

**INSCRIBING THE ENVIRONMENT: AN ECO-CRITICAL STUDY
OF THIRD-GENERATION NIGERIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH**

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OCTOBER, 2020

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE
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OCTOBER, 2020

ACCEPTANCE

This is to certify that this thesis is accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in English (Literature), in the Department of Languages and General Studies, College of Leadership and Development Studies, Covenant University, Ota.

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DECLARATION

I, **OLUSEYE ABIODUN BABATUNDE (14PBC00836)** declare that this research was carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Senayon Olaoluwa of the Institute of African Studies University of Ibadan and Prof. Charles O. Ogbulogo of the Department of Languages and General Studies, College of Leadership and Development Studies, Covenant University Ota. I attest that the thesis has not been presented either wholly or partially for the award of any degree elsewhere. All sources of data and scholarly information used in this thesis are duly acknowledged

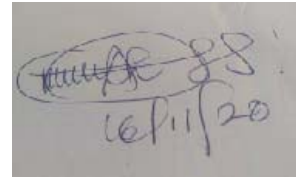
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CERTIFICATION

We certify that the thesis titled “**Inscribing the Environment: An Eco-critical Study of Third-Nigerian Poetry in English**” is the original research work carried out by **OLUSEYE ABIODUN BABATUNDE (14PBC00836)** in the Department of Languages and General Studies, College of Leadership and Development Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria under the supervision of Dr Senayon Olaoluwa and Prof. Charles O. Ogbulogo We have examined and found this work acceptable as part of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Literature.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to you God, the Poet of deeds, for life, for family, for searing illuminations and for inimitable love, grace and mercies with which you continually enswathe me. Everlasting God, I say thank you. Kindly take the glory in Jesus' name.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CNN	Cable News Network
ESGP	Earth System Government Project
GEF	Global Environment Facilities
GGGI	Global Green Growth Institute
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IGR	Internally Generated Revenue
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPOB	Indigenous People of Biafra
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KIMO	Local Authorities International Environmental Organisation (Kimmunenens Internasjonale Miljorganisation)
KJV	King James Version
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
NCF	Nigerian Conservation Foundation
NLNG	Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas
NOSDRA	National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency
USEPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency

ABSTRACT

Ecocriticism is a new thinking that envisions and advocates a strong harmony between biotic and abiotic agents that must cohabitate in a new planetary community and in complementarity for their survival and sustenance. The concept seeks to reformat age-old default thinking premised on anthropological standpoints of perceiving nature as a passive habitat of objects. Ecocriticism, therefore, seeks to locate in literary works, an interpretative importance for nature and such other environmental categories such as land, air, water and forests, among others. Recently, the world has witnessed and is yet battling with a spate of global ecological incidences that have created palpable fear that the destruction of the world may be nearer than imagined. Some of the present day dire environmental challenges which need to be reversed include climate change, loss of biodiversity, drought, land degradation, and pollution among others. The attendant shift to eco-critical concerns catalysed into the birth of ecocriticism first spawned in America and later extended to other climes. The late reception of ecocriticism in Nigeria, otherwise eco-hesitation, is traceable to the socio-political concerns which the literature seems not to slough off. But in its little gestation, many Nigerian writers, especially with the Niger Delta as experimentation field, have reflected the environment along eco-critical precepts and architecture. At the core of most ecological problems is nonchalance by humans, poetry is therefore considered a potent medium of achieving the desired attitudinal change in humans especially in correcting the notion that nature is meant to be exploited, despoiled and degraded. This study is therefore anchored on yielding a future environmentalism based on poetry's ability to raise socio-environmental dilemmas through its engagement with the past, the present and being able to redirect the future in the desired way for the good of the world. This study looks at six representative collections from the corpus of recent Nigerian poetry in English namely: Tade Ipadeola, *The Sahara Testaments* (2012); Tade Ipadeola, *The Rain Fardel*, (2005); Ogaga Ifowodo, *A Good Mourning* (2016); Ogaga Ifowodo, *The Oil Lamp* (2005); Remi Raji, *Sea of My Mind* (2013); and Ahmed Maiwada, *We're Fish* (2017). These six collections sufficiently parade rich eco-critical consciousness extensive enough to form the contextual ground upon which this study is situated. The research is library-based and the research tool is ecocriticism. The study through the various texts was able to establish a strong eco-critical current running through most recent Nigerian poetry in English. It was able to show a synergetic parallel between human and nature. It also revealed that Nigerian literature is fast responding to the new dictates of ecocriticism. This study further showed in a number of ways how ecocriticism is opening new frontiers for Nigerian literature and how the concept has become a major cultural expression of foregrounding culture within the ambience of ecocriticism. The study also discovered how the concept has become a major platform of projecting ecological issues arising in the Nigerian society. The study revealed a heightened eco-critical consciousness in the works of third-generation Nigerian poets.

Key words: Agents, Ecocriticism, Eco-hesitation, Ecological Incidences, Environmental categories, Nigerian poetry.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Knowledge in the the world, for long, was steered and controlled by perceptions standing on religious, philosophical and cultural episteme. The understanding enframed thereof is the supposition of humans as the omniscient of the earth. Kant, for instance, reinforcing the anthropocentric view of western tradition, says that ‘as the sole being on earth who has reason, and thus a capacity to set voluntary ends for himself, [man] is certainly the titular lord of nature, and, if nature is regarded as a teleological system, then it is his vocation to be the ultimate end of nature’ (298). This view has influenced many great works of literature, most of which often reflect the centrality of the human agency, portraying human activities in diverse forms and dimensions. Many expressions of literature prime human portrayal and consideration far and above other elements thus pushing such other elements to the fringe or to utter neglect and rejection.

Before, the introduction of ecocriticism, most literature was replete with stories about human psychology, human civilisation, wars, and human culture among others. Literature then celebrated diverse human experiences in various shades and modes. Nature, in most of these human narratives was often portrayed in the sideline, as oppressed or exploited. Indeed, the environment, particularly nature, most times, is viewed as an exploitable and expendable resource in the hands of humans. At best, nature is seen and used to complement human existence and activities whereas nature is a major factor in guaranteeing human existence and survival. For the purpose of this study, nature, earth and environment shall be interchangeably used. This study is guided by Raymond Williams definition of nature. Raymond Willaims, profers three different areas of meaning for nature. According to him, these are ‘(i) the essential quality and character of something, (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human or both, (iii) the material world itself taken as including human beings (219). Definitions (ii) and (iii) particularly, captures the nature on which this work is premised.

Nature has a way of reminding humans of her place in the planetary schemes, by threatening or destroying human habitation especially when the carrying capacity of the

planet is pushed to its limits. At such moments, there could be some dire consequences. Such dire consequences, in recent times, have fostered and amplified human interest in the issues of the environment more than ever before. This probably may be the reason for the considerable shift to ecocriticism, and also the cognitive shift from old modes of conception and the call for dissolving hierarchical subject-object dichotomies.

1.1.2 Transiting the Geological Periods

The activities of humans, in the 20th and 21st centuries have contributed more to the destruction of the environment more than the previous centuries. The earth has transited from its interglacial state, the natural geological epoch known as the Holocene. Human activities have been pervasive in destroying the great forces of nature. In the words of Steffens, Crutzen and McNeill, the world, 'has been pushed into a planetary terra incognita' (1) that is a strange and an unknown land. Since the beginning of the Anthropocene era, there has been a global and a profound shift in the relationship between man and nature. Humans are faced with a barrage of incidences of global environmental challenges. There is also the palpable fear that the destruction of the world may be nearer than imagined. Some of the present-day dire environmental challenges include climate change, loss of biodiversity, loss of human health, drought, land degradation, environmental catastrophes such as the collapse of the tsunami, the great smog, the Minimata disease, and the Maya civilization. Other examples are the Dust Bowl and the Chernobyl disaster, tsunami, flooding, desertification, poverty and diseases especially in Africa. Other dreadful challenges that humanity is faced with include rapid growth of world population, loss of prime agricultural land to urbanization, increased demands for food production, diminishing water supplies, increased levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (due to fossil fuel burning) deglaciation, changes in rain-fall distribution, and the profligate use of natural resources.

In modern times, there has been a rapid increase in the spate of environmental hazards across the globe. The unprecedented nature of these hazards has attracted the interest of many disciplines to the issues of environment, poetry, is one of them. Anthropocene is what the scientists call the new era in geology caused by human intervention in nature as a result of burning fossil fuels and such other bad environmental practices. The existence of the Anthropocene of only 250 years is what Mirzoeff calls 'a mote in the geological

time which can barely register the ephemeral 10,000 years of the preceding Holocene'(213). This is an obvious indication that the wheel of nature grinds slowly and that the evil that humans do to nature may take some time to materialise.

The Holocene was the period of stable climatic condition that stimulated human agriculture and civilization. Mirzoeff predicted that 'no more can humans see the Anthropocene, extending across centuries through dimensions and across time. It can only be visualised' (213). He further asserts that 'it affects everything from the lithosphere to the upper atmosphere' (213). The planet must be a complex whole of interconnectedness, a system where what affects one affects all. Why then do humans forget their place in the whole, overlooking that certain actions or inactions of today would soon be accounted for, most probably dastardly? Man's unfriendly posture to nature stems from factors such as depravity, ignorance, sheer wickedness, poverty, and misplaced ideological constructs of capitalism and its attendant commodification of all things including nature and human lives. Bertens attests to this view that 'the scientific revolution of the seventh and eighteenth centuries involuntarily facilitated a utilitarian, calculating view of the natural world that not much later would become the driving force behind its violation and exploitation by the industrial revolution'(199). The attendant intensification has led to a situation whereby human life does not matter but technology does, the industry does and the leviathan global imperialism that has become the temple from which the world now worships does.

The seeming unguarded destruction of nature that characterises the modern society must be checked to prevent a gloomy future. To achieve this, nature therefore, needs to be put more on the front burner than it has ever been in all of man's undertakings. This is to stem or outrightly prevent the grave disaster that may ensue from humanity's reckless and inconsiderate attitude to nature. This redress must flow from all departments of man's engagement including poetry. The admonition of Andrew Fiala, in this regard, is instructive:

If we work together and share our resources, we may be able to row our metaphorical "lifeboat" to safety. But there comes a time when it is rational to assume that the lifeboat will not be rescued. Those who continue to cooperate might be praised as Good Samaritans. But if the crisis is truly severe, the egoist may in fact triumph over the altruist in the struggle for survival in the short term; and for the sort

of egoist I am describing here, the short term is what matters most. The more certain we are that the crisis is unsolvable and that the lifeboat is about to sink, the more rational egoism becomes for those who are already primarily committed to egoism (56-57)

Poetry has the capacity to drive messages into the hearts of people. This study therefore critically examines the nexus between the poetry genre and nature within the ambits of the Nigerian literary space. Poetry and nature are not strange bedfellows as nature has always provided the background upon which human stories and experiences are implanted. Nature therefore has regularly been a part of literature though often portrayed in the margins. This marginal representation has often pushed considerations for nature to a relegable background and sometimes when mentioned, it is so done in passing and as mere adjuncts. This study would show the state of awareness in the issues of nature and the environment amongst third-generation Nigerian poets. Interestingly, there seems to be a surge in the interest of some third-generation poets towards nature; this study shall examine likely factors responsible for this. The study shall also look at the depth of this interest and whether such interest is pressed into some other extraneous concerns beyond art.

This study highlights a conscious awareness in the issues of nature and the environment reflecting its importance and indispensability to humans; hence the need for humanity to develop a sentient and a thoughtful attitude to nature and environment. The study also shows that poetry, having an easy inroad into the hearts of people, also has the potency to appeal to human conscience to imbibe eco-friendly attitude to save our world and ourselves.

1.1.3 The State of Man and Nature Interrelations

The several inventions of humans have empowered them to dominate the other species with which they cohabit the earth. Yet, this creativity, has also fostered on the world innumerable global environmental crises, some fledging and some awaiting a catastrophic full-blown proportion. The current world population according to the UN in 2020 estimates is 7.8 billion. This figure is projected to incredibly race to 10 billion. The agricultural, industrial, scientific and technological revolutions have eclipsed our world into devastation in waiting.

It is commonplace information that unusual drought, flood and diseases, are now widespread across the continents, wreaking innumerable havoc on humans in far-reaching dimensions. A good case in point is the COVID -19 pandemic that has killed thousands of people and is currently still ravaging all the nook and crannies of the world. The year, 1988, was declared the world's warmest year, ever, in human history and since then unusual hotness has gained a permanent residency on the planet earth in ways never experienced nor imagined. Humans are now caught in a web of naturalising the artificial in a post humanist drive. Timothy Clark hints about some of the posthumanist inventions as 'nano-technology, genetic modification of plants and animals, gene therapy, biometrics, cloning, stem cell research, artificial life, artificial intelligence and new reproductive technologies' (63). Hans Bertens also cautions that 'we are abandoning our status as humans altogether and are joining the side of (unnatural) technology with our breast implants, pacemakers, lasered corneas, botox injections, hair implants, artificial hips, steel supports for shattered bones and so on... we are on our way to become the cyborgs of science fictions films, half human, half machine' (203). These are some of the dreadful experimentations that would form part of human realities in a few years to come.

The question, that therefore, greets the discerning mind, is the craze in man's inventiveness that seems frighteningly ceaseless and intractably boundless. Slavoj Zizek, quoted in Clark opines that 'nature is no longer "natural", the reliable "dense" background of our lives; it now appears as a fragile mechanism which at any point, can explode in a catastrophic manner' (63). This is brazenly so because of the plastic and ephemeral nature of artificiality. Artificial 'nature' must be time-bound whereas natural 'nature' is timeless. This then becomes a major signposting of the extremism of some of the human inventiveness.

The climate which is a major earth's fundamental life support system has been battered in all fronts. The carbon emissions have polluted the atmosphere. Clean air has become a luxury. Indiscriminate sinking of bore-holes and wells have altered the balance of the hydrosphere. Rising atmospheric and sea surface temperature are creating problems for the cryosphere as they have continued to melt the Arctic and the Greenland ice sheets. Also, irresponsible agricultural practices, high rate of fossil fuel use, mining, road construction, war, terrorism and so on are damaging the biosphere in no small measure. Indeed this endless damage chain to the ecosystem appears extreme and uncontrollable.

In another vein, the world is battling with the issue of warmth and climate change challenges. For instance the global average temperature is 2C and is being projected to grow to 4C and possibly 6C and the whole earth would become hellish. According to the UN, by the end of this century, Nigeria's population may grow at the turn of the century by 349% from 250 to 730 million, US by 54% from 315 million in 2012 to 478 million, among others. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projections on the world climate change is scary with that of Africa being more petrifying:

Warming projections under medium scenarios indicate that extensive areas of Africa will exceed 2°C by the last 2 decades of this century relative to the late 20th century mean annual temperature and all of Africa under high emission scenarios. Under a high Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP), that exceedance could occur by mid-century across much of Africa and reach between 3°C and 6°C by the end of the century. It is likely that land temperatures over Africa will rise faster than the global land average, particularly in the more arid regions, and that the rate of increase in minimum temperatures will exceed that of maximum temperatures. (22.2.1.2)

The world is closing in on yet a large percentage of the people in the world are oblivious of this gloomy threat. While other parts of the world seem to be engaging in conscious efforts at addressing the menace, Africa seems unprepared and careless as the doomsday draws closer even in the face of cruel facts and revelations. The IPCC Report further reveals some of the ominous signs impending:

There is emerging evidence on shifting ranges of some species and ecosystems due to elevated carbon dioxide (CO₂) and climate change, beyond the effects of land use change and other non-climate stressors (high confidence). Ocean ecosystems, in particular coral reefs, will be affected by ocean acidification and warming as well as changes in ocean upwelling, thus negatively affecting economic sectors such as fisheries (medium confidence). (22.3.2, Table 22-3)

Fishing is a major preoccupation and an economic mainstay of many communities in Africa and particularly in Nigeria. Many communities found on the coastlines in Nigeria are fishermen. Fish is also a major source of protein for many people across Nigeria and in Africa. Thus, if fishing suffer a crises, the attendant pain and loss would be colossal. Already people in the Niger Delta have been dislocated from their major occupations such as fishing and farming by the activities of the oil exploration companies. These companies have virtually taken over the people's land. Indeed the Niger Delta people

suffer greatly from environmental pollution. More frightening is the IPCC Report on water which states that:

Water resources are subjected to high hydro-climatic variability over space and time, and are a key constraint on the continent's continued economic development. The impacts of climate change will be superimposed onto already water-stressed catchments with complex and uses, engineered water systems, and a strong historical socio-political and economic footprint. Strategies that integrate land and water management, and disaster risk reduction, within a framework of emerging climate change risks would bolster resilient development in the face of projected impacts of climate change. (22.3.2.2,22.3.3)

Water, which seems everywhere, but scarce for human consumption, is also being threatened by climate change. Human beings may not be able to survive without water. It is the totality of the impending dangers associated with humans' careless handling of the environment and the awful future that most contemporary scientific reports on the environment portend that have spurred interest in this research. Poetry being a potent tool of conscientisation, of inducing moral messages and of driving messages into human minds, is used to convey issues of environment to the fore and acquaint the mass of the people of the dangers inherent in human untoward activities about nature. One good way to achieve this is by looking at the works of poets and examining how well they have discussed the issue of the environment. Have such discussions been able to raise awareness as desired? This study believes that one of the ways of raising such awareness is by analysing works of art from the eco-centric point of view.

However, there is the other side to the argument which is that the planet will continue to exist despite of the fearful statistics and scientific postulations. This view is succinctly captured by Paul Edwards (2010) that 'our planet will continue regardless of the future of the carbon-based life that currently inhabits us'. This opinion is an amplification of what Enrique Dussell, quoted in Nicholas Mirzoeff, calls 'a metaphor for human suffering under global capitalism' (46). These pro-capitalist analysts are always quick to contest any hint that capitalism and its euphemism of market forces have reduced the world, especially human life, to mere commodities, an idea in the service of the capitalist. The subjugation of man and nature has become a major guiding principle for the repression and cruelty to which nature particularly is subjected. This belief is better captured by

Mirzoeff when he asserts that: ‘We now find ourselves confronting an autoimmune capitalism that seems determined to extract the last moment of circulation for itself, even at the expense of its host lifeworld’(215). For how long then shall the world look on as this auto immune capitalism wreaks havoc on the world, in the guise of technology?

The idea of humans dominating their environment is a long-held one and has been built into western aesthetics, as part of religious dogma and as part of the pillars of certain philosophical episteme. The holders of this view would argue that there is a marked connection, for instance, between language and human thought processes. Heidegger, quoted in Clark champions this mode of thinking and argues ‘that there is inherent violence of western thought’(55) in most human thinking. Heidegger’s view, as reviewed by Clark, suggests that ‘language and handed down knowledge by the West may have configured our general and common-sense assumptions and that language as conceived and handed down by the West may have influenced the way we understand, interpret, or even know objects in an implicitly violent and destructive manner’ (55). He further argues that ‘such a dysfunction would pervade the workings of thought, speech and practice everywhere and it would obviously form a major element in the current environmental crises’(55). The present way of perceiving nature therefore may stem from this mode of thinking.

This anthropocentrism of western thought is further reinforced by Martin Heidegger quoted in Zimmerman, that ‘the metaphysical schemes of Plato and Aristotle, were based on the view that the structure of all things is akin to the structure of products or artefacts’ (157). This mode of thinking has ruled the world for a long time and most of the cruelty that man shows to non-human elements derived its foundation from such beliefs. Worthy of note, however, is the caution of Heidegger, as quoted in Clark, that ‘We must free ourselves from the ‘technical interpretation of thinking’ whose origins ‘reach back to Plato and Aristotle’(56). It is against this background that the world must interrogate certain conception that inflates the human ego as lords unto all other non-humans with which humans share the world. This notion of superiority drives humans into maltreating nature and is the reason why the world is at the brink of what Val Plumwood calls “biophysical limits of the planet” (5).

Another source of human domination of nature is found in the domain of religion especially the Bible, that grants Lordship unto humans over every other thing on earth. But one is fascinated by God's proclamation in the Bible (RSV; Genesis 2: 15) which says 'And the LORD God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it'. While it is true that God grants man dominion over all things of the earth, it is also true that that comes with a responsibility to tend and keep the earth. Aside from tending nature being our source of life, revitalisation and strength, it is also an injunction that God wants us to keep as a duty. The questions that then arise are: Have we been keeping God's injunction in this regard? The huge natural disasters that commonly visit us now, are they reactions to our failure in discharging the responsibility that God has placed on our shoulders? Do we need a reassessment of our attitude to nature? Should we continue to imbibe the more profitable values of tending the earth? These and other salient questions inspire this work.

The usual anthropocentric view that has led humans to catastrophes has forced them to look at other alternatives of viewing reality with the hope and expectations of forging and conditioning a different world. The biocentrism option is one such substitute. Buell defines biocentrism as "The view that all organisms, including humans, are part of a larger biotic web or network or community whose interests must constrain or direct or govern the human interest" (134). The biocentrism option seems more profitable to all inhabitants of planet earth, in that, it would be mutually beneficial to both humans and nature. Its dictate of tendering nature is the required therapy that humans need to apply to nature to cause a desired changed world.

1.1.4 Harvesting Poetry and Nature

The concern of poetry for most of the time has always been the sociosphere portraying humans in their conquered environment and quarantining other natural elements to mere background appendages. Though poetry sometimes focusses on nature and the environment, not in much poetry has nature being the subject matter. Most of the time however nature is portrayed for picturesque drives, explanatory of human experiences and as natural aesthetics. Principally, however, the anthropocentric readings of poetry have for a long time been predicated on an arguably faulty episteme of human domination of the environment. Several domains of knowledge have espoused this notion. Indeed from

religion to philosophy, exploitative ideologies and cultural jingoism and all other such carriers and planters of this ego seed have nestled in human consciousness the notion of a 'supreme being' status, especially over other natural elements. These have made humans to dominate their environment albeit carelessly and ruthlessly.

Ecocriticism has become the convenient intersection of poetry and nature. This juncture may produce some harmony or tension. The horizon has often opened a new vista of balance between humans and nature. Humans tend nature and nature in turn regenerates humans in an endless complementary routine. Though literature has always portrayed nature, this, most times happens in the background and as adjuncts in tandem with established modes and social constructs. Nature, at best, is portrayed for pleasure or safari gains or better still, as destination in moments of escape from the depravities and vagaries of human culture. Poetry is ably potent to explain, interrogate and expound all conditions of humans or nonhumans. Its intervention therefore, in nature, should not be perceived as a strange phenomenon, especially considering its propensity to elucidate environmental issues as Lawrence Buell asserted that "the success of all environmentalist efforts finally hinges not on 'some highly developed technology, or some arcane new science' but on 'a state of mind': on attitudes, feelings, images and narratives," all of which can be found in "acts of environmental imagination" (44). Poetry therefore is able to alter perceptions and ensure ethical considerations in a manner that could make the world save for both humans and nature. Poetry, beyond dry statistics, presents itself as an effective tool in voicing multiple perspectives and concerns that are not restricted by place, time, or reality. Julie Sze says:

Literature offers a new way of looking at environmental justice, through visual images and metaphors, not solely through the prism of statistics. This new way of looking references the 'real' problems of communities struggling against environmental racism, and is simultaneously liberated from providing a strictly documentary account of the contemporary world. It allows for a more flexible representation of environmental justice, one with a global view and historical roots" (163).

This view is further corroborated by Rachel Stein when she almost echoes Sze that:

Expressive arts offer individuals and communities creative media through which to explore the intricate intersections of gender and sexuality with environmental justice...By representing sexed and

gendered speakers and protagonists who live inside the issues, the artists give us an honest emotional sense of the complicated costs of environmental ills for those who dwell within affected communities. They also provide an appreciation of the complex and often conflicted positions of the women and men who act against these ills, incurring daily difficulties and real dangers to do so (13).

Indeed poetry has the potential and the capability to interrogate environmental issues without temporal or spatial limitations and gliding it through multiple points of view into absolute meaningfulness and understanding for all to discern.

1.1.5 The Nature of Ecocriticism

Lawrence Buell is the American eco-critic whose work suggests that the environmental imagination engages a set of aesthetic preferences for ecocriticism. These preferences are not necessarily restricted to environmental realism or nature writing, but extends to those forms of fictional and non-fictional writing that focus on nature and the natural elements such as landscape, flora and fauna as self-standing agents, rather than support structures for human action, in the world (135). Ecocriticism thus considers the non-human agents as capable of being perceived independently and pivotal in the scheme of natural things rather than being seen as adjuncts to human beings.

Ecocriticism alerts us to how human activities pose a threat to our natural environment and raises consciousness to the dangers inherent in living carelessly with nature. This accounts for why Bate asserts that 'ecocriticism began in consciousness-raising' (8). It probes and analyses the modes that govern our representations of nature, with a view to providing solutions to some environmental challenges. It however does this taking an earth-centred approach to literary studies. This view is aptly captured by Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells thus 'Most of all ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis' (5). This, thus, ensures the problematisation of environmental issues and raises consciousness and concerns towards their redress.

In summarising the concerns of ecocriticism, Buell points out that:

1. the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device, but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history;

2. the human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest;
3. human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation; and
4. some of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text;

The nature of ecocriticism is that it examines representations of nature in fictional works and probably in non-fictional works. In the words of Bertens, 'it pays particular attention to the question of how nature is construed in [art] presentations' (200). Nature, here, obviously refers to all non-human elements such as animals, landscape, sea, space among others.

Since the birth of ecocriticism, there have been different shades of it, but all emphasise the welfare of the ecosystem, employing eco-philosophy, environmental ethics, evolutionary biology, eco-psychology, ecology and other related disciplines. The enormity of the environmental crises that the world is witnessing today commands attention to issues of the environment and demands that something should be done urgently to salvage the situation. Henry Thoreau quoted in Bertens opines that 'By avarice and selfishness and a grovelling habit, from which none of us is free, of regarding the soil as property, or the means of acquiring property chiefly the landscape is deformed, husbandry is degraded with us, and the farmer leads the meanest of lives' (199). The gravity of these problems becomes a primary call to action for all to come on board and provide solutions to a colossal problem facing humanity.

Ecocriticism involves variegated ideas and ideologies, that interrogate ecocritical perspectives, by shedding light on issues of environmental concerns in literature that hitherto have been at the periphery. Ecocriticism shall be the model for the appreciation of the works of some third-generation poets in Nigeria.

1.1.6 Epochal Classification of Nigerian Literature

The issue of generation or periodisation is tied inextricably to literary periods and trends. Periodisation is an attempt to give boundaries to the work of art. The generation approach to the study of literature affords literary criticism the possibilities for a systematic and

patterned appreciation of literary trends and currents. Save for the complexities they engender and the frustration therein, most literary traditions agree on temporal and coevality on one hand and the ideological and thematic coherence on the other as two major signposts in the formation of generations. It is the practice, therefore for writers to be categorized within a loosely determined age bracket or their published works categorised within a loosely defined time frame.

The issue of generation is always problematic to the literary historian whose purview it is to group or categorise the works of art into ages or generations. Harry Garuba says 'the project of defining and delimiting the boundaries of a literary generation can never escape the problem of semantic, thematic and even ideological indeterminacy' (146). He further submits that:

Even at the most propitious of times, when a convergence of historical events and creative ferment of the imagination appear to announce their evidence, literary periodization remains a messy business. The happy coincidence of history and the foregrounding of particular thematic and formal preoccupation in literature are often one such moment when a period or school seems inevitably to come into being. But the inevitability is deceptive, masking the constructedness of the category we devise for framing our understanding of it and the time-lines we draw to mark it...

Senayon Olaoluwa also opines that 'the formulation of such categorisation becomes problematic when it is imperative to admit that no tradition or generation stands as an island without drawing inspiration from an earlier tradition, no matter the magnitude of contrast a juxtaposition of two separate traditions pretends to show' (5). Garuba thinks that another challenge to periodisation, stems from the fact that some writers, who should be placed in an age by the nature and preoccupation of their works, are left outside of it. This, according to him often leads to other encounters. He writes:

The struggle to both maintain and reconstruct the boundaries then begins as critics scramble to recuperate the distinctiveness of the classification often with qualifiers such as "early" or "late" while the unrecuperable writing continues to mock their best efforts. As boundaries demarcating neat categorizations, therefore, literary periods and schools are porous as they come. As markers of general trends, however, they retain some usefulness, more like provisional maps, open-ended rather than closed, always inviting revision; their reversibility inscribed, as it were, at the heart of their making (146).

Periodisation, most times, is cast among other things, based on the age bracket of the authors, the period of the work and sometimes the style and preoccupation of the writer to categorise works of art into generations. Remi Raji believes that the age of the authors sometimes creates problems of accurate placement. For instance, while Harry Garuba was born in 1958, his first Collection was published in 1982, a year earlier than the collection of Osundare who was born in 1947. Yet, Harry Garuba is often categorised as a third-generation poet while Osundare is considered as a second-generation poet. This, often, subjects periodisation to attacks and criticism. (53). The subtext here, is that, there are issues and sometimes controversies about generational classification. It must however be mentioned that classification allows for convenient understanding of literary discourse across time and space divides. It also affords trends and patterns to be established in the life category of a particular literature which facilitates measured appreciation.

Some of the problems that sometimes follow literary classification are the debate about the number of ages or generations into which Nigerian Literature can be divided. While some critics argue that it can be classified into three generations, another school of thought would rather categorise it into five. Obiwu and Adeeko classify Nigerian Literature into five generations. These are the age of slavery, migration or war as the first generation of poets some of whom include Olaudah Equiano and Ukawsaw Groniosaw. The age of this period is put between 1772 and 1899. The second-generation, put between 1900 and 1947, is the age of colonisation often referred to as ‘the Victorian Lagos’ (Echeremo and John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo) or ‘the Literature Tutelage’ (Wauthier). This age covers Nnamdi Azikwe, Daniel Fagunwa, and Cyprian Ekwensi among others. The third-generation, put at 1948 and 1966, is the age of Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, John Munonye, Buchi Emecheta among others. The fourth generation, according to Obiwu and Adeeko dates between 1967 and 1987. It is called ‘the oil boom generation’. This period features writers like Tanure Ojaide, Festus Iyayi, and Zaynab Alkali among others. The fifth generation is put at 1988 to the present include Lola Shoneyin, Akachi Ezeigbo, Maik Nwosu, Ahmed Maiwada and Joe Uchie, among others.

On the contrary, critics like Harry Garuba, Remi Raji and Sule Egya, in different works, have argued that Nigerian Literature can be classified into three generations. The first generation writing in Nigeria, from the pre independence period to the early 1970s,

focused on colonialism, its oppressive attitudes and dogmas. This set of writers tackled colonialism and its implementers. Colonialism provided the material for them to feast on. They were heavily influenced by western writers. Timothy Materer, he asserts that:

Of significant mention is the influence of modernist poets like Gerald Manley Hopkins, Thomas Stearns Eliot and others whose creative temperament was characterized by metrical finicality, obscurantism and fragmentation, features that often stand in the way of poetic apprehension and only serve to build a cult image around poetry (1).

Though many of them were trained by the colonialists, the first generation writers frowned at the disdain that characterised the attitude and writings of the colonialists about African culture. They questioned colonial assumptions and self-assurances. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* argues and rejects the animalistic and debased portrayal of the black man in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1939). Many writers in this generation wrote back at the colonialists putting up a strong defence for their culture and humanity. This first era of modern Nigerian poets and writers in English, according to Egya, 'were concerned with culture contact that arose as a result of the colonial incursion of the white people into the country'(19). The writers – Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Gabriel Okara, Christopher Okigbo, Timothy Mofolorunso Aluko, Elechi Amadi, Flora Nwapa, and many others—were interested in responding to, or decentering, the master narrative of colonialism, consequently romanticizing their culture in order to, according to Achebe, 'teach the white men that before they came, the African cultures had existed' (45). It is worthy to note that at the core of any eco-critical initiative is the love for nature. To that extent romanticism and ecocriticism are inseparable.

Though many of these writers did not deviate from the styles of the colonialists, their writings contested imperial representations and abuse. They question colonial assumptions and self-assurances. They created works that contested the reductive conception of the African culture and people in colonial writings. They denounce any colonial superiority over the African culture. The Negritude Movement was one of such reactions to redress the European's misconceived or deliberate falsehood about the African personality. These writers counteracted the then colonial discourses that misrepresented the African culture as traditional, primitive and outlandish. Other works of these poets and writers include Wole Soyinka's *The Dance of a Forest* (1960), Cyprian

Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* (1961), John Pepper Clark's *Song of a Goat*, Adaora Lily Ulasi's *Many Things You No Understand* (1971), Christopher Okigbo's *Labyrinths with Path of Thunder* (1971) among others.

The second-generation writers otherwise termed "the post-Soyinka's generation" by Femi Abodunrin et al quoted in Olaoluwa (5), came immediately after the first generation and they are the writers whose works became published between the 1970s and 1980s. Some of the writers of this generation include Zaynab Alkali, Tess Onwueme, Bode Sowande, Kole Omotosho, Odia Ofeimun, Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan, Festus Iyayi, Abubakar Gimba, Tunde Fatunde, Tanure Ojaide, Wale Okediran, Ezenwa-Ohaeto and Catherine Acholonu. The poets of this generation had a different poetic tradition hallmarked by the simplicity of language and an enduring love for orature. According to Niyi Osundare, quoted in Olaoluwa:

Theirs...is the literature of social command, extremely sensitive to the social realities around them, but without losing sight of the aesthetic imperative of their works. This generation shocked African literature with a combativeness and radicalism never experienced before. The thematic preoccupation remains the desperate situation of Africa (7).

They made poetry, people-centred. They re-interpreted the notion of poetry being obscure and brought it down to the level of the ordinary man. Ojaide says, "The language of [the second era of] African poetry taking a cue from traditional poetry aims at the clarity of expression . . . the poets used simple language to match their concern for the common people" (84). They, being the conscience of the society, identified with the people and championed their causes. They ventilated the concerns, yearnings and aspirations of the people.

Many in this category were trained by the first generation writers. The writing of this era was steeped in Socialist/Marxist ideology. For these poets according to Osundare 'Art has the power to touch. Art affects. And anything that affects, changes people, changes communities' (55). They condemned and criticised the social order of their time. Literature to many of the writers and poets of the age must be pressed into socio-political concerns hence this generation of writers wrote in support of the masses. Egya says:

These poets are so powered by the Marxist ideology and are so vigorous in their enterprise that the flourishing of national

imagination, by which we mean the use of creative writing, a product of imagination, to make important political statements and redirect people's thinking towards positive change, is often rooted in their generation which is why Stuart Brown concludes that "it has been in the post-independence era that the idea of the poet as agitator and social commentator - indeed of poetry-in- English as an alternative forum for political debate - has really taken root" (2).

The poets of the second-generation moved away from the colonial representations and foraged a dangerous and devious path of confronting the gun with the pen. It was a daunting experience yet they threw themselves into it to save themselves and the people from the terrorising fangs of tyrannical and oppressive soldiers and maximum rulers.

Poets of the second-generation developed their own literary aesthetics to conform to the protest content of their art and for ease of understanding for their audience. They shunned the patterned, metric and rhythmic flow of western poetry to reflect the disorder that characterised their environment.. Ezenwa-Ohaeto quoted in Egya justifies the rupture of form by poets of this generation when he opines that:

The desires of the poets to eliminate textual impediments unclog poetic syntax and infuse the poems with the oral flavour of the rich and variegated Nigerian culture, hinged on [the] conscious reaction to make more people enjoy poetry, despite their occupations, in spite of their preconceived ideas of the poetic craft, and not withstanding their levels of intellectual sophistication (2).

These poets had more preference for content than form. For them the message was more biting and more important than the form in which it was presented. They have continued to influence the third-generation in not emphasising form but in giving preference to content. Poetry, for them, was a potent tool to engage the military on whose shoulders all the malfunctions of the Nigerian system were heaped. Some of the works of these poets and writers include Kole Omotosho's *The Curse* (1976), Bode Sowande's *A Sanctus for Women* (1979), Femi Fatoba's *Petals of Thought*, Omolara – Ogundipe Leslie *Sew the Old Days* (1985) Tunde Fatunde's *No More Oil Boom* (1985), Niyi Osundare's *Songs of the Market Place* (1983) and *Moonsong* (1988), Odia Ofeimun's *The Poet Lied* (1980), Funso Aiyejina's *A letter to Linda* (1988), Tanure Ojaide's *Children of Iroko* (1973) and *Labyrinths of the Delta* (1986) among others). In a similar vein, Funsho Ayejina in "Recent Nigerian poetry in English: An alter-native tradition" (1988), identifies the second-generation of Nigerian poets as the exclusive promoters of socially-responsive

poetry, while labelling the older generation of Nigerian poets with a different preoccupation.

The emergence of the third-generation writings can be traced to the 1980s and was first associated with the poetic genre at the beginning. Its subjects and themes smacked of the oil boom and the ironic poor conditions of the mass of the people. Harry Garuba's *Voices from the Fringe* (1988) heralded the birth of this generation. Other earlier works of this generation are Omowunmi Segun's *The Third Dimple* (1990), Karen King Aribisala *Our Wives and Other Stories* (1991) Sola Osofisan's *The Living and The Dead* (1991), Biyi Bandele's *The Undertaker and Other Dreams* (1991) Remi Raji's *A Harvest of Laughters* (1997), among others. Recent writers in this generation include Chimmanda Adichie, Helon Habila, Tade Ipadeola, Ogaga Ifowodo, Lola Shoneyin, Ahmed Maiwada and so on.

Egya lists some of the earliest collections of this generation of poets as follows: *Poets in Their Youths* (1989) edited by Uche Nduka and Osita Ike; *A Volcano of Voices* (1999) edited by Steve Shaba; *25 New Nigerian Poets* (2000), edited by Toyin Adewale; *Let the Dawn Come: Voices from North-East Nigeria* (2000), edited by Idris O. Amali; *Five Hundred Nigerian Poets* (Volume 1, 2005), edited by Jerry Agada; *Camouflage: Best of Contemporary Nigerian Writing* (2006), edited by Nduka Otiono and Odo Okoyendo; *Crossroads: An Anthology of Poems in Honour of Christopher Okigbo* (2008), edited by Patrick Oguejiefor and Uduma Kalu; and *Pyramids: An Anthology of Poetry from Northern Nigeria* (2008), edited by Ismail Bala Garba and Abdullahi Ismaila (49). Egya also says that the thematic preoccupations of this group 'show that the entire body of Nigerian poetry, given its organic, dialogic connection with history, continues to push new frontiers in the country's struggles to achieve nationhood' (49). This generation is remarkably different from the other generations in many regards. They were out on a revisionist journey querying and questioning hitherto socio-political constructs upon which certain assumptions were made and received. Adesanmi and Dunton describe the generation as one 'in which the tropes of Otherness and sub urbanity are being remapped by questioning erstwhile totalities such as history, nation, gender, and their representative symbolgies' (10). The environment is another other that should be added to this list. This generation of writers was faced with difficult socio-political situations in their time such as oppressive military rule and indiscriminate detentions, arrant killings, indiscriminate

arrests, challenging economic situations, poor infrastructures and leviathan sleaze, to mention a few.

