

ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF SELECTED POEMS OF NIYI OSUNDARE, TANURE

OJAIDE AND NNIMMO BASSEY

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Title Page

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Literature in English**

June 2016

Certification

This is to certify that I, Michael Onyeisi Ejiodu, am responsible for the work submitted in this dissertation, except as specified in the works cited.

Michael Onyeisi Ejiodu

June 2016

Approval

This Dissertation has been approved by the Department of English Language and Literature,
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the Almighty God, the creator of the Earth

and

To the friends of the Earth: all who labour that the Earth might not die.

Acknowledgements

I have had the rare privilege of having two experts supervise my work. This is not very common. Therefore it is particularly pertinent that I acknowledge both. I wish to express my profound gratitude to my first supervisor, Dr F. O. Orabueze, who started this work. She painstakingly went through the planning stages of this thesis, and read through the first chapter, making relevant suggestions towards improving my efforts. Accept my sincere appreciation.

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I give my final thanks to God the Father, that infinite being none can understand, His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Guide.

Abstract

This thesis examines the human impact on the environment, especially on the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, and its treatment in the selected poetry of Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey, using the ecocentric and the anthropocentric theories from the domain of ecocriticism. The texts studied are *The Eye of the Earth* (1986) by Niyi Osundare, *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* (2008) and *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1998) by Tanure Ojaide, and *We thought it was Oil But It was Blood* (2002) by Nnimmo Bassey. A total of fifty-three poems were analysed. Constituting this number are seventeen poems from Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*, fifteen from Ojaide's *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* and eight from his *Delta Blues and Home Songs*, and thirteen from Bassey's *We thought it was Oil But It was Blood*. From this research, which adopted library method, it was discovered that much of the criticisms of the selected poems and indeed the poetry from the Niger Delta region have concentrated on the socio-political phenomena such as pre-colonialism, colonialism, independence struggle, corruption, exploitation of the masses, oppression and protest. The findings of this research are, one, the poets have presented the earth (environment) as being inherently valuable, possessing value beyond what humanity has ascribed to it, in terms of being beautiful and bountiful; two, humanity has displayed the anthropocentric attitude and as such has devastated the earth to the ultimate detriment of the earth, the flora and fauna as well as humanity; three, there is a wealth of literary techniques such as the invocation of the African muse, lyricism, chants, numerous sound devices and imagery employed by the poets, in the realization of the themes presented in the selected poems. Finally, from the whole research, the following conclusions were drawn: first, that the environment, which is inherently valuable, is generally being destroyed by human beings in their efforts to make life "better"; secondly, that the destruction of the earth is already affecting humans negatively; and three, that Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey are calling on mankind to eschew attitudes and activities that lead to the destruction of the environment. Therefore, this research submits that there is the need for humanity to treat the environment with utmost tenderness and affection, and to take from her what is absolutely necessary, and in a genial manner. It suggests that the theme of ecocentrism should be vigorously pursued in both literary creations and criticism by literary scholars.

Table of Contents

Title Page	ii
Certification	iii
Approval	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Abstract	vii
Table of Contents	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Background to the Study	1
The Life and Works of Niyi Osundare	13
The Life and Works of Tanure Ojaide.....	14
The Life and Works of Nnimmo Bassey.....	15
Statement of the Problem	16
Scope of the Study.....	18
Significance of the Study.....	19
Purpose of the Study	20
Theoretical Framework.....	21
Definition of Concepts.....	44
Anthropocentrism	44
Ecocentrism.....	46
Other(s)	46
Ecology	46

Biodiversity.....	47
Sustainability.....	48
CHAPTER TWO	49
REVIEW OF RELATED SCHOLARSHIP	49
A Survey of African Literature: Themes and Trend.....	54
A Review of Literature on Niyi Osundare's Poetry.....	64
A Review of Literature on Tanure Ojaide's Poetry	72
A Review of Literature on Nnimmo Bassey's Poetry.....	85
CHAPTER THREE	88
ECOCENTRIC INTERPRETATION OF SELECTED POEMS OF NIYI OSUNDARE, TANURE OJAIDE AND NNIMMO BASSEY	88
Ecocentrism in Niyi Osundare's <i>The Eye of the Earth</i>	88
Ecocentrism in Tanure Ojaide's <i>Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel</i>	98
Ecocentrism in Tanure Ojaide's <i>Delta Blues and Home Song</i>	108
Ecocentrism in Nnimmo Bassey's <i>We Thought it was Oil But it was Blood</i>	112
CHAPTER FOUR	115
IN DEFENCE OF THE EARTH: ANTHROPOCENTRIC READING OF SELECTED POEMS OF NIYI OSUNDARE, TANURE OJAIDE AND NNIMMO BASSEY	115
Anthropocentric Reading of Niyi Osundare's <i>The Eye of the Earth</i>	115
Anthropocentric Reading of Tanure Ojaide's <i>Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel</i>	124
Anthropocentric Reading of Tanure Ojaide's <i>Delta Blues and Home Song</i>	138
Anthropocentric Reading of Nnimmo Bassey's <i>We Thought it was Oil But it was Blood</i>	147
CHAPTER FIVE	165
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	165

Summary.....165

Conclusion.....166

Suggestions for Further Research.....170

Works Cited... ..171

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

It will be pertinent to state, at the outset, the trajectory of this thesis: the examination of Tanure Ojaide's, Niyi Osundare's and Nnimmo Bassey's responses to the ecodegradation of Africa, and particularly the Niger-Delta region, in their poetry, with a view to establishing the consequence of such degradation upon the earth and mankind, as well as the re-orientation of the human mind, already corrupted by human culture which functions at counter purpose with nature, towards handling the environment with tenderness. Therefore, the critical canon adopted in the study is ecocriticism; and the texts for the study are *The Eye of the Earth* by Niyi Osundare, *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* and *Delta Blues and Home Songs* by Tanure Ojaide, and *We thought it was Oil But It was Blood* by Nnimmo Bassey. A total of fifty-three poems were examined. Constituting this number are seventeen poems from Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*, fifteen from Ojaide's *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* and eight from his *Delta Blues and Home Songs*, and thirteen from Bassey's *We thought it was Oil But It was Blood*.

The Niger Delta region has suffered so much violence since the discovery and exploitation of crude oil began in the region. This has been heightened since the declaration of the Ogoni Bills of Rights by Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), through which the Ogoni people demanded,

Among other things, political autonomy to participate in the affairs of the Republic as a distinct and separate unit (by whatever name called), provided that this autonomy guarantees political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people; the right to control and use a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni

development; adequate representations, as of right, in all Nigerian national institutions, and the right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation (1).

This Bill served to raise awareness about the conditions of the people and the environment of the Niger Delta region. The awareness manifested in the increase level of protest and violence among the people of the Niger Delta region as a whole, not just that of Ogoni land. According to Shaibu Jibril Mohammed, "the chain of events that have followed the declaration of the Ogoni Bills of Rights since 1990 to date has two discernible issues about the contest for the control of oil resources in the Niger Delta with youth restiveness manifesting in violence, hostage taking, etc" (378).

The violence talked about has been attested to by numerous kidnappings for ransom, acts of oil pipeline vandalism, protests and other forms of disturbances. According to Edirin Jeroh,

Nigeria has however recorded a relative high rate of violent crimes over the years. For instance, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which produces over ninety percent of the nation's oil has in recent times been plagued with series of kidnappings, oil pipeline vandalism, protest, riots, civil disturbances, armed robbery... (246).

This is because the area has witnessed neglect in terms of infrastructural development. Another reason is that the people living in the area have been deprived their means of livelihood due to the many oil spills and the destruction of the biodiversity. According to Augustus Atubi, "one of the most visible consequences of the numerous oil spills had been the loss of mangrove trees", which was once "a habitat for the area's biodiversity" (270). The magnitude of the oil spills is so high, Atubi has stated, that "a total of 4,647 incidents resulted in the spill of approximately

2,369,470 barrels of oil into the environment, of this quantity, an estimated 1,820,410.5 barrels (77%) were lost to the environment" (270). From this figure, it is obvious that survival for both human beings and the flora and fauna within the region will be almost impossible, at least in the long run. The situation is amplified by Atubi thus:

With particular reference to the fifty years operations of the oil industry in the Niger Delta, the exploration of oil has caused and continues to induce serious negative environmental impacts. The problem of oil spillage has a major devastating environmental effects associated with oil industry in the Niger Delta. The disaster refers to any uncontrolled well blown out pipeline rupture or storage tank failure which poses an imminent threat to the public health or welfare. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that over 4,000 oil spills discharging more than two million barrels of crude have occurred in the Niger Delta since 1960 (269).

With so much oil spillage and the biodiversity gone, the live of the people as well as the organism and the entire environment is negatively affected.

Oil spillage is not the only way through which the environment is being degraded. There is also gas flaring. This has not only resulted in air pollution, it has also led to increase global temperature. According to Nwajiuba, C.U. and R.U. Onyeneke, "an analysis of temperature records shows that the earth has warmed an average of 0.6°C over the past 100 years..." (34). This period largely lies within the time most of the oil exploration and gas flaring have been going on. The increase in temperature has brought other consequences such as low level of rainfall, as well as the rainfall not maintaining the known pattern and volume according to the seasons. According to Nwajiuba and Onyeneke, "precipitation has equally changed randomly in

terms of pattern and volume. It is clear that these changes in volume will, in many parts of the world, affect socio-economic sectors like water resources, agriculture, human settlements, ecological systems, human health, and environment" (34).

The high level of dangerous gasses released into the environment is another way the degradation of the environment has been caused. These gasses have greenhouse effect and have given rise to overall global-warming. According to Nwajiuba and Onyeneke,

More than before, climate change issue has become more threatening to the sustainable development of many nations of the world. Mean global temperatures have been increasing in line with precipitation increases since around 1850, mainly due to the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (33).

One thing is certain, human beings have affected the environment negatively in their efforts to live more comfortably. But that does not mean that human beings have not been affected as well. According to Kelly Bryan Ovie Ejumudo,

Ordinarily, organizations as legal entities, interact with and exploit the environments for the accomplishment of their specific goals and those of the larger society. This interaction affects the ecosystem and the inhabitants, especially man. As a result, there are pressures from society, which make it incumbent on corporate organizations to be socially responsible by being responsive to the yearnings and expectations of their operating environment (204).

It is for this reason that the people of the Niger Delta react in protest against the activities of the oil exploration companies operating within the region.

African literary artists have done a great deal of work concerning Africans in their social, political and historical relationships both with Africans and with people of other races. This could be seen even with a casual, yet panoramic, view of the titles that have emerged from the continent of Africa, beginning with such writers as Oludua Equiano, Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and so on. It is true, according to Oyekan Owomoyela, that “Africa has a long literary tradition” (NP), but one can say that this literature, until the 20th century, was largely not written down. It was essentially oral, and passed down from one generation to the next through oral means. However, this situation changed to the extent that African literature of the post-colonial era is mostly written, albeit in the language of the former colonial masters. This is accounted for by the colonial experience which lasted, according to Owomoyela, “from the 16th century to the mid 20th century” (NP). This oral nature of traditional African literature has accounted for the presence of oral literature materials in the written literature from Africa.

African Literature has been mainly on culture and culture-related matters: protest, violence, economic injustice, political injustice, social injustice, exploitation, neglect of the people, et cetera. Consequently, the lachrymal, protest and revolutionary aesthetics have held the attention of the literary artists, critics and social commentators both within the Niger Delta region and Africa generally, as well as their sympathisers. But, all seem to be oblivious of the fact that man is simply a secondary sufferer of the actions of the multinational organisations and that man generally has wreaked the havoc in his efforts to make life more “comfortable” for himself. Justifying the necessity of protest literature of the Niger Delta, a part of Africa, it may be necessary to cite Chinyere Nwahunanya in “The Lachrymal Consciousness in the literature of the Niger Delta:” “Let us reiterate that protest literature arises in societies where there are anomalies in the socio-political and economic structures put in place by the ruling class to drive

their dominant ideology” (38). There has been so much imbalance in the life of the people of the Niger Delta in relation to the people of other regions. In addition to the anomalies in the total structures of the society generally, man has consistently despoiled and devastated the environment, and this is most grievous in the Niger Delta region.

It might be necessary to locate the Niger Delta region. This is the area covered by nine states spanning the south-south, mainly, the south-west and the south-east geo-political zones of Nigeria. According to G. G. Darah, “the Niger Delta region is made up of six of Nigeria’s 36 states, namely, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers” (4). About this region, Isaac M. Udoh quotes Stock DVD-ROM to have said: “the Niger Delta is one of the largest wetlands in the world and the largest in Africa, measuring an estimated 36,000 square kilometres” (110). However, for the purpose of this research, the Niger Delta region is taken to mean the entire area of land and forest inundated by the river Niger. It is an area which is very rich in natural resources. Whereas oil is not being exploited from the entire stretch of land, other forms of degradation take place, such as bush burning, over cultivation, over harvesting of timber and other natural resources, et cetera. This is the area which has been the sustenance of a people, a place which gives physical expression to their social, psychological and spiritual wellbeing. It is this kind of situation which, moves A. C. Emeribe to assert that,

...man’s environment is that which gives him physical sustenance and affords him the opportunity for intellectual, and spiritual and social growth ... the natural and the man-made, are essential for his wellbeing and enjoyment of basic human rights... (Qtd in Udoh, 110).

This is the kind of place and essence which has more-or-less been wrestled away from the people of the Niger Delta by the multinationals, the rulers and their associates via human activities.

About this region and the activities going on in the region, Nwahunanya states that,

In the fifty or so odd years of oil prospecting and exploration in the Niger Delta, the human population and the flora and fauna indigenous to the region have been the direct recipients and victims of the negative consequences of oil extraction. There has been widespread scorching of the vegetation by gas flares, the subsequent disappearance of foliage and the overexposure of the soil cover to harsh weather conditions, death of aquatic life and a destabilization of the ecosystem (37).

Allwell A. Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu, agreeing with most other writers from the region and their sympathizers, have observed that, “one also has to mention the numerous oil spills and their grave effects, especially on the environment” (50). The flora and fauna, in their totality, have suffered, and the suffering has been transferred unto man. This is the reason there have been lachrymal and revolutionary attitudes within the Niger Delta region since the days of Isaac Adaka Boro.

This (the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and Africa) is the area most hit by poverty and lack of infrastructural development. This is the reason the people have been mostly concerned with the issues of protest and revolution. The people live in the area where, until recently, there has not been good food, water, roads, hospitals, schools, and other basic amenities. The life of the people could be summed up as that of the mud fish which dwells in the swamp; only, the mud fish lives in its natural habitat and so could be described as rich. This is in addition to the poison they daily have to contend with in the form of carbon dioxide and other dangerous

substances, and scorching heat among other discomforts and death-inducing materials and conditions. Therefore, Celestine Oyom Bassey states that,

The security of the Nigerian State must be defended: gas flaring, and oil spills, which combined with the deterioration of the soil that proved a poisonous cocktail for the Ogonis' livelihood are inconsequential and surface perturbations that the minority oil producing communities can live with (25).

About the ecodegradation of the Niger Delta region, and the extent to which it goes to affect the people, Palms Chinaka observes that, "The pollution impacts in these areas go as far as affecting the borderline communities during the energy production activities" (30). Chinaka goes on to quote Nnimmo Bassey, who viciously attacks the government, as stating that "over 100 flare sites in the Niger Delta belch 400 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalents into the atmosphere annually" (30).

And he goes on to add the health implications of the environmental problems. To him,

The flaring of gas has the tendency of unleashing such diseases as cancer, asthma, bronchitis, blood disorders, etc. Subsequently, against the region's ecosystem, the people are forced to share their neighbourhood with such unfriendly phenomena as acid rain, global heat, deforestation, wildfires, contaminated toxic water, etc (30).

Nwahunanya adds his voice thus:

There have also been health issues resulting from gas flaring, some being the consequences of dietary shortfalls, and others the result of the emission of large amounts of methane and carbon dioxide, gases which have been confirmed to have high global warming and green-house effect potentials (37).

Environmental pollution and the resultant health issues are some of the problems of the world today, and particularly of the Niger Delta, about which Nwahunanya states that,

There are portrayals of the death of the land, dying rivers, polluted land and rivers, silted rivers, fast disappearing flora and fauna, land that has turned hostile to its inhabitants due to infertility, the general destruction of the ecosystem and the lowering of the equality of human life due to human greed (42).

The attitudes of the government and the multinationals only serve to heighten and hasten the violence. Chinaka has also captured this in his summation of their posture:

There is also the accusation that the oil multinationals in question would rather provide “logistics” for the military men deployed to the area than compensate the people whose farmlands and rivers are polluted and devastated in the drilling process (29).

Because of the lack of care and interest in the welfare of the people and the environment, government has been indicted to the point of being accused of neglecting or setting aside court orders or judgements with respect to the plight of the flora and fauna of the Niger Delta. In the words of Nwahunanya,

In spite of the fact that there have been judicial orders for the stoppage of gas flaring in the Niger Delta (such as the November 1995 judgement by a Federal High Court sitting in Benin City, headed by Justice V. C. Nwokorie), gas flaring has continued unabated. The overall effects of the oil companies in this region are better imagined than experienced (38).

Consequent upon this situation, Onukaogu and Onyerionwu have asserted that,

Oil – in all of its capacities as a top global revenue earner; a strategic propellant of crisis situations (even of war proportions) and a supreme variable in the desperate international conversation on environmental degradation – has constituted a talking point so resonant and delicate (50).

The significance of oil in the world economy of today is the reason the capitalist world, and the world in general have refused to take a look at the consequences of the continued exploitation of the earth, the environment. Therefore when oil spills or the water is polluted, either the government does not see it or chooses not to care.

Attention is here focused more on oil, not because it is the only source of ecodegradation, (virtually all other actions of man are) but because the preponderance and the magnitude of the capacity of oil to pollute the environment is astronomical and beyond imagination.

Part of the reason for the protest demeanour, revolutionary ethos and “lachrymal consciousness” (37) in Niger Delta literature, as Nwahunanya describes it, are the environmental degradation, poverty, lack of care and infrastructural development and the attendant suffering, diseases and death on the people of the Niger Delta. This is in addition to the psychological dislocation of the people and their apparent reaction to their forceful separation from their land (their earth), a treasured part of the life of the African, and the nostalgic feeling engendered. This is how Nwahunanya puts it:

The lachrymal nature of Niger Delta literature is predicated first on a nostalgic remembrance of what the land was like before it became degraded and the apparent lack of concern of the authors of the spillage for the present predicament of the environment (41).

A good number of writers have raised their voices against this situation in what is called Nigerian Literature. One of such writers, who has aptly described and summed up the situation, is Chris Onyema. He writes that,

Since the discovery and commercial exploration of oil in the area in 1958 until date, the people of the Niger Delta, who are mainly fishermen and farmers, have been suffering from acts of bioterrorism, oil pollution of the lands and waters, gas flaring, hunger, diseases and poverty, as a result of the general destruction of their aquatic and terrestrial reserves. Poverty breeds prostitution, gas flaring breeds cancer and respiratory diseases, while lack of commensurate duty of care, by the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies, breed “bunkering” and further oil spillage, militancy, unemployment and youth crises, arm proliferation and hostage-taking of foreign and local oil workers (189).

Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, commenting on the effects of the exploration of oil and the responses to it in the literary and social circles, have cited Tanure Ojaide:

By the 1960s the rivers had been dredged to take in pontoons and even ships, to enter our backyard. Shell B. P. had started to feed the African Timber and Plywood company in Sapele. Streams and marshes dried up. Rubber trees were planted in a frenzy to make money and were soon tapped to death. The *Oware* fish that used to jump across culverts/roads were gone. There were no more fish in most of our waters. The heat from the blowout in Kokori and such places imperilled our lives and our means of sustenance (Quoted in Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 52).

Almost immediately, Onukaogu and Onyerionwu quotes Ojaide as stating that, “now the environment is destroyed with gas being flared, the farms are not good, fishes are driven from the rivers, *everything is polluted*” [emphasis mine] (52).

When “everything is polluted,” writers and writings will have no other choice than to respond proportionately to the state of pollution either by weeping or reminiscing over the glory of the ancestral or virginal groves. Therefore, Nigerian Literature and literary artists, especially the Niger Delta strand, have actively responded to the psycho-social and economic situation. For example, Chris Onyema aptly states that,

Nigerian Literature is a socially conscious act used as moniker for social, political and environmental witnessing. In discharging the burden of the writer as an ecological witness, novelists from the Niger Delta area of Nigeria evolve art, which, in the vocabulary of Glotfelty (2003:2) “has one foot in literature and the other on land.” Land, conceptualized as a cohyponym of green in ecocritical discourse, becomes a quest to reconnect with supraordinate nature – equanimity of human, cultural, terrestrial and aquatic reserves – through creative ties even to the numinous. Currents in the Niger Delta environmental discourse implicate ecological crisis experiences and challenges that flow from the politics of oil exploration and its environmental impact assessment in the Nigerian sub-region (189).

Consequent upon this, Onyema writes that,

Rather than deep indulgence in “the praise-song school” of romantic green, Niger Delta writers praise nature as nostalgic memorialization that instills a psychological throwback to the eco-harmony that prevailed in the “pre-crude”

Delta, in order to give fillip to the degree of loss, devastation and suffering spilled by crude (oil) exploration. Here, we have ecological and psychological experiences worth telling and ecological or green ideals worth attaining; there, we have those who are paying for eco-devastation with their lives (190).

The main focus of this research is the demonstration from selected poems of Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey that the earth is inherently valuable; it is also an invitation to humanity to eschew any act that is capable of degrading and destroying the environment.

The Life and Works of Niyi Osundare

Niyi Osundare was born in 1947 at Ikere-Ekiti, Ondo State. He holds a B.A. (Honours) (English) from the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, M.A. from the University of Leeds in England, and PhD from York University, Toronto, Canada. Today, he is a professor. His areas of specialization are African literature, literature of the African diaspora, literary stylistics, sociolinguistics, and creative writing.

Osundare is a poet, dramatist, essayist, media columnist and critic. He has published many creative works. These include volumes of poetry, plays and essays. His poetry collections include *Songs from the Marketplace*, *Village Voices*, *The Eye of the Earth* (winner of a Commonwealth Poetry Prize and the poetry prize of the Association of Nigerian Authors), *Moonsongs*, *Songs of the Season*, *Waiting Laughters* (winner of the Noma Award), *Selected Poems*, *Midlife*, *Horses of Memory*, *The Word is an Egg*, *Pages from the Book of the Sun: New and Selected Poems*, *Early Birds*, *Not My Business AQA Anthology 2005 Onwards*, and *Tender Moments: Love Poems*.

To Osundare's credit, there are these other works: *The State Visit* (play), *Two Plays*, books of essays, *Thread in the Loom: Essays on African Literature and Culture*, and *The*

Emerging Perspectives on Niyi Osundare. He has also contributed a lot to literary reviews in the form of articles on literature, language, culture, and society.

Osundare has carried out readings and performances of his works in many parts of the world, and his poems have been translated into many international languages, such as French, Dutch, Spanish, Japanese, and Korean. (Source: “Niyi Osundare”).

The Life and Works of Tanure Ojaide

Tanure Ojaide was born in 1948 at Igberhe village, Okpara in Delta state and he holds a B.A. Honours (English), an M.A. (Creative Writing) and a PhD in English. He is a teacher of African literature, Pan-African/Black Literatures, Caribbean Literature, Non-Western and Post-colonial Literatures, and Folklore and Oral Literatures of Africa and the African Diaspora.

In his literary creativity, he is distinguished for a strong sense of criticism of the human society, especially in the practices of religion, imperialism and a myriad of other themes. He is a prolific writer in the genres of the novel, criticism, essay and poetry. He has a total of eighteen collections of poetry to his credit. These collections of poems include *Children of Iroko & Other Poems*, *Labyrinths of the Delta*, *The Eagle's Vision*, *The Endless Song*, *Poems*, *The Fate of Vultures*, *The Blood of Peace*, *Daydream of Ants*, *Delta Blues and Home Songs*, *Invoking the Warrior Spirit*, *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*, *In the Kingdom of Songs*, *Invoking the Warrior Spirit: New and Selected Poems*, *I Want to Dance and Other Poems*, *In the House of Words*, *The Tale of the Harmattan*, *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* and *The Beauty I Have Seen: A Trilogy*.

Ojaide has also published a memoir: *Great Boys: An African Childhood*. This was closely followed by his works of fiction: *God's Medicine Men and Other Stories*, *Sovereign Body* (A

Novel), *The Activist* (A Novel), *The Debt-Collector and Other Stories*, and *Matters of the Moment*.

Ojaide has equally contributed immensely to the domain of literary criticism. Some of his contributions here include *The Poetry of Wole Soyinka; Poetic Imagination in Black Africa: Essays on African Poetry*; (With Joseph Obi) *Culture, Society, and Politics in Modern African Literature: Texts and Contexts*; *Poetry, Performance, and Art: The Udje Dance Songs of the Urhobo People*; *A Creative Writing Handbook for African Writers and Students*; *Ordering the African Imagination: Essays on Culture and Literature*; (With Rose Aziza) *The Urhobo Language Today*; *Theorizing African Oral Poetic Performance and Aesthetics: Udje Dance Songs of the Urhobo People*; and *Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 360: Contemporary African Writers*. He (With S. S. Ugheteni) edited *Yono Urhobo: Obe Rerha*.

For all these, and others that could not be contained here for lack of space, Ojaide has won numerous honours, awards and scholarships. (Source: “Biography”, “Tanure Ojaide”)

The Life and Works of Nnimmo Bassey

Nnimmo Bassey was born on 11th June, 1958 in Akwa Ibom state. He is fluent in the English and Ibibio languages. He is a graduate of architecture from University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1981). Between 1982-1991, he was an architect in Physical Planning Division of the Vice Chancellor’s Office, University of Benin.

Bassey has been a champion of the struggle for the protection and survival of the earth and its environment, and he has held various key positions in the organizations he has helped to form. Some of these include, Chair of Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) (2008-present); Co-founder, Environmental Rights Action Nigeria (1993); Executive Director, Environmental Rights Action (ERA) (1993-2014); Member, Board of Directors, Nigeria’s Civil Liberties

Organisation (1993-1999). He has also served in the executive of Association of Nigerian Authors as general secretary from 1993-1997.

Bassey has five collections of poetry to his credit: *Patriots and Cockroaches*, *Poems on the Run*, *Intercepted*, *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood* and *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat*. Apart from poetry, he has also written some books and numerous essays on environmental issues. The books include *Oil Watching in South America*, *Genetically Modified Organism: The African Challenge*, *Knee Deep in Crude*, and *To Cook A Continent: Destructive Extraction and Climate Change in Africa*.

For his contributions to the welfare of the earth and the safeguarding of all lives, Bassey has won many awards. Some of them include Sophie Prize on behalf of Environmental Rights Action, Oslo (1998), Time Magazine's Heroes of the Environment (2009) and Right Livelihood Award, Stockholm (2010). (Source: "Nnimmo Bassey").

Statement of the Problem

People have over the years considered human beings as the most important among the things that exist on earth. They have also viewed the other elements as not having values beyond those ascribed to them by human beings. To humanity, the other elements are there for the service of mankind, and are only valuable to the extent to which they serve the interest of man. For this reason, humanity use and abuse the environment, not realising or minding that the earth suffers. Most of the criticisms of Niger Delta literature have concentrated on protest themes, even when they dwell on environmental pollution. The implication of this is that the analysis of the African environment in literature, especially poetry, has not received adequate attention from

critics. The critics' attentions have always been paid to the plight of humanity. These are the problems which have affected humanity, the environment, literature and literary criticism.

Also, it has been observed that the analysis of the African environment in literature, especially poetry, has not received adequate attention from Black African critics. American literary critics and their Australian counterparts have started ahead on this route, and have made quite an inroad into the study of the symbiotic relationship between literature and the environment; this is not losing sight of the contributions of their literary artists. But this cannot be said for Africans specifically, and critics from other parts of the world. At the creative level, African writers have produced a plethora of works. This is most true of Nigeria and the Niger-Delta specifically. However, in the critical domain, only skeletal works have been done. William Slaymaker notes, for instance, that,

The African echo of global green approaches to literature and literary criticism has been faint....Black African writers take nature seriously in their creative and academic writing, but many have resisted or neglected the paradigms that inform much of global ecocriticism. The (siren?) call of the Green Wave resounding through much of the literary world has been answered weakly by black African writers and critics (132-133).

