

Eco-Poetics and Politics of Nationhood in Nigerian Literature

By

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Abstract

The Nigerian sphere of the global greening aesthetics is crisis-ridden and coloured with an admixture of ecology, politics of national identity, and essentially regionalised in its spatial settings. This flowering trope focuses the environmentally degraded delta coastal fringes and evaluates as a direct response to the environmental degradation and marginalisation of the ethnic minority of Niger Delta region that produces the petro-dollar wealth which is the mainstay of Nigeria's economy. This literary tenor became more strident in the aftermath of the brutal execution of the Ogoni-born Nigerian writer/environmentalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, in November 1995. These texts posture the oil-bearing coastal region as victim of environmental disasters, political and economic emasculation, and as a people most disadvantaged in the successive federal regimes. This paper relies on ecological postcolonialism as theoretical basis for analyzing the emergent eco-regional literary trope that globalises Nigeria's long-drawn ecological crisis and its enlistment in the global greening movement for socio-economic justice, environmental sustainability and human development

Key words: ecological postcolonialism; greening aesthetics; environmental imaginaries; ethnic nationality; Niger Delta

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Introduction

In the last two decades or thereabout, environmental literature in the Nigerian context has to firm up definite accent with tenor of protestation, opposition and despair. This body of texts centralises the Niger Delta environmental crisis with the turbulent socio-political legacies that go with it. For this reason, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has in recent history become an epicenter of ethnic nationality upheavals that stem from the issues of environmental sustainability, the minority question, and the fundamental rights of the delta oil-producing ethnic minority communities. This situation reverberates in the myriad of creative works that have drawn their themes on the ecological and socio-economic condition of the minoretised coastal communities where the resources that sustains the national economy from. This situation has turned the region into a pun of political intrigues, power tussle and treachery, and also created a lot of violent conflicts and insecurity in the region while the main issue of ecological redress has been slow in coming. The indicators of the present dangers that trigger the uncertainties and gloom as captured in this body of literary production include the globally acknowledged depletion of the ozone layer due to endless gas

flaring, acidcarbon rain that poison the coastal waters, remont incidents of oil spillag environmental poisoning and the destruction of the socio-economic line of the victim communities with the attendant incidence of human displacement, and other such cothresk Perhaps the most intolerable of the situation that is recurrently thematised in these texts is the continued pillage and siphoning of the commonwealth accruahle from all production by the oll multinational companies in collusion with the powerful government officials, without a demonstration of serious concerns about the endangered eco-system and human in the host communities. These are the onuses of the eco-literary and critical concerns of this growing body of the greening literature in the Nigerian context.

The ecological damage done to Nigeria's Niger Delta environment by the oil-multinational corporations, in collaboration with the federal government has been enormous and globally acknowledged. As a result of this, the literary response to the ecological condition of the delta region of Nigeria locates the creative setting as a site of negligence, a region of endless struggles and multifaceted crisis, just as the victim communities have continued to cry out for environmental discipline, social justice and fundamental human rights with regards to the sustainability of their land resources and collective survival. E.J. Alagoa rightly points out that:

The communities in the Niger Delta have developed a mentality of neglect and a sense of separation and isolation from the rest of the nation. The sense of neglect is especially acute in the instance of the building of access roads, so that the Niger Delta is physically separated from the rest of Nigeria (4).

In the Nigerian literary sphere, there have been some recurrent engagements with the situation through creative works and even with physical activism. Beyond Nigeria's Niger Delta situation, humanity has realized the dangers of environmental abuses and uncertainty about survival of earth at the moment. The world now faces the threat of conflagration due to human activities that endanger the ecosystem. Voices of dissent from the victims of environmental exploitation and endangerment have been on the rise. Protest marches across major cities of the world continue to draw the attention to the dangers that humanity faces due to unregulated human activities that endanger the atmosphere and human life.

Eco-Textuality and Contextuality in Nigerian Literature

In trying to analyse the theoretical undercurrents of environmental poetics, Cheryll Glotfelty states the following: "Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment", and clarifies further that ecocriticism does the similar thing that feminism "examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective", just as Marxism explains literature from the of production of goods and services, and concludes that "ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (xviii). The critical praxis associated with eco-definite concern in literary texts actually began to gather momentum in the 1990s and the kind of reception given to the idea and practice of eco-literature (ecolit) and criticism (ecocrit) kind of makes the African critics, like in the production of other theories such as postcolonialism, deconstruction, Marxism and others, mere onlookers, in terms of origin and historical implications. This explains the pessimism that trails the reception of ecological postcolonialism even when African scholars continue to contribute towards a larger dissemination of ecology-based literary discourse.