For the generation, revisionism was therefore a major survival strategy and a way to reshape the world. Also, the third-generation poets were more engaging with contemporary issues that affected the lives of the ordinary people. Most of them veered off the discourse around colonialism that pre occupied most Nigerian literature for the greater part of the century. They were more concerned with the issues of the moment, especially those that made living a good life almost impossible for the ordinary people. They were vexed with the atrophying social conditions that characterised the existence. Little wonder that Niyi Osundare refers to this generation as “an angry generation” (21). Egya captures the thematic preoccupations of poets of this generation much more succinctly when he asserts that

Poets of this generation attempt to chronicle those years and define the cruelty with which those dictators thrashed the land. Apart from harking back to the years of suffering, they philosophize, with generous sympathy to the ordinary people, on the current psychic collapse and frustration in the land, which are natural consequences of the military dictatorships (2).

The preoccupation of the third-generation of Nigerian poets is also further surmised by one of the very brilliant minds of the period Remi Raji, who itemised the concerns of the generation thus:

to engage in intimate dialogues and interrogation of years and decades of despondency, to confront the outrage of tyranny, to plant hope where none is imagined, to explode the myth of silence and give voice to the speechless, to pluck laughter from the howling winds, . . . and above all, to be the active child of Optimism in the midst of dire Pessimism (24).

Raji’s opinion forms the major strand of the preoccupation of the third-generation to date though constantly reviewed along the lines of the changing dynamics in the society. Poets and writers of this age have picked up the gauntlet, engaging these issues in different genres in ways never seen before. The poignancy and the pungency of the tone of condemnation of the ills and rot in the Nigerian system always and easily exposes their fury and impatience with the continuation of that sordidness.

They are the authors of a new kind of poetry. Garuba, quoted in Adesanmi and Dunton, submits ‘that the new poetry demonstrates from the totalised pivots of antecedent Nigerian poetic practices: cultural nationalism and its centralising myths of transcendental nationhood’ (17). This is a clear departure from the ideology of the poetry of the first generation Nigerian poets. Egya says that ‘the third-generation poets emerging from their threnodic work have an *aggressive* vision, powered by a righteous rage, to reclaim their nation, its psyche and collective dream, from the claws of the military oppressors’ (50). Egya further submits that this generation, led by Osundare, Ofeimun and Ojaide, ‘step out boldly with radical poetics and confrontational praxis, wrenching poetry from the sublime rhetoric of modernist craft to the blunt expression of a communal vision, howling at oppressors in stylized orature, the new poets, already immersed in the intensity of the oppression that defied the venom of the earlier poets, invest their metaphors with anguished threnody. Perhaps because of the level of despoliation, the nadir of inhumanity, the forceful suppression of their arts and egos, the utter helplessness and pessimism, in the land, the new poets choose to wail for the land; they weep; some of them are pessimistic, knowing that they are engaged in an impossible struggle’ (50). According to Biakolo quoted in Raji (26), the third generation are “tortured souls.

Poetry was the genre with which many of the writers in this generation gained prominence. Indeed at the time, the poetry genre was the most popular genre of all the genres. Adesanmi and Dunton adduce the reason for this:

The dominance of poetry in the early years of the generation was reinforced by a combination of factors. First was ANA's legitimization of poetry as the major genre of its emergent members prizes such as the All Africa Okigbo prize for poetry - sponsored by Soyinka - and, later, the ANA-Cadbury prize for poetry, both of far more visible and privileged than the prose and drama. Furthermore, ANA's sponsorship of publications also concentrated on poetry. In conjunction with Concord Press of Nigeria, ANA sponsored publication of prize-winning manuscripts such as Afam Akeh's *Stolen Moments*, Uche Nduka's *Flower Child*, Emman Shehu's *Questions for Brother*, Esiaba Irobi's *Cotyledons*, Idzia Ahmad's *A Shout Across the Wall* and Kemi Atanda Ilori's *Amnesty* (4).

Another factor that helped poetry dominate the first decade of the third-generation Nigerian Writers can be ascribed to the late Sesan Ajayi, Akeh, Nwakanma, Osha, and Otiono. They were all poets but also editors of literary pages in newspapers, journals and

magazines – outlets which featured penetrating commentaries, book reviews and interviews. Their preference for poetry could have influenced the rise of the genre. Sesan Ajayi, for instance, published his Collection *A Burst of Fireflies* in 1991 and many of his peers too later followed.

The Poets of the third-generation are also able to develop a distinct style. They moved away from what Harry Garuba calls the ‘ritualistic centre’ of the first and second-generation save for a few ones amongst them who preferred the ‘traditionalist urtext’. These exceptions include Femi Osofisan and Niyi Osundare. Adesanmi and Dunton say ‘the departure from this urtext is, arguably, the most significant distinguishing feature of Nigeria's third-generation poetry’ (16). This break affords the third-generation poets a wide creative space that engendered in them a fecund production of varied and diverse literary works with much thematic fluidity and robustness. Adesanmi and Dunton also aver some of the features that mark the generation:

The absence of a "centre" constructed on a foundation of historical and traditional totalities makes for a much more expansive creative space, fluid plot, faster-paced narrative, language shorn of the domestication-impulse of the first and second-generation writers. Setting is almost always urban and ambience is equally euromodernist (16).

A major concern of the third-generation poets was the people with whom they have become inextricably attached. To this end, they domesticated language. While they wrote in English, they wrote in a manner that the mass of the people would easily understand. Some of them wrote in pidgin. Some of the poems of Mamman Vatsa’s were written in pidgin. They use day to day images and symbols that the people can easily identify with. Their themes are people oriented and their styles accessible. Most of them are writer – activists who are not only ready to speak for the people but would, if need be, engage in real activism to forge a change in their societies.

The classification into three generations seems more real and less superfluous. The fact that this classification started right from the colonial era, up to the creation of the Nigerian state and to the modern Nigeria makes the classification real and easy to relate with. Classifying Nigerian Literature, before the emergence of the Nigerian state, seems a little supernumerary. This study is anchored on the Third-generation Nigerian Poetry in

English being the generation that displays the greatest preoccupation with ecocriticism in the works of the three generations.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

This study seeks to look at some representative work, of some third-generation Nigerian poets, with a view to identifying whether there has been a shift in the portrayal of nature in the works of literature from other generations of Nigerian poets especially amidst the many ecological challenges facing the country now. This study seeks to know how far and how well, efforts have gone in the direction of portraying environmental issues to reflect the current environmental challenges being faced in the country today. This work also analyses the selected works, against the different dimensions of ecocriticism to reflect its level of consciousness as reflected in the selected works. Many Nigerians depend on nature and its products as farmers, fishermen and as people who consume natural products. Many of Nigeria's original forests have disappeared due to logging, illegal mining, excavation, mechanised farming, city expansion, road expansion, land reclamation, and industrialisation among others. The consequence of all these includes flooding, desertification, and loss of plants, animals and humans that depend on these forests. Other ecological problems in Nigeria are loss of natural habitat, terrorism, pollution, oil spills, gully erosion and urbanisation. African people have come to contend with all of these and these issues have been properly represented in the Literature.

Issues of climate change are also threatening human existence, even on a global scale. The enormity of issues of the environment, in Nigeria and the world, and indeed, the need to change the human attitude towards nature and the environment is the reason behind this study. This is because at the core of most of these ecological problems is the nonchalant attitude of humans and the long-held belief that nature is meant to be exploited, despoiled and degraded. This study stems from the need to use literature, to cause attitudinal change, on issues of the environment through the right portrayal of nature and the environment in the works of literature.

There is a need for literary discourse to begin to engage issues of nature and the environment in Nigeria more than before. This is to bring the issue of nature and the environment to the front burner to galvanise interest in the writers and for the readers to

take a more conscious interest in the issues of nature and the environment. This, ultimately, is to change human attitude to nature and the environment so that the earth system and humanity can be saved. To this extent, issues surrounding environmental thoughts are essential to be pointed out to the world. This accounts for the reason why eco-critical literary scholars are always interested in altering perceptions and ethical considerations for and in support of the environment. This study taps into this notion, at attempting to redress some of the ecological challenges, in Nigeria, through attitudinal and behavioural changes.

1.3 Aim of the Study

This study aims to examine how some third-generation Nigerian poets have portrayed nature and the environment in their works. This is to show how extensive is the portrayal and whether such portrayal is reflective of the diverse ecological challenges that the country is currently facing. The study would also examine whether such portrayal is capable of changing people's attitude.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

- i) attempt an eco-critical reading of some selected poems that fall under third-generation Nigerian poetry in English. This is to examine how recent Nigerian poets have portrayed nature and the environment in their works;
- ii) examine the agency of materiality and how this has been reflected in the selected works;
- iii) find out if the portrayal of nature is explicative of environmental issues in the selected works of third-generation Nigerian poetry in English;
- iv) investigate the relationship between ecocriticism and animism in the selected works;
- v) investigate the parallels drawn between humans and nature in the selected works;
- vi) find out ways through which poetry can help project environmental issues more than what obtains in the present.

1.5 Research Questions

This study also attempt to answer the following questions:

- i) how have the selected Third-generation Nigerian poets portray nature and the environment in their works?
- ii) how has the agency of materiality been reflected in the selected works?
- iii) is the portrayal of nature and the environment explicative of environmental issues?
- iv) are there animist reflections in the handling of ecocriticism by the selected poets of this age?
- v) how has parallel been drawn between humans and nature in the selected works?
- vi) how can poetry help project and call more attention to environmental issues?

1.6 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to an eco-critical reading of selected collection of poems of some Third-generation Nigerian poets that are listed below:

- i) Tade Ipadeola, *The Sahara Testaments* (2012)
- ii) Tade Ipadeola, *The Rain Fardel* (2005)
- iii) Ogaga Ifowodo, *A Good Mourning* (2016)
- iv) Ogaga Ifowodo, *The Oil Lamp* (2005)
- v) Remi Raji, *Sea of My Mind* (2013)
- vi) Ahmed Maiwada, *We're Fish* (2017)

1.7 Justification for the Study

The selected collections are from third-generation Nigerian poets across the country. Their works have been identified, as reflecting a rich ecocritical consciousness. Also, the selected works manifest the geographical and cultural spread of the Nigerian literary landscape. Six collections from four poets have been selected. Two collections are selected from two of the selected poets who have over the years shown a remarkable

disposition and commitment to ecological inclinations. This is to x-ray and discern the pattern and the flow of eco vision that they have and how much of that has been reflected in their works. One each is selected from the other two poets.

Tade Ipadeola is a Nigerian poet who has shown a consistent commitment to nature and environmental issues. Two of his works have been selected. These are *The Sahara Testament* (2012) and *The Rain Fardel* (2005). From these two works and others, a trend and a commitment to eco-critical issues have been identified. He won the prestigious Nigeria Prize for Literature in 2013, the highest literary Prize in Nigeria and on the African continent with *The Sahara Testament* (2012). Also in 2009, he won the Delphic Laurel with his Yoruba Poem ‘Songbird’ in South Korea. Ogaga Ifowodo is a major voice in Nigerian poetry and an eco-activist of the Niger Delta bent. Two of his works selected are *A Good Mourning* (2016) *The Oil Lamp* (2005.) The last set of anthologies include Remi Raji’s *Sea of My Mind* (2013) and Ahmed Maiwada’s *We’re Fish* (2017). While some kind of spread may have been achieved with this selection that is Ipadeola and Raji from the South West, Ifowodo from the South-South and Maiwada from the North West, it is instructive to inform that their works do not reflect any such regional labelling or politics. Indeed, the content of their works reflects a national outlook. It is also worthy to note that they belong to the third-generation of Nigerian poets and their works are largely representative of the temper and mode of the generation. It must however be stated that the selected works have been picked as some of the best for the theory and concept of ecocriticism that is being explored. This consideration, therefore, vitiates any desire for a geographical spread or any political convenience.

These works shall serve as the basis upon which ecocriticism shall be properly discussed. The works shall be used to illustrate the different colourations of ecocriticism and to explore the relationship between literature and the environment.

The choice of poetry, as the genre in which this discourse shall be situated, is apt in the sense that the object of ecocriticism as a literary discourse is to ultimately change our perception and our attitude about the relationship between literature and the environment. This, it is believed, can be achieved if the environment is portrayed as a needed or integral being in the ecosystem and not as something to be exploited, despoiled and destroyed. Poetry has quick access to the mind of men and it can quickly and steadily

carry didactic messages faster than other genres. Its musical nature too is an advantage in memorizing and retaining moral messages. It is therefore not surprising that most religious books are written in poetry. The Holy Bible, particularly, instantiates this argument remarkably as the books of Psalm, Proverbs and Job among others are written in poetry.

This study shall also attempt a comparative study of the different selections and poems to consider the styles, techniques, content and such other poetic devices adopted by the poets to discuss eco-critical issues in creating eco-critical consciousness in the reader. All the generic features of the different collections and poems shall also be analysed.

1.8 The Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it would serve as a wholesale and comprehensive treatment of nature and environment in third-generation Nigerian poets. Hitherto, there have been few eco-critical studies of Nigerian Literature and the few concentrated more on the novel genre and the Niger Delta. Not much of eco-critical studies, however, have been done on the third-generation Nigerian poets. This study shall look at the portrayal of nature and the environment among the third-generation Nigerian poets in a comprehensive manner beyond studies in the past that have either looked at nature from the romantic point of view or from the point of view of pressing nature into some socio-political activism. For instance, many ecocritical works on the Niger Delta aim at denouncing exploitation which has brought untold hardship to the people and degraded the Niger Delta environment, in cataclysmic proportions. While this is a plausible eco-critical approach to literature in the social dimension, it however does not represent the totality of the dimensions of ecocriticism.

This study moves away from viewing nature only in terms of ready evidence that it provides against exploitation, but would consider ecocriticism from a broader perspective taking into consideration some of the dimensions of ecocriticism. The study critically examines eco - critical consciousness in the selected poems. The study also provides a base for the different handling of nature by the different poets whose works have been selected, noting their varied styles and perspectives. It is also believed that this study will

make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge and serve as a worthy anchorage for other researchers in the field of literature and environmental studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter examines some of the past efforts in ecocriticism before it matured into its present state. It is a review of the different shades of ecocriticism with a view to updating this work with the current realities in the theory. This chapter also looks at how ecocriticism has fared with other theories, especially postcolonial theory. The poetry genre, in which this study is implanted, is also reviewed.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Ecocriticism shall be the basis and the framework of this study. The study shall, however, be viewed from a postcolonial ecocriticism point of view. This is so because ecocriticism and postcolonial theory have shared semblances that can facilitate a valuable exposition of the works under review. Ecocriticism, as defined by Lawrence Buell is the ‘study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis’ (1). Lawrence Buell’s definition shall guide this study. Also, the selected poems shall be analysed based on the different waves and shades of ecocriticism.

2.1.1 Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism started predominantly as a white movement, it therefore, lacks the institutional support base to engage multicultural and cross-cultural concerns in a comprehensive manner. (Glottfelty xxv). The application of ecological efforts to postcolonial criticism is relatively new. Its introduction has led to debate into issues of ‘settler culture’ and the use of territorial metaphor to reflect on the changing patterns of land use and spatial perception. It has also brought to the fore, matters of the geopolitics of colonial occupation and expansion, the rival claim of western property rights and native/indigenous title, destructive encounters between conflicting ecosystems, and the mutual entanglement of biological and cultural factors, in providing the ideological basis for imperial rule. (Connell and Marsh 172). Huggan believes that many of the issues,

here, were motivated by a sense of collective historical guilt and the vicarious trauma' (172).and what Rosaldo calls the 'imperialist nostalgia'(69-70)

The intersection between postcolonial ecological concerns and ecocriticism is gaining momentum in recent times. Postcolonial ecocriticism according to Mukherjee 'complex interplay of environmental categories such as water, land, energy, habitat, migration with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict, literature and visual arts' (177). He asserts in the same vein that 'any field purporting to attach interpretative importance to the environment must be able to trace the social, historical and material co-ordinates of categories such as forest, rivers, bio-regions and species'(145).

The historical category is a major connecting point between postcolonial and eco-critical studies. Since postcolonial studies is a rejection of a point of view, fostered on the colonised communities through education and religion, one which includes a reaction and portrayal of nature and environment, postcolonial ecocriticism thus becomes a veritable marriage where discourses vending off colonial imagination can be implanted. In ecocriticism and postcolonial theory are found, in the words of Dominic Heads, 'an informed recentring common to the different branches of post modernism such as post colonialism and ecologism' (28-29). Mukherjee (178) gives the historical account of the postcolonial and eco studies and submits that both fields developed and entrenched 'roughly in the same historical moment'. Similarly, SueEllen Campbell finds common grounds between deep ecology and poststructuralism that 'both criticize the traditional sense of a separate, independent, authoritative centre of value or meaning: both substitute the idea of networks (131).

Postcolonial ecocriticism is often faced with the problem of the amorphousness of terms, definition and conceptualisation and it has been argued in many quarters that the term is 'conflicted' and 'contradictory'. Though postcolonialism projects a review of all colonial manifestations, be it materialist, historical and ideological, which may also include environmental issues, the term postcolonial ecocriticism has created a focus in postcolonial discourse concentrating on the issue of ecology. The argument about definition, not covering the wild expanse of issues of the environment may seem plausible, in the sense that a strait-jacketed approach, in definition seems unattainable. Suffice to mention that many great scholars such as William Rueckert, Cheryl Glotfelty

and Harold Fromm and Greg Gerrard among others have attempted and presented acceptable definitions. The goal of postcolonial ecocriticism is however too important to be lost in a qualm of definition.

Any major study of ecocriticism in postcolonial communities, has always contained a comprehensive critique of European modernity such as capitalism, colonialism, imperialism and patriarchy. The first wave of postcolonial and ecocritics therefore, emphasised the role of history in literature and culture. Pablo Mukherjee asserts 'that when first wave postcolonial and eco theories attempted to relate 'texts' to the world, the relative paucity of historico/materialist conceptualization meant that they often failed to conceptualise the kind of progressive universality to which they aspired'(179). The second wave introduced the socio historical critique of the colonialist past and designed a new response to it. Most of the writings of the second wave spanned from the 90s and the radical change in thinking was propelled by some catastrophic events of the period. Notable amongst these include the gulf war, the attack on the United States and the Twin Towers among others. These events altered the perception, the interpretation and the resolution modes of the postcolonial and eco theorists. They, therefore, set out to find a resolution to some of these problems in an alternative way. There was in the words of Mukherjee 'the urgency of finding conceptual and practical pathways towards challenging the deadly banality of globalisation' (181).

According to Mukherjee, this development also affords the practitioners of postcolonial and ecocriticism to continue to 'analyse their own institutional locations; they must analyse a range of discourse and policies that shape the global North-South relations' (181). The subjects of this discourse are numerous and vary from one point of the world to another. For instance, issues of refugee, migration, diaspora, terrorism and so on, have their ecological dimensions localised by peculiarities. These are conveniently taken up in postcolonial ecocritical discourses. Indeed this consideration, Mukherjee posits led led to the 'historisation and materialization of both the environment and culture' (181) because the crises had historical, cultural, socio-political and environmental consequences. The essence of environmental perspectives in literary studies is a way to respond to contemporary pressures and challenges of the global environmental crisis. This view, though not the only concern of ecocriticism, has projected ecocriticism and made it attractive to many disciplines. It should, however, be noted, that even before now, issues

of place, which seems to be the focal point of ecocriticism, has somewhat been accommodated in scholarship, though in modes far less appreciable, especially in forms such as surrounding, setting, situation or atmosphere. These elements, hitherto, got peripheral attention just like ecological issues that ecocriticism has today brought to the front burner of academic, social and political discourses. For instance, it is instructive to note that literary and cultural scholars have been ‘developing ecologically informed criticism and theory since the seventies’ (Glottfelty and Fromm xvi).

More than anything, however, ecocriticism has become an omnibus discipline for all hitherto disparaged disciplines and thought processes about nature, place and culture. A major thinking along this line, is the position of place in culture and vice versa - a theme that has been well espoused by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*. Place has always been associated with culture and culture has always been a product of space.

Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have attempted to reconceptualise social, spatial and bodily structure outside the classifications, categorization and boundaries usually imposed on them. The concept is about how experiences of place are affected by modernisation and globalisation processes or the way ‘locality as a property or diacritic of social life comes under siege in modern societies. (Appadurai,179). The importance of place in perception and behaviour has become a great debate in the humanities and especially cultural studies. There have been various attempts at addressing this issue too, even in ecocriticism. One such is deterritorialisation, seen as a detachment of social and cultural practices from their ties of place. It is the loss of the ‘natural’ relation of culture to geographical and social territories (Candini, 229). It relates to the compression of the global and the local in what Roland Robertson calls ‘glocal’ (26). On the other hand, reterritorialisation is the attempt to realign culture with place. Place in this context becomes a major influencer of culture. It breeds conservatism and an inextricable attachment to place; hence communities are wont to fight to retain their land, which they see as their common heritage and worth dying for, if need be. The argument and counter-argument of these concepts continue to rage in literary discourse and it appears it will for a long time.

Another view of place is the global ecological citizenship, which is a devotion to human and other ecological issues. This view believes that nature has an extrinsic value for all. It

counters the view that nature has only an intrinsic value, a view that is considered anti-eco-centric especially for believing that humans are not part of nature. (Curtin 189). This is one of the notions that create a stumbling block to ecocriticism in proffering solutions to contemporary social and environmental glitches. The idea that man is not part of nature presupposes that man can maltreat nature.

The challenge of a conceptual framework, of postcolonial ecocriticism, is found in the dissimilar view of western ecocriticism and that of others. While western ecocriticism is what Alfred Crosby, in his book, *Ecological Imperialism*, calls ‘environmental terrorism and political tyranny’ or ‘a juxtaposition of the violent appropriation of indigenous land, (64), postcolonial ecocriticism condemns and reacts sharply to such purloin. It however, promotes cultural and primordial attachment to place. Ecological imperialism has been defined by Deane Curtin as ‘the connection in theory and practice of race and the environment so that the oppression of one is connected to and supported by the oppression of the other’. (145). This view is also corroborated by Val Plumwood’s ‘hegemonic centring’, which underlies racism, sexism, and colonisation and such other historically connected materials which according to her have been conscripted to exploit nature while minimizing non-human claims to earth. (4). Plumwood argues that it is ‘hegemonic centring’ that accounts for environmental racism and the continued exploitation of the non-human elements. The justification for colonisation stems from this basis of understanding non- European lands and the people and animals that inhabited them as ‘spaces’ ‘unused’ ‘underused’ or ‘empty’ (53). This is in the same way that Eurocentrism justifies indigenous people and cultures as primitive and less rational and closer to children and nature, (53). In shaking off all forms of imperialist ideology Huggan and Tiffin adduce that:

A re-imagining and reconfiguration of the human place in nature necessitates an integration of the category of the human itself and the ways in which the construction of ourselves against nature – with the hierarchisation of life forms that construction implies – has been and remains complicit in colonialist and racist exploitation from time of imperial conquest to present day (53).

Postcolonial ecocriticism, therefore, queries the very ideological standpoints upon which European conquest and foreign domination are founded. Postcolonial ecocriticism helps

to generate an alternative view about the issue of nature and the environment from the hitherto forced exploitative view on colonised minds. This probably informs why Cara Cilano and Elizabeth Deloughrey refer to postcolonial ecocriticism as ‘aesthetics committed to politics’ (84). Postcolonial ecocriticism ordinarily evolves from two points of view. One, is to grind issues of the environment from the socio-political angle, especially relating it to the exploitation of resources for political or economic gains. Two, is the commitment to nature on pastoral impulse or appreciating nature for its own sake. In all, Huggan and Tiffin summarise the objects of postcolonial ecocriticism thus:

What postcolonial ecocriticism alliance brings out, above all is the need for a broadly materialist understanding of the changing relationship between people, animals and the environment – one that requires attention in turn, to the politics of representation as well as to those more specific processes of mediation that can be recuperated for anti-colonial critique (79).

Ecocriticism has the potency to open minds to the forces at play, in socio-political relations in the treatment of the environment. It also has the power to stir the mind into rejection and protestations; hence the advocacy functions it sometimes performs. This advocacy function can be in dual forms, such as in relation to the real world we inhabit and to the imaginary spaces it opens up for contemplation of how the real world can be transformed. This has made Huggan and Tiffin opine that ‘postcolonial ecocriticism preserves the aesthetics function of the literary text while drawing attention to its social and political usefulness, its capacity to set out symbolic guidelines for the material transformation of the world’ (79). The advocacy strength or the protest powers of postcolonial ecocriticism has made some critics refer to it as eco-socialist. Reacting to the eco-socialist label, Anthony Vital in his essay ‘*Toward an African Ecocriticism*’, suggests that ‘reconciling postcolonial criticism and eco/environmental criticism might need taking the complex interplay of social history with the natural world and how language both shapes and reveals such interactions (90). The point however, is that not all eco-critical discourses are eco-socialist in nature. Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt emphasise the importance of paying attention to a variety of issues or problems related to postcolonial environments:

As we see it, postcolonial green scholarship must define itself not as a narrow theoretical discourse, but as a relatively inclusive methodological framework that is responsive to ongoing political and ecological problems and to diverse kinds of

texts... Our goal is not to suggest a universalizing approach through some magical half-way, in between 'common ground,' but rather to grapple with the issues that each of the various writers presented here offers us (9).

The point however, is that not all eco-critical discourses are eco-socialist in nature.

Postcolonial ecocriticism rejects the idea of development that propels the growth of global corporate interest and puts forward a development that takes cognizance of the people's culture, history and future. It frowns at development that destroys the people's habitat and preoccupation and reduces humans to expendable materials. This is the attraction and the nature of postcolonial ecocriticism. It is a theory that is responsive to the socio-political and the psychological needs of a people who have been battered by political bastardisation, economic slavery, colonialism, intellectual subjugation and crass servitude.

2.1.2 The Sphere of Ecocriticism

The sphere of ecocriticism is the whole of the earth. The earth is the third planet from the sun between Venus and Mars. It is made up of several unique properties, characteristics and composition which all affect the processes of the earth differently. Each of these properties and elements in Earth's system is largely categorised into one of the four major subsystems called spheres. The spheres of the earth describe and harbours great interconnected mysteries that make this planet habitable. A study of the earth system aside from showing the natural processes and cycles of the Earth, also espouses and enriches our understanding of Earth and the environment. The earth system can be categorised into four major systems which are called the spheres. These spheres are lithosphere (land) hydrosphere (water) biosphere (living things) and atmosphere (air). These spheres are often further broken down into sub spheres.

Lithosphere

The lithosphere is made up of all the hard and solid landmass on the earth's surface, the semi-solid rocks (molten materials) underneath the earth crust, and the liquid rocks in the inner core of the earth. The lithosphere includes mountain ranges, rocks, huge plains, flat areas and deep valleys. The lithosphere consists of layers, different physically and chemically. The lithosphere is further divided into sub-spheres namely the crust, the mantle, the outer core, and the inner core. The outermost layer comprises of loose soil in

nutrients, oxygen and silicon. Beneath this is a thin, solid crust of oxygen and silicon. Following this, is the semi-solid mantle of oxygen, silicon, iron and magnesium. Underneath this, is a liquid outer core of nickel and iron which is also replicated at the centre of the earth.

Hydrosphere

The hydrosphere consists of solid, liquid, and gaseous water of the planet. The natural earth features depicting the hydrosphere are the rivers, streams, lakes, seas, oceans and water vapour. A small portion of the water in the hydrosphere is fresh, that is, non-salty. This water flows as precipitation from the atmosphere down to Earth's surface, as rivers and streams along Earth's surface, and as groundwater beneath Earth's surface. Most of Earth's freshwater, however, is frozen while ninety-seven percent of Earth's water is said to be salty. The salty water collects in deep valleys along Earth's surface are referred to as oceans. Oceans carry most of the salty water while the majority of lakes and rivers carry freshwater.

The differences in the level of temperature often cause water to change its physical states. For instance, water, near the Poles is very cold while water near the Equator is very warm. In a similar vein, extremely low temperatures, like those found at the Poles cause water to freeze into a solid-state such as a polar icecap, a glacier, or an iceberg while extremely high temperatures like those found at the equator cause water to evaporate into gas.

Biosphere

The biosphere consists of all the living things on the planet. This includes humans and all the microorganisms, plants, and animals of Earth. Living things in a biosphere form ecological communities, otherwise called biomes, according to the physical surroundings of an area. Ecological communities interact together with the physical aspects of the earth including the hydrosphere, lithosphere, and the atmosphere. There are six main biomes present in the biosphere. These are deserts, forests, grasslands, aquatic, tundra, and chaparral.

Atmosphere

The atmosphere is the air in the Earth's system. The atmosphere is a mixture of nitrogen (about 78%), oxygen (about 21%), and other gasses (about 1%) such as carbon dioxide (0.039%), argon (0.93%) and the rest are traced to gases (krypton, neon, helium, and xenon). The atmosphere extends from below the planet's surface to above the planet's surface. The atmosphere consists of different layers. The upper portion of the atmosphere protects the organisms of the biosphere from the sun's ultraviolet radiation. It also absorbs and emits heat and regulates temperature. The atmosphere consists of five layers namely the troposphere, stratosphere, mesosphere, thermosphere and the exosphere. These layers are different in chemical composition and temperature.

2.2 Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the environment. The philosophy behind ecocriticism is an attempt to redress the relegation of nature in literature and literary criticism. It is an attempt to bring the issue of the environment to the fore, as a contribution to addressing the challenges that ecological issues have posed in the world today. Writing about nature can rightly be said to be the precursor of ecocriticism. But interest in it grew due to global concerns for horrendous yet varied environmental crisis that have continually threatened the world. The rise of ecocriticism can be traced to the early 1990s with the publication of Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* in 1995 and Cheryll Glotfelty's and Harold Fromm's collection, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, in 1996. Ecocriticism is however said to have been fully developed into a literary theory by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, which was published in 1996. (Ugwu 19). They defined ecocriticism as 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' (Ugwu 19).

Though Josef W. Meeker's essay of 1974 entitled "*The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*" was the first to give a hint of ecocriticism, William Rueckert was the first to coin the term 'ecocriticism' in his 1978 essay "*Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*". Rueckert meant to experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature. He was however, interested in

reading texts *as* ecosystems, not in reading texts *about* ecosystems. Rueckert argues that texts and humans create a kind of literary ecosystem, one in which ‘poetry specifically acts as an infinite energy source from which culture is manifested to create creativity and community, and when their energy is released and flows out into others, to again raise matter from lower to higher order’ (111). Rueckert thereby sets an agenda that would be the basis of ecocriticism.

The major concerns of ecocriticism are further highlighted by Glotfelty in the "Introduction" to *Writing for an Endangered World*, (2001) where Buell takes seriously the limitations of his earlier work and ecocriticism, stating that:

Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, an ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture. Understanding how nature and culture constantly influence and construct each other is essential to an informed ecocriticism. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land. As a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman (xix).

There is a nexus between nature and culture, and this accounts for why the two concepts are complementary. Whatever affects one affects the other. Murphy (1998) opines that, “Ecocriticism can be employed in studying any literary work insofar as that work reveals or reflects something about nature and humanity’s place in, with, or against it” (34). The argument and the counter-argument about the place of nature in culture and vice versa is a long and deep one. Suffice to say however that the two influence each other in a complementary routine.

2.2.1 The Birth and Waves in Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, though a relatively new discipline, has since grown in areas previously untouched by literary theory. However, despite significant development within the last thirty years, ecocriticism still exhibits great potential for further growth and cultivation (Harrington and Tallmadge xv). It emerged mostly from the study of the distinctive American tradition of non-fictional writings, based on the idea of the wilderness by Henry D. Thoreau, Mary Austin, John Muir, Wendell Berry, among others. Recognition, in the

evolution of ecocriticism is also given to the founding of the Yosemite and Yellow stone, the Sierra Club and the Nature Conservancy (Clark, 25).

Lawrence Buell, one of the earliest leading eco-critic figures, says ecocriticism is ‘a mode of vision that opens itself up as well as it can to the perception of the environment as an actual independent party entitled to consideration for its own sake; (77). Ecocentric vision in the words of Byron Caminero-Satangelo, ‘encourages a focus on nature as wilderness or outback, since in this form nature appears to be most fully separated from ‘culture,’ there to be known and valued for itself’ (63). The theory frowns at Marxism and post-structuralism for perceiving nature as part of culture. Ecocriticism’s major concerns, according to Buell, are to give the non-human ‘a voice, invest it with a value, emphasise human’s interdependence with it, decentre the human and alleviate environmental degradation’ (Buell 7 - 8).

Ecocriticism deals with issues surrounding the environment such as its exploitation and preservation, as expressed in the works of literature. The term ‘ecocriticism’, in the introduction to the *Ecocriticism Reader*, is identified simply as “a study of the relationship between Literature and the environment”. Glotfelty and Fromm highlight the objective of ecocriticism thus:

How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In addition to race, class, and gender, should place become a new critical category? Do men write about nature differently than women do? In what ways has literacy itself affected humankind's relationship to the natural world? How has the concept of wilderness changed over time? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture? ... What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies? How is science itself open to literary analysis? What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics? (xix).

Nature and the environment straddle and affect human lives in diverse forms; hence the interdisciplinary approach that ecocriticism often employs in the study of nature.

The first wave ecocritics could be said to be the precursors of the field of ecocriticism. A prominent figure among them is Thoreau, who in an attempt to answer the question “Where is the literature which gives expression to Nature decided to speak for Nature, “for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil – to regard man as an inhabitant or part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society” (180). Thoreau is regarded as a foundational figure in American nature writing and environmental studies, and Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* made him a sort of indirect founder of ecocriticism. Thoreau’s concept of nature of “absolute freedom and wildness” as a universal understanding of the natural world, held sway at a time especially in America and left many writers and critics of colour wondering where and how to find the literary nature with which they were accustomed.

Though the journey of ecocriticism could be traced to the first wave, it could also be traced to other waves of ecocriticism. First-wave ecocriticism places a greater emphasis on the preservation and protection of the natural environment, though these goals it achieves particularly through political action (Howarth 69). In the words of Lawrence Buell ‘Ecocriticism’s first wave is ‘rooted in deep ecology, tended to see nature and human beings as opposed to one another, and held that the proper response of environmental criticism should be to help protect the natural environment from the depredations of human culture’ (21). *The first-wave* ecocriticism is anti-anthropocentric in its view. It supports the bio centric view of the world by condemning any harmful human interference in the natural world, and prioritises the needs and protection of the natural environment over humans and the human environment.

On the other hand second-wave ecocriticism, aside from discerning the natural environment, casts its concerns on the human development that destroys the environment such as dams, power stations, nuclear sites and industrialisation among others, while also taking into consideration the traces of nature in urban settings (Goodbody 12). The second wave also displays a mode of representation that takes a balanced and more realistic approach to human-nature relationships by considering the symbiotic, as well as parasitic, interaction of both humanity and nature, and recognises that neither of the two exists entirely independent of each other. The second wave addressed itself to human and nonhuman concerns as well as to nature, urban and suburban environments. It also

focused on the wilderness settings and to all types of literary texts, no longer just nature texts. The second wave of ecocriticism movement fueled environmental activism around the world hence the environmental justice movement found in it a safe abode to function. The second wave adherents no longer saw humans and the environment as opposed to one another, but rather they paid attention to how they were mutually interdependent. The centrality of nature in ecocritical discourse at the time saw an attempt to steep ecocriticism more into science than the arts. Some eco-critics adopted the method of spreading the message of greenery through the natural sciences as a means of promoting a green consciousness to change the attitude of people towards a dying earth. This attempt however, led some eco-critics into believing that “ecocriticism belongs more to the “science-literate” (Buell *Environmental Criticism*14). However, William Rueckert feels otherwise. He rather would want both science and literature work together to achieve the desired environmentalism. Rueckert, explains the link between science and literature thus:

How does one engage in responsible creative and cooperative biospheric action as a reader, teacher (especially this), and critic of literature? I think that we have to begin answering this question and that we should do what we have always done: turn to the poets and then to the ecologists (113).

The third wave of the ecocriticism movement branched from romanticism, deepening its philosophical and conceptual depths. The third wave has come to be known as ‘ecophilia’ in the words of Aaron Moe (72). Ecophilia is different from Edward Wilson’s ‘Biophilia’ (1984) which refers to inherent love in all living things. Though ecophilia targets a heightened consciousness in the sensitiveness and the sensuousness of nature, it also argues for love for all things. Ecophilia, according to Seth T. Reno, has gone beyond the arguments of the first wave and second wave ecocriticism ‘by recovering the scientific, medical and philosophical valences of Romantic ecology’. Indeed, Romantic ecophilia is rooted in Nichol’s theory of ‘urbanatural roosting’, which implies eco-centric dwelling in the natural world. Ecophilia, like its parent stem romanticism, though a product of affective thinking, is opposed to industrialisation, consumer capitalism and some skewed conservative political ideology. Through ecophilia, it is believed that when humans show love for nature, it helps to divest humans of hubris, subjectivity and distinctness in relating with nature.

The third wave also tried to free ecocriticism from its American bias. Ecocriticism became tuned into a global scope, mode and frequency. It deconstructed the inherited binary of human and nature that has often privileged the former. Adherents of the third wave reckoned environmentalism as a key attribute of all texts. They also extended the frontiers of ecocriticism beyond wild and rural landscapes to cities and suburbs and expanded the scope from the forest, the wilderness and the animals to the oceans, the seas, the space and indeed all nonhuman elements.

The fourth wave which has come to be known as material ecocriticism, evolved in 2012 based on of a new materialist paradigm arising from the concurrence of cultural discourses and natural processes. The foundation for the turn to materiality was laid around the 1980s culminating from an amalgam of efforts and disciplines such as philosophy, literary and cultural studies, feminism, animal studies and a few others all querying the hitherto dualist epistemology upon which most human thought processes were rested.

According to Tuin and Dolphijn quoted in Serpil Oppermann much of material ecocriticism relies on ‘non-dualist epistemic practice’ (89). This, Oppermann believes ‘reconfigures our understanding of materiality in a relational sense as dynamic processes of life and material substance with agentic properties’ (89). Oppermann referenced Karen Barads’ *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Meaning* (2007) as a major pioneering work that led to the emergence of material ecocriticism. This effort was soon supported by many international and interdisciplinary publications. Some of these include Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), Diana Coole and Samantha Frost’s *New Materialism: Ontology, Agency and Politics* (2010), and Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin’s *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies* (2012).

