broader scale: it juxtaposes linear and cyclical waiting as a means for making sense of, and dealing with, extreme upheaval. Put differently, the novel, like Kaaka's embedded micro-story, uses its linear narrative to forge the progression of events into cyclical patterns, or rhythms, of living. To paraphrase what Nilges argues about time, "thinking and knowing [waiting] requires narrative. [Waiting] is inseparable from the stories we tell about it and through it."[55] In this process, Kaaka's micro-story, and by proxy the novel, takes *storytelling* and *nature* as the two intertwined elements that scaffold the rhythms—and the waiting—that allow the community to resist the "post-colonial chaos" around it.

But the visitor's story is ambiguous, as it is unclear whether the visitor is good or bad. While a visitor has positive connotations, their refusal to leave is ominous. Through this indeterminacy, the visitor might be a metaphor for one of several elements in the novel: Amin's soldiers, the war itself, the Liberators, or the character of Bahati.

Initially it may seem as though Amin's soldiers might be the expected visitor, since the family is primarily "waiting" for them. As the story unfolds, the soldiers attack and kill Kaaka and Alinda's mother. Consequently, even though the soldiers depart immediately, the aftermath of their violent presence lingers on, making them—or their attack—a visitor who will never leave.

On a more metaphoric level, the war itself might be seen as a visitor who refuses to leave, for, as Tembo notes, Uganda continued to experience political unrest for many years after Amin was overthrown. The waiting extends beyond the novel's timeframe in other ways: the fate of several characters—Alinda's brother Tendo and best friend Jungu—remains unresolved; and the last scene ends with the family standing at the crossroads of three roads.

As such, the seeming lack of resolution suggests, per Tembo, that "the novel anxiously debates whether the community's waiting is really over, and whether driving away one violent regime really signals a return to peace and freedom."[56] Yet this is only the case if the community's waiting is linear, much as the novel is, so that it calls for a finite resolution. I would instead suggest that its waiting provides a deep sense of cyclical time, where catastrophes and well-being

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54 Kyomuhendo, *Waiting,* 3.

55 Nilges, *How to Read a Moment,* 14.

56 Tembo, "Reading," 103.

have always coexisted, and where a rhythmic oscillation between bad and good is the basis of communal meaning-making practices.

The open-endedness is perhaps most evident in a third interpretation of Kaaka's story, as the Liberators also become a visitor who does not leave. Unlike Amin's soldiers, who come and go, the Liberators are welcomed like visitors, yet do not go back as expected:

> "I wish they would leave. Surely they've been here long enough!" Father said.
>
> "It's been three months now," the old man said, looking down at his stump.... "It seems they are waiting for some more soldiers to join them."[57]

Though the Liberators eventually leave, their lingering—*their* waiting—gives a sense that there is never a final resolution: difficulties and relief follow each other in quick succession, albeit on divergent scales.

The oscillation between tragedy and triumph culminates in Bahati's case, the Tanzanian liberator who stays in the village. Tragically, Bahati hides when the other Liberators leave in order to stay with his girlfriend Jungu, while Jungu—who does not realize Bahati is waiting for her—follows the Liberators. Though Jungu never returns, the heartbroken Bahati stays on with Alinda's family, replacing the brother who left.[58] He is, in effect, the visitor who has no intention of returning, but also the one visitor whose lingering is welcome.

The many possible interpretations of Kaaka's visitor-as-leaf story stress the sense of transience that permeates *Waiting*—as if everyone is at some point a visitor, moving between waiting and being waited for, between ups and downs, coming and going. Thus, I disagree with Tembo's arguments that "the villagers' wait is a fruitless one" or that the war renders the community "completely powerless and, therefore, any form of resistance is futile."[59] Instead, in my reading, waiting shows the communal integrity and successful resistance that characterize Alinda's family, which comes to final fruition in its ability to turn events into stories—as *Waiting* itself also does, several decades later.

Even though Kaaka's story does not "wait" to be told in the same way that novels do, her micro-story—like the leaf, and like the novel—is characterized by both irreversible forward movement and natural cycles—for while the leaf cannot return to the tree, its falling is part of the tree's seasonal growth. Likewise, while the novel progresses chronologically and moves from conflict to resolution, its cyclical sensibility is reflected in the triadic relationship between the community, nature, and storytelling. That is, the natural world is not only a static entity in the backdrop, but an agentive element in the lives of its characters, providing a steady rhythm against which the community recognizes—and narrativizes—how their life grows even when seemingly standing still, or "waiting."

