

**LITERARY ECOLOGY IN THE NIGERIAN SPACE: AN ECOCRITICAL
READING OF SELECTED POETRY**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL
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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work, and has not been submitted for a degree in any other University.

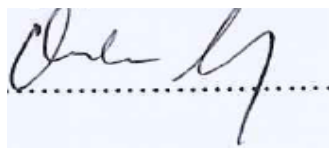
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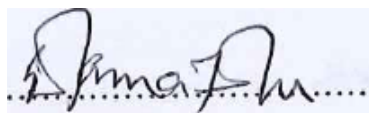


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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my late mother, Mrs Victoria Esan Oguntuase (1937- 1994). Her wish for me was to rise to a place of reckoning in society by taking a Bachelors degree and becoming a Secondary School Principal who would ride in a Toyota Crown car. I have surpassed her expectation by taking a doctoral degree and reaching the peak of my career as a Chief Lecturer in the Polytechnic sector of tertiary education in Nigeria. Moomi, continue your peaceful rest till the resurrection morning.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

OPEC	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
ICG	International Crisis Group
OMPADEC	Oil and Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People
NNPC	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
DPR	Department of Petroleum Resources
ANA	Association of Nigerian Authors
SPDC	Shell Producing Development Company
UAE	United Arab Emirates
NDDC	Niger Delta Development Commission
NACB	Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank
GNP	Gross National Product

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ABSTRACT

Our fragile ecosystem may become more severely damaged than it is now if all hands are not on deck to retrieve the environment from total collapse. Various human efforts have been geared toward a deserving reclamation of the environment from ruins. These efforts include conferences on climate change, afforestation and reduction in air pollution. Literature is not left behind in the efforts to clean up the environment. It is in this connection that Ecocriticism, the practice of assessing the impact of literary works on the environment has been deployed in this study. More than this, the Reader Response Theory is used as its supporting theory. Selected poems of three poets from Nigeria constitute the primary texts for the Study. The poets are Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Ebi Yeibo. The study looks at the settings in which discussions about the environment take place, the impact of ecological problems on agrarian life and the possible effects of protest and resistance by the direct sufferers of the consequences of degradation on the environment in general. The study finds that environmental issues are widespread and not limited to specific places as constant references to the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria compel us to believe. It has also found that areas outside the Niger Delta can benefit from an improved environment through a policy of afforestation by both government and the governed. It is equally found that literature, using the optic of poetry can raise awareness about the duties of denizens to their environment.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The earth exists by divine creation to meet the needs of humankind and make their existence worthwhile. Since the earth (and our environment in general) supports our 'nature and nurture' earthly existence, it behoves humankind to give a measure of reciprocity by consciously ensuring that the earth suffers no form of degradation or despoliation.

It is important for humankind to harmonise their interactions with their environment in their own ultimate interest. It is because of this that those scholars of Environmentalism in their Eco critical rhetoric have taken it upon themselves to point out clearly the danger of neglecting the biosphere. Firing the first salvo, one of the acclaimed fore-runners of ecocriticism, William Rueckert, wrote his ground breaking treatise in 1978 titled: *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecoriticism*. Rueckert's publication was not the first to raise genuine concerns about human beings' relationship with their environment. But he was generally credited with the copyright of the etymology of the word Ecocriticism. Erecting solid structures on the pioneering foundations of Rueckert, another prominent scholar in the ecocritical phylum, Cheryll Glotfelty followed up with *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) in which she averred that ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between humankind and the physical environment (xviii). Lawrence Buell not only returns a verdict of concurrence with the views of Glotfelty, he adds that the subject has tremendous historical significance. In his work, *The Future of Environmental Criticism:*

Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination, Buell (2005) notes that environmental criticism is a discourse with ancient roots (2). In slightly modifying the position of Glotfelty, he sees ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis. A movement in the United States of America known as Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, ASLE, sprang up to support the activities and pursuits of literary environmentalists. The thrust of the intervention of this body was to draw attention to the urgent need to preserve the environment in the overall and over-riding interests of humanity in general.

According to De Mott (2008), a lot is associated with the United States of America when considering the formal praxis of Ecocriticism, otherwise known as Green Studies in the US. It is a latter-day addition to literary theory because it made its entry only in the late 20th century. It must be admitted that before the grand entry of Ecocriticism or Green Studies, there had been naturalists, environmental thinkers and advocates, writers and essayists. These intellectuals believed that mankind was responsible for damages to the environment and must therefore be involved in efforts to redeem it. Literary scholars believed also that the crises bedevilling the environment could be better handled by literature than by scientific discoveries. The importance and relevance of Cheryl Glotfelty in this connection cannot be over emphasised. As a graduate student at Cornell University, she had widely urged the use of the word 'Ecocriticism' instead of 'the study of nature writing'. To give effect to her advocacy, she made the field of literature truly "green" by collaborating with Harold Fromm write their famous book, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996).

The field of literature and ecology was not left to the Americans alone. On the British side, efforts were equally made to sustain the environment through literary outputs. Jonathan Bate in his book *Romantic Ecology* (1991) quotes Lubos Beniak as saying “the air pollution more than the existence of the Iron Curtain, brought about the revolution in Czechoslovakia” (1). This underscores the importance of all the elements that make up the biosphere. His book had drawn inspiration from a previous work by Raymond Williams titled *The Country and the City* (1973).

From both the American and the British experiences, it can be inferred that the movement called Ecocriticism came out of the need to better an environment that is observed to be suffering from the treatment meted out to it mainly by its human constituents.

Meanwhile, observations in our immediate environment generally point to the necessity to redeem the environment from total waste. Local ponds are seen to have dried up whilst farmlands have become barren from desiccation. Whilst these developments are not peculiar to Africa, scholars from the African continent are actively involved in the mission to rescue the environment from needless waste. Asian writers are not exempt from this crusade as we see from the works of Indian writers like Gayatri Spivak (1988) and the like of Edward Said (1993). This worrisome development has informed the urgent need for World leaders to convene meetings whose theme is to address the subject of Climate change. The noticeable changes in our environment no doubt are the consequences of our relationship with it. All hands must be on deck to salvage the environment in the overall interest of humanity. Literature, it has been pointed out somewhere in this thesis, can perform the function

of the rescuer that nature and the environment badly need. This study is an effort intended to assist in the reclamation of the environment from complete ruins. This effort is to complement the target poets, namely: Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Ebi Yeibo whose works have been selected. Since research is for the benefit of humanity, this study aims to contribute to efforts aimed at salvaging the environment and making it liveable for its denizens.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This work aims to join ongoing efforts to resolve the lingering problems of despoliation, degradation and other harmful practices that make our environment not liveable for its human and non-human occupants. Humankind need sustainable physical environments to inhabit in order to live comfortably and productively. This can only be done if humans make conscious and concerted efforts to prevent the earth from imminent disuse due to harmful practices against the environment. These practices unwittingly imperil human beings, perhaps unknown to them. Despoliation of the earth, pollution of the environment, mindless deforestation and the eradication of aquatic life by the cruel termination of fish farming pose a clear and present danger to the continued existence of humankind.

1.3.1 Objectives of the Study

The objectives for the study are:

- a. To highlight the effects of environmental degradation on farming and the human habitat in the selected poems of Niyi Osundare.

- b. To identify the natural environments in which the poems are set and discuss the effects of environmental hazards on the different settings in the selected poems of Tanure Ojaide.
- c. To interrogate protest and resistance in the selected poems of Ebi Yeibo.

1.3.2 Research Questions

- a. Are local farmers experiencing decrease in yield because of harmful environmental practices in the agrarian space depicted in the selected poems of Niyi Osundare?
- b. Are host communities affected, directly or indirectly, by the consequences of oil exploration, deforestation and degradation in the settings of the selected poems of Tanure Ojaide?
- c. Is there a need for protest and resistance by local inhabitants against the activities of multinational Corporations in the selected poems of Ebi Yeibo?

1.3.3 Research Assumptions

The research assumptions for this study are:

- a) Local farmers in agrarian communities experience decrease in their yield because of harmful environmental practices in the selected poems of Niyi Osundare.
- b) Host communities in the Niger Delta region experience the consequences of mining and extractive operations by multinational Corporations in the selected poems of Tanure Ojaide.
- c) There is need for protest and resistance against the harmful practices of the polluters of the environment depicted in the poems of Ebi Yeibo.

1.4 Justification of the Study

This researcher seeks to identify the problems faced by inhabitants of areas where oil deposits are not found and yet such places are degraded by erosion, deforestation, gold mining, bush burning, desertification and other harmful natural and man-made disasters from which the environment daily suffers. While it covers the effects of water pollution, land degradation and other ecological problems in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, the South Western part whose population is composed of farmers also comes under focus.

Previous studies, one of which was carried out by Salihu Abubakar (2019) did an ecocritical reading of two novels, one by Heron Habila, *Oil on Water* (2010) and the other by Kaine Agary, *Yellow Yellow* (2006). His study, a Masters dissertation, did not fully and squarely address the concerns raised in our study. Hence, it will address far more than Salihu Abubakar (2019) has accomplished. This study will use the optic of poetry. Another study by Joyce Agofure (2016) dwelt extensively on the problems caused by oil mining in the Niger Delta while paying scant attention to similar havoc wreaked on places outside her native Niger Delta area. Selected for this study are poems from West Africa, with Nigeria in focus. We have selected the poetry of Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Ebi Yeibo. This ensured a spread in terms of birth place of the authors and geography of the locations involved in the study. Whilst Tanure Ojaide, for instance, is an Urhobo from the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, Niyi Osundare is Yoruba from the South Western part of the Country where Agriculture is the mainstay of the people's economy. Ebi Yeibo comes from the Ijaw speaking part of the South-South region of Nigeria, an area which also produces oil. Also, the issue of age and generation

to which the poets belong were considered. Both Ojaide and Osundare belong to the second generation of poets whilst Yeibo belongs to the third. The first generation of poets in Nigeria includes Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Christopher Okigbo and Gabriel Okara.

Finally, no matter how much study is undertaken on the writings of poet/scholars like Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Ebi Yeibo, there will always be room for further research since it is an unending endeavour.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is propelled by literary works, specifically from the genre of Poetry. Specific poems have been selected to justify the claims made in this study. The works of notable poets of Nigerian extraction like Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Ebi Yeibo have been identified to meet the criteria for critical analysis, using the praxis of ecocriticism.

Consequently, the following Volumes have been chosen: Niyi Osundare's *Eye of the Earth* (1986) and *Waiting Laughters* (1990); Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1998) and *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems* (1997) and Ebi Yeibo's *The Forbidden Tongue* (2007) and *Shadows of the Setting Sun* (2012).

It must be pointed out that all the poems in the volumes selected here do not fit into the literature-ecology conversation. Only the relevant ones have been taken from the selections and given close reading to justify their relevance to this research.

As we have pointed out earlier in this document, only a few eco poems from each of the poets will be used in writing this thesis. For Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Homesongs* (1998) the following poems have been selected: "When green was lingua

franca”, “Elegy for nine warriors”, “Delta Blues”, “Wails”. In his other volume, *Daydream of the Ants and Other Poems* (1997) the following poems have been selected: “Technology”, “Compound Blues”, “The Paradise of Powers” and “A T & P, Sapele”

For Niyi Osundare, the following poems have been identified as fitting eco poems for use in this study. From *Eye of the Earth* (1986), these poems have been selected: “Forest Echoes”, “Harvest Call”, “Eyeful Glances”, “Let the Earth’s pain be soothed”, “Who says the draught was here?”, “Farmer Born”, “Ours to plough, but not to plunder” and “Our Earth will not die”. His other volume of poetry, *Waiting Laughters* (1990) is not subdivided into poems under headings as seen above. It is a long poem in run on lines of enjambment. There are, however, partitions which are placed under Roman numerals to show delimitations and directions to which a particular sub poem points. In this connection, therefore, the poems chosen are found on pages 45, 74, 83, 84-85, 88-89 and 92.

Finally, for Ebi Yeibo, his collection titled, *The Forbidden Tongue* (2007), has the following selected poems: “Silent Sorrow”, “Rage of a river”, “The Poachers”, “Unyielding Clouds” and “The Forbidden Tongue”. His second collection chosen for this work titled, *Shadows of the Setting Sun* (2012), has the following selected poems: “Dark Lyric”, “The Lingering Shadow”, “Apocalypse”, “Darkwaters of the Delta” and “Oil Water”.

The foregoing shows that a sizeable amount of literature exists on all the poets selected for this study. There is, however, paucity of material on the works of the third poet, Ebi Yeibo, but this does not detract from the quality and relevance of his poetry. His poetry contributes significantly as does the poetry of the other target poets. Whilst

some opinions expressed here are in concurrence with the thrust of this proposal, others are not. The reviews, however, provide the link between what has been done and what still needs to be done. Some of the reviews are outside the sphere of eco-study but they provide a take-off point from which we can arrive at valid conclusions and recommendations in our study.

There are some limitations to this study. In the first place, the locations and settings in the selected poems are limited to the immediate environments of the selected poets. It is Urhobo land for Tanure Ojaide, Yoruba environment for Niyi Osundare and Izon for Ebi Yeibo. It is beyond controversy that issues of the environment are not limited to these areas. Since the selected poets are from these identified areas, the results from findings can only be generalised. Secondly, time constraint is another limitation in the sense that only six months is allowed for field work. The time allowed is definitely inadequate to cover all that there is to cover. Coverage has to be limited to the depictions provided by the poets in their poetry collections. Thirdly, there is inadequate financial resources to traverse the locations identified as settings in the selected poems to conduct interviews for focus groups, transportation and tips for respondents. Finally, the combination of time, finance and access to the poets in their different locations has prevented a one on one interactive session with each of them. The prevalent insecurity in Nigeria makes it difficult to visit the Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island where Ebi Yeibo lectures. Several phone calls to him were not responded to. Economic constraints also prevented me from travelling to the United States of America to interview Niyi Osundare in the University of New Orleans. The same applies for Tanure Ojaide who resides at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. In spite of all these limitations, however, efforts were made to

gather relevant data from related literature and from the primary texts selected for the study.

1.6 Literature Review

Apart from the pioneering efforts and ground breaking contributions of scholars like Glotfelty (1996), Buell (2005), and Rueckert (1978), the views and critiques of their writings by critics and literary scholars in ecocriticism are addressed to determine the divergences and convergences in their opinions. These studies provide the platform on which to locate the extensions to the existing boundaries of knowledge which this study hopes to make. A dutiful review of existing literature also prevents a needless rehash of ideas already expressed by researchers as though such ideas were novel. The review of literature will be divided into two parts. The first will deal generally with the reviews of all three poets and their writings in general. The second part will concentrate on critics' views of the poems selected for this study.

First is Tanure Ojaide, a poet scholar of Urhobo extraction from the oil rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. His works include several volumes of poetry, prose and critical essays. His works are influenced by his background and the sufferings of his people in the hands of neo-colonial forces of exploitation and repression. One critic of Ojaide's poetry, Bamikunle (1992) notes that his poetry delves into the past to assess the present so as to map out strategies to combat future problems. He avers that "Ojaide's poetry takes off from the present in desperate search for values to redeem its malaise. The search takes him to the immediate past in the history of colonialism, and beyond that into the pre-colonial ancestral history and culture" (81). Darah (2009) a fellow Urhobo, critic and columnist, says that "the sinew of Ojaide's poetry harps

on the urgency of his art of resistance...his poetry fits into the tradition of outrage against political injustice, exploitation and environmental disasters” (12). Lamenting the fate of the Niger Delta people and the timeliness and relevance of Ojaide’s poetry, Owomoyela (1979) notes that “in the wake of unbridled assault on the Niger Delta environment, informed by the dynamic logic of ecological imperialism, the region’s traditional economies, cultural practices and socio-political wellbeing were mauled into disquiet” (62). Still assessing the overall impact of Ojaide’s writing, Nwagbara (2010) writes: “following such a polluted socio-economic landscape, Nigerian writers, (amongst them, Ojaide) have risen to the occasion by using art to address, as well as, bring to the knowledge of humanity this form of environmental devastation and inhumanity” (18). Another critic, Shija (2008) notes quite instructively that “the destruction of the environment as in most of Ojaide’s poems dealing with nature is symbolic of the destruction of African (and in particular, the Nigerian) culture and values.” (2). Ezenwa Ohaeto (1993) notes that the poems in Ojaide’s collection portray him as a poet whose vision is all encompassing and the title of the collection metaphorically captures the width and breadth of his experiences.

Having done a review of some of the literature available on the works of Tanure Ojaide, it is important to see the views expressed by scholars and critics in relation to the two volumes of poetry selected for this study. The two are: *Delta Blues and Homesongs* (1997) and *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems* (1997). Writing on the two volumes of poetry as instruments to confront institutionalised oppression specifically in the Niger Delta, Uzoechi Nwagbara (2012) avers that “it is in resisting environmental and socio-economic slough that the essence of Ojaide’s poetics is brought to the fore” (5). In apparent agreement with Nwagbara, another critic, H.E.

Macaustin (1993) is of the view that for “most African writers...there is a direct relationship between literature and social institutions (and) the principal function of literature is to criticise these institutions and eventually bring about desirable changes in the society” (11).

The second poet whose works are considered in this study is Niyi Osundare, a widely travelled and widely published author, critic, columnist and poet scholar. He is a Yoruba from the South Western part of Nigeria. Unlike Ojaide whose works focus on the deprivation of his people in the Niger Delta, Osundare is chiefly concerned with social commentary. In addition, he places premium emphasis on the ecological degradation of the physical space in Western Nigeria which makes farming, the major occupation of his peasant people, almost an impossible occupation to engage in. This background is supported by Macaustin (2012) who notes that Osundare is: “obsessed with applying every available method of bringing his poetry to his people. *He is consumed with this goal because of his peasant ancestry* (emphasis mine), where poetry is acclaimed as the people’s property. Thus, there is a symbolic relationship between the artist and his environment” (64). A. Bamikunle (1992), a notable critic of Osundare’s works, writes: “he, Osundare is a nature poet (who is) interested in both Edenic and exploited West African landscapes but, he does not go so far as to use the words ‘ecology and environment’ in the developing lexicon of ecocrit and ecolit...”(Slaymaker, 686). Saleh (2003) is of the opinion that Osundare’s strength is in his use of language. He notes: “through a studied critique and reworking of the language of their predecessors, Osundare leads the group in their tacit task of liberating and demystifying the business of poetry for many readers (because language and language use lie at the essence of poetry.” (19). Writing specifically about *Eye of*

the Earth, Slaymaker (2002) points out: “Nwachukwu Agbada’s thesis mentions that Osundare’s best work, *Eye of the Earth*, connects Nigerian lore and folktales with sympathy for all exploited peoples of the world, including the oppressed working class and especially peasant farmers in Nigeria” (686). As far as Alu (2008) is concerned, “the past values of the Nigerian ecology in *Eye of the Earth* celebrates (sic) the work of the common people with emphasis that the volume is one of the fiercest indictments of modern economic culture of the people and alien destructive forces” (70).

Ebi Yeibo, the third leg of the tripod, is neither Urhobo nor Yoruba. He is an Ijaw from the South South region of present day Bayelsa State of Nigeria. His roots spread to Rivers State, from which the present Bayelsa was created. Both States produce the highest number of eco poets in the entire Niger Delta region. He was educated at Delta State University, Avbraka where he received a Bachelor’s degree in English and Literature. He proceeded to the University of Ibadan for a Master of Arts degree before finally taking a Doctoral degree from Imo State University, Owerri. He teaches in the Department of English and Literary Studies in Delta State University, Wilberforce Island. Altogether, he has written five volumes of poetry out of which two have been selected for this work. The two are: *The Forbidden Tongue* (2007) and *Shadows of the Setting Sun* (2012).

A critic of Yeibo’s poetry, Ekanpou Enewardideke (2018) looked at *The Forbidden Tongue* (2007) in the light of the poet’s experiences and stance on topical national issues and concludes that from whatever angle the collection is looked at, it shows that Ebi Yeibo inhales and exhales poetry in every dimension. The collection makes scathing commentaries and references to the general decay in public life and institutions but dwells elaborately on the impact of exploration activities on the people

and environment of the Niger Delta Region. Ogaga Okuyade (2011) gives deserved credit to Yeibo as an emergent poet of the Niger Delta extraction when he notes that he is more visible within the corpus of writing that is today seen as Niger Delta literature, a kind of literature that is adjudged not only as combative but also gradually becoming pragmatic and ritualistic. Okuyade's position is reasonable and agreeable in that poets of the older generation from the Niger Delta Region merely depict the parlous conditions of the environment and stop at that. Yeibo and his younger contemporaries complement their prognosis with diagnosis. That holds a lot of hope for a redress of the issues in the dispute between government, the exploiters and the Niger Delta people.

Enewardideke (2018) again in a review of *Shadows of the Setting Sun* (2007) notes that the poet draws attention to the barbarities unleashed on Niger Deltans regardless of their natural endowment with crude oil. He argues that the presence of the natural resource is the main reason for the under development of the owners of the commodity that sustains the entire Country economically. Iloilo (2018) notes that the poetry of Ebi Yeibo is a product of anger and agitation and a reaction to what Gordini Darah's (1998) description of the Niger Delta region as a "defeated and conquered territory" made up of "vanquished victims" (262). Yeibo and other compatriots from his region have therefore joined forces to ensure the release of their ancestral land and its natural endowments from the clutches of death which stares them in the face daily on account of the unfair and inhuman treatment of the region by colonial and neo-colonial forces of imperialism and servitude.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

In an effort to situate a literary research work appropriately, it must have symmetry with relevant theoretical underpinnings. This is what sets it apart and marks it out as research. This study is grounded in Ecocriticism, but it is foregrounded in the Reader Response Theory, a theoretical school that approaches texts (literature) from the view of a reader. Ecocriticism will be discussed in some detail here although it has been touched upon in the introduction to the study. It is one of the recent theories propounded to approach studies about the human environment from literary perspectives. Several scholars and proponents are involved in this area of knowledge but references are copiously and frequently made to the outstanding contributions of Cheryll Glotfelty who had been an advocate of green studies from her days as a graduate student in Cornell University in the United States. She teamed up with fellow scholar and environmentalist, Harold Fromm to write an incisive and insightful treatise on the subject of environmentalism. It is entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996). Both authors argue that ecocriticism is “the study of the relationship between humankind and the physical environment” (xviii). Before them, there was another scholar and author, William Rueckert, who was credited with the origins of the word ‘ecocriticism’. His work, *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* (1978) highlights the interdependence of humankind and their natural environment. It is important to point out that issues about the environment were taken seriously globally. This is because human existence is predicated on them. As the issues were attacked from the United States, so were they from the United Kingdom. References in this regard can be made to the seminal works of British scholars like Jonathan Bate and Raymond Williams. Bate wrote *Romantic Ecology* (1991) in which he quotes

Lubos Beniak as saying “the air pollution more than the existence of the Iron Curtain, brought about the revolution in Czechoslovakia” (1). Bate’s work has benefited immensely from an earlier work, *The Country and the City* (1973) by another British scholar, Raymond Williams. Further on the Reader Response critical theory, it can be said it places great emphasis on the reader as the most important component of a tripod, the other two being the text and the author. Proponents of this theory include Stanley Fish, Wayne Booth and Louise Rosenblatt. It is the opinion of these theorists that a text has no life or meaning of its own outside the perception of a reader. They maintain that a reader invests all literature with life and brings meanings out of them.