These works helped in nurturing the seed of material ecocriticism. Serenella Iovino quoted in Oppermann said ‘due to this richness of voices and contributions from a range of disciplines that intersect with the environmental humanities, it is not surprising that the ‘turn to material...’ is also beginning to have effects in ecocriticism (134). *Material ecocriticism* (2014), the culmination of these efforts emphasises ‘the way material expression determine human non-human relations’ (Oppermann 91). Another key

consideration in material ecocriticism is found in Barad's definition quoted in Oppermann as the 'the ontological performance of the world in its ongoing articulation' (91). This definition implies that all things including the material have communicative engagement and should therefore be seen as part of the communicative unfolding of the world.

Material ecocriticism, in the words of Sarah Jaquette quoted in Oppermann 'spotlights a pervasive materiality as active phenomena that is "constitutive of reality"'. This is to the place of matter to environmental cultural, political and social processes. Material ecocriticism contends that there should be no division among categories such as nature, culture, human, non-human, matter and meaning as they are all 'intra-acting agencies' (Barad 33) in a continuous ever evolving meaning. In material ecocriticism is the conjoining of matter and meaning in a sequence that culture and nature interpret each other in a continual flow. This blend of portrayal of the storied matter and the narrative agency where the 'relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment' (Barad, 152), a synthesis of nature and culture or what Haraway calls 'naturecultures' in *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (1989).

The storied matter is important to both human and the non-human elements. When matter speaks, it does communicate. But do humans listen? Do humans even know how to listen to nature? Yet nature speaks to humans in a continuous, never ending discourse. Oppermann lists some of the ways nature speaks as follows"

Squids for example, tell tragic stories of their diminished ability to survive amid increasing ocean acidity. Retreating glaciers transmit stories about the earth's changing climate, blending global warming with political anxieties and social changes. Another distress story comes from the soil and concerns its excess amounts of nitrous oxides dripping into underground aquifers and reaching up to the clouds, accelerating the erosion of the ozone layer. These stories matter just as much as the telluric stories volcanoes tell of the earth's violent past or the stories fossils tell about biological evolution (95).

These are storied matter spoken by nature in ecological narratives but only meant for the discerning minds. These stories reveal the interconnected relationship that exists between human and the non-human elements of nature yet humans prefer to be oblivious of this nexus. Yet in the words of Bennett quoted in Oppermann, 'everything in a sense is alive' (95). Also, Oppermann, says 'storied matter, then, abides in every living element and

multiplicity of associations, often emerging at unusual moments when our objectifying attitude toward the world changes and becomes attentive to its voices' (96).

Storied matter, according to Iovino and Oppermann quoted in Oppermann 'is a material 'mesh' of meanings, properties and processes, in which human and non-human players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces'(96). The impulse here is that earth is not just a place but 'a story in which we belong and out of which we arose' (Oppermann 96). Material ecocriticism perceives human, nature, culture and the storied matter in terms of convergence and co-emergence, all locked in an interactive web of communication. It speaks in a complex narrative laced with a diverse metaphor for the discerning to unravel. Material ecocriticism, though new on the plane, offers a comforting alternative in the unending battle of alternate reality that incorporates the 'other'. Material ecocriticism embraces all views in a non- dualist sense, yet it pumps a powerful message to the heart of humanity to tender nature and matter for its good. It tries to instil the desired discipline and obligation in humans towards fostering in them, the need to care for nature and materiality.

Since the goal of ecocriticism is to harmonise both the human and the natural elements and that both humans and nature may live successfully in the world, then ecocriticism must be the intermix of the two. Indeed, science and poetry have been locked in a complimentary review of the notion that "people were meant to exercise dominion over nature, or that nature is a passive receptacle of the fertilizing human mind" (Newman 2). However, William Rueckert was quick to identify that 'ecocriticism must first be considered a literary theory before it is perceived a theory contingent on science and a discipline that must critique art before it does science' (56). Also, Lawrence Buell asserts that "the terms of scientific discourse have significant implications for environmental criticism of literature but do not serve as an authoritative model". The discourses of science and literature must be read both with and against each other" (19). The introduction of science to ecocriticism therefore should be seen as a way of gaining more knowledge in the analysis of literature and the environment.

2.3 Ecocriticism in Nigeria

Ecocriticism is relatively, a new branch of African literary criticism. This is so because it was not immediately received by literary critics in Africa as an objective, viable and worthy literary approach to literature. The suspicion that greeted the emergence of ecocriticism, in Africa, except for the white South Africans, who quickly got attracted to it, stems from the oppressive Western centre that the theory was coming from. Black African critics saw the ‘greening’ of literature as another attempt according to William Slaymaker quoted in Olaniyan and Quayson to ‘white out’ black Africans. The duo also attributed the slow reception of ecocriticism to its perception as ‘a hegemonic discourse from the metropolitan West’ (683). This perception, according to Slaymaker (690), caused a great delay in the reception of the theory. Another reason for this deferral is given by Ogaga Okuyade, in Gordon Collier ed. *Spheres Public and Private Western Genres in African Literature* when he says:

The African writer and critic could be equally exonerated from his late arrival into the eco-critical sphere because, over the years, African intellectuals have continued to deal with problems of socio economic and political stakes particularly the legitimacy of their governments and the moral depravity of the later (34).

This, however, does not imply that Africans have not been writing about nature before or that Africans do not appreciate nature. William Slaymaker attests to this when he writes:

Black African critics and writers have traditionally embraced nature writing, land issues and landscape themes that are pertinent to national and local cultural claims and that also function as personal reminiscences or even projections of golden age when many of the environmental evils resulting from colonialism and the exploitation of indigenous resources have been remediated (19).

Many works indeed could be cited to buttress this claim. D. O. Fagunwa’s ‘*Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*’ later translated as *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* by Wole Soyinka, Wole Soyinka’s *Idanre* and Christopher Okigbo’s *Heavensgate* as well as Niyi Osundare’s *Eye of the Earth*, among others, are few of the numerous poems that celebrate the African Landscape. Chenggyi Coral Wu (2016) also corroborates this when she says that African Environmental literature and criticism can be traced back to the 1960s, pre-dating “ecocriticism” as a specifically environment-oriented literary approach, that began

to prosper in Anglo-American literary studies, in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

Wu further argues that environmental criticism, in African literature predates ecocriticism as there has been published critical works on African literature. She cites the example of Ojung Ayuk's 1982 essay "*Environmental Decadence: A Theme in Post-Independence African Fiction*" as one example of environmental criticism produced in early African literary studies. Ayuk focused on environmental decadence, in African literature portraying the degradation of African urban environments in the African novels of the 70s. Wu further gives the example of Jacques L. Bede's "*African Town Environment in Contemporary Literature*" (1975) which provides a survey of African novelists' representations of the urban environment especially in South Africa and Nigeria (19). Bede portrays the African cities as corrupt and destructive influences on its dwellers. (19). Though argue as one may argue that Africans have been conscious and writing about nature, in the words of Slaymaker 'many have resisted or neglected the paradigms that inform much of global ecocriticism' (691). This situation probably led Jhan Hochman, to erroneously conclude, that 'whites have more time for nature than blacks since blacks have been forced into areas for jobs' (22).

Slaymaker further asserts that "Anthologists' reviews and summaries of black African literature and criticism, reflect the 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, who have been active in the past two decades" (34). This view as expressed by Slaymaker, is somewhat erroneous in that while he may be right about the slow reception of the theory of ecocriticism, writing about the environment has often been an inseparable part of African Literature. Many writers and poets in the past wrote about nature. Some of them have been mentioned above. DeLoughrey and Handley quoted in Sule Egya (61) says:

Recent studies in the field of postcolonial ecocriticism have pointed out that the concern with nature or landscape in postcolonial writing is not – as certain views from the Euro-American establishment have suggested – a recent phenomenon. Indeed, nature (the environment, the elements, biodiversity) has always been a participant rather than a mere observer in the struggle to counter colonial discourses.

Egya has also suggested that such eco- critical initiative ‘demands a critical protocol to seek social justice for both humans and nonhumans’ (61). Social commitment, or what Caminero-Santangelo calls “literary engagement”, is therefore, a given in Nigeria’s environmental imagination (62).

Nigeria, in the last two decades, has, however, witnessed a surge in the interest of writers and critics in ecocriticism. Many have followed the footsteps of the likes of Ken Saro Wiwa, Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide. However, for African environmental imagination to properly be grounded in ecocriticism, the words of Anthony Vital are quite advisory. According to him: when he says that:

Ecocriticism, if it is to pose African questions and find African answers, will need to be rooted in local (regional, national) concern for social life and its natural environment. It will need too, to work from an understanding of the complexity of African pasts, taking into account the variety in African responses to currents of modernity that reached Africa from Europe initially, but that now influence Africa from multiple centers, European, American, and now Asia in the present form of the globalizing economy (88).

Some of the poets being considered in this study are good examples of the current responses to ecocriticism. Indeed, the death of Ken Saro Wiwa has reenergised the eco-activism spirit in many Nigerian writers, critics and activists. This is particularly common in the Niger Delta region where environmental degradation especially oil spillage, has almost atrophied human existence. Much of the literature emanating from this region constitutes protest against the criminal despoliation of their land. Ogaga Okuyade, commenting on the volatility of the area says ‘ The Delta people have now managed to unshackle themselves: this in turn has resulted in a backlash of state repression which has permitted corporate violence to run riot, generating further popular and criminal violence, lawlessness, illegal appropriation, and insecurity’(32). This, in turn, has tremendously raised awareness in issues of the environment. Indeed the Niger Delta region of Nigeria produces the highest number of eco-critical works than other regions. The reason for this is not farfetched, since the area is the most ecologically degraded in the country. Some of the eco-activist writers and critics, from the region, include Tanure Ojaide, Ogaga Ifowodo, Ogaga Okuyade among others.

Byron Camiero-Santangelo in Olaniyan and Quayson affirms that ‘the improvement in eco-critical writings in Africa is attributable to the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa because his eco-activism and the award of a Nobel Prize to Wangari Maathai’(698). Similarly, Cajetan Iheka, in *Naturalising Africa*, examines the relationship between the human and the non-human other in African literature arguing for the reevaluation of the question of agency in African and Postcolonial studies. His concern in the book stems from projecting the ecological implications of environmental issues arising in Africa. He therefore concentrated on the effects of oil pollution in the Niger Delta, the devastations of war in Somalia and South Africa, deforestation in Kenya and agricultural development matters in Botswana.

The truth is that ecocriticism is gradually gaining ground, as a reputable literary theory and is being given its deserved pride of place in the world literary circle. Nigeria, is not an exemption especially with the seemingly intractable environmental challenges in the country; one could only expect an increase in the production of environment biased literature and the popularisation of ecocriticism as a theory.

2.4 Shades of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, in its few years of existence, has given rise to several colourations of green. The term has almost become an amorphous name of a sort attracting different disciplines, views and temperaments. While nature writing was about the appreciation and enjoyment of nature and the natural environment, from an observer’s point of view, ecocriticism is interested in nature, especially the environment and all the natural elements, including man and other species – in more empathetic ways. It delves deeply into the throes of the socio-economic and political upheavals, resultant of the subversive actions due to the exploitation of the environment.

Ecocriticism seeks to understand how the physical environment affects characters and issues, in a piece of literature. There have been several perspectives, from which ecocriticism is viewed. These divergent views are what Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez- Alier, in *Literature and Globalisation*, call ‘varieties of environmentalism’ (165). The duo asserts that there are two varieties of ecocriticism namely, First World Environmentalism and the Environmentalism of the Poor. The First World

Environmentalism according to them, stems from Ronald Inglehart's matrix named 'post materialist values', which consists of a set of cultural values that comprises of the preservation of natural environment that occupies the front seat the moment a society attains a level of affluence. This is the state of many advanced and industrialised countries like the United States, United Kingdom, France, China among others.

The Environmentalism of the Poor, they assert, is the kind of environmentalism that the poor countries indulge in which stems from the preservation of natural ecosystems and their sustainable human use. The struggles against the sustainable exploitation of local forests against the construction of dams and firms are often anchored on this belief. Other lenses from which nature is viewed are hereafter discussed.

2.4.1 Romanticism

Romanticism is a movement of the late eighteenth century which developed as a protest against the aristocratic culture of the ancient regime and against neoclassical aesthetics. Some of its precursors, according to Travers, include 'Edward Young, James Macpherson, Johann Gottfried Herder, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Samuel Richardson' (3). Other great minds of the Romantic period were S. T. Coleridge and William Wordsworth, who was the most original and the most prolific of the School of Romanticism, known as the Lake School. (Abrams, 34). A major preoccupation of the Romantic school is aptly captured by Travers who quotes Wordsworth in Preface to the Lyrical Ballad that:

Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended and are more durable lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent form of nature (34).

The assertion highlights the major preoccupation of Wordsworth in all his works and signposts the major thematic concerns of the Romantic Movement till date.

Jonathan Bate's 1991 *Romantic Ecology* revitalized the alternate view championed by William Wordsworth in contrast to the dominant nineteenth-century ideologies of political economy. Wordsworth's works is a revolt to the industrialism and crass consumerism of his age. Bate, in the book subtitled *Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*, reacted to the 'spurious' claim of nature as a topic in Literature. He argues that Romanticism was seen as the basis for the many forms of the countercultural and alternative cultural movements suggesting that nature and the natural are norms of health, vitality and beauty which industrial societies seek to destroy. Bates locates Wordsworth, John Clare and John Ruskin at the beginning of a green political movement and postulates that modern ecology studies the:

complex interrelationships of living things to each other and to their environments could be read as a retrospective endorsement of Romantic conceptions of nature as a holistic living agent or spirit in which all participate and interact: the 'Romantic ecology' reverences the green earth because it recognizes that neither physically nor psychologically can we live without green things; it proclaims that there is 'one life' within us and abroad, that the earth is a single vast ecosystem which we destabilize at our peril (40).

Bates is suggesting that the rediscovery of the green consciousness is a corollary to some Romantic poets' postulation of 'one life' in all things. Modern society is believed to have ruptured and destroyed this harmony. The Romantic school believes that the 'unspoilt' world must be restored for the world to find its equilibrium. Clark mentions some of the fragmentation of the 'whole' person by phenomena such as:

The division of labour, overvaluation of rationality at the expense of spontaneous bonds of feeling both between people and in relation to the non-human, the growth of cities, loss of oral or folk culture to one of mass print, newspapers and television, and the domination of the market economy as the sole reference for justifying human work or valuing things' (16).

These 'insidious modes of artificiality', have prevented humans from balancing up with other natural elements. Bates, therefore, reaffirms Wordsworth's proto-ecological and anti-industrial arguments in *Guide to the Lakes* (1810), where Wordsworth defends the naturalness of the life of the local 'estatesmen' who were independent landholders. In the poem, he decries how machinery has altered the balance of the economy of the 'estatesmen'. Similarly, Wordsworth in 'Michael' and 'Home at Grasmere' also

celebrates the unalienated labour of the freeholder as a way of life against the invading capitalistic ideology. Wordsworth in these and other poems celebrated the idyllic and the beauty of pastoral life. Most of Wordsworth works are about nature and his dedication to the pastoral, is almost unrivalled in literature.

Another strand of Romanticism is New World Romanticism, which aside from rejecting the urban life, dominated by commerce, where men have become tools in the hands of the capitalists sees nature as a therapy for solitude. It also idealises wild nature as the realm, in which the authentic individual can rediscover his or her 'whole' self, seemingly freed from the institutions of the capitalist state and its conformist morality. The New World Romanticists, like the others before them, drew on ideas of indigenous folk culture as basis for rejecting unbridled industrialism and urbanisation. Eric Kaufman captures this better when he writes that:

rather than exalt the civilization or familiarization of settled nature this conception inverted the traditional pattern, praising the uncivilized, primeval quality of untamed nature and stressing its regenerative effect upon civilization (40).

A major take-home from Romanticism, is the principle of homeostasis, which tries to create a counterbalance between the psychic and the ethical. The ceaseless crave for materialism and individualism vitiates in some ways some of the postulations of this school. Another major failing of Romanticism is its depravity of what countermeasures to advocate replaceable to the machine tyranny they vehemently oppose. This failing by extension, may have some restrictions on the intellectual scope of ecocriticism too. According to Timothy Morton (2004) 'ecocriticism is not only another version of Romanticism's rage against the machine, a refusal to engage the present moment' (27). It is, however, pertinent to stress, that ecocriticism is out to engage nature as a partner in the ecosystem that includes human to foster a better and greater understanding between the duo for a better and an environmentally crisis-free world. Jonathan Bates' *Romantic Ecology* however is often regarded as one of the pivotal works upon which ecocriticism leans.

Yet another strand of Romanticism, is American environmentalism, which seeks to regain, restore and recover humans' original relationship with nature. This is often referred to, according to Bennett, as the 'harmony of interests and needs' (81). Thoreau is

often considered the most towering figure of this tradition. Indeed Bennett refers to him as ‘an exemplary embodiment of traditional American values’ (81). Thoreau dedicated most of his writings to craving for a special place for wild nature in American self-idealisation. He and some other environmentalists after him see humans as machines and that the distancing of humans from nature makes them more as a tool useful only for economic purposes. Thoreau, however, feels that the relationship between humans and nature goes deeper than the mere retrieval of humans' inner core through nature. In the words of Sattelmayer ‘nature and the human self... have depths heretofore unplumbed’ (53). Yet in Thoreau’s celebration of nature, with his metaphorical usage of the ‘wilderness’, lurks an inherent contradiction. The urge to learn all things, yet the reckoning that all things are mysterious and unexplorable, are great contradictions that will bog the intellectual mind for a long time.

2.4.2 Deep Ecology

In 1972, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess founded a movement called Deep Ecology. It is borne out of the fact that ecological insights into the complex interdependence of living things require a fundamental change in our basic assumptions (Sessions 19). Sessions argues that modern people treat the natural world with much disdain because of their belief that humanity is separate and superior to nature.

Deep ecology rejects the notion of ‘sustainable development’ and suggests that capitalism, progress, even Western liberalism itself, is responsible for the current ecological crisis that afflicts the world. It calls for a radical critique and transformation of conventional ways of conceiving human values of humanism and of science. Deep ecology desires a new way in our thinking, in our ethics and politics and relationship with nature (Bennett and Royle (167). Deep ecology craves for an understanding of life in which the thinking of the ‘self’ must include that of other organisms and all that supports them as part of one’s identity. It frowns at the atomistic ‘self’ that modern capitalism affords where nothing else matters but the viable ‘self’. Robert Brulle states the two major principles driving deep ecology. One is that it views ‘all natural elements as having intrinsic value and intrinsic worth... They exist for their own sake’(224). The second according to him is that ‘a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise’ (224-5).

In Deep Ecology is a bio-centric view that the perception to kill another is in some sense an act of violence against oneself (Karts, Light and Rothenberg 231 – 52). This is so because deep ecology sees the whole bio-system as one in which what affects one affects all. Deep Ecology rejects the shallowness of reform environmentalism and its questionable assumption that environmental issues can be addressed, merely by adjusting given economic and political structures. It postulates and shares broad bio-centric ethics such that human and nature are locked in a complimentary survival.

Of the many apologists of Deep Ecology, Arne Naess and George Sessions created a most influential platform. They called for eight basic principles to facilitate a revolution in human attitudes. This new set of engagement demands a reorientation in ethics and politics, and is meant to ensure respect in inherent value of all life and the injustice of humanity, and upsetting the diversity of life, except where it becomes exceedingly necessary. Part of the new engagement is the abandonment of the social and economic structure, based on aggressive capital accumulation and narrow materialistic conception of self-fulfilment. It also argues for a reduction in the world population, among others.

The theory of Deep Ecology is more homely to literature, because at the heart of the theory is the belief to change the attitude of the individual who in turn would change the society. Deep Ecology believes that literature goes into the human heart and is therefore apt in implanting nature ethics in the minds of individuals. The ideas that changing the self, to change the society and the danger that careless disposition to the issue of environment can cause the world a huge catastrophe are very plausible notions. Also plausible are the practical solutions that the theory advocates. The issue here, however, is whether radical social change ever really results from targeting personal attitudes, without also directly addressing the specific political and economic institutions such as capitalism, patriarchy, and neo-colonialism that determine how people live and think.

2.4.3 Eco facism

Eco facism is a product of the thinking of Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976). It is an attempt by facist ideologists and groups to appropriate ecology for reactionary purposes. Heidegger claims that European and indeed global history have been largely determined by some unseen elements dictating the modes of thinking since ancient Greece. These,

according to him, are now culminating in a global techno-scientific civilisation that has become a threat, not just to the earth, but also to the essence of humanity. He argues that such thinking has reduced humans as merely another economic resources or even a waste product (Clark 59). Mcneil testifies that ‘the familiar and well known has become boundless, and nothing is any longer able to withstand the business of knowing since technical mastery over things bears itself without limit’ (18).

Eco facism postulates an “authentic dwelling” between humans and their local place, traditions and dialect. It is the ‘closeness to one’s native earth’ that probably saw Heidegger support the Nazi movement which led to his disgrace. (Clark 59). Eco facism is the all too plausible counter-argument that the protection of the natural world justice for future generations and for the non-human can only be achieved by authoritarian governments that are ready to drastically regulate the present modes of life. But one wonders if this would be to the point of exterminating most human species. Again, failure to act right also, about nature may lead to extinction and extermination, especially in the face of catastrophic natural disasters such as floods, diseases and cyclones.

2.4.4 Posthumanism

Posthumanism, according to Catherine Waldby, is ‘a general critical space in which the techno-cultural forces, which both produce and undermine the stability of the categories of the ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ can be investigated’(4). Posthumanism craves for a world where humanity should oversee, control and mould nature. It questions the very idea of nature and believes in the use of technology to defeat natural finitude. Even in its over ambitiousness, it desires human immortality. Posthumanism exalts the human mind, reason and essence and perceives technology as the tool for humans to dominate his world. This accounts for why biotechnology denaturalises life, creates harmful wastes and pollution at the expense of the human life. To posthumanism, the world is a synthetic environment of simulacra. It has made toxic waste and environmental pollution the cultural metaphor of the world creating a palpable fear among humans yet irreversibly progressing. Bill Mckibben argues that ‘nature which is defined by lack of human interference, no longer exists’(62). Buell opines that “ the crisis of nature has become itself our habitual contemporary environment ... the consequence of which even at incipience, is an incessant flood, diseases never seen before, pollution and the warm

world (172)'. The artificiality and the brazen effect of extreme technology may be dire on humanity and the natural habitat of man.

Post-humanism rejects the images of the natural, as some lost condition to which the self should return or be restored and endorses the glorification of the self and counters the romantic claim of nature restoring man to its original state. Hefferman captures what science has become in the hands of man. She asserts:

Pig valves in transplant patients or tissues grown with the aid of a cow egg or hamster egg or fertilised with human sperm to test fertility or pigs spliced with human genes are all acceptable hybrids in the construction of the new post-Enlightenment body of science because in the process of the assimilation of the 'non-human', the hierarchical divide between it and humanity is sustained. The owning, controlling, patenting and manipulation of what is understood as nature (as excluding humanity but in its service) is left unchallenged (128).

Humans, therefore, are regarded as the overlords of all other natural elements who could control the world and indeed use their 'reason' limitlessly in a purported advance march to progress by indulging in anything unrestrained. Indeed, the creation of robots, in the performance of most human activities, now, is a pointer to man going in the direction of creating an artificial human being. According to Harraway, humans have become 'cyborgs'. A modern man is not complete without a technological device or the other. Clark lists other extreme technologies that may reduce humans and their importance as 'nano-technology, genetic modification of plants and animals, gene therapy, biometrics, cloning, stem research, artificial life, artificial intelligence and new reproductive technologies (63).' This list can be extended to include microchip brain, and bionic limbs. But Slavoj Zizek warns that 'nature is no longer 'natural', the reliable 'dense' background of our lives: it now appears as a fragile mechanism which, at any point, can explode in a catastrophic manner' (63). One can only wonder where the revolution of man's thoughts in technology would land the world. Would there not be a limit to the erosion of technology in human affairs?

The near substitution of humans with technology could lead to the extinction of humanity. It has already eroded the culture of humans in grave ways never imagined before. Post-humanism breeds individuality and weakens the social structure, upon which natural interactions, imbued with feelings and camaraderie, is great signposts. The world cannot

be left at the doorpost of post-humanism, lest the whole world may soon become a mere gadget centre with machinated humans leading the pack.

2.4.5 Environmental Justice

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) defines environmental justice as ‘the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income concerning the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies’. Also, Joni Adamson et al, in the *Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics and Pedagogy*, define environmental justice as ‘the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment. We define the environment in turn as places in which we live, work, play and worship” (5). Environmental justice is often also referred to as ecological justice or eco-justice. It is an attempt to empower indigenous people and communities towards sustainable livelihoods, demanding environmental justice and maintaining communal sacred traditions. Ursula Heise comments about environmental justice that:

While a certain kind of multicultural consciousness accompanied the emergence of ecocriticism from its beginnings through its pronounced interest in Native American ways of life, mythologies, oratures, and literatures, a more politicized type of multiculturalism with broadly leftist orientations only became a sustained presence in the field with the rise of the environmental justice movement at the turn of the millennium (386).

Environmental justice is quite useful in the areas of public health and social discrimination. The concept of environmental justice started in the 1980s, as a movement, and as a result of the growing number of polluting industries, power plants, and waste disposal areas located near low-income or minority communities. The movement was set to ensure a fair distribution of environmental burdens, among all people, regardless of their racial background. Clark says ‘Environmental justice primarily names a social movement, plural and engaged in the urgency of local campaign work” (88). Many organisations abound in the world now take up different environmental challenges. Some of these include: the Greenpeace, Earth System Governance Project (ESGP), Global Environmental Facility (GEF), Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), Local Authorities International Environmental Organisation (KIMO), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change (IPCC), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Sierra Club among others.

The social ecologists, as they are sometimes called, are always interested in the social cost of environmental problems. They, according to Bertens, 'target the power and social relations they seek at work in the process of decision making that leads to socio-environmental problems' (205). They engage in activism that confronts the industrial western world, in their damaging activities to the environment, especially as it relates to pollution and waste disposal, among others. The social ecologists are different from the Marxist ecologist in the sense that Marxist ecologists would always argue that free-market economy is the cause of all environmental problems and that supply would always be met at great cost to the environment. This position contradicts the predilection of the social ecologist who holistically often relates, all phenomena to the larger direction of evolution. They both however agree that environmental problems must be addressed.

The world has witnessed many cases of environmental injustices. It is common practice for wastes - toxic and non-toxic - to be shipped from some industrial countries and deposited at the back yard of other countries, especially third world countries. But for the activism of some of these environmental organisations, some countries would have permanently become waste dumps. It is also common for the government to establish power plants, industrial sites and dams and such other projects that could have dire environmental challenges in areas where the poor reside. Environmental justice encourages such communities to speak out, so that their cases could be taken up and projected to a national or international scale, as the case may be. Ulrich Beck agrees on this when he asserts that:

In terms of social politics ... the ecological crisis involves a systematic violation of basic rights whose long term effect in weakening society can scarcely be underestimated. For dangers are being produced by industries, externalized by economics, individualized by the legal system, legitimized by the natural sciences and made to appear harmless by politics. That this breaking down the power and credibility of institutions only becomes clear when the system is put on the spot, as Greenpeace, for example has tried to do (39).

The activism of Greenpeace and other environmental organisations has kept governments, corporations and multinationals on their toes. These environmental organisations serve as

worthy watch dogs to keep our environment safe. It is also the activities of these organisations that have spurred many communities to protest the siting of projects that they feel have environmental risks in their communities.

2.4.5.1 Principles of Environmental Justice

These principles are as drafted and adopted in 1991 at the National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit. There are 17 principles in all and are listed below:

1. Environmental justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
2. Environmental justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
3. Environmental justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
4. Environmental justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testings that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
5. Environmental justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
6. Environmental justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
7. Environmental justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.

8. Environmental justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
9. Environmental justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
10. Environmental justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.
11. Environmental justice must recognise a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.
12. Environmental justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honouring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and providing fair access for all to the full range of resources.
13. Environmental justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of colour.
14. Environmental justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.
15. Environmental justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.
16. Environmental justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasises social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.

17. Environmental justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritise our lifestyles to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

Most of the principles of Environmental Justice have to do with education. Poetry, being a major tool of educating the minds of individuals, would serve so well in propagating environmental education. To this extent, this theory shall serve as one of the pivots of this study. People and communities should be encouraged to speak up against harmful environmental practices. This sensitisation and conscientisation can be taken up and achieved in literature.

2.4.6 Liberalism and Green Moralism

Liberalism is about individual liberty in politics. In ecocriticism, it tries to create a nexus between global threats and individual lives. In an attempt to link liberalism and environment, Taylor asserts that 'the ecological facts of life threaten to challenge our most dearly held political values: justice, freedom and democracy?' (581). Ecological issues have a way of infringing on liberalism and its offshoot, the fundamental human rights. Frazier Nash takes up some of these concerns in *The Rights of Nature* (1989). For the believers of liberalism in ecology, if humans can be entitled to some rights, such rights too could be extended to animals, plants and places. It is at the core of this principle that green moralists draw their concept. They feel that by extending rights to non-humans, they can be protected from exploitation and so be duly preserved. Graham Huggan believes that humans and animals 'are legitimate objects of the practice of ecocriticism's range' (701).

The liberationists, as they are sometimes called, according to Greg Gerard 'undermine the moral and legal distinction between humans and animals. This is to protect and increase the live span of some of the animals that otherwise could have been killed by the ravaging forces of capitalism and free trade' (149). They believe that this would prevent the extinction of some animals. Robyn Eckersley, projecting the green moralist view, suggests the idea of 'ecological democracy' where ecological decisions are not products

of 'aggressive market-like model of competing interests' but rather 'from a product of informed deliberation in which all parties' (38) that may be affected by the decision are carried along. In her words she says:

Ecological democracy may be best understood not so much as a democracy of the affected but a democracy for the affected, since the class of beings entitled to have their interests considered in democratic deliberation and decision making (whether young children, the infirm, the yet to be born, or non- human species) will invariably be wider than the class of actual deliberators and decision makers (38).

Clark then added that the 'non- human species for instance can be represented by scientists or other advocates, somewhat in the way representatives already work on behalf of other people' (105). The brazen oddity inherent in this suggestion is loud and albeit ridiculous. One wonders how expansive the stretch of democracy can be before it can break or take no more. In expressing his concern Taylor says that 'as the extensions of rights to non- humans become progressively more inclusive, the concept is progressively reduced to meaninglessness' (581). Also, McWilliams quoted in Clark argues that 'at the core of liberal thought is the notion that a human being is essentially private and that he becomes interested in politics to compete for the relatively scarce natural resources'(103). Indeed, John Locke, a major founding voice of Liberalism quoted in Clark asserts that 'the earth and all that is therein is given to men for the support and comfort of their being. And so all the fruits it naturally produces, and beasts it feeds belong to mankind in common' (103). If liberalism, at its conception, has conceded nature to humans, it would then be counterproductive to begin to on its basis ask for right for the non-human elements.

Similarly, Andrew Vincent (1998) says that "it is the values and practices of liberalism which now constitute the supreme environmental danger.' and that 'it would appear, even from the mildest environmental perspective that value extends beyond human agency" (44). If liberal justice theory is tied closely to a strong anthropocentric position, then it is not easily adaptable for environmental issues' (44). Also, in drawing the limit of liberalism and introducing a new angle, Anthony Giddens writes:

The classical liberal view of the rights and responsibilities of individuals...is that every individual should be free to pursue whatever lifestyle he or she chooses, so long as those choices do not harm others. However, the liberal state has not been accustomed to extending that

principle to environmental goods, or to the avoidance of harm to future generations, both now have become absolutely central (21).

This may suggest that work, in this area, in the future may have to do with opening up the possibilities of granting the non-human elements some rights. For now, this seems implausible and unrealistic. If this move is considered odd, then Kristian Ekeli's suggestion that 'measures should be put in place to safeguard the claims of future generations and that same be incorporated into the constitutional bases of state' (379) can only be an exotic idea'. One can then begin to wonder how non-living things could be given rights. The tendency of liberalism to be extended to almost anything makes it unwieldy and difficult to manage. Its different and multiple shades are a great disservice to having a thorough follow through in some of its assumptions. Again some of its propositions are too romantic and superfluous, for instance granting rights to non-human elements sounds ludicrous in the least.

2.4.7 Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a concept that highlights and questions the gendering of nature in literary and other discourses. It perceives patriarchy as being responsible for the exploitation of both nature and women. Nature, in patriarchal thinking, is often seen as feminine just as it perceives women as less rational due to their closeness to nature. Noël Sturgeon defines ecofeminism as 'a movement that makes connections between environmentalism and feminism; more precisely, it articulates the theory that the ideologies that authorize injustices based on gender, race and class are related to the ideologies that sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment' (Sturgeon 23). The thinking then is that both nature and women need civilising through masculine control and order (Benette and Royle 167). The relationship between women and nature therefore is one drawn in terms of the denigration to which both are subjected in a patriarchal world. Annette Koloduy says 'how bound we still are by the vocabulary of a feminine landscape and the psychological patterns of regression and violation that it implies (176).

Ecofeminism argues for a change in orientation that would see human engagement with nature from a stance that allows for a relationship with the ecosystem in a non-exploitative manner. It panders to a system of ethics and politics that would not be driven by patriarchal codes and mode of thinking. It rejects the Judeo Christian heritage that

confers rationality on men and 'natural' or less rational on women. In the words of Bertens, 'this has led some eco feminists to identify rationality itself as primarily responsible for our environmental crisis and to adopt a wilfully anti rational, mystical approach to the natural world and the privileging of men as lords over women which it affords' (205). Great proponents of ecofeminism include Annette Koloduy, Louise Westling, Patrick Murphy, Greta Gaard and Donna Haraway.

2.4.8 Eco-cosmopolitanism

Eco cosmopolitanism is an attempt to view ecocriticism from the lens of globalisation. Globalisation scholars are found in many disciplines and are wont to domesticate the concept of globalisation in all areas of scholarship. Ursula Heise in Connell and Marsh says eco-cosmopolitanism 'is an attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds' (167). Ursula argues that 'while cultural mechanisms of which allegiance to national communities is generated, legitimated and maintained have been studied in-depth, ecocriticism has only begun to explore the cultural means by which ties to the natural world are produced and perpetuated, and how the perception of such ties fosters or impedes regional, national and transnational forms of identification'(167). She argues that such attachment to place is neither natural nor spontaneous yet 'allegiances to larger entities – modern society, the nation-state – have to be created by complex and artificial means'(167). She further maintains that analyses of nation-based forms of identity have shown that 'individuals in certain cultural contexts readily identify themselves as belonging to a very large scale an abstract entities of which they have only partial personal experience, a kind of commitment that place-oriented environmentalist tend to consider highly artificial and arbitrary'(167). She suggests that attachment to a place is not natural but merely a function of cultural commitments and habits. She argued that calling nation, abstract ,would be a wrong notion, since culture is the same yardstick to measure national belonging.

The object of eco-cosmopolitan, therefore, according to her, 'would be to go beyond the aforementioned 'ethic of proximity' so as to investigate by what means individuals or groups in specific cultural contexts have succeeded in envisioning themselves in similarly concrete fashion as part of the global biosphere, or by what means they might be enabled

to do so... such a perspective needs to be attentive to the political frameworks in which communities begin to see themselves as part of a planetary community...'(167). The objective that eco-cosmopolitan seeks to achieve obviously is derived from the concept of globalisation.

Eco-cosmopolitanism fashions out an approach that values the abstract and the highly mediated kinds of knowledge and experience that supports biospheric connectedness. Mckenzie Wark examines the enormous role that computer modelling and simulations would play in the scientific display of global ecological processes. He argues that: 'it is only by becoming more abstract, more estranged from nature that I can make the cultural leap to thinking its fragile totality'(117). He believes that through computer mediation, an ecological problem in any part of the globe can be linked to how it would affect other parts of the world. Ursula quoted in Connell and Marsh maintains that 'the task of ecocriticism with a cosmopolitan perspective is to develop an understanding and critique of these mechanisms as they play themselves out in different contexts so as to create a variety of ecological imaginations of the global'(168). An eco-cosmopolitan analysis would therefore look at the work of literature, from the cosmopolitan or global view of the connectedness of the whole world, as a planetary community where what affects one affects all. It is an attempt to foster global ecological belonging on individuals and groups that make up the world. This, according to Ursula quoted in Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh, would ensure that:

existing ideas and ideologies of collectivity and totality, some with very long cultural traditions, are deployed in the attempt to envision global ecological belonging. An awareness of such forms and their cultural background and implications is part and parcel of an environmentally oriented cosmopolitanism that not only seeks to explore how global systems shape local forms of inhabitation but also is aware of how this exploration itself is framed by culturally specific assumptions (168).

The plausibility of the global world, along a planetary paradigm is however suspect based on a number of questions begging to be answered. Would the resources derived from the global capitalism that globalisation promotes be shared on these bases? Why would some countries so called industrialised countries plunder the resources of other nations only to their own benefits and to the environmental catastrophes of other nations? The despoliation of the Niger Delta is a classic example of this mode of thinking. Has the

capitalist world, that seems to be grossing to the West, wealth from the oil exploration of those oil region belt been part of the solution to the problems there? Is the view of eco-cosmopolitanism not an attempt to rationalise the unending plundering of the resources of the world especially the developing and the less developed countries?

Eco-cosmopolitanism fails to recognise the sanctity of place attachment to humans. It allows for the arbitrary and artificial pursuance of wealth to dislocate the 'naturalness' of place to humans. Place, aside being a cultural barometer of behaviour, serves as patent platform of driving worldview and outlook. It is thus too fundamental to human psychology to be artificially credence as eco-cosmopolitanism is wont to trivialise.

2.5 Nigerian Poetry

Nigerian Poetry, like most poetry in the world, especially Greek and English poetry, emanated from orality. Poetry of the pre-colonial era consists of poetry of different ethnic groups and cultures that later made up Nigeria. Poetry, at the pre-literate time, was unwritten and for most of the time anchored on performance. Several conditions such as socio- political currency, cultural orientations and recreational exigencies, among others, often engendered its tenor and temper. The poetry of the period also had a spiritual bent and much of it was soused in the praises of gods and humans. Poets then were found in palaces, singing praises of and to the kings, at social functions, in wars, urging warriors on and at social events exchanging their talents for money. There were also the peripatetic poets who moved from place to place. Poets of those days were griots or jali, who through their poetry, historicises, their cultures and people while they also entertain them. Poetry then has a store of value as it served as a record of symbolic events.