William Slaymaker in his analysis of black Africa's responses to the theorization of the call of global green aptly argues;

Indeed, there is good cause to worry that environmentalism and ecologism are new forms of dominating discourse issuing from Western or First World centres. And the suspicion that environmentalisms in all its various shades of green (including red greens) is a white thing is borne out of the explosive growth of research and participation in it by white scholars in and outside Africa (684)

Irrespective of Africa's marginalization at the theoretical frontier, no doubt. Nigeria's impute to the flowering ecology-informed literary production and eco-critical engagement is tied to the African context of how literature impacts on and responds to the cultural backdrop and creative sensitivities of the African writer. Lawrence Buell et al. assert that eco-critical scholarship has developed into an increasingly worldwide movement, covering commitment to preservationist environmentalism, environmental ethics, place and attachment, and the prioritization of self-nature relationship. In the same vein, Buell et al argue that the ever expanding eco-literary concern also touches such vexing "issues as environmental (in)justice, to collective rather than individual experience as a primary historical force..." (433). In other words, ecology-determined literary production and criticism covers the concern with environmental degradation, political economy, cultural heritage and national identity.

Creative writers in Nigeria have continued to churn out creative works in all genres of presentation and thematic temperament that echo the global greening' project. In the collective effort to humanize the world and chart new directions towards the realisation of environmental sustainability, socio-economic equanimity of society, and human progress, Nigerian writers are daily using their artistry to participate in the global environmental debates and activism, all in the bid to adapt to the current issues of environmental degradation within the Nigerian setting. Like as Mary Kolawale has rightly enthused, "the arts will survive in this age of high technology because the world will always need the artist to humanise the society; but the art including literature must adapt to the exigencies of the time" (23). The common goal is that humanity must integrate into one movement for a safe and sustainable earth in terms of mutual co-existence in the world around us and of both the weak and the powerful towards ensuring the safety of the earth that sustains all.

In African cultural epistemology, man, nature and non-human commingle. From the traditional artistry in terms of songs, poems, plays; the trees, the river, animals, water or streams or in rituals and rites performances, humans and non-human 'Others' co-exist and dialogue one another. In the folklores and fables, in the "tales by the moonlight' performances, and in the costuming of artistic images- the supernatural, the natural, the mythical, animal, the birds kingdom, the forest and imaginable beings that inhabit the marine realms and other places are most often than not factored into human existential reality. All this inform African literary imaginary and relates to the ideals of "primordial natural purity" which is advocated as "a retreat from the social and environmental pollution of modernity" (DeLoughrey and Handley 23). Therefore, it needs not be argued how close to the natural environment the African artistry in all its ramifications could be. In African belief system, the environment is the man, and to be human is to bear the mark of place and the totality of the ecological space where man traces his ancestry to in his collective communal consciousness.

Greening Echoes and the Niger Delta Landscape

The titles of the texts selected for this analysis draw on the environmental issues for the explication of the divisiveness, disorder, and disillusionment that characterise Nigeria's eco-political landscape. This means that the environmental issues that inform the texture of this body of literature with common setting at the delta coastal region are linked to the politics of oil wealth and minoritisation debates in Nigeria. The texts being thus mainly set in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, in the whole, constitute the creative responses to the contemporary thinking about the environment, national identity, socio-economic justice and human sustainability in a hostile landscape. The titles include Ken Saro Wiwa's *A Month and a Day: a Detention Diary* (1995). Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1997). Asonye Tess Onwueme's *Then She Said It* (2002), Joe Ushie's *Eclipse in Rwanda* (2004), Uwenedimo Iwokedok's *Glimpses of the Heart* (2005), Kaine Agarey's *Yellow Yellow* (2006), Adinoyi Ojo Onukaba's *The Killing Swamp* (2009), Martin Akpan's *Goodnight Africa* (2009), Eni Jologho Umoko's *The Scent of Crude Oil*, Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2012), and Eyo Etim's *Alien Citizen* (2013), Arnold Udoka's *Invene: A Dance Drama* (2009), among others.

Ken Saro-Wiwa is popular as a writer and an environmental activist. His prison diary does not only chronicle his role as an environmental activist, but equally narrates his leadership in his Ogoni people's struggle to challenge the oil multi-national companies operating in the Niger Delta regions over the devastation of the Ogoni environment. The narrative highlights how oil-prospecting activities in the coastal region have constituted serious danger to the environment and how the federal government of Nigeria have failed to live up to expectations in the whole process of oil exploitation and environmental management in the region. The story of his detention is incisive and moving and translates characteristically into an autobiographical self-fashioning where the notion of national identity, justice and national equity is interrogated and problematised. The author uses the story of his experience and that of his to re-historicise the labyrinth of oil politics and the paradoxes of nationhood as far as the Ogoni environmental situation is concerned. The injustice associated with oil resource extraction and sharing in Nigeria creates the spate of crisis that had resulted in the death of many prominent Ogoni indigenes who were either directly involved in protest movements or were caught in the crossfire of military-MOSOP power imbroglios. The highpoint of the environmentalist's prison diary is in the enactment of the Ogoni Bill of Rights of 1990 that demands among others, "the right to political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people...the right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation..." (177). The narrator characteristically draws empathy in the bid to bring the Ogoni situation to an international audience. By the autobiographical approach he "challenges the stereotype judgments that are based on simplistic perception of others" as Diane Howard would state of the literary imperatives of autobiographical story, since the autobiography is often seen as "field of education...psychology, sociology, and cultures" (2) in terms of selfhood and representation. The story of Ken Saro-Wiwa replicates the story of the collective identity of Ogoni ethnic nationality in Nigeria.