1.7.1 Literature on Reader Response Theory

Tyson (2006) has identified five major categories of Reader Response Theory as the theory relates to interrogation of literary texts. His categorizations are as follows.

a. **Transactional Reader Response Theory.** This type is associated with Louise Rosenblatt and Wolfgang Iser. The thrust of their argument is that there is a transaction, a link or connection, between the meaning of a text and the interpretation that a reader accords the text based on the personal emotions, knowledge and experiences of the reader. Since experiential knowledge varies from one person to another, readers are bound to have different transactions with the texts that they read and interpret.

b. **Affective Stylistics Reader Response Theory.**

The only theorist associated with this position is Stanley Fish (1980). The kernel of his argument is that meaning is the outcome of a reader’s involvement with a text. It thus means that a text exists as a meaningless entity and has no positive impact on

humans and society until a reader brings out meaning from it. He has spoken elaborately about this in his work, *Is there a text in this Class?* (1980).

c. Subjective Reader Response Theory.

The main proponent of this thesis is David Bleich (1978). He believes that different readers of the same text exhume different meanings from it. He added that the different meanings and interpretations of the same text were compared to establish a continuity of meaning.

d. Psychological Reader Response Theory.

The theorist behind this typology of reader response theory is Norman Holland (1975) who posits that a reader's response to a text is heavily influenced by his/her motive for reading the text. He/she may rationalize the circumstances of a character in a literary work if he/she is psychologically affected by it. He/she may equally downplay or accentuate the impact of some events in the plot structure of a text depending on his/her objective for reading it.

e. Social Reader Response Theory.

This is an extension of the earlier views of Stanley Fish (1980). In this extension, he goes beyond the readership of the individual. He is of the view that members of an interpretive community make meaning(s) from a text by using a specific reading and interpretation strategy.

In a similar vein, Louise Rosenblatt in *Literature as Exploration* (1965) noted that Reader Response Theory was a text related performance. This means that the theory is a performing art which disallows subjectivity or essentialism. In her work, *The Reader, the Text and the Poem* (1978), Rosenblatt says that what an organism selects out and seeks to organize according to already acquired habits, assumptions and

expectations becomes the environment to which it also responds (17). In other words, the environment of the reader is made up of his/her outlook on life as modified by his/her assumptions and expectations. He/she is thus able to meaningfully exert a transaction between the text that he/she reads and the meanings that he/she makes therefrom. In what appears as a corroboration of Rosenblatt's thesis, Yang (2002) states that literary texts frequently contain social dilemmas and conflicts and the reading and comprehension of such texts demand personal responses from readers (187). This position affirms that a reader does not approach a text empty handed, as a *tabula rasa* (a clean, empty slate). He/she comes with his/her own bag of experience from which he/she freely draws in the process of interpretations and deductions from the text he/she has read.

Whilst theoretical approaches like Formalism and New Criticism disregard the role of the reader in meaning formation, the Reader Response Theory strongly disavows textual autonomy.

It is, perhaps, in connection with these possibilities (and more) that Egharevba (2003) says instructively: "making meaning from creative works is the essence of literary criticism and in fulfilling this role, literary critics seek for literary theories that will best elucidate the meaning of a text" (71). In the earlier part of this study, references have been made to the ground breaking contributions of front liners and front runners in the field of Ecocriticism as a branch of Literary Theory. These scholars include, but are not limited to, William Rueckert (1978), Lawrence Buell (2005), Cheryll Glotfelty (1996), Goring, *et al*, (2010), and (Dobie) (2009). A lone but strong thread is woven through the thoughts of the scholars mentioned here and other researchers not

mentioned: literary works have to be studied, interpreted and applied in relation to the dictates and exigencies of the environment in which they are produced or consumed.

1.8 Research Methodology

The research technique adopted in this study is the qualitative type. More specifically, the purposive sampling methodological approach has been adopted. It is also variously known as judgemental, selective, deliberate or subjective sampling procedure. Purposive sampling allows a researcher to rely on their judgement and conviction in the choice of members of the population to participate in their surveys. This non-probability sampling procedure has made it possible for us to make choices based on the characteristics of the samples and the objectives of our study. This methodology has been used because of its two-fold inherent advantages. In the first place, it is a cost effective and time saving sampling method. Secondly, it is the most advisable option to take when there are very limited data to work with. Whilst using purposive sampling, personal judgement comes in handy to identify and select only the cases that assist to provide answers to research questions and help to achieve research objectives. There are as many as six different case types in purposive sampling. These include, typical case, extreme or deviant case, critical case, heterogenous or maximum variation sampling case, homogenous sampling case and theoretical sampling case. In all of this, we have found the homogenous sampling procedure most applicable because its focus is on an identified sub group with similar sample members. Our study focuses on a subgroup that deals only and essentially with issues of the environment as they are investigated by literature. The poems selected for the study are carefully studied with a view to identifying the recommendations by

the different poets as solutions to the socio-economic and environmental problems bedeviling contemporary society. Secondary sources of existing critical works on the poems were read and studied extensively. The Post-Modern Library of Kenyatta University offered invaluable assistance with its many volumes of relevant reference material. Online sources were also used because they brim with current information and writing on all areas of human endeavour.

CHAPTER TWO

INDIGENOUS AGRARIAN LIFE IN NIYI OSUNDARE'S POETRY

*First follow nature, and your judgement frame.
By her just standard, which is still the same:
Unerring Nature! Still divinely bright,
One clear, unchang'd universal light,
Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
At once the source, and end test of art.*

Alexander Pope

2.1 Introduction

The South Western part of Nigeria to which Osundare is native is remarkably agrarian and depends almost entirely on the land for the sustenance of its people. This is why the poetry of Osundare, the self-acclaimed "farmer born" (xi) is replete with echoes of the forests from where comes life, nature and nurture. In the mid-1950s, the Western Region, over which an endowed Premier presided, had recorded tremendous forward leaps in modernity and real infrastructural developments

The Premier imposed Taxes on farmers in the region so that money would be available to government to provide and maintain infrastructure for the comfort and betterment of the people of the region. The farmers and other workers in the region willingly and gladly paid the taxes that government demanded because what was done with the remittances were visible for all to see. A Marketing Board to ensure that farmers got a good bargain for their produce was equally established. Life was visibly more abundant for the people as the refrain of the slogan of the Party in power clearly

proclaimed. It is in this environment that Niyi Osundare was sired by peasant farmers in Ikere Ekiti in the Western Province of the Western region. He rifled through his Primary and secondary education beginning from his town before proceeding to the prestigious University of Ibadan, again the first of its kind in Nigeria. It is important to note that the poet/scholar acquired University education with scholarship provisions made by the government of the Western region. With this background, it was easy for him to travel abroad, first, to the United Kingdom and later to Canada, to acquire the Masters and Doctoral degrees, majoring in English and Literature.

The relevance of the environment, especially the land, to the continued survival of humanity cannot be over emphasised given its inherent capacity for uninterrupted productivity. To tend the land and make it live so that humanity can also live, scholars of the ecocritical bent had devoted tremendous physical and mental energy toward interrogating the nexus between the earth and its denizens, especially human beings. A scholar in this phylum, Scott Slovic (2000), offers an insight into what he construes ecocriticism to mean when he says that it is “the study of explicitly environmental texts from any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human nature relationships in any text, even texts that seem, at first glance, oblivious of the nonhuman world” (160-162). The import of this position is that eco poems ramify both human and nonhuman components of the earth. Both flora and fauna are relevant in the analysis of what constitutes the ecosystem. This, amongst others, is a primary concern of ecocriticism. In a similar vein, Simon Estok (2001) avers that ecocriticism is not just “the study of nature or natural things in literature...it is a theory that is committed to affecting change by analysing the function – thematic,

artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical or otherwise of the natural environment or aspects of it represented in documents – literary or others that contribute to material practices in material worlds” (220). Estok is of the opinion that ecocriticism thrives more on account of its utilitarianism. It is poised to re-examine the environment in general and remediate its pathologies when and where signs and symptoms of dysfunctionality are noticed. It is precisely in connection with this that poets have offered to muse in a direct effort to rescue the failing environment. Selected poems in the collections chosen for this work bear credence to this all-important usefulness of ecocentric poems. More pointedly, Nigerian poets, in their numbers, in particular, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Ebi Yeibo, have teamed up with their counterparts all over the world to show that Slaymaker (2002) was right when he said “environmental literature and ecological criticism are resonating dynamic signals which generate concern for the health of the earth and its resources” (691).

2.3 Thematic Analysis of Osundare’s Selected Poetry

The health of the earth and its resources truly attract the patriot in Osundare when he wrote the poems in his collection titled *The Eye of the Earth* (1986.) Several poems shore up his advocacy for a safer environment in the interest of humanity. In “Forest Echoes”, the poet valorises the verdant lushness of a forest that was once desiccated by rainless aridity. The poems that were treated in this collection are subdivided into three, namely: “back to earth”, “rainsongs” and “homecall”. The arrival of rains is celebrated in the poem titled ‘First Rain’ about which the poet has this to say:

In a way, ‘rainsongs’ is a logical continuation of ‘forest echoes’, it being a celebration of the giver and sustainer of life. As agent of the difference between plenty and famine,

life and death, the rain occupied a godlike place in the consciousness of Ikere's agrarian people (xiii).

The parched earth is restored to normalcy with the coming of rains in the sense that farmers who have put their seedlings in the earth in the latter months of the outgone year are assured of bumper harvests. The opposite would have been the case if the heavens had withheld rains. The outcome would have been harvests of shrivelled crops after investing considerable resources in terms of finance, time and physical energy to cultivate the land, plant crops and tend the soil in expectation of bumper harvests. The short length of the poem makes it easy and desirable to be reproduced in whole as follows:

a tingling tang awakes the nose
 when the first rain has just clipped
 the wing of the haughty dust
 a cooling warmth embraces
 our searching soles
 as the land vapour rises
 like a bootless infantry
 and
 through her liberated pores
 our earth breathes again (29)

The poet deploys figurative usages of personification and simile when he compares the first rains to humans as he says the tang of the rain “awakes the nose” as though the nose were sleeping and the rains have arrived to rouse it from its slumber. He continues the same pattern of usage when he says the rains “clipped the wing of the haughty dust” and “a cooling warmth embraces/our searching soles”. The use of

simile is seen in “as the land vapour rises/like a bootless infantry”. He concludes the poem with another use of personification when he says “through her liberated pores/our earth breathes again”. The poet’s masterly deployment of figurative language elevates the quality of the earth and the benefits that rains offer humanity. The dependence of mankind on the earth and on rains cannot be overstated going by the importance that is justifiably attached to the two natural gifts from God to humankind. The rain is celebrated in the poem because it complements the earth in the production of food for the sustenance of life. This is the crux of ecocriticism. We argue that Osundare has an abiding love and enduring relationship with his nativity and his people such that he uses every means available to him to put the messages in his poems across to them. This is further borne out of the fact that he sees poetry as belonging to the people. His rustic background when growing amongst his family in his home town, Ikere Ekiti, is the most important reason he has an unflinching and unwavering attachment to the land, in particular, and the environment, in general. Abdulrasheed Na’allah (2003) quotes Osundare as saying:

My artistic philosophy of art is essentially holistic: form enhances content, while content in turn enriches form; aesthetic elegance has to be balanced with social relevance. A Yoruba artist constantly seeks the meeting point of the beautiful and the useful. Humanity comes first, hand in hand with a clear visionary thrust: for the poem or story that has no “eye” can only stumble into sterility and darkness (xxv).\

Osundare always looks back and then, forward in an informed effort to extrapolate the future using the strength of hindsight. He admits this much in his preface to his collection, *Eye of the Earth* when he informs his readers that “in the intricate dialectics

of human living, looking back is looking forward; the visionary artist is not only a rememberer, he is also a reminder” (x). It is in his remembrances that he realises an alignment between the past and now in relation to the environment, especially.

In another poem, “Rain-Coming”, Osundare praises the importance of the pluvial properties of rain and their effect on the environment. He says in the opening stanza;

Slowly
but
surely
the early rains ring the bell
and the earth springs green
from the sleep of brown (30).

The reference to “the earth springs green” is both symbolic and instructive. It is symbolic because “green” connotes regeneration and growth. It is instructive because we learn that the environment will naturally and rapidly wear a new look from the cloak of brown that has covered everywhere in the absence of rain.

The earthy disposition of the farmer is seen as the environment changes with the coming of rain. The poet says: “the rain unties the farmers tongue/bursting famine yawns/into barns of liting yams/plums and pumpkins/dense with drink and daring/roll juicily from furrow to furrow”. The restoration of the environment and the new look of the earth with the coming of rains is a great concern to the study of the environment in relation to the position and wellbeing of humankind that inhabit it. It is for this reason that Osundare dwells on the new turn of events in the environment the moment the first rains pound the earth. The poet is uncomfortable with the terrible

effect of the long-drawn aridity on the environment because of the long absence of rain. The rains may have ceased to rain because of natural reasons and yet it may be caused by changes to the environment caused by ‘man and machine’. He gives expression to his sadness when he writes:

slowly
 but
 surely
 the early rains ring the bell
 but oh my land!
 so deep and dry still
 in the unnatural desert
 of barn-burners (31)

The poet laments bitterly in “but oh my land/so deep and dry still” which means that the rains have not been able to sufficiently assuage the dryness of the earth. This is understandable because the rains have been away for far too long. Hope can only be pinned on the presence of rains in quantum to restore the much-needed normalcy and equilibrium to the earth. Osundare insists that the land remains “deep and dry still/in the unnatural desert/of barn-burners”. Deserts are identified naturally by their appearance as places whose forests have become desiccated and whose land has become parched because of accustomed lack of water. But the rain forests in the Southern part of Nigeria have become “unnatural desert” because of the harsh consequences of climate change. The hotness of the environment is what the poet describes fittingly as “barn-burners”. The description is paradoxical in the sense that a barn, usually of yams, is a large depository of large tubers of yams carefully arranged and stored for human consumption and nourishment before the advent of the next

harvest. The scenario painted above threatens the existence of humanity because food, which sustains the human population, is also physically threatened when the barn of yam is burnt down by the scorching, inclement hotness of the environment. The possibility of famine staring the people in the face and threatening them with extinction is enough reason to engage in the writing of eco-friendly poems, the types that are used in this work. It is underscored that only a proper relationship with the earth, in particular, and the environment, in general that can sustain the equilibrium amongst the denizens of the inhabited environment.

Harping continuously on the indispensability of water as *sine qua non* to human comfortable existence, the poet in “Raindrum” says:

of caked riverbeds
and browned pastures
of baking noons
and grilling nights
of earless cornfields
and tired tubers (32).

The lines above say it all. The anguish of humanity is wrapped up in the carefully worded lines of poetry which portray humankind as helpless in the face of pervasive inconvenience foisted on the environment by the carelessness of modern living. The long absence of rain water, for instance, has resulted in “caked riverbeds”, a rather unusual sight in the rain forests with their abundance of running water in brooks and streams. The scenario has become different because the environmental conditions have resulted in “baking noons/and grilling nights”. In ordinary, prosaic expression, what the poet implies is that the noons have become so unbearably hot that humanity

is baked by their intolerable temperature. There is also no respite at night when limbs and bones should take a deserved rest from the toils of the receding day. The poet describes the reality as “grilling nights”. Human existence is therefore depicted as lamentably precarious owing to the temperature of the environment which has become high on account of the treatment meted out to nature by modernity, urbanization and industrialization. The tenuous livelihood of humankind is stretched to breaking limits when food insecurity is added to the woes of humanity. As noon and night life is unbearable, so is sustenance threatened by “earless cornfields/and tired tubers”. The grains in the fields and the tubers in the heaps are fattened by the availability of rain water which has become scarce and almost non-existent because of the scorched environment. The existence of humankind, in relation to food supply specifically, is threatened by these environmental factors.

In “Meet me at Okeruku”, Osundare continues a chronicle of the havocs wreaked on barren, arid land which is made all the more unfriendly by the inclemency of a rainless environment. Face, body and feet are obscenely decorated with unsolicited camwood as people move from place to place. Osundare opens a floodgate of lamentations when he says:

Meet me at *Okeruku*
where earth is one compact
of reddening powder
daubed coquettishly

on the hamattan brow
of trembling houses (33).

We are not certain that the poet has any reservation about the colour or make up of the land in his Ikere Ekiti home town but he makes issues out of the red, dusty powder that paints every part of the human body because it has become loose as a consequence of several months of absence of rains. He raises the hope of his local town mates that respite comes when the rains come. He hopes that theirs would be a sigh of deserved relief when he says:

And when the rains are here
when this dust is clod and clay
show me your camwood shoes
show me hurried toemarks
on the ciphered pages of narrow alleys
awaiting the liquid eraser
of the next shower (33).

From the foregoing it is clear that rains are the elixir that restores humanity into wellbeing. It has the unique capacity to calm frayed nerves and soothe the bodies of those who have become imbalanced because of the hot environment in which they live. The poem underscores the importance of water to life, especially humanity, fish, flora and fauna.

In yet another poem, “Who says that draught was here?”, Osundare paints the rosy picture of an admirable alternative to drought and climatic aridity. He eulogises rains

as though all else depends on them. The following stanzas from the poem say it all. It is apt to commence our examination with the opening refrain:

With these green guests around
Who says that drought was here? (34)

This refrain, the opening couplet, gives an insight into the workings of the poet's mind. He asks repeatedly, his tone laced with unveiled wonderment, how exhilarating the experience has been shortly after repeated showers of rain have replaced the parched, caked and wearisome weather. The noun phrase, "green guests" refers to all the verdant lushness of the sprouts occasioned by the pluvial consequences of rain. The greenery of plants and of the environment in general is restored from the erstwhile brownish colours of dust splattered on them by dirt bearing gusty winds. The succeeding stanzas speak comfortingly and re-assuringly of the wholesome effects of rains on the environment. The poet has the following to say:

The rain has robed the earth
In vests of verdure
The rain has robed the earth
Licked clean by the fiery tongue of drought (34).

The foregoing states the new stature of the environment as soon as the rains stamp their presence on the earth. Dwelling extensively on the power of personification, the poet drapes the earth "in vests of verdure". The new, green pastures and growths have covered the nakedness of the earth. The hot, searing sun is invested with the "fiery tongue of drought". The next stanza is even more instructive of the transformations that plants have witnessed with the coming of rains. It states:

Aflame with herbal joy
 trees slap heaven's face
 with the compound pride
 of youthful leaves
 drapering twigs into groves
 once skeletal spires in
 the unwinking face of the basking sun (34-35)

The stanza shows the joy of herbs sprouting luxuriantly anew and growing as tall as to “slap heaven’s face”. The hyperbolic deployment of language here is deliberate. No matter the tallness of any plant, it can never reach the heaven, let alone slap its face. The poet merely lends credence to the regenerative capacity of the earth in the presence of rain. The last stanza of the poem touches on all aspects of the renewed life in a peaceful atmosphere which the earth enjoys with the coming of rains and the disappearance of drought. The entire excerpt is reproduced here because of its centrality to the espousal of the theme of ecocriticism:

And anthills threw open their million gates
 and winged termites swarm the warm welcome
 of compassionate twilights
 and butterflies court the fragrant company
 of fledgling flowers
 and milling moths paste wet lips
 on the translucent ears of listening windows
 and the swallow brailles a tune
 on the copper face of the gathering lake
 and weaverbirds pick up the chorus
 in the leafening heights

soon crispy mushrooms will break
the fast of venturing soles

With these green guests around
Who will say that drought was here? (35).

In concluding this section of Osundare's poetry, it is appropriate to share with readers and scholars an insight into the working of his mind. This insight is contained in the prefatory notes to the collection, *The Eye of the Earth*. In it, he notes:

Waters are dying, forests are falling. A desert epidemic stalks a world where the rich and the ruthless squander earth's wealth on the invention of increasingly accomplished weapons of death, while millions of people perish daily from avoidable hunger (xiv).

He warns humanity, with the prophetic clairvoyance of a writer, not to toy with the future of humankind because "tomorrow bids us tread softly, wisely, justly, lest we trample the eye of the EARTH" (xiv).

The second phase of the eco poems selected for this study in Osundare's collection is sub-titled, "back to earth". There are four poems in this section and all of them are examined in view of their relevance to the central issue of ecocriticism, the focus of this study. The section opens with a poem appropriately titled, "Earth" (1). It summarises all that the earth accommodates as sustainer of humankind. This is seen in the various items mentioned by the poet in the short poem. It is referred to as the "temporary basement/ and lasting roof" and "first clayey coyness/and last alluvial joy". Further references are made to "breadbasket and compost bed" and other

defining properties of the earth such as “rocks and rivers/muds and mountains”. He ends the poem by recalling a descriptive cognomen for the earth amongst the Yoruba, the stalk from which Osundare sprouts. The earth is *ogeere amokoyeri*. Interestingly, the poet offers an interpretation or translation for the local phrase in what he says is: the one that shaves his head with a hoe. This is a clear metaphor about the earth. The herbs, shrubs, trees and other plants that grow on it are referred to as “hairs on the head of the earth”. Like a human head, it becomes unkempt and dishevelled when left ungroomed. The hair on the head of the earth is groomed using a hoe, not the barber’s clippers. This is done by farmers so that plants are not robbed of nutrients for growth by weed. The poem “Forest Echoes” (3), speaks in detail to the beauty of the forests in Southern Nigeria in one breadth and, in another, to the reversals of its fortunes in the hands of wood cutters who mindlessly depopulate the forest of its greenery and environmental allure. The opening lines of the poem are helpful in the elucidation made in the foregoing:

A green desire, perfumed memories,
 A leafy longing lure my wanderer feet
 To this forest of a thousand wonders.

 The rains have kept their time this year
 (Earth has (finally) won the love of the sky)
 Trees bob with backward sap
 And leaves grab a deepening green
 From the scanty sun (3).

