MODERN NIGERIAN POETRY AND THE ENVIRONMENT: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF SELECTED POEMS OF TANURE OJAIDE, NIYI OSUNDARE AND NNIMMO BASSEY

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis titled: "Modern Nigerian Poetry and the Environment: An Ecocritical Study of Selected Poems of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey" has been carried out by me in the Department of English and Literary Studies. The information derived from the literature has been duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references provided. No part of this thesis has been previously presented for another degree or diploma at this or any other Institution.

Joyce Onoromhenre AGOFURE	_____	_____
(PhD/ARTS/1171/2011-2012)	Signature	Date

CERTIFICATION

This thesis titled "Modern Nigerian Poetry and the Environment: An Ecocritical Study of Selected Poems of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey" by Joyce Onoromhenre AGOFURE meets the regulations governing the award of Doctor of Philosophy of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

Prof. Tanimu A. N. Abubakar Chairman, Supervisory Committee	_____ SIGN	_____ DATE
Dr. Suleiman Jaji Member, Supervisory Committee	_____ SIGN	_____ DATE
Dr. Odiwo Keston Member, Supervisory Committee	_____ SIGN	_____ DATE
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Prof. Kabir Bala Dean, School of Postgraduate Studies	_____ SIGN	_____ DATE

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Victor Agofure and my children Ese, Tega, Ovie and Ona for their support and encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis titled "Modern Nigerian Poetry and the Environment: An Ecocritical Study of Selected Poems of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey" examines the extent to which Nigerian poetry explores the problematic interaction between man and environment at a period when ecological problems pose a threat to the Nigerian ecology. To this end, the thesis argues that the selected poets present the view that the Nigerian people and resources are exploited by the Nigerian elite in collusion with the corporate owners of technology and the controllers of the global market economy for their economic interests, leaving behind devastating ecological footprints on the Nigerian flora, fauna and landscape. The study of the growing concern with the dysfunction of the ecosystem in Nigerian Poetry necessitates the deployment of a contemporary trans-disciplinary methodological approach called Ecocriticism which links literary criticism with ecological issues in order to evaluate selected Nigerian poetry. Taken together, this study posits that although early Nigerian poets were concerned with environmental deterioration, they did not explore it with the same critical idiom, tenor and thrust of the poets of study who have illuminated the precarious environmental concerns in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria by extension. Therefore, the preoccupation of the selected poets with environmental degradation and neglect of the welfare of the people have given their poetry its aesthetic dimension. In view of this, the poets' signification of the deliberate degradation of the Nigerian landscape by Nigerian ruling classes in collaboration with multinational companies point to a trend in postcolonial situations to put power and authority at the service of the market and at the expense of public good. In addition, the poets show that the neglect of the people, poverty, alienation and despair that emanate from the exploitation of natural resources have led to the upsurge of militants who have become defiant in hostage taking and destruction of lives and properties. Therefore, the selected texts illustrate that degradation of the environment does not only impact on the vulnerability of the Nigerian bionetwork, but also on the livelihood of the marginalised communities and the stability of the country.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

As a medium of expressing views about man and his social existence, Literature in general and Modern Nigerian Poetry in particular, is concerned with the survival of mankind and the planet. In this context, Literature focuses on discourses about the ecology and the fate of man in a modern, integrated world in which natural resources are central to existence. Postulations on ecological matters and literary discourses have emphasised that nature is endangered and the exploitation of natural resources for the free market globally contributes to the destruction of the natural world, especially of periphery nations (Bhagwati 42; Mittleman 847). This generates anxiety over increased inequality, exploitation, under-development, ecological degradation such as, loss of biodiversity, erosion, global warming, desertification, flooding, waste, oil pollution, and loss of marine life.

Poetry in general and Nigerian poetry in particular encapsulates the consequences of the interface between nature and man's activities in an epoch of environmental crises. In recent times, natural disasters have not only compelled human societies to reappraise the significance of nature for human survival but also led to the realisation that any harmful human action against nature will yield destructive consequences for humanity (Glolfelty xix). The growing concern with the dysfunction of the ecology in Nigerian Poetry necessitates the deployment of literary works to evaluate environmental concern, thus giving literature a new area of focus. This is to raise awareness on the need for sustainable relationship between man and his environment. It is

in this regard, that this study utilises a contemporary literary theory called Ecocriticism which links literary criticism with ecological issues to evaluate the selected Nigerian poetry.

On this purview, William Rueckert (107) in his essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" illuminates "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature. This is because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world". In this enterprise, the relationship between literature and nature are scrutinised in terms of ecological concepts. Art and ecology, thus, attempt to find common ground between humankind and nature, to show how they can coexist in various ways, because environmental issues have become integral parts of Man's existence. This is one challenge that Ecocriticism addresses in its efforts to find a more environmentally conscious position in literary studies.

In this context, Betty Roszak and Theodore Roszak in "Deep Form in Art and Nature" articulate a pattern for artistic ecology in which interconnectedness comes from 'the truth of the imagination' where "the artist, like a tree, drinks up nourishment from the depths and from the heights, from the roots and from the air, to bring forth a crown of leaves..." (223-26). In view of this, Literature focuses on discourses about the environment and the fate of man in a modern integrated world to which natural resources are central to existence.

1.1 Philosophical Conceptualisations of the Environment

The relationship between man and nature has occupied a significant space in literary imagination over the centuries. The vista of a return to an unspoiled environment has been practiced as far as the "account of the Garden of Eden in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the pastoral form inaugurated by the Greek Poet Theocritus in the third Century BC and in which there was an idealised depiction of rural life viewed as survival of the simplicity, peace and harmony… which

is lost by a complex and urban society" (Abrams 88). Similarly, early tales as *Beowulf*, or Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* were concerned with the portrayal of the physical environment and human interactions with it. Aristotle and other philosophers also examined the diversity of the natural world through their notion of the "Great Chain of being"– which details a hierarchical structure of organisms in the arrangement of minerals, vegetables, primitive forms of animals and more complex life forms to show the relationship of living things. The Renaissance period, often known as the "rebirth" depicted the beauty of the environment and Garrard Mary (899) attests that "Renaissance male artists variously imagined nature as mother, bride, or mistress, positioning themselves as sons, husbands and masters…" as shown in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night Dream* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost.*

Similarly, in the Romantic era (1798-1870) poets' such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge have represented environmental issues in their *Lyrical Ballad* for example. This representation affirms the lifelong bond between art and nature in spite of the reductive viewpoints about Romanticism with which some critics in (Bate 6) argue that what Romanticism valorises "is not nature but human imagination and human language. Romantic ideology, they further posit displaces and idealises; it privileges imagination at the expense of history. It covers up social conditions in its quests for transcendence as illustrated in the poem "Prelude xiii" in which Wordsworth inscribes the view that:

> *…the mind of man becomes*
> *a thousand times more beautiful than the earth*
> *on which he dwells, above this frame of things*
> *(which, 'mid all revolutions in the hopes*
> *And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)*
> *In beauty exalted, as it is itself*
> *Of substance and of fabric more divine* (Donaldson et al 278-280)

The poetic lines above convey imagination as a way of transcending this "frame of things" – 'the earth in which man dwells'…. Implicitly, Wordsworth is "upbraided for… privileging the individual imagination" (Bate 3). Nonetheless, Romanticism celebrates the love of and bond with nature in art and the experience of sublimity through a connection with nature. Nature to the Romantics is the very subject of existence, an alternative where man thrives. They also idealise nature and consider industrialisation as negative thus, emphasising the erasure of modernity. To this end, Ecocriticism, which bares semblance to Romanticism, underscores the balance between nature and modernity and most times, this balance is a political one which strives to preserve natural resources and the ecosystem. In spite of the interface, Ecocritics perceive nature as referential and thus reject the idealisation of nature.

Consequently, this study argues that the correlation between Romanticism and Ecocriticism has often been recognised by scholars hence, Worster (82) in *The Wealth of Nature* argues that "at the very core of the Romantic view of nature was what later generations would come to call an ecological perspective: that is a search for holistic or integrated perception, an emphasis on interdependence and relatedness in nature and an intense desire to restore man to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitute the earth". Therefore, "much Romantic writing emerges from an anxious endeavor to re-establish a vital, sustainable relationship between mankind and the fragile planet on which we dwell" (Mukherjee 123). An instance of this assertion is deduced from William Wordsworth's "The World is too much with us":

> *The world is too much with us; late and noon,*
> *Getting and spending we lay waste our powers,*
> *Little we see in Nature that is ours,*
> *We have given our hearts away a sordid boon…* (Donaldson et al 220).

These lines show clearly man's futile drift towards mundane matters while neglecting the vast potentials that nature holds for him. In the same way, the Transcendental age has shown concerns with issues regarding the environment in the poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson such as "Song of Nature" and "Nature" while the Naturalists focused on the view that the only reality is nature hence, Emile Zola, Herbert Spenser and Richard Wright opine that characters can be studied through their relationship with their surroundings as captured in Emile Zola's fiction *The Experimental Novel*.

African mythology also portrays ecological awareness in riddles, proverbs, epics, songs, rituals, and myths. For Owomyela Oyekan 'Myths' explain the "interrelationships of all things that exist and provide for the group and its members a necessary sense of their place in relations to their environment and the forces that order events on earth" (2). Thus, African ethos is materially and spiritually incorporated with the environment. Nigerian writers such as Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, Wole Soyinka in *A Dance of the Forests*, Elechi Amadi in *The Concubine* convey ecological order, convey a world structured on natural order before the colonial invasion along with the outcome of colonisation in the disturbance of its balance thereby, illustrating the connection of the communities to the natural world. Wole Soyinka in *Myth Literature and the African World* describes the notion of time, soul, human wellness and morality as intertwined to issues of the natural world. He asserts that: …"in Asian and European antiquity, therefore, man did, like the African, exist within a cosmic totality, and did possess a consciousness in which his own earth being, his gravity-bound apprehension of self was inseparable from the entire cosmic phenomenon…" (Soyinka 3). The Ghanaian writer Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother* constitutes traditional African ontology and aesthetics

particularly in the Ewe religious, cultural and mystical rituals and cosmology while the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa' Thiongo emphasises the deep interaction between literary imagination and the African natural world of his people (Gikuyu) as demonstrated in *A Grain of Wheat* and *The River Between*.

Similarly, in *Waiting for the Rain* (1975) the Zimbabwean novelist, Mungoshi shows the extent to which ecological crises created by historical processes are given literary form. According to Ogaga Okuyade "the fiction uses locale and geography to manifest conflicting attitudes towards the land and social identities. For example, the reader is made aware of the discriminating practices of colonial governments through the different distribution of land patterns and usage between Blacks and Whites. In the novel, there is no ambiguity about who controls good land and who farms an infertile land. Land controlled by white people comprises "rolling ranches of Hampshire Estate" which has tall dry grass and fertile soils. This is contrasted with land reserved for Black people which is "scorched", infertile, "white lands" indicating that it is sandy and from it there is nothing that grows in an empty field" (Okuyade xii-xv). The South African novelist Zake Mda in *Heart of Redness* valorises the "forest" in its splendor as an organic self sustaining forest and yearns for the lost rural peace. In spite of these, African literature does not blindly eulogise the forest- as a life giving force/strength. The forest can be a source of death and impotence as found in Okot p' Bitek's *Song of Lawino* where Lawino bewails that her husband's house is a "dark forest of books" – the forest is depicted as a metaphor for westernisation and its outshot renders Ocol unproductive.

The environment has always played a vital role in African existence thus African literary works reveal opinions which can assist mankind live in synchronisation with the ecosystem. As Buell notes in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, "our present day interest in Ecocriticism

is at least partly the product of a longer history predating both modern and Romantic contexts. If environmental criticism today is still an emergent discourse it is one with very ancient roots…" (2). This undertaking shows that since prehistory, literature and the environment have always shared a close correlation – a continuum as evident in the Medieval period, the Renaissance, the Romantics and African mythology over time in the furtherance of environmental concerns.

However, this study demonstrates that the concern with Nature over time is different from the contemporary concerns of literature with environment – degradation and exploitation of natural resources designates a deliberate degradation of nature and space for the specific purposes of exploitation, industrial production, market and profit. On this backdrop, the selected poetry examines the poets' opposition to environmental destruction and the exploitation of the Nigerian ecosystem along with the desire for a sustainable relationship between man and his physical habitat. Through their poetry, Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare, and Nnimmo Bassey reveal that environmental degradation and the consequent impoverishment of the lot of rural communities in Nigeria have inhibited Nigerian natural environment from enhancing its socio-economic development and the survival of the affected people. This research appraises the manner in which Niyi Osundare in *The Eye of the Earth (1986)* and *Waiting Laughters* (1990), Tanure Ojaide in *Day Dream of Ants* (1997) and *Delta Blues and Homesongs* (1997) and Nnimmo Bassey in *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* (2002) and *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* (2011) signify the degradation of nature through oil extraction and the growing clamor for resource control which has given rise to pockets of agitations in Nigeria today. The selected poets' capture the extent to which the collaboration between multinational corporations and the ruling elites have jeopardised the progress of Nigeria. From this purview, contemporary Nigerian

poetry collections act as an opposition to globalisation and demonstrate its concern for an inward-looking and people centered development in Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Ecological, political and literary discourses have emphasised that nature is endangered and the exploitation of natural resources for the free market globally contributes to the destruction of the natural world of periphery nations. This study is premised on the argument that as a medium of expressing views about man and his social existence, Literature in general and Modern Nigerian Poetry in particular are concerned with the survival of mankind and the planet. The study also upholds the view that the selected works of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey demonstrate that Nigeria is entangled in the peril of exploitation, destruction and mismanagement of its natural resources by the combined action of its ruling class and multinational companies. Through this approach, the study expands existing knowledge on the selected texts which is limited to the evaluation of the texts as oral performances, as celebration of Nigeria's glorious past, as conflict between western and traditional cultures as advocacies for radical change. This study deploys Ecocriticism to explore Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey's selected poems as critiques of the collaboration between the Nigerian State and Global Corporate Capitalism to exploit Nigeria's natural resources for self enrichment and profit. The critical gap that this study fills signifies that as a discourse, the poems investigated demonstrate that socio-ecological issues have churned up issues of militants, displacement, under-development and pollution not just on the Nigerian space but also on the livelihood of the marginalised people. Taken together, this study posits that although early Nigerian poets were

concerned with environmental deterioration, they did not explore it with the same critical idiom as the poets of study who have illuminated precarious environmental concerns in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria by extension. Based on the above, this study is anchored on the propositions:

1) How the selected poets utilise poetry as a mouthpiece to express discontentment with globalisation and its corollary and lay emphasis on the sustainability of Nigerian environment.
2) How the contemporary environment-centered poetry and the criticism it has generated transcend the socio-political issues articulated in early Nigerian Poetry.
3) How Ecocriticism can be a valuable means of evaluating the selected Nigerian poetry as discourses about the environment and the human interactions with it.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study is circumscribed by the affinity between literature and society in an era of massive exploitation of natural and human resources for economic purposes in the process threatening the planet's basic life support systems. On account of this, the study shows the quintessence of Ecocriticism in relation to issues of consumerism and environmental damage in the light of modern technological advancement. Consequently, this approach is applied to the selected poems of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey in order to illustrate that mankind's activities on the Nigerian environment are imbalanced and their effects are deleterious. In view of this, the objectives of this study are to:

1) Show that Poetry is a fitting discursive medium employed by poets to enunciate their discontent with the status quo and to contribute to the debate about ecological issues in Nigeria.
2) Demonstrate that there is a close correlation between literature and environmental discourse in their involvement in issues of environmental destruction, militancy and underdevelopment.
3) Illustrate that Ecocriticism is a potent theory for literary evaluation and a dynamic phenomenon as regards socio-political discourses which literature signifies.

1.4 Justification/Significance of Study

The significance of this study titled *Modern Nigerian Poetry and the Environment: An Ecocritical Study of Selected Poems of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare, and Nnimmo Bassey* is the deployment of insights from Ecocriticism to the evaluation of the concerns of recent Nigerian Poetry with environmental degradation. This approach illustrates that the selected Nigerian Poets are keenly aware of the relationship between power, industrial production and the exploitation of Nigeria's unnatural and natural resources and they use their poetry to reveal the convergences of poverty and militancy on them. In view of this, Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare (second generation poets) also known as the Alter-Native poets focus on the state of the society, in unmasking the forces at play within it and Nnimmo Bassey (a third generation poet) belongs to the twenty-first Century Nigerian poets whose concerns lament the betrayal of political leaders and the dilapidated state of the nation Nigeria. These poets of study occupy dominant positions in explicating ecological matters because their compositions under study provide vistas on environmental issues and the condition of the Nigerian landscape on account of the civil war, the oil boom and the incessant exploitations of natural resources. To this end, this study contributes to literary scholarship by considering the ways the poets of study delineate ecological degradation and its impact on Nigeria's bionetwork.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The study covers the analysis of selected poems in Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* (1986) and *Waiting Laughters* (1990), Ojaide in *Day Dream of Ants* (1997) and *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1997) as well as Nnimmo Bassey in *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* (2002) and *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* (2011). The periodisation of the selected texts from 1986 - 2011 reveal a critical epoch in Nigeria's political economy and history and raises

discourses around contemporary issues such as the Niger Delta Oil crisis, the widening gap between the extremely rich and the extremely poor, environmental destruction, and political dissensions which keep unfolding in the Nigerian social space. These specific texts are appropriate for this study because they are anchored on the view that in Nigeria, ecological problems are consequences of exploitation of the people and of natural resources for profit. The choice of the selected poets is therefore based on their description of the ugly sides of environmental realities in Nigeria which accentuate underdevelopment, create violence, strained social relations and their call for a healthy environment, the survival and progress of the Nigerian people and the world at large. Hence, irrespective of the selected poets varied ethnic background and generational gap their works convey values in harmony with the principles of Ecocriticism in order to show the havoc done to the Nigerian ecology.

1.6 Research Methodology

This research employs the qualitative research method which explores issues by analysing data through words and concepts. This study therefore involves an in-depth analytical investigation of primary data- in Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* (1986) and *Waiting Laughters* (1990), Ojaide in *Day Dream of Ants* (1997) and *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1997) as well as Nnimmo Bassey in *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* (2002) and *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* (2011) with Ecocriticism as its analytical framework. Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary study that combines natural science and humanistic discipline – ecology and literature. Therefore, interdisciplinary approach is essential in this research because it connects and integrates approaches to show their complexities. This study investigates secondary sources in the form of existing literature in several fields, books, magazines, e-journals, articles, newspapers, presentations, lectures, and unpublished works which provide valuable information

about current environmental issues in Nigeria and the world at large. The Library and the Internet were also consulted for relevant data for this study.

1.7 The Development of Nigerian Poetry

Modern Nigerian poetry historicises the socio-political, economic and environmental issues that stir poets such as Okigbo, Okara, Soyinka, Ojaide, Osundare, Ofeimun, Acholonu, Bassey and others to write. The written poetry in English began in the 1930's before the establishment of the University College Ibadan in 1948. According to Lindfors (75) "Nigerian poetry started …in popular mass media which were available to educated Nigerians more than half a Century earlier…. Nationalist newspapers of the 1930's and 1940's frequently carried a special column- "a Poet's Nook" or "Poets corner" in which patriots and politicians expressed their loftiest thoughts in rigidly metrical rhyme."

The period of the 1930s and the 1940s was dominated by intense nationalist movements because of decolonisation in Nigeria. Nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dennis Osadebay began to write poems which were made public on radios and in newspapers. These pioneer poets used poetry as a tool in their public engagements to achieve political independence. Their comments on topical issues reflect issues like racism, the negative impact of colonialism and the need to carve a better image for the black man in the world as depicted in Osadebay's collection *Africa Sings* (1950). Nwoga describes these pioneer poets as "…men and women involved in the problem of gaining recognition for the qualities of the black man, of achieving the political independence of their countries from colonial rule, of forming the minds of their countrymen for a new Africa" (33-37).

However, the establishment of the University College Ibadan and subsequently the University of Nigeria, Nsukka provided training ground for poets whose compositions exhibit maturity and mastery of both style and form. Such Poets as Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara and J.P. Clark Bekederemo who were trained in these Universities began to write poems. These first generation Nigerian Poets, emerging from the crucible of colonial ideology, succeeded in laying a solid basis for Modern Nigerian poetry. This generation attempted to communicate a sense of severance from their African roots in an essentially esoteric voice (Maiwada 124). Chinweizu and others identified the following categories common to these early 'poets- euro modernists' who assiduously imitated the practices of the 20th Century European poetry: the traditionalists who sought to model their English Language poetry on elements from traditional African poetry and a miscellany… of individual voices of the middle ground who… share no strongly distinguishing characteristics (Ushie 3).

These first generation poets conscientiously wanted to prove themselves as fine poets and impress the outside world and reverse the Eurocentric notion that nothing good could come out of Africa. Thus, they were fundamentally irked by colonial abuse and tried to authenticate the African personality… within a neo-colonially structured milieu (Maiwada 124). With the achievement of independence, these poets abandoned the recurrent theme of colonialism and what Nwoga describes as "private domain" to comment on the dilemma of Nigerians caught between the European and African culture. On this basis, Aiyejina (112) asserts that "Nigerian poetry in English before (1967-1970) was marked by an excessive preoccupation with the poet's private grief and emotions over and above social tragedies and triumphs. It was also a poetry distinguished by an undue eurocentrism, deprivationism, obscurantism and private esoterism". Furthermore, in order to present themselves as excellent poets, the first generation poets

overemphasised form at the expense of meaning. This was as a result of the influence of English poets like T.S. Eliot, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Ezra Pound. This is why Chinweizu Jemie Onwuchekwa, Onsucheka J. and Ihechukwu Madubuike describe the poetry of the first generation poets as "Hopkinian disease". They state further that "despite the high praise heaped upon it from all sides, most of its practitioners display glaring faults e.g. old fashioned, craggy, unmusical language, obscure and inaccessible diction, a plethora of imported imagery…" (165).

Chinweizu et al condemn the first generation poets for making their poetry unnecessarily difficult as it estranged the poet and his audience. In this vein, they advocate for simple language and technique in their works which will impel the audience with enthusiasm to respond to the content of their poetry. In spite of this, the economic situation in Nigeria had begun to deteriorate extensively. Nigerian leaders had failed to meet the aspirations of the masses. This concern gave new perspective to the Nigerian poets of the second-generation also known as the Alter-Native poets which include: the poets of study Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, the like of Chinweizu, Odia Ofeimun, Onyora Ossie Enekwe and Catherine Acholonu. Their pursuits focus "on the present state of the society, in unmasking the forces at play within it, revealing the material sources of exploitation and injustices, demonstrating how the masses could liberate themselves and… the collective struggle fought by the hero with a thousand faces and a thousand hands" (Ushie 4). Thus, it became common among poets to align with the less privileged. This situation lends credence to Irele's assertion that "in a growing literary culture, the cannon is hardly ever a stable or final one and every generation has the opportunity to shape its literary preferences according to its own perception of the values it considers essential to the community of its tradition" (Irele 110).

According to Aiyejina (115) "the Nigerian civil war contributed to the advent of the second generation poets as mangled limbs and dismembered bowels of victims metamorphosed into images of death, aridity, decay, putrefaction, betrayal and hypocrisy in their work. The mournful tone of dirge became the dominant mood of the poetry by the post-Okigbo poets. Thus, it became paramount to respond to the situation at that time by producing poetry relevant to the realities of their daily existence." It is important to mention, that, although Okigbo, Clark and Soyinka showed some perception of the civil war in their later poetry, it was not with the same stridency exhibited by the second-generation poets such as Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare in the struggle for the betterment of the Nigerian people. This is because the former were concerned with the struggles of a nation undergoing the process of transformation from colonial through neocolonial to a self determining nation. In consequence, the second generation poets' works respond to circumstances distinct to the historical period of the 1980s and the 1990s and on "the present state of the society, in unmasking the class forces at play within it, revealing the material sources of exploitation and injustices, demonstrating how the masses could liberate themselves …" (Ushie 4). Poetry works like *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983), *Village Voices* (1984), *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), *Waiting Laughters* (1990) and Ofeimun's *The Poet Lied* (1980), Tanure Ojaide's *Labyrinth of the Delta* (1986), *The Eagle Vision* (1987), *Endless Song* (1989), *The Fate of Vultures and Other Poems* (1990), *The Blood of Peace and Other Poems* (1991), *Day Dreams of Ants* (1997), *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1997) abound during this epoch to reflect the grim disillusionment.