This thesis seeks, among other things, to identify those inherent qualities that the earth possesses, and to establish and examine the level of human degradation of the Niger-Delta environment and how this has been presented by the selected poets of the region in their poetry, and as such, create awareness about the effects of such degradation and abuses, both to the humans and the "others" in existence and then suggest how possibly the anomaly could be

remedied. This is to ensure that there is a redirection of man's attitude towards re-engineering the earth to make it more receptive to man in the future, than it is today.

The selected poets have employed some elements of style in the creation of their poems. Efforts shall be made to establish these elements, which among others include invocation of African muse, chants, personalisation of the earth, imagery reflective of the different moods and circumstances of the Niger Delta region, et cetera.

Scope of the Study

This study is focused on the ecocriticism of the selected poetry of Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey, three of the Niger-Delta poets, who have paid considerable attention to the plight of the environment and her reaction against the degradation effected by man with the attendant hardship and havoc on man. Therefore, for analysis, the selection of poetry is based on seventeen poems from Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*, fifteen from Tanure Ojaide's *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* and eight from *Delta Blues and Home Songs*, and thirteen from Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood*. A total of fifty-three poems were examined. Two collections have been selected from the poetry of Tanure Ojaide, as against one each from the other two poets. This is to ascertain the level of consistency displayed by Ojaide, in relation to his professed concern in literary creations as being ecological issues, and as supported by critics of his works. More than the other poets, he is an avowed environmental poet. Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey have their different orientations, which are more of social themes such as corruption, oppression, social injustice, et cetera. Efforts have also been made to examine the literary devices and other techniques employed by the poets for the realisation of the themes of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism presented in their poems.

The scope of the study also covers the examination of the literary aesthetics achieved by means of the different devices employed by the poets in the presentation of the theme of ecocriticism in their poem, as well as the interrelationship between the devices and theme. Striking among the devices employed by the poets are invocation of African muses, chants, lyricism, different sound symbols, personalisation of the earth and imagery reflective of the different moods and circumstances presented in the poems.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the thesis is primarily in the exposure of the selected poetry of Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey to the world as it affects their involvement of the themes of ecological abuse and misuse. It is also important for having attempted to demonstrate the fact that the earth possesses inherent beauty and wealth. This has moved the study of the works of the selected poets forward, away from the protest domain, into the anthropocentric and ecocentric domains. This study also shows that poetry could be employed in the reinterpretation of the relationship between humans and nonhumans towards fashioning better coexistent models, which will, in the long-run, be in the best interest of the human sub-species. This research has exposed the literary devices employed by the poets in their creative effort. Some of these devices include invocation of the muse of Urhobo culture, invocation of the muse of rain, chant, repetition and refrain; imagery of destruction and degradation, fire and arson; pollution, death and dying, etcetera. These have been beautifully employed in the creation of the poems and the presentation of the themes.

Finally, it is hoped that this study has also added to the corpus of literary analyses of the poetry of the selected poets and other literary writers in terms of the treatment of the themes of ecocentrism and anthropocentrism, as well as the techniques employed by the selected poets

Purpose of the Study

It is clear that African poetry has not fared well in the pursuit of ecocritical ideals, neither has poetry in both ecocentrism and anthropocentrism. The references to ecological themes, in the literature from the Niger Delta region generally, have been rather unconscious, and often as they affect human beings. African poetry has been predominantly concerned with issues of individualism, ethnicity, slavery, cultural identities, nationality, colonialism, post-colonialism and the attendant socio-economic problems. The environment has been largely neglected or abandoned.

Therefore, the purpose of this research work includes, one, to propel African poetry (and literature) forward in the effort to make it significantly go green by denigrating anthropocentrism and espousing ecocentrism; two, it is also the purpose of this research to draw attention to the fact that if mankind can walk his way back to, and reintegrate with the environment, and care for her and not exploit her, humanity will be on the road to redefining itself and finding the natural harmony that ought to exist between man and other parts of nature, as well as among men; and three, it is the purpose of this study to demonstrate how literary devices have been employed to realise the themes of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. The above is to be achieved beginning with the selected poems of Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is ecocriticism. It is one of the latest among the terminologies to enter into the annals of literary criticism, and about which Simon E. Estok says, “It is also very young” (1). It is a phenomenon which seeks to raise awareness about the interrelationship between literature and the environment, which Cheryll Glotfelty, in “Introduction” has described as “literary studies in an age of environmental crisis”(xv). What these translate into are that there are environmental problems, and that criticism in this mode examines the relationship between humans and the nonhumans with a view to ascertaining how best the coexistence of both could be optimally managed. According to Ann B. Dobie, ecocriticism made its first appearance as a canon of literary criticism in 1978 in the title of an essay: “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” by William Rueckert (238). Ecocriticism is a term that has to do with the interrelationship between literature and nature, the use of literature to re-order the attitudes of man towards adjusting his way, so as to make him recognize the symbiotic affinity needed to forge a new and better relationship between man and “other” aspects of nature.

Ecocriticism, as a literary term, was coined in the late 1970s. It is a term arrived at by a combination of the shortened form of ecology (eco) and criticism. According to M. H. Abrams, ecology is “the science that investigates the interrelations of all forms of plant and animal life with each other and with their physical habitat” (71). Abrams further states that,

Ecocriticism (or by an alternative name, environmental criticism) designates the critical writings which explore the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, considered with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities (7).

A fundamental issue arising from this is that there is already a segregationist tendency in the relationship between humans and nonhumans, a situation which ecocriticism seeks to nullify.

While elucidating on the nature and function of ecocritics and, by extension, ecocriticism in “Ecocriticism,” *Wikipedia* observes that,

Ecocritics investigate such things as the underlying ecological values, what, precisely, is meant by the word nature, and whether the examination of "place" should be a distinctive category, much like class, gender or race. Ecocritics examine human perception of wilderness, and how it has changed throughout history and whether or not current environmental issues are accurately represented or even mentioned in popular culture and modern literature. Other disciplines, such as history, philosophy, ethics, and psychology, are also considered by ecocritics to be possible contributors to ecocriticism (NP).

Another term for ecocriticism, used by Jonathan Bate, is “Global Warming Criticism”. The term reflects a focus on the climate, and overtly eliminates the rest of “the others” of the environment; and Kate Rigby adopting “Global Warming Criticism” states that,

Informed not only by meteorology and ecology, but also by the new science of non-linear dynamic systems popularised as ‘Chaos Theory,’ Global Warming Criticism presupposes a natural world which can no longer be thought of as passive, orderly and compliant, but which is rather volatile, unpredictable, and responsive to our interventions in ways that we can neither foresee nor control (158).

Therefore, the environment has a voice, and a very loud voice at that; and it responds to humanity's violation of her terrain and sanctity. This calls for a moderate interference, as it is absolutely impossible to avoid collecting from the earth.

From the short history of ecocriticism, one can say that it is still evolving as a critical mode and as a school of literary criticism, but this does not mean that it has not acquired some definitions. Glotfelty in "What is Ecocriticism" has defined ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (NP). Serpil Oppermann also corroborates this where he cites this same definition (1). Glotfelty, in "Literature and Environment, the Long View: Thoughts from the Founders of ASLE", refers to membership of The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) as those "scholars, teachers, and writers who study the relationships among literature, culture, and the physical environment" (1). This immediately gives an idea of the direction of the flow of thought of ecocritics and ecocriticism, which involves the use of literature to further the education on the need to protect and improve the earth by man, as well as the need to allow the environment to enjoy her peace and comfort. The critical factor in the definition is "relationship," which entails the interplay between literature and the ecosystem. Men have been discovered to have grossly abused the "others" in nature, and this has in turn led to the gross alteration of human nature.

According to Lawrence Buell, ecocriticism is "the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyse the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation" (Qtd in Dobie, 239). The cardinal contribution here is the inclusion of the sciences in the study. However, this definition, clear as it seems, does harbour some complexities. One would wonder how the sciences could be applied to the study of literature.

They, the sciences, could analyse and do analyse the environment; the result of such analysis could then show the literary artist and/or the critic the level of degradation of the human and natural habitation; arising from the above, the sensibility of the artist, the critic and the artist-critic would be sharpened, such that he/she could then theorise for humanity and so increase their awareness in terms of how to maintain, preserve or protect the environment. Therefore, ecocriticism, from this position, is an all embracing discipline involving and requiring the attention of all.

Building on Glotfelty's definition above, other scholars have added their own definitions to the growing volume on this nascent phenomenon. Buell, according to Dobie, added that "any study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" should be "conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (Qtd in Dobie, 239). The key phrase here is "commitment to environmentalist praxis." This presupposes the need for emphasis on finding ways of ensuring that the environment is tended to enable her yield abundance and comfort to mankind in particular, and nature in general.

The fostering of harmonious coexistence between the human and the nonhuman components of nature is the primary target of ecocriticism. This is also captured by Lance Newman in his definition of the concept of ecocriticism. According to Lance Newman, ecocriticism is "a movement based in University literature departments, but one that is ambitious to reach beyond them, in order to accomplish a most serious and important goal: transformation of human relations with nature" (Qtd in Daniel Gustav Anderson, 35).

Estok is cited by Dobie as extending Buell's "comment by saying that ecocriticism 'takes a stand by its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study and by its commitment to making connections'" (Qtd in Dobie, 239).

“Connections,” as used here, pertains to the link between the humans and the nonhumans, that is, the other aspects of nature, which in all respects should be symbiotic and mutual. Continuing, Dobie cites Camilo Gomides, whom she claims recognizes the social purpose of ecocriticism. To her, Gomides speaks of “motivating audiences to live within a limit that will be binding over generation” (239). This implies the reengineering of the awareness about the preservation, protection and the nurturing of the others of nature. Further, Dobie states that Estok,

Broadens ecocriticism to include the study of any theory that is committed to effecting change by analyzing the function – thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise – of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other) that contribute to material practices in material world (239).

This relates to one of the most widely held views about ecocriticism: that it is an interdisciplinary subject. Summing up this section, it will be pertinent to cite Dobie again:

What all these perspectives on the field have in common is that they are interested in *examining the relationship of literature and nature* as a way to renew a reader’s awareness of the nonhuman world and his or her responsibility to sustain it. Sharing the fundamental promise that all things are interrelated, they are actively concerned about the impact of human actions on the environment. According to Glotfelty, consciousness raising is ecocriticism’s most important task [emphasis mine] (239).

It is imperative to observe that ecocriticism is also known by many other names which include ecopoetics, environmental criticism, environmental literary criticism, literary ecology, green cultural studies and derogatorily, compost structuralism. It is also equally important to

segment ecocriticism into two: Dark greens and Light greens, and to observe that the constant here is “green”; and that the variables are “dark,” which applies to those who subscribe to an absolute return to nature and “light,” which denotes those who are less zealous about their commitment to the adverse impact of mankind on the environment (Abrams, 71-76).

Gloftelty, according to Dobie, has delineated some patterns which ecocriticism has followed, thus,

Beginning with an interest in “representations,” and examinations of how nature is depicted in literature, thereby raising public awareness of attitudes toward the natural world. Practitioners look at how stereotypes warp reality and note where nature is absent, simply ignored. Sometimes they narrow the focus to look carefully at a particular aspect of nature such as a geographical region or the wilderness or the mountains. An effort to rediscover and reconsider the genre of nature writing, which had fallen into neglect, constitutes the second phase. The attention that has been paid to this endeavour is apparent in the growing publication of anthologies of nature writing and works that have an ecological awareness. The third stage, the theoretical one, draws upon science, history, and philosophy to ask a wide range of questions about such topics as the consequences of anthropomorphism, the relationship of nature and culture, and more (242-243).

Oppermann, writing about Cheryll Glotfelty’s and Harold Fromm’s edited book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology*, states that the book which “is a collection of carefully selected essays... signals the emergence of a new type of literary criticism, now unanimously accepted as ecocriticism” (1). Oppermann further observes that, “as the essays in

this book indicate, ecocriticism aims to bring a transformation of literary studies by linking criticism and theory with the ecological issues at large” (1). The actual feature of ecocriticism, according to Oppermann, is that it “lunge[s] a call to literature to connect to the issues of today’s environmental crises. In other words, ecocriticism is directly concerned with both nature (natural landscape) and the environment (landscape both natural and urban)” (1); to these must be added humans, and the human impact on the environment. It is in the realization of this that Oppermann asserts that,

Ecocriticism, then, attempts to find a common ground between the human and the nonhuman to show how they can coexist in various ways, because the environmental issues have become an integral part of our existence. This is one problem that ecocriticism addresses in its attempt to find a more environmentally conscious position in literary studies (2).

The phrase, “a more environmentally conscious position,” stands as a flagpole among duties ascribed to ecocriticism, in the sense that this is the ultimate goal of the overall exercise. Men have overused and abused the nonhuman facet of the natural world, and this has resulted in serious adverse effect on all nature, including humans, a phenomenon that has been examined from the scientific, anthropological, sociological, et cetera, axes; yet, mankind continues to despoil the earth. Therefore, it has become imperative for ecocriticism to evoke this environmental consciousness with a view to heightening the awareness in man about the negative effect of his actions and inactions on the environment. This is an endeavour which places the premium of demand on academics all over the world.

There is a very important question which sums up the demand of ecocriticism on academics. The question which Glotfelty asked is, “How then can we contribute to

environmental restoration?” (Qtd in Oppermann, 2), and the question followed quickly at the foot of the observation: “work as usual seems unconscionably frivolous. If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem” (2). Glotfelty, as presented by Oppermann, although speaking to professors of literature, is actually addressing all human beings, and as culprits, humanity must retrace its steps, be remorseful for its actions or inaction, and pay restitution to the earth and ensure her continued existence. However, Oppermann warns that the contribution, so spoken about,

Should be well focused on the literary as well as on the ecological concepts, not privileging one over the other. The task of ecocriticism, then is to formulate a conceptual foundation for the study of interconnections between literature and the environment.... Within this framework, ecocritics are mainly concerned with how literature transmits certain values contributing to ecological thinking. They state that the environmental crisis is a question that cannot be overlooked in literary studies (2-3).

The assertion above is quite apt to this thesis: the examination of the implications of the relationship between poetry and the ecological state of the Niger-Delta Region. The purpose of this research is the raising of awareness of humanity to the effects of her actions and inactions on the nonhumans within the Niger Delta region. Although Oppermann warns that “it is important to note that literature should not be used as a pretext for examining the ecological issues” (3), it must be observed that in its raising of consciousness, on environmental matters, ecocriticism should not only be aesthetic but also ethical, since it, in the words of Oppermann, “inquires into the ways in which nature is marginalized, silenced, or pushed, in Manes’ words ‘into a hazy, backdrop against which the rational human subject struts upon’” (3). This attitude in literary

criticism is what William Rueckert has referred to as “literary ecology,” and which Oppermann has explained as “... a projection of human ideas about human responsibility into the natural environment” (3).

At every inch of the way, one finds that man tends to separate himself from the nonhumans. This, as has been hinted on above, accounts for the misuse and abuse of the earth; but what most humans, till now, have failed to realize is the efficacy of Barry Commoner’s First Law of Ecology, which is, “everything is connected to everything else” (16) and which in turn, according to Oppermann, echoes the quantum physicists’ definition of reality as “an undivided wholeness” (7). Therefore, according to Glotfelty in “What is Ecocriticism:”

Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture (NP).

What these laws mean is that humans cannot and should not be separated from the nonhumans, as none can survive independent of the other. We are all the different parts of one organic whole, living in a chain of relationship, with one connected to the other in a vicious circle. Also, the human counterpart should not attempt an over depopulation or over exploitation of the nonhumans, as the consequence is that the resultant ill will always come round to befall humans: “everything is connected to everything else” (Commoner, 16).

Another author who has looked at the context and concept of ecocriticism and its implication for the present and the future of mankind is Rigby. According to her, “in 1756, the vicar of Selbourne planted four lime trees between his house and the butcher’s yard opposite, ‘to hide the sight of blood and filth’ (151). This act by Gilbert White, the vicar, is a clear indication

of the state of uneasiness about the slaughtering of animals for food. It is not only animals that are being killed, but other elements in the ecosystem. Therefore, Rigby states that, "...the ecosystems sustaining all life on earth have become ever more critically endangered by our growing numbers and levels of consumption, ever more... live at an ever greater remove from the natural world, unmindful of their impact upon the earth" (151).

That the earth is endangered has been captured much earlier by some other disciplines, especially philosophy, the sciences and science related ones, but literature and literary criticism have been much slower in the portraiture devoted to this phenomenon. This feeling is also shared by Rigby when she states:

Literary critics and cultural theorists in particular have been notoriously slow to register those changes in thinking about the relationship of culture and society to the natural world which began to be articulated in neighbouring disciplines, above all philosophy, but also theology, politics and history, from the early 1970s (151).

Also Cheryll Glotfelty in "Introduction" states that,

If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never know that the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed you might never know that there was an earth at all (Qtd in Rigby, 151-152).

That there have been calls for the rescue of the earth is not in doubt, but these have only been very recently and in an isolated manner. Rigby also observes this when she states that, "there were in fact some isolated calls for an ecologically oriented criticism during the 1970s.

However, it was not until the end of the twentieth century that the study of literature and the environment was finally recognized as ‘a subject on the rise’” (152).

The term, ecocriticism, was first used by William Rueckert in 1978 as mentioned earlier. However, as a critical vocabulary, according to Michael P. Branch, Glotfelty in 1989 “not only revived the term, but also urged its adoption to refer to the diffused critical field that heretofore had been known as ‘the study of nature writing’” (1). According to Branch, “Since that meeting in 1989, the term ‘ecocriticism’ has bloomed in usage, so that now one finds it appearing with some frequency in calls for papers, critical articles, and indeed academic job descriptions” (1). This gave him (Branch) the impression that the “acceptance of the term is imminent” (Branch, 1). Events of the recent past, as well as today, in the world, especially where environmental hazards are concerned, have made the acceptance of the term mandatory.

The study has assumed different names and forms, but in all, two very important features stand out in any discussion on ecocriticism: these are culture and nature, which over the period and under the different critical modes, have often conflicted, and each struggling for unwarranted supremacy. Therefore, there is the nature-culture conflict, where, whereas the ecocritics and the romantics are on the side of nature, the other critics are in alignment with culture. The argument of the culture-conscious critics, just as it is reflected in almost every document of human civilization, is that the other elements in the world are there for the sole use of man, or at least, mainly for the purpose of man’s sustenance and satisfaction, and that it has been preordained from creation or the beginning of the world, depending on one’s religious or philosophical leaning; but the nature argument is that humans and others are all part and parcel of the same world, and so, demand equal respect and attention. Thus, in negation to the culture argument, Walter Benjamin “observes that to the historical materialist, there is no document of civilization

which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (Qtd in Rigby, 153), and according to Rigby, “most ecocritics would agree with this, but they would add that there is also no work of culture which is not simultaneously exploitative of nature” (153). The implication of this is that ecocritics abhor the over-dependence on, and exploitation of nature.

Another reason culture is so domineering in the affairs of man is that human beings are immersed in culture which fashions their being (from the moment they are born) and their earliest perceptions of the “others” in the environment; and as such, through culture they perceive and peruse nature and every other thing. Therefore, Rigby’s assertions that “culture constructs the prism through which we know nature” (153) becomes very apt. The implication, as set out just now, is that human beings tend to judge from their stand-point as impinged on their consciousness by their practices which connote their culture. But the truth is that one, nature is much more than culture presents it to be; and two, the idea and feeling that culture is superior to nature is erroneous. Thus, we can agree with Rigby that “ecocriticism, then, remembers the earth by rendering an account of the indebtedness of culture to nature” (154).

Another reason nature features most prominently, more than other concepts, in ecocriticism is its origin. Ecocriticism sprang from the genre of literature called nature writing, in the United States. It is not surprising, therefore, that nature is always presented as a superior facet over culture, which hitherto, except for some occasions, for example, the Romantics, has been presented otherwise. Again, Rigby declares that,

It is important to note that in the US especially, ecocriticism to a considerable extent grew out of the study of that hitherto highly marginalised genre, nature writing. Among those who founded the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) at the 1992 annual meeting of the Western

Literature Association, several key players were scholars of nature writing, including ASLE's first President, Scott Slovic, and Cheryll Glotfelty, editor of the first ecocriticism reader and co-founder of *The American Nature Writing Newsletter*, which later became the *ASLE Newsletter*. Nature writing figures [sic] prominently in ASLE's official mission, 'to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and the natural world,' and to encourage 'new nature writing, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature, and interdisciplinary environmental research.' (158)

Another scholar who tries to identify the origin and business of ecocriticism is Jonathan Bate. In his "Culture and Environment: From Austen to Hardy," Bate declares that,

Ecocriticism began in consciousness-raising; it has much to say about the specific histories and the mythical structures in which humankind's consciousness of environment has been and continues to be expressed.... Its ultimate value will be as a form of consciousness: it models an attentiveness, an attunement to words and to the world that acknowledges the intricate, inextricable networks linking culture and environment ... (549).

This calls to mind Commoner's First Law of Ecology: "everything is connected to everything else" (16).

Lyn White Jr, an American historian, in 1967, according to Rigby, published an article, in the journal *Science*, entitled "The Historical Root of our Ecological Crises." The fact that this work appeared in a science journal lays credence to the fact of ecocritical problems being seen as problems emanating from the sciences, and the solution to which was also to be sought there; but

today, it is obvious that science has not only been unable to provide an understanding of the problem, and as such cannot solve it, it has also been discovered that the problem is both “cultural and social in origin” (154), as Rigby would say. Continuing, White, according to Rigby, argues that “what people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is by religion” (154). This could be seen in Western Christianity, as recorded in and interpreted from *The Bible*. The inadequacies of science in the effort to solve man’s problems which have resulted from human’s degradation and abuse of nature (the nonhumans), as well as efforts at solving these problems, is what ecocriticism has come to address.

Also, discussing Joseph Meeker’s *The Comedy of Survival*, Rigby speaks of Meeker’s condemnation of “classical tragedy which, he [Meeker] contends, reinforces the anthropocentric assumption that nature exists for the benefit of mankind, the belief that human morality transcends natural limitations, and humanism’s insistence on the supreme importance of the individual’ (155). But today, humanity knows better, that the nonhumans are not just meant for them to negatively subdue, but to tend affectionately.

The irresponsible attitude to the environment manifests in all human activities, even in agriculture, which ought to nurse the earth to produce sustenance for mankind, such that Rigby, discussing human violence on the earth, and examining the modern farming implement and technique, states that,

Such a plough, equipped with a vertical knife to cut the line of the furrow, a horizontal share to slice under the sod, and a moldboard to ‘turn it over’... appeared in northern Europe towards the end of the seventh century. Whereas the

older wooden plough merely scratched the surface of soil, the new plough, which required eight oxen to pull it, *attacked the land with such violence* that cross plowing was not needed, and fields tended to be shaped in long strips [emphasis mine] (155).

The picture of violence presented here is horrific, and the diction is an apt one for the graphic description of human actions and activities against the earth – the foundation of all nature, including humans. Yet, the activities and the description of the seventh century is nothing compared to what is happening in today’s world; it is no longer a case of “attack” but that of a total annihilation, an obliteration of the earth, which in the long run will come round to man, and which is already affecting man in different ways; thus, to White and all ecocritics, in the words of Rigby, “the natural world is no longer a passive recipient of human interventions and projections but an active participant in the formation and transformation of human culture and society” (157). Consequently, ecocritics, according to Rigby, “need to draw also on geography, ecology and other natural sciences” (157), to ensure that human wellbeing is well synchronized with the health of the earth: this is the optimal position for the world, a position which ecocriticism is pursuing with vigour.

The most respected and eminent Victorian scholar, John Ruskin, is said to have reacted against the maltreatment of nature. According to James Hopkin,

... holding this [Turner’s] 1832 painting aloft in front of his students, Ruskin, a great champion of Turner’s work, declared: ‘you, if you like, may go to Leicester to see what it is like now. I never shall. But I can make a pretty good guess.’ And with that, he picked up a paintbrush. On the glass, he dashed in a ‘be-au-ti-ful iron-bridge’ over the original stepping stones, and a cluster of ugly houses in a

field. *Then he painted the river an indigo colour to signify pollution from nearby factories.* With a final flourish, he added great clouds of smoke across the sky, and announced: ‘The atmosphere is supplied – thus!’ [emphasis mine] (1).

The import of this is that the pollution and hazards as well as the devastation are as a result of the mechanics of “modernization” as envisioned and perpetuated by human beings.

Environmental crises have been with man, as could be seen from the mythical Noah’s flood, as recorded in the Christian *Bible*. Through the generations, since recorded history, man has been faced with flood, fire, hurricanes, typhoons, earthquakes, landslides, earth tremors, volcanic eruptions, oil spills, gas poisoning, atomic poisoning, nuclear radiation, et cetera, but in recent times, the frequency at which these are occurring is outrageously high, and the magnitude of these natural disasters is alarmingly high, and is ever increasing almost by the hours. At this, one wonders why it has become so. The sciences and, particularly, environmental studies, have revealed that man is the cause of these. Man has enabled these by his attempts and efforts to over exploit nature, all in the bid to make life very and more “comfortable” for himself. Therefore, while not ruling out the facts that some natural heavings could be observed in the environment, the great devastation thus observed today could be said to have been occasioned by man.

The reason for this new trend in literary criticism is because of the numerous environmental hazards to man, resulting from environmental degradation. Man has dangerously abused the nonhumans in the planet earth, and he has started going beyond the earth to other planets in the name of science and discovery, and in the attempt to manipulate these planets for the “benefit” of man. The consequence of this is the reaction of the earth and the other entities in the environment against man. Today, it is not scarce to hear of earthquakes, hole-in-the-ozone layer, global warming, gas poisoning, nuclear radiation, nuclear waste and hazards, flooding, oil

spillage, the invasion of human habitations by other animals and birds, and such like mind and psychologically devastating phenomena, as well as the attendant deaths resulting from the hazards.

According to Rigby, Buell has delineated the characteristics of environmental literature to include:

1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical framework.
4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text (159).

Therefore, the criticism of eco-literature must, among other things, seek to establish the presence of the four features identified above. In this realm, the goal of the ecocritics, which according to Rigby, "is concerned to develop a form of criticism that will ultimately lead us back to the world beyond the page" (159), will be achieved.

Ecocriticism, as an analytical category, cannot be said to be free of problems; thus, according to James Hopkin, "today's burgeoning cultural studies school, with its insistent and self-referential intellectualism, has demoted nature to the status of a linguistic construct, merely another text to be discussed and dismissed, severed from the natural reality to which it refers" (1). This is in reaction of what Hopkin considers a linguistic jamboree, all in the name of ecocriticism as a philosophy. Consequently, Kate Soper, according to Hopkin, warns that, "it is

not language which has a hole in the ozone layer” (1). This is the crux of the Matter: “hole in the ozone layer.” This is a flagpole of the adverse effect of human activities on the other parts of nature, as nature’s reaction is immediately felt by man in the forms of excessive heat, skin problems, and death of humans as well as other entities. Ecocriticism has advanced the critical reactions to literary texts, and has been employed in revisiting earlier works and authors towards exposing the neglected aspects in the proclamations on them. The earlier works here refer to all those works from the classical to the modern period. Thus, according to Hopkin,

‘Turned to the romantic poets and their writings on nature to redress the balance of the culture-nature debate’. Bate draws upon Wordsworth as an exemplar of ecocritical thinking for Wordsworth did not view nature in Enlightenment terms – as that which must be tamed, ordered and utilized – but as an area to be inhabited and reflected upon. By so doing, he hoped human beings might ‘see into the life of things’, and reveal their place in a system of delicate relations between the human and the nonhuman worlds (Qtd in Bate, 1-2).

This relates ecocriticism to the field of literary criticism, a family to which it belongs.

Ecocriticism is pessimistic in its outlook and endeavour. This is because it, in nature, especially in its call to humans to tend nature with care, else it “explodes” and with man shatter, sends a note of woe and alarm about the “doomsday” about to dawn in human history. This is the time when, if nothing is done to reverse the trend of human livelihood and the direction of his activities, the human life support and the entire earth may cease to exist. The pessimistic note is only a strategy to gain attention, as well as establish a pattern towards creating awareness about the danger which the world is driving into. The end of this seemingly gloomy approach is optimism.