The poet, as a local of the hinterland in a far-away agrarian community of Ekiti State, is accustomed to the forest from whence cometh food for living. His sense of smell

and love for the forests is heightened in “a green desire/perfumed memories”. The luxuriantly growing leaves of forest plants have an unmistakable scent which is difficult for the poet to ignore because it holds an abiding fascination for him. The fact that the forests hold a lot of attraction for him is given expression in “this forest of a thousand wonders”. The necessary balance in the ecosystem and the mutually rewarding symbiosis of the elements are appreciated when the poet says “the rains have kept their time this year”. This joy of timelines of the rains gives an inkling to the possibility of lateness of rains in years gone by. The regenerative capacity of the earth, complemented by timelines of rains, is extolled when the poet says “bouncing boughs interlock overhead/like wristwrestlers straining muscularly/on a canvas of leaves wounded/by the fists of time”. The poet soon lapses into stanzas of lamentation when he recalls the deforestation that has taken place without sparing a thought for afforestation. This has the potential to despoil the environment and render it unliveable for humanity. His lament is couched in:

A forest of a million trees, this,
 A forest of milling trees
 Wounded, though, by time’s axe
 And the greedy edges of *agbegilodo*’s matchet (5)

Sawmillers invade the forests and mow down the large, tall growing trees to feed the growing furniture industries spewed in our collective contemporary consciousness by modernity. This would have been commendable if the forests were not rendered bare by plundering their resources without recouping the loss in the form of tree planting. The consequences of such carelessness were enormous and deleterious for the environment. The *agbegilodo* is an onomatopoeic descriptive for a heavy truck used

for transferring logs of wood from the forests to the mills where they are sawn into planks for sale and for other uses. The size of the truck itself does incalculable damage to crops planted on farms, especially on portions where an immediate route is made out for it to haul its wooden cargo.

The poet continues to valorise the trees in the densely populated forests of Southern Nigeria when, one after the other, he speaks about the qualities and characteristics of each of them before finally crowning the palm tree king of all trees. Osundare, in this connection, muses as follows:

Let the *iroko* wear the crown of the roof

Let *ayunre* play the clown of the fireplace

But let no tree challenge the palm

Evergreen conqueror of rainless seasons.

Mother of nuts and kernels

Tree proud and precious like the sculptor's wood

Bearer of wine and life (6).

The peculiar attractions of the *iroko* tree are laid out as a tree which can be cut into planks for roofing houses while *ayunre*, another tree type which does not match the former in value is suitable for use in the local hearth whether in the farm or at home. They are readily useful for cooking meals. The poet deservedly eulogises the palm tree which he describes as “the evergreen conqueror of the rainless seasons” and “mother of nuts and kernels”. It is further said that the palm tree is “bearer of wine and life”. These properties, peculiarities of the tree types identified by the poet, can easily be laid waste if the environment is not preserved to nurture their continued growth in the forests. This is the concern of a poet like Osundare who has deployed

his experiential knowledge of native, agrarian life to support the need for the preservation of the environment in virtually all his collections of poetry. In this connection, the poet has this to say:

The 'Forest' in the first movement is, essentially, shades and shadows of a remembered landscape, echoes of an Eden long departed when the rain forest was terrifyingly green..... Left mostly now are echoes whispered in the stubborn ears of memory. Most of those trees so vivaciously native to the forest have met a rapid death in the hands of timber merchants whose exploitative improvidence is symbolised here by the ubiquitous *agbegilodo*. (xii-xiii)

Osundare does not spare the greedy merchants and capitalists for their rapacity and improvidence. Government is equally not spared the weight of his sledge hammer. He remonstrates with policy makers for losing sight of enactments that will protect the future from the excesses and abuses of today. He bares his mind in the following:

In a land where vision and humanistic sympathy have taken leave of the ruling class, hardly is there any policy aimed at stopping the parlous depletion of our natural being. Hardly is anyone aware that today's profit (for them) is tomorrow's irreparable loss for universal humanity (xiii).

The poet has, in the excerpt above, performed one of the sacred duties of writers in society: to guide the people through their writing to abstain from what will ultimately be unprofitable and embrace that which will conduce to the good of all. The truth need not be over stated that the earth is a constant factor which must be dutifully considered to secure the future of humanity. The branch of literary theory called Ecocriticism is involved in the interrogation of the relationship of humankind and the physical environment in which they live. The poems examined so far, and others like them, are composed to draw attention to the overriding need to relate responsibly with the

environment to ensure that humanity is not faced with avoidable perdition in the fullness of time.

In the same chain of thought is the next poem titled, “Farmer-Born” in which the poet assiduously and conscientiously identifies with his roots and the circumstances of his upbringing. He is never pretentious about the status of his parents as peasant farmers. It is our view that Osundare is saying that although humankind has neither input nor control over who one’s parents are and the circumstances of one’s birth, such considerations obviously do not dictate how far one can go and how high one can rise in life. His own life speaks eloquently to this reality, having gone through thick and thin beginning from his rusty, bucolic background to his present attainment as a scholar/poet of note and literatus of world acclaim.

His fondness of his parents’ occupation as peasant farmers and his growing enthusiasm with plants on their vast acreage of farmland are recorded in the following:

Farmer-born peasant-bread
I have frolicked from furrow to furrow
sounded kicking tubers in the womb
of quickening earth
and fondled the melon breasts
of succulent ridges (43).

Osundare has fond remembrances of the earlier part of his life spent on his father’s farm. The allure of that period is evergreen and memorable. All the recollections are made possible by an environment that conduces to good living. The images of a young lad frolicking all over the farm is evoked as he moves from one furrow to another monitoring the growth and tenderness of his father’s plants until they reach maturity.

Language deployment helps greatly to drive home his points, especially with figurative personifications. He sees himself as a medical doctor palpating and listening to the sound of “kicking tubers in the womb of quickening earth”. The seedlings, yams in particular, show signs of growth, development and maturity as if they are steadily developing foetuses in their mothers’ wombs. The poet’s fondness of farm life and its attractions is further seen in how he “fondled the melon breasts of succulent ridges”. These references to, and parallels between the properties of the earth and the peculiar physiognomy of women is deliberate and instructive. It is only women who are naturally endowed and specially empowered to incubate children and, afterwards, suckle them from the lactation from their mammary endowments to give life, energy and deserved nurture to a newly sired neonate. In what looks like a comparison of life in contemporary times and the rich, pristine and unadulterated victuals he had in his formative years, the poet laments his latter-day experiences when he writes:

Farmer-born peasant-bred
classroom-bled
I have thrown open my kitchen doors
and asked hunger to take a seat,
my stomach a howling dump
for Carolina rice. (44).

The obvious differences in the taste and texture of locally produced (and locally consumed rice) and the modern day imported species are glaringly presented to readers so that life lived in an unpolluted ecosystem is adjudged to be preferable to other types of existence.

In another poem titled, “They too are the earth”, the poet compares two extremes of people living on earth in different stations. The differences in their status are not unconnected with the inappropriate relationship between humankind and the environment. Whilst the lowly placed fetchers of water and hewers of wood occupy the densely populated lower rung of the ladder of social stratification, a select few perch at the top reeking in obscene splendour. For the low, the least and the last, the poet has this to say:

They too are the earth
 the swansongs of beggars sprawled out
 in brimming gutters
 they are the earth

 the sweat and grime of
 millions hewing wood and hurling waters
 they are the earth

muddy every pore like naked moles (45).

Were the earth an appropriately tended place, all its human denizens would have equal opportunities to live life in abundance. The consequences of degradation and despoliation, however, make this wish impossible. Large portions of farmlands have been ceded to or forcibly overtaken by industrialists who degrade the earth and leave the whole environment unliveable. This category of interlopers are the people Osundare describes in the next stanza when he asks:

Are they of this earth
 who fritter the forest and harry the hills
 Are they of this earth
 who live that earth may die
 Are they? (45).

In a tone laden with alarm and fear for the future of humankind, the poet asks rhetorically if the ones who “fritter the forests and harry the hills” are also of this earth. His uncertainty about whether they are of the earth or not is heightened when he enquires if those “who live that earth may die” are also of this earth. It is clear that humans who despoil and degrade the earth merely cut their noses to spite their faces. If they subdue the entire environment and make people live in anguish, will they relocate to Mars, or Neptune, and from there do their business here on earth?

Osundare engages in the use of repetition, otherwise called tautology in strict literary sense. Repetition means the deliberate use of words or phrases several times for the sake of emphasis. By reading and re-reading, the poet is laying emphasis on a point which he wants his readers to note. The tautological question, “are they of this earth” draws attention to the strange indifference of killers of the earth to the feelings of the environment and its people. The alliterative deployment of words like “fritter” and “forest”, “harry” and “hills” is to accentuate the concerns and anxiety of the reader about an environment laid to waste by the carelessness of humankind.

In yet another poem, “Ours To Plough, Not To Plunder”, the poet sends out a clarion call to humankind to treat the earth with care, caution and concern. This is because the bowels of the earth hold our sustenance. Our relationship with it will dictate whether we derive boom or doom. It is after a mutually rewarding symbiosis between the earth and humankind that we can urge ourselves, as the poet leads, to boastfully and confidently say:

Out with mattocks and matchets
bring calabash trays and rocking baskets
let the sweat which swells earthroot

relieve heavy heaps of their tuberous burdens (48).

He continues that humankind cannot empty the storehouse in the earth if we treasure it as the food basket of humanity. The poet challenges all humanity not to leave the earth fallow, unexplored. As moral compass and social conscience of society, the poet further counsels:

Our earth is an unopened grainhouse
 A bustling barn in some far, uncharted jungle
 A distant gem in a rough unhappy dust
 This earth is
 Ours to work not to waste
 Ours to man not to maim
 This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder. (48).

The poet's repeated usage of words and expressions like "rough unhappy dust", "waste", "maim" and "plunder" is intended to send a serious message to humanity that grave damage may continuously be done to the environment if we do not seek necessary redress and tend the earth more carefully than has been the case hitherto. Indeed, the metaphor in the first line of this stanza, "Our earth is an unopened grainhouse" is a metaphor that reminds humanity of the abundance of the earth and its infinite capacity to feed the entire population living on it.

In what looks like an inspiration laced with hope in the face of seeming despondency, the poet in "Our Earth Will Not Die" gives a reassurance that the earth will live forever in defiance of the several abuses to which it is daily subjected. He praises its phenomenal regenerative capability and resilience. He delivers a heart-warming

judgement that the earth will live and not die. This position of hope is contained in the following:

Lynched
 The lakes
Slaughtered
 The seas
Mauled
 The mountains

But the earth will not die. (50).

Osundare uses personification as he employs verbs of violence to express environmental destruction. These verbs include, “lynched”, “slaughtered”, and “mauled”. These words, in various degrees express the gravity of violence that is done to the earth. It is heart-warming that in spite of the violations suffered by the earth, it remains resilient and undying.

The hope of humanity is anchored on the resilience of an earth which can never be brought down regardless of any gang up against it by felons who daily despoil it. He clearly states the activities of these fiends when he explains:

Here

there

everywhere

a lake is killed by the arsenic urine
 from the bladder of profit factories
 a poisoned stream staggers down the hills
 coughing chaos in the sickly sea
 the wailing whale, belly up like a frying fish,
 crests the chilly swansong of parting waters (50).

From the above, a grim picture of despoliation is painted. What becomes of a lake when its water is “killed by the arsenic urine/from the bladder of profit factories”? It has simply been denatured; its contents unusable. The same goes for seas which have become “sickly” because their waters have been polluted leaving in them “the wailing whale, belly up like a frying fish”. The large chunk of protein-giving meat from the wasted whale is lost to poison injected into the body of waters by operators of the “profit factories”. Even when Osundare knows the purveyors of the evil that is inflicted on the earth, he still asks in rhetorical enquiries who the malefactors are:

Who lynched the lakes. Who?
 Who slaughtered the seas. Who?
 Whoever mauled the mountains. Whoever?

Our earth will not die. (50).

The deleterious consequences of chemical pollutants injected to the environment which result in acid rain, the unavoidable death of aquatic life and de-naturalization of the forests constitute his vituperations against the careless handlers of the Earth. His plaintive lament is seen in:

And the rain
 The rain falls, acid, on balding forests
 Their branches amputated by the septic daggers
 Of tainted clouds
 Weeping willows drip mercury tears
 In the eye of sobbing terrains
 A nuclear sun rises like a funeral ball
 Reducing man and meadow to dust and dirt.
 But our earth will not die (51).

The lamentation of the poet in his muse is truly scary. When rains “fall acid on balding forests”, the result is that the dense foliage of the trees is chopped off by the acidic properties of the ominous rains. This is why “their branches are amputated by the septic daggers/of tainted clouds”. Factory machine release of poisonous effluents into the atmosphere results in the release of acid rains which give the forests their “balding” heads. The misery of humankind worsens when “weeping willows drip mercury tears” and “the nuclear sun rises like a funeral ball/reducing man and meadow to dust and dirt”. The evocations here are horrific indeed. The “funeral ball” is capable of melting anything in sight-fish, flora, fauna, flesh, and all. Even at this, the poet rekindles hope when he says hopefully, obdurately and dispassionately that “our earth will not die”.

The gale of disruptions to the environment through degradation and despoliation sweeps through both land and water. Everything in sight is consumed by the hostile impact of industrialization and modernity. This scenario is captured by the poet when he says:

Fishes have died in waters. Fishes.
 Birds have died in the trees. Birds.
 Rabbits have died in their burrows. Rabbits.

But our earth will not die. (51).

In the concluding stanza of this poem, the poet sings the song of hope. His faith is reinforced by the resilience of the earth and its capacity to rise each time it has been mowed down by forces of destruction, despoliation and degradation. The poet plays his part in the collective theatre of humanity as prophet and teacher who beats the path for society to tread. He repeatedly rekindles the hope of humankind that a better future beckons. This is what he means when he says:

Our earth will see again
 eyes washed by a new rain
 the westering sun will rise again
 resplendent like a new coin.

The poet praises the earth for its inherent qualities which make it live in spite of several and continued efforts to kill it. The import of the statement that “our earth will see again, eyes watched by a new rain” is that the rains will definitely re-awaken the earth from its present state of disuse and misuse in the hands of despoilers. It reaffirms that the earth will for ever be relevant in the affairs of humanity. The poet continues:

The wind, unwound, will play its tune
 trees twittering, grasses dancing;
 hillsides will rock with booming harvests
 the plains batting their eyes of grass and grace.

This stanza adds to the capacity of the earth to benefit from several other elements apart from the rains. Added to this is the wind which also boosts crop yield. The observable impact of the wind, literally speaking, is seen in “trees twittering” and “grasses dancing” as it plays its tunes.

The sea will drink its hearts content
 when a jubilant thunder flings open the skygate

and a new rain tumbles down
 in drums of joy.
 Our earth will see again
 this earth, OUR EARTH. (51).

The poet rekindles hope in the midst of pervasive despair about the terrible reversals of fortunes that the earth has continuously suffered in the hands of the fiends who maul, lynch and slaughter it. He sings triumphantly and hopefully that “our earth will see again//this earth, OUR EARTH”.

After examining the position of Osundare in *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), the shift in the focus of this research is to his other collection used for the explication of his thoughts on the environment and what it profits from poetry. *Waiting Laughters* (1990), engages our attention now. A reader or researcher who is not thoroughly perceptive may go away with the impression that this collection does not accommodate poems of the ecophilic bent but looks more like a long lyrical chant rendered to the accompaniment of musical instruments. This position is held by some researchers and critics. One such critic is Taiwo (2010) who notes that the poems in the collection dredge up “a strong aura of invocatory chants of redolent tonalities, an indication that the poetry collection (sic) is a long song in many voices”. He continues his observation by adding that “the scenario is actually that of an oral performance, replete with repetitions amongst other performative elements which enhance its semantics and musicality” (2). It is our view that beneath the veneer of musicality in oral performance lies a strong message that is tied to the environment. This message is borne by the semantic imports of the lexical choices the poet makes in the presentation of his positions and claims in the poetry. We further rely on Ann B Dobie

(2009) that a researcher can exhume some meanings that may not be too obvious to a reader if he or she has not paid particular attention to meanings outside the physical text before him or her. Dobie (2009) instructively admonishes in *Theory to Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*, that “an ecocritical reading of a text enables a researcher to resurrect less well-known texts of nature writing...and literature that is not explicitly about nature. *This provides opportunity for a reader to discover new dimensions of works long thought to have been dissected*” (242) (emphasis ours). We intend to “resurrect” the texts in Osundare’s nature writing which may not have yielded themselves to easy comprehension as such. Whilst resonating the views of Glotfelty (1996) on the need to look beyond the ordinary to make meanings from a text, Dobie (2009) has the following to say:

Ecocriticism according to Glotfelty is following an analogous pattern beginning with an interest in ‘representations’. An examination of how nature is depicted in Literature, thereby raising public awareness of attitudes toward the natural world. Thus, practitioners look at how stereotypes warp reality and note where nature is absent or simply ignored... An effort to rediscover and reconsider the genre of nature writing “which has fallen into neglect” constitutes an important phase... (242).

Our position in the foregoing, that Osundare’s *Waiting Laughters* contains ecocentric concerns which will become more explicit and discernible upon closer study, is in agreement with the position of Agofure (2016) who notes that “waiting” represents the poet’s criticism of Nigeria’s socio-economic and environmental conditions captured in the diverse problems of exploitation, oppression, subjugation, disillusionment and environmental degradation” (63). Agofure expatiates further that the title of the poem is linked by the motifs of “waiting” and “laughter” which issue

from the memory of the poet and that the entire collection “explores multiple dimensions of socio-political changes that evoke (both) laughter and grief...the poet’s idea of waiting and laughter is (therefore,) a matrice of his social vision” (63).

Generally, critics have appraised *Waiting Laughters* (1990) and agreed that it is a worthy collection and an addition to Osundare’s many literary contributions aimed at repositioning the polity for the good of all. One such scholar and critic is Abiola Irele (1988) who concludes that “Osundare’s *Waiting Laughters* marks the highest peak in the poet’s progression toward an artistic fusion of craft and content that has produced an increasingly dense poetic idiom” (16). Another critic of *Waiting Laughters* whose views are examined here is Kunle Ajibade (1988) who poignantly asserts that “the selected poetry is a refutation of sorts, an affirmation of life. Yet it is the story of a long-suffering people rendered in a *colourful imagery of death and living*” (emphasis ours) (5). The images of death and living in Ajibade’s appraisal of the collection are paradoxical, yet complimentary. The circumstances in which the dehumanised citizens live evoke the images of death. These images stare bleakly at the living in their abjectly penurious existence as they eke out a difficult living because of the realities of existence forced on them by exploiters and their local collaborators. The views of a famed ecocritic, Lawrence Buell (2005), are worth our review as we situate humanity and other earthly denizens as mutually dependent entities in our environment. Buell posits that “human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest because flora, fauna, fish, birds and flowing streams are endowed with a habitat, a history, a story of their own” (7). With these backgrounds in mind, Osundare’s muses in this collection are now x-rayed to identify their symmetry with the plight of the environment to which he seeks to draw attention. His opening lines

on the first page of the book and the introductory section of the poem illuminate our minds. The poet says:

I pluck the words from the lips of the wind
 Ripe like a pendulous pledge
 Laughters parable explode in the groin
 Of walking storms
 Clamorous with a covenant
 Of wizened seeds

Tonalities. Redolent tonalities

Of wandering fancies yeasting into mirth,
 Yeasting into glee in the crinkled lanes
 Lingering aroma of pungent chuckles,
 Of giggling cheeks,
 The rave of ribs which spell the moments
 In latitudes of tender bones

Tonalities. Redolent tonalities

I pluck these murmurs
 From the laughter of the wind
 The shrub's tangled tale
 Plated tree tops
 And palms which drop their nuts (2).

From page 2 all through to page 9, there are words, phrases, lines and other expressions that depict the despicable lives that people live in parched, arid environments made so by the insularity of leaders to the changing fortunes of the environment. The scenario depicted above is crystallised with such expressions as “unbridled deluge”, “shrub’s tangled tale”, “wizened seeds”, “showerless seasons”, “waking storms”, “dusty laughter”, “bristling deserts”, “austerity factories” and “orphaning storms”. Osundare’s outburst in the foregoing is deliberately vituperative. His expressions are decidedly combative against leadership that maintains an uncanny insularity to the despoliation and degradation of the Nigerian environment. He is, by

the medium of this poetry, urging government to revamp the environment and enact proclamations for its conservation.

From the opening line of the first stanza of *Waiting Laughters*, the keen reader finds that the general outlay of the pages, the aesthetic presentation and visual pleasantness that should characterise a poem are absent. There are quatrains as there are sestets running into enjambments and *verse libre*, a literary and aesthetic device that leaves out regular patterns in the presentation of poems. The choice of the poet appears deliberate: to make a comment about the disorderly state of the contemporary Nigerian polity, especially with particular reference to its approach to issues affecting and concerning the environment. As the researcher proceeds with the reading and annotation of the poems from page to page, he/she comes face to face with the imports of what Abiola Irele (1998) has earlier described as “an artistic fusion of craft and content that has produced an increasingly dense poetic idiom” (16). The density of Osundare’s poetic idiom covers the entire volume of poetry from start to finish. References and consultations need to be made to his Yoruba origins to fully grasp the messages intended by his poetry. Osundare’s deployment of language and local idioms in this volume can be described using the title of his earlier essay on the works of Wole Soyinka which he appropriately entitled: *Words of Iron and Sentences of Thunder; Soyinka’s Prose Style* (1982). Soyinka’s solidity of language, patriarchal prose and dense idioms are the reasons Osundare wrote his paper on the works of the Nobel laureate. It is appropriate in this study to describe Osundare as he has depicted Soyinka because of his obscurantist, almost obfuscatory linguistic and lexical choices in *Waiting Laughters*. His choices here contrast remarkably with his deployments in his other literary productions. As we noted earlier, Osundare has chosen to be

advertently impenetrable and inaccessible. This is to symbolize the palpable tensions and difficulty inherent in living in Nigeria at the time of his writing and in contemporary times.

The poet speaks truth to power about the criminal neglect of the Nigerian ecosystem when he says:

Truth of the valley
Truth of the mountain

Truth of the boulder
Truth of the river

Truth of the flame
Truth of the ash

Truth of the sun
Truth of the moon (3)

.
Truth of the liar
Truth of the lair

Truth of the castle
Truth of the caste

Truth of the desert
Truth of the rain (3).

The truth of the matter is widespread. This is why he repeats deliberately the noun “truth” in each line of the seven stanzas in the excerpt. The word is used repeatedly fourteen times to show how important it is. Its dragnet covers the entire theatre of human endeavours. It is the desire of the poet as a social crusader to importune political leaders to address matters of the climate and of the environment in general. This is the essence of the interaction between literature and society. This appears as drawing from a rich knowledge of the penchant of leaders to be insensitive to the

strident calls to remedy the ills in society before things get to a head, Osundare justifies his insistence on using words, poetry in this case, to rouse leaders from their cocoon of insularity and deliberate insensitivity. In this connection, the poet writes:

Blame not, then,
The rapid eloquence of the running vowel
When words turn willing courier
In the courtyard of dodging ears
Can the syllable stall its tale
In impertinences of halfway fancies? (5).