On the other hand, the third-generation poets are artists from the 1990s to the present and includes Nnimmo Bassey, "Femi Oyebode, Afam Akeh, Onookome Okome, Uche Nduka, Chin Ce, Usman Shehu, Remi Raji, Joe Ushie, and Uchechukwu Peter Umezurike, Obi Nwakanma,

Ogaga Ifowodo, Chidi Anthony Opara and Maik Nwosu" (Ushie 22). Some of their literary works are *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* (2002) and *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* (2011) by Nnimmo Bassey, *Love Songs of My Wasteland* (2005) by Remi Raji, *Dark Through the Delta* (2004) and *Aridity of My Feelings* (2006) by Uchechukwu Peter Umezuirike which register contempt against Nigerian ruling class insensitivity to the plight of the people and the degradation of the natural environment. These New generation of poets' also known as new Nigerian poets or twenty-first Century Nigerian poets have been regarded as lamentation poets- they "lament the betrayal of political leaders and the dilapidated state of the nation…" (Mowarin 125). As with most literary ethos, Nigerian poets have voiced their discontent with governments' insensitivity towards Nigeria's socio-political and ecological issues.

United by a collective essence therefore, Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide as second-generation poets and Nnimmo Bassey as third-generation poet raise discourses around contemporary issues such as the Niger Delta Oil crisis, the widening gap between the extremely rich and the extremely poor, environmental destruction, and political dissensions which keep unfolding in the Nigerian social space. Consequently, in terms of thematic exploration, there is no clear-cut dichotomy among the three generations of Nigerian poets and despite the different epochs they depict, this study notes the sociological and ecological tilt involved in their work.

1.8 The Nature and Scope of Ecological Crisis

The origin of ecological crisis is crucial for comprehending the ecocritical study of the selected Nigerian poetry. There is no doubt that the present dimensions of ecological crisis in the society extends to the economic, political, cultural and social levels. The crisis is circumscribed by the upsetting of ecological systems, the threat to renewable resources, the running out of non-renewable resources, the rapid downgrading of the environment and the quality of life. It has

now been established that the ecological crisis, the greenhouse effect, as well as, the consequent climate change – which is the most important manifestation of this crisis degenerates rapidly. In essence, however, ecological crises are fundamentally created by the systematic orientation towards regarding the natural environment as means of production in modern and post modern thinking and there are landmarks in the development of this orientation as outlined below:

i) Industrial Revolution:

The Industrial Revolution of the 19th Century is an integral part of the system of the capitalist market economy, a phenomenon that leads to a continuous economic growth and development, consumerism and a growing concentration of income and wealth (Fotopoulos 27). This is inevitable because of the paramount need of those controlling the means of production to maximise profits through improvements in economic efficiency and competitiveness. Signifying the phenomenon of the modern nation state with its contradictions, banalities and trauma through urbanisation, unequal power and economic relations…" (Abubakar 43) industrialisation ensures the minimisation of the social controls that protect the environment and treat it as a resource or input in production.

ii) The Classical Greek humanism:

This emphasises the inherent superiority of humans over other species and nature and defines man as a rational animal. The Greeks held that humans in virtue of their rational capacities have greater value than any non-rational being including nature "Rationality is the key to human superiority over animals" (Pojman 107-108). Therefore, having strong interest for human welfare alone and downplaying the importance of the non-human permits the despoliation of nature.

iii) Cartesian Dualism:

The Cartesian dualism of soul and body is another basis for human superiority over animals and other non human beings. In the opinion of Descartes, human beings have souls while animals do not have. In this light, animals are mere automata and lack the divine element, the soul that makes humans spiritual beings (Pojman 108). Cartesian dualism therefore implies that human beings on account of the possession of souls are superior animals and this ideology spurs mankind to alter the natural environment purely for his interest and needs.

iv) Anthropocentricism:

Anthropocentricism, according to Hiltner Ken (2) is an "ethic that makes human interests paramount". Anthropocentricism puts human concerns above those of other species including nature. Against this backdrop, the interest of any species such as human beings over the biosphere supports disconnection and initiates environmental disintegration.

v) *The Judeo-Christian Concept of Superiority:*

The Judeo-Christian concept is a major source of human superiority in that it claims human beings are made in God's image and have a higher place in the 'great chain of being'. Against this backdrop, Lynn White published an article titled: "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" which maintains that modern science and technology are products of Western culture and because Western culture has at its roots Christian attitudes and principles, nature has no reason

for existence except to serve mankind. Thus, Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt for the current ecological crisis (Bristow 1). The portion of the Bible most quoted by critics who consider Christianity to be arrogant toward nature is found in Genesis Chapter One: "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (27-28).

The two verses cited above give the Christian view point about land conservation and stewardship. Human beings possess physical and spiritual attributes not shared by animals, such as moral consciousness, the ability to think abstractly, an understanding of beauty, emotion, and the capacity to know and worship God. For Buell, "the opening chapter of Genesis is the root of Western techno-domination … and the point of mentioning this is not to arbitrate it but to call attention to the antiquity and durability of environmental discourse-and its variety both within individual thought traditions…." (2) To this end, the Christian ideology of humans dominating the natural environment for self aggrandisement and profit over the ages has supported the persistent exploitation of natural resources.

According to Bristow (1), "estimate in world population over the past two centuries have been alarming, the world is undergoing a demographic transition". The United Nations recently estimated that 44% of the world's population live in countries where the fertility rate has fallen below the replacement rate, and demographers are now predicting that world population will peak within 50 years and then decline, perhaps sharply, with potentially serious consequences (Singer 22). Humankind has been given the honor and privilege of managing and administering

God's creation, with the expectation that he will do it responsibly. However, persons who misconceived the Biblical teachings assume that since Nature is subordinate to Man, they willingly used it for their slightest whims. Hence, Lynn laments that: "Christian attitude towards man's relation to nature is universally held… To a Christian a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West…" (1203-7). By these views, the culpability of Christian ideology alongside the exploitation of the natural resources for the free global market has degraded the natural environment and led to clichés of conservation movements. On the contrary, the accusation against the Christian faith regarding the exploitation of the environment is based on several misreading of the Bible. Although, Christians are enjoined by God to exhibit dominion over nature, this is to be done rightly. Hence, Genesis 2:15 puts it "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden to dress it and to keep it" it is obvious that conservation and not exploitation to merely serve human needs is the Christian standpoint.

In this context, "Globalisation" which "is a major scourge of imperialism depleting the environment dates back to the ancient and medieval trading systems of the old Mediterranean world (from which African, Asian, and European societies participated in cultural, religious and economic exchange) and only became consolidated in modern times in the 19th Century colonial empire- which has shaped the national, economical, cultural, technological and structural identities of present societies on the planet" (Abubakar 39). On the other hand "Environment", "defies a universal method of definition" (Jimoh 19) however, "environment has been conceived as a system within which living organisms interact with the physical elements" (Sada 29). The environment is made up of a number of spheres which include the hydrosphere, the atmosphere,

the lithosphere and biosphere. Therefore, Man's relationship with his environment has taken three phases these are the Paleolithic age, the Neolithic age and the Modern age. The Paleolithic age marked the era of environmental determinism where the environment essentially provided for man due to man's low technological development and the Neolithic era marked the Iron Age when equipment was fabricated with metals due to remarkable improvement in man's technological proficiency. While the modern age, marks the age of industrialisation and globalisation epitomised by production growth and profit as well as devastation of the environment (Robinson 19).

In the same way, "globalisation, a continuation …of colonialism is gradually changing the globe. The nature of change in the globe is hotly debated as some optimist see it as a source of economic progress, global integration, cooperation and a future world of better conditions. Others argue that, it is accelerating the process of exploitation of nature and humanity spinning the globe faster and faster towards an ecological meltdown" (Clapp 15). To this end, "Shrinking" the world to fit global markets has led to the growth of the centre of the system at unsustainable rates… generating a planetary scale of ecological contradictions imperiling the entire biosphere (Dauvergne 249). In this outlook, the apathy shown by corporate giants towards the exploitation in sub-Sahara Africa is not different in comparison to that shown by the colonial powers. The visible result of these activities is a rapidly degraded environment.

In the light of the above, the selected Nigerian poetry collections show the horror unfolding between humans and nature, as societies become increasingly detached from their rural roots and traditions. The poets Ojaide, Osundare and Bassey have incessantly blasted at the rottenness of cities in Nigeria – the Niger Delta region and others, viewed not only as pits of

decadence but as destructive forces of Nigeria's natural environment and the livelihood of the impoverished people.

1.9 Ecocriticism as a Theoretical Framework

Poetry about nature has been a vital part of literary tradition whether in opposition to a feared environment or exaltation of creation represented by forests, lakes, mountains and other features. Canonical writers like Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth and others have represented nature using images of rosy clouds and ethereal peaks or hostile wasteland. However, the environmental crises of the 21st Century have given rise to a literature that signifies the fragility of the interrelatedness of all life forms thus underpinning the frailty of the ecosystem. This development necessitated the emergence of Ecocriticism – a new approach which forms the increasing presence of discourses on the tension between environment, power, and consumerism in the postmodern world.

Ecocriticism began with the pioneering works of British critic Raymond Williams who wrote a seminal critique of pastoral literature titled: *The Country and the City* in 1973 and the American Joseph Meeker who wrote *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and Play Ethics* published in 1974. Also, Ecocriticism as a movement owes much to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*- an environmental expose'. These works propose that environmental crisis is caused primarily by a cultural tradition in the West of separating culture from nature and the elevation of the latter to moral predominance. "Ecocriticism" was coined by William Rueckert who used the term Ecocriticism in a 1978 essay titled: *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*

with the intention of focusing on "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Glotfelty and Fromm 107). In the mid-eighties, the need to establish Ecocriticism as an approach within criticism worked out through the publication of two seminal works on ecocriticism – *The Ecocriticism Reader* in 1996 by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm along with Lawrence Buell publishing *The Environmental Imagination.*

Ecocriticism as a movement is known by a number of designations including "green cultural studies", "eco-poetry", "environmental literary criticism", "green-poetry", "eco-literature" and "eco/environmental studies". Ecocriticism has its source from two Greek words Eco (oikos) and Critic (kritis) meaning "house judge". Ecology in this regard means man's house and the critic is its judge – an arbiter of taste who wants the house kept in good order: no technological tillage, no oil spillage to ruin the original décor. Therefore, an ecocritic is a person that judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effect of culture upon nature with the view of celebrating nature, bearing its despoilers and reversing their harm through political actions (Rueckert 107).

Although varieties of voices do not always address Ecocriticism in complete harmony, there are substantial agreements on some key issues. One of these is that Ecocriticism is committed to changing things. Another is that "Ecocriticism makes connections… and Ecocriticism at its best seeks to understand, comprehend and discuss the ways dynamics of subjugation, persecution, and tyranny are mutually reinforcing, the ways that racism, sexism, homophobia, speciesism… are interlocking" (Estok 229). By analogy, Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationship between literature and environment or how man's relationships with the physical environment are reflected in literature (Buell 1091). Ecocriticism investigates literature

in relation to the histories of ecological thought, ethics and activism. It explores the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment conducted with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on the environment by human activities (Abrams 87-88). Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary study which combines the natural science and humanistic discipline and the most widely known ecocritics are Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, Scott Slovic, Simon Estok, Harold Fromm, William Rueckert, Michael Branch, William Howarth and Glen Love.

Cheryl Glotfelty, one of its proponents explains "Ecocriticism" as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, Ecocriticism takes on earth-centred approach to literary studies (Glotfelty xviii). Ecocritics encourage others to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis, and about how language and literature transmit values with profound ecological implications.

Buell Lawrence, in a similar way defines Ecocriticism as the study of the relation between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of environmental praxis (Buell 1091). By appealing to the "spirit of commitment to environmental praxis", Buell rejects harmful theoretical notions representing nature as an ideological screen. By this, the green world becomes nothing but a projective fantasy or social allegory. For Buell, literary texts should contribute to man's interaction with the natural world.

Michael P. Branch espouses the significance of Ecocriticism theory as a call for cultural change. Ecocriticism, to him is not just a means of analysing nature in literature rather it implies a move towards a more biocentric world-view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of human conception of global community to include nonhuman life forms and the physical environment. Just as feminist and African American literary criticism call for a change in culture that is, an attempt to move the culture toward a broader world-view by exposing an earlier narrowness of view- so does ecological literary criticism advocate for cultural change by examining how the narrowness of our culture's assumptions about the natural world has limited our ability to envision an ecologically sustainable human society (Michael xiii).

Scott Slovic offers a broad description of "Ecocriticism as the study of explicitly environmental texts from any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any text, even texts that seem, at first glance, oblivious of the nonhuman world" (160-162). Similarly, Simon Estok in his own contribution explicates that Ecocriticism is more than "simply the study of nature or natural things in literature. Rather, it is a theory that is committed to affecting change by analysing the function- thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical or otherwise of the natural environment or aspects of it represented in documents – literary or others that contribute to material practices in material worlds" (Estok 220). This definition echoes the functional approach of Ecocriticism which analyses the analogies between ecosystems and imaginative texts and posits that such texts potentially have a regenerative function in the cultural system (Estok 223).

However, Stephanie Sarver submits that 'Ecocriticism' should be labeled environmentalism. This is because Ecocriticism as an approach to the study of literature shares a common concern with the relationship between humans and nature. Whereas "ecology" is a scientific discipline which studies the connections between organisms and their environment. "Environmentalism" comprises a range of practices that promotes the well being of the earth. In this context, Stephanie Sarver is of the opinion that literary scholars in their works are informed by environmental concerns as such study texts not organisms. Into the bargain, Sarver contends that Ecocriticism is not a theory at all rather "Ecocriticism is… an unfortunate term because it suggests a new kind of critical theory. The emerging body of work that might be labeled ecocritical is united not by a theory, but by a focus: the environment. This ecocritical work draws on a variety of theories, such as Feminist, Marxist, Post-Structuralist…" (Rigby 68). It is apparent, that Sarver ignores the fact that generally, theories derive from theories that precede them and borrowing from another theory is allowed in the articulation of a new critical practice. On this note, Lawrence Buell posits that "ecocritical practice has its theoretical and methodological bases in a number of theories best understood as a variety of semi over lapping projects. Therefore, all theories are synthesis…" (Glotfelty 78).

For some African critics, "Ecocriticism… appears as another hegemonic discourse from the Metropolitan West…" (Slaymaker 684). The suspicion that environmentalism in all its various shades of green is a 'white' thing borne out by the explosive growth of research and participation by white scholars in and outside Africa (684) has contributed to the low visibility of ecocriticism in recent African writing. This is temporal as Black African-Nigerian poets such as Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Nnimmo Bassey have joined their counterparts in this globalised interest that "environmental literature and ecological criticism are resonating dynamic

signals which generate concern for the health of the earth and its resources" (Slaymaker 691). To this end, a pioneer of Ecocriticism, Lawrence Buell (33) postulates four principles in appraising any literary composition ecocritically. These are:

> The 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.
>
> The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
>
> Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.
>
> Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant is at least implicit in the text.

In line with the tenets of ecocriticism, Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells in *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature* illuminates the "possibilities of the ecocritic in tracking environmental representations wherever they appear, to see debates which seem to be taking place, and often concealed in many cultural spaces" (5). By engaging other literary theories, Ecocriticism illuminates a better understanding of nature writing. This is the basis why ecocriticism continues to enlarge as a discipline in an age of global environmental crisis. In depicting ecocritical views, one of the poets of study- Nnimmo Bassey in the poetry collection titled: *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* (2012) in the poem "I Will Not Dance to Your Beat" avers that:

> *If climate change means death to me but business to you*
> *I will expose your evil greed*
> *If you don't leave crude oil in the soil*
> *Coal in the hole and tar sands in the land*
> *I will confront you and denounce you*
> *If you insist on carbon offsetting and others do-nothing*
> *false solution…* (11).

The poet laments how the Nigerian ecosystem has been wrongly portrayed as a creation to serve man's caprices. As an ecocritic, Nnimmo Bassey makes efforts to reveal how the Nigerian environment has been abused hence his insistence "leave crude oil in the soil". In another poem titled "What can you sink?" the poet again bemoans the state of Nigeria's natural surroundings:

> *Oh but a thousand things sunk*
> *Nothing compared to carbon sink*
> *The stuff that dulls to sleep*
> *Turrets hammer the skies in industrial layabouts*
> *Automobiles, a thousand other polluters*
> *Load the skies with the choking gas*
> *Some smart guys dream of do nothing solutions*
> *Reap billions and con a captured world*
> *While the skies get burnt*… (16).

The above stanza describes the indiscriminate pollution of the Nigerian environment which is evident in the lines *Load the skies with the choking gas/... while the skies get burnt*.... Thus, gas flaring and pollution noticeable in the Nigerian space show the predominant theme of ecological degradation.

Ecocriticism has much to offer and Karla and Kathleen (31) posit that "the applications and theory that Ecocriticism develops… broadens understandings of how modern cultural assumptions about the environment have developed". In addition, an ecocritical reading of a particular text takes up crucial questions such as:

> Does the setting function simply as background or does it play an active role in the narrative?
> If it plays an active role, how important is it in working out the narrative?
> How is nature affected by human beings?
> How responsible are the human beings for the environment?
> What questions does the text raise about human interactions with nature?
> Does the text raise the reader's awareness of the natural world and his or her connections to it? (Dobie 243).

Addressing the representations of nature focuses on specific issues relating to the ecology and analyses the treatment of nature expressed in the text. It also tries to link nature to the plot and other elements in the text. It finds out whether the values represented in the text are consonant with "green" thinking and if literary metaphors for land have an impact on how humankind deals with the land. Furthermore, ecocritical examinations of environmental exploitation, destruction of human and non-human habitats and how these motifs are expressed or disguised in a text may also be readily applied to the existing body of Post-colonial theory.

1.10 Overlaps between Ecocriticism and Postcolonial Ecocriticism

There are many terms in environmental issues and theories which share common denominators in the goal to protect the environment. For Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffan "Postcolonial ecocriticism and Ecocriticism are hedged about with seemingly insurmountable problems. The two fields are notoriously difficult to define not least by their own practitioners…. Thus, internal divisions…e.g. the commitment to social and environmental justice or differences… and large scale distinctions based on the attractive view that postcolonial studies and eco/environmental studies offer mutual correctives to each other turn out to… be perilous" (3).

To shed light on the above, Lawrence Buell attests that "Ecocriticism" like all critical word is a contested term. Buell explains that ecocritical investigation of literary images of nature belongs to the "First Wave" while the "Second Wave" investigations emphasise nature's relationship to the realm of politics – including the importance of political categories such as gender, class, race, sexuality and environmental justice in order to investigate nature's ideological construction including the ways nature is conceptually manipulated. The "third

wave" ecocritical investigations recognise ethnic and national particularities from an ecocritical perspective. Ecocriticism explores the local or global, the material or physical, the historical or natural history in the context of a work of art. In this context, the study is located in the second wave Ecocriticism as it captures nature's ideological constructions and the diverse ways the environment is manipulated.

On the other hand, Postcolonial Ecocriticism is a variety of Ecocriticism that addresses "concerns with conquest, colonisation, racism, sexism along with its investments in theories of indigeneity and diaspora and the relations between native and invader, societies and cultures" (Huggan and Tiffan 6) to explicate ecocritical modes of feminist ecocriticism, romantic ecocriticism and postcolonial Ecocriticism "need to be understood as particular ways of reading" (Huggan and Tiffan 13). In other words, "feminist ecocriticism and postcolonial ecocriticism presuppose feminism and postcolonial area of interest. What… this suggests is that postcolonial field is inherently anthropocentric–human centred…while, Ecocriticism speaks on behalf of the non-human organisms" (Huggan and Tiffin 3). Irrespective of the different discourses about Ecocriticism and Postcolonial ecocriticism, this study posits that Postcolonial ecocriticism cannot be appraised without delving into environmental issues and Ecocriticism or eco/environmental studies cannot be addressed without dwelling into postcolonial issues alongside imperialism – a metaphor that explores ideologies of domination and socio-historical effects.

In this context, Pablo Murkherjee (144) maintains that "surely, any field purporting to theorise the global conditions of colonialism and imperialism (…call it postcolonial studies) cannot but consider the complex interplay of environmental categories such as water, land, energy, habitat, migration with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict,

literature, theatre, and visual arts. Equally, any field purporting to attach interpretative importance to environment (call it eco/environmental studies) must be able to trace the social, historical and material co-ordinates of categories such as forests, rivers, bio-regions and species". Huggan and Tiffan (13) maintain that "Postcolonial ecocriticism like several other modes of Ecocriticism – perform advocacy function both in relation to the real world it inhabits and to the imaginary spaces it opens for contemplation of how the real world might be transformed". Therefore, to reconcile Ecocriticism and Postcolonial ecocriticism theory according to Howarth William (90) "the complex interplay of social history with the natural world and how language shapes and reveals such interactions" must be taken into account. This investigation makes apparent that Ecocriticism theory and Postcolonial ecocriticism (a mode of Ecocriticism) have conflicting interests as well as goals which converge towards documentation of environmental abuses, exploitation and the liberation of the oppressed to protect nature, animals and peoples. Ecocriticism and Postcolonial ecocriticism cannot be scrutinised without exploring social, historical and environmental issues in the society.

This chapter examines the extent to which the Nigerian ruling class and multinational corporations have deliberately manipulated Nigeria's natural resources as sources of economic profit and self-pursuits translate to environmental annihilation, underdevelopment, displacement, neglect of the people and militancy. In this perception, the consciousness to address Nigeria's environmental unease prompts the selected poets to examine environmental dimensions in their works through Ecocriticism. Ecocriticism calls for a shift from one context of reading to another – specifically a movement from the human to the environmental as well as understanding the ways that dynamics of subjugation, persecution, tyranny and others are mutually reinforcing. The

study illustrates the extent to which studying environmental representation in the selected works covey the poets' ecocritical insights regarding man and his environment.

1.11 Chapter Structure

This study is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one which is the introduction examines the background to the study, philosophical conceptualisations of the environment, its statement of problem, aim and objectives, justification, theoretical framework, research methodology and chapter structure. Chapter two reviews related literature and views of the selected poets and critics. Chapter three evaluates Environmental Aesthetics in Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* and *Waiting Laughters*. Chapter four explores the Question of Development in Ojaide's *Day Dream of Ants* and *Delta Blues and Home Songs*. Chapter five analyses Green Resistance in Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* and *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat*. Chapter six undertakes a comparative analysis of the main concerns and aesthetic dimensions of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey's poetry. Chapter seven is the conclusion which brings together the major issues raised in the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literature and environment have shared a close relationship as evident in the works of artists down the ages. Literary critics examine how the connection between environment and society is textualised in literary works. In this regard, increasing environmental devastation in the twenty-first Century and the popularity of postmodernism agitate ecocritics who see postmodern dismissal of the "real" as complicit in the destruction of nature. Ecocritics maintain that "postmodernism re-creates the world as text, thereby destroying the world in the process" (Richard and Sammells 94). In this context, the human drive to assert superiority over the physical environment has manifested in myriad of contexts. These have evolved from the will to survive or the desire to have access to natural resources, to the rise of empires and the excessive equation of land… (Colchester 3-4).

Based on these, Robinson (50) reveals that "environmental damage does not just happen. It is the result of the ways in which production and consumption are organised under

capitalism…." The repeated plunder of the environment and the aggravations of environmental problem are outcome of the capitalist system. In this regard, Fisher Ernest (50) acquiesces that the "move from the preservation of nature to malignant global capitalism, highlights that, capitalism has turned everything into a commodity with a hitherto unimaginable increase in production and productivity, extending the new order dynamically to all parts of the globe and all areas of human existence". Mankind's insatiable pursuit of growth and profit has perpetrated damage on nature on a massive scale.

Al Gore in *Earth in the Balance: Forging a New Common Purpose* expresses "the dangers that frontier capitalist operation brings to the world and warns that unless there is a way of dramatically changing civilisation and man's way of thinking about the relationship between humankind and the earth our children will inherit a wasteland" (220). In this purview, "environmental crisis is as much a crisis of values and motives as well as a crisis of science and damage…. Secular changes in science, politics and economics to safe guard the environment are of secondary importance… each new ecological disaster has brought renewed… attempts to understand man's dislocation from the natural world…" (Richard and Sammells 104). In other words, the defense of nature is interconnected with the pursuits of social justice.

In this connection, the threats that the continuous misuse of the environment poses on humanity in the twenty-first Century is signified by Ecocriticism. Ecocriticism speaks for the earth by rendering an account of the indebtedness of culture to nature while acknowledging the role of language in shaping the view of the world" (Campbell 5). Thus:

> Ecocriticism begins from the conviction that the arts of imagination and the study there of can contribute significantly to the understanding of environmental problems and the multiple forms of eco-degradation that afflict planet Earth today. In this,

> ecocriticism concurs with other branches of the environmental humanities – ethics, history, religious studies, anthropology, humanistic geography – in holding that environmental phenomena must be comprehended, and that today's burgeoning array of environmental concerns must be addressed qualitatively as well as quantitatively… (Buell et al 418).