This feeling is also shared by Rigby, where she comments on environmentalists and compares them to “Gramscian Marxists”. According to her,

Environmentalists, not unlike Gramscian Marxists, tend to be pessimists of the intellect and optimists of the heart. No matter how grim the statistics on the degradation of soil, air and water, on the loss of biodiversity, on global warming and the depletion of the ozone layer, on rising human population and consumption levels, we continue to wager on the possibility that the extraordinary beauty, diversity and fecundity of the earth can, in some measure, yet be saved, and that we might one day learn to live on this earth more equitably. Buoyed by this leap of faith, we continue to seek for sources of hope: places from which change for the better might be initiated (158).

Ecocriticism has come to build this hope and seek for ways of improving the earth and enhance the relationship between humans and the environment to ensure that the earth does not end in dissipation or an explosion.

Reasons could be adduced for the trend of human consumption, which are for economic production or relaxation. This trend is as a result of the culture developed by man for his “benefit.” The real “achievement” made by man is the continued despoliation of the earth, which will lead to a catastrophic end of the earth and all in it. Commenting on this situation, Rigby says, “under the Modern Constitution, it has been all too easy to move between the consumption of nature as raw material for economic production during the working week, to the consumption of nature as sublime or beautiful on Sundays” (161). So, from whichever angle one looks at it, man continues to consume nature, and in a most callous manner.

The despoliation, which arises from the subjugation of the nonhuman residents on the earth, as well as the earth, over the years, has translated into the suppression of races, classes, and genders. This is one way in which Commoner's "First Law of Ecology" (16) has been confirmed, that what affects one, of both logicality and necessity, must affect all. Therefore, it has become a social problem. About this, Rigby argues that,

The romantic affirmation of the ties binding human well-being to a flourishing natural environment finds its critical counterpart in the recognition that 'ecological exploitation is always coordinate with social exploitation'.... According to Rousseau, the progress of civilisation in the domination of nature had been achieved at the price of increased social inequality, alienation and military conflict (162).

Ecocriticism examines not only the social injustice of human's exploitation of the nonhumans, it also delves into the examination of the relationship between the stronger species of humans and the weaker ones, where it is not just a matter of oppression, but also the inability of the subdued to speak or to be heard even when they complain. Here again, Rigby declares that,

Although, as we have seen, ecocriticism often incorporates questions of social justice, it nonetheless differs from other forms of political critique in one important respect: namely, as a form of advocacy for another, which is felt to be unable to speak for itself. If, as Gayatri Spivak (1988) has argued, the human subaltern cannot always be heard without the mediation of more privileged supporters, how much more so is this true of the subordinated nonhuman? This is not to say, however, that nature is entirely silent. Nor, despite all our best efforts at domination, is it truly subordinate (as we are forcefully reminded by every

earthquake, volcanic eruption, passing comet, and the sheer unpredictability of the weather) (163-164).

The cases of environmental crises that are witnessed today are all reflections of the reactions of the environment to the human over-dependence and abuse on her. Therefore, humanity must heed the voices of the nonhumans so as to ensure that the earth and all creatures do not die.

Towards this end, in this research, poetry has been selected. The choice of poetry as a medium through which the earth could be saved or sustained is not out of place, since poetry provides the space and atmosphere in which language blends very well with the environment to the end that poetry gives a soul to the environment, and also, as it responds to nature, as the romantics would say. This function of poetry is corroborated by Rigby. While interspersing her views with Bate's opinions, Rigby states that,

Poetry, in this view, does not name things in order to make them available for use, but rather in order to disclose their being in language. Poetry thus becomes a 'refuge for nature, for the letting be of Being'. It does not necessarily do this by explicitly defending nature's 'rights'. The best ecopoetry, in Bate's view, is not overtly political, let alone propagandistic. Rather, poetry becomes 'ecopoetic' simply (or not so simply) through its disclosure within the realm of *logos* of the earth as our *oikos*, or dwelling place. It is in this sense that poetry might be said to be 'the place where we save the earth.' (165)

Saving the earth has become mandatory as it is gradually slipping through our hands and away from our feet. This again, and as has been stated all along, is as a result of the ecological dehydration occurring by the seconds. Therefore, Rigby's statement here is apt. According to her,

As our world becomes ever more ecologically impoverished and technologically manipulated, we need writers and artists who can draw our attention to the beauty, complexity and potential fragility of the earth, mediating the ‘voices’ of nonhuman others, whose being and meaning we can never fully comprehend, and, perhaps, inviting us to join in their heteroglossic song. From this perspective, we need a practice of reading which, in recalling the absence rather than the presence of that which is named in the text, inspires us, in Yves Bonnefoy’s words, to ‘lift our eyes from the page’ (166).

Since the page only keeps the record of the occurrences on earth, and since the real actions take place in the physical world, humanity is therefore enjoined by Yves Bonnefoy that, “It is not within the poet’s scope to re-establish presence, but he or she can recall that presence is a possible experience, and he can stir up the need for it, keep open the path that leads to it” (Qtd in Rigby, 166). Hence, the poets under study and their poetry, are recalling the presence and also stirring up the need in the humans to realize that there is the need for them to peacefully coexist with the others in nature. This also synchronises with Rigby’s observation:

If the natural world around us is endangered, how can we read a poetic evocation of another’s experience of it, without wanting to restore it as a possible locus of our own experience, since the poem itself cannot do so? Read in this way, ecopoetry may well become a factor in our efforts to ‘save the earth,’ not only through our creative and critical writing, but perhaps in more directly political and practical ways as well (166).

Poetry is known to appeal to human emotion, reaching the inner recesses of the mind and the subconscious. This stance is adopted by William Wordsworth in his definition of poetry in

“Poetry is the Image of Man and Nature” as, “the spontaneous overflow of *powerful feelings*: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity [emphasis mine] (250). As Charles Keplan has noted, poetry is “the best agent for leading men to act virtuously. When men act virtuously, conflict is either prevented, or becomes easier to resolve” (Qtd in Nwahunanya, 40). Thus, poetry fits properly into the resolution of the environmental problems, since it could be employed in the dissemination of the awareness of the human impact on the nonhumans. This becomes most relevant if one realises, as Wordsworth in “Emotion Recollected in Tranquillity” puts it:

Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science. Emphatically may it be said of the poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, ‘he looks before and after’[Hamlet IV. iv. 37]. He is the rock of defence of human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love ..., the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time (604).

Therefore, poetry can very well delve into the realms of the sciences and other fields, and also adequately discuss matters of environmental degradation, as well as the relationship among all.

The conscious call against this wave of problem in the world started in literature in the 1990s. This was pioneered by such scholars as William Slaymaker, Lawrence Buell, Simons C. Estok, William Ruechert, Jonathan Bate, Laurie Ricou, Michael P. Branch, Thomas J. Lyon, Glen Love, Ann Ronald, Scott Slovic, Cheryl Glotfelty, Rebecca Raglon, Mark Busby, Frank Bergon, David Robertson, David Copeland Morris, Don Scheeze, Nancy Cook and others. But in the sciences, the awareness has been there, especially since World War II. In literature, America,

Canada and Australia have been in the lead in this call; but in Africa, evidence shows that people are only becoming aware of the impact of environmental degradation. This could be attested to by the fact that a conscious effort at the study of the environment in literary works, or the study of the earth as a suffering-wailing character is only beginning to germinate. One of the first major critical studies on literature dealing with the environment is the volume edited by Chinyere Nwahunanya: *From Boom to Doom: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the Literature of the Niger-Delta* (2011).

In the face of the high level of environmental degradation occasioned by the continuous despoliation of the earth by human beings, the lack of the knowledge of the inherent values of the earth and the attendant consequences of these on both humanity and the biosphere, the theory of ecocriticism has been adopted for the study, as no other theory can better aid the explication of the selected poems with a view to exposing the inherent qualities of the earth, and condemning the destruction of the environment by human beings.

Definition of Concepts

Two of the concepts in ecocriticism germane to this study are anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. It is necessary to explain them since they are central to the study. Also, it is important to explain the concepts of “other(s)” and ecology as used in this research.

Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism has to do with the human assumption of superiority over other parts of nature (the nonhumans). Abrams sees it as an orientation in “the interest of human beings” (72). The advocacy in the anthropocentric mode is the human opposition to the nonhumans, as well as human superiority over “others” and his freedom. The hallmark of this, according to Abrams,

is “to exploit natural resources and animal species for their own purposes” (72). This idea is deeply rooted in *The Bible*, the sacred books or documents and teachings of other religions and Western philosophies, which have accorded man the dominant position in the scheme of things, with the exception of some of the religions of the Far East (the Orientals) which accord the animals some measure of equality with humans, at least in the spiritual realms. For example, in *The Bible*, God gave man “*dominion* over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” [emphasis mine] (Genesis 1:26). This message is emphasized in verses 28-30:

²⁸And God blessed them [Adam and Eve], and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and *subdue it*: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. ²⁹And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat and it was so [emphasis mine].

A philosophy such as this, in the hands of humans who think only of their comfort, could produce nothing less than the destruction of the harmony that ought to exist between the humans and nonhumans, and also further the subjugation and exploitation of the nonhumans. Humanity seems to have lost sight of the injunction to “replenish the earth” and have concentrated on the phrase “subdue it”.

Ecocentrism

Ecocentrism is a reaction to the conditions generated by the situation of anthropocentrism as demonstrated by human beings. It focuses on the presentation of the earth as being inherently beautiful and rich, and calls on humanity to see the environment as valuable, and so treat it with tenderness. Abrams states that ecocentrism is, “the view that all living things and their earthly environment, no less than the human species, possess importance, value and even moral and political rights” (73). This is the root of ecocriticism and ecoliterature, which, as earlier observed, is a focus on the interrelationship between literature and the environment or the ecosystem.

Other(s)

This simply refers to all other creatures other than humans. It involves the nonhumans, ranging from the biggest in size to the smallest; the living and non-living things; the vegetations and non-vegetations; bacteria, viruses as well as elephants; all land dwelling beings as well as the land with all its minerals and nutrients; the waters and the water-dwelling creatures and the minerals therein, the air and everything in existence. It is these that ecoliterature tries to salvage.

Ecology

According to Robert Leo Smith and Stuart L. Pimm, ecology is

also called bioecology , bionomics , or environmental biology; [the] ‘study of the relationships between organisms and their environment. Some of the most pressing problems in human affairs—expanding populations, food scarcities, environmental pollution including global warming, extinctions of plant and animal species, and all the attendant sociological and political problems – are to a great degree ecological.’(NP)

The word ecology is said to have been coined by the German zoologist, Ernst Haeckel, who, according to Smith and Pimm, “applied the term *oekologie* to refer to the ‘relation of the animal both to its organic as well as its inorganic environment’” (NP). It must be pointed out here that environment refers to all other organisms, the physical surrounding as well as the relationship both within and between individuals from other families. And it is the interaction among all these which has been described as ecosystems. This has also been altered by human activities by increasing the atmospheric carbon dioxide, which is also a greenhouse gas with all its attendant negative effects on man and all.

Biodiversity

This is a term used to refer to the whole biological constituents of the earth. According to Ecological Society of America, biodiversity refers to “the range of variation found among microorganisms, plants, fungi, and animals. Also the richness of species of living organisms” [sic] (1). Similarly, Natasha de Vere has stated that “biodiversity is the variety of life on earth and includes variation at all levels of biological organisation from genes to species to ecosystems. Genetic, organismal and ecological diversity are all elements of biodiversity with each including a number of components” (1). Biodiversity is essential to the totality of the earth. According to Ecological Society, “biodiversity is intrinsically valuable and is important for our emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being. Some consider that it is an important human responsibility to be stewards for the rest of the world’s living organisms” (1). It may be proper to add that it is not only valuable to humanity, but to the earth as a whole, and so the need to protect it becomes very important.

Sustainability

The concept simply means to sustain. This carries the idea of not destroying whatsoever is involved, at least not to the extent of making it go into extinction. According to Tom Kuhlman and John Farrington, “The concept of sustainability was originally coined in forestry, where it means never harvesting more than what the forest yields in new growth.... The concern with preserving natural resources for the future is perennial” (3437). What this means is that with the stock preserved, there will be provision for the future. This is the whole idea of sustainability. It therefore carries the idea of tending the biodiversity on earth. About this, Kuhlman and Farrington have said that, “traditional beliefs enjoined thinking in terms of stewardship and concern for future generations (3437).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED SCHOLARSHIP

Among the recent literary phenomena in the world today is environmental literature, which is taking firm root in the Nigerian and African literary soil. The actual originator(s) of this trend may be difficult to identify. Suffice it to say that issues of environmental degradation have appeared in pieces of literature, although they appeared merely as symbols for the actualization of the pursuit of the other social, psychological and economic explanations and solutions to the problems of humanity and Africans generally, and Nigerians in particular. A cursory look at some of the works by some Nigerian authors will reveal this. For example *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *A Dance of the Forest* and *The Trials of Brother Jero* by Wole , *The Last Duty* by Isidore Okpewho, *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi, *No More the Wasted Breed* by Femi Osofisan and even the monumental *The Palmwine Drinkard and His Palmwine Tapster* by Amos Tutuola have the forest, animals and the general biosphere in them, except that they act as settings and symbols serving the need of man in the texts. But the conscious focus on the effect of human interaction with the environment, as well as the innate values of the earth in literary works, especially poetry, could be identified with such writers as Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey. This is not only a recent, but also a burgeoning phenomenon in the literary history of Africa and Nigeria. It is not out of place, therefore, that Donatus I. Nwoga states that,

It is legitimate to expect that more and more, African students will be introduced to poetry through their own poets. This is a development in the right direction. For though poetry speaks a universal language, it is natural that, at least in the early stages, one comes more easily and directly into the employment and

appreciation of literature that deals with one's own environment, fears, joys and way of life (NP).

The implication of this is that poetry (literature) speaks a universal language, but that it must be viewed against the milieu from which it emerges. It is only in this light and context that it will be most meaningful. Therefore, to study the poetry from the Niger Delta region particularly and Africa generally, it will be worthwhile for one to be conversant with the occurrences around the specific African sub-region, although, this does not mean that a "blind study," if one may call it that, cannot be embarked upon. Also, it is important that the history of literary development and criticism be perused. It is in this light that a peep into the trend of African literary growth and progress as well as that of its criticism would be undertaken.

The earliest proper written documentation of the poetry from Africa could be placed somewhere between the 1930s and 1940s. This does not mean that poetry had not been with Africans before this time. African oral poetry has been in existence. This has been discussed at different fora over the years, and there are numerous anthologies and records of these. Ruth Finnegan's *Oral Literature in Africa* is one of such masterpieces. Towards ascertaining the dating of the earliest documentation of Africa's experiences in poetic form, it might be necessary to quote at length from Kojo Senanu and Theo Vincent:

Beginning from older poets like Leopold Senghor and Birago Diop, we provide a historical perspective in which the protest movement of the 1930s and 1940s gave way to the crisis of identity which accompanied the attainment of political independence by African states in the late 1950s and early 1960s. If the earlier period was characterized by elaborate gesture of affirmation and self-assertion against hostile outside influences, the second period is noted for the satiric and

deflational tone of the writers anxious to debunk false positions taken by their immediate predecessors. And we can see that a third phase of African writing began to emerge in the mid-1960s: during which the writers turn more and more inward towards personal exploration and the rediscovery of their roots in the traditions of their ancestors. During this phase the writers have begun to think of themselves more as artists rather than politicians and the forging of links with the artistic tradition of Africa is being steadily undertaken (7).

This same segmentation has been described as phases by Senanu and Vincent:

We observed four phases in this development, always, in the presence of the indigenous traditions. 1) the *pioneering* phase of the 1930s and 1940s, 2) the *transitional* phase of the 1950s and early 1960s, 3) the *modernist* phase of the mid-1960s and early 1970s, and 4) the *contemporary* phase which we are now experiencing (8).

Let it be observed here that the contemporary has diverged into multifarious strands and shades. It is arguable that one of such strings is what one may modestly call “the environmental phase.” While one could argue that writers have done an appreciable volume of work here, although often by coincidence, it cannot be as effectively proven that there has been a good attention of criticism focused on environmental poetry. It is for this reason that one can mention such writers as Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey as writers, albeit new; but none can be as effectively established as a strong ecocritic. This does not mean that there have not been critical studies on the ecological problems in the literature from Africa. There have been, although most of them are occasional references, except that one could readily see this in Uzochi Nwagbara, who to a large extent is skewed towards protest. The selected writers, as mentioned above, along

with the others who have followed the environmental problems in their literary works have focused on environmental degradation and its effects on mankind, as well as the biosphere in general.

The segmentation, a kind of periodization, serves to position African poetry for a better and more worthwhile study. However, it must be stated that this temporal classification is not all that there is in the study of African poetry. The geo-political classification is also present. Here one could talk of African poetry in terms of the North, South, East, French West Africa and British West Africa. Of importance here is the case of the experiences of Africans in the hands of both the Arab and the European powers from the different countries, especially the British and the French. It is worthy to note that their different colonial administrative methods, at the beginning, and covert intention as later revealed, created a lasting impression on both the physique as well as the psychology of the different ethnic groups on the African continent.

Still on the different stages of development or phases, one may observe that it may be very difficult, if at all possible, to decipher any sharp demarcation separating the phases. It could be said that there is a glide and crisscrossing of ideas and methods between and among the different developmental phases. This, again, could be understood in terms of the dynamics of human existence and growth. This is a position also upheld by Senanu and Vincent where they state that, “we would emphasize that these are not four periods rigidly separated either by exclusive styles and modes of writing or works of different poets.... In other cases, the poetry straddles a number of phases” (8-9). And referring, perhaps to the differences in the historical, geographical, political and social situations of Africans and the poets, Senanu and Vincent have added that, “indeed, within each of the four phases we have identified, we observe differences of

achievement between the regional and linguistic groupings of the poets, as well as differences among the individual poets within the groups” (9).

It will be necessary to briefly sketch the characteristics of the phases as identified by Senanu and Vincent. The terrain of African poetry in the pioneer phase was fraught with poets who were colonial subjects, and whose identities were badly attacked. Among the themes and feelings which featured in their works are exploitation, racial discrimination, struggle for political independence and nostalgia about the African past. The bulk of the poets in this domain did not receive adequate training in the European languages and the western artistic creation process. They were mainly politicians who were bent mainly on the struggle for independence. The transitional phase, as it should be, moved beyond the borrowing of the pioneer phase and its experimentation to the competent use of the European languages which were received along with the other characteristics of colonialism and the general presence of Europeans on the African continent. And in the modernist phase, the poets were more self-conscious in their search for technique from Africa’s native traditions. Finally, the contemporary phase presents poetry and writers, generally, who having attained educational maturity and in addition to most of the themes examined by the other phases, delved into the spiritual heritage of Africa. This is also in addition to the multifaceted themes and approaches to issues concerning Africans, as they concern new ideologies and experiences, as well as how these ideologies and experiences interact with the indigenous attitudes and philosophies. After a cursory look at these phases, one could conclude that perhaps, what may have guided the segmentation of African poetry into the phases as highlighted above is not entirely time but themes and styles employed by authors from the different regions and at the different epochs.

A Review of African Literature: Themes and Trend

Through the early years of African literature, until recently, the African environment has not been given much attention, and the case is worse for the criticism of environmental literature. The reason for this could be lack of awareness of the consequences of human interaction with the environment or neglect of the environment, or non-existence of the term in the history of literary criticism in general.

Today, ecocriticism is a very new concept in the annals of literary criticism globally, as such, it is not surprising that Africans, generally, and Nigerians, specifically, are only beginning to be aware of its relevance. This has accounted for its recent emergence in the literature from Africa, and hence, this study. There is no denying that the environment has featured in the prose, as well as drama and poetry works from Africa. Some of these include *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and *Anthills of the Savannah* by Chinua Achebe, *The Interpreters*, *The Jero Plays*, *The Strong Breed* and *A Dance of the Forest* by Wole Soyinka, *No More the Wasted Breed* by Femi Osofisan, *Song of a Goat*, *The Masquerade* and *The Raft* by J. P. Clark, *A Wreath for Udomo* and *Tell Freedom* by Peter Abrahams, *Down Second Avenue* by Es'kia Mphahlele, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* by Ngugi wa Thiong'O and Micere Githae Mugo, *The Black Hermit* by Ngugi wa Thiong'O, and collections of poetry such as *Poems of Black Africa* edited by Wole Soyinka, *Selection of African Poetry* edited by Kojo E. Senanu and Theo Vincent, *West African Verse* edited by Donatus Nwoga, *Seven South African Poets* edited by Cosmo Pieterse and many others; but there has not been any conscious effort at interpreting these from the ecocritical point of view. In these works, the environment, or the "other" in existence has only been used as a symbol, not as actual characters, nor are they presented as degraded and negatively affected; but they are depicted just as platforms upon and within which the human characters function so as to

realise the desired theme of the works. The environment has only functioned as the settings for the works, whether prose, poetry or drama.

It may be really very difficult to establish the first poet to focus fully on the environment; it will not be quite so to identify some of the earliest poets especially to have consciously turned to the environment in their poetry. Five, among these poets, are the critics and teachers of African literature, Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and the late Esiaba Irobi; also there are the poet-dramatist and teacher, J. P. Clark, and the environmental right activist and social commentator, Nnimmo Bassey.

The names that appear here may seem so recent. The reason is that they are writers who have, relatively, only recently started turning to environmental issues. These eco-poets, as they may be called, rank among the first Niger-Delta poets to focus on the environment, appealing that the earth should not be “killed”, but that it should and must be tended. Although, the bulk of them did not focus on the implication of humanity’s continued degradation of the earth, they simply lament the harshness and inhumanity that humanity brought to bear on the earth, the environment. An example here is Niyi Osundare in *The Eye of the Earth*.

Early writings from Nigeria, and Africa generally, were mainly focused on the glory of Africa’s past, albeit in some quarters spiced with satiric episodes. But the more conscious socio-political writings from pre and present Nigeria focused on the advent of slavery, colonial invasion, colonialism proper, independence struggle and recently, post colonialism. Some writers are known to have paid attention to the impact of the West on Nigeria and Nigerians, and by extension Africans. One of such is Chinua Achebe. He has demonstrated this in his *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, two most important of his novels, and in fact among the most important from the continent of Africa and the world in the twentieth century. In *Things Fall Apart* the

reader sees how the coming of the Whiteman has destroyed the Igbo society, leading to the death of the most illustrious son of the land: Okonkwo dies a shameful death by suicide. This theme is carried on in *Arrow of God* where the presence of the white man is seen not only destroying the culture, the socio-political and religious structures, but also destroying the family and family life. Ezeulu's family is shattered and Ulu, the great deity, is abandoned for Christianity, the religion and as such the culture of the Whiteman.

African literature (therefore, Nigerian and Niger-Deltan) has followed the protest trend in reaction to the experience from the socio-political perspectives. Again, this is in conformity with the situation of African literature being very strongly functional in addition to it being aesthetic. The realization of this inclination may have also dawned on Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson, and so they assert that, "if the only literary and critical tradition one is familiar with is the African, one could be forgiven for thinking that writers and critics of African literature invented the idea that literature has a function, and that that function is to serve society" (101). This is aptly summed up by Chinua Achebe in "The Novelist as a Teacher" thus: "perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure" (105). Again, Achebe in "The Truth of Fiction," states that, "actually art is man's constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him; an aspiration to provide himself with a social handle on existence *through his imagination*" [author's emphasis] (107).

Writers from other climes have dealt with environmental matters for quite some time now. Specifically, Europeans and Americans have been on this exercise for a relatively longer time compared to Africans. There are times when writers produced works which could be termed prophetic. From the west, Herman Melville achieved this in *Moby Dick*, which in the 19th

century, presaged the environmental literary age of the 20th century and beyond in the work about a whale, and about which Nadine Gordimer states that,

Moby-Dick can now be seen as an allegory of environmental tragedy. ‘The Whale is the agent of cosmic retribution’: we have sought to destroy the splendid creature that is nature, believing we could survive only by ‘winning’ a battle against nature; now we see our death in the death of nature brought about by ourselves (115-116).

This prophetic inclination could be found in some African writers. This is the case with Africans who have produced works on the environment much before the dawn of awareness. A reading of the works of Africans of the period before environmental awareness would reveal this.

Further on the interaction between literature and the environment in Africa, William Slaymaker agrees with the claim made by Hochman on the reason for the ecodegradation of the African environment, at least by Africans. This, according to Slaymaker, is that “whites have more time for nature than blacks since blacks must use a great deal of energy resisting or coping with white hegemony” (684). In addition to this, Slaymaker is said to have given reasons for the slow takeoff of ecocriticism in the literature from Africa; and Byron Caminero-Santangelo has expanded this, explaining that there is both colonial and power play in ecocriticism. According to Caminero-Santangelo,

Slaymaker even acknowledges that a primary reason for African resistance to ecocriticism is its potential “imperial” implications: “there is good cause to worry that environmentalism and ecologism are new forms of dominating discourse”....

I would like to explore both the history of the relationship between imperialism

and environmentalism in Africa... and the implication of this history for some key ecocritical positions (700).

Judging from history, the issues of power play have never favoured Africans since after the glorious era of both Egypt and the Queen of Sheba. Therefore, it is not surprising that, especially in South Africa, responses to ecocriticism and ecoliterature have been sparse and mostly by the white population, according to Slaymaker.

Concerning ecocriticism and ecoliterature in Nigeria especially and Africa in general, the focus has been on oil exploitation and exploration, almost to the exclusion of the forest as a beehive of activities and a source of beautiful resources; and just as oil has captured the attention of the world and Nigerians, so has it captured the attention of literary writers and critics, with the exception of a few among whom are Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey.

African critics and literary men and African literature generally have been very slow in responses to the greening of literature, a trend that has waxed very strong in the literature and critical works from America and the West. Reasons have been given for this by scholars, among whom, one of the most eloquent is William Slaymaker in his "Echoing the Others..." where he argues that African writers and critics are sceptical about this new trend in literature, seeing it as a new form of, or weapon for the actualization of the political agenda of America and the West, just like they did with such phenomena as Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Development, the divide between the Developed and the Developing and less Developed Worlds, Post-Colonialism, Independence, Post-Independence, Modernity, Post-modernity, et cetera. Also, the obvious over dependence on nature for energy for survival by Africans is another factor responsible for the slow take off and advancement of ecoliterature and the ecocriticism of African literature. This could be seen in the light of the harvesting of wood and

other resources necessary for survival in the absence of the sophisticated gadgets used in America and the West.

Resulting from the above, and Slaymaker's discussion on some critical as well as literary works from Africa, he (Slaymaker) observes that the "essays point to the conclusions that some black African critics and writers have already drawn: ecolit and ecocrit are imperial paradigms of cultural fetishism that misrepresent the varied landscapes of sub-Saharan Africa. The misaligned icons of the natural order are invasive and invalid and should be resisted or ignored" (685). But from the emergent occurrences of today, for example the flooding of 2012 in Nigeria, which virtually engulfed from the Middle Belt, the South-West, the South-East to the South-South geopolitical regions, as well as other ecological disasters, it is clear that both ecocrit and ecolit are as important as any other device that could be employed towards the safeguarding of humanity, the biosphere and the entire world or nature, that is if they are not even more important.

The slow start of and the slow growth of both ecolit and ecocrit could also be ascribed to the age and relative development of the European languages on the continent of Africa. Although European languages (English, French and Portuguese, especially) were introduced into Africa well before the colonial era, particularly during slavery and the preceding "discovery" era, the actual blossoming of the languages on the continent of Africa coincided with colonialism, independence and post independence. Therefore one can say that the European languages are relatively young. This is perhaps one of the reasons Albert S. Gerard's asserts, "the introduction of the writing skill to Africa was by no means a consequence of western colonization" (16). As at the time of the entrant of the European languages into the shores of Africa, it had been perfectly entrenched in the Europeans themselves. Therefore, a standardized discussion on concepts, as

well as the christening of occurrences and manifestations in the European languages would easily be within the reach of the Europeans themselves.

Colonialism and the slavery before it were gory experiences and still very fresh in the minds of Africans. The new colonialism and the other phenomena that intertwine them were all detrimental to the psycho-social, spiritual as well as politico-economic wellbeing of the African. Therefore, the natural tendency will be for them to be suspicious of the intentions of the Whiteman, with respect to this new and emerging concept and politics: environmentalism. In addition, Africans were more concerned about freeing themselves physically, and at least politically, although the world now knows that the so called political freedom is only a ruse. Reacting to the interrelationship between literature and the experiences Africans have passed through, Lindfors states that,

The new literature in English and French that have emerged in black Africa in the twentieth century have been profoundly influenced by politics. Indeed, one could argue that they have been generated and shaped by the same forces that have transformed much of the African continent during the past hundred years. Writers have served not only as chroniclers of contemporary political history but also as advocates of radical social change. Their works thus both reflect and project the course of Africa's cultural revolution (22).