From the stanza quoted here, the poet evokes the image of a speaker suffering from verbal diarrhoea when he talks of “rapid eloquence of the running vowel”. He has to rely on the efficacy and instrumentality of the power of words because “words turn willing courier/in the courtyard of dodging ears”. The beauty of poetry and the power of words are on display here. Words can penetrate the fenced walls of the leaders and deliver the messages that a messenger cannot transmit in person. The phrase, “dodging ears” metonymizes recalcitrant, deaf and insular leaders who deliberately haul defiance at the masses and their pleas for a better life in an environment that is free of man-made threats to peaceful existence.

In an effort to show the interconnectedness between nature and humanity and reinforce ecological uniqueness and utility, the poet demonstrates the cooperative enterprise of all the components of the earthly environment. This is what he does in the following lines:

The wind has left springing laughter
In the loins of bristling deserts,
Sands giggle in grass,
Following pebbles reach for sacks of scrotal pasture

And still fugitive like a fairy,
 The wind gallops like a thoroughbred
 Dives like a dolphin
 Soars into the sky
 Like *awodi* with a beak of feathery oracles (4).

The restlessness of the wind is described in uncomplimentary sentences as the quote here shows. Having become rather violent, it has “left springing laughter/in the loins of bristling deserts”. Desertification is a product of careless handling of an environment that is otherwise rich in greenery. The consequence is that humankind suffers possible blindness from the violent gusts of winds which spread dry dusts in a desert. With the use of figurative expressions in profusion, the poet introduces a personification as we see the “sands giggle in grass” and “the wind gallops like a thoroughbred” which “dives like a dolphin”. Figures of comparison, *simile* and *metaphor*, are also seen in the examples above. All the living elements, especially animals and sea creatures, point to the communality and interdependence of all occupants of an ecosystem. These items include: grass, thoroughbred (horse), dolphin and hawks. The environment becomes richer with these creatures enhancing its biodiversity and uniqueness. It is the need to protect this alluring diversity that drives poets of the ecocritical phylum, amongst them Osundare in our peculiar case, to engage in writing poetry of preservation and conservation of the environment in the overall interest of humankind.

The coverage of the poet is far and wide. His observations, consequent upon which the poems in this collection have been composed, include phenomena in places farther than his immediate socio-cultural milieu. Issues of despoliation, degradation and

general mismanagement of the environment affect almost everywhere outside his Yoruba geography and physical delineations. This is why his poetry is encompassing and enveloping of the concerns raised in places where mining and extractive activities take place, where logging and timber businesses leading to deforestation take place, where the land has been over used and not left to fallow and recoup its nutrients and other instances where the lakes and ponds have been polluted and rendered useless. The issues and concerns raised by the prevalent and pervasive misuse of the environment are addressed when the poet says:

My foot knows the timbre of fiery skies
Where songs still dripping
With the sap of the wind
Dry their limbs in furnaces
Of baking proverbs

My song is space
Beyond wails, beyond walls
Beyond insular hieroglyphs
Which crave the crest
Of printed waves (25).

The reference to “fiery skies” in “my foot knows the timbre of fiery skies” reminds the reader of what the atmosphere has become after being consistently and mercilessly assailed by poisonous effluents from gas flaring emissions in places where oil exploration perennially takes place. The hot, inclement skies lead invariably to climate change and its deleterious effects on humanity. The line, “My song is space/Beyond wails, beyond walls/Beyond insular hieroglyphs” refers to the limitless reach and octopoidal influences of the poems on readers and leaders of government businesses. The songs and the messages they present come with such clarity and lucidity that no

semantic ambiguity or obfuscation can be imputed into them because they are “beyond insular hieroglyphs”, hieroglyphs being sign writings whose real meanings may not be readily decipherable by simple minded readers and analysts.

Our references and analyses so far have been drawn from Section (i) of the collection broadly entitled, *Waiting Laughters*. Section (ii) of the collection deals, with the same consistency and venom, with issues of the environment which poetry is being deployed to address.

The poet opens the section with lamentations of the shattered innocence of the Nigerian landscape. The activities of explorers and exploiters have changed the face of the environment for the worst. The plunder and pillory of nature, and the rape and deflowering of the environment are captured:

The innocence of the Niger
 Waiting, waiting
 Fourhundredseasons
 For the proof of the prow
 Waiting
 For the irreverent probing of pale paddles
 Waiting
 For the dispossessing twang of alien accents
 Waiting
 For scrolls of serfdom, hieroglyphs of calculated
 Treacheries
 Waiting
 Without a face without a name without a face without a-
 Waiting
 For the Atlantic which drains the mountains with
 Practiced venom (37).

Employing the tenets of Reader Response Literary Criticism, it is safe to conclude that the reference to “the innocence of the Niger” in the stanza quoted above is to the pristine sedateness of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. It is the proverbial goose that lays the golden eggs on which the Country depends almost entirely. Waiting for

“fourhundredseasons” is a long wait indeed. The reference to four hundred seasons here is a reminder of Ayi Kwei Armah’s novel, *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), which is a historical chronicle of events in Africa in one thousand years. The deduction comes from the fact that in Africa, there are two seasons, the Rain and Harmattan. This differs from the reality in the western world where there are all of four different seasons, namely; Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter. Osundare is thus drawing the reader’s attention to two hundred years of unabated bashing of the Niger Delta area by agents of foreign powers whose economic interest is oil exploration and exploitation. The jumbling of “fourhundredseasons” symbolises the unsettling cacophony in the historical accounts of the contact of the rampaging imperialists and the aboriginal Niger Deltans.

Osundare paints a more dreadful picture of the global dimension of the environmental crises when he muses about places outside Nigeria but within Africa. This is to underscore the reach and influence of artists and writers globally. Since the phenomenon of environmental disasters is worldwide, the poet makes copious references to locations where the effects of degraded environments are noticeable. In this connection, he ventilates his feelings when he notes:

Waiting
 For a history which snails towards the coast,
 A delta meandering dreams
 Waiting ...
 Where rock riles river and conquering boat
 Fathoms the sand in a tumble of misty furies
 Waiting

The Nile knows, the Limpopo lingers,
 The Kilimanjaro preserves the lore in icy memory
 Waiting (37).

In the quote above, “the delta of meandering dreams” refers unambiguously to the quandary and directionlessness of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria soon after the ingress of the interloping fortune seekers into its territory. The dreams of the people now “meander” because they can no longer maintain a steady course. The common destiny of the entire Region flounders without a particular destination and purpose in mind. The resignation of the people is occasioned by a degraded environment that neither supports farming nor aquatic means of livelihood.

The effects of environmental crises in parts of Africa, outside the precincts of Nigeria attest to the urgency that the issue requires. References to “Nile”, “Limpopo” and “Kilimanjaro” point to the widespread nature of ecological problems that Africa, nay the World, grapples with. The referents, respectively, are metonymies for Egypt, South-East Africa and Tanzania. In what looks like a sense of desperation and despondency, the poet asks rhetorically:

But for how long can the hen wait
 Whose lay is forage for galloping wolves? (37).

The intrinsic nature of the poet activist is dredged up in the question he asks here. A tinge of protest surrounds his enquiry as he ponders on how villains and vampires can continue to feed on the resources delivered from the belly of the Niger Delta Region whilst the entire place is left to waste and its people abandoned to lick their wounds. The lines of poetry in *Waiting Laughters*, and indeed in Osundare’s other poetic,

literary productions, propose the answer to his question. The poems in this collection demand that the injustice meted to an undeserving people needs be redressed not only to restore and rehabilitate them but also to rekindle hope in the environment.

Section (iii) of the collection, *Waiting Laughters*, continues the lamentations of the poet, a build-up on his musings in the two previous sections. We concur with the poet that this is how best to draw the attention of citizens and people at top level of government that the environment deserves attention if it must continue to offer protection and support to humankind. The inclement weather with its attendant aridity which almost threatens life and existence is the reason he says:

My land lies supine
 Like a giant in the sun
 Its mind a slab of petrified musing
 Its heart a deserted barn
 Of husky cravings (45)

The choice of diction by the poet is spectacularly evocative of the mood of the environment and the need to bring this to greater focus. The first line of the stanza quoted, “My land lies supine” likens the land to a human being who has become famished and dehydrated because of malnutrition by underfeeding. It now lies, helpless and bereft of vigour. This is a fitting description of a parcel of land which has been over used and has not been left to fallow and recoup its natural nutrients. The implication is that its yield will become very low and the downward trend will be sustained with each successive year of planting. We infer that famine stares the population in the face with the land being continuously and unrepentantly degraded. The depiction of land as “a giant in the sun” whose mind is “a slab of petrified musing”

and whose heart is “a deserted barn” is thoroughly disconcerting and worrisome. Osundare further bemoans the plight of the earth, the environment and its denizens when he writes:

And in this March,
This March of my heated coming,
The sky is high in the centre of the sun
Cobs faint in the loins of searing stalks’
The tuber has lost its voice in the stifling womb
Of shrivelled heaps. (45)

Climate change and the intensity of the heat from sunlight aggravate the circumstances of the environment. Massive deforestation has laid the whole earth bare, unprotected from the scorching sun by the foliage of trees. This is why “cobs faint in the loins of searing stalks” and worse, “the tuber has lost its voice in the stifling womb of shrivelled heaps”. We affirm in this study that ecocriticism contributes to the wellbeing of humankind using the instrumentality of literature in general and poetry in particular. Wherever they are domiciled, humans are same and share the core values of existence and survival. Mankind survives basically on food and drink offered by the natural environment which they inhabit. The “fainting cobs” and the “voiceless tubers” evoke feelings of empathy with farmers in East and West Africa. In Kenya, where this scholar studied, the staple foods of the populace, *githeri* (a mixture of maize and beans cooked as a meal) and *ugali*, maize meal are made from maize. *Githeri* and *ugali* are Kiswahili words. One therefore becomes apprehensive to read of cobs (of maize) “fainting in the loins of searing stalks”. The apprehension continues when we read that the “tuber has lost its voice in the stifling womb of shrivelled heaps”. Tubers can be of cassava or of yam. Whilst cassava (*manihot*

utilisima) is planted and consumed in Kenya, both crops, that is cassava and yam (*discorea rotundata*) are planted and consumed in West Africa, especially in Nigeria and Ghana. It is heart-warming that yam is grown in limited quantity in Meru in Kenya. Its cultivation can be extended to areas where land is suitable to grow the crop. The reference to humans and the food crops they survive on is to underscore the importance of the interdependence of nature and humankind. The poet proceeds to warn of possible dire consequences attendant to a refusal to accord the earth and the entire environment a decent treatment. He maintains that “death” stares humanity in the face when he notes:

A king there is
In this purple epoch of my unhappy land:
His first name is hunger,
His proud father is Death

Which guards the bones at every door (45).

The implication of Osundare’s musing is that hunger and, by consequence, death is the fate that lies in wait for mankind if we all fail to pay heed to warnings and admonitions to treat the earth with dignity. Lapsing into Yoruba language, his mother tongue, the poet brings out the horrifying semantic spectacle of famine and avoidable reversal of fortunes. This he couches in:

Ibosi o
Hands which go mouthwards
In seasons of ripening corn
Have lost their homeward trip
To the waiting bowl (46).

Away from the dark and sepulchral depictions that Osundare employs to bring to our consciousness the need for an improved environment, he nonetheless associates with humanity and fervently hopes that the earth, once desiccated and parched, will again breathe the breath of life. His hopes and best wishes are presented in:

My land is a desert
waiting for the seminal fury
of uneasy showers (47).

Osundare unwaveringly believes that humanity is sustained by hope in tomorrow. This is what lightens the burdens of today and keeps the human spirit high. A further expression of hope in the midst of pervasive gloom is seen in the following excerpts from *Waiting Laughters*. :

Even when elephants plod through
Our ripening farms
When stalks are sad
And broken buds lament their bleeding scars,
A few flowers cling, still,
To the beard of the valley
Dancing, dancing, in the whistling wind (67).

Hope is rekindled in the foregoing because the spirit of humankind will be lifted high by the reassurance that things will get better with patience and hope, no matter how bad they seem now. This position is buttressed by the image of the elephant, the humongous lord of the forests, “plodding through our ripening farms//when stalks are sad//and broken buds lament their bleeding scars”. In spite of this reality of the rampaging elephant, “a few flowers cling, still//to the beard of the valley” (67). The

reference to the few flowers still clinging to the beard of the valley is an assurance that humankind will not die of hunger and starvation.

2.4 Towards Ecotopia in the Selected Poems of Niyi Osundare

The aspirations of Niyi Osundare meet with those of the proponents of the concept known as Ecotopianism. It is an offshoot of Ecocriticism. Whereas Ecocriticism emphasizes the symbiosis between humankind and the general environment that they inhabit, examined from the prism of literary texts, Ecotopianism pushes this limit further afield. It is a word formation, etymologically speaking, from the clippings of two words, *Ecology* and *Utopia*. Taken together, they refer to an environment that is capable of providing residents and occupants with what looks like an Eldorado. Toward achieving this objective, literature is expected to prescribe Ecovigilance, Ecoactivism, Ecosensitivity and Ecosympathy. These terminologies lend themselves to easy understanding in that they express the important need to pay particular attention to the way that humankind relate to their environment through vigilance. By this is meant that they should not let anything go without scrutiny if such happenings will hamper the environment. Literature should further show the need for denizens of the environment, especially the human species, to be advocates of a liveable environment devoid of harmful avoidable hazards which are human creations. Ecosensitivity involves being sensitive to the immediate and remote environment in such a way that new developments are noticed and examined to evaluate their implications for the general welfare of the people occupying a given environment. Finally, Ecosympathy appears like a pot-pouri of the concepts already elucidated upon in the foregoing. It implies that humanity must be manifestly sympathetic to the

environment as though it were an animate object. It is this sort of genuine sympathy to the fortune or misfortune of the environment that will ensure that it is nurtured to benefit humankind in turn. The two positions, ecocriticism and ecotopianism, present a more assuring future for humankind, a far cry from merely directing our consciousness to the threats being faced by the environment but in equal measure, giving humanity hope in the face of despair and redemption in the face of total defeat and loss. This is why Ochia Clement Eloghosa (2020) concludes that “ecotopia is concerned with examining the ecological issues that underpin a literary text advocating alternative responses and vision in order to combat environmental degradation” (171).

Chang Hui-Chuan (2005) notes that ecotopianism frowns at “the corporate and technological exploitation of nature and the ensuing environmental degradation and extinction of species” (251). The highpoint of this theory is that it has a critical bent. It queries the insatiable craze for wealth and material acquisitions whilst disregarding mother-nature with adverse consequences such as pollution and degradation of the environment and the destruction of plants and animals. Hui-Chuan proceeds with the argument that ecotopianism is interested in presenting “an alternative vision, the interconnectedness among humans and nature and the need to maintain the balance between economic pursuits and ecological concerns” (251). It is in this connection that literature finds relevance. The interdependence of literature and ecology offers the opportunity of censorship and condemnation of ecological infractions, using literary texts. Literature, in general, thus becomes the checks and balances over ecology in the overall interest of humankind. The import of this position is that only

a radical approach to issues of the environment can guarantee the desired equality and equilibrium between nature and humanity.

From Osundare's interventions so far, it is clear that his poetry goes beyond pointing out the clear dangers faced by humankind in a depleted and degraded environment. He goes further to show by example that the present gloom will give way to a rekindled hope. This is the approach that he uses in the poem, "Ours to plough, not to plunder", for instance. He reminds us how the fate of humankind is tied, almost inextricably, to the fate of the earth. The continuity of mankind depends almost entirely on the existence of the earth. The earth bears water, food and plants on which humankind depends for support, sustenance and longevity. This streak of hope runs through another poem, "Our Earth will not Die". This is a clear affirmation of hope in the midst of pervasive despair that humanity is assured of a greater tomorrow on condition that we do not abuse our environment, a major component of which the earth is. As he concludes the poem, he reiterates the strength of his belief that our earth will not die. But there is a proviso to this. Our earth will not die only if we do our duty by it by resisting its despoliation and degradation through conscious efforts.

Osundare's recommendations are not limited to the ones he has made in *Eye of the Earth* (1986). The dragnet covers *Waiting Laughters* (1990). It is a considered view that desertification in some parts of Nigeria, especially in the West, and land degradation and despoliation in the Niger Delta can best be addressed by government proclamation prohibiting such practices. This is the impact of scholarship. It enables humankind to benefit from researches and findings, after all research is for the benefit of humanity. We concur with these positions and views.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this Chapter, it is defensible to note that Osundare, like other poets, social commentators and activists in his category, has dealt extensively with issues about the human earthly environment. He has deployed literature, poetry in particular, to interrogate these issues. Readers and scholars are inspired by him that humankind has a lot to benefit from an environment that is bereft of avoidable negativities like degradation, despoliation, air pollution and sundry matters. These matters are dealt with extensively in several verses of poems contained in the two volumes of poetry selected for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

ECHOES OF THE PAST AND REVERBERATIONS OF THE PRESENT IN TANURE OJAIDE'S WORKS.

*I live not in myself, but I became
Portion of that around me; and to me
High mountains are a feeling, but the
hum
Of human cities torture: I can see
A link reluctant in a fleshy chain,
Class'd amongst creatures, when the
soul can flee,
Of ocean, or the stars, mingle and not in
vain
George Byron.*

3.1 Introduction

The health of humankind depends almost entirely on the quality of the environment they inhabit. This is why literary pundits have taken it upon themselves to intervene decisively in matters affecting the environment and the place of humankind in it. The poetry of many poets has delved into this subject with a view to finding a common ground to resolve knotty issues about the environment and its denizens. In particular, the poetry of Tanure Ojaide focuses on the infractions on the Niger Delta space, being a scion of that region. The natural endowments of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria make it the hub of mining and extractive activities on a very large scale. Multinational companies and conglomerates are located strategically in that region to do multimillion-dollar business. It is baneful and agonizing that the activities of oil companies and associated businesses leave the land degraded and despoiled. The entire environment is polluted because of effluents from gas flaring. The waters are

rendered un-useable either for direct consumption or for fish farming. This litany of woes has resulted in bitter complaints from the occupants of the oil rich region. Amongst the complainants are the elite amongst whom poets are situated. From that region alone, there are many poets of note amongst whom are the revered John Pepper Clark, Odia Ofeimun, FBO Akporobaro, Tanure Ojaide, Dennis Osadebey, Tony Afejuku, Ebi Yeibo, Ibiwari Ikiriko and many more. All of them are concentric in their bitterness against the oppressive system that takes without giving back, leaving a trail of blood, anguish and disequilibrium in their land. From amongst the battery of poets from that region, Tanure Ojaide has been selected. Two of his poetry collections were analysed in this study to highlight the relationship in the thoughts of the poet with the physical environment of the Niger Delta. The collections are: *Delta Blues and Homesongs* (1997) and *Daydream of Ants and other Poems* (1997). Many poems in both collections speak to the condition of the Niger Delta people of Nigeria which Ojaide considers deplorable. He is not alone in this line of thought as his other compatriots feel the same way as he does, giving rise to the magnitude and profusion of poetry from the region and the consequent groundswell of agitations and protests to reclaim the land.

3.3 Economic, Sociological and Environmental Issues in the Niger Delta.

It is germane to further probe into the history of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria with a view to establishing that it had internal peace and economic prosperity before the people clashed with agents of imperialism and economic neo-colonialism. Ojaide made references to this when he said in the poem titled "Technology" that multinational companies had changed the landscape of their environment through

“cold-headed strategies...//the bush-rat dug a dungeon of infinite outlets...//ants raised a hill//to cover their habitat of holes” (13). The metaphorical references in the foregoing are to the ruins left in the wake of extensive mining and extraction of oil deposits in the area. In a plaintive tone of despondency and ululation, the poet says in conclusion “You can see what we were born into” (13).

Nseabasi (2005) described the sprawling Niger Delta as the second most expansive wetland coming after the Mississippi. It is second to none in the whole of Africa. In all, there are six States in Nigeria whose sea shores yield oil in large and commercial quantity. These States include present day Rivers, Edo, Delta, Cross-River, Bayelsa and Akwa-Ibom. The expanse of land on which these states are located, according to *Time* (2006), and Powell, Marriot and Stockman (2005) harbours the largest reserves of crude oil all over the world. It is estimated to be about 34 billion barrels. The entire region which is made up mainly of creeks, lagoons, marshland and tributaries is estimated to cover over 50,000 square kilometres of land in the Southern part of Nigeria. The area, according to Saliu, H. A. *et al* (2007) “constitutes the hub of oil and gas exploration in Nigeria...Exploration from this region has been a major source of revenue for the Nigerian government and (it) put(s) the state at a strategic position in the global calculations of industrial states and their multinational oil corporations” (277). At the height of its glory, Nigeria was the 5th largest exporter of crude oil amongst the oil-producing countries in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, OPEC (Agbu, 2005). The ICG in its report of 2006 states that Nigeria is the largest oil producer in Africa and the tenth in the whole world (ICG, 2006). *Time* (2006) and Omotola (2006) concur that a region which produces resources as massive

as we have detailed here is ironically home to Africa's most wretched people who inhabit the theatre of the continent's most terrible environmental destruction. Whilst Agbu (2005) noted that the resources in the Niger Delta which should be celebrated as "paradise on earth" were sadly seen as "hell on earth" (81), Osuoka (2003) was of the view that "all the activities connected with oil, beginning with exploration and drilling to transportation have unfavourable consequences on the inhabitants of the Niger Delta who depend exclusively on the natural environment for their survival and livelihood" (116). The Niger Delta environment suffers from all fronts: there are oil spills almost always, there are blowouts from over-aged wellheads, and there are rusty pipelines and ill-maintained facilities used for oil production. The invariable result is that the oil fields in Nigeria have a scandalous record of the highest incidents of oil spills in the world (ICG, 2006; Agbu, 2005; Osuoka, 2003).

This appalling situation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has attracted the attention and reaction of environmentalists who feel that the inhabitants have had a raw deal for more than sixty years of oil exploration on their land. In the place of wellbeing, the people have health hazards. In replacement for economic buoyancy, the people face acute loss of steady income from farming and fishing. In general, the people are bedevilled with ecological holocaust. It is for this reason that the late writer and environmentalist, Ken Saro Wiwa (1992) concluded that the consequences of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region were genocidal. Waxing philosophical and poetical, Saro Wiwa asserted:

Oil exploration is an ecological war in which no blood is (apparently) spilled, no bones are broken, no one is (assumed) maimed, so few are alarmed but men, women and children die; flora, fauna and fish perish; air, soil and water are poisoned and finally, the land and its inhabitants die. (42).