To this end, "Literature can be perceived as an aesthetically and culturally constructed part of the environment, since it directly addresses the questions of human constructions, such as meaning, value, language, and imagination, which can be linked to the problem of ecological consciousness that humans need to attain" (Oppermann 29-46). So, "Literature, whether handed down by the word of mouth, or in print, gives us a second handle on reality…" (Achebe 117). Within this framework, ecocritics are concerned with how literature transmits values significant to ecological thinking. They posit that environmental crisis is a question that cannot be overlooked in literary studies hence Nigerian poets are "turning to cultural expressions opposed to the processes and effects of capitalist globalisation (Shantz 121). Thus, "Literature – the product of the literary artist is one of the most reliable guide into understanding people, their times and ways. This way, the poet is a central figure not only in defining the quality of life, but in the cure of the multiple infirmities which affect…" (Obiechina 128). In retaking the responsibility of speaking on behalf of the people, contemporary poets are conscious of their duty to typify the socio-economic, political, cultural and ecological activities of the day hence, Sanchez (112) "elucidates the relationship between art and society – art contributes to the reaffirmation or devaluation of ideas, goals, or values…."

For over six decades, Nigerian writers and poets have explored environmental issues, exploitation of indigenous resources and the evils of colonialism. Their works depict pastoral life, a glorious Nigerian past and cultural conflict as portrayed in the poetry works of John

Pepper Clark in *A Decade of Tongue* and "The Casualties", "Agbor dancer", "Olokun", Gabriel Okara's "The Fishermans invocation" and "The Call of the River Nun", "Piano and drums", "The Snowflakes", "Night rain", "Streamside Exchange" and Christopher Okigbo's poems "Labyrinths", "Heavensgate", "Silences", and "Paths of thunder". For instance, J.P. Clarks's poem "Olokun" articulates these poetic lines:

> *I love to pass my fingers*
> *(as tide thro' weeds of the sea*
> *And wind the tall fern-fronds)…*
> *And as the good maid of the sea,*
> *Full of rich bounties for men…* (Soyinka 43).

J.P. Clark's poem "Olokun" adulates the mermaid of the sea using nature imagery – "weeds", "tide", and "fern-fronds" in the lines: *I love to pass my fingers (as tide thro' weeds of the sea/ and wind the tall fern-fronds).* The poet employs nature images to celebrate African traditional ethos. As well, Gabriel Okara in "The Call of the River Nun" describes the physical environment in these words:

> *I hear you call!*
> *I hear it far away,*
> *I hear it break the circle of these crouching hills…*
> *Like the trees to watch my mirrored self unfold…*
> *My river's calling too!*
> *Its ceaseless flow impels my found'ring canoe down its*
> *Inevitable course…* (Sentinel Poetry).

Gabriel Okara employs nature imagery in the above poem to describe culture conflict. The lines: *I hear you call/I hear it break the circle of these crouching hills…* conveys advancing forces – 'these crouching hills' indicates Western intrusion into the African space. The poet bemoans the outcome of the clash saying: *…its ceaseless flow impels my found'ring canoe down its/*

inevitable course…. Furthermore, Christopher Okigbo's poem titled "Lament of Flutes" portrays environmental concerns in these lines:

> *TIDEWASH….Memories*
> *Fold-over-fold free furrow*
> *Mingling old tunes with new…*
> *Where are the maytime flowers,*
> *Where are the roses? What will*
> *The watermaid bring at sundown*
> *A garland? A handful of tears?…* (Sentinel Poetry).

The poem "Laments of Flutes" draws attention to the physical environment eroding as a result of environmental decline captured in the expressions – "TIDEWASH", "Where are the maytime flowers?" and "where are the roses?". In this context, the poet shows early Nigerian poets' laments concerning the environment as the poet questions: *What will the watermaid bring at sundown/a garland?/A handful of tears?* The analysed poems confirm environmental decline as the outcome of alien intrusion hence: *mingling old tunes with new*.

Furthermore, martyred environmentalist and poet, Ken Saro-Wiwa also decries the ruination of Ogoni people's farmland and waters by the multi-oil conglomerates in cohort with the political class. His environmental activism finds expression in his political essay *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (1992) and his prison diary *A Month and a Day* (1995). "A take on the unjust execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, as well as, criticism of the exploitation of natural resources of the Ogoni land is illustrated in Soyinka's "The Open Sore of a Continent" and N' Allah's *Ogoni Agonies: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Crisis in Nigeria*. The anthology describes the travails of the people of the oil rich Delta in terms of wars… fought against Nigerian based multinational oil companies, principally Shell and Chevron, and the other a 'political war' aimed at nothing other than the extermination of the Ogoni people by systematically dispossessing them of their fundamental human rights and locally generated wealth"… (Huggan and Tiffan 35).

For Ushie (13), "the writings of earlier Nigerian writers which include Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo and others were in praise of nature essentially, they never considered the consequences of man's business on the planet". In addition, Gabriel Okara in an interview with Sumaila Umaisha says about his earlier works influenced by rivers – "if I am to write on the rivers today, they will not be the same because… there are some recent changes to reflect present realities". Thus, this outcry bemoans the budge from the celebration of environment to a lamentation for its demise "that we have gradually been stripped and exposed to the elements" (Ojaide 16). On this backdrop, the selected poets' eco-poetic sensibilities are affixed on the concern that, environmental crisis, one of the most pressing concerns in the twirl of twenty-first Century show that, Nigerian ecological ruin comes from not understanding that nature is not an object of inexhaustible consumption. In this way, Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey "have called for a prioritisation of green discourse for better… socio-economic relations as well as environmental sustainability in order to give face to the invisible but, palpable presence of capitalism on the Nigerian environment" (Nwagbara 17).

2.1 The Views of the Selected Poets and Critics

The poet Tanure Ojaide is a prolific Nigerian poet and writer born 24th April, 1948. His roots run deep into the Delta region and his work is highly influenced by the oral traditions of the Urhobo people. Affirming, Ojaide declares, that "it is the oral tradition that makes us the African writers we are. As an African writer, the oral tradition mediates between writing in English language and writing about a people and a place that is not indigenously and originally English" (Onyerionwu 329). Ojaide has won national and international poetry awards- the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for the Africa region (1987), the BBC Arts and African Poetry (1988 and 1997), and

the Association of Nigerian authors Poetry Prize (1988 and 1994). He has to his credit a number of collections which includes *Children of Iroko and Other Poems* (1973), *Labyrinth of the Delta* (1986), *The Eagle Vision* (1987), *Endless Song*, (1989), *The Fate of Vultures and Other Poems* (1990), *The Blood of Peace and Other Poems* (1991), *Day Dreams of Ants* (1997), *Delta Blues* and *Home Songs* (1997), *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live* (1999), *In The Kingdom of Songs* (2003), *In The House of Words* (2005), *The Tale of the Harmattan* (2007), *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* (2008) are some of his Poetry contributions as he aims at his target Nigeria or Africa's malevolent dictators. Ojaide is noted for his stylistic vision and criticism of imperialism, religion, and environmental issues.

For Bamikunle (81) "Ojaide's poetry takes off from the present in desperate search for values to redeem its malaise. The search takes him to the immediate past in the history of colonialism, and beyond that into the pre-colonial ancestral history and culture…." According to Ezenwa Ohaeto, "poems in the collection portray him as a poet whose vision is all encompassing and the title of the collection metaphorically captures the width and breath of Ojaide's experiences. Although, the preoccupation of Tanure Ojaide is with the instances of injustices…, he manages to add variety to the poems through the portrayal of different personae and the use of succinct imagery. He thus, creates poems that are neither boring nor monotonous despite his focus on social issues and human vices…" (Olafioye 74). For G.G. Darah, "the sinew of Ojaide's poetry harps on the urgency of Ojaide's art of resistance. The poetry of Tanure Ojaide… fits into the tradition of outrage against political injustice, exploitation and environmental disasters…. His poems are verbal missile directed at political oppressors whose rule has brought misery and distress to the region" (12).

Another notable critic Oyekan (62) maintains that "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- and yet 90% of Nigeria's foreign exchange comes from oil exploration, exploitation and marketing by the multinational corporations." In reflecting these schisms in the Nigerian social space, Amuta (38-39) identifies the concerns that, the "refraction of social experience through the prism of the human imagination, the ontological essence of literature is to be located in terms of the extent to which it recycles social experience and transforms it into an aesthetic proposition".

Nwagbara's insight on Ojaide regarding the despoliation of the environment is significant. He avers that "following such a polluted socio-economic landscape, Nigerian writers have risen to the occasion by using art to address, as well as, bring to the knowledge of humanity this form of environmental devastation and inhumanity. The hallmark of Ojaide's art is to use literature to engage the realities in his milieu. For him, literature is a reproduction of social experiences; it is a refraction of the totality of human experience" (18). Further, Nwagbara posits that, "it is in resisting environmental and socio-economic slough that the essence of Ojaide's poetics is brought to the fore" (5).

Darah (12) perceives that "the poetry of Tanure Ojaide… fits into the tradition of outrage against political injustice, exploitation and environmental disaster. From his titles, one can discern an abiding concern with the fate of the Niger Delta people". Though political, economic and environmental issues dominate the criticism of Ojaide's works, Amuta (129) opines that

"man's quest for freedom and self-actualisation lies in the tendency to resist or protest against oppressive, repressive ideologies and to re-create wholesome landscape. In engaging this re-creation process, literature is at the heart of it all, it is a veritable tool for engaging "…reality through signification…." This is because "literature is one of the institutions of change through which ideologies, values, education and cultural paradigms are imparted thereby sensitising the people about exploitative, authoritarian regimes" (Nwagbara 20). On this backdrop, Macaustin (11) argues that for "most African writers… there is a direct relationship between literature and social institutions. The principal function of literature is to criticise these institutions and eventually bring about desirable changes in the society". In retaking the traditional conscientiousness to speak for the people, contemporary Nigerian poets are aware of the civic task of an artist which reverberates in their techniques and mirrors the socio-economic and political practices of the day.

Still on Ojaide's poetry, Shija (2) highlights that "the destruction of the environment as in most of Ojaide's poems dealing with nature is symbolic of the destruction of African (Nigerian) culture and values". Ojaide's environmentalism does not only articulate the thrust of ecocriticism, but, makes it functional, so that the aim of the concept is not lost in vagueness. Thus, Ogaga (115) asserts that "Ojaide's poetry demonstrates that art can be central to urgent environmental concerns and can play a central role in directing attention to unresolved ecological issues". Critics on Ojaide's work demonstrate that, Ojaide's literary composition call for harmony with the natural world around mankind hence, "for the poet to be silent constitutes grave mistake, no matter how grim or unspeakable the national condition or invincible the power of authority might appear to be. If silent, the enemy speaks; he sets the agenda of the debate. The national condition will thus get worse. The polity is enamored when it reads the words, hears its

voice in the mirror of every letter…" (Olafioye 166). In this sense, the "commodification of relations that crushes Nature as well as robs man of his natural inheritance, is an ideological veneer by the powerful (the core nations) for economic, political, ideological and social control. The commodification of Nature has become an ideological cover for those members of 'humanity' who, in asserting positions of privilege, have constructed not only Nature but fellow humans- typically the poor… as mere resources to be exploited. Significantly, it is …among these inferior positions that the impacts of ecological destruction are most severely experienced" (Shantz 144-154). In all of these, the need to preserve the beauty and purity of the environment, relates to mankind's source of survival.

On the other hand, the Nigerian artist Nnimmo Bassey was born 11th June, 1958. He is a published poet, environmental activist, Pastor and architect. He is from the Ibibio speaking part of Calabar. He has to his credit books, articles and poetry collections such as *Patriots and Cockroaches* (1992), *Poems on the Run* (1994), *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* (2000), and *Intercepted* (1998), *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* (2011). He has also written books like *Beyond Simple Lines*: *The Architecture of Chief G.Y. Aduku and Archcon* (with Okechukwu Nwaeze) (1993), *The Management of Construction* (1994). *Oil Watching in South America* (Environment), *Genetically Modified Organisms: The African Challenge* (2004), *Knee Deep in Crude* (2009). *To Cook A Continent: Destructive Extraction and Climate Change in Africa* (2011). Nnimmo Bassey's poetry delves into the consequences of environmental devastation wrought in Nigeria and the world at large. However, critical works are yet to abound regarding Nnimmo Bassey's poetry composition. His poetry *We Thought It Was Oil… but It Was Blood* (2002) and *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* (2011) lament the result of land grab in Nigeria which most times

culminate in conflict and ecological despoliation. Thus, "…the huge squandering of oil generated in Nigeria can be seen as symptomatic of both the fetish value of international petrodollars and the social/ecological ruination brought about by oil capitalism's predatory alliance with the nation-state…" (Huggan and Tiffan 35).

Most of Nnimmo Bassey's works centre on the destruction fashioned on the country Nigeria by oil companies which have sunk their claws and talon into the rich Delta region. Ochibejivwie Lexy speaking about Nimmo Bassey avers that, "among the present Niger Delta poets such as J.P. Clark, Gabriel Okara, Tanure Ojaide, Hope Eghagha, Ogaga Ifowodo, Ebi Yeibo, Joe Usie and others…who have attempted to capture the Deltascape through their poetic stamina, he more than most, matches his creative visions of the environment with a more practical and a more tenable approach to resistance, to ecological disasters besetting the continental sphere…." In this regard, Ogaga's "The Cumulative Neglect of Collective Responsibility" attests that different media across the world continue to capture the turbulence in Nigeria's Niger Delta, especially the face-off between the so-called militants and the government and the environmental disasters that oil exploration and exploitation have triggered in the area…" (115).

In addition, Romanus Aboh states that "Nnimmo Bassey's collection of poems engages in eco-terrorism as he lets out his malcontent for an ill-treated ecosystem…. Bassey falters not in calling a spade by its rightful name, as he indicts neo-liberal forces in tandem with the government as culpable for the lingering ecocides in the Niger Delta region, the same way he exhibits adept knowledge for environmental matters while mapping out the people's will to stand against seeming distaste by any conventional means…" (87-108). Thus, like fellow

environmentalist, Nnimmo Bassey is of the opinion that scientific improvement such as biotechnology poses massive land and human misery. He bemoans environmental plundering of the ecology by greedy multinational companies who present themselves in the pillage of resources to promote imperialist control as well as the dumping of ecological wastes in ways that widen the chasm between the centre and periphery. Bassey concurs that "the so-called progress of the past centuries has brought man into a situation where the basis of life on earth is seriously under threat (*European Greens*)". Nonetheless, technological development may delay the deterioration of the earth for a time; it cannot prevent the ecological and social collapse of civilisation.

Many voices of dissent disapprove the despoliation of nature which persists irrespective of the many conferences held nationally and abroad. In this context, Nwachukwu (16) is of the opinion that "nowadays, nature and environment are used as tools to express nostalgia about how things have changed from the good old days to these bad days… the idyllic life of the old days seems lost and the writers are trying to reclaim it in their imagination". In consequence, Nnimmo Bassey is scathing in the signification of "indigenous colonialism" that has been practiced against Nigeria's minorities in the name of oil. Thus, "Nigeria has been synonymous with a history of colonial oppression that operates at several different levels… by implication, the ethnic minorities and indigenous people of Nigeria specifically and Africa as a whole…" (Huggan and Tiffan 38). For Inya Eteng (21), "what currently prevails in the Southern oil enclave is a specific variant of internal colonialism…. There is a highly exploitative and grossly inequitable endowment/ownership between the Nigerian state and the oil bearing communities…."

The shift from the preservation of nature to capitalism in the wake of frontier global capitalism fundamentally ensconced different mode of man's relation to earth. Nnimmo Bassey's poetry provides a depiction of oil pollution in Nigeria with regards to the rural poor whose lives are closely affected by the operations of the multinational companies. This explicates why the enormous oil resources produced scarcely reflect in the living standard of the commoners in the oil bearing enclave of the Niger Delta. Thus, it is relevant to concur that the root explanation of the 'curse of oil' according to Michael Perelman (6) in *New York Times* …"does not lie in the physical properties of petroleum but, in the social structure of the world". Therefore, rich natural resource base makes a country especially a relatively powerless one a target politically and militarily for dominant nations. Hence, "the curse of oil manifests in what might be called a planetary ecological rift in the human relation to the global commons – the atmosphere and oceans… this leads to ecological degradation on a large scale which threatens to undermine all existing ecosystems and species" (6). The narratives of exploitation, administrative neglect and under-development are persistent happenings of the twenty-first Century in which the Nigerian nation and the multinational corporations have a role to play. James Robinson (2) comments that "the atmosphere which once resulted in profit is now resulting in cost because of the expense to prevent the potential ruin of this vital source. He remarks that just as the tragedy of commons theory is applicable to grazing lands and waterways, the atmosphere has been treated as common space… due to its lack of boarder…." Thus, the irresponsible use of the environment is a global issue of common space which echoes across Bassey's poetry of study.

The poet Niyi Ariyoosu Osundare on the other hand was born March 12th, 1947 at Ikere Ekiti now in Ekiti State. He is a holder of numerous awards for poetry – the Fonlon/Nichols award for excellence in literary creativity combined with contributions to Human Rights in

Africa. His poetry output has continuously astonished readers and critics. Osundare has published several volumes of poetry and these include *Songs of the Market Place* (1983), *The Eye of the Earth* (1984), *Village Voices* (1984), *A Nib in the Pond* (1986), *Waiting Laughters* (1990), *Songs of the Season* (1991), *Midlife* (1993), *Seize the Day* (1995), *The Word is an Egg* (2002), *Early Birds* (2004) and *Tender Moments: Love Poems* (2006) and *Random Blues* (2011). Osundare is renowned for his commitment to socially relevant art and artistic activism. His radical poetic style demonstrates his service to his African audience as exhibited in his rejection of Euro-modernist models.

Speaking about Osundare, Abdu Saleh asserts that: "through a studied critique and reworking of the language of their predecessors Osundare leads the group in their tacit task of liberating and demystifying the business of poetry for many readers. As language and language use lie at the essence of poetry, African poetry can only gain its distinctive quality by the degree to which its language about being more African and less European has misguided" (19). To this end, the tone and tenor of Osundare's compositions are reasons for diverse and sustained interests in his works. The employment of rich Yoruba oral literary devices in his poetry made it unique and startling investigative. His people centred approach is very central to the resolution of the polemics of governance and politics in art (Abdu 20). Maucaustin (64) observes that, Osundare "is obsessed with applying every available method of bringing his poetry to his people. He is consumed with this goal because of his peasant ancestry, where poetry is acclaimed as the people's property. Thus, there is a symbolic relationship between the artist and his environment…."

However, critics such as Aderemi Bamikunle "categorises Osundare as a nature poet interested in both Edenic and exploited West African landscapes but, he does not go so far as to

use the words ecology and environment in any of their current incarnations in the developing lexicon of ecocrit and ecolit…" (Slaymaker 686). Also, "Nwachukwu Agbada's thesis mentions that Osundare's best work, *The Eye of the Earth,* connects Nigerian lore and folktales with sympathy for all exploited peoples of the world, including the oppressed working class and especially peasant farmers in Nigeria" (Slaymaker 686). Alu (70) states that: "the past values of the Nigerian ecology in the poetry *Eye of the Earth* (1986) celebrates the work of the common people with emphasis that the volume is one of the fiercest indictments of modern economic culture of the people and alien destructive forces. It takes a pictorial account of aggression on man and the earth". In other words, *Eye of the Earth* (1986) is devoted to reclaiming the earth that has been made prostrate by capitalist practices in the quest for alternative order for better leadership (Nwagbara 14). Similarly, Maucaustin maintains that, the justification of the will to revolution in Osundare's poetry is based on a vigorous, sustained solicitude for one of the world's oldest producers: "the peasants, those who till the soil, and their quasi-mythical ties to the earth. In his verse, we confront both poetry of revolution and revolutionary poetry, in forms and techniques. His focus is to immerse, through his poetry the realities and multifarious lineaments of Africa's underdevelopment…" (65). Thus, Bodunde affirms that, Osundare's criticism of the "capitalist formation and pursuit of alternative social practice differs significantly from the existing decadent structure…" (100).

However, earlier "anthologies, reviews and summaries of black African literature and criticism reflect a general absence of ecocriticism and literature of the environment as noteworthy and attractive topics for research and creative writing in the academic and metropolitan communities of Africanists and artists in the past two decades…" (Slaymaker 690). Also, "Chidi Amuta's critical work *The Theory of African Literature* does not refer to any

literary approaches that are allied to nature and environment, nor is there any acknowledgement of ecocriticism in Mineke Schipper's *Beyond the Boundaries: African Literature and Literary Theory*. Nothing of relevance to ecocriticism is found in Eldred Jones *Critical Theory and African Literature Today.* There are no references what-so-ever to the environment and ecology in the many critical collections that focus on black Literature and criticism…" (Slaymaker 689).

Against this backdrop, Michael Lundbald's "Malignant and Beneficient Fictions: Constructing Nature in Ecocriticism and Achebe's *Arrow of God*" is an example of few available works on Ecocriticism. Lundbald's work merely focuses on Achebe's use of the environment to express the Igbo experience in the pre-colonial era. Okuyade Ogaga in a recent book titled: *Ecocritical Literature: Re-greening African Landscapes* "examines the representations, constructions and imaging of the relationship between the human and non-human world in contemporary African literature and culture" (Okuyade paperback). On this note, Bodunde (27), states that, the "act of portraying the true state of affairs in Nigeria through literary creation is a form of environmentalism against the warped ideas that ecological imperialism spreads in order to gain foothold through capitalist globalisation and information technology which have the possibility to homogenise the world". Walunywa (21) emphasises that "practices and institutions which crumble and crush ecological sustenance need to be tackled through works of art. Thus, poets envision a world devoid of environmental predation and predators…."

The selected works by Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare, and Nnimmo Bassey, deconstruct social, economic and political views which reflect the values of modern civilisation. These poets lament the ecological collapse threatening the Nigerian landscape and show that the increasing level of environmental degradation by the world's mining industries are unsustainable. This is because the massive expansions of mineral exploitation come at the expense of destruction of

livelihoods and culture for many communities. The works studied though written across disparities of time and space share common experiences alongside specific messages that the survival of the ecosystem depend on mankind's symbiotic relationship with the environment. Beyond previous studies on Nigerian poetry, Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey employ their environmental poetry in opposition to the destructive forces of global economic expansions of the twenty-first Century in the consciousness of Ecocriticism. The gap identified in the review of existing scholarship justifies this study and provides a background to the discussion of Ecocriticism in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS IN OSUNDARE'S *THE EYE OF THE EARTH* AND *WAITING LAUGHTERS*

The canon of environmental aesthetics has expanded beyond the concern with what is beautiful in the arts to incorporate the appreciation of natural and cultural landscapes. However this appreciation and the need to preserve the landscape are complicated by the conflation of technology and globalisation which encourages the avaricious over-exploitation of natural resources for industrial and commercial production of goods. This has made the twenty-first century an epochal moment of unease that nonetheless inspires poets to interrogate the relationship between consumer economics and the environment. This chapter investigates the aesthetics on which Nigerian poetry interrogates the environment as evident in Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* (1986) and *Waiting Laughters* (1990). The volumes of poetry are axiomatic of the poet's concern with the pathetic state of the Nigerian environment and the Nigerian ruling class' penchant to safeguard and exploit resources for wealth, power and profit at the expense of ecological balance and the livelihood of the suppressed people. Against this backdrop, Osundare underscores the view that oil exploration and its outcome do not in any way translate into environmental preservation or meeting the needs of the people but their reverse and it is this concern that influences his handling of aesthetics in the selected texts.

According to Perkins and Roberts (194-195), Aesthetics is the study that deals with beauty and human judgment concerning beauty while "Environment" refers to surroundings. Environmental aesthetics examines the interaction between the individual and the environment in relation to beauty and social existence. The human-environment includes the physical environment and the objects that occupy it as well as the psychological and physiological

processes of human perception and cognition. For Glissant, the "aesthetics of the earth" should move beyond an obsolete mysticism of place and engage a form of "ecology" that criticises homogenising models of consumption. He asserts that "passion for the land where one lives is … an action one must endlessly risk" (Deloughrey and Handley 27).

To this end, environmental aesthetics "emphasises the aesthetics of nature understood by environmentalism… of all sorts…" (Fisher 667). The aesthetic importance of nature describes the environment as beautiful and having intrinsic value. From this standpoint, the environment is regarded not as an adversary or resource to be subdued and exploited, but as something worthy in itself. It is on this basis that Leopold affirms that "a thing is right when it preserves the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise…" (240). For Fisher, "the rapid growth of concern for the natural environment… has brought the reintroduction of nature as a significant topic in aesthetics… as it poses questions about how mankind conceptualises aesthetic interactions with nature, the aesthetic value of nature and the status of art about nature. It is a natural concern about the degeneration of the environment, aesthetics and otherwise. It is the result of the academic world becoming aware of the significance of the environmental movement…" (667).