At independence, much of Nigerian Poetry had become written and many still in the oral forms were recorded into the written forms. Nigerian poetry is often characterised by variegated historical and political continuum, with different and wide thematic and technical realisations. A large chunk of the pre-independence poetry mimicked western traditions, and the poets and scholars, who introduced literacy to some of the earliest Nigerian poets especially of the literate era. This mimicry, was shaped in form and content, before some of them later developed their own voices and styles. A major reason for this imitation is captured by Olaniyi Okunoye when he asserts that:

Nigerian poetry is the most developed and has also attracted a variety of critical responses. Informed scholarly opinion, recognises the promotion of creative writing by expatriate teachers within university communities in Ibadan and Nsukka as laying the foundation for the development of a Nigerian tradition of poetry. The efforts of people like Martin Banham, Ulli Beier and Janheinz Jahn at the University College, Ibadan and those of Peter Thomas at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in their early days, are recognised as the main stimuli for the flowering of creative writing in these universities (777).

Since the first generation of poets in Africa and specifically in Nigeria, were trained by the western scholars who naturally taught them in the western traditions, some western critics therefore, saw Nigerian poetry as an extension of western literary traditions hence they adopted western literary cannons in appreciating the earliest written Nigerian poems. Okunoye further captures this idea when he says that: ‘The earliest phase in the study of African poetry naturally showed a great deal of interest in its formal peculiarity. Pioneered by European critics of African literature and a few indigenous scholars, the motivation for this critical project was the urgency of appraising African poetry in the light of the European tradition to which they assumed the emergent African poets were indebted’(778). Also, Funsho Aiyejina remarks that: ‘Generally speaking Nigerian poetry in English before this period (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, obscurantism and private esoterism (112).

The post-independence poems of the 60s celebrated cultural nationalism and condemned the post-independence disillusionment that followed. The poems of the 1970s mostly reflected the civil war experiences, feasting greatly on the physical and the psychological ruins left in its wake. This according to Chidi Amuta, led to “the politicization of the Nigerian literary imagination” (92). The 80s was the period of ideological contestations amongst the intellectuals of different bents, though more fashionable was the Marxist/Socialist group. Also some of the poems of this period and the 90s attacked the military dictatorship and condemned the crass oppression and under development that characterized the junta period. Stewart Brown quoted in Okunoye opines that, “the defining characteristic of Nigerian poetry in English has been its confrontational attitude to authority.” While there has always been a sense of social responsibility in Nigerian

writing as a whole, it is possible to argue that it was most intense from the mid-eighties to the late nineties (779)'.

Since the eighties, Nigerian Poetry has become a veritable tool of reacting to the socio political realities in the country. Poetry became the platform to excoriate abusive leadership, lash out against oppressive governments and denounce social ills and decadence. It became a potent artistic weapon to free the Nigerian political space from tyrannical governments. This social tool status of Nigerian poetry led to the radicalization of the content, mode, tone and form and indeed the language of poetry. People experimented with a number of things bastardising form and content all in a bid to turning poetry into a veritable tool of rejecting oppression and as an agent of social mobilisation.

This study shall examine such literary tropes associated with sensitising the future as a crucial dimension which also brings us into the awareness of our vital role and ability to regenerate lives. The future marks the potentiality of literature to widen human visions in making sense of the past and in imagining what may become the hereafter of the world. This future emerges in forms of environmentalism, that reveals to us our responsibility and alertness to experience the self and the other. This study, is anchored on yielding a future environmentalism, based on literature's ability to raise socio-environmental dilemmas through its engagement with the past, the present and being able to redirect the future in the desired way for the good of the world.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology adopted to carry out this research work.

3.1 Research Design

The research design for this study was non-experimental and non-numeric. The research is majorly a textual analysis and it therefore adopts a library study method. This design suited a study of this nature which is an explication of poems that were products of imagination. This design helped analyse the poems, using the ecocriticism praxis. This study is hinged on relevant literary and critical theories, with a especial reference to ecocriticism, which ensured qualitative evaluation and interpretations of the selected collections of poems.

3.1.2 Sources of Data Collection

The primary data for this study were sourced from six collections of third-generation Nigerian poets. The selected collections had been carefully picked and critically used in discussing a new trend of ecocritical perspectives in Nigerian Poetry. These poets had been followed over time and had been identified as having rich ecocritical consciousness in their works. This research was entirely library-based.

Additional materials, being secondary sources of data, were used to further discussions and exploration on the focus of this study. These secondary sources were drawn from relevant monographs, journal articles, books, theses and the internet. The Centre for Learning Resources (CLR) of Covenant University housed most of these invaluable resources and was optimally utilised in actualising this project. Other learning resource centres where relevant materials were found, were visited. These resource centres were frequently used to ensure currency of the materials for this project and this guaranteed that a wide range of the focus of the project was covered.

This research adopted ecocriticism as the theory with which the selected works were analysed. It looked at the different dimensions of ecocriticism from romanticism to animism which ensured a rich and comprehensive analysis of the selected works. The selected works were fairly representative of the third-generation of Nigerian poets.

3.1.3 Justification for the Selection of Authors and Texts

The selected collections had been painstakingly picked from Third-generation Nigerian poets across the country. However, beyond any geographical convenience, the works have been selected owing to their rich eco-critical concerns and they have been found appropriate in illustrating ecocriticism, as practiced in Nigeria. Indeed these works have been identified as reflecting a rich ecocritical consciousness.

The choice of poetry as the genre was because poetry has quick access to the mind of humans and could quickly and steadily carry didactic messages faster than other genres. In picking poetry for this research, a major consideration was its musical nature especially at helping to memorise and retain moral messages. It is therefore not surprising that most religious books are written in poetry.

3.1.4 Data Analysis

This research carried out an eco-critical explication of the selected collections which analysed their contents and the contextual portrayal of eco-critical matters. The analysis helped to examine the thematic preoccupations, the styles, images and other poetic devices adopted by the poets. The analysis also helped in drawing conclusions on the eco-critical perspectives and approaches of the selected poets. The research tool for this study was ecocriticism. This green criticism concept was at the centre of all explorations of the selected collections, though references to other literary theories were also made to crystalise the focus of this study.

1.9 Limitation of Study

This study is limited in the sense that it could not cover all the collections of the third-generation poets in Nigeria. Also, this study is time bound.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Using ecocriticism, one is able to come out with the following findings as they relate to the different works examined.

4.0 Expalanation of the Results

In Tade Ipadeola's *The Sahara Testaments*, one is able to deduce that the collection is an arcane and comprehensive narrative, though in poetic form, of African history and civilisation using the desert metaphor to dateline the history of an entire continent, and its span. Indeed from Mari Djata, to Sundiata, to Sankara and even to Boko Haram, the piece constitutes the testaments of the highs and the lows of the African continent as it spectacles the flurry and fauna of the African landform. *The Sahara Testaments* is a metaphorical portrait of mother Africa, a romanticising of a continent's idyllic past and a sublime poetry of arousing a continent's lost pride. It displays a philosophical and thematic depth that fascinates the mind into the wondrous yet unexpected beauty of a desert, the Sahara desert, the horrendous horror of her histories, and the sacred solemnity of her ways with a rare grace and charm.

Beyond this, *The Sahara Testaments* is an exposition about the Sahara Desert, as a different part of nature that hitherto carries a baggage of misconceptions, as the hell of the earth and as a waste land among others. However, Ipadeola, through robust poetry, is able to fascinatingly weave an epic rhyme on the Sahara Desert as he captures her geography, geometry and histories. Through this, the poet is able to draw the Sahara Desert out as a unique and an 'other' part of nature that humans should learn to relate with and which is able to transmit and from which humans are able to learn the lessons of perseverance and tenacity that may be necessary in surmounting the challenges of the world. The poet is also able to shift from human centered subject to nature moving from the object to the subject. This is a major goal of ecocriticism and this accounts for why the collection is a worthy eco-critical work.

In *The Rain Fardel*, Ipadeola, used nature and environmental materials in many ways. He has used natural elements especially of rain and its metaphor to enrich the aesthetics and the message of some of the poems. He has also used the eco materiality of rain not only to imbue different layers of meaning in some of the poems, he also has through it been able to extract the depth and intellectualism built into some of the poems. Some of the poems are written on different aspects of nature with the rain and water, serving as major tropes. This, the poet has done in line with his vision of eco-activism and of keeping environmental issues on the front burner. Ipadeola has shown a religious commitment to pressing environmental issues bothering the world and has consistently helped to raise awareness on such issues, so that the world can begin to address them for the benefit of mankind. Indeed, for Nigeria and the whole of humanity, to be properly orientated along eco-friendly lines, a lot of education needs to be done and Literature is a potent tool of achieving this.

The associative rain title of the collection is instructive. The several evocative musings of the poet, as presented in different poems, come in rainy torrents, educating and confirming the scale of the poet's creative fervour. It, also like the rain, exposes the filths in our society in forms of ills and decadence which should be washed away to ensure a better and a regenerated society for all. Indeed, every poem in the collection is a rain of a sort, tackling a burden of the several raised in the collection. Also, the poet uses the rain metaphor as an archetypal figuring for nature to engage the human mind in a dialectics through which the various environmental failings of humans are catalogued and exposed. Similarly, rain affords water with its palpable force and effect of cleansing, cooling and soothing, all these afford the poet to construct nature as a palpable force, meant to cleanse the harms and the debauchery in human society and to act as a change agent of ritualising the world into a new and regenerated mode.

Ifowodo, in *A Good Mourning*, was able to establish that human interactions with different materialities have ways of conditioning the human environment. These materialities determine the behaviours of humans at a given time. Indeed, the environment in which humans live, is replete with many objects and substances which affect the environment; hence they are eco- materialities that humans must relate with. These eco-matrialities therefore must not be such that can be harmful to humans, lest humans would resist such environment if they can. It is important to note, as seen in this

collection, that the human environment could be made injurious from mundane material things to political and economic inclemencies. The collection therefore presupposes that humans have a major role in nurturing their environment to be able to live a healthy life and indeed sustain themselves. This seems the reason for the swell in the 'new materialisms' to create an ecological dialogue with the hope and a projection to create a discourse about the 'beingness' of agents. The collection raises the possibility of an eco-ethics, that binds humans to the material entities upon which human livelihoods depend so that humans are able to relate better with other 'agential beings' around. The collection also reveals a worthy path, in the human quest for ecological justice, as a way of salvaging humanity through nature as privileged arbiters of the future.

In Ogaga's *The Oil Lamp* we were able to find that the collection variously chronicles the hardship, sufferings, and the cruelty meted to a people whose only sin is the wealth that nature has deposited in their land. The situation of the Niger Delta seems to conform with David Montgomery when he says 'the soil quality determines the rise and fall of empires' (1). The collection also records how their environment becomes degraded in the massive exploitation and exploration that goes on indiscriminately in the Niger Delta. It is a quaint and a dreadful picture of how a people's livelihood and survival become withdrawn from them. It is a dirge lamenting the physical and the psychic dislocatedness of a people culturally situated and accustomed to the fecundity of littoral lifestyle. It is a mournful withdrawal of an organic environment of a people by the pollution and the pollutants that the ravaging forces of capitalism have become in the Niger Delta. It is an elegy of a people faced with hopelessness and wretchedness, in spite of abundant natural resources. It is the requiem of a people bearing the brunt of a wasteful and reckless nation, a people constantly yearning and crying against oppression and burning for justice for the long years of depravity and neglect and for the blood of lost illustrious sons and daughters that have been mixed with oil and taken to lubricate capitalism across imperial metropolises. It is the monody of a people and an environment caught in a survival fix.

In Remi Raji's *Sea of My Mind*, it is found out that animism with its superstitious and sometimes superfluous beliefs has become inextricably associated with humanity and there is no letting go of animist thoughts and practices. The collection discloses that as long as there are people, so long would there be religious longings and spiritual engagements and indeed religions. As long as these are in existence so long also shall

there be animism though which may come in variegated dimensions. Even at the height of science and technological breakthroughs there shall be some inadequacies, some lack in effectual spirituality and yearnings by humans, for which modern science and technology would fall short. It is found from the collection, that even in the current age, that science and technology seems to have taken over, there still abound a plethora of animist practices observable in the so called age of science. Otto Friedrich, for instance, notes in Time Magazine in 1987, that ‘a strange mix of spirituality and superstition is sweeping across the world (sic). Many people still believe very strongly in astrology and horoscope, footballers request luck and favour by kissing the ball and Harry Garuba refers to the ‘larger than life statue of Sango, the Yoruba god of lightning in front of the headquarters of Power Holdings Plc.(245) People place hands on television, radio or hand set to receive miracles in forms of prosperity, healing and exorcism, people buy new cars, build new houses and touch them with their heads to request for same luck or favour so they can achieve similar feats. The list is endless. The collection indeed is a testament of the many irretrievable animistic practices of humans.

In Ahmed Maiwada’s *We’re Fish* we see the demystification of humans from the arrogance emanating from the age old anthropocentric episteme that considers humans as the Lord of the earth to the fish and not even Fish. The collection in a way, issues a warning to the world for humans to change how they relate to nature to save the world, especially the Planet earth from its present anarchical drift orchestrated by human’s irresponsible and unguarded attitudinal and environmental recklessness. However, the poet’s point of contact, to changing the world, stems from saving the sea through the marine environmental utility that the collection preaches. Indeed, according to the poet, in his interview with The Sun, ‘we may start healing the world from the sea’. The sea, is the natural habitat for the fish just as the the earth is the natural habitat for humans. In this collection the fish, mirrors humans, while the sea also mirrors the green earth which is a metaphor for an environmentally healthy society. The collection argues that it is only when the planet earth is saved, that humanity may be free from an impending Armageddon. These underlining trope and themes are what *We’re Fish*, mediates with a picturesque innovation, quaint freshness and a charming novelty to save a dying world.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

This chapter considers the various analyses of the selected texts especially against the various dimensions of ecocriticism. The ecocritical consciousness of these poets is critically examined in this chapter.

5.1 Unearthing Africa Through the Prism of Desert Ecology: Tade Ipadeola's *The Sahara Testaments*

Deserts, for the harshness and horror associated with them are some of the dreaded parts of the globe. Little is known about deserts but few narratives on them in the public domain especially as relayed by illegal migrants are scary and bewildering. Though Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, viewed the desert as a sacred place, uniquely able to evoke in people a proper, non-anthropocentric understanding of the value of nature, this denuded sprawl is often projected as a land of abhorrence and despair, hostile to human, animal and plant habitation. Deserts are often regarded as unreceptive of animacy and habitation because they consist of arid and dry ecosystems. Deserts also called the sand seas or oceans of sands have been defined by Noir-Meir (1973) as 'water-controlled ecosystems with infrequent, discrete, and largely unpredictable water inputs' (26). Also, Balasubramanian says deserts are dry ecosystems comprising a substantial part of the globe' (1) Major deserts in the world are the Sahara Desert, the Arabian Desert, the Kalahari Desert and the Australian Desert. The Sahara Desert is famed to be the world's largest sandy desert and the world's third-largest after Antarctica and the Arctic (Babagana, 2016).

Tade Ipadeola's *The Sahara Testaments* offers another perspective of the Sahara Desert, as it probes this atomistic mode of seeing the Sahara as hell on earth. Ipadeola tries to retrofit and interpolate this hitherto human imagination about the desert. He, in a way, attempts to change the structure of perception, cognition and the stereotypes hitherto associated with the desert. *The Sahara Testaments* (2013) is a poet's sojourn in the desert through which the desert, its ecology and the human pilgrimage are historicised. The

desert, through the collection, confronts us as a site of intellectual transformation and a lens through which African and indeed human history, culture and aesthetics are narrativised. The desert therefore, inclines a metaphor of a kind not only for Africa but for the entire humanity with its crisscross civilisations. Tade Ipadeola's *The Sahara Testaments* (2013) uses the Sahara desert to argue that, this particular desert beyond its perception as a wasteland, as Africa is also regarded, is a unique other of the earth, enriched with its peculiarities and educating significant human history, culture and art. The choice of the desert as a phenomenon locked in a misconception of a waste land is a symbolism for the disdainful perception of some western countries.

Ipadeola is a Nigerian poet who has shown a substantial and consistent commitment to nature and environmental issues. From his works, a trend and a commitment to eco-critical issues have been identified. He won the prestigious Nigeria Prize for Literature in 2013, the highest literary Prize in Nigeria and on the African continent with *The Sahara Testaments* (2013). The collection, *The Sahara Testaments* (2013), beyond chronicling the history, geography and the geometry of the Sahara Desert, is a strident remark on Africa. This, the collection does in two folds. One, is its romanticising of Africa a trope which runs through the collection most manifestly. Two, is the despoliation, ravaging and the unbridled exploitation of Africa. by rapacious forces that bombarded the continent to wreck and plunder her resources in phases of slavery, colonisation, and neo colonialisation. The collection provides details through various symbolism and representations of the effects of this purloin on Africa and her people.

The desert as portrayed in *The Sahara Testaments*, (2013) is a symbol which summarises Africa's past, present and its future. It unfolds the secrets of the desert, serving as a metaphor for Africa, retelling and reminding the reader of Africa's journey through the histories of slavery and colonisation yet creating an awakening spirit in the Africans of the present to restore the greatness of the continent. The poet while admitting that a concatenation of events led him to write hinted that the collection is about Africa's past, present and future. Ipadeola, in recalling what led him to write the collection in an interview he granted *The Citizen* magazine, on the 15th of November, 2015 says that it is about 'human engagement with the land, our victories and defeats within this conundrum of a continent, the history of Africa, the prehistory of Africa and the human geography of the continent move me'. He further mentions that:

I remember writing the four first quatrains of the Sahara Testaments in an airplane going from Lagos to Delhi. It was a daytime flight and flying over the Sahara in day time gives you an idea of just how vast the space we are talking about is. And then you think this is not just a wasteland but a theatre in which significant human history has occurred. Here is where mankind first discovered how to reckon the calendar and ancient rock art from the Cave. There is a lot to say about the pressures on the planet and the fragile hope we can still entertain and pursue. I felt that the seizing of the day could be done with sobriety as it could be done in a spirit of celebration – of human triumph over materialism and crass planetary exploitation.

The poet's love for the African continent is easily discernible from his frequent display of effusive language, romanticising the African continent like Niyi Osundare who has committed himself to positively portraying Africa. (Fortress 13). There is a way in which *The Sahara Testaments* explores the poet's romantic conception of Africa. Many scholars have suggested the symbiosis that exists between ecocriticism and romanticism. "Green Romanticism" is what some scholars have used to describe the connection that exists between postcolonial criticism and ecocriticism. This relatedness, some argue, is traceable to romanticism and colonialism as suggested by Richardson and Hofkosh. They posit that the interaction between the two portrays 'the sublime contradiction of the 'four quartets of the globe' into a free-standing work of imagination, a testament to the 'imperial present' mind of the romantic artist rather than the discursive presence of empire in the seemingly autonomous literary work' (2). Indeed there is no way certain eco-critical problem and outlook would be dispensed of the long colonial experience which would have shaped and conditioned the human mind over the period.

Fortress opines that 'Romanticism encourages free expression of the revolutionary will. It promotes the radical condemnation of all that is rational and conventional. It gives to poetry a new definition that is deeper, personal and sometimes mystical. Besides, romanticism, encourages a new interpretation of imagination and nature as a free creative spirit in man' (13). The romantic bent, identifiable in *The Sahara Testaments*, is in tandem with Bates' Romantic Ecology which postulates that "if one historicizes from an ecological viewpoint – a respect for the earth and a scepticism as to the orthodoxy that economic growth and material production are the be-all and end-all of human society – [then] one finds oneself squarely within the Romantic tradition" (Bates, 1991).

The Sahara Testaments is a collection that spans 191 pages and is divided into three parts denoting different modes, mood and temper. The first part of the collection has five chapters, followed by the Atlantic Interval, which consists of four parts, while the third part consists of 67 asterisks used in place of numerals or alphabets. The first chapter of the collection denotes the beauty and the rare elegance of the desert. This is revealed in the splendour of symbols, characters and even in the quaint rhythmic flow of the quatrains that characterise almost the entirety of the collection.

The nexus between romanticism and ecocriticism, is underscored in this collection, through an avid and passionate description of the nature of the desert. This is akin to most of John Keats' poems especially his Odes. Fortress asserts that 'as is common in Keats poems, ecocriticism tends to be celebratory in tone, in their writings on nature' (37). Ipadeola, in like manner writes glowingly about the desert, offering a counter-narrative to the stereotypes about the desert as a land of suffering, death and crime. *The Sahara Testaments* provides an alternative narrative against the desert as only being associative of anguish, suffering and danger. In so doing the poet engages the reader in a most romantic description and attachment of the desert and by extension the African continent. Ipadeola captures a typical scenery in his reflection:

It was the age of flame trees, their implacable beauty claiming more surface than the sand, lavish sunlight daubed each petal with pigment from stars. A fruity blanket perfumed Sudan, made a galaxy of delight (14).

The description above of the Sahara and Sudan is one of the many superlatives and romantic capturing of the the desert by the poet. One could not have imagined the richness of the desert to the extent of having 'roaming magnate crocodiles,' being described as 'massive mastodon'. The desert that many believe is an arid land, where nothing grows and where living is hard just like Africa. is condemned to poverty, underdevelopment and diseases, becomes the symbol of the vitality of the African continent. It is also an indication that Africa is not a place where only poverty, diseases and gross non-functionality of systems and policies are drawn but that Africa has her good sides, strength and vitality too. The poet believes that civilisation moved from Africa to the rest of the world. He says 'Africa touched the world before the world/ Touched Africa' (14). This is a deep line and a very instructive metaphor of the reference to Africa being the first hub of civilization, which the West destroyed and later pretended

to be the initiators of civilisation in Africa. Egypt was reputed to have presided over the world civilization at a time. Cheikh Diop attests to this when he says that:

Undoubtedly the basic reason for this is that Herodotus, after relating his eyewitness account informing us that the Egyptians were Blacks, then demonstrated, with rare honesty (for a Greek), that Greece borrowed from Egypt all the elements of her civilization, even the cult of gods, and that Egypt was the cradle of civilization (4).

The collection corrects the notion that Africa is a barren land. It argues that Africa is endowed with wonderful landscapes and different natural beauties which may have been bastardised by African leaders. Indeed, the rich natural resources, that God has deposited in the African soil is one of the reasons for the continued wrecking of the African continent by the West. It is however ironical that despite the huge endowment of the continent with sundry resources, it is still associated with squalor and poverty. The desert, especially Sudan, is the land of prosperity and oil yet it is the land of penury, war and death. The desert, thus becomes a metaphor for Africa as a land that is ironically richly blessed in mineral resources but is still a land of lack. Ipadeola's argument, is that African leaders need to rise up to the challenge of saving Africa from its present morass of gross underdevelopment, poverty and death. The massive resources of the African continent should reflect its abundance. The poet celebrates the beauty of Africa by writing glowingly about Sudan. He paints a paradisiac picture of the Sahara Desert:

There is the remote Sudan, land of the Nile
And Sun motley on Meroe vivid with dreams
Where the children flourished without guile
Where forest and shrub drank the same streams (10).

The poet portrays of Sudan as an enclave bestowed by nature, with a lot of natural beauty and resources. It is a Sudan where two wonders of nature interweave. The Nile is the longest river in the World and the Sun is just one throughout the universe. Though the sun gives warmth and growth to humans and vegetation, it does not shine on the world evenly. For instance, while those in the polar region crave for the warmth of the Sun, they can only get it seasonally. But the Sun which is a symbol of strength and life, always shines on the desert in an unrivalled manner. Similarly, the poet captures a scenic and alluring environment of the desert, one that romanticises the desert as an embrace of the natural world. The poet's reverence for the natural world, is easily discernible as

expressed in his bounded passion and knowledge for the desert. A glowing example of this is when the poet writes:

Listen, the desert is singing, singing, just singing,
Listen, its duet, a duet with the breeze
They are singing an old song full of clinging
Just clinging and its joys as they squeeze

In the manner of the elements.
Their dance is a raft reaching back to genesis
Where with Jasmine mingling they entrance
The cloud and every creature sweet is

Their tan rhapsody, their melodies of old gold
Cartwheeling in the sunset, magnificent their display
Crowding space with all the awe it can hold
Riddling the radius of sunset at end of day (17).

This alluring and picturesque depiction of the desert in neatly sculpted quatrains creates a major source of beauty and order for the collection. Even amid the suffering and the bloodbath that sometimes dog the desert, one would never have imagined that the desert could still emit such grandeur and attraction to be so described. This is a confirmation that nature bestows beauty on the desert not minding humans' ceaseless destructive impact on the environment. Humans destroy the environment with their exploitative activities, wars and bad environmental practices. The desert is also not exempted from such environmental plunder. Many wars and crimes are perpetrated on the desert which despoils the land and the environment. These hostile acts tend to injure the well-being of the nature of the desert. The poet constantly gives vivid descriptions of the desert:

Soon the bluster of wind shrouding plain
Blurring distance, fraying nerves, shall pass
And calm, soothing in its stead, make gain
Stare serene upon empty space and mass

Of immobile dunes, sand staid and unshifting
Parched on the edge of the southern limits
Of the Sahara, where goat herds, slow drifting,
Flow in vicious patterns of grazing bits. (122).

Ipadeola, through these scenic depictions, reveals the hidden beauty and splendour that one can catch in the desert. It reveals that the desert can also provide much-needed vegetation through which animal husbandry can be supported. The desert is an environment sumptuous in many things of nature which may not be easily available in

other parts of the earth. The desert is a unique order of the earth characterised by clement, inclemnt and fascinating environment. The desert is capable of providing inspiration and cover for the people who co-inhabit it. The poet further writes that the desert is a place where:

Wind-breasting crickets, armoured copper knights
Disturb the evenings pleasantly with music
Of their feet. Many are the desert nights
That thrill with their symphonic tonic (125).

Nature has a way of romanticising the mind, of providing succour and comfort especially when it meets with poetry. This can simply sum the pulchritude of nature and its being the haven for humans in moments the world becomes disordered and pestilential.

The poet gets so carried away with the magnificence of the desert environment that he plays on the popular nursery rhymes ‘twinkle, twinkle little star’ to further create beauty around the desert and its narrativity. This popular nursery rhyme is one of the many used to appreciate nature especially the star and it is also used to train younger minds into the beauty, rhythm and the retention that poetry offers to learning. The poem is used to build the intellect of the children and one can only relish the excitement with which children render this age-long poem. The poet decides to do a brilliant mimicry of this poem thus:

In silence, starry- eyed, up above the world so high
Their distant celestial dance as nuanced, as rich
As Liberian diamonds flung in the sky
With Angolan élan. They defy gravity, we itch (17).

Away from the mimicry of the nursery rhyme, the third line in the stanza makes a critical remark that cannot be grossed over. The ‘Liberian diamond’ reminds one of the ‘blood diamonds’ upon which was a major cause of the civil war in Sierra Leone in the 1990s. The lust for diamonds had empowered and bolstered the confidence of the rebels to fight against the government and the people of Sierra Leone. It was a war-crime offence which saw the former President of Liberia Charles Taylor prosecuted and jailed. The occurrence further strengthens the argument that mineral resources seem to be more of a curse to some African nations than a blessing. According to information on the ebbsite of Pure Earth the case of lead poisoning arising from mining activities in Zamfara State, Nigeria led to the death of an estimated 400 children. Also, there have been cases of pipeline vandalism, which oftentimes result in loss of human lives and grave environmental

degradation. These are some of the needless and avoidable disasters that humans foist on themselves through the greedy exploitation of natural resources.

For instance, though Sudan may be a land of rich mineral resources, the same mineral resources have been part of the country's source of misery. The poet therefore, also, records a Sudan that has been war-ridden and blood-soaked. Indeed nature may have bestowed a lot of beauty on Sudan; humans however have a way of violating the beauty of nature. Sudan has had two civil wars. The first one was fought from 1955 to 1972 and the second was from 1983 to 2005. There has been a prolonged conflict between the government and the opposition forces. The point here is that people engage in conflicts ,for varied reasons and most human activities consciously, or unconsciously, tend to destroy not only themselves, during violent conflicts, but also nature and the environment. The poet writes:

And there is this Sudan, codex rescriptus, palimpsest
Where Janjaweed repaints memory in blood clots
Of innocents, where crude-fed millions kill in jest
Where oil and race yield endless, deadly plots (11).

Sudan though may be a land of beauty; it is also a war infested enclave where people fight over oil unremittingly. The crude deposits in the land ordinarily should be a blessing but the quest for materiality and human avarice has degraded the blessing into a curse for the war torn-nation. Indeed oil to Sudan and for many African countries has become a burden instead of being a resource of advancement for the people. Unfortunately,oil, wherever it is found on the African continent, has always led to huge crisis, death, calamity, suffering, poverty, environmental degradation among others. It is a sad trajectory that despite the huge deposit of crude oil in Sudan, the land has been a land of poverty and strives. It has a long history of instability and unrest and is one of the poorest nations on the planet earth. The desert through these incessant wars, becomes a theatre of war where humans fight for resources that nature has bestowed the desert. While nature may be harsh in the desert, many of human's ignoble activities too have turned the desert into a hellish place.

The greed of humans is brought to bear here in the violent manner people fight over resources deposited in the ground for the wellbeing of the people. It is a sad commentary on how undisciplined, avaricious and capitalistic, humans have become. It is pitiable that

the value being attached to these resources is more than that attached to human lives. This is one of the shortcomings of capitalism, especially the attempt to commodify life and human existence. This ideology has inculcated the grab-at-all-cost syndrome, in most humans and this is at the core of the depletion of the natural resources and environmental degradation. Ipadeola captures the war situation on the desert thus:

Field deaths. From a bullet in the eye,
Shrapnel in the guts, gas in the lungs
Death from pellets, from a shattered thigh
Crude deaths and clean, death with prongs

Strafed limbs, sickled innards of men
Seen and smelt, touched and also felt.
This was death, writ large, engulfing the ken
Of salt greases witnessing how men melt

In Sahara heat under enemy fire
The grain stages of crushing manifests
In drama of death and the dire
Art of slim survival on a terrain that tests

Resolve. Struggling through gun smoke and dust
Diesel exhaust, methane fumes from dug trenches
Where twisted metal greets who comes first
On whom fate tests the wrenches (91).

Ipadeola takes us through the most fearsome of the different colourations of the desert. Here, the desert becomes a hotbed of death where humans are neutralised and killed in the hands of nature and humans, who have committed themselves to an endgame of death as the ultimate resolution of humanitarian crises. In a war situation, the human environment becomes polluted that not only the warring actors are affected but all forms of nature, humans, animals, plants and indeed the whole environment is polluted and affected. For instance, a war environment as the desert has is filled with 'methane fumes', 'gun smoke', 'dust' and 'diesel exhaust' among others. These are pollutants that are capable of subjecting the environment to danger for plants and animals. These pollutants, by themselves are capable of destroying human lives through the impurities that they are forced to inhale.

A major recipient of the negative effects of war is the forest which suffers a major disturbance. The forest becomes a primal victim of war as its ecosystem is destroyed and altered. Indeed forest disturbances often trigger abrupt shifts in forest ecosystems.

Though contemporary and paleoecological observations indicate substantial ecosystem resilience to historical disturbances suggesting that ecosystems recover their essential structure and function after perturbation (Holling 1973), Scheffer, Carpenter and Dakos (2015) affirm that forest disturbances can also trigger persistent changes in the ecosystem state and also increase vulnerability to degradation. (Ghazoul et al 2015; Seidl et al 2016). The destruction of the forest the natural habitat and food source for most animals, also affects the animals and could cause mass migration of the animals. These animals have roles they play in maintaining an equilibrium of the ecosystem, thus their dislocation is an invitation to the utter disruption of the eco system. The forests also produce herbs and drugs for the effective recovery of humans in terms of sickness and for the prevention of illnesses. It could therefore be seen that the effects of war can be immensely devastating beyond immediate human comprehension especially noting the role of forests is regulating the ecosystem.

The strife has altered the activities of the natural elements. This goes to show the adverse effects that human activities such as war and strife and raids have on the environment. The human environment is the nerve of existence. For instance, no mortal can survive without breathing yet the air that we breathe is found in the environment. This is the major reason why humans need to take good care of their environment. Indeed humans are as healthy as the environment in which they live. The destruction of the human environment, by human activity, is exemplified in the collection when the poet writes that:

So that memory suffers seizures with the script
Written in blood of infants, where a river
Carries on the crimson communion of child and conscript
Down, deep down, into Senghal's waiting fever (25).

Water, a major necessity of life, is another natural element at the receiving end of wars. It is doubtful whether human existence can be sustained without water. It is therefore, a great concern that a river that is supposed to provide succour to humans in terms of quenching thirst, for farming, bathing and for washing as a result of human greed, has become the river of blood. This is how the ravenous and acquisitive nature of humans affects the environment. For instance, how would a bloody river perform its natural function? Who would relate with a bloody river? The non-functional river, would,

thereby, bring untold hardship, to human and animal activities. Indeed, it could lead to loss of occupation and loss of lives in human and animals. It may also lead to dislocation and migration among others.

The situation of degrading the environment because of economic resources is similar and easily reminds one of the Niger Delta situations in Nigeria. The people of the Niger Delta suffer land despoliation, environmental degradation, death and fire disasters, among others. The oil war in Sudan, as in other similar places where oil is found in Africa, is often replete with a gloomy portrayal as described by the poet:

Slaughter, food skirmishes, rape and dire need
Exhaust Sudan every hour of the sundial
And dying is not where those that bleed
Fasten themselves to the earth in their last trial (10).

This is the horrendous situation that humans, sometimes turn charming natural environments into. Life becomes hopeless and death becomes as cheap as air. Dying becomes a common occurrence. Lawlessness is the order of the day and all the indices of a failed state are evident. The natural environment is always the worst hit as it is often almost brought into a state of paralysis. Unfortunately, this carries with it a huge stream of implications; humans and animals are displaced from their natural habitats, pipelines are vandalised, military brutality in bids to protect resources other than human lives, occupations are lost or reduced to unbearable minimal, the loss of cultural sensibilities due to dislocation from one's motherland and the loss of some species of animals among others.

Ipadeola shows that nature is not all benevolent and the desert is not different in this regard. Even rain as benevolent as it is can sometimes be destructive. David Rubadiri, in 'An African Thunderstorm', asserts, this much when he creates violent images to show how destructive nature can sometimes be.

Clouds come hurrying with the wind...
Turning
Sharply
Here and there
Tossing up things on its tail
Like a madman chasing nothing...
Pregnant clouds
Gathering to perch on hills
The wind whistles by

And trees bend to let it pass..

The effect of thunderstorms can be devastating on the human community. Sometimes rains come with devastating thunderstorms and at such occasions, humans and animals scamper for safety with children crying and the elderly running helter-skelter. The desert also, can really be a cruel terrain because of its tough, blistering and arid nature coupled with its strenuous, wide expanse and landscape. The desert is a very tough terrain that very few mortals can survive. The intense heat saps human energy very easily and breathing can be difficult. The poet attests to the severity of the desert:

Hostile with each sunrise, shrouding hope and breath
In a cloud of peril. Heaven was brass
After Tripoli's brief honeymoon, dissent spelt death
As big brother stamped his image on grass

In the torturer's gaze, long as the history
Of false confessions which settled on the nurse
Tattling every nerve. He said I'll make you sorry
For every wound you bound. I am the curse (129).

Such is the suffering and tenacity that characterise the desert on moments that the arid land really wants to show its turf and stuff.

Ipadeola displays an uncommon mastery of the histories of the nations and towns that he comes across in the desert. He is very much knowledgeable about the geography and history of the desert enclave as he displays fascinating sentience of the desert terrain, the people and their history. He mentions that Bamako houses the last Kiffians. The Kiffian is believed to have existed for thousands of years in the Sahara Desert during the Neolithic Sub pluvial. The Kiffians were very tall Stone Age people, who lived as skilled hunters, in the desert at a period when the desert was verdant and wet. He writes:

In Bamako, the dream of the last Kiffian lives
Buoyed on bouffant clouds reaching adroitly
Through the shimmering of Sahel sieves
Into Sijimala, where none venture confidently (19).

Sijimala is a great historical reference point about the devastating nature of the wars on people who had lived in the city. Sijimala was a Moroccan city that served as a trade centre. It was located on the Northern edge of the Sahara, in Morocco. Historical accounts have it that the city suffered great invasions from the Berber and that the ruin of the city

extends to about five miles along River Ziz in the Tafilalt oasis near Rissani. These historical entities and many more like them are what the poet aptly captures in the poem. Beyond the guides who accompany tourists and visitors to the desert, the many historical monuments and the natural elements that abound in the desert speak to the human mind. Thus, Tade Ipadeola draws on the power of natural elements and things to portray the living experiences of humans on the desert. The various artefacts and monuments serve as sources of inspiration in the hands of Ipadeola and this is reflected in the poets portrayal of the desert as animate. For instance, he personifies the desert:

The desert dares kill a man among his kin
It dares to strip a maiden before her beloved
Nothing dissuades the dune and starred djinn
From swallowing whole the harmless dove (47).

The desert is spoken of here in this stanza as in many others as a human being. Examples of some of the personification of the desert and other elements include: ‘The desert ‘dares kill’, it ‘dares to strip’, ‘nothing dissuades the dune... from swallowing...’ (47). The desert becomes a potent force capable of causing things to happen. Similarly, Ipadeola further personifies other materialities thus:

Dew on white mushrooms glistens in the early morning
Sun, making the light celestial and the saprophytes
Delectable. Already lizards are out for sunning
And the hunt above in motion by the kites.

It is the twentieth year in Saoura and the waters
Are partial to plants as the wadi is partial
To saurian and birds. The flood mutters
Along the path predestined by it is martial

Forbears since prehistory. It is Abiku, calling
Now as it does every twenty years. A generation
Passes through the road of palms, witnessing
Its flow before the next. The flood’s oration (38).

Ipadeola’s portrayal of several inanimate objects as mortal beings is a major strength for him in *The Sahara Testaments*. Being an environmental activist, he views other nonliving things as neighbours with whom humans co-inhabit the world. Matter therefore is considered important and of the essence. It is from this hindsight that one may approach the many personifications of matters and things that pervade the collection. To speak of Saoura a valley and water, as being ‘partial’ is to think of the two elements as humans.

Otherwise, how could an inanimate object be partial? Again, to talk of a ‘muttering flood’ or ‘flood’s oration’, is to personify flood. However, these elements are not just so described. Rather, they portend the agency of matters and things in the affairs of humans. Humans tend to underestimate these material elements forgetting that they play very critical roles in human affairs. Indeed, some of them, as modern humans and agents of technology, humans seem unable to part with. The poet has an inseparable attachment to nature and its elements and this is quite evident in the collection. For instance, the poet writes about the wind as the harbinger of Africa’s glorious past as he remembers the great deeds of great historical figures like Mansa Musa. Ipadeola writes :

Look who the winds brought back: Mansa Musa
And his caravan of gold, sheer volatility
Journeying with him on pilgrimage, farther
Into the pleats of carved dunes for posterity (19).