In Kaine Agarys fiction, *Yellow Yellow*, the main character/narrator portrays the moral and the socio-economic complications of oil producing communities where oil extraction had not only poisoned the land but also attracted people of all hues to the region, and thus equally poison the cultural ambience that hitherto held the people in common bond of society. In the interactions and conversations at different settings of the story, the general atmosphere of poverty, political and ethnic rancor and fear and uncertainty pervade the region. All this hints at how violence had been incited and the youth had become restive and disillusioned of how the region that brings the wealth of the nation had remained poverty-ridden. The narrator could be heard recalling how the youth got indoctrinated or compelled to resort to violence:

Sometimes, when I would sit outside with boys and girls in my age group, we would be listening to the radio, and sometimes we would hear an Ijaw person, living in Port Harcourt or Lagos, speaking about how the oil companies had destroyed our Niger Delta with impunity... These broadcasts drove the boys in my village to violence (9).

This narrative setting is described as a place of "conflicts, the violence, and the depression that characterized our village more and more" (24) in the oil producing creeks. As a strategy of divide and rule, the oil companies are said to take side and set the people against each other, and disunited (105).

Yellow Yellow like other texts set in the area portray the Niger Delta coastal landscape as a site of exploitation and violence, especially as we consider the role of such characters in the novel such as Sisi, Lolo, the city hustlers who escaped the village where the environment had become barren due to mining activities going on there. The character Admiral who is the military personnel and Sergio the foreign oil worker are metaphorised as symbols of exploitation and colluding with foreigners to siphon the wealth of the region while leaving the native people and host communities displaced and impoverished. Towards the end of the story, the narrative persona whose hybridised identity serves as the leitmotif depicting the sordid picture of disorder that oil exploitation brings to this environment states of how the oil companies have not only degraded the coastal ecosystem but also morally destabilised the peace of the oil-bearing communities thus:

Maybe then I could understand better or with less anger why there were more and more of my kind - "African-profits", "born-troways", "ashawos- pikins", "father-unkowns"- running around Port Harcourt. Maybe then I would not hide from the facts of my birth that my yellowskin and curly hair put on display (171).

This confusion of self-identity is projected by the author to point out to the world the 'gains' that oil has brought to the region and how destabilised the coastal communities had become as a result. The picture here reflects in Uwemedimolwoketok's 'The Green One' from the collection *Glimpses of the Heart* where oil brought out from these communities has 'soiled the land with guns and violence in the line "Steel brought forth by our oil' (37), where the plunderers "like a lion...plundered, killed and raked/Filling his lair with kills" (13). And oil that was supposed to bring wealth becomes, in the words of Eni Umuko: "The oil has become curse to our people" or "The oil is the cause of this malevolence in our society" (63).

Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* presents another perspective of imagining the environmental condition of the Niger Delta region that is captured in this trope of literary works. The text delves into the dynamics of the murky and turbulent Niger Delta region where oil prospecting activity has turned the otherwise beautiful landscape into a hideous milieu and a cesspool of power play and dirty politics of federal might and minority oppression, where oil multinational roguery and the perceived government highhandedness aggravate the misery of the people of the oil-producing communities. With the reportorial approach, Habila uses *Oil on Water* to fictionalise the devastation of the landscape, the gory encounters of people living in the oil-rich, deeply militarised and perilous Niger Delta coastal swamplands. He commences his imaginative exploration of this fragile environment by commencing in a search for kidnapped oil expatriates. What he finds at first glance is the ecological diversity that marks the coastal eco-system that has now become marred by malfeasance of all sorts. He paints the horizon as "the water and the dense foliage on the riverbanks all looked the same: blue and green and blue-green misty" (1), that has now turned to a dangerous terrain and waste land. In his skillful description, he cites numerous tributaries, the disappearing morning fog, the Irikefe Island popularly known as Half-Moon Island which appears crescent-shaped, in the view from the coastlines. The narrator witnesses how the oil-turned brackish stream with its banks full of mangroves and multiple water channels has been badly soiled and polluted. What is most pronounced here is pollution, dilapidation, poverty and fear.