One of such cultural revolutions is negritude. However, as a result of the occurrences in the world today, the preoccupations of the African writers and critics have changed. This change has also coincided with the emancipation of Africa from physical colonialism in terms of geopolitics. Consequent upon this, another pattern of change has been established. This is targeted at the new feeling against the machination of the white man who is out there pulling the strings

while the puppet African governments dance, as they pick up the crumbs falling off the “master’s table.” This is made worse by the fact that at home, the African “masters” terrorize and decimate the ruled African populace. In the face of this, writers cannot keep mute and critics must rise up to the challenges of interpreting the literary works. Therefore, in literature, according to Lindfors,

The change in form and mood suited the temper of the times. Now that colonialism was moribund, one could afford to laugh at colonizer and colonized alike, pointing out absurd aspects of their interaction since it was no longer necessary to demonstrate that Africans were human beings, one could relax a bit and depict them as no better and no worse than Europeans, who certainly weren’t saints. One didn’t have to romanticize the past or pretend that villages in Africa were more wholesome morally than cities in Europe (24).

So, in both philosophical as well as satirical essays and other works of art, it was possible for the writers to laugh at the white, as well as the blacks, especially when the emergent African “rulers” proved not better or more humane and human than the whites. This is a prevalent attitude across Africa of the post independent era, although with shades in the different socio-historic-political regions. There were as such, the production of works which, according to Lindfors, present “a dignified image of the African past” (24), albeit which tried as much as possible to be objectively realistic, for example *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. Also, there were works which dealt with culture-conflict, et cetera.

From East Africa, in the 1960s, we have satirical songs which emerged from Okot p’Bitek in *Song of Lawino* (1966) and the reply, *Song of Ocol* (1967). This trend was furthered by p’Bitek’s followers. In all these, Africa is the target as Europe had gone, returned at least

politically to their home grounds. And from the 1970s, what may be referred to as the civil war years in African history, African writers generally turned their attention to more global issues in their writings. About this period, Lindfors' statement about Anglophone West Africa could most appropriately apply:

Thus, in response to traumatic political and cultural changes, since independence, Anglophone West African writers have moved from an obsessive concern with the residual effects of colonialism in black Africa to a preoccupation with more universal themes rooted in more specific contemporary realities (26).

Due to the fact that African writers, especially from East and West Africa, focused more on Africans in the early post colonial era, there was what Lindfors described as "post colonial disillusionment" (30). According to him, "in this way East and West African literatures became decidedly more Afrocentric in the post colonial era" (30). And Afrocentrism precludes European nor Arab consciousness and, to a large extent, themes that appear global. With the exception of North Africa, the rest of Africa fall under this flame. North Africa has almost always had the Arab culture, and South Africa had her own type of war, which was subsumed under the framework of Apartheid.

With apartheid, the last of the coloration of colonialism gone, the post colonial phenomenon with its hydra-headed trappings emerged. The implication of this is that African writings now embrace, no longer the univariate theme on the African global world or sub African divisions, but multivariate themes spanning and sprawling across the entire world. This is the consequence of globalization. Summing up the situation of African literary development, Lindfors writes:

In Black Africa, then, there have been basically two patterns of literary development in European languages since the Second World War: the gradual Africanization of literary expression in West and East Africa as colonialism gave way to political self-determination, and the rapid de-africanization of South African literary expression as repeated repression at home gave rise to a vigorous tradition of protest writing among exiled South Africans abroad. Writers in each area choose forms appropriate for conveying a political message to a particular audience and have switched to other forms when environmental conditions have altered. Thus, in morphology as well as ideology, literary art has been responsive to the wind of change that swept across sub-Saharan Africa in the mid-twentieth century. The intellectual history of a continent undergoing rapid cultural transformation can be discerned in the significant mutations such literatures manifest (30).

On a rather global sphere, ecocriticism has been discussed extensively. One of those who have done this is Rigby. Discussing Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* (1972), Rigby speaks of Meeker's condemnation of "classical tragedy which, he [Meeker] contends, reinforces the anthropocentric assumption that nature exists for the benefit of mankind, the belief that human morality transcends natural limitations, and humanism's insistence on the supreme importance of the individual" (155). But today, it is known that the nonhumans are not just meant for humanity to negatively subdue, but to tend affectionately. This is the view of ecocentrism, the antipodal concept to anthropocentrism.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that African literary writers and critics have generally concentrated their efforts on the numerous forms of socio-political themes in their works. These

themes include colonialism, culture-conflict, negritude, corruption, segregation, suffering, et cetera.

Review of Literature on Niyi Osundare's Poetry

Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of The Earth* has received a lot of critical attention, from the social, sexual as well as nature horizons. For example, Godwin Jeff Doki has concluded that Osundare is a nature poet. This is a conclusion reached from his study of *The Eye of The Earth*, one of the collections under study. This is a position which also echoes in the work of Charles Bodunde: "Niyi Osundare and the Materialist Vision...." Among the works cited by Samson A. Dare in his sociolinguistic reading of Osundare's poetry in relation to sexual discourse is *The Eye of The Earth*. This is just a highlight of the numerous studies that have been carried out by critics on Niyi Osundare and his *The Eye of The Earth*, especially. It ought to be stated that nature or some of its aspects have been discussed as they affect Osundare's *The Eye of The Earth*, but attention has not been paid to the beauty and bounties, the intrinsic value of the earth.

Discussing Niyi Osundare's "Style and the New Poetic Revolution," Nesther Nachafiya Alu declares that Osundare's

works vividly convey his concept on the relationship between the oppressed Nigerian/African and the crop of leaders there. His works address a deluge of themes which include corruption, poverty, administrative mismanagement, and to a certain extent, the lingering effects of colonialism on the African continent (62).

These are generally the perspectives from which the works of Osundare have been viewed by critics. All have looked at his work from the human-centred approach, but this is not the only orientation of the works of Niyi Osundare. The other thrust from which his poetry could be

viewed is the fight for the environment, the effort to speak for the environment which although is heard, but is never understood until now. Osundare is therefore lending his voice to the seemingly dumb environment. One of the closest to the environmental criticism of Niyi Osundare's poetry could be found in Alu's assertion that,

The Eye of the Earth is very special, fashioned on his perception of man in Nature. The image of the poet here is more than an interpreter of a complex and rich tradition of his people, who share a collective philosophy. He celebrates the work culture of his people with special emphasis on their reverence for nature, defending the traditional myth on which the community lives together resisting collusion. The volume is seen as one of the fiercest indictments of modern economic culture of the people and alien destructive forces. It takes a pictorial account of aggression on man and the earth which is the author's personal contribution to the problems of erosion and desertification (70).

Anchoring *The Eye of the Earth* on Osundare's explication of the causes of the problems of erosion and desertification is where Alu got it wrong. There is neither any indication of erosion and desertification nor reference to them in the poem.

On Osundare's concern about the plight of the masses in his poetry, Alu states that,

Most importantly, the feature of his poetry is his defense of the speechless and oppressed citizens of the land. He appears involved and sympathetic to their unfortunate condition, be it in the rural or urban area. The theme runs through all his collections, cutting across various fields of human endeavour (69).

It could be added that the speechless and oppressed in this situation include all the other elements and beings that make up the environment, the biotic elements. Osundare presents it thus:

And so when you have a country and a continent and a world where instead of that happening, politics is being used to entrench poverty and enrich a few, then problems are bound to rise. Poetry has become a tool for setting things right, for praising virtue.... Genuine poetry raises political songs; political songs directly and indirectly. It tells kings about the corpses which line their way to the throne. It tells the rich ones the skulls in their cupboard (Qtd in Alu, 69).

These are apt descriptions of the works of Osundare, viewed from a broad spectrum dimension. We also quite agree with Alu that social concerns have been the preoccupation of Osundare.

Another critic who has devoted attention to Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* is Charles Bodunde. In his study entitled "Niyi Osundare and the Materialist Vision: A Study of *The Eye of the Earth*," Bodunde observes that Ngara, another critic, paid attention to the earth as being the concern of Osundare in the collection, in addition to the plight of the masses, the poor in the society: "Ngara makes references to Osundare's defense of the peasants, his celebration of the earth and need to preserve it" (82). This is one of the closest references by Bodunde to environmental interpretation of Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*. However, it is only a reference, as no further discussion especially in ecocritical terms, could be fathomed out of the discourse. Bodunde focuses on materialism, especially as it affects "the shift to the capitalist mode of production" (82) from the agrarian subsistence method hitherto practised in Africa.

Again, Bodunde tries to delineate *The Eye of the Earth* from the Romantic perspective. According to him,

A superficial reading of *The Eye of the Earth* suggests a near Romantic idealization of the organic and the meditative value of the 'green world' with its forests, flowers and natural landscape. However, Osundare's depiction of nature,

symbolized in the metaphor of the earth, departs from the Romantic interpretation. Embodied in the typical Romantic epiphanic naturism is nature's capacity to communicate to human instinct and hence provoke meditation. Nature is useful to the Romanticist in so far as it yields itself for imaginative purpose (82).

Osundare has not claimed to have had his imaginative faculty awakened or improved by the presence of the earth or nature; he has only identified the neglect to which the earth has been put and the dire consequences already befalling man. It is this divorce from the imagination invigoration of the poet that separates *The Eye of the Earth* from the Romantic theme. So, to Bodunde, the collection is not Romantic, but one cannot deny the implication of nature in the collection; and it is this that has removed Osundare from the social commentary chart or the line-up of the chroniclers of social problems, and perhaps the solutions in the general sense and as they affect humans, in their interaction. Further, according to Bodunde, "it should also be mentioned that it is Nature's materiality mediated by human activities that forms the basis of Osundare's treatment" (85). This stands as an apt hint at the anthropocentric disposition of man. This is affirmed in Karl Marx's contention, according to Bodunde, "that nature which 'preceded human history ... is nature which today no longer exists anywhere'" (85). It may be reasonable to observe here that man has been largely, if not solely, responsible for the unfortunate situation. In the next section of his article, Bodunde deals fully with the effect of capitalism on the forest. But he falls short of demonstrating this in ecocritical terms. He only sums up the activities of the capitalists as exploitative.

Doki is another critic who has studied Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*, and he is one of those critics who have come close to studying the collection as nature poetry, hence

declaring, in the title of his article, “Niyi Osundare as a poet of nature.” According to him, “Osundare is concerned both with reality and *the connection between the individual and his environment*. It is, therefore, not surprising that the entire volume is devoted to poems about man interacting with the physical aspects of nature” [emphasis mine] (68). But beside this statement, Doki does not go beyond this statement to discuss this work in ecocritical terms; rather he concentrates on the environment as it relates to nature. He fails to identify those inherent values possessed by the forest and the entire nature. In fact, his devotion is to the environment as it reflects the tenets of the Romantic perception and treatment. It is not surprising that he introduces his work defining and exploring Romantic perceptions of poets, from the classical period through the neo-classical and medieval period, through the poets: Alexander Pope, William Blake, George Gordon Lord Byron, William Wordsworth and James Thomson.

Doki’s slight reference to the collection *The Eye of the Earth* as nature poetry is only a departure from his examination of the collection from the perspective that follows the direction of virtually all the critics of the collection and other works of Osundare: the social and economic implication of interaction between the rulers and the ruled, the leaders and the led (the masses) as exists in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular. Hence he comments, “returning back to his old theme of an egalitarian society and economic exploitation, Osundare states that when the gold is dug it should be used for the betterment of society and not to enrich a few kings and Princes” (7). This means that the social gap should be bridged if not eradicated with the resources got from the rock. By this, Doki has returned Osundare to the fold of the social crusaders and Marxism to which he belongs and which he professes.

Another perspective from which Osundare and his *The Eye of the Earth* have been viewed is the esoteric. With Osundare as a rain-maker and the collection *The Eye of the Earth* as

the process and occasion of rain making, we see the poems as the chants and incantations needed to wed the earth and the sky in the consummation of the matrimonial obligation needed to reinvigorate the earth with humans and other entities in nature. This is the stand of Emma Ngumoha, who sees Osundare celebrate “rain ‘the giver and sustainer of life’” (124). To Ngumoha, as it is to all humanity, rain enhances fertility as it imbues the earth with the solvent required by plants to grow; it is the cooling agent needed to soothe all living creatures, and the liquid needed for the overall sustenance of life. From the point of fertility and regeneration of life, Ngumoha states, “the earth personifies the regenerative power of female sexuality, rainfall represents the flow of celestial creative energy whose force is patriarchal, logical and conventional” (125). Therefore, Ngumoha states, “in rainfall, Heaven meets Earth, life burst forth in innumerable forms at every level of existence” (125). This is a resonation of the biblical utterances that gave rise to the birth of such as Isaac, Esau, Jacob, et cetera. From the above one discovers that apart from the interpretation of *The Eye of the Earth* from the capitalist, sociological and nature perspectives, the collection deals with metaphysical relationship between man and other parts of nature. Another way of stating Ngumoha’s contribution is the identification of the collection *The Eye of the Earth* as magical invocation of rain. Therefore, The major concerns of Ngumoha in this article are the issues of the fertility of the earth, enhanced by the rain, as well as the pluvial aesthetics embedded in *The Eye of The Earth*. Ngumoha has also seen Osundare as an enchanter, a magician; and the earth as “the universal Genetrix and nurse” (125).

Virtually all the critics cited here are of the view that Niyi Osundare is “prominent among the younger generation of Nigerian poets” (Alu, 62). Charles Bodunde subscribes to this; and also in the same gusto, Samson Dare asserts that,

Osundare is the clearest, loudest and most heard poetic voice from the Anglophone Africa today. A “new generation” poet, following the earlier established poets such as Okigbo, Soyinka and Clarke, Osundare has through enormous productivity, elegance of style, and currency and consistency of thematic concern, succeeded in drawing attention to himself (91).

One of the elements of style employed by Niyi Osundare in his works is the Proverb. This has also been ascribed to such other writers as Chinua Achebe, Ola Rotimi, and Femi Osofisan. The Proverb is part of the rich oral culture of Africans, especially the Igbo and the Yoruba. According to Yomi Okunowo, “one immediate benefit of oral-written contact is the preservation of the tradition of the oral culture, both in its ‘pastness’ and progression into the future, serving as an attraction and bridge into the written format” (1). It is this oral-written contact which has provided the fertile ground for the flourishing of the proverb in the literature from Africa. Okunowo also identifies parallelism as one of the stylistic elements employed by Osundare, although he does not discuss it adequately.

As part of the “elegance of style” hinted at above, Osundare seeks a euphemistic way of presenting the otherwise offensive or traditionally restricted terms and material in his poetry, and he manages this technique very effectively, although with some lapses in the circumstances affecting women. About this Dare states:

At any rate, Osundare seems to take advantage of this “loophole” in the traditional restriction in presenting and managing the otherwise offensive items. The fact explains the employment of such descriptive expressions as: The Okro penis/penis of Okro, earth breasts, and testicles of the ram... he fails to employ that same

means to “cushion” the offensive effect of “cunt”, for example, in “the tireless cunt which swallows a log” (91).

The loophole discussed by Dare as the elements of style employed by Osundare include periphrasis, euphemism as well as the use of “sex organs of animals or in allegory with material things” (91). This is on the occasion of Dare’s analysis of Osundare’s *Midlife, Waiting Laughter* and *The Eye of the Earth*. The above are some of the literary devices that have enriched Osundare’s poetry. According to Dare, “it may be noted, finally, that poets are not linguistic or stylistic outlaws or islands, although they enjoy an uncommon liberty in their linguistic choices, a situation made possible by that phenomenon called ‘poetic license’” (96). The implication of this is that, although Osundare employs some deviant linguistic structures, he makes a great deal of effort to ensure that he conforms to the standard codes of the English language to the point that his writings become accessible to the average reader of his poetry.

Another scholar who has discussed Osundare’s style in poetry is Alu whose statement on Osundare’s *Moonsongs* is an apt description of Osundare’s style. He is noted to have employed so much the oral quality of African literature, and especially poetry, in his works. Alu states, “the strength of the book as observed by most of its reviews lies more in its form than content mainly because of the oral nature of its structure” (71). Here, one may interject that while not denigrating form, content is the most important feature of the works of Osundare. Apart from structure, other features of African poetry are also employed by Osundare in his creativity, but this does not in any way demean the content of his works generally, and poetry in particular. He, like most other African writers, is a socially committed poet who has employed a myriad of stylistic devices, some of which have been discussed above, in his poetry.

The review of the scholarship on the works of Niyi Osundare shows that the thematic preoccupations of the critics are based on the socio-economic and political conditions of the people. It has been shown that the themes isolated from Osundare's poetry by critics include oppression, protest, nature, rain-making, and sexual discourse. Also, numerous stylistic devices have been identified as contributing to the beauty and effectiveness of Osundare's poetry. Some of the stylistic elements are proverb, euphemism and the oral nature of African poetry.

Review of Literature on Tanure Ojaide's Poetry

Among the critics who have commented on the situation of African literature is the poet-critic, Tanure Ojaide, whose poetry forms part of the subject of this study. According to him in "Preface,"

African literature is unique in the sense of expressing the African condition. The African condition today involves globalisation, conflict management, environmental and geological concerns, and human rights, along many other issues (xi).

This presents a broad spectrum approach to issues affecting Africans generally, and Nigerians particularly. Continuing, he says that, "Literature is a cultural production" and that "Literary criticism has an ethical function and so relates that function to how literature can affect the society and its readers for the better" (xi). It is in the pursuit of these goals that Ojaide has focused his critical and creative energies on the efforts geared towards the enlightenment of the masses on the numerous social issues affecting them. This is to ensure, according to him, that, "Literature should sharpen the consciousness of its people and its readers for a better world" (xi). Further on, Ojaide tries to identify the origin and nature of African literature: "Modern African

literature is the natural inheritor of traditional African literature and though there is hybridity, the literature seems to work best when it carries the old tradition in a new manner” (xiii).

Ojaide’s article “Literature is a Cultural Production” echoes Sule Emmanuel Egya’s “The [African] oral performers see themselves, as humans speaking through poetry to humans about burning issues in their society” (81). Africans are known to have strong attachment to their oral practices. This is evidenced in the works of such renowned scholars as Ruth Finnegan, F.B.O. Akporobaro, Nolue E. Emenanjo, Okpure O. Obuke, Isidore Okpewho, and Ropo Sekoni, to mention a few. Again, it is not surprising that Ojaide’s idea echoes in the work of Egya; this is because he has devoted a lot of attention to the study of the works of Tanure Ojaide, especially in his study of Anglophone Nigerian poetry. According to Egya,

Tanure Ojaide in his *Poetic Imagination in Africa* (1996) consistently draws attention to the contemporary African poets’ inclination to, as it were, return to their cultural roots to fashion an orality development idiom with which they can more effectively communicate with their audiences because the poets have centred their artistic energies on crucial socio-political issues that are common to them (the poets and the audiences) (81).

Apart from the reference to the return of the African poets to their cultural roots, also of importance in Egya’s study is the fact that the African poets have focused their creative energies on the critical socio-political concerns of the Africans.

Among the thematic preoccupations of Tanure Ojaide in his works which are enriched by his appropriation of the cultural artefacts of his people and his childhood experiences, critics have identified activism as the mainstay. A prominent voice here is Uzoechi Nwagbara, who in his “Poetics of Resistance: Ecocritical Reading of Ojaide’s *Delta Blues & Home Songs* and

Daydream of Ant and Other Poems,” concentrates his effort on presenting Ojaide as dwelling on the resistance of the people to the misappropriation of power by the authorities and the multinationals who are daily prospecting for oil and degrading the environment in the process, and without making efforts to assuage the sufferings of the masses. According to Nwagbara, there is “impropriety by the political class in the management of affairs especially in the Niger delta, a region marooned in the Nigerian social space” (17). Impropriety is one of the causes of the corruption that is at the heart of all the problems of Nigeria, and, as such, the protest of the people of the Niger Delta region. The impropriety is also reflected in the way the Niger Delta environment is being abused and abandoned in the cesspool of flotsam, decay and poison from the bowels of the oil companies. Coupled with this impropriety is the case of the neglect of African cultural practices and the economy as well as socio-political practices which have been negatively affected by the activities of the multinationals. Nwagbara describes the situation thus:

In the wake of the unbridled assault on the Niger delta environment informed by the dynamic and logic of ecological imperialism, this region’s traditional economies, cultural practices and socio-political wellbeing were mauled into disquiet. The region, which is the economic base of Nigeria, has witnessed one of the uncanny forms of neglect and marginalisation (18).

It is therefore not surprising that the rural poor of the region have resorted to resistance and activism, and Nwagbara has identified these as the focus of attention of Ojaide in his works.

Further in the same article, Nwagbara turns his attention on environmentalism in the works of Ojaide. According to him,

Above all, Ojaide uses literature for environmentalist purposes. He places premium on the biotic community—its sustainability and preservation.... It is a

literary blueprint that is environmentally conscious and ecologically sensitive to the plights of the people and their environment (18).

One cannot lose sight of the fact of the plight of the people being the major concern of Nwagbara in his criticism of the works of Ojaide. To him, Ojaide presents the people as a suffering group as a result of the degradation of the environment, and a people who now resort to resistance and activism. One thing is clear here, and that is that the plight of the biotic elements is only a matter which must attract attention only to the extent to which its degradation affects human beings. Here, it must be observed that holding sway is anthropocentrism, a philosophy that has been identified to be at the root of the present predicament in which humans have found themselves. This same idea is furthered in Nwagbara's study of *The Activist* and Ojaide's other works. Here he states that,

Virtually all literary works by Tanure Ojaide have the same abiding sensibility anchored in ecocriticism as well as environmentalism. Thus, even *The Activist* (2006), an Ojaide novel has some ecocritical bearing. It is a contemporary novel about oil politics in the Niger delta region of Nigeria and environmental predation by the political class in partnership with the multinational corporations (19).

The hallmark of Nwagbara's discussion of Ojaide's concern in ecocriticism relates mostly to the effect of environmental abuse on the people and the people's responses to it. Nwagbara describes this neo-imperialism thus: "Ecological imperialism in the dispensation of neo-colonialism is more monstrous and sinister, while it takes a subtle, malleable form" (19). It is this wrong situation that Ojaide and his likes are trying to right. This is perhaps the view of Nwagbara, for he states that,

In this fashion, colonial fiction valorised and legitimated the tendency to exploit the natural environment and its resources. This is perhaps best articulated in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), where sheer cruelty and crass inhumanity are meted to the elephants and the native inhabitants alike in the Congo Basin. This double harshness technically underscores the process of commercialisation of the African and Nigerian ecosystem and landscape. The warped rhetoric of anthropocentric messianism was behind other colonial fiction that propagated the colonisers' supremacy (21).

Therefore, ecological imperialism coupled with socio-political subjugation are the concerns of Nwagbara in his study of Ojaide. Diverse social issues are lumped together with environmental ones. While not denying credence to environmentalism in his studies, it must be pointed out that the locus of Nwagbara's contention is humanity, and not necessarily the biosphere; there is little or no attention paid to the flora, fauna and waters for their own sake.

In another instance of Nwagbara's study of Ojaide's works, "Aesthetics of Resistance and Sustainability: Tanure Ojaide and the Niger Delta Question", he also focuses on resistance, which he says is as a result of the social imbalance occasioned by all manner of imperialism (cultural, economic, political, et cetera), and environmental/ecological degradation. He calls the Niger Delta region not just the developing, but also the "peripheral world" and gives reason for her plight. According to him,

This process of exploiting developing or peripheral worlds is responsible for the environmental and ecological damage done to the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, which has been made prostrate following oil exploration by the Multinationals in cahoots with Nigerian ruling class. The Niger delta environmental and ecological

landscape is the artistic resource of Tanure Ojaide's ecocritical poetics, which is predicated on resisting ecological imperialism (31).

Here, Nwagbara, as in most of the other cases, tries to isolate the reason for the protest, one of which is that there is despoliation of the environment by the "Multinationals in cahoots with Nigerian ruling class" (31). Some of the devastation wreaked by the ecological imperialism, according to Nwagbara, include, "underdevelopment, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, loss of aquatic/marine life, environmental degradation and pauperisation of the locals – and Nigerians by extension" (32).

Nwagbara's brief analysis of Ojaide's *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel*, has a bearing on resistance as it affects ecological imperialism, and is significant for this research. Resistance poetics is the target of most of Ojaide's critics, including Nwagbara. They fail to see the espousal of the ecocentric philosophy and the condemnation of the anthropocentric. It is the plight of the people that is of consequence to the critics, as the environment is considered only for its effect on humanity. To Nwagbara, the aesthetic game is such that "it is a literary preoccupation that is environmentally conscious and ecologically sensitive to the plights of the people and their environment" (33). Nwagbara describes Ojaide and his poetics thus: "Ojaide is a functional, realist artist – not given to the Orwellian art for art's sake thesis. He considers his literary trend as refractive of the conjunctures in his milieu" (35). It is a description which is quite appropriate and germane to the situation. To Nwagbara, eco-writers "include Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Ibiwari Ikiriko, Nnimmo Bassey, John Pepper-Clark, Wole Soyinka and Ken Saro-Wiwa, among others" (37); yet the attention paid to these is with respect to their involvement in the promotion of the lives of humans, or the lives of the flora and fauna as an end to the comfort of humanity. Further, Nwagbara states that,

Ojaide likens the loss of feeling for nature to the decline of poetry as a genre, since he reckons that the basic function of poetry is to galvanise, even to educate, the emotions. As Ojaide sprinkles his poetry with environmental, cultural, political and economic flavour, he draws our attention to the polluted atmosphere through the choking in the air. And through the gnarled barks of the trees, he alerts us about the peril of deforestation; and through the faces of the people and the animals, he points a torch to the evils of imperialism and corporatism wrought via blowouts, gas flaring and oil leaks in the Niger delta – and Nigeria by extension. This poetic consciousness negates the impacts of ecological imperialism and environmental crisis (45).

Obviously, this is a condemnation of the anthropocentric misdemeanour of the modern world, cocooned in the “development” lie, which thrives on the death of the natural world. However, this thesis goes further in the examination of the beauty and bounties of the earth. Nwagbara concludes his criticism of Ojaide’s works thus:

In the poetry analysed in this paper, attempts are made to demonstrate that art is a veritable instrument that could be used to contest power thereby resisting any form of subjugation, particularly ecological imperialism. One of the main thrusts of Ojaide’s achievements in this context is the masterly manner he weaves his craft to crystallise the poetics of environmental resistance, which is moored to environmental aesthetics, sustainability and development (53).

Another critic of the poetry of Ojaide is Jeffery Shantz. His article, which examines the poetry of Soyinka and Ojaide from the socialist perspectives, focuses on the resistance imperative. According to him, “African poets like Ojaide and Soyinka strive to see and

understand their post-colonial (or neo-colonial) worlds differently in order to resist, to fight back. Their works also offer new insights for others trying to fight back” (122). Shortly after this statement, Shantz adduces reasons for Ojaide’s choice of both subject and technique, as well as his source of experiences for the job he has to do. According to Shantz,

Here Ojaide condemns the exploitation of people and resources in the Nigerian oil belt. The wealth of the land greatly enriches others while the region is overlooked, neglected and left in desperate need. Ojaide, through the repetitive listing of images ... juxtaposes powerfully the wealth that is removed from the region and its people and the deprivation and want that is left behind in the local communities and environment. This poem is also metaphorical of the larger processes of global capital which reach into neglected regions to tear out resource wealth, leaving few benefits behind (125).

In another effort at the interpretation of the poetry of Tanure Ojaide, Nesther A. Alu and Vashti Yusuf Suwa have isolated protest and cultural revival, which have come as a result of environmental pollution occasioned by the activities of the western hegemony and the cohorts in government. This is made more pertinent by the fact of the land being involved. It is a common phenomenon among Africans who see in the land their existence both spiritually and physically. It is a home for them while alive and for their remains when dead. It is also a home to their gods. Alu and Suwa examine the relationship between the land and the people. According to them, in their opening statements,

Land has since been identified as central to Urhobo politics and culture. They believe that it is an important gift from a deity, “the eternal mother, and the water-goddess.” It is a spiritual gift that should be protected with all sense of seriousness

which reveals the spiritual perspective the conflict has attained in some Niger-Delta communities. They hold that due to the activities of the oil exploration companies, this goddess has moved back into the un-known, leaving this community spiritually vulnerable (133).