The wind becomes a vehicle of memory, recalling the magnificent past of the African continent through the indisputable greatness of Mansa Musa, whom the poet refers to as ‘the one man-hurricane that shook the desert’ (19). The poet here portrays nature as a potent force of inspiration, a tool for recalling past events, a source of escape from the chaotic realities of the world and a soothing balm to life’s many torturous struggles.

The Sahara serves as the vehicle of history and memory recall. It reminds the poet about the different trajectories of histories that the African continent has had to travel. It opens up an African historical antecedent, reminding the poet and the reader her glorious, idyllic past and recounting her journey and descent into her present gloomy visage. Gilroy quoted in Olaoluwa (141) contends that “history...continually crisscrossed by the movements of black people— [is] not only [about humans as] commodities but [as they] engaged in various struggles towards emancipation; autonomy and citizenship”. The poet’s voyage takes him to Mali, an ancient nation of knowledge, also known for the fame and the great exploits of Mansa Kankan Musa. Mali is also a historical nation, the site of the ancient scrolls of Timbuktu. The poet writes that the ‘age-marbled scrolls at Timbuktu rests on rocks’ (19). The Timbuktu scrolls are ancient and very important manuscripts that have been preserved for centuries and which revolve on different topics ranging from history to medicine, to art, philosophy, religion and science.

To Ipadeola, therefore, the wind, beyond its therapeutic and cooling nature, especially in the blazing heat of the desert, is also a source of recalling memory, especially of recounting events of the past, of linking the past and the present and of connecting the present to the future. It is also shown in the collection that nature does not only bring back good memories, it conveys bad ones too. The poet records that:

It took a desert's heat to revisit the sorrow
Of mothers. Those for whom the world entire
Was Ramah. Women for whom no tomorrow
Offered lasting solace. Whose tears tire

Not. It did not matter, saint or courtesan
If son or daughter could not be found
In the wake of a slaving raid, as one woman
They mourned freeborn children now bound

And their anguish rolled loose like the lexeme
Of the desert, whose monotonous eye rhymes
Deep and wide, were temptations to blaspheme:
Offspring crossing boundaries to other times. (22).

Even the blazing heat of the desert is portrayed here by in the extract poet as a force bringing past sad occurrences into humans' present consciousness. Kaplan's *The Restorative Benefits of Nature* confirmed that nature is a cognitive enhancer of memory. Also, Rita. Berto's *Exposure to Restorative Nature* affirms that 'viewing pictures of natural scenes had a restorative effect on cognitive function'. This claim is further confirmed by Berman, Jonides and Kaplan who assert in *The Cognitive Benefits of Interacting with Nature* 'that natural scenery has cognitive and restorative functions on humans' (1207). The desert wind is used by the poet to represent life as it was in the desert in the past.

This poem presents the slaving raids that turned the desert women into symbols of pain and anguish. The environment made the women to be hostile and dangerous, because of the several killings, torture and slavery that they have witnessed. They are women made of 'turgid hematite'(22). They have become steely, tough and hardened. They have 'stoic laughter' (22)and they have become men. This sad experience has a way of hardening these women. Tade Ipadeola writes:

.... They are men
Makers, fishermen of sea and the Sengal river

They are the people, the sandstore women
Singing shuttle songs with Time and weaver (23).

Yet the poet admires them, their courage and their determination and the symbols of strength that they have become. Little wonder the poet refers to them as:

The strands of rare value in the fabric
Africa claims. I sing of them, people of dance,
Whose music retains the stuff and rubric
Of North – winds and easterlies, of deep romance. (pp. 23.)

The poet shows that these women have been unfairly treated in various ways. Their husbands and sons are killed maimed, and tortured and taken into slavery. The women are raped alongside their daughters. These women have witnessed pain and have been brutally dehumanised. They are products of centuries of injustice, tyranny and oppression. They are also denied justice. Ecofeminism suggests a connection between nature and women such that when nature is maltreated women are the first to be at the receiving end and that women and nature are always at the receiving end of the activities of man. They suggest that when nature is degraded, women are exploited. Karen Warren explores this theme greatly in *Ecological Feminism* (1991) in which she alluded to many connections between nature and women. Similarly, Merchant corroborates this when she says:

There is no simple relationship between the ways in which nature has been gendered both positively and negatively as female over the past millennia, and the roles of women in society. Nature has been revered as animate mother, feared and degraded an unpredictable witch, and plowed as virgin land. Yet forces such as the socialization of women and care takers nurturers, the degradation of women's livelihood and bodies, and the double burden borne by women as workers and homemakers in capitalist, socialist and colonized countries have often propelled them to act to preserve both non-human nature and themselves (1).

These women become symbols for the African continent, in terms of the tyranny and the oppression that Africa has suffered as a result of colonisation and probably still suffering in this neo colonial age. Indeed the African continent is yet to come out of the morass of colonisation. Many African nations are still battling with the effect of colonialism that has crippled the African continent for a long time. Suffice it to say however that bad leadership has prevented many African nations from shaking off the shackles of colonialism.

Humans often erroneously see the earth as mere materiality that can be used and discarded. Yet the poet shows that mother earth goes far beyond the dismissible disposition that humans tend to attach to it. Mother earth is the reservoir of knowledge, of things past, of the present and even of the future. It is the basis and the sustenance of livelihood for all creatures and it is right to conclude that life is unfathomable without the mother earth. Mineral resources for instance are deposited in the earth to cater for human's today and tomorrow. The poet, in justifying the place of the earth, in the world, creates a dramatic exchange between the earth and history.

Of final solutions. A Reich remedy smolders
Together with history but only earth can answer
Old questions – obtuse dinosaurs, bones in boulders
Remind us that nothing, not Field Marshal nor panzer.

Defeats the earth, we lean into the future
Growing pains with us, seeking clear light
To read what history has written in the feature
Of earth's profile our instruments, our plight (34).

Mother earth is humanity's common patrimony which must be sustained. It is the basic life support system to humans and animals and plants. Humans should therefore keep the earth healthy and strong.

Tade Ipadeola, in this collection effectively combines history, culture and religion. This mix is noteworthy and commendable as it creates a rich armour for the history and the culture of the African people that the collection celebrates. This afforded the poet to document the whole essence of the African nation as he chronicles their religion, the art, their history and their culture. Ipadeola therefore confronts us with history intermixed with culture and religion on sundry matters. For instance, the history of the slave trade era is chronicled in the collection to create a nexus between the past and the present and of course the future.

There were routes to Slavery's hell
Apart from ship holds. Watch a manacled throng
Trudge their way north, agony in every cell
From thirst and scorpions, deep wrong.

Of the traffic going on for two thousand seasons
There were stray visions of calcium remains
Of dinosaurs on those journeys. God's reasons

For the fossils eluding the captor's carbon brain (43).

Recalling the era of the slavery reveals Africa's ugly past: it portrays the anguish, the terror and the utter dehumanisation to which the African people have been unfairly subjected. It is a reminder of how Africans were mangled into paths and ships and carted to Europe and America as slaves and made to work under the most brutalising conditions. Indeed, as a gateway to other parts of the world many travellers had their lives terminated in the torturous journeys that some had embarked upon. During the slave trade era, people were forced to make the journey under the most horrific of conditions which caused the death of many of them. Modern slavery, on the other hand, is a choice often embarked upon freely and indeed paid for by desperate people who were ready to escape their different countries owing to hard economic conditions. Many of these modern slaves died while crossing the desert, due to the tenacity of the desert, or from attacks from bandits and in wars across the desert among others. Also, many have died while attempting to cross the sea to Europe.

The poet captures use rich imagery the pains and the agony that the slaves passed through. They were 'manacled' yet made to 'trudge' amidst thirst and scorpion bites. Many died in the voyage both on land and at sea. There is also the allusion to Ayi Kwei Armah's novel, *Two Thousand Seasons* a book that catalogued the slave trade period in Africa. The slave trade dealt a devastating blow to Africa and its people and many countries are still battling with the effects, till today. Historically, the Sahara desert provided the route through which Africans were transported to Europe as slaves. Wole Soyinka quoted in Celicien Joseph (2015) says "Every landmark is a testament of history and in our own indelible instance - from Goree through the slave forts of Ghana to Zanzibar - every fort and stockade, increasingly turned into museums, filled with grim evocations of this passage of history" (59). The Sahara desert, therefore, becomes a sad reminder of the unfortunate trajectory of the vassalage that has bedevilled and devastated Africa and her people. It is also a call for the rejuvenation of a sleeping giant.

In Ipadeola's *The Sahara Testaments* one is confronted with the presentation of nature as a spiritual essence. It caters for the human needs and comforts them in times of despair and speaks to humans in many ways beyond the ordinary. In the words of the poet, he writes 'There is poetry here, of neat sculpted quatrains' a line that almost sums the entire

collection. *The Sahara Testaments* is a fine poetry of nature. The depth of intellection and creativity, attained by the poet is exceptional. The collection is a narrative of the desert, of its ecology and its beingness. It graphically takes the reader on a voyage, wondering, wandering through a picturesque depiction of the beauty of the Sahara Desert. To the discerning mind, the desert represents and carries the burden and the history of a people struggling to find their feet having been battered with a slavish experience. Though the desert, 'nibbles at asphalt like black chocolate', it is home to millions of people who have come to master its language and its complexities. Ipadeola notes that:

To the migrants, the desert was the face
Of that hidden museum of hellish inquisition,
Lacking all kindness, compassion and grace
Impervious to the merits of calm disquisition (123).

The desert can be a Zone of discomfort, an abode of suffering, pain, anguish and death. Yet, it is a hidden museum. This presupposes that there are a lot of educative deductions extractable from the desert and that what it represents can be made useful for humans. The discerning mind can uncover the many secrets of the desert, instead of focusing on the pain and suffering associated with it. This, mainly, might have influenced Ipadeola in the sense that whilst many are wont to write on people, he chooses to write such a long poem about the desert to unfurl its secrets and hidden teachings. Still dwelling more on the sufferings in the desert, the poet writes:

They say the only illness of the desert
Is madness. A great truth, verily little known
As thin as that membrane of the heart
As difficult to cure once infected. On its own

Seeking not the company of men or beast
The desert matters silent litanies of wrongs
Repressed joys, erased hopes that was yeast
Prospect that was aroma of victory songs.

In solitude, honing bone deep hatred
Growing colour - blind, spurring overtures of rain
Rewriting biographies of trees in whose stead
Gnarled revenants remain. The desert is diary of pain (87).

The Sahara Desert is portrayed as a place where living is hard for both the life and the non-living things. The weird nature of the desert is terrifying and could sentence the mind to dementia. The harsh weather of the desert does not have mercy for both plants and

animals. The desert teaches immense lessons in patience, endurance and determination. Yet, these are noble ingredients, with which one can survive life's many ravages. The Sahara Desert is a place of death and a place where only the stoic can survive.

Camped out in the Sahara's death zone
Stoic is our waking resolve in the morning
To reclaim the earth and grow grace from stone
Enough for dwarves and giants in joy and mourning (90).

Sometimes, the poet paints a gloomy picture of the desert, which is in tandem with the common beliefs about the desert as a place of hardship and pain. This portrayal of the desert conforms to the street narratives, that travellers relay, based on their experiences while traversing the desert. Many Africans who have become utterly despondent, of the economic situation of their various countries take respite in escaping to greener pastures through the desert. This is a dangerous venture, where thousands die, without getting to their destination, some others are maimed, robbed and raped in the course of the journey. The poet paints a horrible picture of some of the encounters of the people of the desert:

There is no Christmas in their trees, no sea
In their horses. There is not a single drop
Of water in their beds of December, no tea
In their cups. There is no harvest, no crop (99).

This is a dreadful picture of the desert which conforms with the desert being a tough place to live in. Beyond the graphic depiction, the desert here is portrayed as a harsh environment one in which human beings may not be able to survive. This portrayal shows the arid nature of the desert, which largely does not support vegetation and agriculture. The question then is how do humans and animals survive in such a situation? A major point to emphasise here is the indispensability of nature. Humans and animals depend on nature which may come in varied forms such as quality air, potable water and healthy vegetation among others.

The desert, truly, must be a place of different colourations, a place of contradictions and indeed, an 'other' of the world. It is a place meant for the tough and for lessons in patience and on endurance. It is a place where the weather may be cruel and unpredictable. The lesson from all this is that the world may probably be established on the foundation of opposites. The harshness of the weather here compels humans to

appreciate nature it when we are endowed with clement weathers to serve as a reminder that there is harsh weather in some other climes.

The map of the desert is a massive tome
Of wealth in terms of things invincible
It is an encyclopedia of things to come
The manifest of things implied impossible (101).

The expansiveness of the desert also implies its invincibility and unpredictability. It is a bundle of knowledge for the discerning mind. Human beings have a lot to learn from the desert. For instance, it is unbelievable that people could be living on the desert despite its generally tough nature. Yet there is much life on the desert that produces its unique kind of world, different cultures, different belief systems and more that mark the desert as a unique other of the earth.

There is a part of the collection that the poet labels ‘The Atlantic Interval’, which truly serves as an interval in content and style. While all the poems before this section are written in quatrains, poems in this section are written differently. Thus the Interval marks a break from the quatrains. The essence of this may be due to the significance of James Island, Gambia to the poet and to Africa. The poet dwells on the historicity of the Island as a place that slaves have visited. He weaves her history to natural elements such as the wind, the ageless sea and witness trees among others.

That frozen phallus of a cannon stares
Endlessly upon a fecund, ageless sea
Witness trees, weather beaten and gnarled
Affinitize with the elements,
Whispering the songs
Of Neptune when the wind is high.
This is James Island
Spartans as the sun
Where the fittest marched in chains to merge
With futures alien as the skin of shipmaster (108)

The poet suggests that the Island was a place where slaves were loaded into ships and carted away to foreign lands. The use and fusion of nature and forces of nature as part of the slave narrative are compelling. History and nature are treated here as ‘materials’ like ‘mineral resources of the sea’. The Island is a remembrance of the pain and anguish by which Africa’s past was characterized especially concerning Atlantic slavery. It is a sad reminder of the torture and cruelty slaves suffered in the hands of the marauding

Europeans. Indeed because of the importance of James Island to human history, it was given several names such as the Island of sorrow, King Niumi Island, St. Andrew Island and Fort James among others. Tade Ipadeola uses the Island to interrogate and remind of Africa's slave trade era. The West forced and foisted the slave trade on Africa and it accentuated the craze for the exploitation of the resources of the continent. The slave trade later became the foundation for the economic and infrastructural development of the West.

The ready-made human capital that slavery provided and the purloining of the resources of Africa were the basis of the so called economic and infrastructural advancement of some western countries today. Ironically, some of these countries too chide Africa for underdevelopment even when they continue to create political and economic challenges for African countries so that the underdevelopment can continue. Africa's relative backwardness arguably, is traceable to the slave trade invasion into the region. Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson reveal that there is a link between the intensity of the slave trade and present-day socioeconomic outcomes. The agony of the moment must have been so forbidding that the poet uses nature to lament this ignoble past:

And you can hear this Island lamenting and lost
Haunted like the eyes of scattered children
Seeking shelter in a strange and rattled world
Thrust out at turns by traitors and aliens (109).

The poet turns nature into a materiality that takes up a functional role beyond playing the traditional backgrounding role for human activities. Nature becomes a partaker of human suffering and loss. The evil perpetrated on the Island must have been so dastardly and grim for the poet to use nature to portray the level of torture and mindlessness that the slaves must have undergone in the hands of their western tormentors.

Ipadeola seems to have a soft disposition for the masses, 'the wretched of the earth'. He enjoys identifying with the masses; he loves to take on their causes. It is not surprising, therefore, that he devotes a chapter, written in the language of the crowd, a language of the commoner, Pidgin English. Writing poetry, in Pidgin English, was popularised by Gladys Casely-Hayford who as early as 1948 published 'Take Um So' in Pidgin. This effort was followed by Dennis Osadebay with his 'Black Man Trouble' in 1952 and later

Aig- Imoukhuede's 'One wife for One Man' and later Mamman Vatsa's 'Tori for Geti Bow Leg'. Many others have later written poetry in Pidgin. Some of these include Ezenwa Ohaeto, Odia Ofeimun, Tunde Fatunde, Obari Gomba, Osita Ike and Humphrey Ogu among others.

The use of pidgin draws from the need to be conscious of one's environment and to identify with the realities of the people. Tade Ipadeola, in this poem, uses the Pidgin English to lament the sociopolitical conditions of the *holoi poloi* of the society. He expresses regret, anger, sorrow and pain in the hard living conditions of the people. To locate this suffering well with the people Ipadeola chooses the language of the street to identify with the hardship that the people are going through. Ipadeola captures some of the lamentations of the people in the following stanzas:

We own Tajudeen, e get as dis leta nor easy
To write to una. Man nor fit cry, man try
Man nor fit stop. Man eyes be like busy
Road. Plentipain. Man nor fit cry

Like pikin. Man try, man nor fit, man pikin
Just nor fit stop. Man travel go Funtua
Pipole for dere dey cry. Di pain na one kain
How person go fit write am? Man go Wusasa (113).

This can loosely be translated as:

Our dear Tajudeen, it is a difficult choice
Writing this letter, as tears flow freely
Unstoppable. The eyes have become
Like busy roads amidst huge pain. Man can't cry

Like a babe, man continues to cry
Uncontrollably. Even as one goes to Funtua
The people there are immersed in sobbing
How does one write this? Man must leave for Wusasa

This is a portrayal of an environment that is harsh to the people. This accounts for the endless immigration that has become a continuous feature of most African countries and indeed in some other part of the world. There is hunger and abject poverty, in many African countries to the extent that many engage in endless journey to find where the pasture is greener. This has led to the death of thousands of people. The desert has become one of the different escape routes to Europe and other parts of the world. Yet, not

many can survive the rigour and the hardship of the desert. Immigration has become a major issue in the world now. It has created several humanitarian and environmental problems and the whole world is battling with this problem that has become a hydra-headed monster.

The exodus that is taking place in Africa seems endless as many African countries are poverty-stricken and are battling with huge economic problems which have immensely impoverished their citizens. For instance, there is high unemployment rate in Nigeria and many other African countries. The problem of corruption has remained colossal and intractable for many African countries. Indeed, many African countries have become poverty centres of the world, with their citizens experiencing extreme deprivations like malnutrition, lack of food and diseases. Nigeria has become one of the poorest nations in the world alongside countries like Niger, Chad and Afghanistan among others.

The poem, apart from depicting suffering, hardship and deprivations, suggests a workable solution to the gamut of problems that Nigeria and other African countries are facing. The clamour to stop agonising as if some mortal would hearken to the cries of Africa and rescue the people. It is a genuine call that Africa can solve its problems. The African environment has for long become an inclement milieu for personal, sociopolitical and economic progress. And for as long as this remains nothing may prove workable to stem the tide of mass movement that has continuously hit the African continent. People need basic infrastructure to survive especially in the 21st century. Unfortunately, not many African countries can boast of this, yet this is the age of globalisation where information moves almost unrestricted. This Pidgin poem, therefore, is a realistic commentary of the hurtful environment that the African continent has become. It is a true reflection of the happenings in many of the countries in Africa.

Ipadeola's eco-critical bent is further revealed in a section of the poem, where he asks some questions relating to how people destroy the economic environment. This, obviously, is to warn against the reckless destruction of nature and to change the attitude of the people. As an eco-activist himself, he felt the need to change the people's attitude to the environment. He understands the power of poetry to change people's perception and he uses it to great advantage here:

Who is the enemy? Who flares poison gas?

Who cuts down the trees without let?
Who drains the march for all it has?
Who trawls the seas with the killing net? (133).

Ipadeola, queries the people's bad practices against nature and the environment. In Nigeria, a lot of exploitation is going on in the Niger Delta region of the country. This has subjected the people and the region to indescribable sufferings and hardship. The incessant oil spill has turned the whole land into a wasteland where farmers can hardly farm. Similarly, oil spillage has contaminated all the rivers in the region and fishermen have been consequently displaced from their preoccupation. For the people of the Niger Delta, fishing is a major occupation of the people. Unfortunately, many of them have been thrown off business. Indeed many people have had to relocate from their ancestral lands to alien lands. Many also have witnessed dislocation while many have had to drop fishing as an ancestral family preoccupation.

This disruption has broken families, turned many into refugees and has affected negatively the economy of the area. Sending people away from their occupation has increased the poverty level in the region. Attempts, by people of the Niger Delta to reverse this trend has often been met with serious and stiff resistance by agents of government. The whole environment remains polluted and dangerous to humans and animal habitation. At a point in the past, the city of Port Harcourt battled with mysterious black soot that enveloped the city. . Many people in the region have died either as a result of the environmental pollution orchestrated by the oil exploitation or from the armed struggle that the people of the region have unavoidably resorted to and which has been met with deadly violence by the government.

Gas flaring has been occurring in the Niger Delta area for decades with no end in sight. This has exposed the people of the area to serious health challenges, such as skin cancer, leukaemia and lung cancer which are contractable from undue exposure to the harmful substances being flared. These diseases and many more, have been linked to pollutants released as a result of gas flaring. Gas flaring is a pungent indictment of the way the resources of Nigeria are frittered away because the gas that is being flared can be converted into wealth and to provide the people with the much sought after infrastructure.

Another bad practice hinted at by Ipadeola is tree felling which has become a negative phenomenon and is creating severe environmental problem in the country. Trees are

felled indiscriminately in Nigeria and in many parts of Africa. Many people do not consider the catastrophic effect of deforestation,, which is a direct consequence of tree felling. While it is true that the papers and some other materials that we use are products of trees, and while one further notes that some of the food that we eat are generated from trees, the reckless abandon with which trees are felled would cause the world greater damage than any good that can be attached to tree felling. Though there have been many calls and campaigns against deforestation, more efforts must be registered in this regard to achieve a reasonable compliance level. Ipadeola further shows his displeasure for forces that are out to destroy nature and the environment. He laments the privileging of material wealth over human lives. He detests how capitalism has eroded the need to preserve nature and the environment at the expense of humanity and posterity. Ipadeola writes:

The same kind that studies the dinosaur
Learning nothing from lizards, building plants
That make a million mirror in the hour
Learning nought from reflection or the ants.

Who is the enemy but the one with one
Mission? Gourging for gold and yellowcake
To wage the final war that never can be won
With force of arms or megatons? For the sake (133).

Ipadeola reveals the hypocrisy of the capitalist forces and their allies who would always destroy nature and the environment for monetary and selfish gains. The poet reveals the presumptuous nature of man in failing to learn from nature. Truly humans have a lot to learn from nature but for the unbridled arrogance with which humans conduct their activities, which usually blindfolds them to the beauty and instructions that nature imparts. The craze for material wealth has driven humans to a state of utter disdain and negligence. Indeed man, through the instrumentality of technology, has perfected the art of destroying nature. Science and technology have been made to replace nature and posthumanism seems to be leading humanity into extinction, as humans now live in crass artificiality.

The poet, being an environmental activist is optimistic that the forces that support nature would reclaim the earth from her destroyers. Many environmental activists are helping in differentspheres of human activities to save the world from outright plunder. His poems

show the risks and the dangers associated with the careless destruction of the earth and the environment can be devastating and indeed have dire and catastrophic consequences. For instance, climate change and global warming are major environmental problems that the whole world is still trying hard to fix. Yet, it is a direct manifestation of the depletion of the ozone layer owing to the indiscriminate and excessive production and emission of chlorofluorocarbons. The resultant ultraviolet rays that come directly on humans and vegetation has been causing great damage on the world, as humans now battle with various types of health challenges, such as skin diseases, eye damage, immune system damage accelerated ageing among others.

It has become imperative for the world, therefore, to take proactive measures to save the world, as there lies the succour for humanity to also be salvaged. It is doubtful that humans can live without nature. It is pacifying that the poet enjoins the world to take back the earth:

Of rainmakers, keepers of runes, planters of peace
We shall find the answers, reclaim the soil
Soothe the earth of bruises, find surcease
For laboring Atlas and peasants from toil (133).

Truly, all human efforts must be directed at slowing down the way nature is destroyed. It is in doing this that the whole of humanity that seems to be on the precipice of extinction now can be saved. The world should know that the issue of the environment is the issue of life. What humanity does to the environment is the quality of safety and survival that the environment heaves back at humanity. In treating the environment right, we treat ourselves right.

The poet notes how gas-lit lamps adorn the towns and the cities from the money derived from oil. It is unfortunate that, in Nigeria, the bulk of money being spent on building the urban centres, the states and indeed the federation is money made from oil. It is however ironical that the places from where the oil comes from, suffer utter neglect and land despoliation. While the cities glitter, the riverine areas, where oil exploitation is recklessly being carried out recklessly, are decrepit:

Gas-lit lamps bejeweled the highway we travelled
Yenagoa to Alexandria. The whispering gas
Fed a million stands and more, they dazzled
With craft through mangrove and mountain pass (134).

It is baffling why it has become difficult and unachievable for the Federal Government and the oil exploration companies to make life bearable for the people from whose soil the oil is being exploited. Oil, for the Niger Delta people has become a curse rather than a blessing, torture rather than comfort, a menace rather than a pleasure. While advance nations of the world are talking of a new global green initiative, many countries in Africa are yet to clear the pollution of many years and are even still adding more. The UN's Global Green New Deal has taken off between 2008 and 2010 and the G20 nations and a handful of other economies have committed US\$3.3 trillion into fiscal stimulus, of which more than \$520 billion was devoted to green investments. This included pollution clean-up, recycling and low-carbon energy. (Edward Barbier, 60). Many African nations, rather than keying into this initiative, are busy flaring gases and indulging in activities capable of increasing the pollution of an already over-polluted environment.

The desert is also an abode for the animals like snakes, rats, wild goats and birds among others. But these animals like humans are also endangered by wars and strifes. Indeed, some of them are casualties of war. Many of these animals are killed during the wars while many of them die of starvation as a result of their dislocation from their natural habitat. Ipadeola writes:

Horned vipers in the sand, camouflaged, proof
To the divinity of humour even when it's dark
And dry. Far away from oasis and shadoof
Eternal assassins, mousing in their theme park.

And desert rats, captive to deaf musicians
Keep the race of serpents in the race, survival
Chasing the tail of death. They too are Tunisians
They have always been, the desert pair, coeval

With varnished ghosts of leopards, addax, wild goats
Foxes, cheetahs, hard scavengers and survivors
Species yesterday made extinct, living in notes
Of old geologists they too are casualties of wars

Waged with that intensity nowhere else known
To man or beast on this planet. No beast's cry
Suffices, no human hand has written down
Such scale of tragedy as spans Landscapes so dry (155-156).

The fact that as humans die in wars and violent conflicts so do animals, should be a pointer to humans to always be thoughtful before resorting to war. This brings to bear the

importance of conservation and the efforts to preserve conservation in war-torn areas Joshua Daskin and Robert Pringle collected, between 1946 and 2010, more than 250 population of large herbivorous mammals in Africa. More than 71 per cent of the protected areas where the animals lived were affected by armed conflict during the study. They found out that conflict is the most important driver of the population that as the number of conflicts rose, the population growth rate of the animals fell. They, however, suggested that sustaining conservation programmes in war torn zones and aiding animals immediately after ceasefires could save the vulnerable animal population.

The poet is full of hope and optimism for the desert. He wishes that one day the desert will be developed by science and technology. The poet comes out as one who is persuaded that nature, science and technology can blend together:

We dream, someday, that skyscrapers
Would sprout in the arid void we see today
That sooner or later, tailors and drapers
Would make air-conditioned mall arrive and stay

It would be science, it would be art
It would be plants resistant to drought
It would be passion in the human heart
It would be high finance and clout (140).

The poet looks forward to a day that the desert will be developed through art, science, technology and human passion, such that it would become a more comfortable place to live in. The poet suggests that achieving this would be a herculean task but with the coalescing of science, technology and art, Ipadeola believes that the dream is achievable.

Ipadeola's belief in science and technology makes him a moderate environmentalist. He believes that science and nature can have a good blend and make life better. Whereas some environmental activists believe that science and technology caused the destruction of nature and they even clamour for the reduction in innovations, that are destructive to nature. Some others believe that science and technology can be made nature friendly to minimise destruction to nature. The argument about nature and technology continues with different schools of thought holding different positions. Jane Bennett is one of those scholars and theorists who believe that technology has deprived the world of all human significance. She believes that technology has affected and altered the natural processes

and that this has greatly vitiated the relevance of humans in the natural order. According to her:

There was once a time when Nature was purposive, God was active in the details of human affairs, human and other creatures were defined by a pre-existing web of relations, social life was characterised by face- to- face relations, and political order took the form of organic community. Then, this pre-modern world gave way to forces of scientific and instrumental rationality, secularism, individualism, and the bureaucratic state – all of which, combined, disenchant the world (2001, 7).

The conflict between technology and nature has also been considered by Susan Lewis in *Technology, Environment and Society* she concludes, unlike Bennett that the disenchantment thesis is exaggerated and that science and technology indeed have roles to play in the sustenance of the world. For instance, the world is now at the stage where many technologies are deployed to mediate, augment and simulate the natural world. These technologies help to deepen human understanding of the workings of nature through picturesque illustrations and simulations. It is, however, unfortunate that the same technology provides the tools through which nature is destroyed, especially for greed and economic gains. O' Connor quoted in Lewis says 'production and economic growth have been prioritised to the point of catastrophic ecological degradation (9).

The book *The Sahara Testaments* exudes the formal qualities of poetry. This is instantiated by the quatrains that characterise the whole poem and fashioned after the ab/ab rhyme scheme. The emphasis and the quaintness of the language that covers the work is so given pre-eminence that the content is almost lost in the language. The loftiness of the content of the Sahara Desert and the curiosity that it evokes, provides a counterbalance between its epic content and a grandeur language, thus creating a poetic blend that can only be etched by a gifted mind as Ipadeola. The poet, in an interview he granted *The Citizen Magazine*, attested to his love for the formal qualities of poetry from childhood when his father would make him recite J. P. Clark into a recorder. He is also quoted in the interview as saying "as I grow older the formalists seem to have me." He avers further that:

I settled for some sort of compromise between the approach that Pablo Neruda took in his Canto General and the approach

that Derek Walcott took in his *Omeros*. My subject dictated that. I could go from country to country but the boundaries we have today, it must be recognized, are new and arbitrary boundaries. I could strive after a master-narrative around which sub-narratives weave in and out but the space I had to contend with has polyphonic and equally pertinent narratives – to privilege one above the other seems dishonest.

Ipadeola's *The Sahara Testaments* is an arcane and comprehensive narrative, though in poetic form, of African history and civilization, using the desert metaphor to dateline the accounts of an entire continent. Indeed, from Mari Djata, to Sundiata, to Sankara and even to Boko Haram, the piece constitutes the testaments of the highs and the lows of the African continent as it spectacles the flurry and fauna of the African landform. *The Sahara Testaments* is a metaphorical portrait of mother Africa, a romanticising of a continent's idyllic past and a sublime poetry of arousing a continent's lost pride. It displays a philosophical and thematic depth that fascinates the mind into the wondrous yet unexpected beauty of a desert, the Sahara desert, the horrendous horror of her histories, and the sacred solemnity of her ways with a rare grace and charm.

Beyond this, *The Sahara Testaments* is an exposition about the Sahara Desert as a different part of nature that hitherto carries a baggage of misconceptions as the hell of the earth and as a wasteland among others. But Ipadeola through robust poetry weaves a beautiful description of the Sahara Desert as he captures her geography, geometry and histories. Through this, the poet is able to draw the Sahara Desert out as a unique and an 'other' part of nature that humans should learn to relate with and which is able to transmit and from which humans are able to learn the lessons of perseverance and tenacity, that may be necessary in surmounting the challenges of the world. The poet shifts from human centered subject to nature moving from the subject to the object. This is a major goal of ecocriticism and this accounts for why the collection is a worthy eco-critical work.

5.2 Evocative Musings and the Rain Ecology as Metaphors in Tade

Ipadeola's *The Rain Fardel*

The Rain Fardel (2005) is Tade Ipadeola's second collection of poetry. His first, being *A Time of Signs* (2000). *The Rain Fardel* as the name suggests is a concatenation of diverse experiences and experiments by the poet, yet his passion and activism for nature are a

valuable testimony even in this collection. The collection, as a precursor to *The Sahara Testaments* manifests the eco-critical tendencies that would soon reach a venerable crescendo and maturation in *The Sahara Testaments*. While *The Sahara Testaments* is a treatise on the desert, Ipadeola in *The Rain Fardel* uses the rain metaphor to depict varied human experiences that are both admirable and despicable. The collection is a potpourri of poems on varied and sundry matters. One is therefore able to measure the creative elasticity of the poet. Ipadeola displays an uncommon mastery in the treatment of different kinds of experiences, yet cohering all, in a thematic rain motif.

The Rain Fardel may not particularly be an eco-centric collection in the fashion of *The Sahara Testaments*, as it contains a potpourri of poems and sub-themes. Ipadeola only uses nature and the environment as a bastion for some of the experiences celebrated in the varied poems. Indeed many of the poems are full of natural elements such as symbols, images and as metaphors for the varied tempers and temperaments that the poems represent. The collection contains thirty-nine poems in all and Ipadeola uses rain and its manifold metaphors, not only to connect the different poems, but to show the various dimensions of the human world. The collection is a representation of Ipadeola's versatility and according to Molar Wood, in an interview with Sentinel, 'his take on the fathomless dimensions of man - and the earth'. The use of rain a natural element of nature and environment is to describe human situations from different perspectives and in different strides. The poet's approach to all creatures smacks of transcendentalism, a belief in the essential unity of all creation and in the innate goodness of humanity among others. This appears to be the philosophy driving the paralleling of human experiences in nature and using nature to explain human actions.

The poem 'imperium' describes the oppressive attitude of the Western world to some countries especially Afghanistan and Iraq. The poet criticises the absolute power with which the Western world represses weak countries of the world, as exemplified in Iraq, Afghanistan and some Middle East countries. The poet bemoans the faith of these countries and the Middle East in the hands of a 'western carpenter' who continues to nail them according to his volition and national interest. The poet's love for nature is espoused in his portrayal of the pigeon as something that should be well taken care of and not subjected to oppression and tyranny. He, therefore, admonishes that the bearer – pigeon should be treated well, fed and given water. Ipadeola writes:

The bearer – pigeon is old, treat her well,
Bread crumbs and beancake will do
Also water... (1-3).

The poem also serves as a call to action for the oppressed nations of the world to wake up from their slumber as the 'pigeon is greying and in need of sleep (21)'. The message here is to show love to nature and humanity in general. This is one of the major messages of ecocriticism, to show love to one another, even to other beings like plants and animals and indeed to material things that impact on our lives. Ipadeola's position is that nations should assist nations not oppress them. There is, therefore, the need for humanity to hearken to the charge of the poet when he says 'So up your slumbering selves, sit a spell and write' (19). Indeed, humanity must act urgently to save itself. In 'Emergency' the poet declares an emergency on Africa especially the Sudan that has been plundered by rebels. He portrays Sudan as an endangered environment where human life is largely unsafe and threatened:

Smoking syphilis, gone in Janjaweed
Rape this land repeatedly to ruin
From Dafur to Delgo, Sodom descends
Upon Sable Sudan and me. (5 - 8).

This is the portrayal of Sudan as a sanguinary environment where there is the break-down of law and order and human life is not safe. When an environment becomes inclement, basic human socio-economic activities are broadly reduced or impracticable. Farmers are stopped from practising their trade and business activities reduce considerably as people move away from the danger zones. In all, the poet bemoans the acquiescence or the partial intervention and attitude of the western world to the gory atrocities that is going on in Sudan. The place has become a crimsoned environment dispensing death and diseases to humans especially women and children who are always the vulnerable lot in wars. The poet was obviously, condemning the insensibility and the nonchalance of the western world when he writes that:

Not CNN, not SKY can see or feel
The blood on the fields, the children as they died
Clinging to hope that cannot save
Clinging to hate that won't avail (7 - 10).

The whole world looks on, amid an unending crisis that has claimed numerous lives yet still counting. Is it because it is happening in Africa? Were it to be in Europe would the

world have allowed the crisis to fester in this manner? The reference to CNN and SKY is to show that these institutions are agencies of western institutions, the binoculars from which they view the rest of the world. It may also be an indictment on these institutions for not doing enough to publicise the tragic occurrences in Africa, a less developed continent when compared with the rest of the world. And if one may ask, where do these rebels-warring parties in Africa get their arms and ammunitions from? Who finances their operations as without adequate funding many of them would not be able to survive. As long as there are wars and insurgencies in Africa, not only will the region not be stable enough to develop, it will also continue to make the African environment insecure and perilous. The poet therefore, bestows on himself the task of functioning as the voice of the voiceless, to project this tragedy to the world. Hence in the last verse of the poem 'Imperium' the poet says:

But let the world read these, like hieroglyphs
I left behind in Egypt. Testaments
Of the voiceless dead, defiant
Damning greed that feeds on soil. (13 - 18).

The last line above is foregrounds the cause of distressing social upheaval which eventually led humans and the environment into huge disaster. Behind most human conflict is greed. Greed causes, influences and escalates human conflicts. The attendant devastation, that often characterises human conflicts, has a way of affecting both human and the non-human elements. For instance, violence and wars destroy humans and the non-human beings in droves. It can also cause mass migration of humans and animals from one place to another thus creating a host of humanitarian crises. It is also instructive, to note that, the poet shows consistency in his concern and projection of the Sudan crisis. This reveals the passion and the disquiet he feels on the worsening situation in the Sudan. If this concern started in *The Rain Fardel* (2005), it continued in *The Sahara Testaments* (2013) where Ipadeola says:

And there is this Sudan, codex rescriptus, palimpsest
Where Janjaweed repaints memory in blood clots
Of innocents, where crude-fed millions kill in jest
Where oil and race yield endless, deadly plots (11).

The consistency of the poet with regards to the Sudan crisis shows the measure of a poet on issues of concern to him. The emphasis placed on this issue shows the concern of the poet on how solutions may be found. It also implies that for the poet art is not for art's

sake rather it must be pressed into social concerns which in this wise can be inferred as saving humanity and catering for the environment.

Another major preoccupation of the poet in *The Rain Fardel* (2005) is the depiction of the connection between love and nature. In 'The Radius', Tade Ipadeola establishes a nexus between love and nature in a manner that reminds the reader of the romantic era where poets devote lines of poetry to nature in reverence and appreciation. Ipadeola, in the poem celebrates the limitless bounds of the power, the charm and the magic that love can perform. At this time, there is no better prescription to a world that is fast sliding into anarchy and rebellion, a world that is replete with hate and violence and a world that is entirely about the self. Love is what the world needs now more than ever before. It is when humans love one another that they can extend love to other non-human beings. The poet describes the limitlessness of love when he writes that:

The radius of love spans
Beyond fringes of light
It spans the darkness
And all the world that's yet to come (1- 4).