The narrative persona is named Rufus who is a reporter that would guide the reader through the complex, turbulent oil-rich landscape that now becomes a hideout for pirates, oil thieves, kidnappers, gun-tottering militants, fortune-seeking military personnel and hardened criminals. The other key character is Zag, the old reporter through whose role, combining with others such as the old man and the boy, and military commanders serving in the coastal waters, we gain a better view of the landscape and a better understanding of the Niger Delta setting. The quest in the story is the whereabouts of a kidnapped expatriate taken hostage by the militants who are engaged in a 'liberation' war, fighting the oil companies and the federal government for failure to clean up the environment. They are also agitating for the control of the resources of the land that, in their conviction, had been commandeered by hegemonic federal state power, collaborating with the oil multinational companies, who are only driven by profit and care little about the health of the environment. The inhabitants of this landscape are put under siege in the crossfire between the militants fighting for emancipation, the state apparatus and the oil multinational companies. The quest motif used in the narrative brings the of the reporters looking for the kidnapped expatriate to bear on the sordid reality of the damage done to the environment in this region. As the reporters are being ferried across the water channels by the old man with his boy, the outlook and general atmosphere of the milieu are projected:

The atmosphere grew heavy with the suspended stench of deadmatter. We followed a bend in the river and in front of us wesaw dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretchedwings black and slick with oil; dead fish bobbed white-bellied between tree roots. THE NEXT VILLAGE was almost a replica ofthe last: the same empty squat dwellings, the same ripe and flagrantstench, the barrenness, the oil slick and the same indefinable

sadness in the air, as if a community of ghosts were suspended above the zinc roofs, unwilling to depart, yet powerless to return (8).

The metaphor of this land presents it as "this barren landscape"(36), where the young people are abandoning fishing as their primary trade because "no fish for river, nothing... and the option left is to join the youth militant army. As a consequence, the people are described as helpless with the endless "gas flares that lit up neighboring villages all day and night"; and the land is now sharply "divided" (39). The response to the inquiry of the investigating journalists along the water channels gives insight to the condition of life of the displaced people in the oil-bearing delta area of Nigeria:

We left, we headed northwards, we've lived in five different places now, but always we've had to move. We are looking for a place where we can live in peace. But it is hard. So your question, we are happy here? I say how can we be happy when we are mere wanderers without a home (41).

From one settlement to the other, the picture defines "the ruined, decomposing landscape" (56) where oil leakage and rusted pipelines are commonplace. "There are countless villages going up in smoke daily... These people endure the worst conditions of any oil-producing community on earth", and though the government and the oil companies know well what to do but have not the will to stop it ((97). Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* demonstrates an artistic insight to the situation in this ecological landscape that reveals a tragic picture in which "those whom the disease doesn't kill, the violence does", and therefore here there is "more need for grave diggers than for a doctor" (146). The oil-rich Niger delta milieu is described as a ferment of wealth and death.

On his own fictional landscaping of the Niger Delta coastal environment, Arnold Udoka in his dance drama metaphorises the anguish that bedevils Bawkgeng oil-rich community in the delta creeks where the narrator laments and questions: "It is now a curse to claim Bawkgeng as a homeland. The pain in our soul degenerated into fear, indignation, poverty and death. Who invoked this despoliation on our land? Who?" (23). Eyo Etim in the novel, *Alien Citizen* does not necessarily deviate from the stereotypically oil pollution-related and land degradation informed crisis, but its thematic dwells more on the environmental situation where the ancestral land and the seafood-rich coastal resource are taken away from the Nigerian aborigines of the Bakasi islands in a controversial ICJ judgment and ceded to the Republic of Cameroon on behalf of France thereby leaving the Nigerian indigenous people of Bakasi in disarray, like the Orwellian 'beast of no nation'. The story imagines the setting of the now deprived ancestral land of in the past and in the present with the calamity that has befallen it in the present circumstance. The Bakasi experience is sighted in the author's creative lenses as a tragedy, a manifestation of a nationhood that contradicts itself; that exposes her citizens to international ridicule and disrepute. In its representation, the author tries to depict the detached relationship that exists between the ill-fated people of Bakasi and the Nigerian state which has turned its back on those that were supposed to be protected. He at the same give hints at how other nations would quickly rally round and come to the rescue of their citizens in time in case of any threat or harassment, victimisation or persecution, but which is never so with Nigeria. The story echoes the dangers of gas flaring dotting

the region that is emitting heat waves into the atmosphere that makes the atmosphere feel like hell fire.

Ecological postcolonialism in an eco-critical text configures how territorial dispossession and forfeiture of the socio-economic resource of the victimized with the attendant consequences create crisis. It is on this note that Achebe looks back at the Nigerian condition, especially the post independent and post-civil war experience that continues to affect the present that:

Nigeria [was] saddled with a greater and more insidious reality. We were plagued by a home-made enemy: the political ineptitude, mediocrity, indiscipline, ethnic bigotry, and corruption of the ruling class. Compounding the situation was the fact that Nigeria was now awash in oil- boom petrodollars, and to make matter even worse...General Yakubu Gowon...proclaimed to the entire planet that Nigeria had more money than it knew what to do with. A new era of great decadence and decline was born. It continues to this day (243).