From the views expressed in the foregoing, it is discernible that the woes of the Niger Delta inhabitants are compounded by a steady rise in threats to human security. Apart from the issues raised by environmental hazards and worsening health conditions, the unending confrontation between the inhabitants of the oil producing communities and the multinational oil corporations call for anxiety and apprehension. In a desperate effort to keep oil production going, the state took steps to protect expatriates in the oil fields by drafting armed military personnel to maintain law and order at all costs.

3.4 A Critical Assessment of the Selected poems of Tanure Ojaide.

It is from this background that readers and scholars who may wish to carry out further research in this area of interest will best appreciate the undercurrents fuelling the ceaseless and unending agitations in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. These scenarios, put together, constitute the raw materials which supply the themes and body of writings, especially poetry, from the Niger Delta.

One after the other, beginning with *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems* (1997) and later, *Delta Blues and Homesongs* (1998) this Chapter now examines the place and purpose of history as a guide and pathfinder in a desperate effort to forge a union between the receding past and an ensuing present in the poetry of Tanure Ojaide. It is the echoes of the glorious past and the reverberations of the present that enable readers and researchers to differentiate the bounties of the past from the doom of the present.

The irksome rampage and attendant destruction of the alluring past is the launching pad that galvanizes Ojaide to action. His action is the production of several volumes of poetry aimed at salvaging his Niger Delta and retrieving its people from needless ruin. Talking about Ojaide's passion about the Niger Delta and its people, Ayinuola (2013) remarks that "as an environmentally conscious poet, Ojaide allows the social facts in his lived environment to find expression in his art". He argues further that "this trademark is also characteristic of the martyred poet and eco-activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was killed by the Sanni Abacha military regime" (36). Ayinuola's views point to the fact that all the poets from the Niger Delta were concentric that they had to put up a serious fight to restore their inheritance and dignity. The single thread that is woven through the tapestry of their poetic works is invariably the theme of protest, defiance and agitation. All of them are united in the belief that this was a task that must be done in their collective interest.

Since Nigeria became politically independent in 1960 serious problems had arisen in the area of communal and economic development. In the Niger Delta in particular, it had been observed by Ojatorotu (2008 :95), Nnoli (1980 :30) and Osaghae (1994 :9) that Nigeria had witnessed unprecedented upheavals arising from agitations over ecological concerns, environmental degradation, the indifference of the state to the plight of oil producing regions, and the inequitable distribution of wealth and other resources, especially amongst the states in the Niger Delta region. This was why Inya Eteng (1997) argued that:

What currently prevails in the Southern oil enclave is a specific variant of internal colonialism... The specific, highly exploitative and grossly inequitable endowment/ownership-exchange entitlements

relations between the Nigerian state and the oil-bearing communities in particular, which explains why the enormous oil wealth generated is scarcely reflected in the living standard and life chances of the peasant inhabitants of the oil-bearing enclave (21).

The same thought ran through the mind of Oyesola (1995) who argued that the historical sedateness of the Niger Delta region had been shattered by the new petrodollar which clearly introduced ecological neo-colonialism which resulted in the destruction of the social life, economic wellbeing and political direction of the people. He argued further that the Niger Delta, arguably the economic base and support of the country, had experienced the worst form of marginalization, oppression and neglect. This was buttressed by the fact that 90% of the nation's foreign exchange came from oil exploration, exploitation, refinery and sale by multinational oil conglomerates. Uzoechi Nwagbara (2010) argued that Nigerian writers in general, especially the ones from the Niger Delta, relied on the polluted socio-economic landscape of the oil producing region to confront the challenges by using art to query the status quo and to sensitize the people of the area in particular and other Nigerians in general to the inhumanity in the creeks and delta. As far as Nwagbara was concerned, "the hallmark of Ojaide's art is to use literature to engage the realities in his milieu...literature is a reproduction of social experiences; it is a refraction of the totality of human experience" (18).

Nigerian literary critic, Chidi Amuta (1986) aligns himself with the position of Nwagbara that literature has a historical purpose when he says:

As a refraction of social experience through the prism of the human imagination, the ontological essence of literature is to be located in terms of the extent to which it recycles social experience and transforms it into an aesthetic proposition (38-39).

We cannot agree more with Amuta's considered views. Indeed, artists live in their societies and have grown and witnessed an assortment of experiences ranging from the good through the bad to the ugly. These experiences, in Ojaide's case, have been a stretch of undulating vistas. It is gleaned from his poem, "when green was lingua franca" that he grew up in an environment that was beautified by its lushness and verdant allure. All this adorable scenery had been consumed and replaced by desertification ushered in by carelessness in the relationship of mankind to his biotic and abiotic environment. This was made worse by the attitude of the political elite whose practice was to maintain structures which undermined the place of the minorities (Wirth, 1945) whose land and inherent natural endowments produce the resources that support the national economy. Both state and multinationals operate in collaboration to kill the environment as the Niger Delta situation has shown because they "fashion a new ethic sanctioning the exploitation of nature" (Merchant, 1986).

In the poem "Technology", the rampaging exploitation of the masses of the people in the Niger Delta is brought to the fore. Joyce Agofure (2016) laments that this poem "provides a dark parody of the exploitative practices by industrialists on the Nigerian locale. The poem reveals images of the dispossessed Nigerian communities struggling for survival in the encompassment of techno-capitalism" (77). Relevant portions of the poem will illuminate our presentation further:

This started cold-headed strategies:...
 The bush-rat dug a dungeon
 Of infinite outlets...
 Ants raised a hill
 To cover their habitat of holes
 Out for a sliding adversary...
 The eagle cast an evil spell
 Over the ostrich
 To have birds that couldn't fly
 The hawk started endless war
 Against the tribe of chicks...
 You can see what we were born into! (13).

Ojaide's word usage in lines two and three of this poem, "the bush-rat dug a dungeon//of infinite outlets" is a pointer to the expressive use of animal imagery. It is relevant to point out that animals are part of the biosphere. The imagery depicts the transfer of the qualities or capacity to dig holes, dungeons and burrows from animals to humans. In the ensuing lines, we see how "ants raised a hill//to cover their habitat of holes//out for a sliding adversary". This continues the deployment of animal imagery in this poem. That ants could raise a hill to cover their habitat of holes and prevent the enemy from gaining access to it is an indirect call to humankind for environmental conservation and protection. Pursuant to the foregoing, Ojaide gives intimations that when "the eagle cast an evil spell//over the ostrich" and "the hawk started endless war//against the tribe of chicks", it is a veiled exposure of the manifestations and trappings of an oppressive hegemony over the helpless and hapless downtrodden.

The verses above concretize the enormity of exploitation visited on both humankind and the environment they inhabit. The dungeon of infinite outlets refers unmistakably to the trenches dug to lay oil bearing pipes from the point of mining to a distant refinery. It is too obvious to contest that the several kilometres of farmland covered by the pipelines are rendered useless by the multinational companies without sparing a thought for compensation for the indigenous owners of the property. The powerlessness of the local populace made up mainly of bucolic peasants under the oppressive jackboots of the exploitative merchants is what Ojaide describes in “the hawk started endless war//against the tribe of chicks” (13). Philip Aghoghovwia (2013) comments on this brutality against humanity and the environment when he writes:

...for the local populace at the extraction sites, claims to autochthony and, by implication, indigenous rights are suspended for the oil commodity to flow without hindrance to the international markets. Such is the case for the Niger Delta (4).

The last line of the “Technology”, “You can see what we were born into” is both poignant and bristling. It is obvious beyond equivocation that the indigenes of the Niger Delta region, the hotbed of extractive activities have, for long, been denied the naturalness into which less endangered people were born. The younger population aged below fifty years were born into a degraded environment, into a polluted atmosphere, and into famine and deprivation. It is in this connection that Ogaga Okuyade (2011) laments that “oil exploration destroys and reduces the opportunity for human survival” (75). The duty of the poet is to point at these infractions and urge

both government and their foreign collaborators to redress the matters arising expeditiously. Onokoome Okome (2002) argues that the writing of the collection could not have come at a better time. He notes that the collection is consistent with the established practice of focusing on the environmental decay of the Niger Delta Region caused by oil spillage. He adds that the title indicates “a poetry that focuses on the Niger Delta as a landscape in which observable physical disintegration and decay in social life correlate” (195). The disaffection continues with Nester Alu (2012) saying that “the present Niger Delta is a landscape in which observable physical degeneration and rot in social life unite” (133). Still on the issue of resentment of the needless waste and dysfunctionality to which the region has been consigned, Nwagbara (2010) says: “With the emergence of eco-poetry, Ojaide’s writings have come to be considered environmentally conscious texts: they adumbrate an internecine nexus between the natural world and man’s activities on (sic) it” (82).

The poem, “Technology” further explains how the situation becomes exacerbated by the collaboration of locals who point the way to strangers even in darkness. The following lines say it all:

After the reel-legged stork
 Sold out the secret of stilts
 And opened the trade
 For masquerades to market height

In their sleights,
 Didn't I in godly deference
 Want to scrape the sky
 And push back my small horizon? (13-14).

From the above, it can be seen that the secrets of a house which should only be known to the head of the family have become an open secret. For rewards, usually pecuniary, the traditional *modus operandi* of the indigenous owners of the land has been made known to outsiders, in this case, large scale industrialists whose main business is to degrade and despoil their land. Worse still, the national government has “opened the trade for masquerades”, an oblique reference to foreigners of whatever colour. The overall consequence of the unholy and destructive partnership of the foreigners and their local collaborators is the destruction of an environment made so desolate by the uncanny insularity and indifference of the exploiters to the need for remedial measures to save the environment.

In another poem, “Compound Blues”, Ojaide laments the utter destruction visited on the land in the name of technology, modernity and expansion. In the process of urbanization, destruction of natural structures must take place. This position is amplified by Derrick Jensen (2012) when he says “wealth is measured by one’s ability to consume and destroy” (207). Modern day consumption aptly translates to destruction of physical properties of the environment like natural waters, trees, groves and plantations. The relevant lines in the poem are:

Whenever a wall rises in my front,
 I crave to tear it down
 And ride through the rubble

To see what it used to hide... (10).

Many inferences are possible from the short excerpt above. The symbolism of the “wall” denotatively refers to a barricade that makes access impossible. It also connotes a veil that prevents interactions where necessary. In addition, the wall refers to a man-made gulf between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. In the spirit of this study, the wall refers specifically to the alienation of humankind from their environment. Ojaide is poised to confront the situation by protesting this unveiled injustice and cruelty, using the instrumentality of literature and, especially, poetry. Capitalist economy has made life increasingly difficult for both the lower and middle class in society. The rhetorical question, “how could we have arrived here?” is a call to his people to rise in unison to firmly demand a better treatment of and relationship with the environment. In yet another poem, “The Daydream of Ants”, Tanure Ojaide laments and bemoans the conspiratorial predilections of a section of the people to denounce their own constituencies and work in league with known oppressors of the people. The relevant parts of the poem are reproduced here:

We are in league with powers
 To wreck one vision
 With lust for more visions
 To refashion a proud world
 With the same hands that raise a storm of dust... (15).

Local people and the national government unwittingly give in to the antics of multinational oil companies to wreck the visions of the country. Nigerians are used to Vision 2000, Vision 2010, Vision 2020 and so many plans to restore the nation to an Eldorado within a stipulated time frame. The masses of the people have always been sorely disappointed beyond verbal expression each time leaders change the goal posts in the middle of matches. So, foreign investors are always ready to ruin any vision to restore normalcy to a nation in the throes of asphyxiation. A deadline was set to end gas flaring with its concomitant health challenges to the Nigerian population and the environment. This takes place in the country without knowing when it would end. It is these insouciant elements, both local and foreign, who threaten the restoration of the Nigerian environment that Ojaide rails against with his lines of poetry.

The last poem to be considered in this collection is “A T & P, Sapele”. It is a lamentable excoriation of individuals who profit by posing enormous danger to fellow humankind. He may not be wholly disagreeable to the idea of setting up industries that could benefit people. His strong disavowal, however, is the use of such industries to truncate the well-being of the masses of the people. The mindless destruction of the environment and the dangers that such destruction poses may have forced Derrick, *et al* (2011) to say that “it is long past time for those who care about life on earth to...take actions necessary to stop this culture from destroying every living being” (1). The poem, rendered below, illuminates our minds further:

When I first entered the A T & P

On excursion from St George's
 It was next to the largest sawmill
 On earth, we were told...
 When a decade I went home...
 A big clearing welcomed me;
 No longer the unending sheet of green
 No trees had reprieve from the axe...
 The waterfront taken over
 By phalanges of water hyacinth... (30-31).

In just a space of ten years, an un-imaginable destruction of the environment had taken place. The axe had descended on every standing tree. The result was a vast emptiness of a space once covered in green. The poet adroitly deploys a literary device known as 'contrast' to compare and contrast the healthy situation of the environment in the past and its present failing and languid condition. When one considers the extent of havoc done in ten years, how pitiable will the situation look if the picture was painted over a period covering half a century? From the poem, one is able to deduce that one form of destruction leads to another. It is because the trees have all been felled by merciless merchants of timber that the waterfront was taken over "by phalanges of water hyacinth". It is because of developments of this nature that Scott Rusell Sanders (1986) notes pointedly that "once a forest is cut down, or a stream is filled with waste, or a wildlife refuge is opened up for drilling, it is virtually impossible to undo the damage" (182). Our focus will be riveted on the second volume of poems used in the treatment of the themes of this discourse. The collection is *Delta Blues and Homesongs*. (1998). The volume is divided into two parts, "Delta Blues" and "Homesongs" with each part dedicated to the memories of two illustrious Nigerians

dear to the poet. The first is Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa whilst the other is Ezekiel Opkan. All the 51 poems in the collection resonate with the theme of environmentalism. His passion for a re-greened environment in his country, in general, and in his Niger Delta region, in particular, is the motivation and fillip for writing poetry of the hue that he writes. The harsh and grating tone of protest is heard in virtually all the poems. The poem, “Delta Blues”, is a strident condemnation of the activities of those whose stock in trade is the devaluation of the environment. In a generous show of sheer reverence and veneration of the environment, Ojaide in the poem under reference says:

This share of paradise, the delta of my birth,
 Reels from an immeasurable wound
 Barrels of alchemical draughts flow...
 The inheritance I sat on for centuries
 Now crushes my body and soul

The rivers are dark-veined,
 A course of perennial droughts.
 This home of salt and fish
 Stilted in mangroves, market of barter,
 Always welcomes others—
 Hosts and guests flourished
 On palm oil, yams and garri.
 This home of plants and birds
 Least expected a stampede:
 There’s no refuge east or west,
 North or south of this paradise (21).

The poet opens the first stanza with the allure of his land of birth which he fondly calls "Paradise". Even when living mortals have not visited either paradise or hell, the wish of every person is to rest till eternity in paradise in the unwavering hope of a benefit from the presence of God where there is neither night nor day, hunger nor thirst. It is this fictional place like paradise which now "reels from immeasurable wound" inflicted on it by the machinery of oil explorers who spare no thought for humankind and their environment as they plunder the earth in search of the black gold. His comparison of the past and the present leaves him entirely despondent and disconsolate. He laments that "barrels of alchemical draughts flow" from the land of his fathers which warehouses crude oil, "an inheritance I sat on for centuries" but which today "crushes my body and soul". No affliction crushes and humiliates humankind more agonizingly than their deracination from their ancestry, physically and spiritually. The poet recalls years of yore with nostalgia and is pained that want has replaced abundance whilst a land "that always welcomes others" is now taken over by complete strangers in the guise of investment which benefits none in the land. The terrible effect of environmental degradation and air pollution forces the poet to conclude "that there's no refuge east or west//north or south of this paradise". This scenario is patently paradoxical, a paradise without refuge!

The next poem is appropriately titled, "Wails" in lamentation of the gruesome murder by hanging of a writer, political activist and environmental campaigner, Ken Saro-Wiwa. He was killed by the military junta in Nigeria on November 10, 1995 for his principled opposition to the continued devastation of Ogoni land, an oil-bearing community in Rivers State of Nigeria. He was a prolific writer and author of many

books and was once the national President of Association of Nigerian Authors, ANA.

The poem is as follows:

Another ANA meeting will be called
 And singers will gather.
 I will look all over
 And see a space
 That can take more than a hundred—
 The elephant never hides.
 I ask the god of songs
 Whether all the singers will come,
 But that silent space
 That can take more than a hundred
 Stares at me with nostalgia
 And gives me feverish cold.
 I won't find one singer
 When another ANA meeting will be called.

Aridon, give me the voice to raise this wail
 Beyond high walls.
 In one year I have seen
 My forest of friends cut down,
 Now dust taunts my memory (17).

In this elegiac poetry of protest and ululation, Tanure Ojaide rues the dastardly killing of an eminent member and former President of the Association of Nigerian Authors, Ken Saro Wiwa and eight of his Ogoni compatriots. Wiwa's death symbolizes the death of the struggle against environmental degradation and atmospheric pollution in the Niger Delta region. The imagery of the elephant in describing the late writer and

environmentalist depicts the larger-than-life stature of Wiwa whose life embodies the struggle to free his people from needless misery caused by the degradation and despoliation of their land. The poet is filled with understandable nostalgia that the seat usually occupied by the late writer and activist would be vacant as no one will be suitable to fill the yawning vacuum created by the exit of the “Elephant”. The main reason for killing Ken Saro Wiwa by the hangman’s noose was to silence all opposition to the degradation of the Niger Delta. Youths had made mining activities impossible for the multinational companies to the chagrin of the unsmiling and desperate head of the military junta at that time in the dark history of Nigeria as a nation. This is why the poet justifiably laments the exit of the most outspoken member of the Ogoni elite and people, whose land and resources were being plundered by an insensitive capitalist cartel.

Ojaide’s wailing and loud lamentations continue in another poem appropriately titled, “Elegy for nine warriors”. This poem is an enjambment of some sort from the poem we have just discussed. While the other poem focuses on Saro Wiwa exclusively, this one widens its dragnet to cover the other compatriots who were similarly hanged for protesting against injustice in the Niger Delta. The relevant portion of the poem is cited here:

Those I remember in my song
 Will outlive this ghoulish season,
 Dawn will outlive the long night.
 I hear voices stifled by the hangman,
 An old cockroach in the groins of Aso Rock
 Those I remember with these notes

Will walk back erect from the stake (25).

This poem is, in a single breath, a protest against the unwarranted killing of informed people who boldly speak against infractions on the environment and nature and yet a prophecy that death will not end the struggle to free the environment from the ill treatment it suffers without abatement. The line, “dawn will outlive the long night” is a metaphor for newness, hope and change. Knowing the brutality of the State and its disavowal of free speech, the poet uses a metonym, “old cockroach”, for the grim-faced maximum ruler in the state house known by all in Nigeria as Aso Rock. The cockroach, literally and metaphorically, is a symbol for destruction. The poet, in his concluding couplet, notes with defiance steeped in hope that “those I remember with these notes//walk back erect from the stake”. It translates into his unflinching belief that the environment must live no matter how much it is mowed down. Whilst it is true that the physical death of the environmentalists in the hands of a hangman is not reversible, the verses above refer to the undying spirit behind the agitation for a free space to live comfortably in an environment not laid to waste by modernity, civilization and globalism. Ojaide is shouting himself hoarse about the uncompromising need to prevent the environment from falling into total ruins because he shares the same perspective with Everden (1992) who notes that humans possess the “influence to make the biosphere uninhabitable and this can produce suicidal results within a foreseeable period of time if the human population of the globe does not take prompt and concerted action to check the pollution and spoliation that are being inflicted upon the biosphere by shortsighted human greed” (14).

In the poem, “The paradise of powers”, Ojaide weaves another thread through the tapestry of exploitation without borders and without recourse to the future, the hope of humankind. He says:

Planners set up industries
 To generate wealth and wellbeing
 A net thrown into the future
 Lucky will be the one not caught dead (26).

It is evident from this that the state in its bid to industrialise the country does not make provision for the consequences of its urbanization and modernity. The planning is done without due consideration for the people. The effect of such planning, especially where the location of industries is concerned, will affect the health of the people adversely. Many people may become ill and perish consequently. This is why the tone of the poet is laden with foreboding when he says that the net that is thrown into the future may catch only a few surviving humans. The destruction of water with its resources is lamented in the following stanza:

Capitalizing on the rivers and lakes
 Has dealt algae and fish fatal blows
 When water becomes an enemy
 Smile tears for victory (26).

Several sectors of the people’s economy are dealt fatal blows with the coming of oil exploration and production. The ruin is not limited to land degradation which renders agriculture unattractive. The dragnet covers sea transportation, sea farming for fish, prawns, crabs and alligators. All these areas from where the people benefit and sustain

themselves have to be put on hold because of the new normal, that is, water pollution, land degradation and environmental pollution.

On a final note, the poem, “When green was the lingua franca” is considered as one of the veritable literary instruments deployed to attack unfriendly policies and practices aimed at killing the environment:

My childhood stretched
 One unbroken park
 Teeming with life.
 In the forest green was
 The lingua franca
 With many dialects.
 Everybody’s favourite
 Water sparkled...
 I remember *erhuvwudjayorho*
 Such glamorous fish
 But denied growing big...
Uwara, beauty that defies
 Tyranny of *Akpobrisi*
 Forest manic and recluse
 What flesh or fiber fails
 To capitulate before charm?
Urhurhu grapes coloured
 My tongue scarlet
 The *Owe* apple fell to me
 As cherries and breadfruit
 On wind blessed days,
 The cotton tree made me

Fly for tossed-out fluffs... (12-13).

The lamentable scenario depicted in the foregoing is probably the reason for Iheka's (2014) thoughts on the need to salvage both human and non-human components of the environment. He noted that "many African societies despite their complexities and differences, are drawn to an ethic of the earth in whose confines certain nonhuman forms, including plants, animals and so on, are considered viable life forms worthy of respect" (7). Iheka argued that there was a natural complementarity between human forms and nonhuman elements which constituted the living space of the environment. This naturalness should be preserved and not desecrated and wasted.

The lushness of the agrarian environment, the verdancy of the plants and the pleasant beauty of the biodiversity of the poet's locale fill him with the feelings of nostalgia that can find expression only in poetry. It is all this that has come to naught, thanks to the despoliation of the pristine naturalness of the conquered environment. From the poet's lamentations, the greenery is gone. At some time, it was the lingua franca but today, a foreign tongue has forced the only language of the indigenous, homogenous people into obsolescence and finally into disuse and extinction. The poet recalls the "glamorous fish" which was "denied growing big". We note a chain of reactions in the alterations to the biodiversity of a given ecosystem. The moment the greenery ceases to exist, either because of outright clearing or deforestation, the streams and body of waters will gradually vaporize and cease to be. This is why the fish, whose natural habitat is water, will be "denied growing big". The result in human nutrition is the absence of protein provided by fish and other sea foods. It is this frightening scenario and spectacle that makes Luc Ferry (1992) warn us that our "relationship

with nature, now, one-directional, must go from ‘parasitic’ to ‘symbiotic’” (71). It is in the overall interest of humankind to heed this and other warnings to avoid eventual perdition which an unfair relationship with our environment can make our lot.