Indeed, love has the power to make the world a better place to live. It has the power to transcend 'light' and 'darkness'. Love has the potency to create a harmonious environment for humans and other elements of nature. The poet's position is that if only humans can adopt love in all their dealings, the world definitely would be a better place to live in. In the second stanza, the poet, in a characteristic manner of the romantic poets, affirms his love for nature and his land as he says:

So I love this land
I love the loam
I love the clay
I'm in love with the rocks
And trees, the green grass
The brawn harmattan wind when it blows
Across the land (5-12).

It is obvious that Ipadeola loves and enjoys nature. The romantic portrayal of his love for nature is a clear testimony to this. It is also an extension of the harmony that exists between him and nature. This love soon flourished into a calling and activism. For a poet to dedicate and write a collection of poemson the desert, a natural phenomenon, shows how much he cherishes and admonishes nature and probably why he has committed

himself to environmental activism. Tade Ipadeola must have developed an interest in nature and the environment since childhood. Little wonder then that he records things of nature as his hobby:

Love is my hunting
When I mulch planted yam sets.
When I hoe and gather grass,
To shape into halos (17-20).

The poetic persona enjoys hunting and farming and he must have been introduced to this from childhood and his interest in nature might have stemmed from this. Hunting and farming are major providers of food and this is a pointer to the importance of nature to human survival. Humans may not be able to survive without food. It is therefore important for humans to nurture nature for the survival of humanity. In another vein, hunting must be moderately done lest some animals may become extinct due to irresponsible hunting. Also, farming must be done in ways not too harmful to the land and the environment. Bush burning is dangerous and it is a major source of environmental degradation. Indiscriminate bush burning therefore must be eschewed. Another indicator that Ipadeola must have been arrested by nature from childhood is seen in ‘The Barbican Eclogues’ when the poet says:

There is a tree replete with thorns
Standing on the hill
At the back of our circling houses –
No one dares,
No one climbs, no one tries
The prick of the safe Thorntree (1-6).

This poem in name, seems fashioned after Vergil’s Eclogue series. It reminds the reader of how, in the years, past communities revered nature, how trees were part of the landscape of those communities. In ancient days especially in most African communities, every compound had a tree under which every member of the compound would come for relaxation after the day’s job to listen to stories and share experiences. It helped build the communal nature of societies and helped in sustaining the mental wellbeing of the members of the community. The tree planting campaigns that are gaining ground now are steps in the right direction because the human world is becoming largely artificial and naked. Trees serve a lot of functions such as providing food for humans and serving as shade in sunny environments. Trees also help moderate the climate and increase the air quality around humans. This is why it is instructive to take the ‘Plant a Tree’ campaign

seriously as we ensure that we have trees around our residences. The poet obviously, has a knack for observing nature and monitoring how it evolves. He recalls how he had watched a seedling tree transform into a big tree. The poet says:

I have watched that tree grow corpulent
From year to year and heard
How flashbirds croak on it and fart
Their excess to the wind (7-10).

In the poem, the poet gives details of how he has monitored the growth of the thorn tree. A keen observation from a percipient watcher of nature is an opportunity to listen to the language of nature as nature speaks to those who understand its language. Indeed from the poet's perspective, there are things too numerous to learn from nature. Though the human abodes are often surrounded by streams, trees, mountains and hills, most humans are too carefree and oblivious of the messages of nature. Even when nature is angry, as it sometimes does especially when it has been degraded by human degradation activities, it warns and gives signs of anger but many still fail to heed the signs. Nature can be friendly, it can also be fiendish. For instance, trees have aesthetic value, in beautifying an environment. However, if such trees are not properly tended, they can fall on houses and create havoc. One is not oblivious of situations when humans may uncontrollably be at the mercy of nature especially in the event of natural disasters.

The poet, still in the poem, in his characteristic style, believes that nature plays major roles in the affairs of men. He reckons that nature serves as companions to humans and that nature holds some secrets that humans can learn from. The poet, for instance says:

Still, riffs of rain translate our past to us
And the winds are tongues possessed by history
Fluent like rivers that never dry
Loading our secrets places and phrases
Transmuted by time.
This is the camel continent (20-25).

The poet assumes that the rain is a purveyor of knowledge and understanding and that history can only be discernible to humans through this. Similarly, 'winds are tongues possessed by history' (line 21) suggests that the wind is capable of being the conveyor of history. A major style of Ipadeola is personifying nature that is granting human roles to nature in his poetry. This style bothers on eco-critical consciousness that perceives nature as possessing agentic powers potent enough to give directions to human affairs. The idea

of naming Africa as the camel continent is a pointer to the uniqueness of the African environment. The Carmel is symbol of strength, energy reserved vigour. Indeed every continent has its peculiarity. While Asia is the land of peaks, Europe is a collection of connected peninsulas and islands, Australia is a continent surrounded by water, North America is situated completely within the Northern Hemisphere and almost all within the Western Hemisphere, South America is roughly triangular in shape, broad in the north and tapering to a point in Cape Horn in Chile and Antarctica is the coldest continent

‘The Barbican Eclogues’ is a poem with musical accompaniments like flute, drum, gong, and strings for its performance. The musical accompaniments are to give the poem the desired bite it is expected to have on the audience. This performative style dates back to Okigbo, Osundare and Ofeimun To a very large extent, the poem is a revolutionary one, it is therefore meant to charge the audience to action. The poet writes:

The droughts drain us skywards,
We are streams to thirsting skies
And rainmakers say that blame belongs to us
We hear the verdicts all around, how
Well we deserve our just deserts
The oracles surround us with their truths
And we are captive to their sentences ... (72-78).

But let none point the finger too hard, frail
As we are
Frail as we know ourselves to be,
Shielded only by these barbicans. (79-82).

The poet is sharp and quick to express his disgust of a life characterised by lack, underdevelopment and oppression. He laments having to depend on others to survive. He subtly though robustly criticises the oppressors of the people who blame the masses for their misfortune. He, however, warns that the masses should not be pushed too much and for too long, lest there may be a convulsion and a rebellion. The political nature of the poem notwithstanding, the message is not lost still, that humans and nature are a beneficial mix, a complimentary blend that needs each other in the final analysis.

Ipadeola introduces what appears to be another level, in ecocriticism in the poem, ‘Planetorium’ where humans are likened to planets. It is a movement from simile to metaphor. Humans, in this poem, are described, using the characteristics or features of different planets based on their idiosyncrasies and their natural attributes. The poem is

written for some close associates of the poet who probably were in the same class with him. There is an observable trend in Ipadeola's poetry to liken humans to one natural element or the other. For him, nature represents purity and perfection and humans can only strive to emulate this. This probably accounts for the poet's consistent engagement with nature as humans. In *A Time of Songs*, Ipadeola, in the poem, Tatoes, writes about 'Akinmorin' a town near Oyo in Oyo State of Nigeria. He seemingly shares roots with this town, so much that he writes about the town as a partner. He writes:

Once again fetch me dusk-dance
From orchards of our trysts
Fetch me the first of smiles
That stretched your streets and back again (12-15).

Ipadeola has a way of apostrophising nature in ways that confer respect on the inanimate being that is always the subject of most of his poetry. It must be a mutual love and respect that the poet has for human's non-human neighbours. The poem begins with 'The nine of us were planets' For instance, the poet refers to a friend "Lati" as Mercury. He further writes:

Lati was a mercury. Burning on his axis of fire
For Venus the lone girl- world
Earth was the only one of us to take holy orders
And rescind. Mars was myself. (1-4)

In place of Jupiter largest lad
Saturn became a scout-master for the hour
Uranus wore a pair of lenses to fight the long sight
Neptune was Demola that became a millionaire (9-12).

The choice for Pluto was difficult
Who in class was cold enough and distant?
The lot fell on quiet Fred
Who went to India for a bride (13-16).

This is a poem in which Ipadeola reminisces on some of his former classmates yet he is still able to form a nexus between the nine and nature. It confirms the depth of knowledge that is deposited in the poet about nature. The ease with which Ipadeola achieves a quaint motility for nature, in his poetry, is rare and inimitable. For instance, he is able to share the planets amongst his classmates and according to the attributes of the planets. This is a thought-provoking poem enough for one to ask if truly humans were fashioned after the planets, the moon, the stars and so on. Does this belief stem from horoscope and Zodiac

readings? The poem is a corroboration of the fact that humans too are natural elements. It is in line with this that the poet in 'Redivivus' argues for a better society for humans and nature. This, he does, by asking numerous questions. These rhetorical questions task the intellectual acumen of the reader, especially over the issues that these posers raise. The poet writes:

Who would raise the palm-lined cities
Erase the formless squalid sprawls?
Who would plant the people's palaces
At appointed spaces and times?
Yes who would house the nobles
In plain stoneworks and clay?
Who would free the kings to walk
Their streets with humble men? (1-8).

The poet writes about the artificiality of cities. In the poem, the poet mocks human the attitude to nature. This he does by asking questions which obviously, are out to deride how humans have treated nature with disdain. He laments a situation whereby nobody seems ready to stand for nature. He asks about who would 'raise palm-lined cities, about who would address the issue of slums in the cities. The poet even derides the rulers of not being able to make Africa develop things of their own. He laments a situation where is fond of using foreign materials. This practice has been doing irreparable harm to the economies of many African countries and until this is reversed many African countries may find it difficult to do well economically. But the truth is that answers to these if sincerely they were to be answered would hallmark a better society for the Nigerian and indeed the African environment. Currently, the Nigerian environment especially the cities are ridden with ghettos, squalor, putrid shanties and slums. Coping with city challenges has posed a major difficulty to many Nigerian governments. Indeed the failure to effectively handle city environment has a negative effect on the quality of the environment and life in the cities generally. Most Nigerian cities are bifurcated along two milieus, namely, the area for the rich and the areas for the downtrodden. While the areas occupied by the rich may be cleaner, the area occupied by the poor is often dirty, disordered and is usually a haven for criminals.

Ipadeola further shows his passion for a nature-friendly society when he asks to be directed to the individual who responds to the earth better. He says:

Point me to the house of the man
That makes earth yield to reason
And the skies to yield romance
Point me to the house of the man I seek
That fills the trees with seranades – (9-13).

Ipadeola uses poetry here to seek a change in people's attitude towards nature. He longs for a people who would begin to accommodate nature and treat the earth right in their daily activities, people who would respect the trees by planting more of them and tending them right. Employing a participatory approach, the poet invites the reader into the discussion. This is to inculcate the right attitude to nature in them. In treating nature right, according to Ipadeola, is having 'the skies to yield romance' (line 11). This is when the world would be in harmony with nature. The poet further envisions what the cities should look like:

Our cities of dream will have their poets
Our cities of dream will throb,
Our cities of dream will civilize
They'll not corrupt our youth... (14-17).

In truth, the cities have become environmental eye-sores and major corrupt centres for the youths. Many youths in the cities tend to flow with corrupt practices and patterns of the cities. Some of the ills and decadence that youths may fall into, in the cities, include armed robbery, prostitution, thuggery, cultism, drug and alcohol addiction. All these combined, often make the city environment very a dangerous, a place where youths can easily be influenced into these social malaise. When cities turn out well, youths also will be more responsible and would cultivate good manners.

Aside from the concern for the cities, another preoccupation of the poet is seen in 'E fura'. A major poem, in the collection, also shows the poet's passion for the environment. It was first performed at the University College Hospital Auditorium on World Environment Day 20001. 'E fura is a lamentation of man's indiscriminate tree felling, deforestation and bush burning among other numerous unfriendly environmental practices of humans. The poet, through an Iroko tree, which assumes a character in the poem that is largely performative, displays the distresses and the howlings of some natural elements as they suffer in the human hands. The poem is the manifestation of the abuse that humans commit against nature. The poet writes that:

Helpless cries, a tree's twilight

And my voice leaves
A shadow

In the trembling wild ...
The face of the forest is framed
In a shroud of ash –
Death – masks of machetes,
The blazing end of shrubs ...

I, Iroko
King of the forest,
Survey the remnants of my realms:
A kingdom come undone
A broken green array ... (3-10).

Ipadeola, characteristically personifies Iroko, the Stream and the River and are transmogrified with human qualities. They are imbued with the human voice through which they engage in a dialogue. These natural elements obviously representing nature bemoan their mistreatment in the human hands, with each narrating the torture that has enveloped their existence. The Iroko tree laments the indiscriminate. The felling of trees and deforestation are phenomena associated with population growth and have become major problems in the world. People cut down trees with reckless abandon forgetting that trees are life-givers. Trees are great providers of oxygen to humans and animals. Trees are also major causes of rainfall; they therefore, occupy a central position in human activities. However, the indiscriminate harvesting of forests due to human's insatiable needs has endangered these forests, which by extension and implication is putting human lives at serious risks too. Nigeria has lost 96 per cent of its forest due to deforestation, according to Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF). This means the country now has only 4 per cent of its original forest. (Vanguard, 2 Sept. 2018) The implication of this is that Nigeria has serious problems of deforestation, which if not urgently addressed could have dire consequences for the country.

Nigeria has three types of forests namely: the swamp forests, the tropical rain forest and the Wooded Savannah. The total land area of Nigeria is 91, 077, 000 Ha with a total forest of area of 11,089,000Ha indicating a total forest cover of 12.18 per cent. There are different causes of deforestation. Some of these include climatic agents, sunlight, water, wind, biotic agents such as microbes, animals, plants and humans. Of all the agents of

deforestation, however, humans have the greatest impact on the forest. The impact of humans on the forest can be grouped under the following activities: agriculture, urbanization and industrialization, logging, grazing, fire, mining, petroleum extraction and fuel wood collection. Many of the effects of deforestation in Nigeria, according to Mfon et al, include loss of biodiversity, depletion of soil and water resources, atmospheric pollution and environmental calamities such as acid rain, desertification and flood (77).

The poem is not just about deforestation but also about the ill treatment to nature and the environment. For instance, the stream also bewails what has become of her condition. The poet writes:

Fang - first, always
Fang - first –
Serpent seed
Profess undying love
For my fair and liquid curves
And now I gleam no more
The sparkle all stolen
By serpent seed.
I am the stream,
Handmaiden of time, fairest
Of gentle waters
The prime riparian gem ...
Now no more (18-28).

The poet captures the injustice done to nature in different ways. This he does to invoke pity in the readers and probably cause an attitudinal change in them towards nature. This, would enable the much needed education and sensitisation on keeping the environment safe, on making nature friendly, on evolving and imbibing getting the consciousness that tending the environment well is the only way to sustain humanity. The poet for instance tries to condemn people defecating in streams:

I have known the poisoned points
Of amorous scorpions,
I have known the death kiss
Of soil and sewage men ... (29-32).

It is commonplace to see some people empty their bowels in rivers, in streams, on the roads and sometimes on bare ground. When people defecate in streams, they contaminate the water that some other people may need to drink and use for their domestic shores. Nigeria is a developing country and many people live in the villages where they drink from streams and rivers. This is one way diseases are passed on to many people,

sometimes leading to epidemics and deaths of many individuals especially in a country with poor health facilities as Nigeria. The river further laments that:

Aahh, cousin water,
Our tongues are maimed to stutters:
We who sang the pristine songs
Of earth and all alive... (40-43).

The poet however, cautions all to be weary and careful of dire consequences if the world would not heed the advice and change their ways. The poet warns:

E fura ... mankind beware
The march of ages swallows all
And none can live if none will care (67-69).

The poet further cautions:

Yesterday the trees
Today the rivers
Tomorrow may be us... (74-76).

E fura... Mankind beware! (77).

Beware the reckless rage
Against the webs of life! (78-79).

This choreopoem is a model of how poetry can be adopted to change humans mindset on the environment. Its performative nature helps to attract the attention of the audience who may likely be engrossed in the entertainment thus allowing the poet the opportunity to drive home his point. This poem has been able to achieve this feat and more of it is what the world needs to have a completely changed attitude in our relationship with nature. Truth is that many perceive the environment as something to be used and dispensed, and something that would always be there for humans to use. Nature, to some, is a disposable material. Ipadeola's poems have a way of changing people's mindset to be environment friendly and conscious, to treat nature as an associate in a world where survival is hinged on the natural cycle.

A 'Masque of thirst' has similar theme to 'E fura'. It is a poem that Ipadeola performed at Ibadan on World Environment Day 2003. The theme for the year was 'Water: Two Billion People Are Dying of It'. The poem therefore, is apt in decrying the scarcity of water in the World. The poem which is performed with drum and legend accompaniments, laments the lack of water for the consumption of humanity. It is

therefore ironical that humanity can go thirsty in the midst of so much water in the world. The poem reminds the reader of S. T. Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, especially when the poet says:

Water, water everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere
Nor any drop to drink. (lines 119- 122).

According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS) website, the earth is a watery substance and that 71 per cent of earth's surface is water-covered. Yet there is so much lack of water in the world. Indeed, this is an irony. While 'A Masque of Thirst' bemoans the lack of water in the world, it also complains of flood. The poet writes:

1st voice:
Have you seen the rainbow?
Have you heard the rain?
Pray, tell, I must know
How visions fill the brain. (1-4)

Only yesterday the flood,
The rivers of mud
Only yesterday the radiance
Of earth and sky in dalliance (5-8)

2nd Voice
And have you no care but to question
Everything and everyone?
Do you not tire of pestering?
The world for solutions? (13-16).

The poem, an obvious specimen of dramatic poetry is built on dialogue: The 1st voice and the 2nd person who are the two speaking voices, in the poem paint an awful situation of a changing world to things of nature. For instance, it laments that in a dream, the world becomes 'a dry bed of streams', where the second voice becomes 'Lazarus', holding 'an empty calabash' and begging 'in several tongues' not for 'food nor wine' (42-44) but for water. The poet records:

I dreamt myself a migrant memory of water
Brown and storm – perched
So that sleep fled me. (24-26).

Also:

I am afraid neighbour,
 That I cannot hold my peace
 Yesternight I had a dozen disturbing dreams
 In them, the world was the dry bed of a stream
 A tantrum mirage stalking tracts of cacti
 And then I saw you
 A veritable Lazarus
 With an empty calabash
 In a pleading hand. (38-43).

The 'pleading hand' was speaking different languages. This obviously is to show the universality of the problem at hand:

Yem miri!
 Fun mi lomi!
 Ra me na me!
 Bani ruwa!
 Bitte wasser!
 Water please! (48-53).

The gloom of a world without water continues as the Lazarus in the dream becomes multiplied into millions and into billions. This probably accounts for the request for water in different language such as Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, German and English respectively. The poem warns that for this not to materialize, the caution of the weathermaker must be taken seriously:

He bade me to tell you, neighbour
 That will is the only charm
 If the eyes must not see evil. (80-82).

Water is an important part of human existence. It is almost impracticable for humans to exist without water. Yet clean, drinkable water is very scarce in the world today. There must be the will on the part all humans to change their ways and cultivate the right attitude to nature and the environment. Literature is a discipline that has a direct inroad into the hearts of men. The content of literature, therefore, must be made to conform to the right message and didacticism, espousing the ideals inherent in taking care of nature. human's good neighbourliness with nature. Also, the people must be persuaded to shun bad environmental practices with literature instructing on the dangers inherent in the degradation of nature.

In 'Lekki' some of the good and the bad practices that humans do with nature. 'Lekki' is a four-line poem seemed fashioned after J. P. Clark's 'Ibadan'. Like Clark's poem, 'Lekki' is a very short poem that piquantly captures human activities on the Lekki beach. The poem also reminds one of Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, a light satire and comedy, which exposes the hypocrisy and the phoney pretensions of some religious bigots, especially on the Bar Beach. 'Lekki' paints the picture of how nature in this case the Lekki Beach is used for redemptive purposes and in the same vein for debasing the society. It reveals how humans corrupt nature for their selfish ends, by committing different atrocities on the environment and as such not seeing nature as an inviolate. The poem which is also a quatrain describes nature:

At dusk, the sea breaks stride
Toward the bathing forms,
And waves arrow the eyes
With rescue and with sin. (1-4).

People sometimes like to draw closer to nature and unfortunately, when they do they destroy it. For instance, the nouveau riche of Lagos have cultivated the culture of almost living on nature. They push the water away altering the ecosystem most devastatingly. They occupy Lekki and now they have moved further to Banana Island, destroying nature in their quest to dominate it. They drive the ocean away through reckless, criminal and wasteful sand filling. They sometimes block and destroy the natural drainage system, thus exposing their immediate communities and adjoining ones, to incessant floods which often lead to pain and anguish for the people. The government seems complicit in the destruction of the environment going on in Lekki and its environs. Government has continued to look the other way, in the face of this destruction and would only concern itself to palliative measures rather than being proactive on the matter. It is, however, instructive to warn that this conspiracy of the rich and the elites would only further add to the already worsened environmental situation of Lagos. This is why this poem is a good reminder of the need to continue sensitising Lagosians on cultivating the right environmental attitudes. This will, in no small way, change the perception of Lagos as being one of the dirtiest cities in the world.

Ipadeola, in this collection, like earlier mentioned, has used nature and environmental materials in many ways. He has used natural elements, especially of rain and its metaphor

to enrich the aesthetics and the messages of some of the poems. He has also used the eco materiality of rain, not only to imbue different layers of meaning in some of the poems, he also has through it been able to build depth and intellectualism into some of the poems. Some of the poems are written on different aspects of nature with the rain and water serving as major tropes. This, the poet has done in line with his vision of eco-activism and of keeping environmental issues on the front burner. Ipadeola has shown a religious commitment to pressing environmental issues affecting the world and has consistently helped to raise awareness on such issues so that the world can begin to address them for the benefit of mankind. Indeed, for Nigeria and the whole of humanity to be properly orientated along eco-friendly lines, a lot of education needs to be done and Literature is a potent tool of achieving this.

The presence of the word, 'rain' in the title of the collection is instructive. The several evocative musings of the poet, as presented in different poems, come in rainy torrents, educating and confirming the scale of the poet's creative fervour. It, also, like the rain, exposes the filth in our society in forms of the ills and decadence which should be washed away to ensure a better and a regenerated society for all. Indeed, every poem in the collection is a rain of a sort tackling a burden of the several raised in the collection. Also, the poet uses the rain metaphor as an archetypal figuring for nature to engage the human mind in a dialectics through which the various environmental failings of humans are catalogued and exposed. Similarly, rain affords water with its palpable force and effect of cleansing, cooling and soothing, all these afford the poet to construct nature as a palpable force meant to cleanse the harms and the debauchery in human society and to act as a change agent of ritualising the world into a new and regenerated mode.

5.3 Mattering the Storied Matter: Eco Materiality In Ogaga Ifowodo's *A Good Mourning*

The world, for long, has privileged the notions and ideas that promote human as being the centre of the universe. This predilection, has indulged in humans a normative behaviour that reduces nature and the environment as materialities only to serve human. This mode of thinking unfortunately, encourages the despoliation of the environment which combined with other negative attitudes of humans, have caused the world untold disasters and catastrophes and nudging a grave propensity of threat on the world of an

Armageddon lurking somewhere in the near future. To change this perception, there has been a shift from subject-centred models to materialisms in the humanities and especially in the environmental humanities. This is to reconsider the human approach to the environment and other such materialities that have agentic force to impact human lives consciously or unconsciously. This materialist thinking decentres the anthropocentric view that stresses categorical divides along human/nature, masculine/feminine, culture/nature and such other categories that have often created a myth of exceptionalism around humanity. The focus here is to reflect on how these materialities condition human lives as represented in the poetry of Ifowodo.

The turn to materiality, in part, is not so much the failure of understanding the world in schisms but of a failure to appropriately inscribe the material dimensions into its praxis. This mode of thinking thus denies the world the opportunity of a wholesale view, which would have allowed for a broader and more critical observation to assess the world more objectively and probably offer better solutions to its myriad of problems. Žižek submits that ‘materialism means that the reality I see is never whole – not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it’ (406). The fact that the sensing is done by humans, creates an incomplete whole, in a discernible imposition of the human on the thing. It also festers a subjective division between man and matter. For instance, the continuous treatment of nature and materials as objects has failed to offer solutions to the huge environmental crisis that the world now battles. So much does materiality continue to pervade the human world that its relationship with the human world continues to be better considered. Materiality goes beyond describing the human-object relationship. It rather shows the transcendence and the primacy of material things hitherto not given appropriate relevance. Andrew Poe explains that ‘matter and materiality need not be excluded from that which we regard as having agentic capacity (anymore than – pace Kant – angels should be from the categorization of rational being)’ (157). Materiality becomes the human inseparable companion, covertly and sometimes overtly determining human choices, denoting the healthiness and otherwise of humans and the environment, yet still looked down on by the different sites of knowledge before materialism. In the words of Ann Rigney, ‘materiality often secretes more meaning than that which was consciously inscribed in them’ (474).

The sidelining of matters by humans is a major constraint to understanding the agency of materiality.

New materialism, influenced by the critical approaches of Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972) and Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's *Autopoiesis and Cognition* (1980), perceives matter as possessing its agentic manifestations and innate meanings. New materialisms, invests matters with proto personal traits capable of semiotic interactivity. It argues that humans are not the only agentic force but that matters also do have agentic power. Rigney corroborates this:

With the theoretical insights of posthumanist materialism we can attribute the cultural fascinations with objects to the power of the objects themselves. Where traditional cultural theory linked the love of objects above to the whims and taste of connoisseurs, new materialism challenges such anthropocentrism and recognizes that objects themselves have agency (474).

New Materialism thus rejects the logic of human subjects and replaces same with matter, seen as having agentic characteristics. The subtext here then is that humanity is not external to nature but lives therein and that materiality is capable of producing a material semiotic inter-activity with humans. A good example could be drawn from the Yoruba cosmology. 'Kowe' is a mystical and mythical bird in the Yoruba cosmology, whose name is onomatopoeically coined from its cry. The bird's cry is imbued with a semiotic interpretation which is an index of a good or bad omen depending on the type of cry it makes from her two modes of cries. While the first cry heralds bad omen such as death or warning of a great disaster soon to befall an individual or his or her associates or relations, the second cry signals good tidings like birth, success or great attainments especially if after the three loud, sharp cries, it makes another sound or 'ha' 'ero se, se, se' which is a form of soothing sound which tempers the earlier sharp, loud sounds. The bird's sound which could be regarded as mere materiality is of a great essence and indeed of a cosmic importance to the community as the prescient bird has the power to bring things of the future to the notice of an individual or a community. The bird and its cries thus become an agentic force potent to order events in human communities.

5.3.1 The Agency of Matter

Most subject-centred models have always emphasised rationality as a core criterion for agency. Yet, not all humans are capable of rational thinking. Does that mean that humans who are not rational are not agencies? Jane Bennett describes agency as ‘thing power’ which ‘is a force exercised on that which is not specifically human (or even organic) upon humans’ (351). Iheka conceives of agency as ‘based not exclusively on intentionality but on the actions or effects produced by both humans and nonhumans’ (3). Iovino and Oppermann opine that ‘the true dimension of matter is not that of a static and passive substance or being, but of a generative becoming’ (77). This view obviously agrees with Karen Barad’s theory of ‘agential realism’ an epistemological and ontological theory. It is predicated on Bohr’s insight which postulates that ‘matter is not just a passive material that is shaped by agents, it undergoes a process as it stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface’ (90).

Bennett also asserts that ‘objects appear more vividly as things, that is, as entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by semiotics.’ (71) Humans acting under the subjectivist realm and model, do ascribe reducible significance to materials and matters of far greater significance to human lives than we are ready to acknowledge. In the words of Andrew Poe ‘things may be more important than we have given them credit’ (139). Also, Barad says that ‘matter does not refer to an inherent, fixed property of independently existing objects’ rather it is ‘a congealing of agency... a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity (151). Humans pretend or ignore the existential significance of matters and deliberately kill their narratives thus denying ourselves of the essential storied matter of materiality.

New materialism therefore, entertains the agency of matter, which according to Jane Bennett quoted in Iovino and Oppermann is to ‘absolve matter from its long history of attachment to automatism or mechanism’ (77). Indeed humans live in what the German Sociologist Ulrich Beck has called a ‘risk society’ amidst a web of matters impacting and co-existing with the human bodies in same but shared environment. Little wonder then that Linda Nash says that the human body has become an ‘ecological body characterized by its ‘permeability’ ‘a constant’ exchange between the inside and the outside, by fluxes and flows, and by its close dependence on the surrounding environment’ (12). Modernity

entangled humans in a network of matters that daily influences him and his environment. Bennett quoted in Andrew Poe writes that ‘this webbed network is not empowered by our noticing it, but rather empowers those within its frame...matter has an inclination to make connections and forms networks of relations with varying degrees of stability’ (155).

Materiality has different shades with diverse variability which include material feminism which coincides with some essays brought under the name Material Feminism edited by Susan Hekman and Stacy Alaimo. The publication challenged previously defined studies about the body and looked at new frameworks from the lens of New Materialism showing cross relations among the human body, the natural world and the material world. It also thrives to dissolve the language/reality dichotomy that existed by pushing forward a theoretical framework that neither privileges language nor reality but one which explains and leverages on their relationship.

There is also the New Materialist Memory which is predicated on the evocation of memory-laden materiality canvassed by Maria Zirra, Sphinz-Annal Naguib, Charles Stewart among others. Alaimo contends that ‘material memoirs emphasise that personal experience cannot be directly reckoned with not because an understanding of the self as a material, transcorporeal and always emergent entity often demands the knowledges of science’ (87). Material memoir is the piling up of experiences as data to guide one’s life.

Materiality comes in almost all strata of human society. It is ever-present wherever there are humans. The permeability of materiality in human lives is almost inexplicable. It occurs in all dimensions of human interactions. Judith Butler confirms this when she says ‘the self is constituted by the tangle of discourses, these trans corporeal autobiographies insist that the self is constituted by material agencies that are simultaneously biological, political and economic’ (87). For instance, the materiality and the political nature of cancer is brought to bear when Stacy Alaimo agrees with Macy Knorf-Newman’s analysis of Lorde’s in *Cancer Journal* that ‘cancer is political not because either subject-bodies or environment is inherently political, but rather because of the silence and secrecy surrounding the overlapping intersections of those subjects’ (96). Alaimo further asserts that ‘the specific interrelations of bodies and places will continue to be potent, ethical and political even though the specific categories of risk and vulnerability may differ (97). Bolton Valencius quoted in Alaimo says ‘in modern body, ‘health comes to connote

primarily the absence of disease: it implies both purity and the capability to fend off harmful organisms and substances (19). Yet the human environment is riddled with different harmful materiality especially from chemicals, and pesticides.

The truth is that most of our technological devices, especially our mobile devices and our vehicles have become powerful agencies. We have become inseparable with these materialities. We create and store nuclear weapons that could wipe the entirety of the human race yet these are matters, in workplaces there abound harmful organisms that humans come in contact with daily and to keep this information from the workforce, organisations block research results. There are outbreaks of diseases due to bacteria and virus and affected humans suffer indescribably. The truth is the current world is far too much entangled in materiality than it has ever been especially as the craze for technology continues so much would humanity be inseparable from materiality.

Indeed there are even the agentic unseens like God and love that regulate our lives sometimes uncontrollably. Bruno Latour quoted in Andrew Poe summarises how intricately political the networking of materials human, nonhuman, organic and inorganic is when he says ‘I am a political agent, but so too is all I am webbed too, including the food I eat, the water I drink, the garbage I produce, and the land where I exchange food and water for waste’ (154). Human health is as good as the health of his environment. The World Health Organisation quoted in Alaimo defines the environment as ‘all the physical, chemical and biological factors external to a person, and all the related factors external to a person, and all related factors impacting behaviours. It encompasses the assessment and control of those environmental factors that can potentially affect health’ (92). The environment is where the human and the nonhuman agencies comeingle as complex generative forces in a chain of transcorporeality founded on an onto-epistemological platform. It thus becomes imperative for humans to always take care of the environment so that in that cycle they also can enjoy better health.

Eco-materiality suggests that matters are capable of producing their own meaning through its narrativity. To this extent, matters are agentic. They are capable of causing action without being propelled. Ecomateriality is thus a counteractive construct against anthropocentric narrative resting according to Iovino and Oppermann on:

Greek atomism, Renaissance philosophy, Spinoza, Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, and contemporary theorists of science studies and social sciences such as Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, Ulrich Beck, and Manuel De Landa as well as quantum physics, process philosophy, and conceptual trends such as the Actor-Network Theory, agential realism, and object oriented ontology (79).

Also, According to Tuin and Dolphijn quoted in Oppermann much of material ecocriticism relies on ‘non-dualist epistemic practice’ (89). This, Oppermann believes ‘reconfigures our understanding of materiality in a relational sense as dynamic processes of life and material substance with agentic properties’ (89). Oppermann referenced Karen Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Meaning* (2007) as a major pioneering work that led to the emergence of material ecocriticism. This effort was soon supported by many international and interdisciplinary publications such as Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), Diana Coole and Samantha Frost’s *New Materialism: Ontology, Agency and Politics* (2010), as well as Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin’s *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies* (2012). These works helped in nurturing the seed of material ecocriticism. Serenella Iovino quoted in Oppermann said ‘due to this richness of voices and contributions from a range of disciplines that intersect with the environmental humanities, it is not surprising that the ‘turn to materiality’ (90) is also beginning to have effects in ecocriticism.

Material ecocriticism, in the words of Sarah Jaquette quoted in Oppermann ‘spotlights a pervasive materiality as active phenomena that are “constitutive of reality” (90). This is in relation to the place of matter to environmental cultural, political and social processes. Material ecocriticism contends that there should be no division among categories such as nature, culture, human, non-human, matter and meaning as they are all ‘intra-acting agencies’ (Barad 33) in a continuous ever-evolving meaning. In material ecocriticism is the conjoining of matter and meaning in a sequence that culture and nature interpret each other in a continual flow. This blend of portrayal of the storied matter and the narrative agency where the ‘relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment’ (152) is what many ecocritics now refer to as ‘natureculture’.

The storied matter is important to both human and the non human elements. When matter speaks, it communicates. But do humans listen? Do humans even know how to listen to

nature? Yet nature and matter speak to humans in a continuous never-ending discourse. Oppermann lists some of the ways matter speaks as follows”

Squids for example, tell tragic stories of their diminished ability to survive amid increasing ocean acidity. Retreating glaciers transmit stories about the earth’s changing climate, blending global warming with political anxieties and social changes. Another distress story comes from the soil and concerns its excess amounts of nitrous oxides dripping into underground aquifers and reaching up to the clouds, accelerating the erosion of the ozone layer. These are storied matters just as much as the telluric stories volcanoes tell of the earth’s violent past or the stories fossils tell about biological evolution (95).

These are storied matter spoken by nature in ecological narratives but only meant for the discerning minds. These stories reveal the interconnected relationship that exists between human and the non -human elements of nature yet humans prefer to play oblivious of this nexus. Yet in the words of Bennett quoted in Oppermann, ‘everything in a sense is alive’ (95). Also, Oppermann says ‘storied matter abides in every living element and multiplicity of associations, often emerging at unusual moments when our objectifying attitude toward the world changes and becomes attentive to its voices’(96).

Storied matter, according to Iovino and Oppermann quoted in Oppermann ‘ is a material ‘mesh’ of meanings, properties and processes, in which human and non-human players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces’(96). The impulse here is that the earth is not just a place but ‘a story in which we belong and out of which we arose’ (Oppermann 96). Material ecocriticism perceives human, nature, culture and the storied matter in terms of convergence and co-emergence all locked in an interactive web of communication. It speaks in a complex narrative, laced with a diverse metaphor for the discerning to unravel.

Material ecocriticism though new on the plane, offers a comforting alternative in the unending battle of alternate reality that incorporates the ‘other’. Material ecocriticism embraces all views in a non- dualist sense yet it pumps a powerful message to the heart of humanity to tender nature and matter for its good. It tries to instil the desired discipline and obligation in man, towards fostering in him, the need to care for nature.

5.3.2 Eco-materialities in *A Good Mourning*

Ogaga Ifowodo is a major voice in Nigerian poetry, third-generation. He has written many collections, some of which include *Homeland and Other Poems* (1998), *Madiba* (2001), *The Oil Lamp* (2005) and *The Good Mourning* (2016). He is a poet, lawyer, columnist and activist.

A Good Mourning is the latest work by Ifowodo. The title, though taken from one of the poems in the collection, is ironical. For how can something be good yet mournful? The word 'good' may be suggestive of the vitality and the goodness of the African landscape which serves as the location for some of the poems while the mourning is symbolic of the awfulness and the despair that characterise the land. Similarly 'mourning' could be a pun on the word 'morning' to emphasise the idea that there is nothing good about the land that serve as the environment in which the poems are situated. This especially so since almost all the poems in the collection deals with gloomy thematic concerns. The collection ramifies issues around a paradox that the title offers. This is because most of the poems in the collection, though deal with varied experiences and themes, seem connected by a conscious thematic paradox. Some of the poems, characteristic of the Niger Delta Eco poetry, are like autobiographies, cataloguing and articulating cumulatively, some of the poet's exposures, at different stops, in his voyage through life. These poems, in a way, also capture the history of a people and a land enveloped in a battle of survival as a result of the commodification of their land. According to Egaya, a major preoccupation of the Niger Delta poetry is that they act as 'an advocacy for human and environment justice' (2). The entire collection is suggestive of the title and chronicles how the different eco materialities, of the inclement African environment, shape and mould African minds and people.

The collection uses memory and mourning, as mega materialities that configure and reconfigure the African continent. While history becomes the material vehicle for animating the experience, mourning is the inescapable material feeling that the mind interrogates from the experience. It is, therefore, not surprising, that one gets a feeling of depression, orchestrated by a pervasive melancholic tone, symbols and images that run through the whole gamut of the poems. Most of the poems are presented in gripping metaphors, foregrounded in despondency, death, misery and hopelessness. Though many

of the poems, with the exception of one or two, share affinities in grief, despair, shock, trauma and gloom, one is able to enjoy the rich assemblage of metaphors and images packaged in a most profound language. This is an indication of the evolution of Ogaga into the big league of major poets. It is therefore, not surprising that the collection was shortlisted for the 2018 NLNG Literature Prize. Ogaga displays a great mastery for words, that is underscored by the lucidity of expression that he attains in stringing the different experiences captured in some of the poems. Indeed his choice of multiple voices, to depict the different themes and experiences, is marked by grace and elegance. Also evident, is the sense of humour that pervades the collection, which enables the reader to go through the grim pictures that most of the poems paint, without being too overwhelmed by the despondency.

The interlacing of memory, history and mournful experiences that permeate most of the poems, in the collection, reveals the eco materiality of some of the matters with which the African minds and landscape are entangled. For instance, in 'History Lesson', history becomes the counterpoint materiality for the poetic persona to view reality and for him to encounter the world. The teenagers are fascinated by a historical figure like Selasie whose defeat of Mussolini is a source of inspiration to the persona and his mates in the history class. Haile Selassie was the Ethiopian Emperor from 1930 to 1974. In a similar vein, Benito Musolini was the fascist dictator who ruled in Italy from 1925 to 1945. For the poetic persona, history becomes the unseen but the intimately felt materiality that conditions his world view. This accounts for the linking of River Ethiopie to Ethiopia:

And now I wished the car would cough and stop
Catch the mechanical flu or migraine
So I could merge hills and river in one course (24-26).