The Bakasi story is reflected in Etubom Effiong's thought. He is one of the key characters that give some useful hints about Bakasi in a characteristic state of marginalization, exclusion and neglect due to corrupt and inept leadership:

This night, as Etubom Effiong Asuquo watched the ocean environs...his mind drifted. The tide of his thought took him backward in time. He knew these waters. He had always lived in these oceans...He was familiar with all the fishing ports and settlements lining the ocean forests...He had stayed in Abana and Atabong for many years as a fisherman. His trade has carried him round places like Inua Mba, Ine-Usim, Ine-Udo...These places were inhabited by peoples of Efik, Ibibio, Oron, Okobo, Annang, and others like Ijaws, Afikpos... What Etubom could not understand was why the Cameroonians should struggle for the ownership of all these places now simply because the black oil had been found (69).

EyoEtim envisions the tragic condition of the displaced Nigerian people of Bakasi Peninsular in *Alien Citizen* as a nationhood of paradox, where the ideal of national identity is negated, typically represented by the fate that befalls the Bakasi natives.

In their town hall meeting the people of Bakasi at the sober moment, considering the way the federal government at the centre had treated them as alien, raise the question put forward by the character Etenyin Ita Ekeng Eyo in this way:

And now the question: who are we? We are the peoples of Bakasi peninsular, a piece of land occupied by the Efiks, Ibibio, Annang, and Oron peoples since ancient times. The same piece of land is now in Cross River State and Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria...How we came to be paying tax to Cameroonians is an unfortunate event of time and action (91).

As a consequence of the lackadaisical attitude of the Nigerian state towards the fate of the Indigenous people of Bakasi, they in their helplessness are left to fend for themselves if they must survive the effect of the ICJ judgment that nullifies their claim to their ancestral land. Eterio in *King Eyo* thus admonishes his benighted compatriots of Bakasi ethnic nationality in the delta area of Nigeria as follows:

So as far as we continue to call ourselves Nigerians, the gendarmes would continue to hate us, beat us and tax us. So it is left for us to decide if we continue to be Nigerians especially when we know that Nigeria does not care about our plight. Or, we force ourselves to become Cameroonians so that we can cease from being alien citizens to both countries (92).

At the end of the story one could "see" Bakasi that was once in history populated by people lying desolate, as a consequence of the unfortunate court case at the International Court of Justice. This act is seen simply as a colonial continuum that echoes the Berlin Conference of 1885, when imperial European powers gathered to arbitrarily partition Africa and fully now justified the appropriation of Africa's resources and incitement of the population against each other.

is against this background that Martin Akpan's collection of poetry, set in the same Niger Delta milieu in *Good Night Africa* thematises the anger and despair concerning the state of Africa with its recurrent narrative of crisis, including the Niger Delta ecological devastation with the restiveness and violence that characterise it. In *Good Night Africa*, Martin Akpan deploys poetry to situate the metamorphoses of the wealth-bearing Niger Delta land where:

Her water is poisoned by acid rain
Her farmland, famished patches of aridity
...Her rich seafood (the pride of her past)
Now uncatable chips
Self-fried in an unsavory oil slick" (20),

He uses his poetry to depict the threatening ecological condition in the Niger Delta. The poet persona is irked by the spate of siphoning of the wealth tapped from the region by corrupt leaders who preside without clue as to how to utilise the resources of the land for the betterment of society and for common good. The persona sees in the setting a landscape fertile for youth militancy, restiveness, armed robbery, kidnapping, and hired assassins that hold and make life insecure in the region.

In a similar vein, Joe Ushie's collection of poems in *Eclipse in Rwanda* muses on the multifaceted tragedies that characterise Nigerian eco-political landscape and also echoes the different facets of violent socio-political and economic ruptures that have made the condition of the weak and downtrodden of the earth more and more miserable. Each of the three major segments into which the poems are presented is loaded with gruesome imagery in what makes his immediate Niger Delta look like a colony of horror. But essentially, in each of the sections, including 'Rays of Tears', 'Village Echoes', and then 'Echoes from the Silence', he draws on his rich environmental resources as imagery to paint the dreadful pictures of dangers that now pervade humanity. *Eclipse in Rwanda* utilises immediate and familiar environmental resources

as ingredient of aesthetic craftsmanship. The utility of nature-derived metaphors used in couching the lines serves to bolster his vision and enlivens the momentum of his environment tempered creativity.