From the foregoing, the two volumes of poetry used for this study adequately respond to all inquiries about how our environment has been de-natured. They have also shown the efforts made by the denizens of the environment, particularly the human components, to arrest the drift into possible extermination of humanity on the altar of carelessness and indifference. We find the instructive admonitions of Mckibben (2006) in this regard quite illuminating and helpful. He states:

If the waves crash up against the beach, eroding dunes and destroying homes, it is not the awesome power of Mother Nature. It is the awesome power of Mother Nature altered by the awesome power of man, who has overpowered in a Century the processes that have been slowly evolving... (51).

The volumes for this study, *Delta Blues and Homesongs* (1997) and *Daydream of the Ant and Other Poems* (1998) remind us that the past was much better and clearly more desirable than what is available today. All that characterised the past which sustains the love and nostalgia of the poet has all evaporated like ether. The forests have been mowed down and have ceased to offer their accustomed scenery of greenness. The trees have been cut with the effect that the buffers they provide against winds have been removed. Deforestation, devoid of afforestation, has left the earth so bare that erosion has rendered the entire landscape an eye sore. The rivers have either dried up or have become polluted with oil leaking from faulty pipelines with the result that fish farming has become unattractive and unproductive. The people who once lived in an

environment of pristine sedateness now have to bear the noise generated by the new technology driven economy which has become the new normal. The air in the whole environment has become so polluted that medical issues of lung cancer and associated ailments are on the increase in the Niger Delta. These are the reasons that Ojaide is enamoured of a distant past which he fervently wishes could be re-enacted in the Niger Delta area of today. Readers, in particular, and society in general are invited to compare the past with the present and appreciate the pains of the poem about the needless destruction of the past and the yearning for its re-invention in contemporary times.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROTEST AND RESISTANCE IN EBI YEIBO'S ENVIRONMENTALISM

“the likelihood that your acts of resistance cannot stop the injustice does not exempt you from acting in what you sincerely and reflectively hold to be the best interests of your community”

Susan Sontag.

“to spend one’s life being angry, and in the process doing nothing to change it, is to me ridiculous. I could be mad all day long, but what difference does it make?”

Charles Fuller.

4.1 Introduction

The last, but by all means not the least, of the three poets whose works engage our scrutiny and examination in this study is Ebi Yeibo. He is a Nigerian of Ijaw (Izon) extraction. After a degree in English from Delta State University, Avbraka, he proceeded to the University of Ibadan where he studied for and was awarded a Master’s degree also in English. He capped his academic achievements with a doctoral degree obtained from Imo State University. He lectures in the Department of English and Literature of Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Delta State, Nigeria. As earlier noted, Yeibo is the youngest of the three poets treated in this work. He belongs to the third, if not the fourth, generation of poets in Nigeria. The other two, Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare belong to the second generation. His passion for his native Niger Delta, the vigour with which he writes and the anger and combat in his tone are

underscored by his age. His poems are crafted to show anger, protest and to demonstrate resistance to the many years of punishment that his people have taken from heartless explorers and exploiters. He has published four volumes of poetry. From that number, two will be subjected to critical analysis to justify their classification as poems of protest and resistance to the denigration of the oil-bearing environment in Nigeria. The two volumes are: *The Forbidden Tongue* (2007) and *Shadows of the Setting Sun* (2012).

4.2 Literature of Protest and Resistance

Ebi Yeibo, the third poet whose works are used for this study, is aware that one way to draw attention to injustice is to show resistance to the rules of engagement in any contract where parties involved in a contract operate in breach of existing rules and regulations. This is a way of showing resentment to whatever is considered objectionable especially in a relationship between unequal partners, like the one between the oil Companies and the State, on the one hand, and the people of the Niger Delta Region, on the other.

Being a younger poet who belongs to the third generation, his resentment is expressed with greater vigour than is seen in the compositions of the more elderly bards. There is a manifestation of combativeness in his writings. It is important to note that protest and resistance have been employed in places where oppression is visited on the masses of the people. The South African example readily comes to mind. Every organ in the enclave was deployed to wrest power from the operators of the apartheid regime leading to the eventual enthronement of democracy.

In other climes, writers, artists, singers and dramatists have been involved in massive protests to reclaim lost grounds. Ebi Yeibo belongs in this category of writers who deploy the potency of protest and resistance to demand for justice, equity and fairness in human affairs.

This directly led to the deployment of the same weapons in the poetry. From one poem to another, Yeibo spits fire and venom. He excoriates the inhumanity that is manifest in the treatment meted on his native Izon people in the Niger Delta Region. Commenting on Ebi Yeibo's style, Ogaga Okuyade (2012) had this to say:

His place in the emergent tradition of Nigerian poetry is without doubt very visible considering the artistic temper of his poetry – the kind of poetry I describe as poetic protest. His poetry occupies a vibrant space when discussing the history and evolution of modern Nigerian poetry in English. He is even more visible within the corpus of writing we today label Niger Delta Literature – a literature which is not only combative but is gradually becoming programmatic and ritualistic (8).

The following, therefore, is an exposition on what Yeibo has done with his muse in an effort at protest and resistance.

In *The Forbidden Tongue* (2007) he fires the first salvo with “Silent sorrow”, a poem that laments the abjectly penurious and hopeless life of fellow Izon who inhabit the riverine expanse of wet lands in the Niger Delta. The first stanza says a lot about the general mood of the people. It is as follows:

We sleep supine
 On bedbugs of sorrow
 Awake all night
 To stinging songs of the season (31).

He uses the image of people who are drained of vigour to describe their state when they sleep at night. To make matters worse, the people under reference sleep on “bedbugs of sorrow”. This provokes a state of insomnia and wakefulness. They lay awake “all night” because the stings of bedbugs can only be compared to the “songs of the season”. The song the poet refers to is the picture of the want and misery that live with the local inhabitants because their livelihood has been frittered away by powers over which they have no control. The images of bedbugs and the sleepless nights conjure a feeling of frustration and anger which Niger Deltans experience because of the wreckage of their environment. The angst that Yeibo expresses on behalf of his people is legitimate. This is so because their troubles are not limited to sleepless nights but their days are also unbearable. The following stanzas say it all:

Dawn bristles with soulful saviours
 Showing us whining whetstones
 That only blunt our spirits.

Dawn bristles with drizzling dews
 Disfiguring forests of fun
 Foiling foliages of fanfare
 And even fanciful flowers
 On loamy soil
 Flaunt petals of patrimony. (31)

Dawn naturally opens a vista of new opportunities as day breaks. This is not the case as Yeibo depicts it. The reference to “whining stones” is an indication that something positive and soul-lifting is in the offing but the persona says the expectations only “blunt our spirits”. It is antithetical that a whetstone which should sharpen turns out to blunt the human spirit, meaning that the edges of hope are blunt. Despair replaces hope. The reference to “drizzling dews disfiguring forests of fun” explains the impact of acid rain on the entire climate. This is why “foliages of fanfare” and “fanciful flowers on loamy soil” are all consumed by the strange drizzles, not of dew but of destructive consequences of gas flaring. These images crystallize the thoughts of the poet on the havocs wreaked by unfriendly practices on the environment. The adverse climatic conditions in the creeks make harvests a terrible experience. The harshness of the sultry noon occasioned by gas flaring “foils foliages of fanciful flowers”. The effects of gaseous and other effluents are not limited to flowers alone. Food crops for subsistence and market economy are affected. This is why the poet says:

Dawn bristles
 With a fiery flame of fraud
 Burning up blossoming barns
 Like brittle forests
 In the heart of the harmattan (31).

Dawn amongst Yeibo’s people of the Niger Delta is counter-productive as it adds no value to the lives and occupation of the people. Instead, dawn, with its searing hotness and “fiery flame of fraud” has the single effect of ‘burning up blossoming barns’. The destruction of yam tubers invariably is an invitation to hunger and starvation. The little that the people can salvage from their shrivelled harvests is eaten up in the barns

by very harsh and inclement weather. In simple but pungent language, Yeibo compares the diametrically opposed conditions of the local people and that of the oil explorers. These he sums up:

Sagging our stomachs
Swelling their pockets (31).

We see here that the people's stomachs sag in the absence of nutritious food as required for body nourishment. On the flip side, the pockets of oil explorers and producers bulge from proceeds of rape and plunder of a people's resources without leaving something substantial as compensation. Inequality is writ large as some people smile to their Banks whilst others wallow in want. This is why Okuyade (2011) says that the poet is actively involved in "voicing constructive resistance against a system whose intention is to subject the people under absolute despotism" (13).

In another poem titled, "Rage of a river", Yeibo engages in lamentation over the poor treatment of the natives whose natural endowments have provided sustenance for the national economy of the Country for upwards of seventy years. In stanza after stanza, the reader is taken through tales of woes which have become the lot of otherwise endowed people. The following is sufficiently revealing:

Dwellers of the delta
Wax wild on wings of wreckage.

Who wouldn't whose paradise
Becomes a prostitute's rag

Whose brooks brim
With bilious black blood (28).

With words and expressions that evoke an acute sense of loss, the poet likens his people in the Niger Delta to those who have become toughened up by their daily experiences of want, deprivation and squalor. The people “wax wild on wings of wreckage” because their “paradise becomes a prostitute’s rag” and what they have as drinking water is a brook that “brims with bilious black blood”. The literariness of the poet’s expressions is seen in “a prostitute’s rag” and “bilious black blood”. These metaphors accentuate how abjectly dejected the people have become for want of the good things of life. The imagery of “a prostitute’s rag” and “bilious black blood” evokes pity in the reader of the poem. The next stanza, “Whose savoury swamps//are cauldrons of chemicals”, is a depiction of how boom becomes doom and how hopes are dashed and they become despair. A land “whose hallowed virginity//is stolen the wrong way” leaves a permanent scar in the minds and consciousness of a people who feel cheated, mocked, raped and abandoned. Deploying every literary weapon at his disposal, Yeibo finds solace in proverbs. The proverbs in the penultimate and last stanzas read:

O the slaughter of white eagles
Leaves the animal kingdom
In sackcloth

When a hawk swoops on chicks
The mother goes wild (28).

The reference to a sackcloth is what the poet adjudges to be an adequate description of the bereavement of a people whose resources have been plundered without the slightest consideration for the natives and owners. The “mother” who goes wild when her chicks are swooped upon by a hawk refers metaphorically and literally to the whole of the Niger Delta. The region is enraged because of the deprivation it suffers, because of the degradation its land suffers and its woes are compounded because they cannot resort to self-defence since the exploiters have the backing of the Federal Government. From the foregoing, it is clear that the large harvests of oil deposits leave the delta robbed and raped, “its hallowed virginity stolen the wrong way”. Additionally, the poet points out that the deprived people are genuinely provoked to justifiable rebellion and confrontation with their oppressors. These elements of protest and confrontation are the bedrock of the poems selected for this study.

In yet another poem, “The poachers”, the poet further stirs his people to action against conniving natives who swindle their own people but put up a façade of patriotism. Beneath their veneer of chicaneries lies a deep sense of apostasy and willingness to exchange their birth right for the proverbial pot of porridge. In straightforward language, “the poachers” refer pointedly to scavengers in high places and hawks who swoop on brood of chicken to satiate their infinite appetite for filthy lucre. Yeibo describes them as the ones who “conspire with raging hounds//to halt the hallowed//festival of forests” (34). As we have mentioned in several places in this

study, it is fit to reiterate that the reverses in the fortunes of the degraded Niger Delta is not only a function of the polluted waters. It also has a lot to do with deforestation. Trees in large numbers are felled without sparing a thought for afforestation. This is why the poet affirms an end has come to the hallowed festival of forests. The greenery, the vast forests, the breeze flowing from tree foliage and other health-giving accompaniments and derivatives from the forests are permanently lost. This is enough reason to rouse the people to agitation and protest against deliberate dehumanization made possible by deforestation which ultimately leads to climate change.

The poet shifts focus from the forests to other areas of ecological concerns when he writes:

They are the dragons
And the drought
The hunters and hounds
Who poach our fish ponds
Dry up our farmlands
Kill our dreams (34).

The agents of imperialism are the ones that the poet depicts in literary words as “dragons, drought, hunters and hounds”. They are the ones who “poach” the fish ponds, leaving not even a fingerling for the owners of the environment and sea foods. They are the ones who dry up the farmlands and make planting impossible because the land has been over used and not left to fallow. The poet sums up the collective anguish of his people and concludes that the rapists of the land and its treasures “have killed our dreams” (34). The pervasive woes and environmental bereavement inflicted

on the natives are contained in the following two stanzas of unequal lengths, one a tercet and the other a couplet. They are reproduced below:

Now the antelope
 Confers with the deer
 To desert the forest

And pregnant brooks
 Only deliver dead shoals (34).

From the above, it is clear that the cycle of environmental destruction is complete. The animals in the forests confer on the need to relocate further afield since their present habitation is bare and denuded, offering no protection from game hunters. The body of waters, on the other hand produces only dead fishes and other sea foods because it has been poisoned by chemicals in the process of oil exploration. Another plausible interpretation for the antelope and deer deserting the forest is the inclination of expatriates abandoning a site that no longer offers sufficient yield of minerals to retain their continued stay. Birds, it is said, do not tarry too long on a tree that has no fruits. The poet is holistic in his preachment against infractions on the environment because, on the one hand, he excoriates imperialists and their local collaborators for the havoc wreaked on the Niger Delta environment and, on the other, he flagellates his conniving natives who work with foreigners to despoil their land. He opines that Niger Deltans would have been able to come to terms with the humiliation from expatriates if their woes were not compounded by the complicity and duplicity of locals. He has therefore removed the logs in the eyes of his own people so they can see clearly the specs in the eyes of others. In dealing mercilessly with the sell outs amongst his people, the poet asserts:

Yet these braggarts
 Lonely lodestars
 As deaf as an Iguana
 Hoist a dumb flag
 Proclaiming fraternity (35).

He calls them braggarts. He knows they are influential “sons of the soil” whom he refers to as lodestars who are lonely because the people are not with them in their craze for material acquisitions at the expense of the convenience and wellbeing of the masses of their own people. The poet, on behalf of the people, rejects the “dumb flag” hoisted by the thieving, deceitful and self-seeking members of the local communities. He urges his people to disown the few money bags amongst them by refusing to fraternize with them. They and their ill-gotten acquisitions should be rendered insignificant in the midst of agitations for a better treatment for all. In yet another poem, Yeibo lapses into deep lamentation over the precarious existence of the people of the Niger Delta. In “Unyielding clouds” he muses about noonday that is made impossible by effluents which fill the air when emissions darken the atmosphere. He depicts a total dislocation of the normal order of events when he alleges that days have become nightmarish in the Niger Delta. Ordinarily, nightmares in the forms of unsettling dreams sometimes obstruct deep sleep at nights but the situation gets out of the ordinary when nightmares wreak noon days. The situation is better appreciated when the poet is on record as saying:

Here nightmares nag at nerves
 In broad daylight
 Without sleep, without even

A momentary blink of the eyes (58).

As if the pictures painted here are not sufficiently perplexing, the poet admits even the nights of the people are made worse because they find sleep a “distant dream”.

This is what he gives expression to in the following lines:

But sleep is a distant dream
A politician’s promise
Among us who dwell
In the leafy shores of the delta (58).

The fact that both day and night are nightmares for they who dwell in the delta is enough reason to compose songs of protest meant to rouse the oppressors of the people from their reverie and inertia to active wakefulness and productive motion aimed at addressing the issues in contention in the poet’s muses. In the midst of the general cacophony and discordant tunes, the poet issues a query when he asks in an admixture of apostrophe and interrogation:

O how does one blink bleary eyes
Where the air is taut
With constant fumes of things frazzled

Where raw blood
Ravishes the river
Like biblical Pharaoh's (58).

The tercet above harps on how impossible it is to have sound sleep at night when their eyes and accompanying sensibilities have been dulled by fumes emanating from “frazzled things”, by which the poet refers to burnt particles of crude oil and compounds of gas that is constantly flared in the environment. The river that is ravished by blood is a reiteration of the poisoned state of water in the delta which makes fish farming an impossible occupation. The comparison of the intensity of the bloody waters to what happened to Egyptians in Pharaoh's time accentuates the level to which the waters have become irredeemable and unfit for any kind of use. As though the intensity of environmental issues in the delta are not enough for worries, the poet introduces the dimension of political intolerance and totalitarianism on the part of the government in power. Usually, when people's rights are trampled upon, government officials expect reactions to its obnoxious policies. To quell any form of protest or agitation, government moves to arm-twist constituents by warning of dire consequences for disturbing the peace of the civil populace. It is to this possibility that Yeibo refers when he says:

Primed to remand rivalry
 Or drown dissent
 Where mountains are mauled
 With deafening cannons

Prodding lions
 To scurry out of plains (58).

The three couplets above show how the people are mowed down by authoritarian legislations and statutes which forbid them from voicing opposition to abuse of power. We also find that persons who are important in society can be easily and quietly dispensed with at the altar of absolute necessity to keep oil production going without interruption from any quarter. This is why the poet uses such words and phrases as mountains (for important people in society) which can be “mauled” (destroyed completely) “with deafening cannons” (a reference to destructive military hardware). He goes further to argue that if gold rusts, what will iron do? By this, inference is made to the compelling need for lions, in spite of their bravery to scamper into safety from menacing invaders of the environment. The poet ends this poem on a note of irony when he bewails the unfortunate reverses in the fortunes of the Niger Delta people who now await the crumbs that fall from the master’s table when the whole granary and barns of food items ought to rightly belong to them. While “honeypot” in the poem is a metaphor for abundant natural resources, the following line, “salivates at puny prospects” is a literary device that uses gustatory imagery to express an earnest yearning, thirst or desire to be fed satisfactorily in the face of deprivation. Hear him:

Here the honeypot owner

Salivates at puny prospects
Of the sugarcane farmer (58).

The last poem to be considered in this collection is titled, “The forbidden tongue”. It is the title poem. It is an addition to the constellation of complaints and protests against injustice to the environment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The first three stanzas of this poem say it all. The first is a quatrain, the second, a tercet and the third, a couplet. They all bear testimony to the deprivations in the oil rich delta. For emphasis and clarity, the lines are reproduced as follows:

How does the towncrier
Capture the shrill cry
Of seven virgins ravished
By countless crazy he-men

The shattering ululation
Of uncountable heads
Cut off wriggling torsos

The scummy dark blood
Ravaging the river’s silver skin? (60).

The seven virgins refer unmistakably to seven communities in the delta whose resources (virginity) have been violently taken by exploiters in the most ruthless of manners. Only “crazy he-men” will behave this way, forcing their way into women whose consent is neither sought nor got. That captures the dire straits in the delta, a region that is wantonly raped without let or hindrance. To make matters worse, the death of the region is depicted in the literary images of decapitated bodies whose

torsos are smeared by “scrummy black blood” which “ravage the river’s silver skin” (60). The poet, deploying rhetorical questions for special effects of rousing his people to anger and protest, asks:

How does the village crooner
Sing swelling songs
Of a race sassed and sapped

Like a skinny orphan
Savouring a stepmother’s beneficence

Hungry for clemency
Like condemned coupists? (60).

Stanza one above presents a difficult task indeed. It will be tough for the crooner to sing songs of sorrow because such songs naturally lack melody. And there are usually no enthusiastic choruses to make such renditions tuneful and melodious. The land, now lying supine, has been sapped of all juice, leaving only the carcass of a once succulent and rich environment. The deployment of simile as a figurative expression to depict the suffering in the land because of mineral resource exploitation exposes the truth. The entire landscape and seascape now look like “a skinny orphan” fed grudgingly by a cruel foster mother (Achebe, 1964). The people now hunger for “clemency like condemned coupists” on their own land and for what is theirs by natural inheritance. By using these words, phrases and figures of speech, the poet deliberately seeks to rouse his people from inertia to protest the injustice done to their environment. In yet another stanza, the poet rues the effect of fumes and effluents on the built environment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria:

Here mastics only
 Drown the mansion
 With black rain
 Falling in torrents
 Like tears of matricide. (60).

The poet's position here is self-explanatory. It is important, however, to add that the torrential rain of acid on healthy people is capable of inflicting ill-health on them. The effect of climate change, gas flaring, release of effluents into the air and water pollution are sufficient reasons for the poet to call out his people to join him as he raises songs of protest. In the next stanza, the poet raises issues about the oppressors of the Niger Delta region who are ensconced in opulence which contrasts with the pervasive squalor of his people. This perspective is contained in the following:

And dwellers of the rock
 Cloistered, holler endless hallelujah
 Like crows feasting on carrions

 Taunting twilight
 With conqueror's choruses,
 Like a pack of owls
 Shrieking in cacophonous unison (60).

It is important at this juncture, to contrast the "shrill cry" and "shattering ululation" of the people suffering environmental injustice in the Niger Delta region and the "endless hallelujah" and "conqueror's choruses" of the oppressors of the people whom the poet describes as "dwellers of the rock". It is relevant to the overall meaning of this Chapter to explain what "the rock" means to the poet and to Nigerians. The rock

metonymizes the seat of government. It is called “Aso Rock Presidential Villa”. The name is derived from the imposing Rock that overlooks it. It is located in Abuja, the federal capital territory, a destination which is touted to meet the conditions of centrality, accessibility and anonymity. This is the seat of power where the resources of the entire Country, made up mainly of crude oil extracted from the bowels of the Niger Delta, are appropriated. It becomes clear why occupants of “the rock” guffaw “with conqueror’s choruses” whilst the people of the Niger Delta region lick their wounds with “shrill cry” and “shattering ululation”.

Piqued by the scenarios depicted in the stanzas of this poem, Ebi Yeibo erupts in what can be described as his rage, outburst and defiance when he warns that the infractions on his people cannot go without redress and without damning consequences:

See, muddy waters do nothing
To the eyes of an alligator

The muller becomes rich
In old age

The cobra hankering after eggshell
Is caught in the connivance
Of sticks and wires (61).

