

### **Expedition Fund Travel Report**

Thanks to the QM Expeditions Fund, I was able to attend the 13<sup>th</sup> ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) Biennial Conference at the University of California, Davis at the end of June, 2019. At this conference I presented a research paper titled “Ogoni Survival, Healing and Recovery: Challenging the Coloniality of Knowledge/Nature/Being through Zina Saro-Wiwa’s Eco-Films”, which is a project that grew out of my work within the intersections of Global Studies/ International Relations and the Environmental Humanities.

After I presented at ASLE’s Off-Year Symposium last year, which was a nearly carbon-neutral online conference, this year’s meeting allowed me to connect in person with the people I interacted with in the previous year as well as foster new relationships. I attended the conference together with my long-term mentor from my undergraduate studies in the United States, who is the organizer of the special interest group on Indigenous Ecocriticism at ASLE. Since my own research draws on intersectional and interdisciplinary approaches that combine indigenous political ecology, decoloniality and anti-colonialism in Africa, by attending the special interest group’s meeting, I was able to connect to scholars who work on indigenous issues in different parts of the world, draw comparisons and find overlaps. This meeting did not only expand my analytical approach to my own work through engaging with the analytics used by other attendees, but also opened up possible future research avenues which I had not previously considered.

Similarly, the panel on which I presented attracted a large crowd of people and discussions continued well after the official panel ended. Through these discussions I was able to meet and

exchange contact information with key scholars in the field of indigenous ecocriticism and eco-media such as Salma Monani and Joni Adamson.

The presentation which resonated with me most and stayed with me after the conference was the keynote speech by Melissa Nelson. She addressed the relationship of humans to fire from an indigenous ecocritical perspective by reflecting on the California wildfires which have increased in severity, causing displacement and death among both human and more-than-human communities. Her core argument was that the current mode of living based on capitalism, (settler) colonialism, and patriarchy has generated an imbalance across relations, including inter-human, human – more-than-human, and between elements such as fire and water. In our times of rapidly escalating global crises, fire – in the form of droughts, wildfires, acidification, fossil-fuel burning – dominates over water. Professor Nelson traces this imbalance back to Eurocentric, colonial and Christian belief systems that associates fire with savagery, devil, evil, emotion, anger, rage and sexuality and seek to suppress it both regarding human subjectivities as well as in relation to others. Hence, the suppression of fire within leads to the escalation of fire without. A repairing of our relationship to this suppressed side associated with fire is thus central to the re-balancing of our multiple inter- and intra-species relations. This entails addressing the multiple systems of oppression that drive ecological degradation, including the legacies of colonialism, patriarchy and the mastery of nature.

All in all, attending the conference enabled me to expand my network in the environmental humanities and thereby deepening my interdisciplinary work and future research in combination with my own academic background in the critical social sciences.