In the first movement, the poem "Eclipse in Rwanda' mounting on the Niger Delta "watch tower" captures the messy experience of Rwandan genocide, which the poet tags as the Rwandan wees" where the benighted nationalities of this violated country scramble for "more fuel to burn the mother land" in a rage of mutual hate out of which Rwandans turned what used to be "paradisal valleys...into bowls of "hewman flesh" (23). The apocalyptic symbols echo again and again through the poems in the collection. Some of the other poems in this section that highlight this include: Tantalus, volcano', 'fallow forge", "Tides". "Attlakua", and "Sunquake, among others. In the last movement, Echoes from the Silent, the poet pays a convivial homage to the physical environment:

In celebration
Of innocent trees
And beasts found
Among the fallen in this genocide
Of man on man/Beast and tree (57).

In this momentary conviviality earth becomes the centerpiece of the persona's poetic focus. The persona identifies his voice with the mutant nature' which he refers to as Tropical neighbors (58), as he admires the harmony that exists between the trees and the shrubs, just as he in 'Crab tales" is thrilled at the way the big and the small non-human nature co-exist. In the statement of his encomium, "The crab, too, is Nature's (50). Other nature-drawn symbolism include: "Kemapupu' which is personified by the persona as 'Silent companion' (62). "Roadside tree' also flows in that rhythm; followed by 'Egret" and then "The trapped canary. who's "throat remain corn-choked", this "Other" nature that sang 'alfresco' (67-68).

TanureOjaide unleashes with heart-throbbing vibes in Delta Blues and Home Songs, a gruesome symphony of injustice, greed and environmental degradation as far as the Niger Delta natural landscape is concerned. Ojaide assumes the role of "the artist as town-crier" and with such trado-ecological strategy, he swims through the mainstream Ijaw delta coastal eco-political landscape where "The air ripples with birdsong, the tapstar's gourd brims over with fresh wine" as the persona "await(s) the carnival the drum divines" (10). Right from the opening poems in the collection, Ojaide armed with barbed arrows in his poetic quiver, electrifies the stage like a warrior, issuing tirades and trading tackles with those he envisions as destroyers of the physical, social and political environment; who harm the earth, endanger the environment and create unnecessary human suffering. The poem 'When green was the lingua franca', backpedals into the realm of memory to retrieve the 'edenic', rustic African ecological ferment in order to situate the present postcolonial condition of multi-faceted, environmental, socio-political and economic disasters that afflict the land with those that inhabit it.

This flashback technique, like in NiyiOsundare's *The Eye of the Earth and Waiting Laughters*, and Joe Ushie's *Hill Songs* is strategic as a means of highlighting the present postcolonial reality against the humanistic the past. The poem "When green... captures this

childhood edenie and pre-colonial memory against which the present malady is compared and contrasted:

My childhood stretched
one unbroken spark, In the forest green was
The lingua franca with many dialects.
Everybody's favourite
water sparkled... (12).

This is in the opening stanza, but then in the fourth stanza the tone changes and this back-forth glances is symbolic and illuminates the present dangers:

Then Shell broke the bond
with quake and a hell
of flares
Stoking a hearth
under God's very behind....

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

And now what remains of the situation is portrayed in the lyrics of the song in stanza six where the poet, now coming back to the present from a seemingly nightmares underscores it this way: "I see victims of arson/wherever my restless soles /takes me to bear witness" and continues thus:

The Ethiope waterfront wiped out by prospectors-so many trees beheaded and streams mortally poisoned in the name of job and wealth...I left the majority to bemassacred, a treeful carnage

Now I commune with ghosts of neighbours and providers whose healing hands of leaves and weeds have been amputated (13).

Every poem in *Delta Blues and Home Songs* casts a dreadful image of environmental destruction, humanitarian crisis and vulnerable landscape in an apparently misruled state with the resultant miserable human condition.

The dominant symbolism hints at such arousing words as 'Delta blues', "The rivers are dark-veined", "my nativity gives immortal pain/masked in barrels of oil-" and as he puts it: "I stew in the womb of fortune/I live in the deathbed/prepared by a cabal of brokers" (21). The Niger Delta environment around which Ojaide makes a poetic espionage is located recurrently as a site of endless ecological tragedies. The poem 'Elegy for nine warriors' (25) deploys such expressions as 'ghoulish seasons', 'hangman', 'an old cockroach in the groins of Aso Rock', 'sleepless nights', 'the thief', 'nine marchers who died carrying our destiny', or 'blood-laden

season to picture the magnitude of afflictions and travails of a people who now seem resolved to re-define their identity in the light of Nigerian state's genocidal acts against the resilient oil-bearing ethnic minority race. In the poem "Journeying, the poet drops a consoling hint that echoes the point that tyrants of history may have succeeded in silencing, but the tyrants like their victims also meet their doom at the end of it all, though memory of the unbendable spirit of warriors live in happy pages of history books. The contest between Ken SaroWiwa and Sani Abacha cohort over the Ogoni environmental condition and Abacha's bloody regime in Nigeria is implied here.