The poet warns that dire consequences await the despoilers of the land. Hence, it is decipherable that the indigenous people of the delta are not absolutely powerless locals who merely watch their environment go through degradation. The truth is that confrontation with government can be disastrous, given the capacity of the latter to

wield military powers over the un-armed peasants. But away from physical powers epitomized by military hardware, the poet believes in the traditional capabilities of his people to confront usurpers using supernatural powers. This is seen in the incantatory invocations and imprecations placed on the despoilers of the region. He warns that the provocations from their traducers will be short-lived and pale into insignificance in the long run because “muddy waters do nothing to the eyes of an alligator”. He adds re-assuringly that “the mullet becomes rich in old age”. The mullet is a specie of fish that grows in the waters of the Niger Delta region. The poet is filled with optimism that no amount of deprivation or inclement condition will stifle the growth of the mullet. So, it is with his people of the region. Not content with the potent words left in the air after his muse of protest, the poet further churns out esoteric utterances hinged on the cultural beliefs of his people in the supernatural. Yeibo erupts again in the following:

So spurn not
 The soft mouth of a tortoise;
 Only thunder can save us
 From its grip

This tongue, forbidden
 In conquistador’s contrived heavens
 Is the coarse crawl of the tortoise
 That drives away sleep
 From its captor’s home

We do not open
 The crocodile’s intestine in public (61).

He has, in the stanzas above, warned that his people are neither fools nor cowards who are incapable of raising a finger against their tormentors. The reference to the tortoise and its supernatural powers even as it seems innocuous is the representation and presentation of the Niger Deltans, and the Ijaws specifically, as people who can fight and fight dirty, if need be. He concludes that it will be misleading to assume that the taciturnity or even muteness of his people simply translates to idiocy. He avers talking too much in senseless loquacity achieves nothing whereas deliberate dumbness is all that is required to win a war. In other words:

After all, silence has wings
That ferry us
To the peak of dreams (61).

The copious deployment of local contents from the overflowing folk tradition of the Ijons as seen above is the reason Okuyade concludes:

Yeibo's biggest asset is the heavy stock of rich materials from folk tradition and the idioms of his Ijon nation which provide him the artistic resources and techniques for the image making process (17).

The second collection of poems which is used in this study is titled, *Shadows of the Setting Sun* (2012). Like the first collection, relevant poems selected from this are deployed in an effort aimed at situating protest and resistance in the poetry of Ebi Yeibo. In the poem, "Dark Lyric" (34), the poet urges his Ijon compatriots in the Niger Delta to rise to the need to repair the environment which has been destroyed from many years of despoliation. Only then can the people hope for a better future. This is the import of the following stanza:

O sow your sweat
 In motile dew-drops of dawn
 For only hot, steamy sweat
 On a famished farmland
 Fills the pit of a scrambled inheritance
 Bursting upon tomorrow's inheritance. (34).

The poet deploys the metaphor of hot sweat to represent the exertions of the people in a collective effort to save their environment from waste. He argues that the rescue mission has to begin early in the day to show how serious the assignment is. This is what he means by “motile dew-drops of dawn”. He goes on to add that only the works and activities of his people on “a famished farmland” can fill “the pit of a scrambled inheritance”. The pit in the quote above refers to the yawning vacuum left after decades of excavations in the unending search for crude oil. What the poet refers to as “the scrambled inheritance” is the oil deposit in the region, a natural endowment which has caused them many decades of misery. The poet uses another metaphor for the environment when he describes it as “worsted wetlands” in comparison to the dry land in other places where there are no mineral deposits. Medical images are deployed in describing richness of the Niger Delta region and the contents of its bowels. This is seen in the following stanza:

In the formless fetuses of a fecund delta
 Depositing her longing, wearied soul
 In the bowels of the rainbow (34).

The terms, “fetuses” and “fecund” are vocabularies in the field of Medicine which the poet has used to show how important crude oil is to his people. To him, crude oil is

the equivalent of a foetus, an unborn child nestling in its mother's womb. In the same vein, "fecund" which ordinarily means fertility is deployed to attest to the hugely productive environment in terms of mineral deposits, chief amongst which is crude oil. The comparisons made by the poet in this poem and the strong images he uses to support his submissions are intended to spur his fellow compatriots into anger and action against a known enemy whose activities may not cease any time soon. This is why Oghenekaro Ilo (2018) says the poet uses "imagery of destruction, rape and devastation using vivid allusions to the Niger Delta to generate emotions that may lead to the hoped revolution" (270). Yeibo's focus is on environmental issues almost exclusively in "The Lingering Shadow". The effects of dryness of the land and atmospheric pollution are seen in the following:

Gnarly grouse still grows in the land
 With hyacinths in the dry season
 A chimney of unyielding clouds
 Swallowing the stirring sunlight at dawn (35).

The word "grouse" means grumbles of protest. This, as the poet puts it, is widespread in the land. The height of climatic aridity is depicted by the presence of hyacinths in dry season. This has the potent effect of rendering aquatic activity impossible because the waters cannot be navigated in an attempt at fishing. As though this were not enough, smokes and other effluents pervade the entire sky thus "swallowing the stirring sunlight at dawn". The poet stirs his compatriots to action by using words and images which concretize the problems of the area, thus drawing their attention to the necessity of protest.

The Niger Delta landscape and seascape are strewn with several possibilities with the effect that the people experience and endure suffering perennially. It is in connection with these possibilities that the poet again writes:

What with pirates still posturing as patron saints
 The iconization of quackery
 Bats smuggled abroad as eagles
 Harlots hailed as honeypots
 In the patience of the python (35).

The poet's avowed belief is that incompetent and unpatriotic people are employed to carry out exploration activities in the Niger Delta with the result that the touch of professionalism is absent from the handling of the various jobs in the land. His reference to "pirates posturing as patron saints" is a direct attack on rogue elements who masquerade as legitimate business men. Incompetent people are also idolized and promoted beyond competence amongst the expatriates working on oil fields in the region. This is what he describes as "the iconization of quackery". Generally, ill-fitting people who are put in positions where they cannot perform satisfactorily contribute to the problems of the Delta. This is why from time to time, there are cases of oil spillages in the creeks running into several weeks without being put under control. It is this category of bad workmen that Yeibo refers to "bats smuggled abroad as eagles" and "harlots hailed as honeypots". Clement Eloghosa Odia (2020) notes that this poem, and indeed, other "petropoems depict environmental degradation, economic hardship as well as mobilise the people to take collective action in order to redress the situation as this is implicated in the consequences of oil mishap" (97-98). The term, petropoetry, refers to poems written by poets of the Niger Delta Region

mainly whose theme is the effect of oil exploration in the region. Providing more insights into this discourse, Melanie Dennis Unrau (2019) notes:

Petropoetics as artistic and poetic practice is also a land poetics: it explores, enacts, critiques or resists human entanglement with fossil fuels. It can also be a speculative poetics that looks for better ways of relating to fossil fuels and the land. (24).

As far as Clement Odia (2020) is concerned, “petropoetry inspires environmental activism and quest for environmental justice” (95). This thread of agitation, resistance and protest, runs through virtually all the poems in Yeibo’s collections. The choices made from the two collections of poetry used in the explication of this exegesis affirm this statement. The next poem is a continuation of this argument. It is entitled, “Apocalypse”. The examination of the poem begins with its title which is anxiogenic. The Dictionary of the English Language defines the word, Apocalypse as “the unveiling of events prophesied in the Book of Revelation; the second coming of Christ and the end of life on earth; global destruction”. From many biblical allusions which intersperse his poems, the poet can be described as one who has a religious turn of mind. Instances of this will be seen presently. Quotes from many stanzas of this poem will serve to illustrate the points being made about the grim determination of the people to free themselves from slavery even if it means the world coming to an end. The first stanza which opens a floodgate of protests against environmental injustice reads:

The clan will continue to crumble
 With the string of strange missteps

Harrying her, like stockpiled bombs
 Detonated in measured succession
 Leaving behind a contagion of mournful seasons (37).

The “clan” is the community of people living in a given location in the Niger Delta Area. The poet predicts with alarming certainty that the clan will crumble because of the treatment it receives from oil explorers in and out of season. He predicts that the fall or destruction of the clan will be orchestrated by the explosives used to blow up and dredge the earth in search of crude oil. He is consistent in his belief that oil exploration, amongst other environmental infractions, leave the land mourning. Each stanza of the poem begins with a literary device known as tautology or repetition. This is a device employed to emphasise, to foreground and to highlight the importance attached to a discourse. The poet continues in the third stanza when he muses:

The rivers will continue to rumble
 With seductive melodies on mountaintops
 While golden goose wetlands wail
 With vexatious chemicals
 Whacking her womb
 Begetting uncountable barrels of bane (37).

The first line of the above excerpt, “the rivers will continue to rumble” is knowingly underlined by the poet to its relevance to the theme of this discourse. He has used a literary device known as personification to express protest.

In his reaction to the contents of this stanza, Clement Odia (2020) argues that the poet is fascinated with the use of figurative expressions such as repetition, alliteration, metaphor and personification to paint a vivid picture of the environment. The

ecopoetic preoccupation and vision of the poet are brought to life with his choice of diction. The metaphors of “mountaintops”, “golden goose”, “wetlands” and “womb begetting barrels of bane” are effectively deployed to depict the despoliation in the land and his angst about it. A sharp contrast is forged between a mountaintop, a place of pleasure and the abode of the rulers of the land and wetlands which represent the tenement of the flotsam and jetsam of the land. The poet sees the wetlands, unfortunately, as the golden goose which lays the golden eggs which provide sustenance to the rulers on mountaintops. In more practical terms, shun of esoteric literary expressions and concealed meanings, the wetlands connote the sites where mining takes place daily. A marked difference is seen in the tuneful, melodious musical renditions from the mountaintops and the “wail” from the wetlands. The phrase, “vexatious chemicals” is used deliberately to portray the truth that his people seethe with anger over their deplorable state. It is a lamentable state in which the chemicals “whack (destroy) the womb of the wetlands to beget barrels of bane”. The image of the wetlands as a fecund and productive female gender whose womb is destroyed in order to produce barrels of bane, that is, crude oil is aimed at provoking his compatriots to anger, resistance and protest. The reference to barrels of oil as barrels of bane smacks of anger at what should have been a boom but has turned out to a doom. Specifically, Yeibo deliberately describes his people as wetlands, dregs of the earth and common sackcloth who are exploited and despised. Their woes are two pronged: the people suffer economic hardship and the land witnesses ecological degradation. In furtherance of his agitations in this poem, Yeibo accuses the exploiters of always “scanning the liar just for lucre//Looking for only their stomach//Even before the break of day” (38). The import of these lines is the insatiable

search for earth bound resources that will benefit the exploiters. The search is carried out even at odd hours without regard to the rights of the people to a good night rest. They ravage the land in search of mineral deposits “even before the break of day”. The unfeeling nature of the exploiters is captured in the following lines:

The eater of flesh
Has a short memory;
The bone eater
Never forgets (38).

This position is the whole truth. The beneficiaries of filthy lucre accruing from exploration and extractive activities in the Niger Delta Area enjoy their pecuniary rewards but the local people who are displaced and inconvenienced are ill at ease. They are the eaters of bone. Their teeth ache from the grating ossification of bones. Using images and metaphors effectively, Ebi Yeibo rouses his people from apathy by reminding them of how their resources are ferried to other lands (foreign countries) where they are converted to hard currencies. The portrayal of this scenario is better appreciated when taken directly from the poet’s own creativity:

With straggling meandering mermaids
Freighting voluptuous fortunes
To the waiting wind;
Tramps flying in the flamboyance

Of public purse (38).

The diction of the poet in the stanza above, deliberately chosen for effect, presents the image of a large vessel, an oil carrying ship which the poet calls a “mermaid” whose size is so humongous that it “straggles” as it “meanders” on its way out of Nigeria to foreign lands. The use of the noun phrase, “voluptuous fortunes” is a direct reference to crude oil. The tramps who “fly in the flamboyance//of public purse” are the vagabonds who are enabled by the instrumentality of state to live off people’s wealth. These scenarios, deftly captured by Yeibo with the images and metaphors in the stanzas above, are intended to rouse his people to agitate for the right to own and profit from what rightfully belongs to them. In concluding this poem, Yeibo calls on the predators to leave the land alone and let its people enjoy themselves without molestation and insecurity of life and limbs. There is justifiable fury in this concluding stanza:

Let there be an earthquake
 And white messengers roll back
 The stone from the sepulchre’s door,
 Like Christ’s resurrection
 Let us soar beyond
 Pricking primordial boundaries
 On royal wings (39).

The first line of this stanza speaks to the title of the poem, Apocalypse. The use of the word, “earthquake” is a direct call for Armageddon, the cessation of life here on earth. This is the plaintive cry of the representative of a people whose entire livelihood has been appropriated by domestic and foreign powers over whom they are helpless. He

alludes to the Holy Bible as he urges “white messengers to roll back//the stone from the sepulchre’s door”. The reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ is his firm belief that his people will be reawakened from death to life as Christ did. The “white messengers” are the exploiters of crude oil whilst the “sepulchre” is the gateway to freedom for a people who have, for long, been buried in squalor and penury. Yeibo urges his people to disentangle themselves from limitations imposed on them by primordial sentiments and considerations. He urges them to “soar... on royal wings”. He alerts the minds of his people to the fact of their royalty and urges them to struggle to live as Kings in what should ordinarily be their kingdom. The role of teacher and mentor which Yeibo and fellow petropoets from the Niger Delta Region have chosen for themselves is, in our view, a worthy one. Breyten Breytenbach (2007) endorses their choice of vocation and practice as he sums up what an artist should do to enhance the living conditions of the people in his society. He argues that:

In the poor and colonized countries, the writer plays a more visible role: faced with acute social and economic iniquities, he is called upon to articulate the dreams and demands of his people. From these contradictory responsibilities come the dichotomies of the writer’s existence giving rise to so much tension and ambiguity. And from this flows the impossibility of the writer even fitting in completely with any orthodoxy. Sooner or later he is going to be in discord with the politicians (166).

Our views accord with those of the scholar quoted above. No serious writer, especially a poet in this case, can choose to be aloof and apathetic to the plight of the people in his community. He lives with them, feels their pains and anguish and draws the inspiration to combat their adversaries and traducers based on his own first hand experiential knowledge. Yeibo is not living in a colonized country right now but the

vestiges of colonialism and the raging impact of neo-colonialism make it impossible for him to be quiet in the face of tyranny. He and his fellow crusaders, true to the position of Breytenbach (2007), have chosen to draw the battle line with insincere politicians, government officials and turncoats in their immediate environment. This is the only way to point the way forward for their people to march into freedom and retrieve their lands which once flowed with milk and honey.

The poem, “Darkwaters of the delta” draws attention to the difference in the approaches of the West and Africa, Nigeria in particular, to matters of state that require urgent national attention. Ebi Yeibo has written the poem to paint two distinct pictures; the picture of the alacrity with which Barrack Obama, American President responded to issues of oil spillage in the Mexico gulf on 20th May, 2010 and the slothfulness and lethargy displayed by Nigeria, on the other hand, to the same issue. In the United States, the spillage was detected using technology. No such technical precision is ever available to detect any such problem in the Niger Delta. A reading of the poem is relevant to further appreciate the issues involved in the two approaches to the resolution of state matters. The first stanza reads:

Out of the Mexico gulf
Emerges the black monster
Captured by underwater camera on Aljazeera
Mauling bubbly marine breath
In wide torrential strokes, like gammalin 20 (65).

The first stanza sets the background to the destruction wreaked by oil spillage. The poet describes crude oil as “black monster” because wherever it appears it alters the equation for ill. The poet supports this position by saying that the spilled crude, like gammalin 20, has the capacity to “maul bubbly marine breath”. The figure of comparison, simile, is deployed to underscore the acidity and destructive potency of crude oil, which is compared to gammalin 20, when it comes in contact with aquatic lives. The presence of underwater camera to discover such spillages and other happenstances points to the readiness of a responsive government to combat possible infractions on the environment. Yeibo decries the absence of such facilities and the vacillations of government to rise and confront oil spillage when it occurs in the Niger Delta. The dispatch with which President Obama handled the disruption is commendable in contrast to the prevarications and outright lethargy of the Nigerian government. The poet captures it this way:

But this is no time
 For florid abstract rhetoric
 Not even for outright remonstrations;
 Obama abandons the capital
 For a first hand acquaintance
 With the searing scene
 Piles querulous pressure on BP*
 Brainstorming to cap the crude (65).

The need for urgent action by principal officials, not effete representatives, is the kernel of the poet's muse in this stanza. The urgent matter of oil spillage, which also ravages the Nigerian creeks where oil exploration takes place, was addressed by the President himself. He shuns "abstract rhetoric" and "outright remonstrations" as he "abandons the capital for a first hand acquaintance//with the searing scene". Aside from the business-like approach of the President in getting first-hand information on his own, he uses his office to call to order the Oil Company (BP, abbreviation for British Petroleum) whose burst pipes led to the spillage. Leaders on this side of the divide are always ensconced in opulence which insulates them from first hand contact with and appraisal of dire situations. Yeibo probably accuses them of using "florid abstract rhetoric" by setting up unnecessary committees whose reports, always belatedly turned in, are as useless and meaningless as the papers on which they are written. The anger in the poet at the tardiness of government in Nigeria is presented in the following:

Not Aso Rock, which rather
 Consorts with SPDC*
 In the comfort of concrete caverns
 Ferrets for phantom flaws
 In claims and counter claims of conspiracy
 Flying in the creeks
 Crackdown a complement
 To protect the capital (65).

Aso Rock is the metonymy for describing the seat of government in Nigeria. The poet calls it “concrete caverns” because it is built inside hewn rocks to make it an impregnable fortress. It is this seat of power that the poet accuses of treating SPDC, Shell Petroleum Development Company, with kid gloves instead of imposing heavy sanctions on the multinational conglomerate for the shoddiness in its operations. The poet is concerned that the state is only concerned with the amount of money coming into the coffers of government regardless of the attitude of oil companies to the welfare of their host communities. Most times, the state represses the people to protect the companies which make money available to government through mining and other extractive activities. The last poem to be considered in this collection is titled, “Oil war”. In it the poet bewails the circumstances of the diurnal existence of the people of the Niger Delta who are consigned into living in want in the midst of plenitude. This is the thread that he consistently weaves through his poetic compositions in his sustained efforts to rouse his people into anger and protest against modern day slavery. He opens the poem with a condemnation of the guiles used by expatriate oil workers to immobilize the residents of the oil-bearing communities in the creeks of the Niger Delta:

As a prologue to the poaching
 They hold us captive
 On these blackened phosphorous beaches:
 The dog glued to the home
 Never gets pregnant (77).

Yeibo's condemnation of this trick reminds us of the ingenuous trickery of the white man in Umuofia, the fictional community of Ibo people of Nigeria in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) when they came mainly to enslave them but chose to begin by introducing Christianity to them. Obierika, seen as one of the few voices of sanity in the community, rues the impact of the meeting of his people and the whites when he said "the white man is wise. He came peaceably with his religion and we said nothing. Now, he has pitched our brothers against us. Our clan can no longer act as one" (4). In the same way the local people in the creeks have been confined to their ancestral homes since the commencement of oil drilling and production in the early 1950s. The entire environment is rendered useless to its native owners as farming and fishing can no longer be practised. His use of "these blackened phosphorous beaches" is to describe what their places now look like after the constant and continuous emissions of poisonous gases and black smoke into the air they breathe. The consequence of this invariably is that the living area wears a soot of blackness. He ends the stanza with a proverb taken from the rich repertoire of the Izoos as follows: "the dog glued to the home//never gets pregnant". The import of this proverb is not lost on Ebi Yeibo. This is why he uses it to re-awaken the consciousness of his people. Their development is limited because their exposure is put on hold. This is enough reason for protest. The oil workers, whether indigenous or expatriates, do not live among the local people in

the “blackened phosphorous beaches”. They live in the highbrow areas of the cosmopolitan city of Port Harcourt. This stanza is intended to draw the attention of his people to these deliberate differences in their existence and that of their slave masters. In continuation, the poet paints a dark picture of the misery of his people in the ensuing stanza:

Above, as the setting sun
 Peeps through the translucent haze
 With befuddled eyes
 They float on an infinite pageantry
 Of swollen colours, distended bellies
 Even in the chemical-clogged creeks,
 Careened, like River Forcados in high tide (77).

The brightness of the early morning sun is put in check by the thickness of the haze caused by air pollution in the area. The dull sunshine released on the River Forcados is beamed on human destruction floating pitifully on the river. These miseries he describes as “swollen colours” and “distended bellies”. This is enough reason to pick the gauntlet and fight for survival and living a life of worth. Yeibo captures the meaningless existence of his people in moving imageries and metaphors too strong to be ignored. He describes his people as “drifting clay in tattered waist-cloth fit for a hag”. The endless struggle for a meaningful life by his people is captured by the “scramble for a splintered sunlight//floating languidly on the rusty river//like meaningless rubble”. We are reminded of the sorry state of the biblical Lazarus who had to wait patiently but earnestly for the crumbs that would fall from the master’s table before he could eat. Such is the lamentably precarious life of the dispossessed

people of the Niger Delta which calls for remedy through resistance and protest. The last stanza of the poem paints a most pitiful picture of the conditions of the people under reference. It bears full reproduction because it throws light on the point being made about the worthless lives of the people and the need to ward off the miseries of their existence:

O only cast-iron libertines
Carous with damsels
In a cursed cavern
Or blackened beach
Repositories of poisonous products
Of rusty pristine pipes and septic storms
Roaming through the womb of the creeks
Sanctioned by some bloodless god (77).

The first four lines of this excerpt say how almost impossible it is to partake of social activities given the pervasive unfriendly atmosphere created by many years of oil exploration. This is why only exceptional libertines and incurable hedonists can carouse women and socialize in the utterly degraded environment. Rusty pipes are reported to leak poisonous chemicals which pervade the entire creeks. This situation persists because it is conscientiously supported by the state represented by “some bloodless god”. In all of this, Ebi Yeibo, the poet, activist and environmental rights crusader has been seen to use his art, poetry, to serve the needs of his people. Deploying various linguistic arsenals in the depository of literary writing, the poet has unleashed poem after poem to rouse his people from inertia, re-awaken them to action and mobilize them to take their destinies in their own hands.

Elements of protest and resistance in the poetry of Ebi Yeibo

In an effort to achieve the objectives he has set for himself before setting out to compose his lines of poetry, Yeibo uses many devices and strategies to rev up his writing so that his intentions are not lost on his people but, even more importantly, on the oppressors of his people who by all means will come in contact with his poetry. From both sides of the divide, his poetry is aimed at give and take to ameliorate the living standards and conditions of his people without seeking to dislodge the expatriate oil workers from the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. We will examine these elements and strategies in the ensuing paragraphs.

In the poem, “Rage of a river” the poet uses proverbs to rouse his people to anger and action against their oppressors. In stanzas eight and nine of the poem, he makes unveiled references to situations in the land that should warrant protest. When he writes:

O the slaughter of white eagles
Leaves the animal kingdom
In sackcloth (28)

he is referring to the quantum of human misery brought about by the continuous plunder and pillage of the land, leaving almost nothing for the local people to live on. The “white eagles” represent the best of the choice land of the people in whose bowels oil is deposited in large quantity. His reference to “animal kingdom” is actually to the human community. Proverbs have special ways of rendition. The last stanza of the poem actually calls the people to violence by likening the theft of their property to the predatory relationship between the hawk and the chick:

When the hawk swoops on chicks
The mother goes wild (28).