Geographically, Ethiopia is located in the Horn of Africa. The ancient country is situated in a hilly environment from which river Ethiopie must have drawn its source. The similarity in name too must have gone beyond mere coincidence, hence the foregrounding of this linkage in the lore as captured in the last part of the poem thus:

... And oblivious
To what local lore had to say
traced my river source to Ethiopia's high ground. (39-41).

History through "the History Lesson" has made such a great impact on the persona that it has become a vehicle for him to situate his root and assert his identity through his link to

Ethiopia. To the poetic persona, therefore, River Ethiope is not just a river, or another of nature's variant but an eco-materiality with its own essence, being and storied matter that is closely knit and connected to people. The value of the river therefore, to members of the community, goes beyond drinking and washing functions. Indeed, it has acquired a historical and spiritual essence without which the history of the people is incomplete. The river, therefore, as a material being and having been with the people since creation, is a potent historical witness, from which the stories of the different generations of people can be told.

Similarly, the Mazda car, referred to in the poem, though a product of technology, has agency and could relate with humans in ways beyond the ordinary. Most technological devices have agentic powers. For instance, mobile devices have become inseparable parts of modern humans, as they play and fondle with them inseparably. These technological devices have capabilities beyond even the reach of fellow humans. People cry and express great disappointment when they lose their phones. They spend money they can never spend on themselves or on their wives and children on cars and electrical appliances. The agency of this car, is further confirmed by the personification of the technological materiality, when the poet wishes that the car could behave like a human being:

And now I wished the car would cough and stop
Catch the mechanical flu or migraine. (24-25).

The wish of the poetic persona for the car to "cough and stop", amounts to dressing up the car as something that is able to behave like a human being. This wish for a technological contraption to develop human frailties is to afford the poetic persona quality time to commune with nature that is River Ethiope, another material being. His disappointment in the car not behaving like a human being however is captured by Ifowodo:

But cars bow only to their will. The Mazda scorned
My prayer, offering only to break speed
Forced by the Don't overtake bridge sign (32-34).

The little break in speed that the car affords the poetic persona opportunity to get engrossed in his communion with nature enjoying the cross relations and reflections of hilly Ethiopia and River Ethiope:

But the pause was enough for me, I confirmed

The Ethiope's majesty by the absence
Of boats and fishermen, its sacra silence
Mysteriously black ... (36-39).

The agentic power of materiality is further reinforced by the refusal of the Mazda car to stop to allow the persona ample time to enjoy his communion with nature. Taking to another plane, this experience is symbolic of how technology has degraded and taken humans away from nature and how it is creating a gulf between them. Technology has eroded the culture of humans to care for nature. It has become a potent tool of degrading nature and has made human environment riskier and vulnerable. Technology has also turned nature into plastic, a thing, a mere material; yet as humans we tend to forget that we are as good as our environment and that as humans, we cannot exist if divested of the environment.

The poet through the materiality of historicity becomes proud of the feat attained by Ethiopia under Sellassie and he would therefore, not only traces his origin to it but also asserts his pride in the black race. He uses the River Ethiope as a metaphor to salute and praise Ethiopia:

Its waters were the darkest I had seen
And seemed to me the inkwell of the world (27-28).

The writer may also be suggesting that civilisation started from Africa or that Africa or the black race is the precursor or cradle of civilisation and enlightenment. According to Boon and Eyong in the Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems 'Africa is the origin of human civilization and therefore has a rich history. Archaeological evidence points to the fact that present day Egypt was the origin of ancient civilization. (7). Also, Falola and Flemming in the same Encyclopedia assert that 'Africa is widely believed to be the birthplace of modern human beings and is where some of the world's greatest civilization, such the Egyptian and Nubian societies, emerged' (43).

Similarly, 'Perfect Vision' is another personal poem like 'History lesson'. It is the persona's experience at almost being blind. The poem relates the poet's encounter with nature, specifically the sun, when he stared directly at the sun and almost became blind. Coincidentally, the poet returns to the classroom only to be greeted by the Professor with the Moses' encounter with God in Exodus 3. God has shone like a flame of fire to Moses

and Moses had to hide his face the same way the poet did but was prevented from going blind by eye-glasses:

The white-flame brightness of the June afternoon
Was to blame: I had stared accusingly at the Sun
Before fleeing into the cooled classroom,
The dulled light from the glazed - glass window
Softening vision but giving shadows, furry tails,
Strange serifs, to the Professor's words on the blackboard. (1-6).

This poem warns of the limits of taking nature for granted. Although, nature can be friendly, kind and benevolent, it can also be cruel and fiendish. As human beings, we must know the limits of our contact with nature if we do not want to harm ourselves. The eye-glasses therefore, become an inseparable materiality to the poet persona assisting him to see even far beyond the ordinary. It provides the poetic persona, a double vision with which he could see details and probably see beyond the natural limits of the eyes. Extensively, the poem shows how the blend of nature and technology, can be beneficial to human's progress and advancement. Technology just like the eyes glasses helps the poetic persona regain his vision and in the words of Roston it 'involves artefacts' (3). The eyes-glasses assembled from materials which otherwise humans will regard as common acquires an agentic force strong enough to provide vision for the poetic persona. Indeed, humans live in as inescapable world of materialities.

'One Plus One' is a poem in which the poet narrates his experience as a boy serving as an altar boy in the church and how his unholy wish for the altar wine and bread fetches him suspension from the church. He however, returns to the altar later with a woman for marriage. This poem thrives so much on humour, a device that Ogaga has perfected in his art. The Church becomes the materiality for the consummation of marriage. The church is a different entity, a different world where communion with God is possible. The church is that place where different and strange kinds of dynamics operate. For instance, one plus one in the church, as far as marriage is concerned, is one. Similarly, 'in wintered out', Ogaga relates the environment as humans' inescapable materiality. The poetic persona, in the poem, shows his love and concern for nature and the environment. Winter is a period where trees shed leaves and they therefore become skeletal. It is a period of dormancy for plants. The poet shows his concern for these trees, plants and animals, referring to the

trees as wounded woods. The poet reflects on the forest that is perforated due to the winter:

A cold fire has burnt the forest dark
And sere branches stretch
Alas – seeking arms into the ashed void. (1-3).

This is the skeletal image of the forest that the poet paints. It is the picture of a dying environment that needs revivification. The poetic persona feels the storied matter of a dying forest. The poet is drawn to pity and concern:

... then the wounded woods look
Like the open air
Hospital of a battalion vanquished
By fire as it
Stiffened to attention for battle orders (9-10).

The poet uses the opportunity to compare his native environment with his overseas' environment. The poet writes:

... it was time
To end the walk, remembering
Now the meteorologist's prediction
Of a storm -- thinking
Of my native forests, green - black in leafy
Luxuriance (31-36).

The poetic persona is obviously domiciled in a place, where science and technology have advanced to predict nature and its occurrences. This accounts for why he feels he must hearken to the prediction of a storm and return home. Returning home here is akin to a homecoming which is often brought about by nostalgia. Nostalgia, according to Hofer quoted in Feldbrugge 'is a disease of the imagination, an obsession with the native land and with one's home' (19). Hofer is further quoted as saying that it is 'the continuous vibration of animal spirits through those fibres of the middle brain in which impressed traces ideas of the Fatherland still cling', (19). However the prediction of the storming is a phenomenon made possible by science and technology. This portrayal reflects a mix of science and nature. While it could be said that science and technology are nature's major enemies, they sometimes create a blend and assist to save humans or assist humans to control nature.

Though the poem ‘Sixty lines by the Lagoon,’ is written in celebration of the poet, Odiya Ofeimun when he turned sixty, Ifowodo uses the opportunity to reflect on the dystopian condition of the Nigerian society, a cause to which Ofeimun has committed himself in his poetry. Ogaga therefore, in the poem celebrates the love and the commitment of Ofeimun to his land and the people especially in fighting for an improvement in the living standards the people. Ofeimun has always identified with the oppressed and their struggle and has always asked for a change in the morbid landscape of the country. In ‘How can I Sing’? Ofeimun condemns the depravity and the oppression that plagued the African landscape. This kind of theme is what the third-generation Nigerian poets projects in their poetry. The third-generation poets are usually quick to pick social themes such as exposing the decadence in their society. Egya says that ‘the poets of this generation attempt to chronicle the dehumanizing activities of the military regimes and chart a new rhetoric of nationhood’ (47). Ifowodo, therefore, characteristic of his age, laments the harsh environment under which the people live and which has affected the trade of the poet. He does so by adopting a style typical of Ofeimun:

Ah, dear land! For a young country
your people have grown so old
gnarled and wrinkled under the red sun

Of their suffering – same people whose skin
fifty years ago glistened in the dawn!
under your sky arched with grief (24-29).

The Nigerian environment has been harsh and cruel to the people. There is indescribable hunger and starvation in the land. People still battle for the basic necessities of life. Egya says:

Whether it is spiritual displacement or physical displacement, the impoverishment of the lands, of the waters, of the airs, indeed of the environment generally, is also the impoverishment of the humans who inhabit it. This is especially the case when the people are so economically and politically weakened and powerless that they are unable to stand up to oppression. The forces against the people and their environment are not only local, not only national, but also global. (7).

The pressure of survival has turned the country into a big hospital where every soul battles for survival amidst varying sicknesses, orchestrated by the harsh and inclement environmental realities borne out of economic hardship, unemployment, and lack of

infrastructure, among others. Since independence, Nigeria has been bedevilled with political and economic problems and for as long as these persist, living in such environment shall be at great costs and difficulties. Little wonder, then that many young Nigerians often look for ways of exiting the country. Some of such worries, highlighted in the poem, are captured when the poet says:

Our wounded land requires of us a song true
to its torments, but how can we sing
with battered tongues? Under a sky once blue

grown charcoal-dark – fearful clue
to the last thunder gathering strength –
the grass bows to the wind, begs a song true

to the anguish of farmished crops.
You can stand at the door or on the curb
and cry your heart out under our once blue sky (42-50).

Ifowodo's reference to the sky that was once blue is an indication that things are not well with the land, the Nigerian environment. Unfortunately, when the land is sick, the people cannot be well. The Nigerian land and environment have become sick and the Nigerian people and plants are affected. The Nigerian state and the environment have become a dangerous materiality that the Nigerian people must relate with. According to Latour quoted by Cajetan Iheka in *Naturalising Africa: Ecological Violence, Agency, and Postcolonial Resistance in African Literature*, insecurity is an 'actant' and a major part of this materiality that the people have to contend with. Iheka indeed warns that for such agencies humans must "recognize their participation and effects even in those instances of intentional human agency" (4). He further opines that 'intent or purposive action, distributed or diffuse agency is concerned with the actions or the effects produced in the environment by a network of actors, human and nonhuman. 'The Frightened Tree' is a poem written for Chief Bola Ige, who was killed by assassins while serving as an Attorney – General of the Federation of Nigeria in 2001. Till date probes into his death remain inconclusive and the mystery of his death is unresolved. This makes death, insecurity and an endangered political space, the eco-materiality that the poet interrogates. The killing of the foremost law officer of a country is a strong indication of the treacherous nature of security, in such a country. Chief Bola Ige's security details, in a

compromising manner left him for a make-shift restaurant and before their return, their principal had been murdered in cold blood:

Death strolled into your bedroom like a bosom friend
For whose coming and going you had kept the doors ajar
Death borne by the steady hands of paid hoodlums
Felt well enough at home to need just one bullet.

And the careful killer in them saved the unfired
Guns for the next bidder for their kill.
They left as they came, trailed only by the kindness
That saw the guard to question their mission (1-8).

Insecurity is a major challenge in the Nigerian environment and this has been exacerbated by reckless killing of people, just as it has also led to break-down of law and order on many occasions. The country now witnesses a swell in the level of insurgency, cult clashes and herdsmen attacks across the length and breadth of the country. For instance, Ofuoku and Isife quoted in Oli, Ibekwe and Nwakwo noted that ‘in Densina, Adamawa State, 28 people were killed; while about 2,500 farmers were displaced and rendered homeless in a clash between them’(31). They also quoted Idowu as saying that ‘the violence has displaced more than 100,000 people in Benue and Enugu States and left them under the care of relatives or in makeshift Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps while many are still struggling to rebuild their lives’ (31). Political killings that often have remained a permanent feature of Nigerian elections. All these constitute the general insecurity as the eco – materiality that pervades the Nigerian landscape. The police that are meant to secure the people, have often compromised and demonstrated lack of commitment and responsibility. It is the height of irresponsibility for policemen detailed to protect a senior government official to leave him unprotected. The spate of insecurity in the country is so high, that many have had to flee to saner climes:

Cocks are berserk crowing repeatedly
The hour of the murder, but for whom
Do they shriek, their combs aglow
With the rage of the season?
Why do the trees at the gate seem frightened,
Leaden leaves on bowed branches –
because birds have fled to kinder climes? (43-49).

It is instructive to note that, sometimes, when things are about to go wrong or when they have gone wrong in the human society, nature and some other materialities have their own narratives otherwise called storied matter. Abram quoted in Oppermann asserts that ecocriticism consists of ‘a community of expressive presences where all beings have the ability to communicate something of themselves to other beings’ (34) If the human mind is patient enough, these materialities through their narratives have a way of giving signs of dangers and impending dangers or hinting at solutions to problems. However, only the discerning and the gifted can pick and interpret such messages.

Insecurity, in the country, can be traced to military adventurism into politics and it has enveloped everywhere in the country. The poem ‘The Heavenly Gun Club’ depicts military oppression and killing, which left in its wake widows, orphans and numerous bereaved souls on the Nigerian landscape battling with the grief and the demise of their loved ones. Okunoye opines that ‘Starting with the Gowon regime, through the Muritala-Obasanjo, Buhari-Idiagbon administrations (1984–86), the Babangida “presidency” (1986–93), to Sanni Abacha’s junta (1993–98), Nigerians endured various forms of repression. But the misadventure acquired its worst character under the late Sanni Abacha’ (66).

The title Poem, ‘A Good Mourning’, forms the second part of the collection that is subdivided into four parts. The title, an obvious paradox, chronicles the events around June 12, 1983, a day that Nigerians overwhelmingly elected Bashorun M. K. O. Abiola, as the President of the country but which the military, audaciously, annulled. The poem is about an oppressive government, a truncation of the people’s will, a struggle for the actualisation of an annulled free and fair election, resulting in massive continual street protests which grounded a nation to a devastating halt and more are some of the eco materiality that the title poem ‘A Good Mourning’ interrogates. The poet, in the poem, contrasts a good morning that is Abiola’s June 12 and a good mourning, the death of General Abacha. This he does by referring to June 12 which would have marked the end of military adventurism and the day that was to mark the dawn of a new Nigeria as a good morning. Similarly, the death of Abacha, a dictator and a major player in the annulment of June 12 election is referred to as a good mourning. The poem further depicts a social and a political environment that is stifling, one that asphyxiated many people, muffled societal growth and dislocated many individuals. The poem describes the annulment of

the June 12, 1993 Presidential Elections in Nigeria, in which M. K. O. Abiola was acclaimed to have won only for the result to be annulled. This led to the total convulsion of the Nigerian state and many people died in the struggle to actualise the mandate. Notable among them were Chief M. K. O. Abiola, the acclaimed winner himself, his wife Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, Pa Alfred Rewane and a host of other activists. In fact, many activists had to flee the country to save their lives. Despite the repression of this struggle, by successive regimes in the country, it was President Buhari who conferred the highest honour, Grand Commander of the Federal Republic (GCFR) only reserved for past and serving Presidents, in Nigeria, on Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola on the 29th of June 2018. Since this award is only reserved for Presidents or former Presidents in the country, the move was aptly interpreted as a recognition and a validation by the Buhari-led administration that Abiola won the election, especially with the establishment of June 12, of every year as the democracy Day in Nigeria.

The poem confronts some of the most inclement environments as materialities that many had to contend with at the time. This perilous external environment was orchestrated by a most oppressive military junta that oppressed and tyrannised the people for years. The oppression peaked with the annulment of an election regarded as the freest and the fairest in the land. It was an election that unified the country without recourse to religion, ethnicity, creed, culture and such other primordial underpinnings:

A good morning it was: homes
Emptied into the streets

To break a spell, cut
the soldiers' strings that played
For eight years the maddening...

Music of their nightmares.
A good morning it was: they queued
Under the sun burning with the heat

Of their resolve. ballots counted,
The streets sang the winner's name
And they thought the curse was broken ...(30-40).

The military, having seized power, had tormented the political landscape the country and many in the country have become disoriented by the tyranny and the oppression that is innate to military rule. Therefore, when the opportunity presented itself for people to send

the military out of power, people trooped out in large numbers. It was a good morning. Humans have a way of reacting to their environment: when it is pleasant, they embrace it and they recede when it becomes hostile. A convivial environment therefore, attracts people and makes them healthy. The poet, in 'A Good Mourning', creates different 'environments' and this produces the rich background in which the poem is situated. In one of the environments, the poet captures the pristine environment which reflects the humble background of the Chief Moshood Abiola which the poet felt if he had kept to probably would not have cut his life short. The poet says:

Had he kept to gathering
Firewood, scouring the forests
Of Abeokuta for dead branches

To keep the pot boiling
In an old woman's kitchen

He might be alive today. (1-6).

This is a reminder that the different environments within which humans operate attract different risks and as humans we must realise this as we move to different environments in our diverse pursuits in life. Another is the boardroom environment, to which the poet also alludes:

Had he kept to the boardrooms
Once a star led him out of the haunted
Bush, content to measure his power

By the banks that begged for his millions
By his vast estates across the continents. (7-11).

The poet probably feels that if Chief Abiola had kept to the business world in which he had acquired huge success, he would not have died. However, William Shakespeare in Julius Caesar says 'death will come when it will'. Yet another environment is his home 'revelling with women bewitched by his magical purse'. This is a reminder of the polygamous nature of the acclaimed winner of June 12 as he was married to many women.

Other 'environments' that provided rich inspiration for the poem include the imprisonment of Abiola, the killing of his wife and the struggle for the actualisation of the

June 12 election victory that created a general asphyxiating environment that led to the violent convulsion of the Nigerian state through wild protests, paralyzing strikes and violent turbulence. In the process, many people were maimed, killed and many were dislocated from their homes. The attendant turmoil, was such that the head of the then military junta, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, had to step down only for another dictator to come into the saddle. The acclaimed winner of the election was clamped into detention where he died. His wife, Kudirat Abiola, was gruesomely killed. Indeed, the storied matter of June 12, 1993 has become a huge reference point in the annals of Nigerian history and it has continued to influence Nigerian politics till date. It may well also have been the height of undesirable military adventurism in politics anywhere in Africa.

The poem 'From Goma to Gwoza' shares a similar temper with 'A Good Mourning' but extends the frontiers of the characters to other African countries. It is a political documentary, on some African societies, where politicians purloin the resources of their various countries and stark their booties in foreign banks in Swiss and Dubai, among others. The poem documents the current spate of violence blowing across Africa, where suicide bombers kill at will, where statesmen give speeches different from their intentions, where buying of votes has become a way of conducting elections:

Dead now but still king, his magic tutu
Conjures new wonders too many to count:
Pious speeches, suicide bombers, Swiss accounts
(but Dubai has been favoured lately!)
Holy wars, the mass graves of democracy –
You should stop me else I will read a book! (11-16).

Corruption has become the bane of most of the socio-political challenges confronting African countries today. Mobutu used to be the greatest culprit in this but since his demise; there have been many Mobutus in Africa. Mobute Sese Seko was a Zairian maximum ruler whose regime was characterized by repression and massive corruption. Corruption is a major problem in Africa. Greg Mills 'Africa's poverty is not because of lack of capital, access to world markets, technical experts, or the unfair global economic system, it is rather because African leaders have made poor choices and decided to keep the continent in abject poverty. The reckless sleaze perpetrated by these African politicians has often been responsible for the avalanche of socio-economic woes

confronting the African continent and has become a hurtful eco-materiality that the people must contend with.

The collection ends with 'The Sun Speaks to Earth' a commemorative eco poem written for the Solar Text project in, a green energy initiative at Kunstlerdorf choppingen, in Germany. According to the note on the poem, the project is a renewable energy initiative. It is a good development when governments begin to take initiatives that are environment-friendly. It is a step in the right direction to save the human world. The poem emphasises the primacy of the elements of nature such as light, water and dust. The poet pays homage to those who worshipped the sun suggesting that they probably have more knowledge than the present-day generation. The poet writes:

Perhaps those ancients who worshipped the sun
Knew far more than all the knowledge
In a library or ether, flashed to fingertips
At a click or touch of a key, can teach us. (1-4).

'The Sun Speaks to Earth' argues for a world imbued with an eco-consciousness. It prides the Sun as an inseparable human companion, that provides the much-needed warmth without which humans cannot survive. It also emphasises the importance of the sun in agriculture.

Brought down to earth, the sun warns still:
All that you need –

To pump your heart
To light or warm your rooms
To make a seed sprout
To keep the waters swirling or bound in ice
(and save the archipelagos
Where you pitch your tents
At the seas' sufferance) --- (10-18).

These lines explain some of the functions of the sun and this is instructive of the importance of the sun or warmth, to human lives. Without the sun's warmth the earth will not function, as earth may just be like a rocky ball of ice. The sun warms the oceans and the seas. It provides energy for plants and offers food and oxygen for life regeneration on earth. The sun, therefore, is of immense value, to plants and animals. The sun and other natural elements that are sine qua non, to living, should therefore be adequately protected

especially from science and technology which are two major threats to nature. The poet records some of the harm already done to nature:

that and more to the right degree I have given you
to the envy of Mercury and Mars, and all your sister stars.
And if the fate of Mastodons, or the cracked lips

of deserts creeping seaward for a drop of water
or the lessening count of insects, trees and beasts,
or the ulcer you've cut in the sky to bleed
on you fires and plagues I knew well enough
to keep behind the celestial fence – (21-26).

This is a major warning of how human activities destroy nature and the environment. Already is being depleted, in terms of lessening counts of insects, trees and beasts and all of these have their natural roles to play in the creation of an eco-equilibrium on earth. The eco-system is a complex web of biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment. These biotic and abiotic organisms interact through nutrient cycles and energy flows. These organisms need humans just as much as humans, need them. Humans must therefore preserve these organisms, especially the forest, which is their natural habitat to sustain the ecosystem.

Through the several poems in the collection, Ifowodo has been able to establish that human interactions with different materialities, have ways of conditioning the human environment. These materialities, determine the behaviours of humans, at any given time. Indeed, the environment, in which humans live, is replete with many objects and substances which affect the environment; hence they are eco-materialities that humans must relate with. These eco-materialities therefore must not be such that can be harmful to humans lest humans would resist such environment if they can. Humans, therefore, have a major role in nurturing their environment to be able to live a healthy life and indeed sustain themselves. This seems the reason for the swell in the 'new materialisms' to create an ecological dialogue with the hope and a projection to create a discourse about the 'beingness' of agents. This is to help raise the possibility of an eco-ethics, that binds humans to the material entities, upon which human livelihoods depend and to be able to relate better with 'agential beings' around. It is also a worthy path in the human quest for ecological justice, as a way of salvaging humanity through nature, as privileged arbiters of the future.

5.4 Environmental Degradation and the Crisis of Survival in the Niger Delta: A Reading of Ogaga Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp*

The Nigerian economy, prior to the discovery of oil in 1956, was largely agrarian. The birth of crude oil exploration changed the texture and the fibre of the Nigerian economy and indeed the political space. Oil has generated a lot of money into the Nigerian economy as the country's legal tender became a petrol currency, a strong currency and since then oil has become the back-bone and the mainstay of the country's economy. At first, oil was a blessing, as the proceeds of oil were channeled towards the development of the country; it helped to fast-track growth, through infrastructural development upgrade and in building an enviable foreign reserve. The Nigerian economy was respected all over the world. The country, however, soon became prodigal, frittering away resources through megalomaniac corrupt practices initiated by political the leaders. They started stealing public funds and building political structures that became too heavy for the resources of the country to accommodate.

Again, the locals and the environment in the oil prospecting areas are subjected to beastly treatments. Since the discovery of oil, the people of the Niger Delta have always been alienated from their resources. The alienation of the communities has often been heightened by government's support for the oil companies. Phia Steyn corroborates this when she writes that:

The process of alienation was further enhanced by active government support for the oil industry in their often conflicting relations with local communities. This trend was firmly established in the 1940s when the colonial government gave their full support to Shell / D'Arcy in their dealings with local communities, and was further enhanced by the 1949 decision by the Executive Council to all the company to continue work along lines dictated by the company because oil was national interest to Nigeria (254).

As exemplified in the extract above, the alienation of the host communities continues unabated. The activities of the oil companies have made life unbearable for the people of the Niger Delta. Many of them have been displaced from their lands and from their preoccupation such as farming and fishing. These activities have been paralysed and the environment has suffered utter destruction and irredeemable havoc, in the hands of the oil companies. Indeed, some have argued that oil is a curse to the country, for instance, it has made Nigeria too reliant on the resource, with different components of the country always

waiting for oil revenue and the attendant wind-fall for survival and sustenance. Many of the states, in Nigeria, are economically not viable while the few viable ones are reluctant to grow their Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) based on their home resources. The resources curse theory seems applicable to Nigeria in this regard. Richard Auty in 1983, used the term to denote that nations with rich resources, often underperform economically. The study established a pattern that countries endowed with natural resources are unable to use their wealth to boost their economies. This has also been corroborated by Jeffery Sachs and Andrew Warner in their *Natural Resources and Economic Development: The Curse of Natural Resources*. The duo argued that 'countries with great natural resource wealth tend to nevertheless to grow slowly than resource-poor countries' (827).

It may be right to suggest that the people and the environment, have been at the receiving end of oil exploration and exploitation, in the Niger Delta region. Indeed, oil exploration has had negative and disastrous impacts on the people of the Niger Delta. Incessant oil spillage has caused massive destruction of farmlands, as most of the land has been covered in sheens of greasy oil and has atrophied plants and vegetation. Also, this has caused the contamination of potable water and the depletion of the forests and the mangroves. Pollution has also led to the asphyxiation and reduction in the fish population among others. The deplorable state that this has created for humans and the environment is appalling. It has left the youths with restiveness, kidnapping, loss of biodiversity, activism and excruciating poverty, forcing the people into criminality, such as pipeline vandalism, and oil theft. The eco-unfriendly posture of the multinational companies is also a major factor responsible for all these while the neglect and negligence of the government is another. Both the carefree attitude nature of the Nigerian leaders and the gross irresponsibility of the Multinational corporations have created in the people a high level of despondency. The hopelessness is so grave, that many people, of the Niger Delta tend to exercise doubt in the Nigerian project. Okunoye supports this claim when he opines that:

The people of the Niger Delta consciously define themselves as "Other" within Nigeria. This is evident in the way they draw attention to their marginal location in the Nigerian project and the growth in various parts of the region of associations and movements committed to articulating and realizing their basic rights (415).

The paradox created by the oil-rich region and the inexplicable fall in the socio-economic standard of the people, has led to despondency and lack of faith in the Nigerian state. This feeling of revulsion and animosity, has been the stimulating attraction for the militants in the area to commonly take up arms against the state. Obviously, when people are cheated and their resources are taken away from them, without adequate compensation, it results in indignation and anger, which may convulse the structure upon which such a society is run. It is to forestall this kind of occurrence that eco-justice seeks to achieve ecological responsibilities in line with the social rights of the people. This is why in its advocacy, it often clamours for ecology and justice. This is not the case with the Niger Delta, which according to Ayuba Kadafa, 'consists of diverse ecosystems of mangrove, swamps, fresh water and is the largest wetland in Africa and among the ten most important wetlands and marine ecosystems in the world (19). Yet the lot of the inhabitants of the land does not reflect its richness. According to Kadafa, oil pollution and other exploratory activities have turned the Niger Delta into an 'ecological wasteland' (19) where streams and rivers are contaminated, forests destroyed and an overwhelming general biodiversity loss has replaced one of the most profound natural ecosystems in the world.

According to Uyigwe quoted in Kadafa says that 'the ecosystem of the area is highly diverse and supportive of numerous species of terrestrial and aquatic fauna as well as human life' (19). The despoliation and the devastation that have taken over the region, are not only huge but also of cataclysmic proportion, so much that it has rewritten and restyled the ecology of the area. The National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) claims that between 1976 and 1996, more than 2.4 million barrels contaminated the environment'. Kadafa also notes that 'in fifty years, at least 9-13 million barrels have been spilled in the Niger Delta' (19) thus damaging the land and her ecosystem fundamentally.

Aside from the exploration and exploitation of oil, in the Niger Delta other eco-unfriendly activities of the multinational companies devastating the environment include the laying of pipelines across forest and mangroves, the leakages of those pipes, vandalism and gas flaring among others. Some of the pipelines are aged and corroded thus causing the spilling of oil on water and land. This pollution does not only affect humans and the environment alone, it also affects animals too. Briggs, Yoshida and Gershwin say that: 'birds and mammals are vulnerable to oil spills when their habitats become contaminated

and this may reduce reproductive rates, survival and physiological impairment' (147). This is a confirmation that even animals are affected by this environmental pollution and degradation.

It is this burden of survival that has led some of the people in the region to resort to activism and militancy. The birth of activism and militancy, in the Niger Delta, is traceable to the activism of Ken Saro-Wiwa, an intellectual and writer, who articulated the Niger Delta condition more than any individual. Saro-Wiwa an environmentalist of Ogoni extraction upgraded the Niger Delta struggle by internationalising it. He attracted the world attention to the huge despoliation that was going on in the oil region. In the words of Basil Gomba et al:

The region confronts a conspicuous menace on a daily basis: its biosphere is being diminished due to a lack of environmental considerations in the business of oil prospecting and extraction. While agitations to right such infractions initially remained largely internal to Nigeria, Saro-Wiwa became one activist who tore the mask off the crude face of profiteering and industrial abuses. And the world was let into the knowledge that, in the oil rich Niger Delta, the environment and its human populations are victims of one of the world's greatest ecological tragedies (65).

Ken Saro-Wiwa had used the platform of the United Nations Conference on Environment, now Earth Summit, held in 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, to open the eyes of the world to the ecological barbarism of the multinational companies, in the Niger Delta. His activism cost him his life two years after as the head of the then Nigeria's ruling junta Sani Abacha, did not tolerate such activism. Abacha ordered the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and eight others on 10 November, 1995, despite the huge outcry, from voices of reason within the country and the global communities. The killing rather than cow the people in the region, as that seemed the intent, exacerbated the situation and led to greater activism. It also led to the emergence of hordes of armed groups in the creeks of the Niger Delta. Again it caused a swell in the ranks of activist- writers, whirling out protest writings against the oppression and injustice being meted to the land and the people of the region. While Ken Saro-Wiwa's Movement for the Emancipation of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), was intellectual in its approach to the Niger Delta question, other groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), chose to confront the state terror machine, with terror.

In another vein, the Niger Delta condition became a stimulus for writers and this accounts for the fecundity in the literary enterprise, in the region. The Niger Delta struggle easily finds a fertile ground to launch a literary war on the oppressors of the land. Nigerian literature has often been accused of being too confrontational. Indeed, the literature is largely steeped in socialist realism, where art is not for art sake but where art must be pressed into a social function. Stewart Brown maintains, “the defining characteristic of Nigerian poetry in English has been its confrontational attitude to authority.”(58) The irreverent exploration of the resources of the people and the attendant degradation, that sentenced the people, into penury and hardship, therefore, provides the inspiration for the area’s fecundity in reeling out various literary works of different tenor and temper. From the spirituality of J. P. Clark’s *A Reed in The Tide*, to the romantic irredentism of Gabriel Okara’s ‘*The Call of the River Nun*’ and from Tanure Ojaide’s presentation of the appalling Niger Delta degradation, to Ogaga Ifowodo’s reproaches among others, the story of the Niger Delta continues to be told in cadences of pain and anguish.

Ifowodo’s *The Oil Lamp*, his third collection, is a book that captures the crisis of survival by the people of the Niger Delta, whose natural resources have turned their land into a harsh and hostile environment, orchestrated by a grand conspiracy and complicity of the multinational companies, the government and the western world, that profits from the plundering. It is saddening that the tragedy continues in the Niger Delta, till today, in the name of oil prospecting. An oil lamp is an object, meant to produce light or energy, continuously suggesting the position of the Niger Delta as the area producing light or energy, that the Nigeria needs, to run both financially and as the real time energy source of the country. The title also suggests that most of the poems in the collection, are Ogaga’s reflection on his homeland. It is therefore not surprising that some of the poems capture the struggle for survival of a people whose environment is made harsh and hostile and induced by greed and capitalism of some multinational companies. The whole collection, which is divided into five parts, is the narrative of the agony, pain and the suffering of the people of the Niger Delta entrapped in an inferno of oil profiteering and utter government complicity. The five parts are broken down into Jese, Odi, Ogoni, the Pipes war and Cesspit of the Niger area with Waterscape and The Agonist, serving as prologue and epilogue respectively. The names under which the sections are divided are symbols of death and anguish, a sad reminder of the horrendous disasters that have been

visited on the region. The collection therefore, is the narrative and the encoding of the annoyance, agony and the horrors of the Niger Delta people.

The poem 'A Waterscape', serves as the prologue to the collection, providing the much-needed background about the geography of the Niger Delta. It is a poem from which one gets a sense of the natural environment of the Niger Delta area. The Niger Delta sits on water as it is belted to the coastlines. Its littoral setting is further confirmed by the white mangroves that beautify the entire landscape and this is only characteristic of most coastlines worldwide. The poet using the rich images of riverine objects like plankton, shrimp, egg- and – fish in the bloom, creeks among others, is a reflection of the seaside nature of the topography of the Niger Delta. Also, the reference to 'ancestral lake' denotes the long connection and attachment of the people to the area. It has been observed that most Niger Delta poets seem irretrievably connected to the land hence their choice of images and symbolisms are often sourced from the area. Okunoye quoted in Egya notes that "[the] liberty with which Okara in particular drew imagery and symbolism from his birthplace betrays the harmony and communion that the [poets of Niger Delta origin] maintain with their immediate physical environment" (416–17). The connection to the land is also a confirmation that place or location has a way of influencing culture and occupation of the people. Little wonder then, that the survival of many people in the area, depends on the environment and it is therefore not surprising that the major preoccupation of the people is fishing. Ifowodo captures this when he says:

And in the mangrove waters, where tides
free the creeks of weeds, fishermen glide
home to the first meal. (ix).

Though literally, the people of the Niger Delta live on water, they are very hard- working only having their first meal after a hard day's job fishing. Unfortunately, one sees this same environment threatened when the poet writes about the water as:

Blacker than the pear, deeper than soot,
Massive ink-well, silent and mute:
Water, black water (ix).

Water is supposed to be clean and transparent, but black water indicates contaminated water, that may not be drinkable but that may also be dangerous for fish and other animals to live in. It is then plausible to ask how humans can survive in unhealthy water and environment. The black water, obviously, is not natural but contaminated, as a result

of oil spillage and the despoliation of the land due to oil exploration. It is unimaginable, how the people of the Niger Delta survive in an environment where there is no clean, water especially in a country where public water supply is a luxury.

The poems, grouped under Part 1 Jese, are divided into fifteen subsets labelled in Roman Numerals and they piece the different experiences of the degradation that threaten the people's survival. When oil was first discovered in the area, the people would have been filled with the optimism and the euphoria of better days ahead. Oil, being in high demand, all over the world, was supposed to impact positively, on the lives of the people and indeed on the environment. Surprisingly, oil became the doomsday of the people. This is what Ojaide calls "sitting on oil and yet remaining impoverished" (244). Subsets I - III of the collection, address the degradation of the earth, through deforestation, the failed promise of the government to provide electricity and the stripping away of the wealth of a people. All these, as x-rayed in the poem become the standpoint of a penetrating social commentary on the provision of basic infrastructure and on the failure of the government to cater for the people and the environment. The poems lament the survival of trees that have become victims of cooking. The forests have been decimated as a result of incessant tree felling and the forest that normally serves as the shield of the human community,, is removed and humans become vulnerable to danger from all fronts. Ifowodo shows how vulnerable the trees have become when he writes that:

The forest quivered as trunk after trunk snapped,
and a nameless rage wagged green-fingered
branches in the air as they fell to the hungry axe

They smelt edible death in food cooked
with logs still so alive they hissed,
Then puffed out clouds of wet smoke so bitter

the women wept into the pots.
In the fourteenth month of the fuel crunch,
with oil lamps dry and dusty, nightfall (3).

Human actions and activities, have been responsible for the depletion of the forests, in the Niger Delta. While on one hand, the forests are wiped out by the exploration of the oil companies, on the other hand, in the event of fuel scarcity, especially kerosene, which is used for cooking in many homes, people resort to firewoods and this often leads to the felling of trees. Some of these trees are cut and not allowed to dry properly, before they

are converted into fire wood, hence ‘with logs still alive they hissed’/ ‘then puffed out clouds of wet smoke so bitter’(3). Ifowodo’s thesis is that the earlier humans appreciate the place of forests and its eco-systems, in human lives, the better for our collective survival lest the death of the earth may be nearer than expected. Forests serve as food, as timber, as carbon storage, as nutrient cycling, as water and air purification and as maintenance of wildlife habitat. Plants from forests are also used in the preparation of drugs, for the treatment of ailments. Forests, in Africa, also do serve as sanctuaries, where deities are worshipped, among others. The importance of the forest in human and animal lives, cannot be overemphasized. Thus, there is therefore, a strong need for humans, to show greater restraint, in acts capable of causing deforestation. There should, be more commitments, and efforts, in the preservation of forests, than depleting it.

It is in the light of this, that the tree planting initiative, sweeping across the world is laudable and indeed the campaign should be intensified. Humans and animals are endangered when the forest is completely degraded, as this may resort in dire climate change consequences, such as causing excessive heat, flood and habitat loss among numerous other effects. It is in the light of stemming the tide of this unusual heat that took over Akwa Ibom that Tropical Research and Conservation Centre planted 500 trees in five villages. (Tropical Research and Conservation Centre).

The poems also document the failed promises of politicians, who come to the people, during electioneering campaigns, and promise heaven and earth but who eventually would fail to actualise their promises. Some of the politicians capitalise on the sufferings of the people in this regard hence they promise to redress the situation if voted into power, but surprisingly when they get into office. They refuse to attend to the problem rather most of them look for how to profit from the pathetic situation. The poet writes that:

They turned to candles till their need made wax gold,
forcing them to roost earlier than their hens.

on moonless nights when fireflies mocked
the dimmed promise of eletiriki. (3).