Thus in Ojaide's poetic vision, the land and the people that dwell there in his poetic setting is ecologically degraded and the culprit is a 'fetish country (Fetish country' 39) full of reptilian and animal characters such as "a cobra with a hooded face"; where the court sycophants 'offer sacrifices to the god of power'; and lord of dogs' preside over the destiny with absolute command; in 'his roundtable of flies'; and nobody dare speak of the god whose lightening seeks to strike dissonant tongues'. This land is described as an odorous landscape that stinks to the point of suffocation. Thus: "The stench from the court shrine asphyxiates the country" (line 4). Now what remains of this disillusioned eco-political landscape is a fragmentation and gloom (Fragment 59). It is magnified as a land that is marked by discontent and despair, which the persona uses the line: 'Who can stop this deluge/of discontent.../night always falls': and the 'healer' seems not to know the antidote' of this poisoned atmosphere, just as in the shadow of moonlight the watches intertwine hands into unbreakable knots/to keep leopard/from breaking into the circle/of the goat's refuge'; even daring the squadrons of police and dogs' ("Lordship of the leopard" 79).

In the genre of drama, the boom of eco-literary temperament that focuses the issues of Niger Delta ecological degradation blossoms still. The title of AdinoyiOjoOnukaba's *The Killing Swap* itself is equally metaphorically instructive. This entry which creatively dramatizes the circumstances leading to the brutal execution and martyrdom of Nigeria's foremost environmental activist and writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa, by the military dictatorship of late General Sani Abacha in 1995, made the Finalist list in the 2010 NLNG Nigeria Literature Prize. Adoniyi'sOnukaba's *The Killing Swamp* in its fictional and moving dialogue delves into the intrigues and the treachery of, as well as the nemesis that resulted in/from the state's criminal murder of Ken Saro Wiwa. The play imaginatively re-enters the psychological battle and the unbendable spirit of the heroic fighter whose battle cry was 'Resource Control',- a quest for a people's destiny, propagated under the aegis of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). The play depicts the silent agony of injustice, a man's battle for the soul of his benighted community, and against state terrorism, and the globally acknowledged Ogoni ecological horror. But the enactment is not just about the outcome of the destruction of Ogoni eco-system by Shell and other multi-national oil companies such as Chevron, Mobil and others, but about a nation festering, that continues to degrade itself and its people. As the hero in the play is made to state at the commencement of the dialogue before his brutal murder:

My cause our cause, I must say, is a national one: to excise from the heart of this sick and frail nation a malignant tumour; to remove this lump of injustice from the heart of this nation; torid this pitiable land of a deadly virus. A noble cause, eh? (*The Killing Swamp* 8).

The play situates the ecological crisis engendered by the multi-national oil companies under the watchful eyes of the Nigerian state that turns its attention to petro-dollar oil wealth, but turning the other way from the safety and survival of the land and the people living in the midst of voluptuous but nationalised and largely misappropriated wealth. The gruesome enactment being witnessed throughout the stage arises as a result of the resolve by the victims of environmental degradation and economic displacement to redefine their lives and means of survival.

To further accentuate the Ogoni frustration and indeed, that of the ethnic minority Niger Delta population that had brought the nation to the present condition, the dramatist uses dialogues, characterisation and changing settings to illuminate the dark testament of Nigerian nationhood and to show the audience the driving impetus that had informed the emergence and aggravation of the prolonged and complicated crisis. The dialogue between the Major and Kenule is revelatory even though the identity of the Major is hidden until towards the end of the play, for the anticipated dramatic effect, but that is Kenule, which could be said to be Ken Saro Wiwa, is not in doubt. The character Major, presses on the hero to recant his revolutionary stance especially with his ethnic nationality organisation's movement (MOSOP) with its Ogoni Bill of Rights, which seeks to carve a humanistic identity for the much federally marginalised and traumatised oil-bearing Ogoni land and the Niger Delta people entirely. Kenule states in his utter deviance against his tormentors saying: "My ideals will never die...will never die... The struggle continues!" (13-14).

A clip of the statements that the tragic hero makes before he is finally blacked out is salient in highlighting the reasons why Ogoni people rise up against the Nigerian state by referring to the injustice and marginalisation of the Niger Delta ethnic minority people in their land. He tells his hangman, (revealed to be his own cousin) the Major, in a scene of dialogue that:

Any nation that can do to the weak and disadvantaged what the Nigerian nation has done to my people loses any claim to independence and to freedom from outside influence...There is no doubt in my mind that the ecological war being waged in the Niger Delta by the Nigerian government and the oil companies will never go unpunished. It is a crime against humanity. It is genocide (31).