Yeibo, practically likens the multinational companies to “hawks” whilst the mineral endowments in their soil is the “chick” which the hawks find an easy prey. The “mother” of the chicks is the Niger Delta region and its people who are roused from inertia to meaningful actions to secure the land from permanent yet avoidable destruction. A direct call to street fights and civil disobedience would definitely earn him sanctions from a colluding and conniving state. This is why his instigations are couched in proverbs. Chinua Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) states that the art of conversation amongst his Igbo people is one to which great importance is attached. He adds: “proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten” (Pg 3).

In yet another poem, “Silent Sorrows”, Ebi Yeibo urges his people to firmly hold their destinies in their own hands by urging them to speak against the visible absurdities of the state. The following stanzas sum up his anger against the oil exploiters and the colluding state and the need to speak up against such.

O let lacerations of a loose tongue
Pull down unseen hands
Hoisting broken covenants (33).

O let lacerations of a loose tongue
Banish garish gnarly barricades
From boundless seas (33).

The people now have “loose tongue(s)” which, like whips, should be used to “lacerate” the bare backs of their oppressors, whether local or international. That is their own way to draw attention to the pains and punishment they have had to live with since oil exploration and processing commenced more than half a century ago.

The urge on the local populace to protest the injustice meted out to them is seen in yet another of Yeibo’s poems titled “Unyielding clouds”. Using relevant biblical allusions, the poet urges that words be used as weapons of protest. This is seen in the reference to the miracles wrought by Jesus Christ using the potency of words. Further explications on this will be made shortly after the relevant stanzas of the poem have been quoted as follows:

The sanctity of sacred words
Stills running waters
Raises the widow’s son

Spawns even the Rock’s
“Rise up and walk...” (63).

From the foregoing, Yeibo is on record to have made references to the miracles wrought by Jesus Christ. This feat is demonstrated in three ways: one, Jesus calms the sea as seen in “stills running waters” (Mark 4: 39); two, He raises the only son of the widow from death which is seen in the line “raises the widow’s son” (John 5: 1-15); and three, finally, He restores the withered legs of the lame which is seen in the line “rise and walk” (Luke 7: 11-15). Besides, the profusion of biblical allusions made here, Yeibo appears to believe in the saying that muteness is the harbinger of ill luck

(a saying amongst the Yoruba of Western Nigeria). This is probably why he urges speech in the following stanzas:

O the unspeaking mouth

Smells rancidly (italics ours for emphasis)

The hidden scrotum

Swells rabidly. (63) (italics ours for emphasis)

It is clear that Yeibo is in support of free speech especially when it is deployed to achieve an objective, that of fighting injustice and its institutions. Credence is lent to his position because it is the power of God which is put to use in the Creation Account as chronicled in Genesis 1: 3. It is with the instrumentality of Word that light was created in the world which existed then in formlessness. Yeibo correctly states that if the human buccal cavity remains closed permanently, shut off from air, it will ooze forth odoriferous smells. This is why the oppressor of the people must be assailed with words potent enough to awaken their dead sensibilities.

As this Chapter winds down, it can be said that Ebi Yeibo's use of protest and resistance in his collection of poems has served the purpose of a wake- up call to his people who must rise stoutly and defiantly to claim what rightly belongs to them. He realises the limits of the potency of confrontation with the state and has therefore chosen this medium of passive resistance, using the instrumentality of poetry. The rough necks on the streets are doing their own bit by locking down the operations of multinational companies and, in some cases, kidnapping their expatriate workers.

Yeibo could not directly canvass violence and full-blown war because of the realisation that the state could wipe out the entire people overnight.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this Chapter, it is worth noting again that the objective for the inclusion of Yeibo's poetry in this study is to measure the success and impact of protest and resistance of the local people against the activities of oil explorers and oil companies who degrade the land and pollute the environment in the process of work. Going by the reaction of government and the oil companies in taking remedial measures to alleviate the pains and suffering of the people of the Niger Delta Area, it can be said that his poetry has been deployed in the service of his people. This is done with the result that the people have some respite but will definitely be happier if their situation improves further.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY

The overall objective of a study or research of this magnitude is to widen the scope of existing knowledge and break new grounds for the benefit of humanity in a world that is in a state of unending flux. In all, three poets were selected for this study and each of them had several collections of poetry from which two volumes had been earmarked as most appropriate for this work. Two of the poets, namely, Tanure Ojaide and Ebi Yeibo, are from the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Whilst Ojaide is Urhobo, Yeibo is Izon (spelt Ijaw in some publications). Both places of origin are riverine and blessed with abundant, almost limitless deposits of mineral resources, especially crude oil which has been the backbone of the Nigerian economy since their discovery in 1957. The third poet, Niyi Osundare, is of Yoruba extraction. The Yoruba occupy the South Western region of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. His people are predominantly farmers, although some places and locations in the West are endowed with oil. The quantum of oil that is available in Lagos and Ondo States is inconsequential, compared to the large deposits in the Niger Delta. The alloy of the riverine Niger Delta and the Yoruba geography is a pointer to the reality that environmental issues are widespread and not limited to specific places. The poems selected from the three target poets have demonstrated the relevance of the assumptions governing this study. As oil drilling and gas flaring have bedevilled the Niger Delta, the West is holed up in the throes of deforestation, land degradation and climate change. These are issues that are strong and sufficient enough to warrant a study of this scope. Further studies and research in the area of environmentalism

which focus on subjects drawn from Nigeria can concentrate on Northern Nigeria where natural desertification has altered the living equation of the people. The point being made, therefore, is that green studies are pervasive. It leaves no area untouched, in terms of geography, and human and non-human components of the environment. The relevance of Ecocriticism as a literary theory cannot be over emphasized as it serves to illuminate the minds humankind and the general environment that they inhabit, technically known as the ecosystem. Ecosystem allows eco-diversity because of the beauty of creation which allows otherness. The sum of all that the environment parades is the beauty within which humankind live. It is this beauty that literature seeks to preserve by interrogating the forces that threaten it. Ecocriticism thrives on the use of literature of all kinds to probe into the inner recesses of the life of humankind with a view to identifying what needs to be retained to make life continuously liveable and what must be expunged to achieve the same objective. Any of the three known typologies of literature can be deployed in this regard. Many researches and theses have been carried out using the novel, otherwise called fiction. In doing that, significant contributions have been made to knowledge. For this study, however, the genre known as poetry has been deployed. Altogether, six collections from three poets were selected to address the issues and concerns raised by the relationship of humanity and their immediate environment. For further emphasis, the poets and their respective works are as follows. *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems* (1997) and *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1998) are taken from Tanure Ojaide's several volumes of poetry. *The Eye of the Earth* (1986) and *Waiting Laughters* (1990) are taken from Niyi Osundare's works whilst Ebi Yeibo's *The Forbidden Tongue* (2007) and *Shadows of the Setting Sun* (2012) are also used for the study. In the main,

the poetry of Ojaide and Yeibo draws attention to the woes which have befallen their people of the Niger Delta area. This is understandable because a writer does not live in a vacuum but he responds to issues arising from his socio-cultural and politico-economic milieus. The two poets could not have left the riverine South where they were sired and written lines of poetry about the West or the North where they are shorn of the requisite experience and literary wherewithal. Their literary productions frown at the connivance of power with multinational oil companies to wreak havoc on the Niger Delta environment and its residents. In poem after poem, they point out the infractions on the environment and the consequential impacts on the residents. The poets see a potent force in poetry as a useful instrument in pointing the way forward in the journey towards rescuing the environment from total waste.

It is only in a sane environment where the desired equilibrium is maintained amongst all the denizens, human and non-human, that development can take place. It is in a clime depicted above that fish farming can take place. It is there that land cultivation for food production can take place. It is there that humankind can live peacefully in a healthy environment without inhaling fumes and effluents from factories. It is there that humanity can live without the danger of being drenched by acid rain caused by the pollution of the atmosphere by gas flaring. The objectives of this study have been achieved just as the consequential research questions have been answered satisfactorily. In the case of Tanure Ojaide, for instance, the objective of the study was to identify the natural environments in which the poems were set in order to discuss the effects of environmental hazards on the different settings of the various poems. Our study has responded to this by assessing the settlements of Urhobo people in the

marshland of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It has also found out that the people suffer remarkably from the activities of oil explorers in their environment. It has also been found out that farming, a life supporting practice amongst the people, has become impossible because the land used for this purpose has been degraded in the process of prospecting for oil, exploration and transportation of oil by pipelines which are laid through thousands of kilometres of farm land. In the case of Niyi Osundare, the objective for using his poetry as a benchmark for ecological and environmental studies slightly differs from Ojaide's. Whereas Ojaide's preoccupation is to draw attention to land degradation and environmental hazards caused by oil exploration and gas flaring, the objective for the inclusion of Osundare in this study is to highlight the effects of environmental degradation on farming and the human habitat through his poetry. As we have pointed out earlier in this study, the vast acreage of land on which Yoruba peasant farmers work has been degraded by many factors. Some of these are unchecked gully erosion due to deforestation without simultaneous afforestation and government decisions on land use which are unfavourable to farmers. The effects of unfavourable climatic and environmental conditions of the Western part of Nigeria have been found to adversely affect the livelihood and continued existence of the people of that geographical area. This study has found out that farm yields had decreased profoundly because of harmful environmental practices. The farmers in the area who were accustomed to bumper harvests before the incursion of land degraders had been forced to accept miserable harvests of shrivelled crops from massive human and capital investments in farming. The objective for including the poetry of Ebi Yeibo in this study was to increase awareness on the need for protest and resistance by every concerned person, especially in the Niger Delta area, against the continued

degradation of the Niger Delta environment. This objective has been fully met in the sense that Yeibo's youthfulness is seen to have paid off through his poetic productions. From one poem to another, his activism, combativeness and pugilism are on display as he urges his people to rebel against policies that would exterminate them if not checked conscientiously and determinedly. The defence of the Ijaws is found to be double edged: the people in the streets are ready to deal roughly with perceived enemies of their people through physical protests, armed struggles and occupation of oil production sites. The elite are not exempt from the struggle. Their approach is non-violent passive resistance which is seen in the array of poets from the region dishing out verses intended to rouse their people to anger and to demand for fair treatment in matters affecting their despoiled environment. Expectedly, there have been conflicts between multinational oil companies who must pollute the environment and degrade the land for oil production and the local militia who must hold their destinies firmly in their hands if they must live. The complementarity in the efforts of the two poets from the South and Niyi Osundare from the West points to the overriding need to prevent the environment from falling into disuse at all costs. Whilst the two fire canons from their cylinders in the South, Osundare is roaring in the West that land degradation occasioned by deforestation, erosion and desertification must be prevented. All these efforts are aimed at deploying literature as a potent tool to halt the drift from the needless inhumanity to fellow humankind. The issues of the environment differ from place to place as the poems selected for this study have clearly shown. In the West, from where Osundare hails, the productive capacity of the farmer is hampered by harmful environmental practices. He introduces himself proudly as the son of a farmer who was raised in the pre-industrial and bucolic

precincts of his father's large acreage of farmland. It is therefore logical for him to use the only instrument available to him, which is poetry, to preserve the pristine environment he inherited from his parents from going into avoidable ruins in the hands of local and international poachers.

CONCLUSIONS

From the foregoing, it is clear that a gap has now been filled in research concerning the environment. This is because many previous efforts in this regard, until lately, have not addressed the issues of the environment and the place of humankind in it. Undoubtedly, ecocriticism is a latter-day literary theory which focuses mainly on the interactions of humankind and their environment. Its concerns have given rise to studies which ramify the need to salvage the environment from needless destruction. In addition to the above, the deployment of poetry in addressing and resolving issues emanating from the environment is not as widespread as we see in the use of other genres of literature, especially fiction. This is another gap that is filled in the ever-widening vista of research available for exploration by present and future researchers. Amongst other reasons, research is carried out to effect needed changes from positions that are considered necessary for change. The agitations in Nigeria, for instance, over what is called "Resource Control" amongst the people of the Niger Delta has forced government to allocate 13% of cash flow from oil every month to communities where oil is mined. The sustained protests by youths from all oil producing areas, in addition to the intellectual support from their elite, have given rise to the decision of government to consider "derivation" as a component in the sharing formula of resources to all sections of the Country. As if this is not enough, the Federal

Government has also established the Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC. It is meant to manage huge financial resources allocated to the region to meet deficits in infrastructure and other areas of need. The Commission, as a matter of principle and policy, is headed by high profile indigenes of the Niger Delta exclusively. It is reasoned that intellectuals and political leaders from the region which is bedevilled by problems of degradation and despoliation will be in the best position to address their own problems. In addition to this, the Federal Government, through the Ministry of Environment has awarded contracts for the “clean up” of Ogoni land. It will be recalled that several poems by Tanure Ojaide were written to remember the heroic deeds of Ken Saro Wiwa, the Nigerian environmentalist who was hanged by the Nigerian state along with eight of his Ogoni compatriots on the 10th of November, 1995. It was commonplace to read references to “the Ogoni 9” in several publications in Nigeria. It was this “Ogoni” that was being referred to. It is a large expanse of land and water where oil mining takes place massively. The land has been rendered not usable for Agriculture. Its waters have been rendered useless for human consumption, for domestic use and for fish farming because of pollution from burst pipes and other incidental occurrences in the line of production. These conditions which were brought to the attention of government by the people of the Niger Delta and the intelligentsia, made up of poet activists, led to a shift in the attitude of government to issues arising from the oil- bearing areas. Research revealed that the lid had been blown over all manners of perpetrators of anti-development practices in the region: politicians, the unpatriotic elite, corrupt public officials and misguided youths. This was one of the successes of literary artists in their determined efforts to resist oppression using the instrumentality of poetry.

RECOMENDATIONS

Our position from the conclusions made above, is not to prevent oil exploration from taking place where massive oil reserves have been found. This would be anti-development. Our conclusion is not that all the land that is available to humanity should be reserved for use by agrarian farmers. That will be reductive because it will downplay the importance and relevance of modern mechanised farming with its capacity to improve crop yields and increase food supply to the people. We are, however, mindful of the need to preserve the environment for the good of humankind. In this connection, when it is development oriented to mine oil and process it for industrial, corporate and individual use, care must be taken not to grab all the sites of oil exploration and render them un-usable to humankind. Oil exploration takes place in Texas, in the United States of America. This developmental activity is not carried out to the detriment of life. We have not heard of or read reports of massive protests by Texans to draw the attention of government to issues of pollution or land degradation. Since learning is a life-long process that never ends, we recommend that the Nigerian state despatch a team of professionals in the oil and gas business to the United States and to the United Arab Emirates, (UAE) where oil exploration takes place massively and their people are not endangered.

In addition, gas flaring deserves government attention. In Nigeria, for instance, government had issued deadlines for gas flaring which never materialised. Gas flaring takes place daily with the masses of the people simply looking on as the air they breathe in every second is polluted. We urge that the American example is again examined with a view to effecting a remedy for this health hazard in Nigeria. In the

US, for instance, every apartment is supplied with gas for domestic use. Residents pay for gas consumption either monthly or as agreed in legal tenancy documents. This generates money for government. The Nigerian government can benefit from this practice in three ways, namely: (a) the people who can afford it could have gas piped to their apartments thus making life more comfortable for them, (b) government will generate more revenue for its developmental efforts and (c) the environment will be free from air pollution.

Away from environmental pollution caused by gas flaring, we focused on what a re-greened environment can do to humanity. The deforestation in Western Nigeria can be arrested by a state policy on afforestation. We recommend that this is pursued as an emergency that is second only to war. The possible effect is that the land could be reclaimed and the environment restored. The brooks could run again. Wildlife could naturally return to their accustomed habitat. The local people could relive their bucolic life of pristine purity, bereft of modernity and its deleterious accompaniments. It is recommended that the beam of a powerful research searchlight be beamed on the northern part of Nigeria with its inherent climatic aridity. Whilst successive governments at the federal and state levels have taken steps to re-green the environment and boost agriculture using mechanized irrigation, we recommend that the UAE example be copied. It has become a top tourist attraction today because the government of that country has turned its fortunes around. The country earns a fortune from tourism in contrast to what it was half a century ago. The fortunes of northern Nigeria can be turned around similarly if the right things are done at the right time. Previous researches in the field of ecocriticism, especially by Nigerian scholars, have

focused on the south, the oil rich Niger Delta especially. This was why, in addition to the devastations in the Niger Delta region, our study examined issues in Western Nigeria where environmental problems had negatively altered the equation of existence for its people, especially peasant farmers.

It is in these and other ways not captured in this study that research can both be helpful and beneficial to humankind. It is intended to assist humanity as it struggles daily to make today better than yesterday and tomorrow better than today. Here lies the beauty of research. It takes place all the time and keeps humankind abreast of contemporary developments in their immediate and far-flung environment. It has been affirmed by common place experience that what is constant in life is change. Humanity, therefore, should keep pace with modernity and novelties in order not to lapse into obsolescence. This is partly why this study has recommended that modernity, mechanization and current technology should be deployed in finding enduring solutions to the problems the Niger Delta region of Nigeria in a way that both the people of the region and the state could be celebrated beneficiaries.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Thesis Supervisors

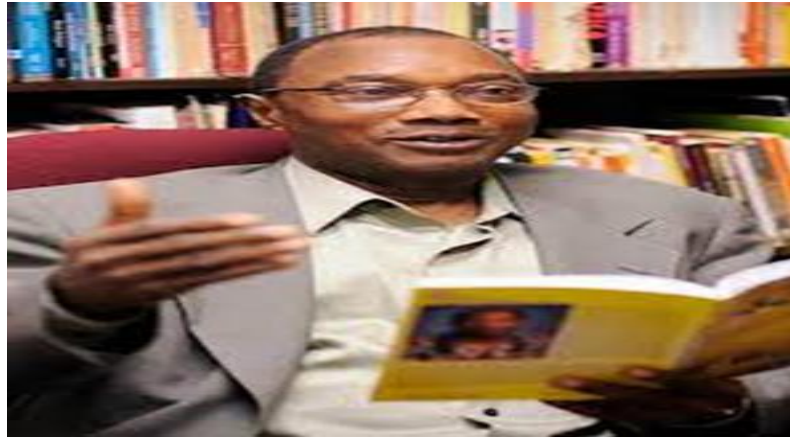


Prof Oluoch Obura, First Supervisor.



Dr Kisa Amateshe, Second Supervisor.

Appendix B: Authors of Primary Texts



Prof Tanure Ojaide, Poet scholar.



Prof. Niyi Osundare, Poet scholar.

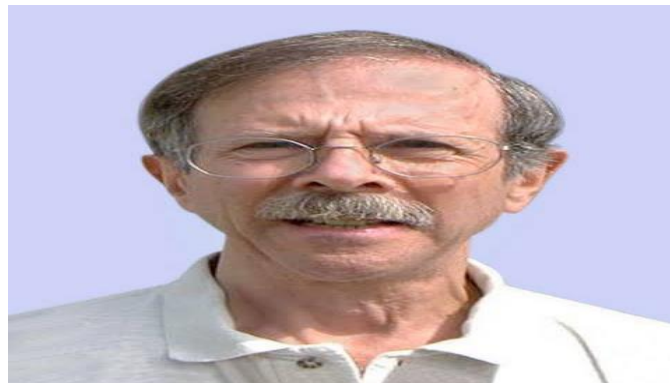


Dr. Ebi Yeibo, Poet activist.

Appendix C: Theorists on Ecocriticism



Prof .Cheryll Glotfelty, author and proponent of Ecocriticism Theory.



Prof Harold Fromm, author and Ecocriticism Theorist

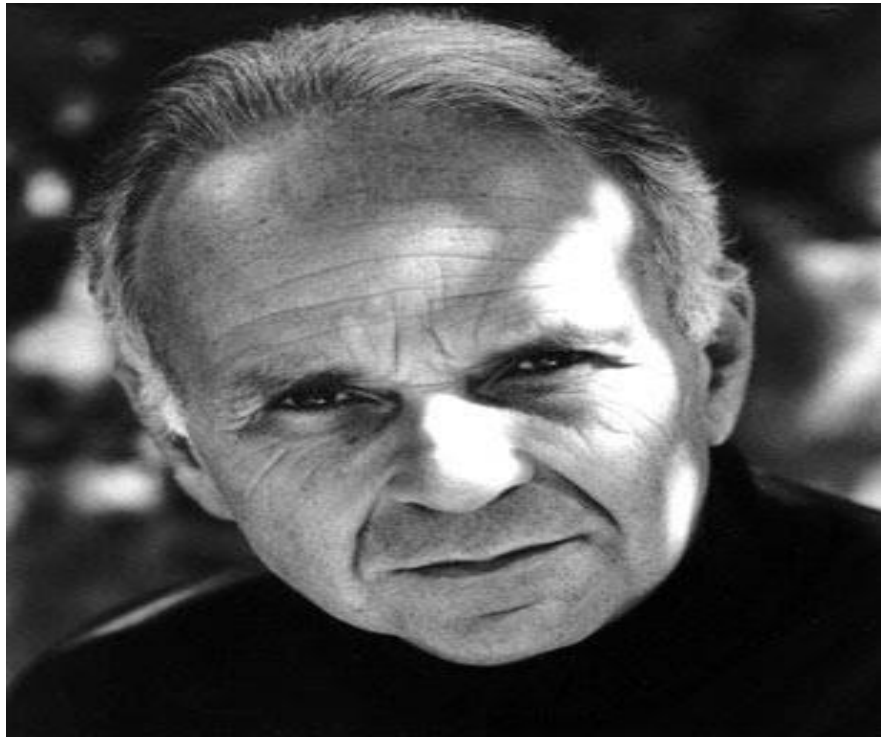


Prof William Rueckert, author and environmentalist activist.

Appendix D: Theorists on Reader Response Theory.



Louise Rosenblatt, author, teacher and theorist.



Prof Stanley Fish, proponent of Reader Response Theory

Appendix E: Instances of Gas Flaring in Nigeria.



Offshore Gas Flaring in Nigeria.



Another instance of Gas flaring in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

Appendix F: Consequences of Oil Spillage.



Dead fishes in polluted waters in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.



Consequences of Oil Spillage in Nigeria's Niger Delta.

Appendix G: Instances of Deforestation



Deforestation through logging in Nigeria.



Desertification in Nigeria.

Appendix H: Effects of vagaries of weather on Rice Plantation.



Blossoming Rice plantation in Nigeria.



Flooded Rice plantation in Nigeria.

Appendix I: A well- tended Yam farm and Yam barn.



Well cultivated Yam farm in Western Nigeria.



An example of food storage using Yam barn in Western Nigeria.