The narrativizing qualities of nature are dramatized in the novel's many descriptions (micro-stories in my terms) of the environment. From the very beginning, Alinda describes the weather as an element that corresponds with the community's waiting:

> The sky was beginning to darken with gloomy gray clouds, swelling, racing, and dissolving into each other. The sun had hidden its face in fear of the angry clouds.... The clouds were moving at a more leisurely pace and seemed undecided whether to release their waters or not.[60]

57 Kyomuhendo, *Waiting,* 91–92.
58 Ibid., 98–101.
59 Tembo, "Reading," 98–99.
60 Kyomuhendo, *Waiting,* 5.

The animate depictions of the sun hiding its face and of the clouds purposely delaying convey what Harry Garuba has termed "animist materialism," connoting a prevalent practice in African literature of imbuing nonhuman elements with agentive subjectivity.[61] In the above quote, Alinda's description of the sun and clouds as "hidden" and "undecided" accords them "a physical, often animate material aspect"[62] that emphasizes how they—in spite of being weather elements—interact with people and, in this case, echo the community's waiting. While resembling anthropomorphism, the point is not that the clouds have subjectivity, but rather that they have materiality: for "even when discourses are based on mystification, they still possess *real effects* and, through the power of normalization, exert an influence on subjects and an impact on culture" (my emphasis).[63] In this case, the clouds' "real effect" (like that of the leaf in Kaaka's story) is to give the community a story, or an echo in nature, through which they can make sense of their own waiting: the rains will come and go, and so will the war.

Paradoxically, perhaps, I take such "animist materialism" as indicative of a human measurement of time—not so much because it depends on humans, but because it is premised on a kind of communality in which human and nonhuman collectives are intertwined and jointly premised on subjectivity. Among the many recent theories that reconceptualize the world as being "alive" by recognizing forms of nonhuman agency,[64] the work that most closely mirrors Garuba's idea of "animist materialism" is perhaps Amitav Ghosh's book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and The Unthinkable*.[65] Ghosh stretches nonhuman agency to greater length than Garuba by suggesting that elements such as mountains or rain might be thought of as having consciousness. Nevertheless, Ghosh, like Garuba, emphasizes that the agency of the natural world is most evident in traditions of storytelling, which allow nonhuman entities—exactly like human characters—to become narrative elements that propel the story forward.[66] Combined with Nilges's claim that the novel has the ability to narrativize conceptions of time and thereby make these accessible to thought,[67] the animist representation of weather in *Waiting* thus foregrounds a temporal logic that transcends the capitalist notions of linear time measured through productivity.

The temporal logic I am trying to get at here is not one that lends itself to easy explanations, since it really does depend on a communally generated kind of embodied knowledge that an academic article cannot replicate. Put differently, a "human measurement of time," in which "human" connotes community, is, above all else, culturally specific, local. As Russell West-Pavlov notes, "both absolute time and capitalist production [have] detached temporal and productive structures from the traditional matrix of nature, *locality* and social networks" (my emphasis).[68]

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[61] Harry Garuba, "Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society," *Public Culture*, 15, no. 2 (2003): 261–85.

[62] Ibid., 274.

[63] Ibid., 268.

[64] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[65] Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016).

[66] Ibid., 80.

[67] Nilges, *How to Read a Moment,* 14.

[68] Russell West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 120.

It is this matrix that the novel's interrogation of waiting, through communal animist storytelling practices, seems to regain. What I earlier called "people over productivity" is, then, not just about *people*, but about communities; and communities, in turn, include not only humans, but nature as well, bound together by practices of narrativization that are recursive, rhizomatic, and open-ended rather than linear.

The centrality of natural events peaks in the novel's last part, when torrential rains and an earthquake destroy parts of the village. While somewhat of a dystopic ending,[69] the community makes sense of it through animist materialism:

> "All this rain!" Maya broke the silence. "What does it want? It's been raining ever since the Liberators left," she continued, twisting her mouth in disapproval.
> "And there's more to come," Nyinabarongo added.
> "More rain?" Maya groaned.
> "Well, all that shaking of Mother Earth's buttocks this morning is bound to earn her another beating from her husband, Heaven. He might think that she was trying to entice another lover with her big buttocks, and he's sure to send more of his messengers to beat her up," Nyinabarongo said seriously.
> Maya and I laughed together.[70]

The anthropomorphic sensibility of rain purposely wanting to "beat the earth" conveys, again, the agentive role—and material effects—of weather elements. It also continues Alinda's implicit juxtaposition of the community's and nature's cycles of waiting. For the clouds, which were "undecided" when the family's waiting was at its peak, release all their pent-up energy at the precise moment when the community's limbo of uncertainty finally seems to be over.