Ojo Onukaba postures the Niger Delta coastal region as a locale of death and this is amplified in his imaginative recast of Ken Saro-Wiwa's activism. The hero portrays the collective voice and the pulse of the voiceless and oppressed minoritised segment of the Nigerian nationhood. As he explains to his executor, the real reason for their woes goes beyond the official narratives that had stigmatised and criminalised the resisting Ogoni ethnic minority and indeed, the Niger Delta communities in the following lines narrated by KENULE:

It's all about oil. My actions and words have become a threat to the flow of oil from the Delta. I have asked them to reclaim their land. I have told them to hold the oil companies accountable for the dead creeks and oily swamp. I have opened their eyes to all atrocities of the oil companies which have

wasted their fertile land and polluted creeks amid rivers that supply them drinking water and sea food... We have not been found guilty for murder. We have only been found guilty of obstructing the flow of oil our soil (32- 33)

It is affirmed that the presence of oil companies has turned the Niger Delta land into a swamp of death and the Nigerian military standing on guard. But ironically the Major, representing the Nigerian state apparatus turns the story around by accusing Kenule of doing this: "MAJOR: You have turned the Delta to killing swamp. KENULE: Hold the Nigerian Government and the oil companies responsible" (56). Through the dialogues we can reassess the situation and properly view both sides of the argument in relation to the condition of the ecological landscape. Today it is no longer in doubt why Abacha military regime fought tooth and nail to eliminate the hero of this dramatic enactment.

Tee Akacke Onwueme's *Then She Said It*, is another creative platform by which the environmental situation in Nigeria's Niger Delta setting comes into a dramatic focus. The dramatist uses the major Nigerian waters such as Osun, Atlantic, Ethiope, Niger, Benue, Obida, Koko, Kainji and Oji alongside with the chorus of the people as aesthetic equipment for the characterisation and settings to engage with the crisis of degradation and poor grab mentality of the nation's oil resources. The play metaphorises a broken and fragmented state that exhibits imbalance and pitches the nation against itself. As it is aptly put in the dialogue in movement Nine, after Obida's emotion-packed speech of appeal to the deities of the land to intervene in the face of injustice and profanity committed by the multi- national adversaries against the land. The appeal points to the ancestral forces how 'flood threatens the land', and 'sharks, white and black, have taken over the shores, and thus putting life of the community in danger. What this symbolises in ecological postcolonialism is simply that to the natives, as Fanon rightly states, land occupies vital place in the destiny of the people. The native societies have strong attachment and significant to the natural inhabitants. Land has economic, cultural, and sociological relationship with the people who inhabit it; and, land with its resources is discussed as a source of pride and dignity, and if taken away what remains is indignity and emptiness. That is why the question about who really owns the land by NIGER is thematically significant. I say who owns this land? The question and answer session of which the character BENUE asks the chorus to respond reifies the eco- thematic concerns in the enactment.

BENUE thus asks the women of the Delta environment: "Ever since they discovered oil in our land, they drill, dry and fry us alive with the fishes and farmlands all cooking in the oil", and the chorus affirms this claim; and BENUE interrogates further: "...where else in the world does oil cease to anoint?...Plants, animals, children, men, women cooking in their oil. Oil sapped from the very soul of our sagging land. Ah! People of the delta! Do you see yourselves drowning?" (76-77). In the 'Epilogue: A Nation in Custody, the closing part of the play. KOKO/LAWYER character take a back-and-forth-leap to examine the ecological, socio- political and historical implications of the dubious practices that now turn the Niger Delta land into a cesspool, where the multi-national companies in collaboration with the Nigerian state have degraded the landscape, poisoned the water resources, frittered the farmland and brought untold hardship to the ill-fated people that inhabit the area. The implications include a

ravished ecological landscape, a displaced agricultural/aquacultural ferment. polluted poisoned atmosphere and the soil system that as a result brought about poverty and joblessness, and incite the people against each other thus making the area dangerous to live in.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the eco-poetic implications of the body of literatures in the Nigerian literary sphere that situate the ecological context of the Niger Delta crisis, and in context of the global greening ecological movement. The paper also explored the informing parameters for the characteristically dissident, oppositional and protestation undertones of what is manifestly a regionalised setting of this blooming trope of creative works. The intriguing thing about this body of writing is the way the authors, in every genre of creativity, factor the struggles for environmental sustainability, socio-economic justice and the outcries for national equity, that have been the utmost desire of the Niger Delta inhabitants, into their creative imaginaries as a consistent literary activity. It is evident that this commitment to environmental discourse through creativity has served to bring the very complicated and longstanding Niger Delta environmental crisis to the global mainstream of nature discourse and human survival in a safer universe. The study has revealed a booming interest in environmental concerns by Nigerian writers who incidentally are mostly inhabitants of the affected communities and thus 'eye-witnesses' or direct victims, one way or the other, of the unpleasant environmental condition of Nigeria's Niger Delta minority ethnic region.

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