This study foregrounds environmental aesthetics in Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* (1986) and *Waiting Laughters* (1990) in order to foster the relevance of ecocriticism as a viable tool for analysing texts that deal with the nature/human dichotomy in the modern world. This study underscores the extent to which aesthetics plays an influential role in how mankind ascribes value to the environment. Thus, reading Osundare's work from an ecocritical perspective offers a transformative discourse in evaluating the multifarious ills against Nigeria's

natural environment in the post-modern age, thereby demonstrating that symbols of environmental degradations are paradigms of aesthetic value.

Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* (1986) is divided into three sections- *back to earth, eyeful glances rainsongs* and *homecall* with eighteen poems. This study investigates ecological implications in such poems as "forest echoes", "The Rocks Rose to meet me", "harvest call", "Let the earth's pain Be Soothed", "First rain", "Rain-coming", "Rain drum", "farmer-born", "They too Are the Earth", "Ours to Plough, Not to Plunder" and "Our Earth Will Not Die". The poetry *The Eye of the Earth* is divided into varying length of poems which lament the damage afflicted on the Nigerian environment for economic reasons and technological advancement. It is a collection of confessional and lyrical poetry which captures the poet's memories and experiences. Osundare's environmental views are derived from traditional beliefs taken from African culture precisely the Yoruba world view. He believes that nature supports a coherent balance between microscopic organisms, animals, plants and humans and hence calls for the preservation of Nigerian environment from the destructions of modern civilisations. More than any of Osundare's collection of poetry, *The Eye of the Earth* dwells on mother earth and other forms of physical nature. According to Bamikunle (189), "the collection addresses concerns about the earth in its idyllic state". In his preface to *The Eye of the Earth*, Osundare states that "*The Eye of the Earth* echoes an Eden long departed through the nostalgic portrayal of the earth" (xi). In this collection, the poet bemoans the state of the Nigerian ecosystem manipulated by capitalist plunder. However, Osundare recalls an encounter with the uncontaminated environment in these words:

> *Farmer-born, peasant bred. I encountered dawn in the enchanted corridors of the forest, suckled on the delicate aroma of healing herbs, and the pearly drops of generous moon. Living in those early days was rugged, but barns brimmed with yams fattened by merciful rains and the tempering fire of the upland sun…. Earth was ours and we earth's…* (xi).

Embedded in this extract is the evidence that Osundare is fascinated with the primal relationship between man and his environment hence, *The Eye of the Earth* is laden with nature metaphors which convey the splendor of Nigeria's biodiversity. As Osundare states, his poems are inspired by the memory of the past, a "journey back into these times and beyond when the earth's head stood on its neck and a hand sprouted but five fingers. Thus, if there is a passionate nostalgia in the rendering, it is the legitimate flame of the inevitable fire often kindled when an embattled present makes a forward thrust difficult (surely not impossible!)…. For in the intricate dialectics of human living, looking back is looking forward; the visionary artist is not only a rememberer, he is also a reminder" (Osundare xii).

Consequently, this study deploys Lawrence Buell's four principles in determining how a text lends itself to ecocritical reading as well as the extent to which Osundare's poems convey overtones of Ecocriticism. However, in order not to make the analysis too prescriptive, two of Buell's principles are employed in this chapter. Thus, Buell's first tenet postulates that: (i) *The environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated by natural history* (Buell 7). In line with this premise, Buell posits that the environment should be treated more than just a setting in the text and an instance of this is sustained throughout Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth.* Osundare's poetry provides a voice for the environment by articulating harmonious forest life. This is apparent in the opening

poem "Forest Echoes" where the poet's memory of forest- splendor and rustic scenery is vividly described thus:

> *...bouncing boughs interlock overhead*
> *like wrist wrestlers straining muscularly*
> *on a canvas of leaves wounded*
> *by the fist of time*
> *I tread soft soled, the compost carpet*
> *of darkling jungles…*
> *...nurtured by lore nurtured by fairy truths* (3-4).

"Forest Echoes" communicates an aesthetic magnificence of the rain forest and one can almost feel the rhythm of life in *...bouncing boughs interlock... straining muscularly...* and the rhythm of non-life in *…compost carpet of darkling jungles….* This contrast suggests how life forms interact in the bionetwork. Using the poetic device- simile, the poet brings to fore the beauty in the forest he has grown in and known as he writes that: *bouncing boughs interlock…/like wrist wrestlers…/on a canvas of leaves….* The "canvas of leaves" evokes an image of an attractive forest undisrupted by human activities. The poet also creates symbolic images of nature using: "bevy of birds", "barrack of beast", "a school of truant antelopes", "the partridge alert like road side grass", "the weaver bird", "the squirrel, the chameleon", "the praying mantis", and "the millipede" which combine to create beauty and elegance. "Forest Echoes" describes how man, animals and plants intermingle in a continuum of harmonious existence. Ironically, Osundare's "Forest Echoes" now bemoans "Oke Ubo Abusoro" a "forest of million trees" as a "forest of milling trees wounded" cut down by the matchets of timber merchants. In "Forest Echoes" several ecological statements are which in ecocritical terms show the implication of human interaction with nature. Thus, the poet laments the despoliation of productive trees in the lines:

A forest of a million trees, this,
a forest of milling trees
…wounded, though, by time's axe
and the greedy edges of agbegilodo's matchet
A stump here, a stump there
like a finger missing from a crowded hand… (5).

By depicting the environment not merely as a framing device, "Forest Echoes" redirects attention to the degradation of the Nigerian landscape in: *A stump here, a stump there/ like a finger missing from a crowded hand….* The poet laments the annihilation brought about by the greedy edges of the "agbegilodo's"- the political elites and multinational corporations on Nigerian's physical environment in their obsession for industrialisation and profit. "Forest Echoes" demonstrates the distorted human-nature relationship on the Nigerian environment thus, affirming that human history is implicated in natural history. In a similar vein, the poet laments the estrangement apparent in the Nigerian environment in these words:

…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).

The poet sarcastically presents the manipulative activities in the phrase "the cannibal calvary of the forest" by using scornful expressions such as "the Iroko which swallows the shrub", "the elephant which tramples the grass" to bemoan the abused Nigerian ecosystem. The poet's use of "hyena", "elephant", "Iroko", and "preyers" are metaphors for devourers of Nigeria's natural resources and words such as "grass", "shrub" and "hare" symbolise the often exploited environment and dispossessed people. "Forest echoes" therefore corroborates Ehrenfeld's

assertion that "the spread of globalisation has been so comprehensive and its effect is being felt in the remote human communities and natural areas" (Ehrenfeld 1).

Similarly, the poem "The Rocks Rose to Meet Me" describes the poet's previous encounter with rocks. The wanderings enables the reader experience the vastness and beauty of the natural world where "The rocks… occupy a central place in the cosmic consciousness of the Ikere people of Nigeria. It must be stressed that these rocks are dramatised… as a creative material essence, as lasting monuments of time and space" (Osundare xiii). The poet attempts to give voice to nature by emphasising responsibility and respect towards nature. He celebrates the "rock" not just for its physical constituent but also for its economic value to alleviate the misery of the common people hence he cautions:

> *…the gold let us dig,*
> *not for the gilded craniums*
> *of hollow chieftains*
> *(…Who deem this earth their sprawling throne)…* (14).

From the stanza above, the poet maintains that gold, a symbolic representation of natural resources, should be utilised to empower the ordinary people so that "the world may sprout a hand of equal fingers" (14). The line "the world may sprout a hand of equal fingers" creates a concrete image of equality in contrast to plunder and inequality. The poem shows how the physical environment and humans share a rightful place in the scheme of things and warns all those who exploit the Nigerian ecosystem for their own personal sumptuousness that the consequence of their greed awaits them. The poet elucidates how legacies of ecological dispossession have enabled imperialists and their cohorts to continue exploiting Nigeria's natural resources. Also, "Harvest call", opens with the poet's declaration of harvest. In this poem, the

earth is depicted as a source of productivity hence the celebration of "yam" the king of crops – thus:

> *here where yam wore the crown*
> *in the reign of swollen roots*
> *amid a retinue of vines and royal leaves;*
> *between insistent sky and yielding earth,*
> *the sun mellowed planting pageants*
> *into harvest march…* (18).

Once again, the poem validates Africa's beautiful past using nature images in "retinue of vines", "royal leaves", "swollen roots" and "yielding earth". In this regard, the poem "Harvest call" has ecological implication as the earth is shown to provide its inhabitants with food, sunshine and water. However, the poet grieves over the damage globalisation has generated since natural resources are deliberately exploited for profit. The poet bemoans the exploitation of Nigeria's landscape and questions the situation in these words:

> *But where are they?*
> *Where are they gone:*
> *Aroso, geregede, otiili, pakala*
> *Which beckoned lustily to the reaping basket…*
> *The yam pyramids which challenged the sun…*
> *Where are they?…* (20).

With the zeal for conservation, the persona employs rhetorical questions to comment on the extent to which remarkable crops have waned – *The yam pyramids which challenged the sun… Where are they?* The stanza reveals the impact of industrialisation on land as giant multinational corporations obtain more and more areas that have been earmarked for global trade while local farmers abandon the "wealth of existing varieties of farm produce in favour of new commercial high yielding varieties" (Ehrenfeld 1). Therefore, the poet's remark in: "with our earth so warm /

how can our hearth be so cold" confirms that everything is connected to everything and the disturbance of one disrupts the other.

In a melancholic tone, the poet summons all to ponder over the destruction created by the ravenousness of those who devastate Nigerian farm lands for selfish gains. The section *Eyeful glances* provides an overview of ecological concerns which seek to forge new treaties of relation between humanity and the environment. The poet mirrors this:

> *Our farms are tinder*
> *For a dispossessing flame*
> *A criminal torch, an incendiary plot*
> *A blaze conceals the trails*
> *of looters of state…* (25).

In the line: "tinder for a dispossessing flame" is a metaphor which depicts the persistent dispossession of marginalised Nigerian people of livelihood. The stanza conveys a contrast between the beauty of the earlier and the ugliness of the latter. The end rhymes in "flame", "Trails" and "State" suggest the dissonance between nature and humanity. Likewise, "Let Earth's Pain Be Soothed" explores the result of human interference on the Nigerian environment using images of drought, hunger and famine. To bemoan this condition the poet states:

> *The sky carries a boil of anguish*
> *Let it burst*
> *Our earth has never lingered so dry*
> *In the season of falling showers…*
>
> *Dust*
> *dust in brewing kitchens*
> *dust in busy bedrooms*
> *dust in retrenching factories…* (27-28).

The line "the sky carries boil of anguish" symbolises the despoilment of Nigeria's ecological balance and the legitimate place of all things which when disturbed leads to serious threats. In

consequence, different places are experiencing unusual rainfall pattern, weather conditions and pollution and Nigerian forests are dying off because of unfavourable growing conditions as the poet laments: "Our earth has never lingered so dry/in the season of falling showers". Basically, the lines mentioned convey the growing manipulation in nature such that "dust" spreads all over the kitchen, bedrooms, factories and even power brothels. In connection, Cheryll Glotfelty (3) remarks that: "we are facing a global crisis today not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how ethical systems function". Furthermore, in the poem "First Rain" the poet illustrates nature's response to the coming of the first rain using -*a tingling tang awakes the nose/ when the first rain has just clipped*…. Through the poetic device onomatopoeia in "tingling tang" and "clipped", the clicking sounds in the aforementioned words signify hope as *our earth breathes again*. This creates a pleasant impression that the raining season has a significant place in the Nigerian ecosystem hence: *cooling warmth embraces/our searching soles* (29). On the other hand, the poem "Rain-Coming" makes obvious that the arrival of rain is not just to enable plants germinate or produce rather in an imaginative display of paradox "Rain-Coming" illustrates that the earth has been ruined as shown in:

Slowly
But
Surely
the early rains ring the bell
but oh my land!
so deep and dry still
in the unnatural desert… (31).

"Rain-Coming" like every other poem in *The Eye of the Earth* creates memory of what the land was once like – a creative imaging of the pre-industrial for post industrial times. The nostalgic feeling for a dying environment is uttered in *oh my land! In the unnatural desert*. There is a call to re-establish man's root in a less domineering way. The poet's description of the earth's

deterioration by environmental predators is to impugn mankind of greed. Like the other poems investigated, "Rain-Coming" presents a picture that everything is connected thus, "it does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether but rather plays a part in an immensely complex global system in which matter, idea and energy interact" (Glotfelty 9). Once more, the poet's insight concerning nature's despoliation in "Raindrum" is captured in the lines:

> *of caked river birds*
> *and browned pastures*
> *of baking noons*
> *and grilling nights*
> *of earless cornfields*
> *and tired tubers* (32).

The poet's symbolic depiction of the ecosystem in words like "caked river beds", "baking noons" "grilling nights", "earless cornfields" highlights the havoc of environmental devastation on the Nigerian landscape. The poet shows an impassioned defense of mother earth and the tirade against the dangers of globalisation. To this end, Ehrenfeld (52) avers that: "to think environmentally is to recover the thoughts of some era in the past before the disruption of the human and natural world… by the embrace of modernism and postmodernism".

Apart from celebrating the magnificence of the earth, the poem "They too are the Earth" symbolically outlines a deliberate exploitation of the Nigerian ecosystem which translates the marginalised people as "beggars in brimming gutters", "hewers of wood", "labourers", and "women battling centuries of maleficent slavery". The poet utilises explicit strategies to convey his awareness of the obliteration of Nigeria's natural environment by the political class and their cohorts in these words:

> *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? (35).

The poet conveys his worry for the unthoughtful actions of Nigerian political class and multinational companies in their deliberate manipulation of the Nigerian natural environment as mere means of production for economic profit and consumerism. In this regard, Ivanova and Esty posit that "globalisation presents mixed blessings for the environment. It creates new opportunities for cooperation but gives rise to new issues and tensions as liberalised trade generates economic growth which in turn may translate into…unsustainable consumption of natural resources" (10).

"Our Earth Will Not Die", the last poem in *The Eye of the Earth* resonates with images of nature evident in words such as forests, rivers, mountains, seas, the sun, and even the birds and fishes with a sense of admiration nurtured by biodiversity. The poet draws attention to the horror of despoliation by multinational companies which destroy fishes, "birds in the trees", "rabbits in their burrow" thus "reducing man and meadow to dust and dirt". Thus, using rhetorical questions such as "who lynched?", "who slaughtered", "whoever mauled" "who?" highlights the persona's quests to expose all those involved in the devastation of the Nigerian natural environment as he laments:

Who lynched the lakes. Who?
Who slaughtered the seas. Who?
Whoever mauled the mountains. Whoever?
Our earth will not die… (50).

"Our Earth Will Not Die" is also a metaphor to give a picture of the earth's resilience. Ecological awareness in "Our Earth Will Not Die" sheds light on the causes and consequences of Nigerian environmental destruction in:

…The rain falls, acid, on balding forests

their branches amputated by the septic daggers
of tainted clouds
weeping willows drip mercury tears
in the eye of sobbing terrains
nuclear sun rises like a funeral ball
reducing man and meadow to dust and dirt (51).

The lines above address the global and local implication of the destructive era of globalisation and capitalist exploitation. The poet utilises personifications such as "balding forests", "branches amputated", "tainted Clouds", "sobbing terrains", "Mercury tears" to convey the gravity of devastation on nature. Furthermore, the use of simile in *a nuclear sun rises like a funeral ball* shows the impact of man's injurious activities on the natural world -*reducing man and meadow to dust and dirt*. Thus, irrespective of destructive representations, the poet evaluates Nigerian environmental problems with a creative illumination laden with hope as he states:

Our earth will see again
Eyes washed by a new rain
The westering sun will rise again
Resplendent like a new coin…
…Our earth will see again
This earth, OUR EARTH (51).

The Eye of the Earth expresses how human's can change their approach to land and a livable planet. The poem activates interconnectedness in a way that resonate the promise of strengthening ecological relationship between the human and the natural world. *The Eye of the Earth* illuminates hope of regeneration for the Nigerian social space through environmental aesthetics that decries capitalist undertakings. On this note, Mittleman (847) comments that "large scale growth in world economic output has not only quickened the breakdown of the global resource base, but has upset the planet's regenerative system including its equilibrium among different forms of life and their support system…."

From an ecocritical perspective, it is apparent that human beings share the planet with a plethora of other species struggling to survive with the same tenacity as humans hence the ethical responsibility of humans to preserve the environment is paramount. *The Eye of the Earth* creates an overwhelming presence of nature such as rural scenes, landscapes, and homely farmers. The poet's use of nature imagery creates cosmic consciousness and provides an urgent response to the growing Nigerian ecological crisis.

3.1 The Loss of Pristine Purity in *Waiting Laughters*

Waiting Laughters (1990) is divided into sections I, II, III and IV with simultaneous lyrics connecting them. The poem's title is linked by motifs of "waiting" and "laughter" that flows from the poet's memory. The collection explores multiple dimensions of socio-political changes that evoke laughter and grief. More than mere refrain, the poet's idea of waiting and laughter are matrice of the poet's social vision. In this context, "waiting" represents the poet's criticism of Nigeria's socio-political and environmental conditions captured in the diverse problems of exploitation, oppression, subjugation, disillusionment and environmental degradation.

Irele (16) explains that Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* marks the highest peak in the poet's …progression toward an artistic fusion of craft and content that has produced an increasingly dense poetic idiom. Also, Ajibade (5) states that *Waiting Laughter* (1990) is judged as truly a distinguished volume, vast in its range of images, intensely lyrical. Ajibade (5) "comments that the selected poetry is a refutation of sorts, an affirmation of life. Yet it is the story of a long suffering people rendered in a colorful imagery of death and living". In addition, the poet's exploration of ecological themes and infusion of optimism in the treatment of societal ills are qualities that set him aside from his contemporaries.

For some critics, Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* (1990) does not depict nature in any way because flipping through the collection of poems conveys a "strong aura of invocatory chants of redolent tonalities an indication that the poetry collection is a long song in many voices…. The scenario is actually that of an oral performance, replete with… repetitions among other performative elements which enhance its semantics and musicality" (Taiwo 2). On the contrary, this study shows that *Waiting Laughters* has ecological representations. Ann B. Dobie in *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism* asserts that "an ecocritical reading of a text enables a researcher to resurrect less well known texts of nature writing …and literature that is not explicitly about nature…. This provides opportunity for a reader to discover new dimensions of works long thought to have been… dissected" (Dobie 242). Cheryll Glotfelty also maintains that the developments of ecocriticism… turn to forgotten texts in an effort to find new perspectives …in literature. Thus:

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

With regards to the above, this study investigates Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* as a poetry collection that has environmental relevance. In evaluating how a text lends itself to ecocritical reading, Buell's second principle postulates that: (ii) *Human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest* (Buell 7). From this criterion, Buell infers that concern and sympathy should be given to nature and humans equally. In other words, animals, rocks, plants, birds and rivers are all "endowed with a habitat, a history, a story of their own" (Buell 7). From this

standpoint, instances of ecological unease and the need to rejuvenate the environment should be implicit in a text. In this context, the title of the collection *Waiting Laughters* captures the theme of "waiting". Here, "waiting" is a metaphor to criticise alienation, deprivation and environmental degradation in the society. The first section of the poem describes the despair over Nigerian landscape through nature images which the poet garners from the environment as he thus illustrates:

> *I pluck these words from the lips of the wind*
> *Ripe like a pendulous pledge*
> *Laughters parable explode in the groin*
> *Of waking storms*
> *Clamorous with a coven*
> *ant*
> *Of wizened seeds…*
>
> *I pluck these murmurs*
> *From the laughter of the wind*
> *The shrub's tangled tale*
> *Plaited tree tops*
> *And palms which drop their fruits…* (2).

Such words and phrases as "wind", "waking storms", "wizened seeds", "shrubs tangled tale", "plaited tree tops", "unbridled deluge", "harried seasons" and "showerless seasons" (2-9) conveys the poet's piteous feelings over the deterioration of the Nigerian environment -an indicator that Nigeria's ecosystems is under stress and for this reason he calls for its conservation.

Waiting Laughters is irregular in its structure. The poet adopts the free verse style with instances of lines in quatrains, couplets and sestets – the disorderly structure affirms the poet's disappointment regarding the Nigerian environment. The use of enjambment also enhances this effect as the poet illustrates the reality of Nigeria's ecosystem in:

Truth of the valley
Truth of the mountain…

Truth of the sun
Truth of the moon
Truth of the desert
Truth of the rain…

Blame not, then,
The rapid eloquence of the running vowel (3-5).

Through *Waiting Laughters*, the poet explores Nigeria's environmental catastrophe by articulating the bitter truth of the "valley", "mountain", "rain", "desert", and "moon" which have been despoiled by ecological hazards. The poet as a "righter" deems it necessary to employ poetry as a means of communicating to the world the ecological crisis of his locale as he says: *blame not then /the rapid eloquence of the running vowels*. Against this background, the poet uses his works to draw attention to decades of oil exploitation in Nigeria and translates to issues that relate to toxic waste, contamination, extinction of species, acid rain and destruction of tropical rain forest. The poet calls for a better relationship with nature as he demonstrates in the lines:

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

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

The lines demonstrate ecological interactions as sands are described as giggling in grass, fallowing pebbles reach… for pasture and the wind is observed galloping into the sky. In a

similar concern, the poet's lamentation for the plundered earth goes beyond his immediate environment as he mentions thus:

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

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

The poet's expression of grief over the destruction of the Nigerian ecosystem is obvious in *...my foot knows the timbre of fiery skies* thus, having realised the consequences of Nigeria's environmental decay the poet uses his poetry for consciousness purpose as he says: *My song is space/Beyond wails, beyond walls/Beyond insular hieroglyphs*. This corroborates Glissants assertion that "aesthetics of the earth" rises to the challenge of appreciating beauty even when the land and sea have been ravaged…a call to re-orient people to love the earth" (Ddloughrey and Handley 27). Consequently, by emphasising critical issues about the despoliation of Nigeria's bionetwork confirms Buell's ecocritical tenets that environmental concerns are legitimate interests.

In addition, the poet in section ii of *Waiting Laughters* depicts the extent to which the Nigerian environment has transformed from its innocent state to a plundered landscape as he says:

The innocence of the Niger
Waiting, waiting…
Four hundred seasons
For the proof of the prow
waiting

For the irreverent probing of pale paddles
Waiting
For the dispossessing twang of alien accents
Waiting…
For scolls of serfdom, hieroglyphs of calculated
treacheries
waiting
withoutafacewithoutanamewithoutafacewithouta-
waiting
For the Atlantic which drains the mountains with
practiced venom… (37).

The poet in a solemn detached manner illustrates an ironic condition in the expression *the innocence of the Niger*. Here, "Niger" is a symbol of dispossessed people who after been deprived of their land and resources can never remain innocent due to exploitative insatiability of exploiters in their "irreverent probing of pale paddles". The poet jumbles words in withoutafacewithoutanamewithoutafacewithout- to show the obliteration and onslaught on the Nigerian landscape through the Niger River instigated by "alien accents", "treacheries" and "practiced venom" hence:

conquering boats
which fathoms the sand in a tumble of mysty furies…
the poet cries out' but for how long can the hen wait
whose lay is forage for galloping wolves?… (37).

Waiting Laughters is an evocative investigation of exploitation of the Nigerian ecosystem and the degradation of the Nigerian landscape shows the ecosystem as dynamic. Thus images such as "galloping wolves", "conquering boats" and "mysty furies" convey the assault on the Deltascape and the ecological destruction that follows.

In section iii of *Waiting Laughters*, the poet illustrates the capacity of poetry to remind humankind of the relationship between landscape, man and society. The current apprehension

about the Nigerian environment in an age of globalisation has enhanced the expansion of imperialism which has sapped the fragile state of the Nigerian landscape. The poet confirms this:

> *My land lies supine*
> *Like a giant in the sun*
> *Its mind a slab of petrified musing*
> *Its heart a deserted barn*
> *Of husky cravings…*
> *My land is a desert*
> *Waiting for the seminal fury*
> *Of uneasy showers…* (45-47).

Waiting Laughters like *The Eye of the Earth* encapsulates the present state of the Nigerian environment in contrast to the past. Note the use of nature images in "land", "sun", "barn", "desert" and "showers" in *my land is a desert- waiting for the seminal fury*. These lines satirically questions the ways global economic hegemony has transformed the Nigerian bionetwork. In this light, Brian McHale validates the contemporary ecological quandary as he declares in these words:

> The last third of the twentieth Century has become increasingly characterised as the age of critical transition, revolution and discontinuity. In this situation two major aspects of change are now crucial…The explosive growth in man's actual and potential capacities to interfere on a large scale with the natural environmental processes through which we may manage change more effectively…our present waves of change differ from those of recent past, not only in their quantitative interrelationships… global in scale, physically affecting the physical balance of all life on the planet itself… now constituting a socio-ecological transition of evolutionary magnitude (McHale 1-5).

Waiting Laughters is a picture of a modern integrated world perilously ruled by self interest, greed and economic power. The poet bemoans this condition and cautions:

> *Those who sharpen knives*
> *For our fledgeling voice*
> *Will go back home, drowned in the deluge*

Of its echoes (67-70).