It is in reaction to this that Tanure Ojaide took to exile in the United States and also writes in condemnation. So, from his vantage point of a thorough knowledge from both within the Niger Delta region and from outside the region, Ojaide is able to objectively discuss the plight of the environment and people of the Niger Delta region. About this, Alu and Suwa say, “from his vantage position, he objects to absorbing ‘wholesale the culture of western technology’ as well as ‘the multinational plunder’ because it is observed to alienate the people from their environment and from their own spot that ‘sustains their economic production’” (134). This reeks of the anthropocentric hue, the being of the environmental degradation talked about.

Another coloration added by Alu and Suwa in their criticism of the works of Ojaide has to do with social issues. The social issues are not just dropped, they are blended with environmental dispossession and ultimately the exile disposition, as well as economic injustice. According to them,

Ojaide broadens the perimeters of the problem by painting devastating pictures of the ugly situation in the following lines: Our sacred trees have been cut down/to make armchairs for the rich and titled; /Our totem eagle, that bird of great heights, / has been shot at by thoughtless guardians (9). The loss of his country / land leads to one of Ojaide’s popular themes of the exile. It is this wonky situation that has pushed the very incisive in society, especially the poet, into a situation of internal exile. ...In addressing the subject of oil exploration and the degradation of life,

Delta people are savagely let down in the dubious oil deal. The national wealth is paraded and wasted before them by the obese conscience of the devastated land (134).

The exile and exilic consciousness is another way in which Ojaide's poetry has been examined. This is at least a bi-dimensional phenomenon as it is both physical and psychological, to say the least, a situation which James Tar Tsaaior has described as "spiritual exile which registers itself in terms of absence through presence" (100).

These critics have also exhibited a human centred approach to the criticism of Ojaide's works. This is a situation in which the rivers, flora and fauna are neglected or, not given the required prominence. Only the conditions of human beings are addressed or focussed on. It is an anthropocentric world that is advocated. According to Alu and Suwa, "the magnitude of harm on life can be appreciated if we understand the quantity of harmful substances released into the soil through the highly technical means of oil extraction. These substances in form of fluids and oils sink into the water to render it unfit for human consumption" (134 - 135).

Another issue implicated in Alu and Suwa's criticism of Ojaide's poems is the cultural imperative. According to them, "in Ojaide's poetry the target is the reconstruction of his Urhobo world and culture. He castigates modern society's ill..." (140). This is the modernity that has wreaked the so-much-talked-about havoc to the African environment, psyche, sensibility and physique. Thus, to Ojaide, literature is a reconstruction material for culture and so he employs it vigorously. It is not surprising that Aminogbe, Aridon and the other deities, patriarchs and matriarchs, as well as spiritual and social practices of the Urhobo people are re-enacted in his works.

Another critic who has lent a voice to the examination of the landscape in the study of Ojaide's works is Charles Bodunde. His interest in his paper entitled "Tanure Ojaide's Poetry and the Delta Landscape: A Study of *Delta Blues and Home Songs*" is poetry and its relationship with the Delta landscape, with a view "to explore the ways in which Ojaide connects images of a ruined landscape with political and economic exploitation" (197). To justify his claim to duty, Bodunde asserts that, "the image of the poet-persona in childhood reminiscence is appropriately linked with a landscape in its greenness. Here, flora and fauna images are employed to signify an active life" (197). As with almost all the other critics whose critiques have been reviewed in this study, Bodunde's concern is humans and their comfort. According to Bodunde,

"Delta Blues" amplifies the Delta paradox of hunger in the middle of feasting. Ojaide traces the tragic turn of events to the evil exploits of "baron robbers" who appropriate the banquets, turning the Delta birthright into "a boon cake for others." The poet avoids the naivety of oversimplification by locating the Delta problem as a complex of factors relating to the actions of those he calls thieves in the house who betray the struggle and external "reapers of the delta crop" who "care less for minority rights" (202).

Another important factor which the critics have deciphered from Ojaide's works is his examination of the state of squalor of the Niger Delta region and its consequence of the people's response through activism and protest, including arms resistance. This could be summed up in the life and death of "the Ogoni nine," among whom is the late Ken Saro-Wiwa, an icon of environmental right protection. In response to this situation, Senayon S. Olaoluwa asks the question, "Where Do We Go From Here?" He examines the landscape of the Niger Delta and adduces reasons for the migratory tendency of the people of the area, as presented by Ojaide in

When It No Longer Matters Where You Live. His first salvo hits Western imperialism. According to him,

The evolution of Niger Delta cities, like many other African cities, must be construed against the backdrop of Western imperialism. When European activities began in this part of the country in form of trade, it was on equal terms. The Niger Delta people then had enjoyed the envious status of middlemen between Europeans and other African neighbours, especially those from the other side of what came later to be known as River Niger. But the equal relations soon gave way to an interaction of inequality, whereby trade in African slaves, rather than exchange of African commodities for European products, became the core definition of commerce (175-176).

This is the situation which gives rise to what Olaoluwa describes as, “specifically for Ojaide, the recurrence of the Niger Delta condition in his poetry stems from the huge paradox that dogs the history of the region, that is, the ‘paradox of sitting on oil and yet remaining impoverished’”(176). This is the crux of the matter: impoverishment and outright destitution of both the region and the inhabitants. Further in the article, Olaoluwa demonstrates that the harbinger and symbol of this imperialism is the “Ship,” (after which Ojaide titles one of the poems in the collection). Further, Olaoluwa states that, “the collection *When It no Longer Matters Where You Live* begins with a reflection on ships, the mnemonic and symbolic reminder of the genesis of marginalization and despoliation of the Niger Delta space” (177). Therefore, the squalor to which the Niger Delta people are subjected is as a result of the deprivation of the region and the people, as well as the gulf between the Whites and the Africans, the rulers and the ruled, and the rich and the poor. In the circumstance, according to Olaoluwa,

The search for environmental sanity in the foremost oil city of Warri can at best be compared to the search for rivers in a desert. The environmental eyesore must also be viewed as an indication that poverty rules the space and whatever myth of the “House of Wonders” that may have been woven around the city has completely disappeared. The evidence reinforces the argument that although “the dream of the successful city which ... accompanied independence for African nationalists can be characterised as a modernist dream”, the realization of this dream has however been vitiated by the connivance of both the political elite and the overbearing influence of the multinational companies, in the case of the Niger Delta cities (182).

Warri is one of the major cities located within the Niger Delta territory. It is also a town that has received a large dose of deprivation and impoverishment which the region has witnessed and still wallows in. But it must be cited that compared to the area predominantly inhabited by the Ijaw nationals, Warri could be described as having been pampered beyond imagination. Yet, this is the region which produces the wealth upon which the nation, Nigeria survives and prides herself. Thus, exile is not surprising, and the exile has to be both internal and external, since there has been, according to Olaoluwa, “the neglect and economic exclusion of the masses in the country by the tripartite alliance of the state, the elite and the multinationals” (185). And this is how Nwagbara, in “The Antinomy of Exile: Ambivalence and Transnational Discontents in Tanure Ojaide’s *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*,” sums Ojaide’s exploit: “apart from the environmental and social disequilibrium that are dissected in the collection, a major focus of the poetry is the paradox of exile experience” (158). And in “In the Shadow of the Imperialist: ...” Nwagbara has asserted that ecological necessities inhere with imperialistic

manifestations and that a fight against these is the preoccupation of Tanure Ojaide in *Delta Blues & Home Songs* and *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems*. Therefore, Nwagbara has asserted that,

Nigerian writers (poets), which include Tanure Ojaide, have engaged in artistic combat to resist ecological imperialism, one of the ugly faces of global capitalism. The mainstay of Ojaide [sic] poetry is to use literature to challenge unjust system. For him, literature is a reproduction of social experiences: it is also a method of seeking alternative perspective to imperialist pressures” (82).

Also, Olaoluwa, as most of the other critics of Ojaide, has concentrated his efforts on the effects of the despoliation of the environment on the people. None, to the best of my knowledge, has given much attention to the direct effect of the activities of multinationals and their cohort on the waters, flora and fauna.

The concern of Ojaide’s critics is primarily the socio-political condition of Africans presented in the collections of poetry. Thus, they have focussed their attention on the themes of social injustice, suffering, corruption, protest, et cetera. They have excluded the plight and inherent values of the environment in their investigation of the works of Ojaide, which form the focus of this study.

Review of Literature on Nnimmo Bassey’s Poetry

The least studied among the three ecopoets under study in this research is Nnimmo Bassey. This is not surprising, since he is a relatively younger poet with fewer creative and poetic works than the other two. However, there have been comments on his collections among which is *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood*. As in the criticism of Ojaide’s and Osundare’s poetry, the concern of critics of Bassey’s poetry is with man primarily, and the

environment and the social system as they affect man in general. Among those who have made comments about the works of Bassey is Ogaga Okuyade. About *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood*, he states:

Nnimmo Bassey's "We thought it was Oil but it was Blood" becomes a travesty of the expectations of the masses. Sometimes the poets in their exploration of the plight of the masses, adopt post-structuralist binarism in their approach to address the dismal conditions of the people. This technique gives the reader an opportunity to easily distinguish the rulers from the ruled and make glaring the consequences of the insincerity of government to the people (22).

As has been hinted earlier, this is a human-centred criticism of the collection; and unfortunately, this is his only comment about the collection or any other from Bassey.

Another scholar who has chipped in a few words on the poetry of Bassey is Uchechukwu Peter Umezurike. According to him, Bassey, a Nigerian environmental poet, "Laments the misfortune of the oil-rich communities" (3). Also, as in previous situations, the focus is humanity and their comfort.

Most examinations of the poetry from the selected poets are resistance-centred, not earth-centred. Even when the earth is mentioned or discussed, it is with keen interest on how the activities of the oil prospecting companies and other agencies of "development" have negatively affected mankind, and not the flora and fauna per se. The hallmark of the criticisms of the poetry of the selected poets, as well as those of the other literary artists from the African sub-region, therefore, is human being at all levels: the human-human, human-river, human-flora and/or human-fauna dimensions. It could also be argued, therefore, that the environment which is a

conglomeration of the list above except human beings, is simply a sub-subaltern of the lowest degree.

The interest of the environment (the biosphere) has been neglected. The consequence of this is that humanity has not been properly exposed to the ills confronting the biosphere, especially as represented by the poets. Also, the consequences of the eroding of the flora and fauna have not been appropriately made obvious to humanity. The repercussion of this anthropocentric disposition of humanity has been left unmentioned to the populace. The implication of these is that humans are steadily marching unawares to their death, and the death of the earth. It is for this reason that this research is focusing on the biosphere in the poetry of Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey.

Therefore, this study employs the ecocentric and anthropocentric theories of literary criticism, subsets of ecocriticism, in the analysis of *The Eye of the Earth* by Niyi Osundare, *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* and *Delta Blues and Home Songs* by Tanure Ojaide and *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood* by Nnimmo Bassey.

CHAPTER THREE

ECOCENTRIC INTERPRETATION OF SELECTED POEMS OF NIYI OSUNDARE, TANURE OJAIDE AND NNIMMO BASSEY

This chapter examines the selected poems of Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey from the ecocentric perspective. This is to enable the discovery of the inherent qualities of the earth. Nature inherently is in a state of balance, with no part being out of proportion in relation to itself and others; also, the earth is bountiful and rich beyond human imagination in all ramifications. Therefore, the earth has inherent values other than those arrogated to her by humanity in relation to what people get from the earth, or humanity's view that the value of the environment is only to the extent to which it can serve people's needs. These are the positions presented by the poets under study in this research. The poets and their works are Niyi Osundare in *The Eye of the Earth*, Tanure Ojaide in *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* and *Delta Blues and Home Songs* and Nnimmo Bassey in *We Thought it was Oil But it was Blood*.

Ecocentrism in Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*

In the collection, *The Eye of the Earth*, Osundare presents the earth, which is the environment, in splendour, harmony, abundance and beauty. This is the position presented in the first segment of the collection subtitled "back to earth." The first poem in this section, which is actually the first in the entire collection, "Earth" presents a picture of the earth as the beginning and the end, which encompasses everything on earth, living or dead. It provides sustenance for mankind and other entities:

Temporary basement

and lasting roof

first clayey coyness
 and last alluvial joy
 breadbasket
 and compost bed (1).

In short lines of between one and three words which suggests immediacy, the earth is presented in the image of a house, with foundation and roof, to accommodate all creatures. It is also a receptacle for the dead, even as it provides food for all: “Temporary basement / and lasting roof / ... / breadbasket / and compost bed” (1).

As the earth sustains all lives, it also receives their remains at death: “compost bed.” In this poem, Osundare gives the first indication as to what or how the earth should be employed: it is to be cultivated. It is “Oje ere amokoyeri” (“The one that shaves his head with the hoe”). This suggests tending, a kind of nursing, albeit with a coarse implement; a handling that would enable her (the earth) yield her best for human beings and all nature. The hoe is the instrument of great value to Africans and the Yoruba in particular.

The fact of the earth as the foundation of all life, the beginning and end of all existence, having been established, the poet moves on in “Forest Echoes” to transport the reader through memory lane to the beauty, grace and the wealth of the earth, and introduces the reader to the very first source of despoliation of the earth and the reasons, as well as the source of the reasons. These are the Whites, Capitalism, and the lumberjacks, here represented by the ‘agbegilodo.’ In this poem, the forest is the metaphor for the environment; and about the beauty and grace of the environment, the poet says, “A green desire, perfumed memories / a leafy longing lure my wonderer feet / to this forest of a thousand wonders (3). The forest is described as being “of a thousand wonders” and “a green desire, perfumed memories” (3). It is no wonder, therefore, that

the forest has the capacity to lure the poet-persona into, through and down memory lane by its fragrance. This becomes most interesting as the “desire” and “longing” are presented in the colour and images of the forest, “green” and “leafy” and as having the capacity to lure.

True to ecoliterature, which this collection *The Eye of the Earth* is, the trees, leaves, rain, et cetera are personified and they react to reflect the seasons or times:

The rain have kept their time...
 (Earth has (finally) won the love of the sky)
 Trees bob with barkward sap
 and leaves grab a deepening green
 from the scarcity sun (3)

and “Bouncing boughs interlock overhead / like wristwrestlers straining muscularly” (3), while the poet-persona “treads the compost carpet of darkling forests / where terror grows on trembling leaves / natured by lore / nurtured by fairy truths” (4). This rings of the mythical ills, evils and horrors about the forest and the earth (environment) as peddled in Africa from the days of our ancestors. The feeling of fear is accentuated by the employment of sound effect and images.

In the next stanza, the poet focuses on time which bridges the gap in all things from birth to death: “Oh time / coffin behind the cot” (4). Further, the reader is led into the understanding that there is a staunch interconnectivity within the environment and that “everything is connected to everything else” (16), as Barry Commoner would say in his First Law of Ecology, an idea also echoed by Leopold thus: “the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts” (2). The connection is a continuous chain. All items and things are linked, one to the other as if with a rope, as the poet says,

...every toemark on the footpath

every fingerprint on every bark
 the ropy climbers flung breathlessly
 from tree to tree (4).

The environment is not all beautiful and rosy, if anything, like roses, the environment has thorns: “the haunting sound and silence / of this sweet and sour forest” (4). All these serve to strengthen the memory of what it used to be and ultimately lead to the present, and the next section of this poem whose concern is a total recall of the beauty and benevolence of the earth. Among the prides of the forest, the “forest of a million trees,” are such as “Oro,” “Iroko” which “wears the crown of the forest,” “Oganwo” which “wears the surrogate crown,” “Ayunre,” the Palm which must not be challenged for it is the “evergreen conqueror of the rainless seasons” (5 - 6). The trees are personified as kings, other royalties and warriors.

The idea of “warriors” invokes the feeling of war, and as such cannibalism. So, there is a cannibalistic relationship in the forest (part of the environment), as presented in the following lines:

Behold, too, these preyers
 in the cannibal calvary
 of the forest:
 the *iroko* which swallows the shrub,
 the hyena which harries the hare,
 the elephant which tramples the grass (10).

In this excerpt one sees imagery suggesting killing and violence, such as “preyers”, “cannibal calvary”, “swallows”, “harries” and “tramples” (10). This is only a regulatory process employed by the environment as a natural method of ensuring a balance. So the poet-persona calls out,

“Tell them all the calm behind the claw / Tell them the sun / which succeeds the night” (10). The regulatory process is emphasised by the link provided by the alliteration in “calm ... claw / ... sun ... succeeds” which, like “the ropy climbers flung breathlessly / from tree to tree” serves to connect everything. The seeming violence and preying tendencies displayed by the different beings and organisms are not just sport or evil; they are often for survival. And later in the collection, the regulatory process is more fully developed.

The ants, the anthills and the activities in the anthills are the next to be focused on. The reader sees a lot of wonders: the building, maintenance and defence of the anthills. This is so perfectly presented, as one observes the “pyramid of the forest, / with a queenly Pharaoh... [and] ... moatless castle” (10), that one begins to wonder if the anthill is not the best of places to dwell in. The most fascinating of all is the re-engineering of the lives in the anthills, and this emphasises the maintenance of the balance just talked about. The division of labour is equally fascinating.

“Forest Echoes” begins from plants, and ends with plants, and hedged between these extremes are other elements from and of the earth, such as animals. This is the case of a journey that has come round full circle, after touching on all segments and sections of the forest. Importantly, everything in this section of the poem serves to remind the people of the yester-years in the jungle, the African forest, which is rich with abundance from nature; yet, reality must prevail and as such, memory is called upon to abate:

... now

Memory,

loud whisper of yester-voices

confluence of unbroken rivers

lower your horse of remembrance

Let me dismount (12).

Memory, personified as a horse-rider, and described as “loud whisper of yester-voices” and “confluence of unbroken rivers” is called upon to “lower [his] horse of remembrance” so that the poet-persona may “dismount” (12). Here, memory becomes a metaphor for transporting the poet-persona down history lane and round the earth.

In “The rocks rose to meet me,” the reader is ushered into the grove and groove of the gods which is also the house of gold. This is a rich and sacred home from which “Olosunta” spoke first” with an “eloquent” voice, and “Oroole” came next. In lines replete with personification, the poet-persona presents these voices that are testimonies as to the treasures locked up in the environment for all to carefully access. In a bold statement, the poet-persona reminds the people that “earth is where we stand / earth is where we strive” (15), reminding the people of the function of the earth as a home. Therefore, human beings must be conscious of the fact that the earth provides sustenance for them.

As a follow up to this, and an expatiation of the message, Osundare goes on to identify the provisions of the earth: these are flourishing cornfields and fattened tubers. These bountiful harvests are made possible by the efforts of the earth, which provides the space for the crops to grow and produce, as well as the nutrients, enhanced by “elephant grass,” which “follows the land,” “the living water from your [the] rocky arteries,” which “swell the grain / with living water” (15). All these are made possible by the presence and effort of the rock of “Oroole,” Olosanta” and other natural phenomena. Therefore, “the hoe does not scoop a sterile clod / ... the dibble does not drill a deafened dross” (15). This is a sure promise and there is the hope that the

earth must release her bounty that humanity and the others in existence (the environment) might live.

In “Harvest call” the poet furthers and concentrates on the bounties of the earth. For example, he enumerates yam, corn, cotton and beans as resulting from the fertility of the land. So, one sees “fattening yams” full of zeal to enlarge and so valiantly crack heaps and “a dough of contention smooth down / the rugged anger of hunger” (18). All these happen in Iyanfoworogi. Then, at Oke Eniju, “... Coy cobs rocked lustily / in the loin of swaying stalks” (19) and “here in May / the sky was a riot of pollen grains / and ivory mills waited (im)patiently / for the browning of grey tassels” (19 - 20). And in June, “corn cobs flashed their milky teeth / in disrobing kitchens” (19). Also, at Ogbese Odo, cotton pods’ lips are parted by December’s sun, and the busy farmsteads are draped “in a harvest of smiles” (20). All these are references to the bounties which the earth can and does bring forth.

In the last segment of this poem, a lot of rhetorical questions are asked in which the poet-persona seizes the opportunity to enumerate most of the other foods that have not been mentioned earlier. As a result of this, the reader is reminded that,

Uncountable seeds lie sleeping
 in the womb of earth
 uncountable seeds
 awaiting the quickening tap
 of our waking finger.
 With our earth so warm
 How can our hearth be so cold (20-21)?

The land, a metaphor for the environment, has the capacity to and does nurse the dormant seeds into action, and the sleeping ones to wakefulness. Yet, there is hunger in the land. Therefore, the poet-persona asks, “with our earth so warm / How can our hearth be so cold” (21)? This means that people are not supposed to experience hunger since the earth provides enough for mankind, but unfortunately food is lacking.

The first rain in the poem, “First Rain,” comes to fulfil Osundare’s (the rainmaker’s) invocation and plea that earth’s pain be assuaged. So in the poem the reader sees “the wing of the haughty dust” being clipped by the first rain and then, “a cooling warmth embraces / our searching soles / [and] / through her liberated pores / our earth breathes again” (29). This is another indication that the earth cares for herself, and is self-regulatory and regenerative; it also cares for humanity. And so nature is rejuvenating as seen in “rain-coming,” where life returns to the environment, the grasses and other vegetations growing anew; the earth is cool and all are fresh and appear well. This does not mean that there are no problems anymore, since the core of the earth is still dry and hot and the arsonists are not yet repentant:

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).

In a lamentation tone, the poet-persona invokes the images of dept and dryness as well as destruction: “deep”, “dry” and “barn-burners”. Strengthening this is the employment of alliteration.

The sense and feeling of renewal is further pursued in the next three poems. For instance, in “Who says that drought was here?,” there are “green guests around” and “the rain has robbed the earth / in vests of verdure,” there is “herbal joy”; the termites return from the anthills, “butterflies court the fragrant company / of fledgling flowers,” “the swallow brailles a tune” (34-35) and so on. Here, nature is seen at its best, taking care and bringing forth herself in health and glamour, and causing joy to permeate everywhere. This is after the iron fingers of drought had tightened the drum surface of the earth, and the earth had seemed dead, as presented in “Raindrum” (32). The implication of this, therefore, is that the environment (earth), or nature has the capacity to regulate its chemistry and bring everything to a balance and a state of perfection.

The environment is ambivalent. It oscillates between good and bad, the positive and the negative. The different negative manifestations are metaphors for the evils that humanity propagate, activate and execute in their interrelationship with fellow humans as well as other entities that make up the ecosystem. The rain could be disruptive, and viewed against the backdrop of the beautiful and magnificent things and capabilities of the earth. One could rightly posit that nature, the environment, the totality of which is represented by the earth, is ambivalent, oscillating between good and bad, fullness and emptiness, fruitfulness and scarcity or lack and destructiveness and protectiveness. But in all, the earth regulates herself. The ambivalence is only a regulatory process.

In “Excursion,” the poet-persona takes the reader through the village and among the rustic elements of the environment of the typical village, and by this, he introduces the reader to

the fact of his being “Farmer-born peasant-bred” in the poem “Farmer-Born.” In this poem, the poet-persona, while employing numerous alliterative and onomatopoeic words, leads the reader to the knowledge of the abundance in the village (rural) environment. So the poet-persona “sounded kicking tubers in the womb / of the quickening earth,” “fondled the melon breast / of succulent ridges” in a relationship reminiscent of sexual intercourse. He has also “... sought iroko refuge / at hungry noons,” “plucked the pendulous promise of ripening / pawpaw” and has “... rattled the fleshy umbrella / of mushroom jungles / rustled the compost carpet of fallen leaves / and savoured the songful clatter / of opening pods” (43). Other literary devices used in the presentation of the environment are personification and metaphor.

In the poem “Ours To Plough, Not To Plunder” (48 -49), the poet-persona details how the earth should be handled. According to him, “The earth is ours to plough and plant” (48). This is to ensure that she yields her abundant food, water and wealth, because, “Our earth is an unopened grain house, / a bursting barn in some far, uncharted jungle / a distant gem in a rough unhappy dust” (48), which must be worked that her wealth, her treasure, may be unlocked. Therefore, the poet in a final statement in this poem states that

this earth is

ours to work not to waste

ours to man not to maim

This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder (49).

This is aptly rendered as music orchestrated by such devices as repetition, alliteration, assonance and so on as employed by the poet-persona in the excerpt above. It is in this state that the earth could yield her best; a state in which the earth is treated affectionately and nursed like, not just a human, but a baby.

But there is hope, a light at the end of the tunnel, as the poet tells the reader that “Our Earth Will Not Die” even if we:

Lynched

the lakes

Slaughtered

the seas

Mauled

the mountains

... Our earth will not die (50).

Osundare has been able to present to the reader, through the numerous imagery and other literary devices, the abundance which the earth possesses, irrespective of what human beings say or think about the environment. Some of these literary devices include metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia, invocation, alliteration, repetition, rhetorical question and lyricism.

Ecocentrism in Tanure Ojaide’s *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel*

Another poet whose poems are studied from the ecocentric perspective in this research is Tanure Ojaide. One of the themes presented by Ojaide in his *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* is the beauty and benevolence of the earth. In the poem “Gathering the Singing Craft,” an early poem in the collection, one is introduced to the benevolence and beauty of the environment. One sees the sun smiling, and children making friends with the streams:

Now is the season marked by the sun smiling

profusely over a million reeds of falling rain

and thrilling the world with a festival of fun.

In childhood we laughed off tears at play;
 in sweating storms we made friends of streams
 and dived into water to resurface with smiles (4).

In the first three lines of the excerpt, nature is personified, "... the sun is smiling / profusely over a million reeds of falling rain / and thrilling the world..." (4), so it becomes easier and natural for children to "laugh off tears at play" and make "friends of streams" (4). Cementing the conviviality, its continuity and the bond created by the poet in the poem, the poet uses sound effects provided especially by alliteration, verbs in the progressive form and the personal pronoun "we". The relationship presented in the excerpt above is a clear manifestation of what the relationship between humans and the earth should be. It is not surprising that the relationship is this cordial. The reason for this is that there was harmony between humanity and the earth. However, one must be quick to add that this cordiality was before the ecodegradation started.

Continuing on the identification of the beauty and bounties of the environment, the poet-persona in "When We Hear the Name of President" declares that these are beauties that have turned curses on the people of the Niger Delta. The bounties mentioned here include oil, gas, green (vegetation) and water. This is how the poet-persona puts the situation:

because oil boku for our land;
 because gas boku for our backyard;

 all the green God take cover us dey go;
 the water the Almighty give us they poison (57).

This admits to the fact of there being a lot of bounties and nature's own benevolence on the people. But the contention is that these have become the sources of problems and pain. The employment of pidgin in this poem is significant. It makes the message more immediate and serves to link the message with the people of the Niger Delta among whom pidgin is prevalent.

In "Victory Song" the poet-persona presents the environment as rich. The earth is a place which provides for man, and generally supports life. The poet-persona says,

Root crops grow and flourish underground
despite the menacing army of black armoured beetles –

Look at the brimming barns in the backyard
and see what became of several tubers of yam.

....

There's no end to the possibilities of hope;
a miracle harvest escapes vagaries of the weather

("Victory Song", 91).

The earth, the totality of the environment, has the capacity to adapt to changes which enables her produce sustenance, manifested in "the brimming barns in the backyard" (91), and then regulate herself, no matter how capricious the weather may be. Alliteration, as used in the excerpt, provides music even as it creates the continuum in the provision which the earth makes available. Humanity is wrong in thinking, that they regulate the environment, and put in place the necessities which enable the earth to maintain herself. The earth is self-reliant. This is also true of the forest, about which the poet-persona states,

The axe threatens with its filed large tooth,

the worm picks piecemeal with its might

but the tree will grow to centuries;

its offshoot reach into millennia (91).

This is the hope, the only hope of sustenance of mankind and all nature. Here, there is the power of resilience and rejuvenation, as “the tree will grow to centuries / and “its offshoot reach into millennia” (91).