But more than the previous quote, the *narrative* dimension of this animist materialism is emphasized in Nyinabarongo's micro-story, when she turns Maya's question about "what the rain wants" into a fantastic children's tale. The children's reaction to the story is laughter, suggesting it to be mere jest. But later, the community interprets the weather-caused damage as reflecting (and influencing) their social structures in uncannily precise ways: the Lendu woman's and Nyinabarongo's houses are destroyed, prompting them to move in with Uncle Kembo and father, who have respectively become their partners during the war; the old man's house is not harmed though it was weaker that the others, hinting at his believed-to-be cursed position in society; and the Liberators' shelters are all washed away, signaling a new beginning: "'Well, now we have nothing left to remind us of that painful era,' Nyinabarongo said, sounding relieved."[71]

Nyinabarongo thus makes sense of the destruction much as she previously did of the rain and earthquake, showing how "animist subjectivity is constructed on a relationship between the object world and a self that is mediated by meaning."[72] That is, the micro-stories and similes through which the weather is imbued with agency reinforce the sense that nature and community interact in purposeful ways characterized by the uncanny, or mystification in Garuba's terms. Indeed, Nuttall uses Morton's idea of climate change as the uncanny to argue that rainfall, and specifically the way rain is represented in novels, generates "rather an eerie intimacy with

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69 Tembo, "Reading," 102.
70 Kyomuhendo, *Waiting,* 104.
71 Ibid., 107.
72 Garuba, "Explorations," 279.

other species. It is a feeling that everything is alive, has a kind of consciousness; it is a feeling of ecological awareness."[73] It is this uncanny, finally, that brings together the nexus of community, nature, and storytelling that I have traced in my readings: the uncanny *is* the "human measurement of time" that the community creates and recreates through its storytelling practices and which crucially depends on waiting.

Importantly, the community finds meaning in the weather-caused damage, unlike the man-inflicted tragedies of the war. This suggests that the violent aftermaths of nationalism are *not* part of the natural cycles of good and bad that come and go in succession but, rather, an unprecedented interruption, a catastrophic linear event much like the arrival of the British in Achebe's novel. Nevertheless, the community's ability to cope with the two kinds of calamities—natural disaster and man-made war—is interlinked, constructed through a process of waiting that builds on the triad of community, storytelling, and nature. This has three dimensions: 1. The *community* recognizes (even if unconsciously) parallels between their own waiting and the waiting that is part of *nature*'s rhythms. 2. This recognition is framed within micro-*stories*—including similes, anthropomorphism, and folk tales—characterized by animist materialism, which builds on the *natural* world's uncanny interactiveness with society. 3. Taken together, communal waiting and animist storytelling practices provide a sense of agency and meaning in the face of uncertainty and trauma, which I call a human measurement of time.

The community's narrativization of its own experiences through the uncanny materiality of the weather thus functions as a collective meditative practice. On an extratextual level, the novel itself takes part in this process of meaning-making through waiting: like its embedded micro-tales, *Waiting* makes sense of the war by telling the story of a community, by animating rainfall to foreground the community's temporal rhythms, and by taking time (twenty-eight years, from 1979 to 2007) to be told.

Thus, while following a linear structure and a realist framework, the sense of time generated by the novel's ways of waiting is both non-linear and non-realist: through slippages between the embedded stories and the novel itself, we get a sense of how communally sanctioned narratives keep time in flux, changing both our understanding of the past and our imaginations of the future in ways that have concrete material effects in the present. Likewise, the uncanniness of rainfall in the novel seems to spill over from the diegetic realm into our awareness, as readers, of the world around us—and, perhaps most noticeably, rain, as Nuttall also emphasizes in her framework of "reading for rain"—as having materiality, impact, by way of our interaction with it.

To conclude, *Waiting* portrays storytelling as a generative form of idleness which calls attention to the agency of lived experience over seemingly objective ways of measuring value, like clock time and capitalist productivity. As a result, in both *Waiting* and *Things Fall Apart*, communal (and storytelling-based) waiting becomes a potent mode of resistance, as well as a coping mechanism, in the face of political oppression, even when it is not consciously conceived as such. Time is crucial in this understanding of waiting-as-idleness—not just because such waiting requires time, but because it requires stories, and stories are, more than anything, templates of temporality. Indeed, Nuttall (like Garuba, Ghosh, and Nilges) argues that narrative *form* reflects its theme, and that "reading for rain" allows us to notice "what temporal logics and narrative forms these rain-induced crises are producing."[74] Here, rather than focusing on rain alone, I have

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73 Nuttall, "Pluvial Time/Wet Form," 470.

74 Ibid., 456.

attempted to highlight the narrative forms generated by waiting, calling these a "human measurement of time": a temporality that depends on community and the stories through which it constructs itself. Ⓐ