A number of converging imperatives have prompted widespread attention to environmental predicament. The environmental destruction evident in the poetry *Waiting Laughters* has much to do with global economic domination. The era of "Excessive consumption, unnecessary production, vast quantities of waste and scandalous disparities between the rich and the poor have combined to put the future of both humankind and the natural world in question" (Russel 18). The poet demonstrates the gloomy outcome thus:

From the ruptured slumber of the stars
From the begging banter of the dew
Which ekes a fragile peace
From the riot of rainless seasons,
Earth sprawls like a famished bull-
Waiting for its horn of rain… (43).

According to the latest biological trends, critics note that humans are now the dominant predator in every ecosystem (even in the seemingly limitless Pacific and Atlantic Oceans) and unless restraints are put in place, humans will exhaust the globe's natural resources, full its sink and over step the earth's capacity to support life (Dauvergne 375). This lends credibility to the selected poetry's demonstration of Nigeria's environmental degradation of the bioregions as proven in these lines:

the arid lament of trees without leaves…
and rivers whose beds know no liquid snore
in a season of slumbering moons, cracked,

the lips of voiceless grass
water-holes are receding sockets
in the distant eye of dazzling earth;
every path knows now the pilgrim-age of gaping pots…
of assassinated dream… (92).

The vivid imagery of void in "trees without leaves", "rivers whose bed know no Liquid" "voiceless grass", "water-holes are receding sockets in the distant eye of dazzling earth" illustrate that technology and industrialisation are makers of environmental retrogression. The poet depicts social life as a quandary fractured by social inequality and "assassinated dreams". The impact of liberalisation is damaging as a force sinking the globe into a bog of ecological decay. In contrast, the poet states in these lines: *Grant us/ the fortitude of the lamb which lames a lion/ without inheriting its claws…/the wisdom of seasons which see/the hidden dagger in a plumage of smiles…* (95). In order to create a sustainable environment mankind needs to return to the conservation of the environment. Consequently, environmental imagination demonstrates an aesthetic preference for ecocriticism which is… especially attentive to those forms of… writings that highlight natural elements – landscape, flora, and fauna as self standing agents rather than support structures for human action in the world… (Buell 1).

From the aforementioned, Literature, according to Abubakar "secures its right to say everything. Literature ties its destiny to a certain noncensure, to the space of democratic freedom… the allaying of suspicion or terror with regards to it… with the unlimited right to ask questions, to suspect all dogmatism, to analyse every presupposition…" (36). Thus, Literature in general and Nigerian Poetry in particular "can aid in the journey of self discovery… an inspirer of development" (Darah 16). This study therefore draws on literary representation of environmentalism in Nigeria ecosystem in order to unearth the everyday environmental catastrophe at work in the Nigerian social space that may go unnoticed using contemporary ecocritical approach to uphold that human interest is not the only legitimate interest.

3.2 The Quintessence of Environmental Poetry

According to Leigh Hunt, "poetry embodies and illustrates its impressions by imagination or images of the objects of which it treats and other images brought in to throw light on those objects, in order that it may enjoy and impart the feeling of their truth in its utmost conviction and affluence" (2). In other words, Poetry has important things to teach humanity. Apart from its aesthetic and pleasing qualities, poetry encodes and communicates nature related ideologies. By this, "Poetry can act as an ice-axe to break the frozen sea inside us, awaken our dulled perceptions out of habit-ridden disregard to a sense of the vitality and beauty of nature and therefore sharpening our determination to take actions that will preserve it" (Hunt 7). This is the power of all poetry particularly the power of eco-poetry. Thus, an eco-critical approach to a poem will investigate the specific methods a writer employs to analyse and establish ecological vision.

From this purview, modern Nigerian poetry has functioned as a medium of engagement, disapproving of colonialism, cultural imperialism, globalisation, political tyranny and environmental despoliation. Nigerian poetry foregrounds the dislocation of Nigerian ecosystem and through same; reveal the evil of exploitation of Nigeria's natural environment. Along these lines, Niyi Osundare's poetic endeavor in the *Eye of the Earth* (1986) and *Waiting Laughters* (1990) lends credence to the views of Mishra Raj as he asserts:

> *I write to untie the knots*
> *That lump my throat…*
> *I write to wipe the tears*
> *As the pages of pain*
> *Scroll from my thumbs…*
> *I write myself into time*
> *I write that they may know…* (Raj 1).

Niyi Osundare's poetry offers valuable perspectives for understanding the factors which have shaped the Nigerian environment. His selected poetry has become a reference point for those utilising poetry for an enduring sense of literary, social and environmental values. He is unapologetic in revealing societal ills as he captures activities and experiences of his socio-cultural milieu. On this note, "art, the expression of society, manifests in its highest soaring, the most advanced social tendencies… therefore to know whether art worthily fulfils its proper mission as initiator… one must know where humanity is going, know what the destiny of the human race is … lay bare with a brutal brush all the brutalities, all the filth which are at the base of our societies…" (Maiwada 9). Osundare's poetry brings to fore the impact of human activities on Nigeria's ecosystem alongside acts inimical to the well being of the suppressed communities. Further, Rodrigues (170-184) avers that, "the shift towards a focus on the rights of nature considers ecosystems and natural communities as entities that have an independent right to exist and flourish". To this end, environmental criticism challenges the exploitative principles and prioritisation of science to promote a modern world at the detriment of the environment.

This chapter examines the extent to which aesthetic values expressed in Osundare's works are consistent with ecocritical views. The analysis conveys that the appreciation and preservation of the landscape is complicated by the conflation of technology and globalisation which promotes the ravenous over-exploitation of Nigeria's natural resources. Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* and *Waiting Laughters* are axiomatic of the poet's concern regarding the pathetic state of the Nigerian environment and the apprehension show the penchant of the Nigerian ruling class to manage and exploit resources for wealth, power and profit at the expense of the livelihood of the repressed people and ecological balance. The chapter demonstrates that Buell's first two principles evaluated in *The Eye of the Earth* and *Waiting Laughters* confirm the

collections as environmental texts. Therefore, ecological degradation depicted in the poetry analysed show that Nigerian environment is valued as raw materials to be exploited for profit hence the need to find solutions to this attitude adds value to the current debates on ethical responsibilities of individuals, including artists towards nature.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DEVELOPMENT AND ITS AFTERMATH IN OJAIDE'S *DAYDREAM OF ANTS* AND *DELTA BLUES AND HOMESONGS*

Modern industrial development and its global spread combine the deployment of capital and technology with the massive exploitation of natural resources for the production of goods and services for profit. Although this meets the desire of consumerism, its actualisation causes over-exploitation of natural resources, global warming, emissions, waste, marginalisation of communities and displacement. This chapter therefore examines the role of poetry in depicting the negative consequences of industrial development. In this sense, Nigerian literature redirects consciousness to a consideration of Nigeria's place in a threatened world. Since literature raises people's awareness about social issues, Poetry is a potent medium of exploring socio-political maladies that affect society as well as advocating social transformation.

To this end, Tanure Ojaide's *Daydream of Ants* and *Delta Blues and Homesongs* investigate the extent to which Niger Delta's rich environment is afflicted by decades of oil exploration and exploitation. This is fundamental in portraying the calamity besetting Nigerian space in the wake of increasing environmental crisis. Thus, Ojaide's poetry presents the experiences of the marginalised Niger Delta region as manifestations of dehumanisation of the weak by Nigerian rulers in conjunction with multinational oil companies for selfish interests. In doing so, Ojaide illustrates that oil exploration, marketing and the results thereof do not constitute development. Paradoxically, as wealth arises from oil exploration, marginalisation of the people deepens. Ojaide uses this irony to illustrate the ambiguity of development in the postcolonial condition.

Consequently, "Development" according to Sen (3) is a "strategically ambiguous phrase adapted to the different needs of those who use it… and it is often the enormous cultural assumptions and presumptions of the West". "Development" could be described as a mechanism of discursive control… of economic management based on the assumption that the western values it inculcates are indisputably the right ones characterised by ethnocentric approach in which people and cultures are treated as abstract concepts to be moved up and down in the charts of progress (Huggan and Tiffan 28). Far from putting an end to old-style imperialism as Truman puts it, "modern development finds new ways of expanding the on-going collaboration between national governments and gargantuan transnational companies whose economies exceed …the largest 'developing' countries and whose financial and technical assistance is provided in terms that continue to favour the west" (Esteva 9-11). The traumatic condition in the Niger Delta region is axiomatic of Truman's views because it illustrates the predatory structure within the region and the predicament of its people.

To this end, Ezeoechi Nwagbara writes that "in order to remake the delta region environmentally… sustainable, Ojaide's poetry advances the possibility of this through… resistance, a kind of dissidence poetry couched in Ecocriticism that negates ecological imperialism, a capitalist practice that destroys the Niger Delta environment" (19). As a mouth piece, "poets enact a circuit of healing in their poetic imaginative passage – from estrangement to transformation and reintegration" (Elder 1). Like every other literary medium, Poetry awakens people's perception concerning their realities. Thus, Literature plays a significant role in …articulating a poetry of place in the alienating wake of globalisation (Deloughrey and Handley 15).

4.1 Ecological Destruction in *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems*

Environmental destruction in the face of development is fundamental in understanding the realities of a nation's culture, politics and domination. This study investigates Nigerian poetry, in relation to environmental commitment evident in Ojaide's *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems.* The words "Ants" and "Daydream" are sarcastic images which the poet manipulates to communicate the disquiet in the Nigerian society with an aim of ridiculing human folly. Ojaide's *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems* is divided into sections I, II, III, and IV respectively. For the purpose of appraising *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems* ecocritically, Buell's third principle which states that: (3) *Human accountability to the environment is part of the texts ethical orientation* alongside definitions of Ecocriticism will be utilised. In this context, Ecocriticism is more than simply the study of nature or natural things in literature: rather it is a theory that is committed to change by analysing the function- thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical or otherwise of the natural environment or aspects of it represented in documents (literary) that contribute to material practices in material worlds. The collection *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems* affirms Ojaide's connection to his Urhobo homeland alongside the destructive impact of modern technological development on it and Nigeria by extension.

The poem "Technology" criticises the havoc of technological advancement which keeps altering the Nigerian environment. In the lines: *the ban on trespassing collapsed/the world swamped with hostility*… (13) foreground the extent to which globalisation has opened up trade across continents alongside its incongruity. "Technology" provides a dark parody of the exploitative practices by industrialists on the Nigerian locale. The poem reveals images of the dispossessed Nigerian communities struggling for survival in the encompassment of techno-capitalism as portrayed in:

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

This stanza makes probable that the crisis confronting mankind are intimately linked to the perception of nature's assets as resources to be exploited. Against this backdrop, the poet employs his poetry to indict Nigerian leaders and their cohorts as liable for the destruction on the Nigerian environment. The poet laments in: *bush-rat dug a dungeon/of infinite outlets …ants raised a hill/to cover their habitats of holes*? *The eagle cast an evil spell… to have birds that couldn't fly*….These lines illustrate limitless exploitation, power and force. Also, the images "bush-rat" and "ants" are symbols of plunder – one operating from outside and the other from within. This conveys an overall representation of subjugation to which Nigerian environment is abused. The poet mentions in these lines:

After the reed-legged stork
sold out the secret of stilts
and opened the trade
for masquerades to market height
in their sleights,
didn't I in godly deference
want to scrape the sky
and push back my small horizon? (13-14).

From a satirical perspective, the poet conveys ways in which Nigerian political elites in partnership with transnational corporations are in the front line of assaulting the Nigerian

environment as they: *opened the trade/for masquerades to market height/in their sleights*…. From the lines, "masquerades" are agents of global free trade who through their mode of operation intentionally despoil the Nigerian natural environment to suit their insatiability. Thus, the poet laments they …*want to scrape the sky and push back my small horizon?* This line suggests the enormity to which individuals can become manipulative in exploiting nature's resources.

Similarly, the poet's lamentations in "Compound Blues" against the notions of development and modern technological expansion demonstrate that the reverence for the Nigerian environment has diminished. In this connection, Derrick Jensen states that: "wealth is measured by one's ability to consume and destroy" (207). Thus, to change this condition, the poet says that:

> *Whenever a wall rises in my front,*
> *I crave to tear it down*
> *And ride through the rubble*
> *To see what it used to hide*… (10).

The "wall" in the lines above denotes forms of barrier and disconnection that arise from modern technological expansion. This "wall" breeds a demarcation between the "have" and the "have not" and alienates man from nature. Hence, using a strong sense of repulsion for alteration of values, the poet declares: *Whenever a wall rises in my front/I crave to tear it down*…. This is because the whole idea of development has generated waves of challenges for capitalist economies, making life increasingly unequal not only for the lower classes but for the middle class as well. "Compound Blues" therefore signifies the decline of Nigeria's natural balance and the need to rectify this. He also restates the realities of Nigeria's socio-political and

environmental anguish as the poet rhetorically questions *...how could we/have arrived here /violating the sovereignty/of quiet ones?* The lines questions the economic and social system that is working the world to death, imprisoning it, torturing it and erecting a wall of demarcation between man and his environment.

It is apparent that "capitalism has gone too far, devouring the very preconditions of economic and social life, problematising its own long term viability… and demonstrating extraordinary level of dysfunction and disequilibrium" (Urry 50). Nigeria's ecological problems are outcome of structures of hegemony and elitism geared to exploit the common people and the natural world. The poet interrogates the logic that leads inevitably to murdered oceans, demolished mountains, damned rivers and poisoned air space as he articulates: *how could we/ have arrived here/without breaking through mountains?* The copious use of rhetorical questions in the lines serves as a moral voice in creating awareness against despoiling nature. In a similar vein, the title poem "The Day Dream of Ants" bemoans how the conspirators assert:

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

From the stanzas, the poet condemns the industrialists and their cohorts who scheme to plunder Nigeria's natural resources for profit hence …wreck *one vision for lust for more visions….* On the contrary, the poet suggests a cordial relationship with the ecosystem in opposition to the inclination for modern technological progress. Sickened by persistent exploitation, the poet decries: *He has torn apart the human suit/he was born with for good/now an elephant he charges/and tramples the earth-/everything yields to his boots* (16). The lines foreground that

industrial globalisation depicted in the images of "elephant" and "boots" are representations of exploitations trampling down the Nigerian landscape. By conveying conditions of the Nigerian natural world, Ojaide directs humans to understand their place in the world and create awareness about the preservation of the Nigerian environment thus making accountability of the environment an ethical point of reference. Similarly, the poem "The Paradise of Powers!" reels about the repercussion of arbitrarily destroying nature in the lines:

> *…planners set up industries…*
> *Capitalising on rivers and lakes*
> *Has dealt algae and fish fatal blows…*
> *space is being torn open*
> *a caesarian section for martial babies*
> *the ant daydreams in its daemon world*
> *of surviving fire stroke…*(26)

The above stanza acknowledges that industrial civilisation truncates survival on the planet hence …spaces *being torn open*/*a caesarian section for martial babies* are end results of industrialisation and globalisation. Hence, to put an end to the socio-political, physical and technological infrastructures that permit multinational corporations and cohorts to destroy the Nigerian ecosystem – *capitalising on rivers and lakes…* the poet redirects mankind to rethink the way to interact with the natural world. Also, the poem "A T & P, Sapele" conveys the numerous problems of civilisation which is killing the planet. According to Derrick *et al* (1) "it is long past time for those who care about life on earth to… take actions necessary to stop this culture from destroying every living being". Along these lines, the poet advocates a pragmatic approach to saving the earth. He believes that industrial civilisation is fundamentally unsustainable thus, must be dismantled in order to secure a livable future for all species. The poet recalls the environmental devastation in the lines:

When I first entered the AT & P
on excursion from St George's
it was next to the largest saw mill
on earth, we were told…
When a decade I went home…
A big clearing welcomed me;
No longer the unending sheet of green
No trees had reprieve from the axe…
the waterfront taken over
by phalanges of water hyacinth… (30-31).

The poet interweaves scenic memories of the past frustrated with total annihilation in: *A big clearing welcomed me*/*No longer the unending sheet of green*. To illustrate that there is an interconnection in the web of things and the destruction of one affects the other, the poet grieves: *the waterfront taken over/by phalanges of water hyacinth….* Consequently, by reflecting environmental concerns, the poet affirms that human answerability to the environment is part of the text's ethical choice thus individuals must address the abuse on Nigeria's bionetwork in particular and the world at large.

Likewise, in "Steel of Dominion" just as the title indicates, the poem reiterates the destructive actions of individuals against the Nigerian landscape such that… if *the mountain was not to our taste/we blew it to the shape of our heart…* (32). The poet utilises this poem to sensitise humans of their place on the planet in order to avert catastrophic fates against other organisms in their bid to manipulate the environment. In a similar vein, the poem "The Power of the Victims" is a strong indictment against those that hold the Nigerian natural environment hostage to its ruthless appetite. In a scornful manner, the poet expresses grief about: *...cutting through stones to pathways/arching wide rivers with rainbows/arching wide rivers with rainbows* (34). This corroborates Scott Russell Sanders (182) claim that: "once a forest is cut down, or a stream is filled with waste, or a wildlife refuge is opened up for drilling, it is virtually

impossible to undo the damage…." In view of this, Jensen (13) insists that "destruction is not merely a byproduct but, a requirement of civilisation. The drive to create more delusional civilised wealth requires active destruction of the landbase…."

In connection, the poem "Excavation" illuminates that, the aftermath of multinational gold diggers scampering for expansion culminates in the displacement of the marginalised people hence, the lines assert that: *people lived here /their dispersed children/polishing their memories/with unabating tears…*(35). The poet bemoans the extent to which exploitation translates to *...howls of dispossession/subsumed in passing wind* (35). To this end, 'the new catastrophism', the increasing prosperity, wealth, movement and connectivity of the industrial period will continue forever (Urry 36). In a similar way, the theft and rape of natural resources in "Inquest: By Lake Nyos" illustrates that an enormous share of Nigeria's wealth is over exploited through high consumption rate of resources for profit thus, causing: *seismic motions under lake/emitted highly gaseous poisons/ from the earth's underbelly…*(42-45) which threatens biodiversity.

Like many Ecocritics, the poet through his poetry disseminates that technological advancement is not making things better. Against this backdrop, Edward Said describes the impact of technological expansion: "this process was never ending, as a huge number of plants, animals and crops…gradually turned the colony into a new place complete with new disease, environmental imbalance and traumatic dislocations for the overpowered natives – and connects, inextricably this geographical violence to the politics of empire: the culmination of this process is imperialism which dominates, classifies and universally commodifies all space under the aegis of the metropolitan centre" (271-272). Therefore, in "Belated advice" the poet cautions: *Yield to no one…/to behead the forest/from the soil/minerals for explosives/to tear the earth to pieces…*

(46). Also, in the poem "Moon", *The moon is burnt out by countless waves/Of neon fires set by sign-makers…/I see her pale and breast less,/The dispossessed minion of a vandalised sky* (62). These lines signify the magnitude to which forces of greed are busy taking away everything that was once good and leaving behind corporatism and a ruined planet. Buell (1) affirms "that threats from civilisation bring about a dim terrain hidden behind the visible world and threatens life on earth. People… find themselves exposed to radiation ingest, toxic levels and are pursued into their very dreams by the anxiety of a… dangerous, hostile substances concealed behind the harmless facades…."

From an ecocritical viewpoint, *Day Dream of Ants and Other Poems* confirms that, Nigerian rulers in alliance with multinational companies subvert Nigerian ecological order by over-exploiting natural resources for power, wealth and profit. Therefore, Nigerian ecosystem and its attendant concerns have taken a prominent place in post-modern thought and it is ostensible that, there is a connection between the treatment of flora and fauna and the treatment of dominated societies. Ojaide's *Day Dream of Ants and Other Poems* offers ideas towards taking necessary actions to salvage the Nigerian space. In consequence, human accountability to the environment, environmental awareness and the notion of environmental praxis as the text's concern are observable in Ojaide's *Day Dream of Ants and Other Poems*.

4.2 A Mirror of Nature in *Delta Blues and Home Songs*

Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs* has a total of 51 poems and is divided into two. The first section of *Delta Blues* is in honor of Ken Saro-Wiwa while, the second section *Home Songs* is in honor of Ezekiel Opkan. The individual poems in the collection vary however; all of them present an experience that stems from civil protest and environmental degradation. Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1998) delves into the socio-environmental happenings that have

wielded a compelling influence over the Nigerian people and the world at large to unfold sinister vistas which poetry interprets. The poet captures the horrendous experiences of the Nigerian people as it relates to environmental panorama of contemporary Nigeria. Subsequently, this section utilises Buell's fourth principles of an ecocritical text which states that: (4) *Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant is at least implicit in the text*. As an environmental poet, Ojaide presents poetry in which themes of nature, conservation, wilderness or environmental crisis loom large. Thus, an ecocritical reading of Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Home Songs* is feasible because of his consistence with environmentalism of his homeland and the Niger Delta region.

In this context, using *Delta Blues and Home Songs*, the poet facilitates reverence for the Nigerian environment by taking up concerns regarding environmental annihilation. By replicating issues of environmental degradation on the Nigerian bionetwork testifies that environmental concern over time is dynamic and not static. The poem "Delta Blues" shows the poet's chagrin at those humans altering the landscape of his native land as he declares:

> *This share of paradise, the delta of my birth,*
> *Reels from an immeasurable wound.*
> *Barrels of alchemical draughts flow…*
> *The inheritance I sat on for centuries.*
> *Now crushes my body and soul*
>
> *The rivers are dark-veined,*
> *a course of perennial draughts.*
> *This home of salt and fish*
> *stilted in mangroves, market of barter,*
> *always welcomes others—*
> *hosts and guests flourished*
> *on palm oil, yams and garri.*
> *This home of plants and birds*
> *least expected a stampede;*
> *there's no refuge east or west,*
> *north or south of this paradise* (21).

Consequently, human excesses, political ideologies and social injustices have played active role in modifying the Niger Delta environment as the poet recalls in a mournful tone these words: *barrels of alchemical draughts flow/from this hurt to the unquestioning world…. This home of plants and birds / least expected a stampede/there's no refuge east or west/north or south of this paradise* (21). The poet's rummage into Nigeria's environmental ruin is a prelude into the future that requires intervention. The paralysis that engulfs the land of his birth is the poet's antagonism as he states:

> *Masked in barrels of oil-*
> *I stew in the womb of fortune.*
> *I live in the deathbed*
> *Prepared by a cabal of brokers*
> *Breaking the peace of centuries*
> *and tainting not only a thousand rivers*… (21-22).

The above lines are jibes against Nigerian rulers' and cohorts who indulge in nefarious acts to propagate their exploitative undertakings on the Nigerian landscape. Multinational corporations prop up dictatorial trails by brutally manipulating the land and its resources for capital. The poet illustrates this in these lines: *breaking the peace of centuries/my life blood from the beginning/…scorching their sacred soil…/the animals grope in the burning bush*. Ojaide does not only recount the memories of yester years, he recalls the ruin that has become the norm in his native land all for "development". It is on this backdrop, that, he employs the poem "Wails" to give him voice to raise a wail about the ruination that has taken over his nation as he avers:

> *Another ANA meeting will be called*
> *and singers will gather.*
> *I will look all over*
> *and see a space*
> *that can take more than a hundred–*
> *the elephant never hides.*

I ask the god of songs
whether all the singers will come,
but that silent space
that can take more than a hundred
stares at me with nostalgia
and gives me feverish cold.
I won't find one singer
when another ANA meeting will be called.

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

Furthermore, the poet uses the lines above to reminiscence the brutal killing of the eight Ogoni men and Ken Saro-Wiwa whom he describes as "the Elephant" whose absence would be noticeable at the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) meetings. Ken Saro-Wiwa was once the national president of ANA and his death signified collective tragedy and political struggle of the Niger Delta people. He championed the cause to reveal the dilemma of environmental devastation in the Niger Delta region. The poet reiterates this horrifying loss in the poem "Elegy for nine warriors":

Those I remember in my song
will outlive this ghoulish season,
dawn will outlive the long night.
I hear voices stifled by the hangman,
an old cockroach in the groins of Aso Rock.
Those I remember with these notes
walk back erect from the stake… (25).

The poet calls to mind the martyred warriors, who stood against the degradation of the land and stifled by the brutal leadership of a onetime Nigerian head. This misdeed remains alive in the collective memory of the people.

In lieu of ecological relevance, Everden (14) opines that, humankind has the "influence to make the biosphere uninhabitable and this can produce suicidal result within a foreseeable period of time if the human population of the globe does not take prompt and concerted action to check the pollution and spoliation that are being inflicted upon the biosphere by shortsighted human greed." Luc Ferry (71) in *The New Ecological Order* asserts that humanity's "relationship with nature, now, one-directional must go from 'parasitic' to 'symbiotic'." In view of this, the poem "When green was the lingua franca", bemoans the effects of capitalist urbanisation on the land, animals and people of the rich Niger Delta. The poet takes a journey back to his childhood memories as he recounts that:

My childhood stretched
One unbroken park
Teeming with life.
In the forest green was
The lingua franca
With many dialects.
Everybody's favorite
Water sparkled…
I remember erhuvwudjayorho
Such glamorous fish
But denied growing big…
Uwara, beauty that defies
Tyranny of Akpobrisi
Forest manic and recluse
What flesh or fiber fails
To capitulate before charm?
Urhurhu grapes coloured
My tongue scarlet
the Owe apple fell to me
as cherries and bredfruit
on wind blessed days,
the cotton tree made me
fly for tossed-out fluffs… (12-13).