Another strand one observes is the presence of the bounties of the environment. It is clear that the earth is rich beyond human imagination; and the potentials are more than as identified by man or ascribed to the earth by humanity. This is strong in the poem “The Faith of Our Lingua Franca.” The forest is noted for abundance of fruits and other delicacies, in addition to almost all the foods that are fed upon by mankind. The other foods and delicacies, especially the aquatic, are got from the waters, which also belongs to the earth. In language replete with images of food, the poet-persona captures Aminogbe’s experience of the bounties from the forest when he says that, “Aminogbe recounts his childhood delights: / Wild apples, cherries, grapes, and breadfruit / garnered from the forest...” (69). Continuing, he identifies the uses of the provisions of the forest. “Grandma” is said to employ them as delicacies with which, “(she flavoured fresh fish dishes” (69). One of such is “lemon / leaves, [which] fortified the body with secret chants” (69). From the aquatic environment, the poet-persona identifies some provisions which are also valuable. According to him,

Creeks and rivers flowed all year round

and fishing with hooks brought home

fresh and salt water fish – Catfish and
mudfish were metaphors for adult acts (69).

It is not surprising therefore, that the poet-persona concludes, “So forest and rivers gave out with both hands / What he needed to live in the land of his birth (69). This is the hallmark of the benevolence of the environment. Nature is so rich that, no matter how humans may choose to look at it, it provides for them what they need to survive and live a life of comfort. In this poem, “Lingua franca” has become a metaphor for the abundant provisions made available by the forest for humanity.

In the proverb of the Urhobos which is also a proverb from the Niger Delta people, as well as the other people who make up the southern region of Nigeria, the benevolence of the earth is also established in “Invocation”. Here, poet-persona states, *"when the cherry fruit finds its favourite, / it falls freely for him to pick"* [author’s emphasis] (3). The repetition of the idea emphasizes and makes it much clearer to outsiders as well as those who subscribe to the saying. The speech manners of a people gives insight into the social and otherwise pattern of relationships, both at the inter- and intra- human levels. It is built into the complex matrix of a people's sociology and psychology. The proverb is repeated in the next but one stanza, and at the same distance the closing stanza is recast not in the mold of probability but the affirmative, thus: *"The cherry fruit has found its favourite / and it falls freely for him to pick"* [author’s emphasis] (3). Therefore, the environment is benevolent, although sometimes in a selective manner. There is no argument that the poem, "Invocation," is addressed to Aridon, whom Ojaide has said is the “god of memory and muse of the Urhobo people” (158).

In section iii of the poem, "Gathering the Singing Craft", more of the bounties of the earth, and her benevolence, are returned to in the discussion of the birth and growing up of the

child who is born for all in the communal landscape of the African environment. Some of the lines run thus: "he fended for himself and friends collecting fruits" (7) and "...he loved to sit under umbrella trees" (8); "Hurricane blew fish from far away into his water, / the land was his school" (7). The emphasis here is on the varieties of food provided by the environment for the sustenance of mankind. Spread in-between these lines and around them, there are listed some eco-friendly activities which are embarked upon by the child. According to the poet-persona,

He now rejoices that his catapult shot no bird;
 . . . He smoked out no game from man -
 holes and shrank from slaughtering any fowl
 ("Gathering the Singing Craft", 7).

This is different from the act of annihilation of fishes with "Gamalin 20" ("Dirge II", 140.)

While discussing the socio-political situation of the people in the poem, "Good or Bad", the poet hints at the generosity of the environment in her provision for mankind. This is how the poet-persona puts it, "Aminogbe concedes: no cabal / should usurp the commonwealth; / enough morsels of the pumpkin / to sate the multiplicity of mouths" (10). And while commenting on the past through the present in "In the Castle of Faith," the poet-persona concludes the poem with a reminder of what nature holds for man and how she presented it to soothe or serve humanity. The poet-persona states that,

Every group has a story of salvation.
 Different waves free the drowning from sharks,
 different moons lead the way for the lost.

A river ferries fugitives, welcomes them

into its foothold - Ethiope, Benue,
 Comoe, and Volta, you are saviours.
 ("In the Castle of Faith", 20-21)

One impression one gets from the above excerpt is that the environment is caring and protective for the hunted and oppressed. It provides succour for all creatures.

"Smoke" starts with the line "The tree thrills with wealth of green leaves" (41). This suggests the abundance from the earth. The poet-persona is at his best in the presentation of the bounties and beauty of the earth, an idea which is further discussed in the poem "The fate of our Lingua Franca". Here Aminogbe is presented as recounting his childhood days and delights; and this is in remembrance of the benevolence of the environment. According to the poet-persona,

He [Aminogbe] listened to birds, the choral ensemble
 of weaverbirds, parrots, soloist and flutists

that piped the night away and at day became
 work songs of young and old in the fields.

creeks and rivers flowed all year round

. . . .

So forest and rivers gave out with both hands
 what he needed to live in the land of his birth;

. . . .

green was the lingua franca

he learnt from ebullient leaves (69-70).

The forest is personified as a food vendor and source of comfort for human beings, represented by Aminogbe. The interaction between the forest and rain is the foundation of this provision which ultimately gives rise to the “wild apples, cherries, grapes, and breadfruits” (69). Significantly, the forest which is a metaphor for the environment produces and presents musical performance in the form of “the choral ensemble / of weaverbirds, parrots, soloist and flutists” (69), and by this, kills the boredom of the night, and soothes the people as they work during the day. It is not surprising therefore, that the “forest and rivers gave out with both hands / what he [Aminogbe] needed to live in the land of his birth” (69). And in "State Executive" the poet-persona actually uses the term "land's fortune" (23) to refer to the bounties of the earth which mankind has mercilessly and indiscriminately siphoned.

In "Love Song," a poem devoted to the examination of Nigeria, the poet-persona once more takes up the issue of the beauty of the environment. Here are some lines to show this:

I have explored the far-flung contours

from Mambila, Jos, through Obudu

down to Ikogosi springs and the sheer

green luxuriance of the Niger Delta.

Where else is this lush body, this beauty

that is the cartographer's beloved angel?

A centenarian's lifetime is not enough
to spend in the bosom of this beauty -

her bounty a gift of the kindest gods
my pride; envy of the outside world. . .

("Love Song", 102-103).

The first two stanzas of the excerpt above presents the geography of the region covered in the presentation of the beauty captured in *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel*.

Ojaide sums up the ecocentric appeal in the poem, "The Bill of Rights". One of the conclusions one could draw from the poem is that everything and being have their importance. This is the whole essence of ecocentrism in literary appreciation. Ojaide has presented, in this poem his ecocritical manifesto. According to him,

To the minstrel every day is Earth Day
with a bill of right for all the living.
He signs affirmative action for all species
of butterflies, iguanas, sun-birds and others;
he researches to prolong the life-span of worms,
flies, bees and all threatened by early death.
Beauty that scares, the snake will by right of
life be protected. If it were not there, what
would test the temerity of the forest guard (152)?

The poet also espouses the right of the earth, the flora and fauna. This could be summed up in the concept of environmental protection and management. In the second stanza of the poem, the poet-persona states,

They have their concerns as any society,
 need privacy to be themselves at home and
 so want their territorial integrity respected.
 - Farmland is tolerated
 with good husbandry
 fishing should be scaled down
 not to decimate the population;
 hunting should be banned for sport
 to avert a pogrom of the game tribe (152).

And moving further, the poet-persona makes some recommendations as punishments for those who violate the environment. He declares: "Let poachers receive maximum sentence. / As for prospectors and polluters, let / them be charged for crimes against life" (153).

Considering the benevolence and beauties of the earth, the poet-persona poses the question, "in whose interest is this virginal beauty?" The response which Aminogbe gives, according to the poet-persona, is "For all humans" (152).

The final recommendation which the poet puts in the mouth of the poet-persona in the last stanza of part one of the poem, "The Bill of Rights," is that the environment should be allowed to flourish and enjoy protection against human destructive tendencies; and that these beauties should be treasured. According to the poet-persona,

Let the earth hold to the lingua franca of green,

and like indigenous peoples enjoy protection.

- As for the choral ensemble, let it play on
without human cacophony. Let the beauty
and smell of the forest remain forever treasured (153).

While laying emphasis on the Niger Delta region, Ojaide has examined the totality of the environment of the Nigerian landscape and has demonstrated that the earth is capable and does provide sustenance and beauty for herself and mankind. Among the numerous literary devices employed are imagery, invocation, chant and lyricism provided by alliteration and repetition among others.

Ecocentrism in Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs*

About the same fervour runs through *Delta Blues and Home Songs* as in *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel*. The collection also dwells to a large extent on the beauty and benevolence of the environment. Ojaide has in *Delta Blues and Home Songs*, as in the other, intermingled the treatment of the ecocentric tendencies with the anthropocentric behaviour while making out ample time to delineate the inherent attributes of the earth.

Very early in the collection, in "When Green was the Lingua Franca," this is seen. The poet-persona lists a lot of the items of benevolence of the earth, from forest properties to those of the waters, while remembering his childhood. The environment is seen as a park which teems with life. According to the poet-persona,

In the forest green was
the lingua franca
with many dialects.

Everybody's favourite,

water sparkled . . .

I remember *erhuvwudjayorho*,

such a glamorous fish

. . . .

Uwara, beauty that defiles

tyranny of *Akpobrisi*,

forest manic and recluse -

what flesh or fiber fails

to capitulate before charm?

Snails and *koto* lured me

. . . .

Urhurhu grapes coloured

my tongue scarlet,

the *Owe* apple fell to me

as cherries and breadfruit

on wind blessed days [author's emphasis] (12).

The term “lingua franca” calls to mind the idea of language. In the metaphor of the leaves, which stands as the language of the forest, the poet-persona gives a run-down of the many elements of the beauty and bounties of the earth. Among these are “*erhuvwudjayorho*, such a glamorous fish”, “*Uwara*, beauty that defiles”, “*Akpobrisi*, forest manic and recluse”, “Snails and *koto*”

“*Urhurhu* grapes”, and “the *Owe* apple” (12). Other bounties listed in the poem include cotton tree, gum tree, *Ikere*, froglets, skipper-fish, and the

Undergrowth kept as much
 alive as overgrowth, the delta
 alliance of big and small,
 market of needs, arena
 of compensation for all. . . (13).

This is of course, before the advent or arrival of Shell, which “. . . Broke the bond / with quakes and a hell / of flares (13).

In the second poem, “My Drum Beats Itself,” the poet-persona tells the reader that, “No one doubts anymore the fortune slipping away” (16). This confirms the idea of there being bounties in the environment, although they are slipping away right before the people, occasioned by human actions.

The theme of the beauty and benevolence of the earth, the environment is returned to, most forcefully in “Delta Blues,” although with early and persistent references to the despoliation of the earth. The opening line of the poem runs thus: “This share of paradise, the delta of my birth” (21). In the second stanza, beginning from the third line, the poet-persona identifies some of the elements of the benevolence of the earth of the Niger Delta. These are presented in the following lines, “this home of salt and fish / . . . / palm oil, yams and garri. / This home of plants and birds” (21), and shortly in the next stanza the poet-persona asks pertinent questions. These questions accentuate the beauty and benevolence of the earth. According to him,

Did others not envy my evergreen,
 which no reason or season could steal

but only brighten with desire?
 Did others not envy the waters
 that covered me from sunstroke,
 scourge of others the year round (21)?

The implication of this is that from the beginning, the environment of the Niger Delta region has been bestowed with wealth and splendour beyond compare with other regions.

The collaborative effort between the environment and humanity is one of the themes discussed in the poem, "New moon." The poem opens with reference to the arrival of the moon along with the emotion and the general atmosphere it generates among the people, especially the children,

We welcomed the moon
 with jubilation -
 children had allies in women
 to whom the new moon
 must have meant much too.

 The divine guest increased
 not only our laughter
 but also our fold (84-85)!

Here, in the last lines, the moon is presented as being an agent of productivity, of procreation, since it is an agent of multiplicity of children: "The divine guest increased / not only our laughter / but also our fold" as "our allies indoors gave birth, / after nine moons" (85). This is how much the environment can aid humans in the effort to provide for, protect and propagate the specie.

Ojaide's concern in *Delta Blues and Home Songs*, and as explicated in this section is the environment. Also of interest are the earth's inherent features. Ojaide has been able to artfully present these bounties and beauty via his application of the crafts of a groit under the influence of "Aridon", the god of memory and the muse of Urhobo people. In addition to these, Ojaide employs such literary devices as repetition, alliteration, imagery and personalization leading to the implication of the poet-persona and human beings in general.

Ecocentrism in Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood*

The last of the poets whose collection of poetry is examined in this section of this dissertation is Nnimmo Bassey. It must be stated that Bassey is too angry to sing about the beauty of the environment. He is immediate, and deals drastically with the situation as he sees it desolate. This is the temperament of an environmental right activist, a man committed to the rights and sustenance of the earth.

Perhaps, the remembrance of home, Niger Delta, serves to remind Bassey of the beauty as he sees the earth in its luxury in other places, even outside Africa. One of such places is Tidbinbila, "a nature reserve near Canberra, Australia" ("Tidbinbila", 49). In "Tidbinbila," the poet-persona presents the beauty of the earth. Also, the abundance of the earth is fused with these beautiful dispositions of the environment. The focus is the terrain, vegetation, animals, especially those considered esoteric, exotic and or endangered. How these scintillate the senses and bring succour to alienated and frustrated senses and minds is the primary focus of the poet-persona. It is the awe of the Koala and Kangaroo, peaceful in their game reserve, which radiates all the effervescence of the beauty and bounty of the earth, which it is a part of. This is what has

enthralled the poet, and has the capacity to hold the attention of humans as a whole. This is what the environment is made of: beauty and bounties.

Bassey has been able to present the beauty and bounties by means of some literary devices and presentation techniques. One of these is the melancholic tone, which is reflected in the first line, “Lost in the beauty of Tidbinbila” (49). To sustain the mood, the poet uses the line as a refrain, and ultimately closes the poem in the same line. This is an apt mood for the loss of the provisions of the environment in the poet’s home, the Niger Delta.

In an action reminiscent of love-making, the poet-persona interacts with the environment, “I caress an assortment of ferns”, even as he scrapes his soles on path “beaten by folks in / Search of peace / on this rocky trail” (49). Worthy of note here is the implication of the folks, who are not sophisticated. They are both “rural” and “peaceful” with the environment. Thus, together with the environment they blossom, such that one sees “elephant eucalyptus trunks”, the koalas dozing and the kangaroos “skip and gambol in the sand”, while he looks on “lost in the beauty of Tidbinbila” (49).

Bassey has, in this poem, demonstrated his commitment to the explication of the inherent features of the earth; he has done this in a very skilful way and by the appropriation of the device of comparison, images reflecting the activities of the animals of the wild (koalas and kangaroos) even as they live in restriction in game reserves, and images of healthy and symbiotic co-existence between human beings and the biosphere.

From the foregoing, it has been demonstrated that the earth is full of bounties and beauty. It is in the light of these, against the backdrop of the devastation caused by humanity, that the poets are calling out to all mankind and especially the inhabitants and operators within the Niger-Delta region not to destroy the environment anymore. This is the hallmark of ecocentricism,

which focuses on the espousal of the earth. Osundare, Ojaide and Bassey have been able to present the theme of ecocentrism in very skilful ways by the appropriation of various literary devices, such as images reflecting the activities of the animals of the wild, images of healthy and symbiotic co-existence between human beings and the biosphere, invocation, incantation, chant, and lyricism and emphasis provided by alliteration, onomatopoeia, repetition, and rhetorical questions. Some of the other devices employed are personification, metaphor, and personalization leading to the implication of the poet-persona and human beings in general, in matters relating to the interrelationship between human beings and the earth.

CHAPTER FOUR

IN DEFENCE OF THE EARTH: ANTHROPOCENTRIC READING OF SELECTED POEMS OF NIYI OSUNDARE, TANURE OJAIDE AND NNIMMO BASSEY

The poets whose works constitute the corpus of data in this study are Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey. Niyi Osundare in *The Eye of the Earth*, Tanure Ojaide in *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* and *Delta Blues and Home Songs* and Nnimmo Bassey in *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood* have presented the theme of anthropocentrism. The poets have made every effort to expose the anthropocentric disposition of humanity with a view to debunking it and stating that it is evil and detrimental not only to the environment, but also to mankind, both in the short and long run.

Anthropocentric Reading of Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*

The degradation of the earth also forms the locus of attention of Niyi Osundare in *The Eye of the Earth*. In this collection, he traces the relevance of the earth and from there moves on to establish that there is degradation of the earth. The poems open with the establishment of the earth as the foundation of all life, the beginning and end of all existence. From this the poet moves on in "Forest Echoes" to transport the readers through memory lane to the beauty, grace and the wealth of the earth, and introduces them to the very first source of despoliation of the earth and the reasons, as well as the source of the reasons. These are the Whites, Capitalism, and the lumberjacks, here represented by the 'agbegilodo.'

Among the prides of the forest, as presented in "Forest Echoes," the "forest of a million trees," are such as "Oro," "Iroko" which "wears the crown of the forest," "Oganwo" which "wears the surrogate crown," "Ayunre," the Palm which must not be challenged for it is the

“evergreen conqueror of the rainless seasons” (5 -7). But these are beauties which are tampered with and destroyed by human beings and their agencies, and they are here metaphorically represented by “agbegilodo,” the timber lorry. The activities of the lumberjack, which are purely for economic reasons, serve to start and perfect the processes of deforestation, which also destroy the natural habitat of the other animals, birds and other organisms, and indeed, the whole environment. Among these unlucky lots, as mentioned by the poet, are fishlets, tadpoles, birds, beasts, antelopes and partridges. There are also the weaver birds, squirrels, chameleons, millipedes, praying mantis and the ants (the termites). This situation has also been discussed by Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Andrew Myers. According to them, “the African environment is also a victim of commodification, and has been for generations” (1).

From the anthills, the poet-persona focuses on snakes: “my parting eyes sing silent requiems / to the vertebra of expired snakes” (11). The snakes are dead, and the cause of death is not mentioned here, but perhaps, it is as a result of the unkind invasion of the forest by human beings and their agencies of destruction. Then, from the dead snake in the undergrowth of the ferns, the poet-persona moves on to talk about “patonmo,” which is described as the “coy mistress of gallant pilgrims” (11). It is such invasions that have left the environment devastated and the earth so cold in the sense of the current state of lack of provision. We have been told that our hearth is cold and our health and lives are failing. This is the problem that faces mankind in this age. The reason for this, the poet-persona has given inkling to in “Forest Echoes.” It is the “agbegilodo,” the metaphor for deforesters and all assassins of the earth, the mutilators of the forest who leave the forest “wounded / ... / A stump here, a stump there / like a finger missing from a crowded hand” (5).

Then, in “eyeful glances,” the journey through the earth continues through “desert” and “January’s door”, and of course till before “the waters of March” and the “gruelling heat / of a hungry season” (23 - 24), and from dawn to dusk. Colours play very important roles in this section, thus, the reader sees “orange idioms”, “flame trees”, “petals of fire”, “orange hands”, “bloodshot eye”, “gloomy alleys”, “NEPA’s darkdom”, “distant glows”, and “sparks of amber blood” (24-25). Amidst these colours, and accentuating them, are violence, anger, and the urgency of war everywhere. The reader is also shown the different activities performed by the season – the cloud, the weather, the sun, the horizon and all other entities that make up the climate of Africa – these activities are reminiscent of human activities in their destructive endeavours.

The reader feels a sense of pressure and tension prevalent everywhere, and such pressure and tension could be discomfiting for humans. This discomfiture, having been built up from the previous stanza, is left for the last stanza of “eyeful glances” by the poet-persona. Here, he states that,

a careless match a harmattan rage
 our farms are tinder
 for a dispossessing flame;
 a criminal touch, an incendiary plot
 a blaze conceals the trails
 of looters of state (25).

These are images suggestive of arson and all other forms of destruction; therefore, the ecodegradation exposed in the activities of the lumberjacks at the beginning of the poem translates into the erosion of the human and humanistic values and ethics.

Consequently, the poet-persona in the next segment appeals that the “earth’s pain be soothed” in a poem of the same title. The poem opens with, “the sky carries a boil of anguish / let it burst” (27) and goes on to identify this burden which is metaphorically represented by dust which pervades everywhere from the “kitchens” (27) to the “eating halls”, “busy bedrooms”, “scheming boardrooms”, “retrenching factories” and “power brothels” (28). Again, social issues are unequivocally raised and closely engrafted to environmental ones. From all angles, one observes that the earth is in pain; the inhabitants are in pain; the sky is burdened and the forest is vanquished. The earth is personified in this poem, just as in almost all the other poems. The environment is not presented as a framing device or setting for literature or humanity, but as a character by the poet.

Still carrying on the sense of the earth being capable of both positive and negative impact, at least in the short run, the poet presents to the reader some of the negative impacts of rain (a part of the earth) on the other aspects of the environment in “But Sometimes When It Rains.” Here, one observes that “sometimes when it rains / an angry thunder raps earth’s ears / with its hands of fire” (36), and “a heartless storm beheads / the poor man’s house / an impregnable mahogany falls / across ... farmward path / fields and tender tubers” (36) become submerged and “trysts is washed out” (36). All these are violent images and metaphors for the evils that humanity propagate, activate and execute in their interrelationship with fellow humans as well as other entities that make up the ecosystem. They are also reflections of the interaction among the biospheric elements. The images serve to make more palpable the extent of damages that are reflected within the environment.

However, all the magnificence of the earth have changed and the bounties are gone, both from the environment and the poet-persona since he has become “classroom bled.” Western

educational system and culture have dehumanized the Africans and have divorced them from the environment, which they have, hitherto, lived in harmony with. The consequence of this is that hunger has been invited, and it has taken over. This is a phenomenon that is alien in Africa, for even when the occasional droughts set in along with the attendant famine, these were only very short-lived and far flung, occurring almost once in generations. On the contrary, now the poet-persona states,

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

The only food Africans rely on now to fill their stomachs is foreign rice: “Carolina rice.” Africans have become aliens in their land and no longer relish their traditional African menu, a neo-colonialist phenomenon. It is this foreign influence that has led to such manifestations as the lumberjacks and the accompanying “agbegilodos.” These have obviously created “The Wretched of the Earth,” as Frantz Fanon would say, and these are manifested in numerous forms, such as beggars, snakeskin shoes and Mercedes tyres, the hewers of wood and hurlers of water, the mine workers, whether living or buried alive, and women who suffer in the hands of the male chauvinists. The import of this is that human beings have despoiled the environment so as to have exotic materials (snakeskin shoes and Mercedes tyres) which are social indicators. This is akin to what Gilbert Tarks Fai, observes in his analysis of *A Dance of the Forest*. According to him, “by trying to improve his life through forest exploitation, digging of roads, agriculture,

construction of houses and bridges etc [sic], man destroys the natural habitat of these supernatural forces” (97).

Social stratification, therefore, is a product of Western education: he is “Classroom bred.” Consequently, the poet-persona 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 strong rhetorical questions firmly stitched by means of alliteration generated from harsh fricatives (/f/ and /h/) and onomatopoeias (“fritter”, and “harry”), the poet-persona mourns the attitudes of human beings; and in the last but one line, juxtaposes the intention of human beings with the effects of their activities in the paradox “who live that earth may die” (45). The reason for these rhetorical questions is that those who despoil the environment do not seem to be from this earth, as their lifestyle obviously indicates that they do not have the interest of the environment at heart, or they do not put the earth into consideration. One can also observe that the oppression of the environment has dovetailed into social problems of oppression of the masses by the rulers, as well as the female gender by the male.

In the next poem, “What The Earth Said,” the social problems are brought fully round-faced with environmental ones, and made full issue for discussion, and its relationship with the ecosystem and the entire human race is established. Here, there are the “sleepy boots plodding,” “hands calloused by wood and steel,” “foreheads foraged by grit and grime,” “Penuried lives, spent, in ghetto dungeons,” “foremen soulless like their whistling whips,” “*executhieves* hold fort

for alien wolves,” “factorylords roll in slothful excess,” “backs creak on heartless machines,” “lungs powdered with asbestos death,” and “lives snuffed out like candles in the storm” [author’s emphasis] (46-47). The expressions are laced with powerful images signalling violence and destruction. This is conveyed by means of the numerous alliterative and onomatopoeic words. Also reflected in the expressions is the insensitivity of people to the plights of others, as well as corruption depicted in “*executhieves* hold fort for alien wolves” (46).

The social problems of inequality and poverty, which the poet has aptly captured using strong onomatopoeia as well as alliteration, build up to health issues of poisoning at the factories and ultimately early death; as such, “the earth receives these green fruits,” which have been “snuffed out like candles in the storm” (47), and the earth calls out,

behold these seeds planted so soon
 in the season before the rains
 let them sprout in the month
 of daring struggle;
 let them bloom
 and kill the killer pest (47).

Images of premature deaths are presented in the green fruits which are snuffed out like candles in the storm. The poet-persona also draws attention to the green fruits becoming seeds planted so soon in the image reflective of farming. And as plants, the seeds are expected to germinate and grow; and then they are expected to blossom “and kill the killer pest” (47). The violence depicted in the poem is initiated by the killer pests, which are human beings; and the seeds planted so early are to revenge against human beings. Fai has observed the adoption of the strategy of revenge by the environment against human beings. According to him, *Murete* reminds Eshuoro:

“we have claimed our own victims – for every tree that is felled or for every beast that is slaughtered, there is recompense, given or forced’ (96). Manifestations of the revenge by the environment are the different environmental hazards and diseases experienced in today’s world.

The injustice metaphorically started by the lumberjacks and their “agbegilodos,” which is reflected in the death of the trees and symbolically the death of the environment, has come full circle to befall human beings. This, in all ramifications, has justified Barry Commoner’s First Law of Ecology, “everything is connected to everything else” (16). Consequently, the poet in a pacy rhythm calls out in the last but one poem that the earth is “Ours To Plough, Not To Plunder” (48). In the poem, which is of the same title, the poet-persona details how the earth should be handled. According to him,

The earth is ours to plough and plant

....

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 - 49).

Employing contradictory terms, the poet presents how the earth should be treated, “work / waste”, “man / maim”, and “plough / plunder”. It is still obvious that alliteration plays prominent role as a link to bind the poem into a unified whole. These devices help to emphasize the importance of the message presented by the poet: the message of the preservation of the earth.

But as stated earlier, there is hope, a light at the end of the tunnel, since the poet has stated that “Our Earth Will Not Die” even if the people,

Lynched

the lakes
 Slaughtered
 the seas
 Mauled
 the mountains
 ... Our earth will not die (50).

The connectivity which the poet tries to establish in the poem is heightened by the link provided by means of the alliteration running from every line into the succeeding one, and finally ending in the assertion, "Our earth will not die" (50). The general observation of the environment reveals that,

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 (50).

Another device employed by the poet is personification. The earth is personified. This makes the manhandling of the earth more sensitive, as the reader feels the harm as occurring himself. At least, the reader gets the feeling that a sibling is being harmed and becoming a patient on a sick bed: "a poisoned stream staggers down the hills / coughing chaos in the sickly sea"(51).

It is at this point that the poet-persona rhetorically asks to know who or those that lynched, slaughtered or mauled the environment. The answer has however been supplied at the outset of the collection, and has been reiterated within the poems: it is human beings; and with the rain falling "acid, in the balding forest," "a nuclear sun rises like funeral ball / reducing man

and meadow to dust and dirt” (51), humans have no haven or resting place, they must die just as, “Fishes have died in the waters. . . / Birds have died in the trees. . . / Rabbits have died in their burrows. . .” (51). These deaths are sinister, since they are occurring in very unnatural circumstances. The conditions under which the elements and other beings are dying are those that are supposed to sustain them. Here again, the many “death” serves as the link to hold the poem together, as well as amplify the effect of the ecodegradation. Fai, in his analysis of *A Dance of the Forest*, also observed the numerous deaths. According to him, “Eshuoro is not only concerned about the destruction of the forest but the destruction of the environment as a whole. He laments on the fact that four hundred million ants have been callously smoked to death by humans” (96).

Osundare has been able to demonstrate that human beings are destructive to the totality of the environment. They have been responsible for the death of the earth and all the inhabitants. One of the strongest devices used by the poet in the realisation of his themes is sound effects, manifested in alliteration, onomatopoeia, repetition and even refrain. Also among the devices used is diverse imagery reflecting activities from the numerous disciplines of human actions. These have served to bring to fore the themes presented by Osundare in *The Eye of the Earth*.