The lines above capture the agrarian environment and biodiversity that the poet once knew and grew in and for which the Niger Delta is celebrated. The poet continues to lament the state of things thus:

> *Then Shell broke the bond*
> *With quakes and a hell*
> *of flakes. Stoking a hearth*
> *under God's very behind!...*
>
> *I see victims of arson*
> *Wherever my restless soles*
> *Take me to bear witness.*
> *The Ethiope water front*
> *Wiped out by prospectors-*
> *So many trees beheaded*
> *And streams mortally poisoned*
> *In the name of jobs and wealth!* (13).

From the above, notions of exploitation, annihilation and repression are employed by the poet in words such as: "wiped out", "beheaded", "restless soles", "mortally poisoned" and "victims of arson" to depict the havoc meted on the delta landscape by the ruling class and multinational companies. By lamenting these concerns, the poet shows that the environment is a process rather than a constant. Heidegger criticises "the metaphysical presuppositions responsible for ecological destruction – a transformed awareness of what humanity and nature are would lead spontaneously to a transformation of society" (Zimmerman 195). The solution to "environmental crisis would involve an ontological shift: from an anthropocentric and utilitarian understanding of nature to an understanding which 'lets things be,' i.e. other than merely as raw material for human ends…" (Zimmerman 196).

Ecocritics argue that technological "progress" has been purchased at the detriment of nature. Such consequences are consistent with Western philosophical and religious traditions that

have privileged "man" in comparison with lowly "nature". In this context, "Descartes and other early modern scientists interpret nature as a lifeless machine, thus removing impediments that otherwise would have slowed economic "development" of natural resources by the emerging class of capitalists" (Zimmerman 3). The poem "Fetish country" challenges agents of development and expansion in Nigeria who promote environmental devastation in the effort to utilise unscrupulous means to harness the natural resources. In "Fetish country" the poem illustrates how the uneven development of capital ensures that wealth meant for the common good is funneled out while the very workers who produce value are abandoned in deplorable conditions. This vista is critical because the same rulers and their cohorts exploiting the Nigerian environment are still recycling themselves in nefarious pursuits. The poet illuminates this:

> *Inside the rocky cave they offer sacrifices*
> *To the god of power, a cobra with hooded face.*
> *Piles of bodies deck the altar with over abundance.*
> *The stench from the court shrine asphyxiates the country…* (39).

From the stanza above, the poet opines that, the ecological problems facing Nigeria stem from variety of pressures that have developed over time as a result of the growing strain on natural resources. The poet utilises his craft to orchestrate this disequilibrium as he vows to resist the environmental crisis:

> *…Let me be the eyareya grass*
> *shaken relentlessly by winds…*
> *Let me be that perennial river*
> *That will be swallowed by the sea*
> *But will continue to swagger…* (68).

The poet is of the opinion, that, the more repressive a situation, the more urgent the communicative purpose of the poet to assuage it. He communicates: *let me be the perennial river/that will be swallowed by the sea/but will continue to swagger*…. It is depressing, that,

Nigerian political rulers and cohorts are bequeathing an environment that is completely eroded, communities whose shorelines have been washed away due to the high volume of deep-sea exploration and exploitation activities. Once hilly and highland environments have been reduced to below sea level, navigable creeks which once supported socio-economic activities among local dwellers have been silted with dredge dump. This has brought forth various militant groups in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria who claim to be against every form of oppression of the environment which has impoverished the region and its people. They engage in conflicts by actions such as sabotage, hostage taking and property destruction in order to have greater share of Nigeria's oil revenue. Eteng (21) maintains that: "the specific, highly exploitative and grossly inequitable endowment/ownership- exchange entitlements relations between the Nigerian state and the oil-bearing communities in particular, explains why the enormous oil wealth generated is scarcely reflected in the living standard and life chances of the peasant inhabitants of the oil-bearing enclave". Against this circumstance, Ojaide's poetry finds ample expression in utilising poetry as a medium of persuasion which culminates in environmentalism against global commercialism. In this light, Ojaide declares regarding the relevance of his works:

> my view is to touch people's mind about what is happening in the Niger Delta through imaginative reconstruction of episodes, events and situations. And these issues should draw sensitivity to idea about the environment and society which concerns everybody. I am doing it from a different perspective which I think is very effective. I am fighting this battle from an intellectual, imaginative, and emotional level, from a level that people will be more sensitive to what it happening and that has nothing to do with violence and the politics of it (Onyerionwu 326).

Ojaide's works are veritable gadgets to winnow out the disquiet enshrined in resource accumulation so that ecological equilibrium and social justice may hold sway in the Nigerian landscape.

This chapter evaluates the selected works as depictions of the devastating legacies of over exploitations of Nigeria's natural resources. The works of study validate the postulations that human accountability to the environment and the perspective that the environment is a process rather than as a constant is the text's ethical concern. The chapter reveals ecocritical wisdom and the poems examined confirm conditions that demand reflections about the connection that individuals should have towards the Nigerian natural world. Consequently, Ojaide's *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems* and *Delta Blues and Home Song* conspicuously oppose the destruction of Nigeria's ecosystem and portray its crisis as a manifestation of man's insatiable desire and greed.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 GREEN RESISTANCE IN NNIMMO BASSEY'S *WE THOUGHT IT WAS OIL BUT IT WAS BLOOD* AND *I WILL NOT DANCE TO YOUR BEAT*

Amidst scientific evidence signaling ecological disturbance, Nigerian poet Nnimmo Bassey presents human impact on the environment in critical ways. In this regard, this chapter evaluates Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* and *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* using the concept of green resistance, a view adopted to protect the environment from the ravages of current civilisation thereby, putting humans back in touch with the earth. Green resistance which Nnimmo Bassey articulates in his poetry foregrounds the role of literature in conveying the universal apprehension that nature is endangered by a combination of negligence, exploitation and greed. Subsequently, this chapter surveys the extent to which green resistance has been employed as a form of struggle in opposition to globalisation and its corollary. Bassey, like other ecocritics explore the extent to which inconsiderate exploits result in ceaseless deterioration of the natural environment and how this threatens lives and natural space in the Niger Delta. Thus, the notion "green resistance" considers the interdependence of organisms within ecosystems and the inherent worth of other life forms of the natural world.

In the same vein, Derrick et al (1) aver that green resistance includes "a fusion of dedicated activists, poets, climate scientists, ecologists, environmental justice advocates, landless peasants, labour organisers, farm workers, and indigenous communities resisting resource exploitation and ecological destruction…." It connects battles against mountaintop removal, water privatisation, mega dams, genetically modified crops and pesticide poisoning with fights for workers' rights, labour justice, and corporate reform. It links campaigns to prevent climate chaos as well as adopt renewable energy with demonstrations against war, militarism, repression and human rights abuses. "Green resistance" is geared towards saving the planet, its wildlife and

its people. Thus, the enlightened must rise up in resistance- not to reform, but rather to totally tear down the corporate capitalist economic system. In this light, Derrick Jensen (207) asserts that, "the dominant culture of civilisation- is killing the planet earth. It is time for those, who care about life on earth to take the necessary action to stop this culture from destroying every living being…." To pretend that civilisation can exist without destroying its own landbase and the cultures of others is to be entirely ignorant of history, biology, morality, and self-preservation. The current environmental realities of earth warming and its resultant impact for a green earth has become the new sensibility in the Niger Delta and the Nigerian landscape. Along these lines, Nnimmo Bassey's selected works are nexus between literature and the natural environment and his concern for the environment has turned him into one of Africa's leading advocates for the environment and human rights. He stands against the practices of multinational corporations in his country Nigeria and the environmental devastation they leave behind.

5.1 Environmental Advocacy in *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood*

The environmental advocacy that emerges from Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* goes beyond metonymic representation and adopts a metaphorical portrayal of land degradation. Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* centres on the interconnectedness of all existence (human life, biotic and non biotic environment). The poet's critical lens focuses on ecological degradation of Nigeria's landscape and the role of multinational corporations in it. This chapter assesses Bassey's work from an ecocritical viewpoint using Cheryll Glotfelty's set of questions that addresses aspects of ecology and institutional attitudes towards nature as shown in the following:

> *Does the setting function simply as background or does it play an active role in the narrative?*
> *If it plays an active role, how important is it in working out the narrative?*
> *How is nature affected by human beings?*

> *How responsible are human beings to the environment?*
> *What questions does the text raise about human interactions with nature?*
> *Does the text raise the reader's awareness of the natural world and his or her connections to it?* (*Dobie* 243).

Applying the above questions to Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* demonstrates ecocritical undertones which may guide human activity against perceived ecological destruction. Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* is written in a free verse form and the poet's thoughts flow from one line to the other through the device-of enjambment. In the title poem, "We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood" rural scenes, landscapes, streets, and the natural world are employed as settings integral to illustrating the physical and psychological struggle faced by men, women, boys and girls alike. The poet champions the twenty-first Century environmental unease when he declares thus:

> *The other day*
> *We danced in the street*
> *Joy in our hearts…*
>
> *We thought it was oil*
> *But it was blood*
>
> *Heart jumping*
> *Into our mouths*
> *Floating on*
> *Emotion's dry wells*
> *We leapt in fury*
> *Knowing it was'nt funny*
> *Then we beheld*
> *Bright red pools*
>
> *We thought it was oil*
> *But it was blood*
>
> *The heavens are open*
> *Above our heads*
> *Toasted dreams…* (13-14)

In exploring issues about sustainability of the Nigerian environment, the above stanza presents little evidence that government is succeeding in implementing concrete strategic policies to ensure a sustainable landscape. On this note, Moran (1) avers that "yearly, the earth continues to be treated with little thoughts for the future as… the story goes on, giving cause for considerable alarm". The increase in Nigeria's ruling class collaboration with multinational corporations to explore natural resources has brought about many alterations in the Nigerian environmental balance being that, nature now lies in subjection to man's powers. In this light, Nnimmo Bassey declares that, environmental injustice is apparent as:

> … The fossil fuel-driven civilisation has driven humanity to the brink, often termed the tipping point, with regard to the climate crisis. The time has come for action to be taken to reverse the trend. The time has come for the world to look away from the carbon-driven development path and its governing mentality… We have to see trees for what they are and not pretend that they are nothing more than carbon stocks (Gaia Foundation).

The above extract suggests that, the wellbeing of the natural environment should be man's priority. Therefore, Environmentalism is a response to the crisis in man's relations with the surroundings. These responses could be scientific, activist, artistic or a mixture of all three. For Buell (21) "Environmentalism explores the implications of the endangered state of the earth. A testament to the fact that, the natural environment has been degraded by the exploitative activities of man with the attendant fatal consequences…." Gas-flaring, spillages and its antecedents are at variance with the beauty of the ecology like seas, rivers, flora, fauna and forests which adorn the Niger Delta landscape. Thus, Bassey's poetry *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* offers a literary base for environmental reinforcement which may steer human activity against destruction of ecological stability.

In consequence, the poem "We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood" creates a memorable impression about images of Nigerian environment. The poet suggests that, petro-capitalism has negatively impacted on Nigeria's natural environment through oil exploration which inflicts violence and death. Equally, Arne Naess and George Sessions seem to share similar sentiments as they comment that humanity has "no right to reduce… richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs" (Naess and George 2). "We thought it was oil… but it was blood" reels with occurrence that depict the natural environment as a narrative of mayhem and turmoil hence, the poetic lines: "*the other day/…We thought we were free/ three young folks fell to our right/…We beheld /Red-hot guns…/we thought it was oil/ but it was blood*" (13-14).

To illustrate further, the poet employs metaphoric images and personifications like "dried tear bags", "drilling our souls", "heart jumping into our mouths", "toasted dreams", "scrambled sky" suggest the devastating implications of environmental annihilation on the Nigerian landscape and the peoples livelihood. The poet also emphasises the harsh reality of man's ravages that degrades the sanctity of nature. In this regards, Ynestra King articulates: "…we have to be the voice of the invisible, of nature who cannot speak for herself in the political arenas of our society'" (Hay 3). The poet highlights in these words:

Dried tear bags
Polluted streams…
Toasted dreams
In a scrambled sky
A million black holes
In a burnt sky
Their pipes may burst
But our dreams won't burst… (13-15).

The environmental devastation that is occurring in the Delta region and the Nigerian space has had considerable consequences. The poet conveys Nigerian elites' ominous destruction of the Nigerian ecology in the poem "When the earth bleeds". The ecology, which used to be a fertile area teeming with fish, shellfish, and wildlife, now, suffers effects of continuous oil spillage. The poet explicates: "I hear that oil/makes things move"… *A thousand explosions in the belly of the earth/ Bleeding rigs/bursting pipes/This oil flows/ From the earth's sickbed* (16). In a melancholic tone, the poet confirms how disease, poverty, incarceration and torture ravage the land hence: *in reality check/oil makes life stop… the oil only flows/when the earth bleeds* (16).

In addition, non-human nature has taken on a significance that transcends human superiority therefore, speaking for nature or depicting how nature is affected by human beings in a text are principles of Ecocriticism which manifest in poetry via literary devices such as personification and metaphor as expressed in the lines: *oil makes life stop…/when the earth bleeds…*. The lines evoke the power in nature to cause hostility and death. Nature has a voice and humanity must try to understand it and give it representation in the human realm. Agbada (9) maintains that the "Niger Delta has become a geographical space and social constituent in the Nigerian lexicography of agitation for justice. The Niger Delta in recent times has become a volatile region because of the wanton exploitation of the natural resources, oil and the unmitigated neglect of the people of the land. The people live in abject poverty the built environment annihilated by bombardment from the Nigerian military might and the natural environment, its soil and waterways exploited without the required replenishment and sustenance by government and foreign oil companies". The result of this culminates into the parasitic milking of the blood of the people and the land hence the persistent resistance, restiveness and violence. In this regard, one of the group's leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of the

Niger Delta (MEND) in an interview states: "MEND was fighting for "total control" of the Niger Delta's oil wealth as local people have not gained from the riches under the ground and the regions creeks and swamps" (Oluwatoyin 309-325).

Subsequently, *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* depicts "...subversion and defiance provoked by a deep sense of denial against the deprivation of the people from access to the commonwealth which oil brings" (Aghoghoiva 2). Thus, the reckless despoliation of the environment and mankind's ambition to accumulate shows that, this trend has been visible at the transition from feudalism to industrialisation in Europe. The reality is simply getting worse across the world… (*Gaia Foundation).* Along these lines, in the poem "Did you"? the poet employs nature images to portray deadly outcomes of mankind's interaction with the environment conveyed in the phrases: "wheeze of death" and "breath of life" as shown in:

> *These waves… this breeze*
> *Sucked into your lungs*
> *From whence cometh they?*
> *Are you the breath of life?*
> *Or the wheeze of death*
> *From the deadly oven*
> *Of Engen Petronas?…* (18).

These images depict the extent to which loss of innocence is poignantly represented in the totality of Nigeria's ecological degradation in the lines: *South South/North South/South North/ Linked by Pain/* (18).

Furthermore, the inhumane manipulation of the Nigerian natural world in "Climatic Climax" underscores a gloomy imagery through figurative devices like rhymes and run on lines in: /the furnace, sunstroke or tan?/…frogs in the pan?/*the tides swell, the lands subside/A beat the drums of /Men bent on murdering/The weather* … (19). The use of rhymes in the poetic lines "pan" and "tans", "tides…and subside"… creates a concrete imagery of destruction that erupts as

a result of ecological ruin. The poet's artistic enterprise also finds ample expression in the gory picture of animals, plants and landscape that fall casualties of Nigeria's environmental manipulation masterminded by multinational companies and their like as conveyed in: *The jerky rocking mantis praying a dirge/in the battle for life/…streams in a parched land/vanishing signs…* (19). The poet utilises images in "parched land", "vanishing signs", "battle" to portray the condition of Nigerian environment as outcome of ecological degradation and human interactions to it.

Similarly, the poem "Oceanic march" explicates the veracity that the hands of humans have so changed the environment of the entire planet hence:

> *This rising tide*
> *Shoots for boiling point*
> *Whose point is it to set*
> *On fire?*
> *This pile of dirt*
> *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…*
> *Whose duty is it to mix*
> *And to fix*
> *This death sentence…*
> *As we face the spasms of pain…* (20).

"Oceanic March" is a poem of two stanzas with unequal length. It begins with off rhymes (words that almost rhyme) in words like: "point and it", "dirt and death" as well as end rhymes in compound words like "quick-sand" and "Logo-land" (20) to demonstrate a tragic view of the natural environment. The poet poignantly uses the aforementioned words to reflect the reality that, in order to sustain life on the planet, humans must balance economic considerations with ethical consideration of the effect of human actions on the rest of the biotic community. The poet

grieves in: *I see the march of the sea/I see the crushing blows of the seer/in the midst we are in the python's grasp/swept off our feet/our hopes silted/memories of life once lived/* (20). These poetic lines describe man's obvious conflict with the natural world alongside the contamination that has become the norm in the name of social progress. The poem "Oceanic march" expresses the detail that any social system that does not benefit the Nigerian natural environment and people is unsustainable. Thus, sustainability requires the dismantling of economic and capitalist system damaging the earth. Therefore, the poet utilises his poetry not just to describe the degradations of Nigerian natural scenes but also, to conscientise on the global implication of current ecological crisis.

Equally, the poem "The United Niger Delta oil co." enumerates multinational corporations at the fore font of ecological wreck in Nigeria's social space in these words:

> *And so it was that shell, Exxon-Mobil, Texaco, NNPC,*
> *Elf, Chevron, Agip, Statoil and similar entities agreed*
> *That the most desired entity of all*
> *The United Niger Delta Oil Company incorporated*
> *Opened its claws and rigs and climbed broad platforms*
> *Shared and divided the land and the sea*
> *Took the entire coasts of our country*
> *Loving best the heart beating in her waist: the delta*
> *They re-christened their property*
> *The savage land of the uncontacted*
> *The savage land of the blind*
> *The savage land of the powerless saboteurs …*
> *Now the United Niger Oil Company incorporated*
> *Squints at the uneasy economy thought so brilliant*
> *Since nature abhors a vacuum*
> *Now do we apply the ultimate solution?*
> *Today the earth is caught in an unending death song*
> *The flutes dead on the lips of the dying minstreals*
> *Who died wondering why they ever wondered whether*
> *These entities could blatantly change the weather…* (22-23).

The poem "United Niger Delta oil co" gives a vivid representation of Multinational companies who pillage and prioritise the Nigerian environment for their own selfish interests and profit. Also, the poet uses irony in: *the savage land of the powerless saboteurs…* to ridicule the multinational corporations who will become powerless when the people confront them. The poem reminds Nigerians, that, this generation like others before it has the opportunity to take up the challenge of awakening from environmental paralysis hence, in the poem titled "We have one earth" the poet articulates:

> *I scream for a drop of water, a drop of water/*
> *an unpolluted air, a leaf for my pate, a task for my biceps/*
> *answers don't come for voices long dead…yet*
> *…dubious oil flushed with our blood?/*
> *today primates have shot down the sky*
> *revealing the greatest development of Rio as*
> *A jingle that didn't tickle* (25-26).

The poetic lines convey that mankind is experiencing an irreversible recession of the planet hence, the necessity to correct this trend of things. Bill Mackibben (106) asserts that: "Nature is not merely threatened by the possibility of apocalypse, but in some sense already beyond it, for if nature is inflected as wilderness, the very thought of human interference is enough decisively to contaminate its purity…." In consequence, the poem "We have one earth" re-evaluates man's role in the universe as creative beings that connect to heal the earth.

Also, the poet reflects the lack of imaginative vision in rulers and their cohorts who fail to perceive the landscape as part of nature. He portrays this condition in the poem "Shuffle"– where he states: *shivering in the biting sun/I learn afresh/the meaning of climate change/…a deadly embrace… rampaging waves/lap up water locked lands/….* The poet is of the opinion that globalisation does not only threaten the stability of life on the planet, but signals a painful loss of

human intimacy with the natural world overridden by the dominance of economic order. In the same way, the poem "Gas flares" personifies the theme of destruction and pollution in: *The earth gassed…/Popping/A million explosions/A shower of soot/On open raw nerves…* (48). Through the repetition of the phrase "the earth gassed…" in the poem "Gas flares" the poet reacts to the need for planetary renewal. The poet maintains that the fate of the Niger Delta forest, the swamp and the creek lie in the struggle to inhabit the land sustainably. In refiguring nature/ human connection, Mckibben (51) avers that: "If the waves crash up against the beach, eroding dunes and destroying homes, it is not the awesome power of Mother Nature. It is the awesome power of Mother Nature altered by the awesome power of man, who has overpowered in a Century the processes that have been slowly evolving.…" Therefore, McKibben's argument premises on the fact that the survival of the environment is dependent on a fundamental shift in the way humankind relates with nature.

Consequently, *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* (2002) is a resolve to change Nigeria's human- environment relations from catastrophic to a beneficial condition. To concur further, Philip Aghoghovwia states that: In *We thought it was oil but it was blood* Nnimmo Bassey walks through a thin line between poetic commitment and socio-environmental activism in bringing into the public sphere issues of socio-cultural and environmental justice. The poetry collection carries the tone of subversion and defiance and the mood of anger provoked by a deep sense of denial, a collective deprivation of the people from access to the commonwealth which the oil brings. Bassey creates a text that is at best poetic activism and at worst an environmental rights manifesto (https://naturecritical.wordpress.com). The poetic images in the poetry encapsulate the idea that humans are not the crown of creation rather humans are fractions of nature's species. Therefore, as the questions on ecological relevance have shown, an ecocritical

scrutiny of Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* calls for conscientious attention to Nigerian environmental issues that have been pushed to the background.

5.2 Niger Delta and Radical Environmentalism in *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat*

The Niger Delta region encompasses six states which include Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. It is acclaimed to be the largest wetland in the world after Missisipi and the largest in Africa (Nseabasi 165). Thriving with marine life, ferns, lagoons, mangrove plants, creeks, and swamps, the Niger Delta is lying on one of the biggest reserves of crude oil in the world currently estimated at 34 billion barrels (Saliu et al 277). However, Nigeria's Niger Delta and its travails are indeed what may be regarded as potential "paradise on earth" but have metamorphosed to "hell on earth" for the people of the area as a result of cumulative practice of environmental degradation caused by oil exploration (Agbu 81). The violence of the last four decades in the Niger Delta has brought to the front burner the issue of environmental despoliation, its implication on regional peace and security.

In response to ecological annihilation in the Niger Delta and the ensuing social protest, Anna Zalick, writes that "for about a decade, the oil multinationals in Nigeria have tacitly endorsed a campaign, supported through industry consultants, to describe their production as 'legal'. The use of the term 'legal' is aimed at countering the call for 'resource control' among a youth insurgency movement…. Like a range of social and environmental rights organisations in Nigeria and internationally, the youth insurgency in the Delta rose in opposition to the social and ecological injustices that secured private-industry contracts to lift Nigerian oil…" (15). For decades, ecological devastation on one hand and neglect arising from crude oil production on the other has left much of the delta region desolate. The unholy union conspired between the

Nigerian state and oil multinationals at the detriment of the inhabitants of the region presents a bleak future. The indifference as regards the environment is pushing the region towards a devastated ecosystem. An instance of this apathy occurred on July 24, 1987 when news of toxic wastes was dumped in the town of Koko in Niger Delta all the way from Italy hit the headlines. Nigerian government heard of the toxic waste when the barrels in which they were contained had begun leaking. So poisonous was its content that: it affected the entire town of Koko by polluting the ground in which they grow their food..., plants and animals in the water, and polluted the waters outside the Port of Livorno Italy (*Human Right Watch* 3).

The incessant oil spills, blow outs from over aged and ill maintained well heads, pipelines and other facilities make Nigeria's oil field to record the highest number of oil spills in the world (Agbu 82-84). In this regard, Ojaide says: "…whatever happens in the Niger Delta is part of the entire situation of conflict, misunderstanding, mistreatment of the people etc that is going on in the entire African world and elsewhere which has and is still giving rise to imaginative literature" (Onyerionwu 329). This is why, the devastation of natural habitat of the Niger Delta has accelerated the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of peoples of the region hence, health hazards, migration, conflicts, and ecological disaster is the order. This crisis informed the slain environmentalist and poet Ken Saro-Wiwa to assert that "oil exploration in the Niger Delta is an ecological war in which no blood, no bones are broken, no one is assuredly maimed, so few are alarmed but men, women and children die, flora, fauna and fish perish, air, soil and water are poisoned: and finally the land and its inhabitants die" (Omotola 91). Also, Ikelegbe (5) affirms that, the people of the oil bearing region have not been "passive about environmental degradation and the long term neglect that have become their plight. The people have expressed their dissatisfaction through various forms of protest both peaceful and non

peaceful. The present violent confrontation epitomised by rising radicalisation and militancy for resource control shows the Nigerian state and oil companies' insensitivity to the plight of the people…."

Regarding the contradiction in the Niger Delta space, Lindsay Barret avers that: "the story of underdevelopment and neglect of the Niger Delta is well known in the world. The basic theme in all… has been that although almost all of Nigeria's oil and gas resources come from around the region, the social and infrastructural development there is abysmally inadequate" (Barret 46). Similarly, Ray Ekpu offers the same concern as he laments that: "the story of the Niger Delta is the story of a paradox, grinding poverty in the midst of vulgar opulence. It is the case of a man who lives in the bank of a river and washes his hands with spittle. It is the case of a people who live on the farm and die of hunger" (10).

The present social existence of the Niger Delta people spells misery, poverty and disillusionment. Nnimmo Bassey, through his poetry *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* captures an opposition to globalised ecocide culture as well as anti-capitalist movements. This confirms the postulations of ecocriticism which according to Glotfelty "follows an analogous pattern, beginning with an interest in "representations" an examination of how nature is depicted in literature, thereby raising public awareness of attitudes toward the natural world. Practitioners look at how stereotypes warp reality and how nature is absent or simply ignored…" (Dobie 242). In this context, the poet employs repetitions in "I will not", "I will confront", "I will expose" to arouse the people to resist ecological devastation enveloping their homeland. The poet illuminates the dire need for environmental protection of the people of the oil producing areas

and Nigeria by extension. In forging an environmental friendly landscape, the poet reverberates in the poem "I will not dance to your beat":

I will not dance to your beat
If you call plantations forests
I will not sing with you
If you privatise my water
I will confront you with my fists
If climate change means death to me but business to you
I will expose your evil greed
If you don't leave crude oil in the soil
Coal in the hole and tar sands in the land
I will confront and denounce you
If you insist on carbon offsetting and other do-nothing false
Solutions
I will make you see red…
Unless we walk the sustainable path
And accept real solutions and respect Mother Earth
Unless u do…
We will not dance to your beat (11).

From the above stanza, the poet uses nature as an educative tool to lay bare the secrets and the inner workings of man's mind, with a view to transforming him into a better human being. Hence he says: *If climate change means death to me but business to you/I will expose your evil greed…* this remark, emphasises the obviousness of preserving nature for the well-being of future generations.

Similarly, "What more can you sink" a poem of five stanzas, describes the damage done to the mangrove, flora, forest trees and the earth's atmosphere of the Niger Delta. Images of pollution flow through the stanzas as the poet utters: *Oh but a thousand things sunk…/nothing compared to carbon sink/ the stuff that dulls to sleep…/pollute in the city/sink in the village…* (16). In the lines mentioned, the poet persistently lays bare the destructive activities of contractors and multinationals as images of a region under siege. The poet's poem "Hopefully

for a season" portrays environmental wreckage: *driven by torrents of greed/ and churning streets turned seas*…. From an ecocritical stance, the poet champions the need for sustainability of the Nigerian ecosystem for responsible choices as a way to improve people's lives through the preservation of the environment.

Many communities today are victims of environmental plundering and climate crisis due to globalisation and exploitation of developing countries by transnational corporations leaving behind death and devastation. Against this backdrop, the poem "If climate change were little change" further raises awareness against all ecological despoliation. The poet employs the narrative to call attention to the damaged wreaked on the environment as he grieves:

> *Many would gather in Copenhagen and exchange tips*
> *Tales to offset our elastic earth*
> *…move movies on big screens with idiotic grins in an*
> *Age of stupidity… stand at poisoned fires…daring inconvenient*
> *Truths*
>
> *Negotiators negotiate bends open eyed*
> *Blindfolded …listening*
> *With sanity cancelling ear muffs*
>
> *If climate change were little change*
> *They would gather in Copenhagen and exchange tips*
> *And tales to upset our elastic earth except they*
> *See floods under their golden beds*
> *And storms in their ornate tea cups*
> *As they gobble ice creams and artic split ice screams*
> *Turning our forests into toothpicks for their absent teeth…* (61).

The lines expressed above illustrate the extent to which the Nigerian environment in particular and the world in general show observable physical degeneration: *As they gobble ice creams and artic split ice screams/Turning our forests into toothpicks for their absent teeth…* (61). The poem brings the postmodern environment into consciousness thereby describing the relationship that exists between consumerism and the material world. Reacting to the vast environmental damage,

Bassey in *To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate crisis in Africa*" articulates that the world continues to stand in denial of the fact that climate change is triggered mainly by society's continual reliance on fossil fuels. The larger problem is the current form of civilisation, based on Western-style consumption driven by and for profit corporations… Poorer nations are undeniably at the receiving end of climate change and for many, the struggle for survival is literally a swim against the tide in a turbulent rising sea…" (Bassey 101). In this regard, Shinsato (14) confirms that "environmental destruction leaves local population with two options to leave the degraded environment for a more habitable place and become environmental refugees or remain in the degraded environment and risk increased morbidity and mortality through exposure to pollution". In addressing the subject of oil exploitation 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. This is reiterated by Saliu et al, thus:

> The people are fed on the crumbs of foreign theories that have never been actualised to meet their needs. Nigeria is caricatured as a country of "petro-thieves" and legislators who are "legislooters". 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… (135).

Thus, by means of regional vistas of anguish, and discomposure that distort the land, the poet bewails the appalling condition of the Niger Delta. He depicts the stench of human waste into words for the purpose of salvaging the helpless victims of the exploiting system. His sensitivity to the situation makes the subject of the Delta a compact milestone in his imaginative mind as he uncovers the decaying social order in his society. On this spur, the poet underscores in the poem "Mobilise…resist…change": */we've a vision and a mission/to change our world/mobilise/resist/transform/the battles not fought alone…* (23). Using the past to comment

on the present, the poet assesses the ecological devastation in the Nigerian social space and sums-up that development has not brought transformation per se as vestiges of subjugation are still visible in the social order hence in the poem "Mountains of food…oceans of hunger" as the poet declares thus:

> *Mountains of food*
> *Oceans of hunger*
> *Climate change sells us drought*
> *When it rains we are sent to tree tops*
> *Free trade traders trade us sorrows*
> *WTO rules, World Bank, IMF*
> *Neo-liberal power blockers*
> *Confuse, disunite, fool and bemuse a trusting world*
> When our stomachs rumble (29)

"Mountains of food…oceans of hunger" addresses the break between humanity and nature and how creating such 'otherness', via capitalist power brokers serve not only to alienate humanity from nature, rather alienates humanity from other elements of humanity. The poet seems to articulate that "society that treats its natural surroundings in a harsh and exploitative way will do the same to 'other' people. Nature and human ethics are not unconnected. The growing expansion of ecological consciousness translates into deeper understanding of interconnectedness in both nature and history … a far more sophisticated grasp of cause and effect relationships" (Synder 23). The need for justice and freedom reiterates in the poem "Old rio is dead" and the poet declares in these words:

> *… tomorrow's battles must be fought today…*
> *Eco-tourists from rich nations*
> *Eco-tourism in poor nations*
> *Fossilised ideas revived and up-scaled…*
> *Oil spills, gas flares: do they make you dance?*
> *Don't you know that carbon sinks will sink the world?* (25)

Using rhetorical questions, the poet deliberately ridicules those who are agents of exploitation in Nigeria and who have ignored the impact of environmental pollution. The values expressed in the stanzas are consistent with ecological wisdom as the poet bewails "*don't you know that carbon sinks will sink the world*? *Oil spills, gas flares: do they make you dance?* On this stance, Snyder (181) in *Practice of the Wild* avers that: "environmental concerns and politics… focus entirely on human health and welfare issues… We grasp the pain of the human condition in its full complexity and …the awareness of how desperately endangered certain key species and habitats have become." This estrangement can be literal, and metaphorical hence the need to address this condition as captured in: *Eco-tourism in poor nations/ fossilised ideas revived and up-scaled…* that has been entrenched over time. The poet reckons that it is time to pull a resistance to the domain of exploitation in the Nigerian social space. This is accentuated in "Justice now":

Justice now!
No reconciliation…without justice
Roasted skies
Smoked out clouds
Roasted roosters
On second half wings
Distant dreams of the coming doom
Long after the boom had burst
Justice now!
No reconciliation …without justice
This drilling
This killing
This stealing
This maiming
This raping
This spilling
This desecration of Papa's land…
Brown skies
Smoked out clouds
This the stuff of carbon trade… (31-33).

This expression suggests that the influence multinational corporations have on the Nigerian environment is fatal. The poem shows how metaphors of the land influences the way humans treat the natural environment hence details of phrases such as: "*matchets slashing*" "*mangroves dis'pearing*", *"forests missing"*, "*swamps drying"*, *"maiming hopes"* demonstrate the degradation that exist in Nigeria's bionetwork. The disconnection does not just alienate, rather it dissolves the harmonious relationship between the humans and natural world, allowing humanity to become a parasitic element in relation to the environment.

Bassey is committed to defending Nigeria's ecology. Like a true environmentalist, he shows interconnectedness in Nigerian's ecosystem as he revels in water, the elixir of life. He equates water with fertility and vigor. In the struggle to preserve wilderness, he goes beyond traditional conservation concerns to the philosophy entrenched in Ecocriticism-which calls into question the legitimacy of humanity's domination of nature. Through an eco-poetic eye, he challenges the ethics of modern industrial society. Nnimmo Bassey's poetic oeuvre in *I Will Not Dance to Your* Beat (2011) is a testament of those who continue to experience the slow death of their lands, their means of subsistence and communities The poet does not only narrate how the natural paradise in his Delta homeland is lost but how it can be regained. Hence, the notion of sustainable environmental practices should be incorporated in all areas of innovation to maintain harmony with the environment as the poet avers in "Yasuni":

Yasuni
Sacred land
Your defenders
Link hands across generation gaps
Kids, ancestors, butterflies merge confronting the rage of crude addicts
Impotent capital halted by guardians of your treasured space…

Yasuni

Sacred land
Children of the earth bandaging the earth's many bleeding spots
Your blood drained to run the lusts of men
Chains broken, fears dumped, gags burst, your children
Demand the bloodletting has run its day
Despots have made their kill
Humanity captured by plastics and sundry garbage drawn from your veins

Yasuni sacred land
Today your children follow the bloody fangs of the panting vampires…
Silence the rigs,
Hang the monster shovels, block the pipes…
We refuse to fuel the engines of wrath and pains… (64-65).

The poet's use of metonymy in *Link hands across generation gaps* demonstrates interconnectedness which humanity should nurture in order to protect the natural world. The poet suggests that Nigerians need to recognise nature as an autonomous entity and make conscious effort to understand and accommodate it hence, the poet persona asserts in "Tree of forgetfulness":

How cold I forget…
See my defiant chest
See my defiant sides
See my defiant back
My roots are entangled with the taproots of the baobab
My heart bound with her lofty boughs… (63).

The poet in this stanza demands Nigerian rulers and cohort to rescind anthropocentric views and return to nature thus: *My roots are entangled with the taproots of the baobab/My heart bound with her lofty boughs….* Nnimmo Bassey's poems enunciate the role of Nigerians in resisting environmental degradation. The poet's preoccupation on the Nigerian environment does not function simply as background rather it plays an active role in the Nigerian environmental narrative hence his clarion call for change in "Justice now": stand up, people/ Rise/ save the lake/ stop the drillings/save the mine/save our mind. Bassey's insight regarding the Nigerian

ecosystem and its despoliation comes at a critical time in human evolution. This concurs with John Britto (1), assertion that "conservation of nature has become a primary task of every person in the contemporary world. The natural disasters in the recent years have not only enforced the human society to think of the importance of Nature for human survival and the need for a harmonious relation with it, but have cautioned that any human action against nature will yield destruction of humanity…." It is obvious that industrial revolution and the new epoch of globalisation are polluting the air, land and water at an alarming rate. Thus, globalisation the symbol of free market mechanism, along with under-development, oil pollution and green house effect are pointers to a new form of ecological wreck.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 A COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF THE POETS TANURE OJAIDE, NIYI OSUNDARE AND NNIMMO BASSEY

This chapter provides a comparative evaluation of the selected poems of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey in order to examine their convergences and divergences regarding man and the environment. In this purview, "poets writing style, use of language, thematic preoccupation, cultural background, beliefs, thought pattern, religious affiliation, education status and inspiration differ because they wish to create new experiences for readers…" (Olafioye 1). Consequently, the correlation among the selected artists is apparent in their ideological opinions and their aesthetics and thematic thrusts. The poets' preoccupations are circumscribed by their concern with development, environmentalism and the critique of globalisation, pollution, social injustice, corporate greed, green resistance, militancy and displacement.

6.1 Convergences

The works of Ojaide, Osundare and Bassey are marked by similar patterns of thought and theme. Ojaide is basically a poet of nature and commitment. His opinions in his poetry support his stance as a representative of recent environmental concerns in Modern Nigerian poetry. Charles Bodunde attests that "Ojaide relates with the landscape by investing it with symbols that are often intended to pose questions …what Ojaide attempts to project is consistent with his aesthetic practice as seen in *Delta Blues and Home Songs* in which the text focuses on the Niger Delta as a landscape with observable physical disintegration and decay (http://unilorin.edu.ng/publications/bodunde/tanure/pdf. Furthermore, Okuyade (xiii) states that "Ojaide's writings equally articulate how the environmentalism of minority spaces across the world has become the theater where the lopsided distribution of resources and the blatant

exploitation and destruction of the resources of nature are vibrantly played out". In the same vein, the poet Osundare is an outstanding Nigerian poet in whose poetry nature/environment always has a dominating existence. His poems demonstrate the consequences of capitalist industrialism and consumerism. Anyokwu (11) notes that, Osundare makes use of… physical objects which act as metaphors and imagery. This is obvious in *The Eye of the Earth* and *Waiting Laughters* as he conveys the pathetic state of Nigeria's ecological space. Osundare seems to consciously portray the scenes of natural surroundings into his poetry. Even the very titles of his poems signify his love for the natural world. Furthermore, Nnimmo Bassey's poems give voice to the critical issues disturbing the Nigerian landscape and how this affects the host communities. Nnimmo Bassey metaphorically depicts man's exploitative tendencies using death created from the rape of the Niger Delta by the Nigerian government and their cohorts as evident in *We Thought It Was oil but It Was Blood* and *I Will not Dance to your Beat.*

There is a coordinated effort by the trio – Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey to demonstrate the disastrous consequences of current postmodern practices that employ capitalist ideologies of development to justify corporate expansionism. The selected poets are equally concerned with questioning mechanisms that lend legitimacy to practices evident in structures of hierarchy, power and insatiability among the Nigerian elites and cohorts targeted at deliberately exploiting the Nigerian natural world and the marginalised communities as sources of profit. Thus, the selected poets expose local exploitation of the Nigerian environment and the global abuses done in the name of development. Niyi Osundare's poem "Our Earth will not Die" in *The Eye of the Earth* shows this:

Here
There
Everywhere
A lake is killed by the arsenic urine
From the bladder of profit factories
A poisoned stream staggers down the hills
Coughing chaos in the sickly sea
The wailing whale, belly up like a frying fish,
Crests the chilling swansong of parting waters… (50).

Furthermore, the evil of development is captured by Ojaide in *Daydream of Ants and other poems* in "The Paradise of Powers!" as he states:

Planners set up industries
To generate wealth and well-being…
Capitalising on rivers and lakes
Has dealt algae and fish fatal blows…
Space is being torn open
A caesarian section for martial babies…

Also, in Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought it was Oil but it was Blood*, the Poem "The United Niger Delta oil co" confirms the crisis of development in these words:

And so it was that Shell, Exxon-Mobil, Texaco, NNPC,
Elf, Chevron, Agip, Statoil and similar entities agreed
That the most desired entity of all
The United Niger Delta Oil Company incorporated
Opened its claws and rigs and climbed broad platforms
Shared and divided the land and the sea
Took the entire coasts of our country… (22).

Similarly, the poets Ojaide, Osundare and Bassey are well known for poems about place and landscape. They share understanding of the relationship between mankind and the natural world. Their works discuss the affinity between man and the environment emphasising how man takes advantage of the natural environment. This is noticeable in Osundare's "Forest echoes" in *The Eye of the Earth* as he writes:

A forest of a million trees, this,
a forest of milling trees
…wounded, though, by time's axe
and the greedy edges of agbegilodo's matchet
A stump here, a stump there
like a finger missing from a crowded hand… (5).

Ojaide's *Daydream of Ants and other poems* also illustrates environmental degradation in the poem "A T and P, Sapele" in the lines:

When I first entered the AT & P
on excursion from St George's
it was next to the largest saw mill
on earth, we were told…
When a decade I went home…
A big clearing welcomed me;
No longer the unending sheet of green
No trees had reprieve from the axe…
the waterfront taken over
by phalanges of water hyacinth… (30-31).

Bassey illustrates the problems of the dying environment in the poem "Walking Blind" in these lines:

The clouds tell discordant tales
The birds erupt in cracked voices
Wrapped in mixed signals
Trusting farmers go for futile harvests
In planting seasons…
We walk blind
And dance to broken drums… (37).

Giving the increasing urgency of environmental problems in Nigeria, the selected works foreground the extent to which modernisation/globalisation processes have transformed the Nigerian landscape. This confirms Ursla Heise's assertion that "the natural world is manipulated technologically and exploited economically thereby ultimately creating a human sphere apart from it in a historical process that is usually labeled 'progress'. This domination strips nature of

any other value other than as a material resource and commodity that leads to a gradual destruction… (Heise 506). The selected poetry embodies ecological wisdom and concern for nature. The poets Ojaide, Osundare and Bassey depict nature as magnificent, grand and diversified. They express the ecological perspective that man should return to more ecologically attuned ways of inhabiting nature.

Importantly, the poets of study illustrate that the problem of poverty, underdevelopment and politics of exploitation make it impossible for developing countries like Nigeria to conserve the environment therefore they use their poetry to call for resistance as shown in Osundare's collection *Waiting Laughters* section 1 states:

> *My song is space*
> *Beyond wails, beyond walls*
> *Beyond insular hieroglyphs*
> *Which crave the crest*
> *Of printed waves*
>
> *My song is the even rib*
> *In the feather of the soaring bird*
> *The pungent salt and smell of*
> *Earth*
> *Where seeds rot for roots to rise*
>
> *My is the root*
> *Touching other roots*
> *In a covenant below the crust*
> *Beyond the roving camera of the eye* (25-26)

Similarly, on resisting environmental despoliation, Ojaide explains in "Compound Blues" that:

> *Whenever a wall rises in my front,*
> *I crave to tear it down*
> *And ride through the rubble*
> *To see what it used to hide…* (10).

In the collection *I will not Dance to your Beat* Nnimmo Bassey captures issues of resistance in the poem "They charged through mounted troops" as he says:

> *Time to dust our cardboard armours and tin can caps*
> *Bounce back their plastic bullets, spit in their grumpy faces*
> *We've reached the crucial phase when clanging pots and pans*
> *And flying shoes to boot*
> *Must stand for what we know we should*
> *Time to detach their bloodied fangs from of our bleeding veins*
> *Awaken from our nightmares it's time to dream and to act…* (12).

In *We Thought It was Oil but It was Blood* Nnimmo Bassey foregrounds the consequences of pollution in the poem "The United Niger Delta oil co" as he laments:

> *And as always somewhere on the oilrigs, in the creeks and*
> *Mangroves*
> *Of the hell of this national enterprise*
> *Bellies burst as pipes burst*
> *Hellish flares melt gasping throats*
> *And thousands of the living dead fall*
> *Into a thousand gaping holes in the centre of their yards…* (24).

In another poem titled "What can you sink?" The poet Bassey again bemoans the state of pollution in Nigeria's natural surroundings as he states:

> *Oh but a thousand things sunk*
> *Nothing compared to carbon sink*
> *The stuff that dulls to sleep*
> *Turrets hammer the skies in industrial layabouts*
> *Automobiles, a thousand other polluters*
> *Load the skies with the choking gas*
> *Some smart guys dream of do nothing solutions*
> *Reap billions and con a captured world*
> *While the skies get burnt…* (16).

In *Daydream of Ants and other poems* Ojaide articulates the concerns of toxic pollution which has dealt horrific blow on the Nigerian citizenry. Also, the role of Nigeria's elites and Multinational companies who benefit and contribute to environmental despoliation is implicated.

As well, the use of advanced technology is implicated in the degradation of the Nigerian environment as forests, atmosphere and waters are destroyed. This is shown in the poem "Inquest: By Lake Nyos:

…Experts of analysis
Assembled by the dead lake
To measure its depth,
Its water volume
And the distance of the farthest death
Of cattle or human.
Samples of air, water and soil
Were taken; so were colours…
And the provisional finding:
"Seismic motions underlake
Emitted highly gaseous poisons…
Asphyxiated every exposed person;
The toxic fallout
Was so potent
That its inhalers died instantly"… (44-45).

In corroborating what Okuyade has expressed, "All the texts make one glaring point: the ambivalence of the contemporary situation in which the environment is …lamented about: vanishing or on the verge of being permanently lost" (Okuyade xiv). The selected poets reveal unique thematic preoccupation and authorial vision as socialists and ecocritics geared towards the transformation of the Nigerian social space from her socio-ecological decadence to that of a just social order. Therefore, close readings of the selected works convey insights of eco-sensibility to ensure the preservation and sustenance of the Nigerian environment as well as utilising the Nigerian natural endowment to empower the Nigerian people.

6.2 Divergences

From a comparative standpoint, Tanure Ojaide is from the oil-rich but economically impoverished Niger Delta region. He is a second generation Nigerian poet, an Urhobo man from the Agbon

ancestry. Ojaide's grandmother, whom he learnt most of his values from assisted to mold his worldview. To affirm his descent, Ojaide maintains that:

> I am the son of farmer parents. My father had many rubber plantations. He tapped his own rubber trees and prepared grade A rubber sheets. He was also a palm nut collector and had a local palm oil press in which he prepared first grad oil. He was a man who perfected his art of whatever he set to do and took all the care and time required for the highest quality. He had a small cocoa plantation in which he also planted coffee trees and bananas. He was a great fisherman too. My mother was a farmer and planted yams and cassava. She did some fishing too but later was more of a retail seller of meat. It is from this rural and humble origin that I came (Ojaide 122).

Similarly, Olafioye (7) declares that: "grandmother apart, Ojaide studied under the tutelage of other Urhobo traditional artists. Okitiapke of Ekakpamre is largely instrumental to his studying *Udje* dance and songs-a traditional poetry which he later translated into English. Ojute and Omokomoko are other artists who exposed him to the length, breadth and depth of Urhobo poetry, philosophy of life and traditional aesthetics". Olafioye asserts that:

> Tanure Ojaide expands the limits of his African consciousness with the study of other traditional, African philosophical institutions and Praxis ensigned in artworks that can best stimulate energy and the sub-conscious to conquer current social evils. The Shona MBIRA from Zimbabwe, embodies a metaphysics that can make things happen through the spiritual realm In the physical present. He studies and writes on MBARI and IKENGA-the Igbo shrines of creative force. He imbibes the oracular voice of Yoruba Ifa – a knower of hidden things, the god of verbalising, the guiding poetic spirit of a people. Yet the Urhobo IVWRI stands for self defence in slave riots just as the Yoruba Warapa, Shigidi and Lukudi stand for self-defence in wars… Who could ever say that Ojaide, the consummate poet, is ill- prepared? (7)

In the light of the above, Ojaide testifies to his strong link with the Urhobo Traditional religion as he taps into the Urhobo folklore to depict its richness. He transfers Urhobo art-forms into English Language and alludes to words like "Aridon", "Olotu", and "Ominigbo" in his poems. Tanure

Ojaide affirms: "I have used my heritage to poetic advantage in many of these poems by exploring the "Ivwri" philosophy and using Urhobo folklore as a backdrop. Ours is a very rich heritage that gives confidence to one and propels one to the top of one's profession. That is what "Ivwri" does. References to Urhobo historical, mythical and legendary figures such as Mukoro Mowoe, Essi, Ogidigbo and Arhuaran populate my poetic landscape… one cannot be luckier than be enriched considerably by one's own heritage" (Ojaide 122). In this regard, Olafioye articulates that "geography can influence human behaviour and perception of reality. The Delta as a feature of physical geography creates fishing and farming vocation for its indigene that inhabits its enclave…. Nature informs and educates their observations… as underneath the delta are natural resources with which the gods are believed to have enriched the environment" (2). Thus, as an environmental conscious poet, Ojaide employs the social facts in his lived environment to find expression in his art.