Anthropocentric Reading of Tanure Ojaide’s *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel*

In the collection, *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* by Tanure Ojaide, which to a large extent is an incantatory piece, the reader comes into dialogue with a poet and oral bard who under the influence of Aminogbe and Aridon x-rays the flora and fauna, the socio-political and historic as well as economic life of especially the Niger Delta region. From the ecocritical domain, especially in the debunking of the anthropocentric views of humanity as practised today,

Ojaide enumerates and discusses the effects of human activities on the environment. Suffice it to say that the bulk of human activities are injurious to the earth and ultimately dangerous to mankind. Among the many tendencies identifiable in this collection, one could isolate such phenomena as poetry as incantation, poetry as history, poetry as soul-searching, poetry as a social tool and poetry as an instrument for the emancipation of the earth (the environment, the biosphere). Also there is a progression from the oral tradition and history to environmental, and other social and moral issues bordering on oppression, protest, vengeance and the lachrymal. It is important to state at this point that the concern in this section of this work is to demonstrate how much and how far Ojaide has posed a defence for the flora and fauna of the world generally, and that of the Niger Delta in particular. Also, the other poets have similar themes although not so much in the incantatory manner as Ojaide has done. For instance, Bassey is so bitter that he has no time for music and beauty, only venom.

From the very first moment, the poet-persona touches on environmental degradation and / or its consequences in the collection, *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel*, which contains thirty-six parts. In "Invocation," the first poem in the collection, reader is introduced to the issue of environmental degradation and its manifestation. Although the poet-persona invokes for the wherewithal needed to be able to sing his song, an incantation, a search for the initiation and the password into the well of knowledge and ability needed to be able to tell his tale, he immediately makes references to the state of decaying or decayed world with an environment that is dehumanized and thus is fast being eroded. According to him,

... flight needs more

than flair of wings to cross the landmass

threatening death from dehydration.

I have a craggy mountain to climb
 into the clouds to breathe free –

the low lands corrupt with haze and dust (1).

From this it is so obvious that the environment is being strangulated, and that this phenomenon has already started taking her toll on the earth and mankind. The use of images of roughness, difficulties, and filth as reflected in the excerpt above speaks volume about what is to come in the collection of poetry.

In “Gathering the Singing Craft,” the poet introduces to the readers the benevolence and beauty of the environment, while creating the atmosphere as it used to be before the destruction wreaked by man. However, this harmony, beauty and benevolence described in the first two stanzas of the poem are not to last; there is potent danger afield, just as a cobra which “...coils at the threshold” (4) against which eyes must be kept “open even in sleep” (4) is introduced. This becomes most serious when one realizes that “living is working through beclouded years” (4). Therefore, there is fear, uncertainties in life. This is in spite of the wealth and beauty which life and nature offer.

In “Part II” of this poem, the reader is given a hint as to the source of the danger and the fear that are to come: “... he routed / the legion of ragged ailments and left the bush / for the pliable road that brought trucks from town” (4). This is the crux of the matter; the road brought trucks from town. This is the signal of “modernity,” the influence of the West. The west hangs on to the philosophy that has guided them, the anthropocentric philosophy as entrenched in the

Holy Book of Christianity: *The Bible*. Therefore, it is not surprising that the poet-persona declares, "...it is the cheetah's turn to run the race of its life" (5). This is because humanity, especially Africans and Nigerians of the Niger Delta region, have embraced the "modernity" that has sought to bring comfort to them. This is a "modernity" which contrasts with the rural life which has nursed, nurtured and raised the people of the Niger Delta, who lived and had continued to live in harmony with nature. This rural upbringing is presented thus:

A woman conceived, delivered the child for all –
together they raised him to run their errands.

Creeks he jumped over or waded, the land
he cleared or tilled in grandma's company;

he fended for himself and friends collecting fruits,
playing bruising games behind parents in moonlight (7).

He had a mutual cordial relationship with the environment which provided the needed requirements for all in existence, a relationship built on mutual trust and respect. Thus,

He now rejoices that his catapult shot no birds,
he sprang from his post in panic when the rabbit

burst out. He smoked out no game from man –
holes and shrank from slaughtering any fowl (7).

This is a summary of the life and relationship that ought to be between humans and others in nature. It is a symbiotic positive relationship that ought to generate joy. And the poet-persona continues and overtly states that the plague of humanity will not abate,

until there is only one heartbeat
that powers every race everywhere

until there is only one human right
for ants and elephants, barons and beggars (15).

This is a cardinal statement about the total relationship between humans and other entities. Thus, the poet links the fate of humanity with that of the flora and fauna. All must be equally provided for and protected so that there might be peace and tranquillity in the world. It must be stated that the clamouring for only one human-right for ants, elephants, barons and beggars presupposes the absence of right to freedom or right to life for some of those elements identified above.

In “State Executive” the poet-persona becomes more specific in the delineation of the uses to which the contents of the environment are being put; also some of the bounties are mentioned along with these uses. For example, he says, “Remember the many sacred trees / downed to make Ogiso’s state chairs” (24). To provide for the “comfort” of humans, the environment is seriously tampered with to the extent that now human beings have, “coconut without milk” (25). Therefore, now things, the environment and all nature are out of tune, both within and across the species.

It is at this point that the poet-persona lets the reader into the history of the contact of the Niger Delta people, and so Africans, with the white man who brought “development” into Africa and the Niger Delta region. Here, also, the earlier conception and the African notion about the

white man, as well as the African practice of hospitality, are examined. According to the poet-persona,

First came potokiri, ghosts of ancestors or of
unworthy ones refused admittance at Urhoro

...

We had buried them long ago, but know
how the seeming dead come back to life

...

The divine ones in their thoughtful ways

Had rowed necessities into our backyard!

The future would tell their kind of guest (26 - 27).

First, the whites were believed to be the ghosts of the dead come back to life; the ghosts of those dead who were denied admittance into the land of the spirits. They were thought to have brought messages and provision from the forebears to equip the living with the things needed for survival. However, the kind of gift was still doubtful as there were no clear message(s) about the gifts. Therefore, the confirmation about the identity and nature of the ghosts was left for the future. The truth of this situation is revealed soon after they came in the name of trade and religion, as “they crossed their foreheads / with oil or gave bread to recant their truth” (28) and as “they dangle Dane guns, / fired the first shot at / gods and kneeling devotees (28). Also, “they bid for palm oil as soon as / men climbed down the palm tree / ... / buying at no price and selling for profit” (29). It is this self-centeredness that has led to the general atmosphere of destruction

of the environment. It is a narcissism that has sprung at the foot of the anthropocentric philosophy as designed by humanity.

The invaders who were brought on “the pliable road” by “truck from town” (4) moved from the purchase of palm oil to the extraction and exploitation of crude oil. Oil has become a constant and a metaphor for wealth. This, they did and are doing without regard for the health of the environment. Thus, they drill and drain the earth of her fluid and bounties, leaving her to suffer deficiency and malnutrition. According to the poet-persona,

they leave them in drought.

The same Niger Delta
of palm oil, a protectorate
still gushing oil to refineries (31),

and on the next page, the poet-persona overtly calls out the names of the effect and objects involved in this newfound situation. He calls them: “flood,” “drought,” “dead rivers” and “gas flares.” According to him,

Flood and drought hold sway,

with what do farmers and fishers sustain
their lives in the midst of dead rivers, oil –
strangled soil, and toxins of gas flares (32)?

In a situation where the rivers are metaphorically dead, the soil is strangled and there is gas flare leading to the destruction of even the air, all of these elements that should sustain life (water, earth and air) being destroyed; life certainly will come to a halt, to put it mildly. Therefore, the

violence against the environment is invariably linked and mingled with the violence against humanity, and both are fused into one.

It is from the pidgin poem, “When We Hear Names of President,” that this phenomenon is felt more strongly. There is a strong hint at the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the destruction of Odi community for daring to fight for the emancipation of the environment as well as the people of the Niger Delta region. This is glaring in the lines,

From im big big house, one president
 send plenty plenty soja come kill us
 ABC, alias Death Squad, send e own
 come seize our pickin and hang am.
 And Mr Big Belle send lightning
 come sweep Odi with fire (57).

The two heads of government who directed the operations, that have been captured in pidgin, a language which is popular among Nigerian, are General Sani Abacha and President Olusegun Obasanjo. The reasons for the protests that led to the wastage of human resources discussed above are presented in pidgin, a language common with the people of the Niger Delta region. It is replete with repetition and onomatopoeia. Also, the use of personal pronouns “we”, “our” and “us” implicates the readers and every other person as victims of the killings and destruction of the land. Below are three stanzas from the poem,

We don tire dey cry
 na inside hell we dey –
 gas dey burn for our sky whaam whaam,
 our river rotten (shell dey shit for inside)

because oil boku for our land;

because gas boku for our backyard;

all the green God take cover us dey go;

the water the Almighty give us they poison (57).

This is the crux of the matter: oil and gas prospectors (Shell and others), with the support of the Government of the country, have polluted and are polluting the waters, the air and the soil. They have destroyed the elements, and the totality of the biosphere with them. Therefore, earth has become crushing and suffocating for humanity and other elements. As such, the people have to protest, just as the earth does sometimes in the form of natural disasters. This is the duty for which Ken Saro-Wiwa, Odi and her people have been annihilated. Also, one sees a mix of the death of the environment and the people: “River and creek full with dead body, / blood don drive water comot” (58). This is a worse kind of pollution; and this is what stares the people in the face, what they live in: a combination of decaying body, blood, water, crude oil and gas flares. This is more than what any life (human or flora and fauna) could survive in; and it is most painful because those destroying life tend to do it, with relish: “our animals and crops / e dey destroy with smile” (59). The “e” in the quotation refers, separately and collectively, to the powers that be: The presidents or heads of the various governments.

From this point in the poem, the issue of environmental pollution is returned to frequently. In “Part III” of “The Fate of Our Lingua Franca,” Aminogbe is presented as coming to a place, “*where Uvo/Ogidigbo once lay by a tributary of the Okpari River, admiring the river*

before an oil company came to poison it with toxins to a lifeless thing” [author’s emphasis] (72).

Continuing, the poet-persona states that,

The stamp of silence stares at me.

The map of a volcano flares at my face.

Shells’ oil spill snakes towards our feet

the forest sighs in agony; the refuge fumes (72).

Consequent upon the activities of Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC) and other oil companies, the forest is in agony, the rivers are dead and the landscape has been altered to the point of no recognition. In this excerpt, as in most other cases, the poet makes use of personification in his presentation of the environment as he talks about the environment in human terms. Also, alliteration (/s/ and /f/) is employed in the realisation of the quality of music which also emphasises the violence done to the environment. The poet-persona states, “that line is a river, which falls short of the sea”, and goes on to question: “Why is there no valley beside the mountain” (72)? For all these, the poet-persona blames Shell and Government: “Above, the sky burns with the fury of angry gods, / Shell and Government stoke the flames” (73). However, in the fourth line before this, the poet-persona admonishes that people should not try to absolve ourselves of blame for the degradation of the environment. The poet-persona states: “Don’t excuse yourself from the cruel rites of your caste. / How many times has a diversion accelerated arrival” (73)?

The attack on the perpetrators of the mayhem against the environment continues in “Noble Inheritance” where the poet-persona again talks of “a delta of many creeks that I have / to ply and keep clean from Shell’s spilled toxins” (89)? Whether oil or toxins, the hallmark of the

entire tirade is that there is the pollution of the environment leading to the death of the elements, the flora and fauna, and ultimately humans.

Further in “The Fallout”, the poet through the poet-persona makes two very important statements, the first highlighting the acts of ecodegradation and the second emphasizing the fact of the destruction of the earth or the destruction of the ecology finally resulting in the destruction and / or death of humanity and every other organism on earth. According to the poet-persona:

The big heart that bleeds for beheaded trees,
bleeds further at flaring of flowering plants
and for the asphyxiation of rivers by oil barons.

Every life deserves living without the tyranny
of dominion by the armed or the numerous;
the killing pangs of one leaves another in pain (95).

This coincides with Barry Commoner’s “First Law of Ecology” which states that “everything is connected to everything else” (16). The implication of this is that as the environment suffers, so are the people (humanity inhabiting the area) suffering. Furthering the connection, the poet makes use of alliteration which not only emphasises the destruction of the environment, but also enhances the music of the poem. This is seen in the first stanza of the excerpt above. Also there is a strong sense of metaphor in the presentation of the trees which are “beheaded”, “flowering plants” which are flared and the suffocation of “rivers” (95). The poem is largely built on metaphors of violence and suffering, and personification.

In spite of the abundance which the earth gives to humanity, people always want more than they require or need to be comfortable, and so the earth suffers while human beings die by instalments. It is no wonder, therefore, that the poet-persona tells us:

no wonder Aminogbe recalls the old days
with pain and wishes the wealth grew

rather than depleted by famine
that furnished no yam or cassava (69-70).

This is the situation today, a situation of famine, hunger and starvation, death and destruction. So, it is not out of place that Aminogbe and the bards should recall the old days with pain, wishing that the old days, when humankind was one and at peace and unity with the environment, should return so that all could be restored, protected and preserved.

There are consequences for environmental degradation, and the poet-persona presents them thus:

There is no salvation without green garments,
no sustenance comes outside herb-dark waters

no comfort living with dead providers,
no life without living soil, rivers and air.

There are outbreaks of seizures and rashes;
monstrous ailments consume the populace –

the fire from above is an accursed weapon
that folks have to bear till they drop

into hell, a shell of their proud selves (70).

The degradation of the environment has caused discomfort, diseases, sicknesses and deaths on earth. Therefore, it becomes difficult to live. The environment which is presented in the images of soil, rivers and air, are described as dead: “dead providers” (70). It is not surprising therefore, that “there are outbreaks of seizures and rashes” (70); and that “monstrous ailments consume the populace” (70). In addition to these, there is excessive heat which has become like a weapon: “the fire from above is an accursed weapon” (70). This is perhaps as a result of the gas flaring which has contributed to global warming.

In a language evocative of religion; the poet introduces the requirements for survival in the world. The elements in the excerpt are presented as the necessities for survival, and in a string of metaphors they are presented as sickly and ultimately dead. The implication of this is that the soil, rivers and air (the elements which sustain life) are all dead or are in the process of dying, and as such can no longer sustain the other beings and biospheric elements. The consistency of death is emphasised by the repetition of “no” at the beginning of each of the first four lines. Consequently, humanity’s existence is threatened. To make matters worse, “Oil companies care not for the dying” (70). These are the companies which have acted in collaboration with the Federal Government to kill those who have dared to complain about the wrong being done to both the environment and the people of the Niger Delta region.

As part of the effects of ecodegradation, the poet-persona states in the closing stanza of section (i) of "fatalities" that, "The cemetery devours adjoining cities / and the living have only a short time / to wait for their inevitable turn" (99). The overall implication of the entire poem is that the environment is polluted and the flora, fauna and the entire biosphere is dead or dying and as such, mankind is dying.

The causes of all these have been identified by the poet-persona in "Dirge II" section iii thus: "We humans have always been too self-centred / What of the many others dead from our own hands?" (140). It is important to note that human beings employ "Gamalin 20" (140) for fishing, and by this kill the required and other organism that are necessary for the maintenance of the ecosystem. This has summed up the actions of humanity and their consequences. The reasons for the actions are also given. And now people must wait for all the dead who are from the flora, fauna, biosphere through humanity. This idea continues in the next section (iv) where it is observed that everywhere there is the sound of silence because death has taken its toll. But the truth is that it is humans who sustain death in its endeavours, since they are the agents and harbingers. The last stanza of the section states, "There are many kinds of death / and we continue to sustain them all" (142).

Commenting on the level of environmental degradation within the Niger Delta region, Nonyelum Chibuzo Mba has described the people and the environment thus:

His people needed the fish that ... had sustained them from the beginning of time.
 So also did they need the farmland to cultivate cassava, yams and other
 subsistence crops to live on! They also had to grow much needed vegetables....
 oil slicks, blow outs, and gas flares had destroyed that life. Even the rain that fell
 was so sooth-black that no more did anybody drink rain water, which of all

waters, used to be described as God-given water. The people had lost their green refuge as well. Their forests used to have deep green and lush foliage, the pride of the tropics, but that had changed... (234).

From the analysis on Tanure Ojaide's *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel*, it has been demonstrated that the concern in the collection is the destructive attitudes manifested by human beings against the environment. It is obvious that human beings are directly implicated in the environmental problems that are pushing the world into extinction. To be able to achieve this theme, Ojaide has employed a lot of oral performance elements, invocation, recollection, personification, metaphor, alliteration and images reflecting the destruction of the environment and its death.

Anthropocentric Reading of Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs*

In *Delta Blues and Home Songs*, Ojaide dwells more on protest, especially as he decries state high-handedness, oppression, silencing of the people and the activists, and the murder of those who dared to speak against environmental degradation and human rights abuses. It is therefore natural that environmental issues are raised in the course of discussing Saro-Wiwa, as he is known to have been persecuted and murdered by the state for defending the environment of the Niger Delta, which is also his home. The analysis of the collection *Delta Blues and Home Songs* in this section is targeted at exposing the anthropocentric disposition of humanity and the consequences of such attitudes and acts.

Characteristically, Ojaide in the collection, *Delta Blues and Home Songs*, presents the readers with poetry which is suffused with oral performance elements and the invocation of the muse of Urhobo. This is Aridon who is invited to bring about recollection and the powers of

creativity to energise the poet-persona to produce the work he has at hand, as well as make the "little" he has in his mouth yield abundance before, and to the audience.

As in his other collection (*Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel*), the first poem in *Delta Blues and Home Songs*, begins with the recollection of the source of his power of creativity. This poem, "My Drum Beats Itself," is simply an invocation. Some of the lines run thus:

Now that my drum beats itself
 I know that my dead mentor's hand's at work
 This sound I lipsing and others think is mine
 could only come from beyond this world -
 the little from there makes abundance in my hands.
 Inside the drum hides a spirit
 that wants me to succeed beyond myself (10).

Consequent upon this, he (the poet-persona), as a griot, invites to the audience to sing with him. By this, the entire exercise therefore becomes a collaborative endeavour from which none is left out, a technique which Sam Ukala has called "folkism" in drama (qtd in Ugwu and Orjinta, 80). This is a technique on which African literary art thrives. The whole essence of communality is employed in this opening poem.

In the second poem, "When Green was the Lingua Franca," the reader is presented with a defacing of the earth, the environment. To drive home this point, the poet-persona presents in the first three stanzas the bounties of the environment, but from the fourth stanza, the reader is shown the ugly side of where people are living today with a declaration in clear terms the causes of the degradation that has affected their habitat. The causes of this devastation are the oil

prospectors and exploiters, here represented by Shell. According to the poet-persona, "...Shell broke the bond / with quakes and a hell / of flares" (13). A little further, one hears the poet-persona describe the seasons which could be said to be disjointed and crazy due to the activities of Shell as a result of the activities of the oil prospectors. Here, the poet-persona state that,

Explosions of shells to *under*
mine grease-black *gold*
drove the seasons mental
and to walk on their heads [author's emphasis] (13).

The lines "drove the seasons mental / and to walk on their heads" (13) refer to the climatic problems which the world is experiencing today. Here, the persona joins his voice with that of all other people to blame the catastrophe on the environmental abuse, which in this case is occasioned by the activities of the oil extracting companies represented by Shell, a symbol of environmental misuse and abuse.

There is a myth among Africans generally about why the sky is so high today, and this myth often blames women for the recession of the hitherto low and benevolent sky which used to feed humanity. According to the myths, it's either that the women were hitting the sky with the handle of pestles or that a particular woman cut more sky than her family could eat and had to keep the left-over till the next day. And this was a taboo, against the law which forbade such acts. But the poet-persona in this poem exonerates the women, but blames Shell (SPDC) and their associates for this. According to him,

Then shell broke the bond
with quakes and a hell
of flares. Stoking a hearth

under God's very behind!
 Stop perjuring women for
 their industry, none of them
 drove God to the sky's height;
 It wasn't the pestles thrust,
 that mock love game,
 that caused the eternal rift (13).

The poet has effectively used sound symbols, captured in “broke”, “quakes” and “flares”, to evoke the images of violence and destruction that have characterised the Niger Delta landscape.

In the next but one stanza, the poet-persona gives a list of the degradation victims or the aspects of the environment that are degraded which are described as "victims of arson." Some of these are the Ethiope river, trees and streams. These, according to the poet-persona, were all done in the name of search for jobs and wealth by human beings. The poet-persona states,

I see victims of arson
 wherever my restless soles
 take me to bear witness.
 The Ethiope waterfront
 wiped out by prospectors -
 so many trees beheaded
 and many streams mortally poisoned
 in the name of jobs and wealth (13).

It is clear all at once that the imagery employed here are all of violence, poisoning and murder. One finds in the lines such words as "victims," "arson," "beheaded," "mortally," "poisoned,"

"massacred," "carnage" and "amputated." As a result of the brutality, murder and carnage, the poet-persona now has to concern himself with communing with ghosts of neighbours, especially as the trees and the entire flora and fauna have been annihilated, leading to desert encroachment in an area which had hitherto been known for the wealth of green vegetation. All these are presented in a stanza built on a strong sense of personification in which the vegetation is represented as human beings who have been murdered. The poet-persona states,

. . . .

I failed to plant trees
beyond my fenced compound
in the desert-advancing land.

For fear of others' rights, I left the majority to be
massacred, a treeful carnage.

Now I commune with *ghosts*
of neighbours and providers
whose healing hands of leaves
and weeds have been *amputated* [emphasis mine] (14).

The idea of the poisoning of the rivers and the massacre of the earth is carried on in the next poem, "Seasons." This is glaring in the first stanza where the facts are presented and the commencement of the indictment of the leadership of the country Nigeria adduced. By the time one reads to the end of the poem, one realises that the poet-persona has issues with the focus of attention of the ruler which has succeeded in causing more of disunity than unity. The first stanza of this poem reads,

Our towns rose from riverbank of barter
 Once the waters sustained colouring from oil slick
 Our constitution could not remain the same again -
 we selected delegates to take our prayers to Abuja,
 but guns scared them from the promised land.
 If you took fins from a fish, would it still be fish?
 If you told farmers of sand dunes that their hoes
 couldn't make a dent on famine, they would curse
 the oracle for souring their soil with parching wind (15),

and the poem ends in a one line stanza which speaks volumes:

No one doubts anymore the fortune slipping (16).

These excerpts ring a note of woe. There is no doubt that the fortune is slipping away from man, but human beings often do not realise that the same fate has befallen the biosphere. The biosphere is slipping from man just as it is slipping away from the totality of the environment.

In one of the title poems which is also the title of the first section of the collection "Delta Blues," the poet returns to the theme of the environment. Here, the reader is presented with the image of a delta reeling from "immeasurable wound" and from which "barrels of alchemical draughts flow," and now, "the rivers are dark veined / a course of perennial draughts" (21). Consequently, the poet-persona, while empathising with the earth and at the same time lamenting the death of the flora and fauna as well as the rivers and the entire biosphere along with himself, states,

I stew in the womb of future.

I live in the deathbed

prepared by a cabal of brokers
 breaking the peace of centuries
 & tainting not only a thousand rivers
 my livelihood from the beginning
 but scorching the air and soil (21-22).

So, the earth is faced with the problem of desertification, which is echoed in “scorching the air and soil” (22) and global warming. The whole idea of global warming, desert encroachment and deforestation along with the other consequences of these are also highlighted in the next stanza.

According to the poet-persona,

My birds take flight to the sea,
 the animals grope in the burning bush
 head blindly to the hinterland
 where the cow's enthroned.
 The sky singes my evergreen leaves
 and baldness robs me of youthful years (22).

The poet employs the images of fleeing and fumbling, as in a war situation, to present the encroaching desertification.

In the poem, "Journeying," the poet-persona discusses primarily the trial and death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the human and environmental rights activist who was slain by the Sani Abacha-led government of Nigeria. As expected, there cannot be a discussion of Saro-Wiwa without reference to environmental pollution and degradation, as these are the causes for which he was "murdered." Among the references to the plight of the earth which are presented in this poem are the ideas of a swamp becoming desolate and birds disappearing. These portend the death of the

biosphere (the waters, flora and fauna): “a column of helmet-dressed anthills matched through his youth / now a desolate swamp over-ridden by brigades of speculators” (30), and in Part II of the poem the poet-persona says, “even the disappearing birds assemble in the sea skies - / all go back to the sea that awaits their remains” (31). So the remaining birds must die, for they are already disappearing; just as the swamp is already desolate. And while still discussing the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the poet-persona harps on the environmental issue which is the crux of this and most of the Ojaide's poems.

There is a psychological twist to the growth of man, in his dealings with the other aspects of the earth. In addition to the obvious treatment of the abuse of the earth, there is also addressed the movement of the mind of man from the anthropocentric towards the ecocentric, or rather humanistic, as it should be. In "I Will Save My Enemy" the poet-persona states,

A butcher gave up his executioner's knife
 after a cow tied to a stake looked him in the eye -
 whatever he saw there made him think of his life.
 Imagine if every Safari hunter were hounded
 by the herd they decimated for sport (38)!

This butcher is unlike Shell and her counterparts in the oil prospecting industry; he is also different from the mass of humanity who "decimate" the flora and fauna for sport. This butcher is unlike you and I who live that the earth may die. Another important issue raised by the poet-persona is that the "butcher gave up his executioner's knife" after the cow, which was to be killed, looked him in the eye. No one knows what the butcher saw there, but perhaps he realised that he could have been in the state of the cow, or that the death of the cow is going to affect him adversely. This calls to mind Barry Commoner's "first law of Ecology" which states that

"everything is connected to everything else" (16). This is made most pertinent on the realisation of the import of the next few lines about how it would look like if the herd were to hound down the Safari hunter. In addition, the morality of the actions of man is therefore called to question. This borders on environmental justice.

The biosphere, flora and fauna being deformed and / or going into extinction, as in most other cases in this collection, form the reference points in the poem, "Visiting Home." The poem opens with the lines, "I have gone back to the spring at its abandoned source / to half-quench my burning tongue" (45), and ends with the lines,

I stand before the homeland's spring:
I can neither drink of its present state
nor will I throw away the calabash -
I must fashion ways to drink of it
without its dirt, drink it only clean (45).

This is the case of a piece of bone stuck in one's throat. The fact that the source of the river is abandoned presupposes that the river along its course is stale and cannot be drunk. Little wonder then that the water of the river and other bodies of water cannot be drunk since they are polluted at the sources. The poet-persona and the people as a whole are left stranded. Therefore, they must seek for a way to make it clean. This suggests environmental consciousness. The source of the river must be attended to and cleaned, so that the entire course, volume and body of the water can be potable. A question that arises here is, "What is the cause of the abandonment of the river source?" The answer to this could be found in the hands of humanity generally and Shell particularly who represents the bulk of the despoilers of the environment. Sandwiched between the opening lines and the closing ones are a myriad of issues that have adversely affected

humanity and is still affecting them. They form a kind of web from which there is no visible escape.

The examination of Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs* has shown that the major concern of Ojaide in this collection is environmental degradation with emphasis on the death of the biosphere and its consequences on human beings. The poet has also identified the agents of the degradation to be human being, and has condemned the human activities, especially oil exploration, through which human beings have consistently degraded the earth. Among the literary devices employed by the poet for the realisation of his theme are images of poisoning, diseases, sickness, dying, and death; images of fire, burning or roasting, excessive heat, et cetera. All these are captured in the language that is expressive of the mood of people of the Niger Delta and the occasion. Other devices used by the poet are invocation, alliteration, personification and metaphor.

Anthropocentric Reading of Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought it was Oil But it was Blood*

Out of the three poets under study, Nnimmo Bassey is the least Afrocentric, yet overtly ecocentric in the sense of advocating the health of the earth. He shows that the values of the earth are being devastated; he displays the anti-anthropocentric view in his utter condemnation of the human effort and attitude of destruction of the earth and the entire biosphere. It should equally be noted here that he focuses sparingly on the bounties of the earth, at least in a direct manner. His outlook and approach is more global geographically than that of the other poets. Osundare and Ojaide are more Afrocentric than global; they are more restricted. But in all, the three are committed to the earth and the environment. Although his other collections make statements about the earth, Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood* has as its thesis the

anti anthropocentric disposition to the relationship between humanity and the non-human species in existence; and the perspective from which he approaches this is the effects of oil exploration and exploitation. Therefore, it is not surprising that a large part of the poems in the collection dwelt on the effects of the activities of the oil prospecting multinationals and their supporters and partners, the governments.