Ojaide's ability to intertwine the Delta landscape into the space of his art is borne out of his connection with the region, the stream, the fauna and the flora he continually taps from. Ojaide explains the essence of the Delta as a thrust in his poetry as he states: "the Delta has a special appeal to me… the vegetation, the evergreen, the heavy rains almost all year round… complicated by the coming of the oil companies…. Now the environment is destroyed with gas being flared, the farms are not good, fishes are driven from rivers, everywhere is polluted" (http://unilorin.edu.ng/publications/bodunde/tanure/pdf). On this stance, Ojaide avers that "the Niger Delta problem should be viewed… in relation to the global trend of subjugation of minority people by both governments and multinational companies, the ecological problems of the world and many other issues posing great challenges to the world today" (Onyerionwu 327).

The poet's style therefore reveals nostalgic feelings about the Delta as an enviable landscape which is now devastated by the profit driven multinational companies and political class. Ojaide employs a tone that is grief stricken and nostalgic of the past to draw a distinction concerning the destructive realities of the present The imagery employed by the poet Ojaide shows a shift from the green terrain to a disruption of earth's delicate equilibrium as a result of the activities of Nigerian rulers often symbolised as "ogiso" a tyrant bent on crushing the "Iroko"– the landscape and its inhabitants. Noticeable in Ojaide's work is the reference to the Urhobo gods and goddesses whose spiritual abode has been desecrated by modern technological expansion informed by oil exploration. In this regard, many poems in his collections are filled with mournful tones and radical outlook largely because of the injustices meted on the Niger Delta region. Such instances are evident in *Delta Blues and Home Songs* in poems like "Wails", "Immortal Grief", "Delta Blues", "Elegy for nine Warriors", "Hallucinations", "The Chieftain and his Tribe", "Remembering the town-crier" and others replete with themes of despair and anger. In "Delta Blues", the title poem in *Delta Blues and Home Songs* conveys despair of a once vibrant landscape as evident in: *This share of paradise, the delta of my birth/Reels from an immeasurable wound/Barrels of alchemical draughts flow/ From this hurt to the unquestioning world…*" (22).

Furthermore, Ojaide employs conversation as a discourse technique in his poetry. This is evident in the poem "Inquest: By Lake Nyos" in *Daydream of Ants*. The poet laments:

> *…Through whose hands*
> *has death reaped this record harvest,*
> *through what alliance*
> *has death laid down*
> *a night of stragglers;*
> *who captured their spirits*
> *and handed them to death*

to boast of a dominion of bones,
what traitor armed with darkness
snuffed out their breaths,
what wraith offered this proud sacrifice
to be admitted into the hierarchy
of invisible powers? (42)

The above poem is presented in a conversation style where an unseen character is listening to the laments from the poet. Conversation as a distinctive stylistic device of communication gives a poem an element of realism which makes Ojaide's work enjoyable. Ojaide also employs figures of speech such as apostrophe in the works of study. Apostrophe as a rhetorical trope involves addressing some imaginary character, quality or person that is not physically present for instance in the lines "O the mistreatment by death". Death in the line is addressed as if it were a real person capable of feelings. Ojaide employs apostrophe in his works to bring abstract things to life. His use of repetition- the occurrence of particular words over and over again to emphasise certain statements of the speaker with a view to make corrections for instance: *We do not deserve this blow/we do not deserve these tears/we do not deserve these fears… (*42) makes his poems forceful. As well, Ojaide's use of repetitions demonstrates his vigor towards the ideas described. Other poetic devices employed by Ojaide are rhetorical questions, symbolism, sarcasm, proverbs and thematic issues of oppression connected with the green landscape and cultural beliefs of the Urhobo people.

On the other hand, Osundare is a second generation poet. Unlike Tanure Ojaide who is Urhobo, Osundare acknowledges to have been brought up in a traditional Yoruba culture. Christopher Anyokwu gives details about Osundare's work where he says: "my poetry is strongly influenced by Yoruba poetics. Metaphor, simile, hyperbole, metonymy and other figures of speech populate the lines, as fishes do a fertile river. These figures of speech aid the

transformation of the airy nothings of the imagination into rememberable entities…" (http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss1/3).

Not only that, Osundare's use of language shows a reliance on the use of rhetorical strategies of Yoruba oral poetry such as repetition, parallelism, word play, alliteration, assonance which has far reaching implications for rhythm." Osundare also adapts the Yoruba poetic style in Oriki praise chant and Ijala hunters' song for the effect of melody and African authenticity. These features are noticed in some poems in *The Eye of the Earth* such as "Letter to Fawehinmi", "They too are the earth", "The Rocks Rose to Meet Me" and "I sing of change". Osundare's "They too are the earth" focuses on things that make up the earth. He recognises the beggars, labourers', miners and others who he refers to as: *the old dying distant deaths/in narrow abandoned hamlet*… (11). In "The Rocks Rose to Meet Me" there is an encounter with rocks – another aspect of physical nature. Osundare employs the conversation technique where the poet is perceived standing and waiting before the rock of *Olosunta* like a prodigal son. Using the conversation style, Olosunta rock addresses the poet in these words:

> *You have been long, very long, and far*
> *Unwearying wayfarer,*
> *Your feet wear the mud of distant waters*
> *Your hems gather the bur*
> *Of farthest forests;*
> *I can see the westmost sun*
> *in the mirror of your wandering eyes…* (*The Eye of The Earth* 13).

Like a defector, the above stanza portrays the poet seeking to reconnect back to nature. However, although Ojaide and Osundare make use of the conversation technique in their poems still they differ. Ojaide's use of the conversation style depicts an imaginary person speaking while for Osundare it is the rock – nature that tries to reconnect Osundare back to nature. Similarly, Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* employs lots of repetition of phrases, lines and structures which

make his collection distinct. Osundare employs breath space pause (where he uses a letter of the alphabet as a line) in section II of *Waiting Laughters*:

> Long-
> er
> than
> the
> y
> a
> w
> n
> of
> the
> moon
> in
> a
> sky
> so
> brown
> with
> heels
> of
> fleeting
> fancies… (84).

Osundare's use of breath space in the above demonstrates the poet's competence to play with words and to lament the condition of the environment hence: *the moon in a sky so brown*. He also employs rhetorical questions to produce rhythm in a number of his poems. Rhetorical questions are questions not meant to be answered but to be pondered. In other words, questions are asked not for the sake of getting an answer but for asserting… or stressing a point (Etenga 198). For instance, "Harvest call" in *The Eye of the Earth* shows this style:

> *But where are they?*
> *Where are they gone:*
> *Aroso, geregede, otili, pakala*
> *Which beckoned lustily to the reaping basket*
> *Where are they*
> *The yam pyramids which challenged the sun*
> *In busy barns*

Where are they…
Where are they? Where are they gone?

In a unique way, Osundare laces his poetry with the Yoruba language. This is to situate his constant touch with his extraction as well as demonstrate the beauty of Yoruba expression evident in *Waiting Laughters*:

omí í lo o, iyanriṅ loò kủn rò dẻ/
omí í lo o, iyanriṅ loò kủn rò dẻ/
Aye mo rẻ dẻ, ẹ emẹẹ jẹmi lọ lò ọna o o o…

(The water is going
Going going going
The water is going…) (67).

The indigenous language expressed above is also a song and it conveys rhythms and communicative influences. The song divulges deeper meanings through images which it expresses. For instance, the line "water is going going going" can be interpreted as a mournful song which suggests ecological message. Thus, "Osundare translates art and ecology into a creative force leading to a dirge form" (Na'Allah 281). Other elements of oral literature utilised in Osundare's works are proverbs, praise names, myths and idiomatic expressions.

Noticeable in Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* are Yoruba Praise names. This is crucial in order to address elders, spiritual figures and gods. For instance, in *The Eye of the Earth*:

…Olosunta spoke first
The elephant hand which hits the haughty man in the head…
Olosunta spoke
His belly still battle ground of god and gold… (14).

Also in:

This is Iyanfoworogi
Where, garnished in green
Pounded rested its feted arms…

This is Iyanfoworogi
Where valiant heaps cracked, finally
From the unquenchable zeal of fattening yams… (18).

According to Alu (77), "Osundare freely draws his embossed metaphor on the earth from the Yoruba "Oriki" and "Ijala" chants in which he applies extended praise names to the earth. This proves that praise-names epithets are relevant and necessary features of public performance". The use of praise appellations by the poet Osundare is intended to appeal to African audience. In addition, Osundare employs allusions in his work. There are allusions in *The Eye of the Earth* to the rock in Ikere Osundare's home town which the community worships annually during the "Olosunta festivals" There is allusion to the rock "Olosunta" in the poem "The Rocks Rose to Meet Me". The poet does same for "Oroole" a pyramid shaped rock in Ikere which the Osundare describes as the "Pyramid of the brood" (*We Thought It Was Oil…* 15). As well, Osundare's poetry is laced with mountains and hills such as "Olosunta" and "Oroole", rivers and seas like the Osun, the Nile, the Niger, plants and trees such as the "Iroko" and "Iganwo". "The advantages of these physical landscapes situate his audience in time and space as well as enhance great sense of belonging and credibility" (Alu 79). Osundare shares a collective philosophy of the Yoruba people in the veneration for nature. He indicts modern ecocide and mankind's insolence and destruction of this existence. Anyokwu, observes that "taking into cognisance Osundare's idealities with Ogun, Obatala, etc and his concern for nature he falls into the class of Wordsworth" (http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss1/3).

Osundare's use of metaphors and similes in the section eyeful glances are quite remarkable. In the line: *The desert caller/comes on a camel/undulates through the dunes/of hazy shadows…* shows the use of metaphor as an embellishment to arouse emotions and transform people, ideas and places to what the poet imagines. Also, the use of simile in the same poem is

obvious in: *a few teasing drops/on earth's gaping lips/vanishing like droplets/on a steel plate/hot with the forge's red rage…* (23). Simile is also apparent in: *Bouncing boughs interlock overhead/like wristwrestlers straining muscularly/on a canvas of leaves wounded/by the fist of time…* (3) this illustrates a comparison between two things that are basically dissimilar in order to deepen insight on the statement communicated.

Musicality is another major feature of African poetic compositions in Osundare's work. It is accompanied with flute and drums, dancing feet and melodies of voices evident in the collections *Waiting Laughters* and *The Eye of the Earth*. On this backdrop, Abdu (20) maintains that "all the lexical, morphological and syntactic formations Osundare employs embody his impression and assimilations of local- mostly oral repertoire of the communication culture which he translates, transliterates or transposes into the English language" as shown in the poem "Let Earth's Pain Be Soothed" the poet says:

The sky carries a boil of anguish
Let it burst

Let it rain today
that parched throats may sing
Let it rain
that earth may heal her silence
Let it rain today
that corn leaves may clothe the hills
Let it rain
that roots may swell the womb of lying plains
Let it rain
that stomachs may shun the rumble of thunder… (28).

The above lines apart from the use of flutes and drums also illustrate the use of repetitions of lines to reinforce the lyrical tone of the poem often heavy in *Ijala*, *Rara, ofo* and *Ifa* poetry/chants.

Far from the like of Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare, Nnimmo Bassey is a third generation poet often regarded as a lamentation poet. He "laments the betrayal of political leaders and the dilapidated state of the Nigerian nation (Mowarin 125). Nnimmo Bassey is an Architecture graduate from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and has stood against multinational corporations in Nigeria and the environmental devastation they leave behind for the people and the ecosystem. He is an Ibibio by tribe from Akwa Ibom Nigeria. He is an essayist, cartoonist, environmental activist and a Minister of the gospel. These influences affect the Bassey's diction and style. For instance, in the prologue to the opening of the poetry *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood*, the poet employs a Biblical allusion as recorded in (Amos 8: 4) which says: "hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail…" (*We Thought It Was Oil…* 11). In *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat*, the poet in an exceptional manner also employs a Bible verse as evident in (Isaiah 21:11-12): "This message came to me concerning Edom: Someone from Edom keeps calling to me, Watchman, how much longer until morning? When will the night be over? The Watchman replies, "Morning is coming, but night will soon return…" (6). Through Biblical allusions, the poet and pastor Nnimmo Bassey responds to the "prodigality of today's man" using the metaphor "night" to depict the exploitation of the environment and people while "morning" suggests change.

Bassey is a frequent international and national conference speaker on issues relating to extractive industry pollutions, climate change and politics. His works cannot be disconnected from the events of its time. It is in this context, that, Faris Stephen says:

> It wasn't an oil spill that made Nnimmo Bassey an environmentalist. It was a massacre – the 1990 assault by Nigeria's armed forces on the village of Umuechem, where residents of the oil-rich Niger Delta had accused the Shell Petroleum Development Company of environmental degradation and economic neglect. In

> two days of violence, 80 people died and nearly 500 houses were destroyed. "We woke up from a sleep and … everything was collapsing around us," says Bassey, head of Environmental Rights Action, the Nigerian chapter of Friends of the Earth. The deaths convinced Bassey and his colleagues that they needed to broaden their efforts. We realised that if people don't have a safe environment to live in then they don't have … rights (71).

Also, typical of Bassey is his simplicity in diction hence, his use of the pronoun "We" communicates the need for joint efforts targeted to change the abnormal situation of the marginalised alongside the environment. To lend credence to this, Ojakorotu a Nigerian environmental expert affirms that:

> This …frustration (on the part of the region) arising from both state and oil companies' negligence and destruction of the Niger Delta's ecology, which is the basic structure that supports life in the region, and elsewhere. It may be said that the struggle by the people of the region have been predicated on certain fundamental issues, namely: their exclusion or marginalisation in terms of access to oil revenue; their struggle for greater access to resource sharing (known in Nigerian parlance as resource control); environmental degradation; and egregious human rights violation (Ojakorotu 93).

Nnimmo Bassey employs different poetic devices, varied voices and style in his work. He employs metaphor to convey the pervasive image of environmental despoliation and injustice in words like "bleeding rigs", "bursting pipes" to conjure up impressive images of the bleeding earth. Using series of flashback, personal histories, experiences under the state of domination, his works offer biting critique against wealthy bureaucrats exploiting the common people and the Nigerian ecosystem. To illuminate these, his collections of poems are characterised by motley of attitudes such as melancholy, nostalgia, anger and frustration geared towards increasing the consciousness of the people.

Furthermore, to show the exceptionality of Bassey's style, some of his works are not divided into discernable parts. For instance, the poems could be read as part of the theme on issues of ecological deterioration. Most fascinating is the manner some of the poems such as "when the earth bleeds" in the collection in *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* presents an undulating structure to depict the "crude business of crude oil" as well as ridicule the petro-modernity which persistently impacts negatively on the Nigerian environment as the poet states:

I hear that oil
Makes things move
In reality check
Oil makes life stop
Because
The oil only flows
When the earth bleeds… (16).

Note, the wavy manner the stanza is structured to convey how the flow of oil "makes life stop" if over exploited. Bassey's collections are dialectical as they flow into each other in a way that foregrounds the central thrust – the dangers posed by mankind's activities on the ecosystem.

Nnimmo Bassey, unlike the poets Ojaide and Osundare does not employ his cultural background in his works. Nowhere in Bassey's work will one find the veneration of gods, rocks and mountains. However, in *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood*, Bassey merely identifies pockets of local groups in the poem "Winamorena" and mentions places such as *Oloibiri, Ikot Nseyen, Yenagoa Ogoni, Benin City or Sangana*/… *Taylor Creek, Stub Creek Manamo, Nun, Qua Iboe Winamorena beckons Okoroba*/ *Orinoco…* (28) as instances of local nomenclature and to bewail the ecological decay in those locales. Nnimmo Bassey does not employ African mythology in his works probably because of his Christian belief, his position as a Minister of the Gospel, a deviation from the usual perception of cultural assertion.

Taken together, the divergences palpable in the works of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey show they are from different ethnic backgrounds in Nigeria. Ojaide is Urhobo, Osundare is Yoruba and Bassey is Ibibio. Also, Nnimmo Bassey is a third generation writer while Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare are second generation writers still vibrant in the literary domain. Niyi Osundare employs the Yoruba language to convey meaning in his poetry, Tanure Ojaide employs Urhobo heritage to color his poetic diction while Nnimmo Bassey does not attempt to speak in the traditional high flown language and imageries remarkable of Ojaide and Osundare rather Bassey merely mentions some indigenous communities to bemoan the ecological decay noticeable in those settings. Nevertheless, irrespective of the generational gap among the poets of study, they express values consistent with the tenets of Ecocriticism in order to foreground the havoc done to contemporary Nigerian landscape.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7.0 CONCLUSION

This study investigates from an ecocritical perspective the manner in which modern Nigerian poets depict the exploitation of Nigeria's natural resources. In this way, the poets illustrate that the ensuing dysfunction of the environment and the ecosystem has devastating consequences for the people and the space they occupy. In this context, this research employs Ecocriticism as its analytical framework. Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary study that incorporates the insights and techniques of the sciences and humanities to examine the relationship between environment and literature. Ecocriticism is thus deployed to evaluate the selected Nigerian poetry as discourses about the environment and the human interactions with it. This approach illustrates that the selected Nigerian Poets are keenly aware of the relationship between power, industrial production and the exploitation of Nigeria's unnatural and natural resources as circumscribed in their works of study.

In view of this, Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare (second generation poets) and Nnimmo Bassey (a third generation poet) occupy dominant positions in explicating ecological matters because their compositions under study provide vistas on environmental issues and their concern with the condition of the Nigerian landscape on account of the civil war, the oil boom and the incessant exploitations of natural resources. To this end, this study contributes to literary scholarship by considering the ways poets of study delineate ecological degradation and its impact on Nigeria's bionetwork.

This study is premised on the arguments that as a medium of expressing views about man and his environment, Modern Nigerian Poetry is concerned with the survival of Nigeria's natural environment. In this context, ecological and literary discourses have emphasised that nature is endangered and the exploitation of natural resources for the free market globally contributes to the destruction of the natural world of periphery nations. In expressing views about man and his social existence, Literature in general and Modern Nigerian Poetry in particular is concerned with the continued existence of mankind and the planet. Consequently, an examination of the selected works of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey demonstrate that Nigeria is entangled in the peril of exploitation, mismanagement and destruction of its natural environment complicated by the conspiracy of its ruling class and multinational companies for power, market and profit. The study foregrounds the relevance of poetry to socio-political discourses in Nigeria. Poetry therefore, is a potent medium of exploring socio-political maladies that affect society and a platform for advocating social transformation. This research demonstrates that art is a veritable instrument that could be employed to contest power thereby resisting any form of subjugation, particularly ecological degradation of the Nigerian landscape and pauperisation of the marginalised. However, although, African critics have over the years examined the relationship between literature and other forms of social consciousness such as morality, politics, pedagogy, and philosophy, a more conscious insertion of the study of environment in criticism would help literature appreciate art's interaction with other forms of human practice.

The study also posits that contemporary environment-centred Poetry and the criticism it has generated transcend the socio-political issues articulated in early Nigerian Poetry. Thus, although early Nigerian poets were concerned with environmental deterioration, they did not explore it with the same critical idiom as the poets of study who have illuminated precarious

environmental concerns in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria by extension. Hence, earlier approaches have examined the selected works as oral performance, celebration of Nigeria's glorious past, support for peasants and farmers and environmental themes. Being aware of this gap, this study deploys Ecocriticism- which investigates the relationship between human activities and the natural world in terms of the influence of one upon the other to explore Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey's Poetry as critiques of the collaboration between the Nigerian State and Global Corporate Capitalism to exploit Nigerian Natural resources. By this, the study reiterates that the earlier concern with Nature in literary creativity has been transformed into a contemporary preoccupation in which literature designates a deliberate degradation of nature and space for specific purposes such as self interest, market and profit making at the expense of social welfare. In consequence, this study provides critical insights into how over exploitation and consumption of Nigeria's natural resources contribute to the despoliation of the Nigerian landscape and marginalisation of rural communities. In this sense, poetry illustrates the collaboration between power, globalisation and elite formation in the entrenchment of dehumanisation and marginalisation in postcolonial societies.

This study is also circumscribed by the affinity between literature and society in an era of massive exploitation of natural and human resources for economic purposes in the process- threatening the planet's basic life support systems. The objectives of this study show that Poetry is a fitting discursive medium employed by poets to enunciate their discontent with the status quo and to contribute to the debate about ecological issues in Nigeria. It also illustrates that Ecocriticism is a potent theory for literary evaluation and a dynamic phenomenon as regards socio-political discourses which literature signifies. On account of this, the study explains the essentiality of Ecocriticism in relation to issues of consumerism and environmental damage in

the light of modern technological advancement. Therefore, the ecocritical approach applied to the poetry of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey illuminates that mankind's activities on the Nigerian environment are imbalanced and their effects are deleterious. As a reaction to the exploitation and other socio-ecological issues in Nigeria, the selected poets have focused attention on issues of militancy, displacement, under-development and pollution not just on the Nigerian space but also on the livelihood of the marginalised people. The selected poets have through their poetry reveal that the environmental degradation and impoverishment that have become the lot of rural communities in Nigeria have inhibited Nigeria's natural environment from enhancing socio-economic development meaningful for survival. Against this backdrop, this research appraises the manner in which the selected poets signify the degradation of nature, the abuse of oil extraction and the growing clamor for resource control which have given rise to pockets of agitations in Nigeria today. They capture the extent to which multinational corporations in partnership with the political elites have left ecological imprints which jeopardise the Nigerian environment.

The textual analyses of environmental aesthetics in Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* (1986) and *Waiting Laughters* (1990), for example delineates Nigeria's environmental issues and the general human condition. The analysis provides a 'green reading' of Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* as a poetry collection that profoundly engages with the philosophy and poetics of environmentalism and this is in contrast to earlier perceptions that *Waiting Laughters* has little or no ecological significance. Likewise, the concern with Development and its Aftermath in Ojaide's *Daydream of Ant*s (1997) and *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1997) is marked by a commitment which depicts the predicament of Nigeria's biotic community, aspirations and struggles for change. By applying contemporary ecocritical approach, the analysis shows the

impact humans have had on the Nigerian environment through modern technological innovations and global economic expansion. Green Resistance in Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* and *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* examines the dialectic between forms of domination in the Nigerian social space and how this translates into the domination of the environment. Conscious of the apprehensions that perspectives on Ecocriticism circumscribe, a comparative evaluation of the poets Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey suggests convergences in their response to issues of development, environmentalism, resistance, critique of globalisation, militancy and displacement. These poets lampoon the misdeeds of the ruling elites and their cohorts culpable for ecocides in the Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general. The study highlights that Nigerian Literature acts as discourses about the ecology and the fate of man in a modern integrated world to which natural resources are central to existence.

Along these lines, the selected works are axiomatic of resistance against the Nigeria's political rulers and their cohorts who cause pain and anguish for the impoverished majority and their homeland. Central to these issues, the divergences explicated in the selected works illustrate that Ojaide is Urhobo, Bassey is Ibibio while Osundare is Yoruba. Niyi Osundare employs the Yoruba language to convey meaning in his poetry; Tanure Ojaide employs the Urhobo heritage to his poetic advantage while Nnimmo Bassey does not utilise his dialect in his work. As well, they utilise different stylistic devices to convey their ideas. Thus, irrespective of the generational gap among the poets of study, the selected works examined are testaments to the environmental responsiveness and proficiency of the poets Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey who are witnesses to the indiscriminate onslaught on Nigeria's hills, valleys, farmland, rivers and forests transformed into commodities to be grabbed by gluttonous and privileged fragments of the society.

With these discussions, the selected poems establish that ecological problems are hinged on the structures of domination in the human society and are also geared towards exploiting the common people and the natural world under the influence of profit-driven oil prospectors. Therefore, vital issues about developments, the loss of landscapes, the destruction of plants, organisms and animals brought about by capitalist industrialisation and globalisation are fundamental attacks on the Nigerian environment.

It is the summation of this study, that environmental liberation will never be fully achieved without challenging the conditions under which human societies have constructed themselves in hierarchical relation to the environment. This way, the selected works provide textual space for considering the significance of all forms of life hence, for harmony to be restored between man and the natural environment; mankind must act towards sustainable practices that will restore the earth's ecological balance. Through an ecocritical exploration of the selected works, this study illuminates that the Nigerian natural environment is perceived as mere resources to be exploited economically for human interests and pursuits. This has led to the rise of apprehensions from which radical groups have become defiant in destruction of lives and properties. On this note, the selected poets appraise the works under study in opposition to environmental destruction and exploitation of the Nigerian ecosystem along with the desire for a sustainable relationship between man and his physical habitat. Thus, emerging through oppositions to globalisation, contemporary Nigerian poetry is not concerned with the exploitation of natural resources and the destruction of the environment but also shows concern for climate sustainability. In other words, the selected Nigerian poetry collections explore the issue of human and environmental relations and suggest a viable method of restoring equilibrium between these two realms that are persistently in a state of tension in the post-modern age.

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