The degree of the concern expressed by the poet, Bassey, could be discerned from the moment one opens the poem. The "Dedication" runs thus:

A salute to
the Champions and Arrowheads
of the struggle...
That our earth may not die (5).

The trajectory of thought is not muffled at all. It all stands crystal clear: the earth must not die. Also echoing from the lines is the issue of struggle which suggests a fight to save the earth. The earth is a metaphor for the environment.

This theme resonates in the title poem of the collection "We Thought it was Oil - But it was Blood." In this poem, Bassey takes the reader down memory lane, from the euphoria which greeted the "granting" of "independence" to Africans, and Nigerians particularly, through the new form of colonialism which manifests, among others, in this new quest for oil and the ultimate destruction of the earth and humanity with her:

The other day
We danced in the street
Joy in our hearts
We thought we were free

. . .

Looking up,

Far from the crowd

We beheld

Red-hot guns (13).

It is obvious here that Africans were never and are not free; it was only a thought. And from this moment, fear grips the people as hearts jump into mouths and emotion wells, and the people leap in fury. It is at this moment that the people see "Bright red pools" (13) which, without doubt, is of "blood" camouflaged as oil since the people are dying as a result of the exploration of oil from the earth, their environment. The thought of blood calls to mind the numerous deaths within the Niger Delta region, starting from Isaac Adaka Boro, Ken Saro-Wiwa and the nine Ogonis, through the Ijaw nation and the entire inhabitants, who although do not, like the activist die suddenly, but who die by instalments via poisoning of the environment. Consequent upon the massacre, the people are petrified, as reflected in the following lines: "Tears don't flow / When you are scared" (14), as such, the reader sees mouths open from which no screams are heard. The poet-persona gives reasons for all these. He states,

We see their Shells

Behind military shields

Evil, horrible, gallows called oilrigs

Drilling our souls (14).

The government, through the instrumentality of the barrel of the gun has subdued the people and empowered Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC), a metaphor for the oil prospecting and environmental degradation agencies. Thus, with poignant audacity, the

companies generate "polluted streams," and "A million black holes / In a burnt sky" (14-15). Therefore, it is not surprising that "we are the living / long sacrificed" (15). Human beings are dead because the environment is dead, having been sacrificed. The overall implication of this is that what the people thought was oil was actually blood, the blood of the people, the rulers and the ruled, as well as the biosphere, for none can be spared in this holocaust.

The case of oil politics is pursued further in the next poem, "When the Earth Bleeds." Here the poet-persona contradicts the general belief that oil promotes the economy, and says that, rather, it suffocates or kills things. According to him,

I hear that oil
 Makes things move
 In reality check
 Oil makes life stop
 Because

The oil only flows
 When the earth bleeds (16).

The life support fluid of the earth is oil, so like human blood, when it is drained the earth will die. Yet humans are, or seem, oblivious of this fact and, in the efforts to get this oil, there are,

A thousand explosions in the belly of the earth
 Bleeding rigs, bursting pipes
 This oil flows
 From the earth's sickbed (16).

Consequently, the earth is devastated and the environment is polluted.

It may suffice to identify two of the manifestations of the effects of the activities of the oil exploration companies as presented in this poem: "...gas flares" and "...in Ogoniland we can't even breathe," and this is as a result of "...their greed" (16-17). Therefore, because "...the oil only flows / When the earth bleeds," the poet-persona finally calls on all to join hands and bandage the earth: "Let's bandage the earth" (17). The word "bandage" calls to mind a case of injury. The earth is an injured patient who and must be treated as suggested by the bandaging, if she must survive.

The effects of the environmental pollution established in the preceding poems are the focus of "Climatic Climax" where they are actually presented as having reached the zenith in their manifestation. The overall implications of the global warming are enumerated. They include the earth as a furnace, the sun stroke occasioned by the heat of the sun, and the tide which now swells while the land now subsides. The reader also sees the "...jerky rocking / Mantis praying a dirge / In the battle for life" (19). These are images of dying and death. In the midst of these, it is not surprising that the poet-persona states,

I feel the lips of flame
 On the lid of my pate
 The rivulets on my brow
 Streams in a parched land
 Vanishing signs... (19).

The dominant image here is that of fire, heat and dryness, which are orchestrated by "flame". The poet-persona, therefore, calls on the tourists, who are perhaps collectors of artifacts, "*my friends*" not to:

...depart the shores

Of this land *my friends*
 With textiles, crafts and e-mails
 Alone in your pouch (19),

but to:

Take some sands along
 Touch it to your head
 Keep some in your chest
 Connected we stand
 For we are children
 Of the earth (19).

The overall implication of this is that humanity ("my friends" and I) must stay connected with one another and all with the earth, since all creatures are part of the earth. But earlier, it has been made clear that human beings are the ones killing and destroying the earth: "...the drums of / Men bent on murdering / The weather" (19).

Among the influences of man on the earth are the death of the flora and fauna, global warming and the overall destruction of the environment. As such, there is no stopping the angry voice of the poet-persona. This is again made manifest in "Oceanic March." According to him, what issues from the exhaust pipes of the oil prospecting companies, the general industries and other activities of man is death of the biosphere, and this death is also of humans. This is metaphorically presented in the first of the two stanzas. Thus:

...
 This pile of dirt
 Heaps of death from

The exhaust pipes of death
 Can't I refuse
 The poison
 And douse the flares from the nozzles of evil
 This cocktail of an air I'm forced to breathe
 . . .
 This death sentence
 In our homes (20).

Again, the evils of pollution and gas flaring form the locus of attention, and so this situation is described as "death sentence." To make matters worse, the death sentence is issued and dwells in our home, as such there is no escaping the devastation. Consequently, humans, in this web with the earth, are doomed to die, and a very painful death. It is for this reason that human beings "...face the spasms of pain" (20).

The time of day and night are not spared this doom occasioned by the flares from the "nozzles of evil." They are disjointed and out of tune. This is captured, via the images of disunity and disorganization, thus: "... the flares had come / And disunited the day from the night" (22), such that the demarcation between day and night is dissolved. The perpetrators are the oil prospecting companies: "...Shell, Exxon-Mobil, Texaco. NNPC, Elf, Chevron, Agip, Statoil and similar entities [which] agreed" (22); and this is done just as the supreme identity of "The United Niger Delta Oil Company Incorporated . . . / Shared and divided the land and the sea / Took the entire coasts of our country" (22). This is a reference to the historic, but shameful, partitioning of Africa. It is along this coast that the oil belt and wells sit. The people, the flora and the fauna are annihilated "under the canopies of smoke from Lucifer's chimney stacks" (22), a biblical allusion

to the eternal damnation of Lucifer in hell. Also, the mention of the name Lucifer draws attention of the reader to the intensity of the fire in hell as described in *The Bible*, as compared to that which is experienced in today's Niger Delta. The smoke referred to in the quoted line is that from the factories and refineries polluting the environment. Therefore,

...the dead swung from the lampposts

...

Daily the bell tolls over the languishing dead

In the heat of the unresting dead

In unmarked mass graves (22).

Therefore, there are many deaths, captured in clear images, to the extent of there being "...unmarked mass graves" (22). The bottom-line of this treatise is that, "Today the earth is caught in an unending death song" (23). More worrisome is the fact of there being an inextricable link between the degradation of the earth and the degradation/inhumanity (the violence) against humanity. According to the poet-persona,

... since nature rejects a vacuum

We will suck crude from the belly of the earth

Yes, since nature rejects a vacuum

We will pump blood into the belly of the earth (23).

This excerpt underscores the necessity for the numerous deaths: nature abhors vacuum.

Not only humans, but the fauna and flora are also endangered and destroyed. It is not surprising, therefore, that "the butterflies point accusing antennas at the ponds of their spills" (23), a good metaphor for the consequences of ecodegradation. The butterflies are also dying, and the poet-persona and all who worry about our earth "...search without end for that solitary

butterfly" (23). Perhaps this is the being that has the capacity to save the earth. But now, it is going extinct, because, "Yesterday we saw a mountain of butterflies dead" (24).

Fundamentally tied to this subjugation of the earth is the factor of economic deprivation of the masses. Therefore, a Marxist interpretation follows from the explication of the poem since the focus of the United Niger Delta Oil Company Incorporated is to repatriate the proceeds from the exploration and exploitation of the earth of Africa and particularly that of the Niger Delta region to the West in dollars. According to the poet-persona, the company "keeps sailing off with its booty of dollars, greed and crude" (24).

Consequently, in "We Have One Earth," the poet-persona laments thus: "I scream for a drop of water, a drop of water / An unpolluted air, a leaf for my pate, a task for my biceps" (25) as the environment is polluted and the flora, fauna and humans are massively exterminated. In the last stanza of the poem, the poet-persona admonishes and recommends the panacea for the restoration of the environment to what it should be and so restore the much-needed balance in the universe. Here, the birds are a metaphor for the earth. According to him,

If the chattering birds
 Must not run out of breath
 Men must give nature a break
 And for a moment cease their jabber
 To allow the weaverbirds chatter songs of life
 Long postponed (26).

The consequence of this is that "men" (humanity) must give nature, represented by the birds, some respite and the opportunity to express herself, for the much-desired balance and benign climate to be restored.

The first part of the collection ends with the poem "Polluted Throats." This poem accentuates the bitter feelings expressed in the previous poems and ultimately lands on the altar of protest. Here the destruction of farms and streams is presented. This is placed against the backdrop of effeminate men and incapacitated humans. They have been psychologically emasculated, such that they lack the will power to act, and so asks, "...what can we do?" (29). However, the persona gives an answer, which although not what the people expect, as it shows docility, but is desirable. The docility as reflected in the question portrays an emasculated people. The expected is encapsulated in the manifesto of protest as the poet-persona avers: "Something / That's what we can do / And must" (29).

The poem, "Polluted Throats" reeks of Marxism, which is introduced by means of images and language laden with tension, anger and violence: "... pregnant clouds / Furious, howling like dogs / Break into thunderous detonations" (29). This tempo is sustained throughout the poem. Some expressions to show this include, "Match stick on sand paper" and "... beat / A retreat. The poet-persona gives reasons for the protest and violence, "Zambrano drinks polluted streams / ... his rice field die" (29). Therefore he cries out in anguish, asking the lone question which reeks of emasculation. However, in the last three lines of the poem, the poet-persona emphatically resolves that something must be done. This is a Marxist approach to life, a life of protest.

The idea of ecodegradation being a deplorable one is furthered in one of the poems in the next section of the collection, "Naija Project." In the first poem here, the poet-persona presents the reader with the effect of sophistication as perceived by humans. This is represented in the images of "Glass blocks," and "sensors." These are seen as having taken over the environment, and as such, the earth suffers that they might be provided. Nature is in a deplorable condition,

and having ascended upwards on the ladder of "sophistication" of the "modern" world, the poet-persona becomes apprehensive that the elements, such as birds, squirrels, and what he described as "creepy-crawlies" that make up the environment are no more. Also, the trees are bare, the branches are bald and the space is frozen. These are as a result of the activities of human beings that took him up the ladder of modernity. So all one sees around are images of devastation that have become the lot of the earth. Most unfortunate is that the only source of hope, which is a "Lone" leaf suddenly "quivers" and falls. Trees are symbols of life, but when a tree has lost its only leaf, it ceases to represent life or any other thing but death or dying. So it is no longer surprising that there are even no butterflies: "slithering along the path I ponder the absence of butter - / Flies..." (33), and "In the stillness of the air" (33), the poet-persona "ponder[s] the clarity of a sky which / Nevertheless sends showers that leaves you dry but drowned" (33). The overall message is that nature, the world and man are out of joint with each other and itself; a relationship of absurdity at the intra- and inter- environmental levels. So there is a situation in which nature dies so that sophistication and modernity may exist, yet the much-desired modernity is both dehumanising and devastating, a most undesirable thing, in the final analysis.

There is a significant graphic appearance of the poem on paper. This is the reduction of the length of each of the lines to a single monosyllabic word. The thinning down of the lines into one-word- monosyllabic-line in the second stanza of the excerpt is a graphic presentation of the low level into which the earth has been plunged. This is heightened by the image of a fallen leaf.

The poet continues in the next section of the collection, "TIDBINBILA POEMS (Or DO GREENS GRIN?)", to decry the destruction of the earth. One sees this in "Canberra," where the poet-persona, after highlighting the benevolence of the earth, identifies humans as being responsible for the maladjustment of nature. Here, he draws the conclusion that greed is the

undoing of humans: "For humanity consumed / Caught off guard / By gross consumption" (42). This is the overall reason for the human destruction of the environment.

One of the effects of environmental degradation is climate change. This is well reflected in the poem "Shuffle." Among the reflections of this degradation are such expressions as "a cup of sewage," "shivering in the biting sun," "deadly draught," "rampaging waves," and "Polar ice melt(ing) down polar waves" (45). To the poet-persona, these are reflections and images of climate change, along with the consequences. From the second stanza, the paradoxical statement, "Shivering in the biting sun" sets the tone of this change. Other images reflecting the change include, "A deadly draught", "A frozen breeze" "Rampaging waves", "Lap up water locked lands", "Polar ice melt down polar waves" and the expression "Climate Change" (45).

Although there is a sign of life which ought to blossom under normal situation, this is a far cry of the normal, as it turns out to be "A shock of flowers / Above a cup of sewage" (45), so the poet-persona states that, "On this rocky amphitheatre / I stage a mime" (45).

Two worlds which Niger-Delta people have seen are presented in the poem, "In the Backyard (or #57 Park Street)." These the two worlds are the natural and artificial. The natural, what many would call the rural, is encapsulated in,

A forest

A compost

A garden

A pond (46)

which are the natural habitats for "...golden fishes," and "...Chirping Birds" (46). Other things which are seen in this environment, and which make up the life of Africans generally and Niger Deltans particularly, are "compost heap" which could and does hold fishes and from which

occasionally they "wiggle." Among the things and activities of Africans and Niger Delta people at the dawn of Western civilization on the African continent is the presence of Bicycle, the "Iron horse" of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* which had to be tied to a tree if it must be left alone so that it does not run away, only this time and in this poem, "In the Backyard / Bicycles rest up the branches / The tree is the parking lot" (46). But with all these gone, and pure artificiality in full force, people now see,

Mirrors on the wall

Dolphins behind the glass

In the backyard

A peep indoors

An aquarium

With paper fishes

A paper sea (46).

This portrays the fact of nature and the environment having been destroyed and being no more. Natural life has been destroyed; the artificial one is now in place. Humanity must create plastic, paper and glass objects and scenes to remind them of, and represent, the natural. This is the despicable situation in which mankind has worked himself into.

In the next but one poem "Gas Flares", there is a wailing from an apprehensive and hurt soul as reflected in the pain-filled-words of the poet-persona. This refrain, which is also a rhetorical question, reeks of despair: "where will the people go?" (48). This question becomes crucial as it has been revealed that, "Now the sky is ablaze," "Now the sea is ablaze" and "Now the earth is ablaze" (48). With the life sustaining elements, the earth, the waters and the air ablaze, there will be no place for humanity and the flora and fauna to live in. So, the people will

have no place to go; rather, they will go into extinction along with other organisms in the environment. A clear indication that the end has already set in could be found in the line: "The last tortoise is gone" (48). The repetition of the word "ablaze" serves to heighten the image of fire, which the poet presents in the poem; also, it serves to show that the flame is persistent and pervading all over the environment.

All the incidents of fire are happening as a result of the earth gassing and farting and "belching dragons attack" and as "leaping tongues lick / Roof, farms" (48). These gassing, farting and belching lead to

Popping

A million explosions

A shower of soot

On open raw nerves (48).

The genesis of all these rumbling and explosions are as a result of the quest for the exploration and exploitation of oil, in addition to the quest for other means of generation of "comfort" for mankind. The summary of the content of this poem could be the death of the flora and fauna along with humanity - that is the death of the biosphere. A good and convincing experience could be got from a little time spent in the Niger Delta region, especially during the rainy season and on a rainy day. The water from the sky is usually black, filled with soot. This is also captured in this poem in a "shower of soot" (48).

In the section, "The Road to Sogosoma" the poet visits different places well outside the Niger Delta region to comment on the plight of the environment and the totality of the biosphere. One feeling, which is a fact that one gets from this, is that ecodegradation is not exclusively reserved for the Niger Delta region. Bassey's universal approach depicts this. However, in

"Facial Marks (Post-Petrol Era)" the problem of oil and its prospection, exploration and exploitation is presented along with the attendant hazards to humanity and especially the environment. The presence of oil prospectors and explorers is marked by what has been represented in this poem in the metaphor of "facial marks" (54). The lines and the installations of the oil companies are represented in the

Oil ducts
 Tear ducts
 Oil pipes
 Blood veins
 Pipes of Conflict
 Ducts of death
 Pipes of blood (54).

These pipes are ducts through which the lives of the people and the environment are sucked dry to the point of death: they are "ducts of death" and "pipes of blood." It is equally important to observe that the poet presents these marks (the pipes) as "environmental scars and death masks" (54). Other metaphors by which the petroleum pipelines have been presented include, "Forced, alien, wicked, hateful / slave marks, hellish scars..." (54). The implication of this is that the installations and the installers of these marks or masks and scars are alien; and now they "alienate us from our land / Now, we are strangers to our own soil" (54).

Traditionally, facial marks have the functions they perform. In Africa, and elsewhere, they (facial marks) are means of beautifying and/or identifying people. The poetpersona says that

Facial marks help folks
 Pick out members of the clan

. . .
 Facial marks beautify our folks
 They help us attract and scare
 and show our strength (54);

but not anymore, since these marks have become "environmental scars" which are traced "by seismic lines and illegal loggers / Transnational eco-devourers" (54). The term "eco-devourers" suggests destruction or voracious consumption of the environment without consideration for the victims. This, of course, is the attitude of the oil prospecting companies who are operating in the Niger Delta region.

In the last stanza, the locations and functions of the pipes are well spelt out. One is not left in the dark as, according to the poet-persona,

These ducts burrow into our hearts
 These pipes dry our lands
 These pipes drain our soul:
 These pipes steal our dreams (55).

And the reason for all these pipes is explicitly stated: these are "... pipes of dreams / of dollars" (55). This is the crux of the matter. The financial benefit and the overall "comfort" of humans are the hallmarks of the whole exercise of oil prospecting and exploitation. Here, it must be pointed out that not all humanity enjoy the so-called benefit of the oil exploration and environmental degradation, since to many it merely spells "sorrows and tears" (55). It is not therefore surprising that the poet-persona calls for protest against this menace, this evil, spelling doom on the whole of the earth, especially the Niger Delta region. So, one hears the poet-persona calling out,

Come together valiant souls

Drive off evil serpents from our land

. . . .

Link those hands across the seas

Let's block these ducts with our

Collective fists (54).

“Collective fists” suggests collective efforts of the people. This is ushered in by the expression, “Let's”. It is therefore a call to the people, the masses, to join forces to fight off the evil of environmental degradation and its agents, especially, the oil prospecting companies.

There is presented a thesis which in all respects synchronises with Barry Commoner's, "everything is connected to everything else" (16) in "Without the Sun", the last of the poems to be examined from Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought it was Oil But it was Blood*. Bassey tries to establish the relationship of connection and interdependence between two seemingly opposite elements or subjects. Here, it is stated that without one, the other or its value cannot be realised or appreciated. Some of these elements are "sun" and "moon," "man" and "woman," "sea" and "fish", and "land" and "life." (61). Apart from the fact of the poet establishing that the woman proves the man strong, he also states that without the man, the woman can never be said to be beautiful. There is also the assertion that the fish needs the sea to exist and that life, human lives need the land to be. Therefore, it becomes expedient that the sea and the land must be protected for life to continue to exist. The repetition of “Without” throughout the poem is significant. It not only serves to bind the poem, it also stands as a refrain which creates music as well as accentuates the interconnectivity between and among the elements and organisms on earth.

It has been demonstrated in this section that Nnimmo Bassey's preoccupation in *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood* is the condemnation of the anthropocentric disposition of

human beings in their dealings with the environment. He has called human beings to stop the degradation and destruction of the earth. In the poet's efforts to achieve the above, he has made use of various literary devices, amongst which are refrain, and images of murder, destruction, sickness, dying and death; images of the treatment of the earth which has been injured and injury; and the images of heat, fire and dryness.

From the analysis in this chapter, it has been demonstrated that the earth has been greatly abused and misused by humanity. It has also been shown that human beings have done this as a result of their efforts to satisfy their "comfort". The hallmark of the discourse is that, having developed and adopted the philosophies and doctrines of superiority of mankind and subjugation of the earth, humanity has and adopted same, have so demonstrated the anthropocentric disposition to the immediate detriment of the earth. The selected poets have been able to present these by means of the employment of numerous literary devices among which are images of amputation, slaughter, ruin, poisoning, dying, death and decaying; images of the injurious treatment of the earth which include images of dehydration, dryness and burning. Others poetic devices used include rhetorical questions, invocation, incantation, chant, personification, metaphor, and sound devices such as repetition and refrain, etcetera.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Summary

This study has analysed poems from Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey based on the anthropocentric and ecocentric theories of ecocriticism. The collections are *The Eye of the Earth* by Niyi Osundare, *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* and *Delta Blues and Home Songs* by Tanure Ojaide and *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood* by Nnimmo Bassey. The choice of poets and their collections of poetry were predicated on by the observed contents of the poems and the recent leanings of the poets guided by the poets' points of origin, which is the Niger-Delta region. The poets examined other themes in their works, but the focus on their ecopoetry is founded on the need to isolate the problems of ecological misappropriation by man, proffer solution to the recent ecological problems in the world, Africa, Nigeria and the Niger-Delta in particular, and raise awareness about these problems and solutions as presented by the poets.

In the analysis sections of the dissertation, the analysis of the four collections of poetry from the ecocentric perspective and anthropocentric disposition were carried out. Here, it was demonstrated that the poets have presented the earth (environment) as being inherently valuable, possessing value beyond what humanity has ascribed to it; among the beautiful endowment of the earth are the rich vegetation covers, different types and sizes of trees; fresh water, rainfall, wild animals, ants, birds, and other creatures; numerous formations of the earth, such as anthills, rocks and rocky grounds; the minerals, such as gold, crude oil, et cetera.

It was also demonstrated that humanity has so devastated the earth to the ultimate detriment of the earth, the flora and fauna, the entire biosphere, as well as humanity. The

manifestations of the devastation include desertification, death of the wild animals, death of the forest, air, water and land pollutions, global warming, numerous diseases and sicknesses on human beings, premature deaths and general inconveniences to humanity.

Osundare, Ojaide and Bassey have been able to present the themes of ecocentrism and anthropocentrism in very skilful ways by the appropriation of various literary devices, such as images reflecting the activities of the animals of the wild, images of healthy and symbiotic co-existence between human beings and the biosphere, invocation, incantation, chant, and lyricism and emphasis provided by alliteration, onomatopoeia, repetition and rhetorical questions. Some of the other devices employed are personification, metaphor, and personalization leading to the implication of the poet-persona and human beings in general, in matters relating to the interrelationship between human beings and the earth.

Conclusion

The environment and humanity are supposed to live a collaborative life so as to realise the benefit of synergy. This is a general conclusion one could draw from the entire thesis. But this is not so. Instead, humanity has done everything possible to annihilate the earth, simply because of the so much sought after “comfort” which in the real sense of the matter is a case of selfishness and greed. This is the reason so much harm has been done to the earth and all the contents. Consequent upon this, environmental problems have been on the increase by the day in the world. Environmental problems have been with man. This has been stated at the outset of this work. But as observed much earlier in this thesis, the magnitude and frequency of the occurrences have been very great and on a steady increase by the moment. It is for this reason that writers have started turning attention to it in their creative works. This phenomenon could be

said to have been stealing surreptitiously on humanity to the extent that they do not or have not consciously reacted to it as quickly and promptly as they ought to.

But as always is the case, an unexamined literary work is a dead art and may not be known, hence this new turn to ecocriticism for a proper attention to works which have exclusively or partially examined nature deliberately to bring the contents of these works to the people. It is not out of place to find references to ecological material, in the form of flora, fauna, biosphere and the totality of the environment mentioned, or presented and / or discussed in literary works. And these function as components of setting, one of the elements of literature. But, here, it must be observed that such are prevalent in prose and drama, where there is enough latitude for items of such character to be treated. In poetry, this latitude is limited. The reason, perhaps, is that poetry is too compact to allow for the examination of those biospheric elements along with other themes. This is coupled with the fact that environmental materials are not usually the primary focus of attention. But currently, in the world, Africa and particularly, in the Niger-Delta region, there is a conscious and deliberate inclusion of environmental themes, subject matters and materials in the pieces of literature generally, and poetry in particular.

Violence against the earth, destruction of the environment, environmental protection, harmony between the humans and the non-humans, the beauty and bounties of the earth, and her benevolence, are the issues that have been addressed by the poets under study in this work. The poets have recommended the protection of the earth by their espousal of the ecocentric disposition which has hitherto been neglected and the discrediting of humanity's anthropocentric inclination.

The second strand of theme isolated from this study is that the earth has fared badly, so terribly, in the hands of human beings, who have so violently abused her. Consequently, the

three poets studied have, in their collections, unequivocally condemned the anthropocentric nature and actions of humanity.

Most critiques of the works from the Niger Delta region are centred more on activism and resistance, rather than being earth-centred. Even when the earth is mentioned or discussed, it is with a keen interest on the study of how the activities of the oil prospecting companies and other agencies of “development” have negatively affected mankind, and not the flora and fauna. Also, other themes dealt with by writers of African extraction, especially of Nigeria and Niger Delta region, include those dealing with slavery, colonialism, independence struggle, independence, post-independence disillusionment, corruption, oppression, insecurity, and so on. But in all, the most recent and a burgeoning theme and politics is environmental literature, and Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey have perfectly keyed into this. In this study, it has been demonstrated that the death of the biosphere will ultimately not only lead to, but also mean, the death of the human population.

The poets, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey, have succeeded in running through and around the course and nature of the earth and humanity, and they have been able to identify her inherent values. They have also been able to tell readers that the earth is sick and that her ailment is caused by human beings and their agencies. In addition to these, they have been able to explain to the readers that the earth will never die, no matter how destructive people might be, as the earth has the ability and capacity to regenerate and replenish herself. However, they caution that this does not mean that humanity shall not feel the pangs of the reaction of the earth to her maltreatment. Therefore, it is submitted that there is the need for people to treat the earth, the environment, with utmost tenderness and affection, and to harness from her the absolute necessity and in a most gentle manner.

From this study so far, the following observations could be made: one, it is clear that the earth, the environment, is intrinsically valuable; two, the earth should and must be nursed and espoused to enable her yield her bounties; three, there is a major problem facing the earth; and four, the consequences of this problem come round to befall human beings. Finally, some of the conclusions one could draw from the study so far include first, that the environment is generally being destroyed by human beings in their efforts to make life “better,” and that as a result, the environment is dying at a geometric rate in relation to its degradation; secondly, that the destruction of the earth is already affecting humans negatively, and consequently, humans are already dying in direct proportion to the death of the earth; and three, that Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey are calling on mankind to eschew attitudes and activities leading to the destruction of the environment, the earth.

Osundare, Ojaide and Bassey have been able to blend theme and style in very beautiful ways. Their poems could be classified among those that could be described as committed art, about which Achebe, in “The Novelist as a Teacher” states, “perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure” (105). They have not just concentrated on message alone or method; they have produced a blend of the two, capturing the themes of ecocentrism and anthropocentrism by the appropriation of various literary devices. Both Osundare and Ojaide have employed invocation, chant and incantation. Ojaide and Bassey have made good use of memory; the three have artfully employed lyricism and numerous images in the realisation of their poetry.

Suggestions for Further Research

Ecocriticism is a recent approach in the study African literary works and discourse and this is more recent in poetry. So, there is a dearth of literary discourse in the area, especially the sub-aspects: ecocriticism and anthropocentrism. In this research, efforts have been made to discover how much Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey have discussed the degradation of the environment in the selected poems. Attention has also been paid to their application of literary devices. But it must be stated that this is only one work that has viewed the works of the selected poets from the ecocentric and anthropocentric perspectives. It is therefore recommended that more of ecocentric and anthropocentric criticisms be carried out on the works of the poets studied in this research, as well as the works of other literary artists. This is to ensure that the flame of the pursuit of the salvation and restoration of the earth is sustained and achieved.

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