Most Nigerian politicians glib to covet and harvest the people’s vote some of who fall prey to this practice that some Nigerian politicians have mastered adroitly. This has

become a trend in Nigeria and if not checked may be the Achilles heel of the Nigerian democratic enterprise. Politicians at events talk sweet and play to the gallery by saying things they do not have plans of realizing. The poet captures one of them in action when he writes that:

Promises made by a hard-hatted
minister at the tape-cutting for the first
well withered with the drilling tree.

When the tree glowed in the dazzle
of lighted stockades – halogen-eyed Cyclops
guarding the well – they could touch the day

... for forty years, powered by a plant,
till the tree drilled its last barrel.
The electric Cyclops blinked, moved

to another well in another place (4).

This is what most of the politicians in Nigeria do. They rule by deceit and lies and this has become a delineating feature of some of these politicians and their allies. The squandering of the wealth of a people is also couched in smooth lies and fake promises. The wealth of the Niger Delta people is extracted at the detriment of the people of the Niger Delta. It is everything in the Niger Delta that is burdened - nature, the people, the plants, animals, and even the pipes that carry this oil of blood that are left unattended most times is burdened.. Ifowodo relays that:

This was how the damage was done,
With old pipes corroded and cracked
By the heat of their burden - (5).

Some of these politicians are in league with the profiteering multinational oil companies and are only interested in the sleaze that such connivance can bring to them. Ogaga argues that the people must checkmate lying politicians and deal with them, by voting them out during elections. People, who compromise during elections, should not expect good governance. Nigeria needs a crop of committed politicians, who would correct long-standing environmental compromises and situate the country well on the line of progress and advancement.

In iv – xv, the poet takes us into a narrative of how some of the devastations, in the Niger Delta, come about. In the poet's account, the one of Jesse happened when a group of boys

chase rodents into a burst oil pipeline that had become a fountain. Excited of this discovery, the four boys race home to get pails and kegs to fetch this booty and probably make some quick currency out of it. In the midst of the frenzied foraging, scrambling and scooping by the community, an inferno ensues and consumes a whole generation. The poet captures the the terrible carnage as follows:

The news came on the twelfth night:
A breach in a refined products pipeline
In Jese, Delta state, has led to a scramble (7).

The news of the Jesse inferno was widespread and it was a major event that the media really feasted on ineluctably. But to the world out there, it was another normal occurrence in the Niger Delta, where people in great numbers would have been roasted into different shapes like a sculptor's gallery at different times. Humans and the environment are destroyed in one fell swoop and rather than the people and the government learning from this, each carry on as if nothing has happened and the story of horror continues. Ifowodo captures this pathetic situation thus:

the dripping and drying fat of breasts and buttocks
spiced by the aromatic thyme of the shriveling
shrubbery, they rushed to the edges of the blaze
... but all was fuel to the consuming fire,
Bones and flesh as stones and sand and the thrown water (11).

Egya believes that when disasters like this happen: 'the people, the environment and the government' (2) share levels of responsibilities and affectations. For instance, while the multinational oil companies, in their usual capitalistic reveling, are preoccupied with criminal profiteering continue, to degrade the environment, the people's violent disposition to the multinational oil companies attract greater violence from the government that seems only interested in the dollar proceeds of the oil rather than the people and the environment. Unfortunately, rather than the government coming to the rescue of the vulnerable masses, they inflict more brutality on them. Some critics have pointed at corruption as one of the factors for the government's insensitivity. Egya has suggested that it is not in all cases that environmental degradation is tied to corruption. He opines that:

the dialectic for these poets is not the clash between humans and the environment but, more importantly, a tripartite dimension that aligns the fate of the environment to that of the people, and pitches both

against the ineptitude of the establishment. It focuses on the class conflict between the perceived traditional owners of the land, such as the farmers and the fishermen, and those who otherwise tap the wealth of the land, such as public and private institutions (2).

the truth of the matter is that it is the government duty to protect its citizens. Even animals had their fair share of the holocaust. Ifowodo, paints a picture of how some of the animals reacted to the inferno. He writes that:

They came swiftly to the wreck, the prey birds,
Circling the rising and spreading smoke,
Praying for good game as they hunted on the wing

They darkened further the sky, their wings
Stretched tip to tip like a giant tent.
Their laser vision pinpointed the rabbit (12).

While some animals are trapped and killed in the inferno, some were waiting in the wings for a feast. Nature sometimes can be inexplicable. Some animals, like some humans derive pleasure in the downfall of others and in the human world, just like, in nature, might is right. In a similar vein, even crops and farm fields are not left out of the utter destruction. The poet describes how:

The fire uncoiled like an infinite
Cobra, stretched to the farthest edges
Of a land marked by oil for double torment.

And the fields of crops, snatched from water
By the hands of simple farmers, screamed:
It's midseason! We are not ripe!
Do not reap us! Do not cook us! (13).

When crops and farmlands are affected in this manner, it breeds famine, which threatens the survival of humans. The laying of pipelines and other oil exploratory activities in the Niger Delta area has had a debilitating effect on, not to talk of oil spillage and inferno which worsens the situation. The country currently is yet to be food sufficient. Anything that could trigger off a food crisis in the country, must be avoided. Again, farming gulps a lot of efforts and energy; it is, thus, frustrating to see the effort and sweat of Niger Delta farmers ones wasted, without any compensation. Similarly, also affected by this blaze are the creeks and the ponds that are not spared in the wreckage. Ifowodo captures their agony thus:

The creeks and ponds, soon to boil dry
Joined the fields, thinking the case
Of water even clearer and cried: (13)

*Take your cooking oil away
We are no pots or cauldrons!
Can't you see here's no kitchen
And you burn your meal to ashes?*

It is unimaginable that creeks and ponds would dry off as a result of an inferno. Although, this may be exaggerative, it is a reflection of how strange the ecosystem in the Niger Delta area has become. However, when one considers the enormity of the destruction done to the cycle of nature in the Niger Delta, one may but only agree with the horrendous submission hereby depicted in the poem. Ifowodo talks about how:

The land burned, the trees burned, the rivers, burned
The smoke unrolled endless bolts of cloth
To wrap naked grief and shield the world (14).

The annihilation of humans and the environment is total and with a devastating effect. It is a complete cycle of destruction and one which has destabilised the environment and the people. Matters of this nature are better handled by the government which is expected to provide succour and relief for the people. Rather than do this, the Head of State talked down on the victims with insensitivity and arrogance. Ifowodo says:

This was the peace plan: death by hunger or fire
It was fire for Jese, ashes and scars for all
But the head of state who wiped his face and said

*I came to see the damage you have done
And the roast dinner for me and my guests. (14)*

This is all the leader can say amid the agony and the pain that the community was going through. It smacks of insensitivity and sheer wickedness. Ifowodo's position is that one of the major problems confronting many African nations today is that their leaders are quite insensitive to the yearnings and aspirations of their people. They fail to show sympathy to the plight of the people they are leading. Ifowodo further records the arrogance of the Head of State when he says:

Will the government aid the victims of Jese?
The head - of - state, visiting the village,
And pained to his soul, lowered his head,

*Then steadied his nerves: No, he said,
We must not encourage thieves and saboteurs. (15).*

This is how some leaders behave irresponsibly and instead of diffusing a crisis, they aggravate it through their unguarded and reckless statements. They then resort to threat and the use of violence, promising mayhem on an already distraught community. The Niger Delta has been a hotbed of militancy and it dragged on for a long time until the federal government initiated some amnesty programmes which seems to be working and has kept the militants out of the creeks. The militants occupied and became the lords of the creeks, living on criminality, such as vandalism and illegal sale of crude and illegally refined petroleum products. They blew pipelines and kidnapped many expatriates, working for the oil multinational companies collecting ransom before they are released. It is the same frustration that led Madam Edoja one of the poetic figures in the poem, to resort to singing an elegy for oil. her song is hinged on the fact that oil which should ordinarily should have affected their lives positively but which has become a nightmare to their survival and that of their environment. One therefore, agrees with Egys that ‘any engagement with eco-writing in Nigeria would rather centre on the interface between the yearnings of the people for liberation from an inhumane authority, and the fate of the environment exploited by that same authority (2)’. For instance, Mrs Edoja’s lamentation points directly at this when she cries that:

Oil is my curse, oil is our doom.
Where is my husband, where is my only love?
At the bottom of the sea, the bottom of the sea.

... Oil is my curse, oil is my doom.
Where are my children? Where is my husband?
Ashes and bones. Ashes and bones. (17).

Mrs Edoja, a ninety-year-old woman, laments the dangerous environment which has inhibited their survival. She cries about the doom, that oil has brought to the community. The woman has lost her children and her husband, to the inferno, that has gulped the community. She is left alone mourning the loss of her loved ones. All this is an indication that the Niger Delta environment, has become a dangerous zone, for humans. It thus becomes incumbent on the multinational oil companies and the government, to be proactive in doing the needful in the Niger Delta region to prevent disasters like the one of Jesse. Unfortunately, there has been many of such fire incidents, in Nigeria, due to the

vandalisation of pipelines and oil spillages, across the country. In the case of the Niger Delta, crude oil exploration, has become the harbinger of doom for the people.

Odi, a town in the Niger Delta, is another place that Ifowodo talks about in the poem. The Odi Massacre, as it has come to be known occurred on November 20, 1999. It was a disastrous attack on the Ijaw community of Odi, a town in Bayelsa State of Nigeria. Nnimo Bassey quoted in Tope Fasua, claimed that ‘nearly 2,500 people’ were killed in the catastrophe (113). The incident started when five members of the Nigerian Police were murdered by a gang near Odi. The attendant revenge mission by the military, ordered by President Olusegun Obasanjo, left the whole town annihilated but for an Anglican Church, a bank and a health centre. The Odi disaster is a further testimony to the dangerous environment that the Niger Delta environment has become. It is a largely volatile area, where death, agony and pain are the order of the day.

Adopting a lucid narrative style, the Odi experience is captured by Ogaga from poem xvi to poem xxviii. The poet takes us through the background to the catastrophe indicating that five cops and four soldiers sent to maintain peace after a youth revolt arising were killed. Ifowodo further narrates how the president ordered for the destruction of Odi:

A battalion of justice scorched its path
To Odi, came to solve by war
A case of homicide: five cops and four

Soldiers sent to break a youth revolt
Lay dead in the dark labyrinth of the delta,
Engorging sharks or crocodiles, or growing rank

With slick-spiked creek water. And the president,
Ex-commando, false general,
Summoned the governor of the province (21).

The tension and the break-down of law and order are deducible from the image painted by Ifowodo in the collection. He presents a Niger Delta, environment where a group of criminals can hide and reside, and be protected from being apprehended. This is an indication that such a community is complicit and unsafe. The criminal temerity of a group of criminals, to kill law enforcement agents is disdainful and uncharitable. However, the order of the ‘President’ to have declared an onslaught on the entire community, as if the criminality was a communal act, thus killing many innocent souls including women and children, in retaliation, was extreme. This explains how endangered

the Niger Delta people and the land are truly are. The people of Odi were dislocated after the invasion of the military. Everybody had to run in different directions and many of them took refuge in the creeks. Bombs were thrown here and there and the whole community became a terror enclave. Humans were forced to live in the Hobbesian state, as they eat insects and wild roots fresh:

And the men, far from yam or fish, turned insect
Hunters, wild root diggers. Banished
From fire, they ate their food fresh (23).

Bombs continued to descend on Odi with craze and utter wickedness while the people fled deeper into the forest with their children strapped to their backs crying, famished and fearful. As this was going on, the soldiers having been satisfied that the insurgent would have run into the forest entered into the town and began a house-to-house campaign with irrepressible wickedness. The invasion of Odi is the height of man's inhumanity to man. On the one hand is the insensitive and the oppressive federal government, on the other hand, is the overzealousness on the part of the security agencies who sometimes when drafted to a crisis spot to maintain the law and order, exhibit ruthlessness and aggravate the scale of violence. Ifowodo writes about the overzealousness of the soldiers, especially when they discovered during a house-to-house search, that some military materials like 'the army combat kit: fatigues, olive wide buckle belt hanging from a wall, 'dusty boots and helmet,' The fact that these, obviously must have been stripped from a murdered soldier sent the soldiers into a wild frenzy predicated unjustly on an *esprit de corps* to justify their destruction of the village. Ifowodo writes that:

They emptied their rifles on the walls
On the wing of the roof unbroken
By the fallen tree, shouting now

No police cautions, but war cries:

Come out cowards, bloody bastards!
So you ambush four soldiers, kill them

And think you're brave. Come out!
Show us how many more you can kill! (28).

Such was the brazen cruelty that the soldiers exhibited while destroying Odi. They spared nothing. Not even Sergeant Tobi, alias One Nigeria, who was killed by a tree felled by the brutality of the soldiers. Sergeant Tobi was paralysed by a spinal cord injury he suffered

during the Biafran war and had for thirty years begged for death to end his anguish. Adopting the omniscient narrative technique, the poet takes us into the inner recesses of the One-Nigeria man as he considers between taking flight like others and staying to be killed by the rampaging forces. He chose the latter. And truly as he predicted, he was killed by the forces of the country he fought to keep as one nation. In a fluid poetic narration, Ogaga captures the death and the latent irony associated with his death. He writes:

What they had not seen was the body
Of Sergeant Tobi, alias One Nigeria,
Crushed to death by the falling tree

Paralysed by a spinal-cord wound
In the Biafran war, he lay face-up,
No longer begging God for his death (29).

According to the poet, Sergeant Tobi says ‘One war spared only my breath, froze me to a bed/let this mark my end/’ (29). The soldiers at the fish market split a dead dog open, wrote on standing doors and walls with the dogs blood declaring the end of Odi and the war they unleashed on the tiny village and her people. Ifowodo writes:

*THIS IS THE END OF ODI
THIS IS WHAT WE DO TO COWARDS
THIS IS JUST A WARNING*

*NEXT TIME YOU SEE SOJA YOU GO RUN!
NEXT TIME WE WILL SHOW NO MERCY
NEXT TIME FOR ONE SOJA, YOU WILL ALL DIE! (30).*

Ifowodo laments a situation whereby the army of a nation reduces itself into ragtag armed men jubilant over the annihilation of people it swore to protect. The oil in Odi ironically becomes the cause of the destruction of the land. The incidence is a further confirmation that the world has gone really capitalistic where materiality is worshipped. In the case of Odi, oil has a better value than human lives hence oil will be defended at the expense of human lives. Little wonder that Ifowodo writes that “We will protect our oil wealth at any cost, says the President’. It is therefore not surprising the lamentation of Pa Pirirye who after returning to his house is greeted with ruins and the blood sign that reads: “*NEXT TIME YOU SEE SOLDIER YOU WILL RUN*” (30). The pain of the old man seems not to be because of the devastation that has been visited on himself, his people and their land

but the fact that the perpetrators are fellow blacks. The old man remembered the invasion of Benin by the white colonialist and how the white invaders were caused. However, they have cursed them. But the old man could not come to terms with the fact that this colossal destruction was effected by his fellow countrymen. The old man laments:

*... I have lived too long. Today, my feet
Sink into the ground at the sight of my door*

*When British soldiers looted and burned Benin,
we cursed strange men come from beyond the sea,
from the land of the dead, so evil they had no skin.*

*But who shall we curse now, who now is the enemy?
My eyes have seen two evils, must not see another. (31).*

Such is the regret as expressed by Pa Piriye through whom Ifowodo speaks about Nigeria. The feeling and the thought that colonialism was the worst thing to have happened in Nigeria is negated by the reality of black on black inhumanity. This feeling is strong and potent enough to evoke a feeling of revulsion, disappointment and agony as it does in Pa Piriye. Many Africans had thought the worst was over after the end of colonialism but the current realities in various African states affirm the contrary, as many African leaders who replaced the colonialists are worse. Many of these African leaders, have become gods, who must be worshipped by their people. Many of them stay in power throughout their life-time. Their blend of democracy is monarchical in content and form. Hence the constitution and the people are their appendages available to them to turn and twist according to their mood and temper.

The soldiers' plea, to a fisherman, returning home after a long time, on the sea, that he should not return home, is a testimony of their acts of wickedness in Odi. They said 'You have no home anymore. Go back to sea!'(30). However, this did not stop the fisherman from seeing the ruins that his village has become, the ashes of the schoolbag from where his daughter usually brought out *The Fisherman's Invocation* which she read to welcome him from the sea. 'He held the book and wept into the ashes of burnt-out things,/ the bitter memory of unusable fragments (32).

Odi, thus ineluctably, becomes the metaphor for the state's brutality, cruelty and oppression. The Odi narrative is replete with woes and gory tales of killings, devastation and suffering and it is symbolic of the general experience that has characterised the day to

day living of the Niger Delta people. The Odi massacre is a huge sour point in the history of Nigerian statehood, an abuse of power, a denigration and commonisation of human lives and a privileging of oil over humans. Egya aptly puts it when he says that 'the people face extinction because of the wealth of the land, and the land faces depletion because of the greed of certain people. (10)' It is indeed tragic and heart-rendering, the way the land is exploited, how humans are maltreated and the environment jeopardised. Nnimo Bassey, in 'United Niger Delta Oil Co.' captures it succinctly when he says 'As the oil companies 'suck crude from the belly of the earth' (39) they also 'pump blood into the belly of the earth' (41). This though sounds like an imaginative figuring but what Bassey has done is that he has painted the reality of the area as it is.

Similarly, Ifowodo is able to paint the extreme cruelty, suffered by the Niger Delta people, through the gory depiction of the Odi tragedy and he is thus able to move the reader to pity and empathy. This has been a major devotion of many of the Niger Delta poets, who tend to attract attention to the area by portraying the inhuman treatment to which the people and the land are subjected. This, they have effectively achieved as they have raised the issue of the Niger Delta to international consciousness, a move earlier championed by Ken Saro Wiwa.

The sequences of the poems, captured under 'Ogoni', are in furtherance of Ifowodo's argument that the Niger Delta people have rather have been unfairly treated, despite their abundant wealth that is being shipped away. These poems depict the oppression and the brutality of the Ogoni people by the military with the connivance of the federal authorities to unleash brutality on the Niger Delta people and their land. In a fearful, yet sympathy laden tone, Ifowodo painstakingly and in gripping dramatic poetry, relates the terror and the subjugation of the people who live in perpetual fear and horror. Beyond the words of the poet, Ifowodo creates some characters representative of the two of the three groups that can be blamed for the turn of events in the Niger Delta. These are Major Kitemo or Major Kill Them All who later became colonel Kitemo, an old man, the school boy, his father and a woman. These people, rather than being readily available to sheepishly take in the indoctrination of Major Kitemo, display an unexpected grit, brilliance and a sound knowledge of the subject matter in a manner that not only shocks Major Kitemo but made him answer their unexpected questions with some unease.

The quartet displayed a rich sense of history of their land and jolted the oppressor by their sound argument which deflated the chicanery that Kitemo wanted to sell to them. Indeed the soundness of their argument, makes Kitemo almost lose his temper because he is a soldier trained in brute force other than in bowing to superior argument. The argument between Major Kitemo and the people raises germane issues of ownership, resource control and the centrality of the people in the exploitation of resources of a land. When Major Kitemo asked the people, whether they own the land, the kind of answers he got must have sent jitters down the spine of the soldier:

“Yes,” they said, as I knew they would.

“And how did you come to own it?”

“By its being on our land, “they said.

“The land is Nigeria’s, “I corrected them.

And then an old man, parched and cracked

Far worse than any sun –sucked patch

Of spill-soaked land I have seen, asked in return

“And how did Nigeria come to own the oil?”

Oh, I should have paused to give thought (40).

The poet through this dramatic posturing, adopts multiple voices to give voice to different opinions and perspectives. From what the soldiers says, one is able to access what goes on in the minds of the oppressors. Similarly, one could decipher the mindset of the people. The dramatic nature of the poetry therefore creates a good ambiance for accessing different opinions on the subject matter in focus. The woman asked:

No vex Oga soja, but who (Don’t be irate officer but who}
Or wetin make up dis Nigeria? (or what makes up the Nigeria ?)
There were many hands now up, no doubt (40).

Even the school boy added his voice when he asks

“... Excuse me sir,” he said?,

but in whose name, and by whose powers,

“Were the laws you cite made?” it was unreal,

an ancient, a female, and a sapling,

had taken words from me, and by whose powers (41).

Such is the level of intelligence displayed by those people that had soldier felt could be brainwashed into renouncing their their resolve to demand for justice for themselves and their land. It has been a long struggle and agitation that started since the oil exploration in

the Niger Delta and the struggle has been handed from generation to generation. It would then be foolhardy, for anybody to feel, that the long agitation would be wished away, on a platter of indoctrination, brute force and blackmail. The Niger Delta struggle has become a culture, a way of life and part of the ethos of a people, who have continually been battered and submerged in oppression and travails occasioned by years of neglect by some capitalistic oil companies and insensitive government. This neglect thus becomes the fuel upon which history laden with anger and despair is transferred from generation to generation. This accounts for why the Niger Delta is the hotbed of protests and activism, aimed at correcting the long period of injustice.

Even ‘Major Kill Them All’ as Major Kitemo is sometimes called attests to the doggedness of the Niger Delta people and their commitment to save themselves and their land. Ifowodo captures Kitemo’s confession thus:

I had used two centuries of killing skills,
Yet they clung to their claim. (44).

The speaking voice, here, obviously that of the killer soldier, brags about his killing skills, and one wonders who his victims are, other than the people he has been asked to defend. This depicts the cruelty and the oppressive nature with which the oil corporations and their Nigerian state collaborator have been handling the Niger Delta issue. The clamour for Environmental Justice, for a fair treatment and the meaningful involvement of the people in the appropriation of their resources, should be upheld and made practicable. Attempts by capitalist institutions to try and mock the degradation of the people and their land, as Huggan and Tiffin are wont to do, when they try to diminish the writings of Ken Saro Wiwa as theatrical and pretentious. This is not only annoying but also repulsive. The duo write in the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (65) that “the combination of fable and high moral drama that can be seen in Saro-Wiwa’s autobiographical accounts of the Ogoni’s struggle also tends to be replicated in the critical discourse that is applied to them, indicating a general tendency in activist writing towards a theatricalisation of the issues it sets out (43). One can only wonder if theatricalisation is apposite in the capturing of the suffering of a people from the point of view of an insider. For instance, the quartet almost summarised the agony of the people of Ogonis in the hands of their oppressors when they eventually emerge from the creeks

where they hid themselves throughout the period, the military unleash terror on them. Ifowodo talks about the unsavoury experiences of the people of Ogoni, during this period:

three have died of snakebites, four of malaria.
two women have given birth under trees. Five elders' hearts
expired with the last bomb. Our stomachs are raw with roots. (48)

The description as theatrical of the suffering of the Niger Deltan people smacks of indifference and does not represent the true feeling of the people. This, however, is condemnable. The events around which Ifowodo has built a poetic narrative are real and are verifiable historical facts, recorded in the media and in researches. When human beings and nature are destroyed for profiteering or economic gains, it leads to the commodification of human lives and material gains are made to override concerns for humans and the ecology. Deep ecology frowns at attempts by humans, blindfolded by crass profiteering, by looking at the atomistic self in pursuit of their liberal capitalism. Deep ecology, out of its biocentric ethics, perceives that to kill another creature is an act of violence against oneself because the 'self' truly consists of the self and other creatures. So when humans destroy fellow humans they destroy themselves. The same way when humans destroy nature they destroy themselves. Humans, therefore, must move to abandon any social and ecological structure that privileges aggressive capital accumulation and making self as the utmost focal point of significance. Indeed, Shell, the major beneficiary of the oil exploration in the Niger Delta has severally been accused of being complicit in the killing of the people of the area. It is instructive that for peace to reign, the people of the Niger Delta deserves better treatment and their environment given an improvement.

So great and intense is the crisis of survival, in the Niger Delta that it yielded the greatest vandalism that Nigeria has ever seen. Many of the youths, of the Niger Delta, jaded by the status quo and inspired by massive unemployment, took to arms and challenged the Nigerian state. They seized the creeks and continually broke the oil pipes. They vent their anger on the oil corporations, by kidnapping their expatriates. The Niger Delta became a sweltering point for violent engagements, as different armed militant groups took over the region, committing all manners of atrocities in the name of activism. The crisis was so bad that it did not only affect the internal oil consumption of the country, even at the international oil market, it affected the price of oil. The government mobilised the terror

machine of the state and the theatre of war was set. The resort to arms by the Niger Delta youths is what Ifowodo attempts to explain and defend in the poem Pipe wars. The 'Pipe wars' is the tag for the different poems, that narrate the experiences written in defence of the resort to arms.

Ifowodo recollects the hanging of the Ogoni Nine, a group of activists who led the struggle against the inhuman treatment of the people of the Niger Delta and their environment. The poet identified this as the reason for the taking up of arms by the youths. The uprising is also fuelled by the long brutality of the state, and the oil corporation's insensitivity to the plights of the people of the region due to the exploratory activities:

they hang nine
for murders pre-planned
and Colonel Kitemo

had, at last, his last word.
The troubled peace of surrender
churned stomachs, threw up

The bile of raw-root meals
eaten in the bush, renewed the taste
of uncontainable grief. (51).

The killing of the Ogoni Nine, against all international imploration and pleas would continue at least for a long time to be the reason for all manners of activism the Niger Delta. The execution of the 'Ogoni Nine' was seen as an attempt to silence agitation, in the area but if that was the intent, then the strategy has been counterproductive. Indeed, it has escalated the agitation and in fact, taken it to a heinous violent scale. Another reason for the escalation of the crisis in the Niger Delta, is the continuous despoliation of the land that seems will continue forever. The despoliation continues to affect the lives of the people and their environment that the people are trapped in a perpetual perplexity. Ifowodo tries to summarise the sufferings of the people when he writes:

They are that lives amidst such wealth in our favour
Land; to hear them bewail the dissipation
of their share of earth's bounty, the devastation

that pours oil on rivers to float fish
lure the flamingo to a lethal meal

and quill the secretary bird's death on sludge;
that irrigates lowland crops to rot their roots,
and wells resentment like ocean tides above their heads. (52).

These threnodic lines present the hardship of a people; as oil spillage on the rivers, kills the fishes and takes away the fishermen from work. In the same vein, sludge irrigates the lowland and sends away the farmers from their work. The people live in a violated environment. In all of this, the government seems most culpable of failing to protect its citizens. A government that fails to take the welfare of its citizens, seriously, can only be described as irresponsible. Sometimes, government is even complicit of sponsoring rifts among the oil communities to weaken their resolve in the fight against the wretchedness that oil has placed on them. A case in point is the feud between Oleh and Olomoro, two oil communities that had lived in peace for many years only to get embroidered in a violent feud that claimed lives from the two communities. Ifowodo, suggested that this rift, was induced by the government, as he writes that:

Such folly
as Major Kitemo's pretext in Ogoni
as flattened a town for a felony

as burned one thousand officially dead,
as turned a scrapping for used pipes
--- so rusted Shell could dig them up! ---

into a war for territory
between Oleh and Olomoro:
with oil wells and pipelines, without piped water (54).

Ifowodo believes that the government and the oil companies' collaborate to sponsor feuds amongst the host communities to present the government an excuse to foist mayhem on the people. Sometimes the unsuspecting host communities too fall into this trap, willy-nilly, with brother killing brother and devastating their environment the more through trappings of war and violence. And the government that has many responsibilities to handle plays the ostrich. The continuous gas flaring that pollutes and makes the air inky is there for the government yet successive governments continue to look on as what could yield millions of dollars to the country to cater for the need of the citizens is allowed to waste away and in fact, kill the people they swore to take care of. Ifowodo refers to this flaring when he says:

by the flame of Iron-Dragon---
the gas-flaring stack whose awful mouth spits fire
without cease near his village. Born before

the first built by Shell, he too had cursed
The dragon, called it Hell's Gorge,
Sure to retch on every head afflictions and deaths. (55).

Indeed, it is the gas flaring stack that Ifowodo calls the oil lamp. It is the oil lamp that lights up the Niger Delta instead of government providing 'eletriki' (55) which is the name the people of the area have given electricity which many of the host communities lack just as they lack many other infrastructure, it uses money realized from oil to provide infrastructures for others. The oil lamp, at another level, refers to the area that provides light to the dark economy of the country. Though the oil lamp lights Nigeria, (as oil is the mainstay of the economy) it fails to harvest the much needed basic infrastructure and development for the Niger Delta community. For instance, the women still visit "Old Tobrise' (61) for child- birth. This is an indication of lack of health care facilities. Little wonder then that the women have to rush Wonodi's wife to Warri 'where they say there's a machine / to save the ones that come too soon/ (61). Wonodi's wife has a premature delivery which the local midwife could not handle. Sick people are taken to Warri or Port Harcourt, on canoes as there are' no motor ways' (60) and /there's no doctor in Asaba- Ase/ no clinic in a hundred miles,/ (60). So whether it is in the midnight or daytime not the sick must be rushed to Warri or Port Harcourt where there are modern health facilities. When the people get to these urban settlements, they see a great division. While there is the side that is always in perpetual darkness courtesy of the 'Never Expect Power Always' (62) which is the street name for a dysfunctional electricity corporation in Nigeria, the other side, the oil staff estates, is always glowing with electricity. Ifowodo describes this thus:

See where I live----a shack in the swamp
But light shines on the oil staff estates---
well-drained and paved and mosquito-proof,
Went past one today as I tramped for work (62).

This is the reflection of a typical Nigerian society, which privileges the rich far and above the ordinary man on the street. The rich live in well-structured areas enjoying all the basic necessities of life which include security, social amenities, health care, healthy environment, among others, while the poor are pushed into slums and ghettos where

criminality and diseases are bred. The Nigerian society privileges the white expatriates well above their Nigerian peers who could deliver better service. This is an attitude that must change if Nigeria must encourage its own nationals to take up the challenges of nationhood and development. The country can only develop if it looks inwards and harnesses its own resources well enough for greater efficiency.

Again, the Niger Delta is also the oil lamp, as it is perpetually on fire, due to the exploration, exploitation, violence, military operations among other armed struggles that have almost become a permanent feature of the oil-rich area. The Niger Delta is a largely volatile area which harbours all manners of agitations wild and tender. It is characterised by killings, kidnapping, oil theft and pipeline vandalism among others. This has not only threatened the survival of people of the area, it also creates fear in the minds of those who may wish to visit the place. The place only oscillates between calm and wild agitations. The Federal Government Amnesty programme seems to be working at least it has succeeded in calming the frayed nerve of the militants and the country is enjoying some respite.

Ifowod's *The Oil Lamp* variously chronicles the hardship, sufferings, and the cruelty meted to a people whose only sin is the wealth that nature has deposited beneath their land. The situation of the Niger Delta in tandem with David Montgomery's opinion that 'the soil quality determines the rise and fall of empires' (1). The collection also shows their environment has been degraded as a result of the massive exploitation and exploration that goes on indiscriminately in the Niger Delta. It is a hideous and a dreadful picture of how a people's livelihood and survival have been withdrawn from them. It is a dirge lamenting the physical and the psychic dislocatedness of a people culturally situated and accustomed to the fecundity of littoral lifestyle. From the perspective of Ifowodo, it is a mournful withdrawal of an organic environment from a people by the pollution and the pollutants that the ravaging forces of capitalism have come to foist on the Niger Delta. It is an elegy of a people faced with hopelessness and wretchedness despite the abundant natural resources. It is the requiem of a people bearing the brunt of a wasteful and reckless nation, a people constantly yearning and crying against oppression and burning for justice for the long years of depravity and neglect and for the blood of lost illustrious sons and daughters that have been mixed with oil and taken to lubricate capitalism across

imperial metropolises. It is the monody of a people and an environment caught in a survival fix.

5.5 Locating Animist Figurings in Remi Raji's *Sea of My Mind*

Remi Raji is the pen name of Aderemi Raji Oyelade, a Professor of English at the University of Ibadan. His first publication, *A Harvest of Laughters* (1997), eminently launched him onto the world literary scene and since then, he has shown a fecund literary prowess which has seen him produce more collection such as *Webs of Remembrance* (2000), *Shuttlesongs: America – a Poetic Guided Tour* (2003), *Lovesong for my Wasteland* (2005), *Gather My Blood Rivers of Song* (2009) and his latest is the one under review which is *Sea of My Mind* (2013). The oeuvre of Remi Raji's poetic engagement reflects him as a poet committed to condemning the ills and the decadence in his society especially corruption, ineffective and ineffectual leadership that dog the African landscape and which have submerged the African continent and the people in penury, degraded infrastructure and hopelessness. Remi Raji is a poet that is committed to charting a progressive course for his society no wonder he has been a constant voice, always on duty in the service of the people but virulent to the people's oppressors. This probably accounts for why Sule Egya titled a review work on his poems as *Poetics of Rage* (2011).

For many, Remi Raji's poems are often viewed from the political lens. This manifestly is due to the overt political nature of his poetry. While this piece is not out to challenge this patently valid thesis, it however, posits that beyond the political nature of Remi Raji's poetry, his mastery and use of natural elements is profound and salutary. Remi Raji has a charming religiosity for the use of nature and natural elements in his poetry. His deep sense of nature and its use by him almost as an object of worship in his poetry has attracted this attempt to examine his religious use of eco-critical materials or animism in his latest Collection *Sea of my mind* (2013). Remi Raji always ensures that he finds a parallel between his poetic subject matter and nature indeed from socio-political concerns to pristine love experiences. And this is one style that he has perfected so much that he is incapable of writing a poetry that is not enriched in nature and her elements. His, is a commitment to nature and its workings which often reflects in his poetry. Beyond enriching his poetry, it affirms Remi Raji as a poet that is fascinated by the workings of

nature and as a writer who has profound love and understanding of nature and the relationship that should exist between humans and their environment.

The collection *Sea of my mind* contains a potpourri of poems dilating differing experiences but which are knitted under the sea metaphor and symbolism. The collection consists of four sections named after the activities of the sea: Waves, Ebbs, Flows and Recessional. Indeed one can conveniently say that Remi Raji is one of those poets that Sule Egeya says 'relied heavily on nature to aestheticise their thoughts in poetic forms' (208). Egeya further reckons that:

Some of the poets exuberantly poetise the belief – that their poetic inspiration comes from natural objects, such as water, hills, rocks and trees. Other poets clearly deploy the animist belief in natural objects to thematise critical issues in the life of their nation (258).

Remi Raji, though a fecund and versatile poet writes about all shades of issues and he has perfected the art of exquisitely bringing nature into whatever is the subject matter that his poetry is trying to celebrate. He, therefore, belongs in the second category of poets that Egeya highlighted above. It is instructive to note that animist belief in natural objects differ from people to people and from race to race, it therefore, goes without saying that a poet that would richly use nature and her elements in poetic forms must be deep in the knowledge of such representations by his people. Remi Raji is one such poet that has an inimitable grounding in nature, cosmology and the artistic representations of his people the Yoruba race. He exemplifies a poet that has a rich reservoir of the oral traditions of his people. This often reflects in his poems as we shall later see.

Remi Raji engages in animism for most of the time as a counter discursive approach of situating the theme of the poem in context. He, therefore, historicises the socio-political realities surrounding his environment. Egeya asserts that Raji 'follows the steps of sociological writers in Africa (a path well forged by Achebe) who always establishes an organic connection between their writing and their society' (63). Other poets who exemplify this mode and temper aside Remi Raji include Wole Soyinka, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, J. P. Clark and Harry Garuba while poets who have religious colouration to their kind of animism include Gabriel Okara and Christopher Okigbo. It must be said

here that these are loose categorisation as in practice very thin line separates the poets and the value they attach to animism. Egya further clears the air on this when he says:

It is important to stress that the difference between poets who deploy animism in their nature poetry to express their affiliation to gods and goddesses, to stage their poetic inspirations, and those who use animism to engage in counter discourse is not clear cut. It is rather a matter of degree (262).

This clarification must be made lest the categorisation may seem rigid. But really it is not because while animism is there in Africa as in other societies, it comes in differing shades and people too react to it in different ways.

Animism

Animism is the belief that all-natural things and phenomena are alive as they have innate soul or spirit. Animism, at first was an unfashionable term as it derogatorily denoted primitivism. This accounts for why Carolyn Rooney asserts that ‘animism belongs to the repertoire of terms that were aimed to distinguish between primitive and modern thought’ (17). Nature is the environment in which humans are enfolded; they must therefore interact with the generative forces of nature, out of curiosity, out of existence and generally as a way of relating to their environment. The agency of nature has been a long held one and it is properly grounded in the scriptures. For instance, in the Bible, Genesis 28; 10 – 22, Jacob in a dream had an encounter with God and in verse 17 the Bible (KJV) says ‘And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’ Also in verse 22 the Bible (KJV) says ‘And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee’. The stone therefore, becomes a reverence being transmuting from ‘thingness’ into a spiritual essence and significance.

Similarly, in Joshua 24:27, the Bible (KJV) says ‘And Joshua said unto the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spoke to us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God’. Also in Luke 19:40, the Bible records Jesus when he says ‘And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out’. In the same vein, the Muslims venerate Ka’ba the sacred stone in Mecca when they go on pilgrimage. These are clear indications of the inseparability of animism from

religion and no religion, according to William Gilmore, has been able 'to disown some of their commonest heirlooms left by their primitive modes of thinking (4). This belief is derived from the long-held beliefs then that nature behaves like humans, animated by desires, moved by emotions and empowered by abilities parallel to those he perceives in himself (4). Contemporary environmental doctrines such as deep ecology, and some scientific theories such as the Gaia theory, are often considered as sympathetic to animistic beliefs.

Tylor according to Gilmore defines animism as 'the doctrine of spirits or spiritual beings' (4). Tylor's definition has often been criticised as 'so vague that it gives no grip upon the actual conditions which attend to an animistic stage of thought or upon that thought itself' (4). In another vein, animism according to Gailyn Van Rheen, is 'the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and that human beings must discover what forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power' (20). Despite the many shortcomings that may be advanced against Tylor's definition, Sinead Mattar in *Yeats, Fairies, and the New Animism in New Literary History*, believes that Tylor has made an astounding contribution to the study of animism. He says Edward Tylor, Andrew Lang, James Frazer and their contemporaries' espousal of animism is reflected in the mythology, folklore and belief that sprang from this period of development and lingered on into the 'adulthood' of the world or a series of 'survival' (21). Indeed, this mode of representation ruled human thought for a long time and it is still the foundation of most human beliefs.

The whole existence of humans rests solely on nature, just as nature too, needs humans and this creates an ontological connection that is manifest in the complimentary relationship that exists between the two. There is the shade of religiosity to the human nature relations which manifests in paganism that is worshipping natural elements such as stone, trees, and animals among others. This approach formed the fulcrum of interactivity between ancient generations and nature. From the standpoint of ecology, the primitive people were therefore, able to place an intrinsic value on nature albeit spiritual which imbues the natural elements with some sacredness and agency to mediate undertakings in the human world. This, in a way, afforded the preservation of nature which is one of the objects of modern-day ecocriticism.

The import of ecology and ecocriticism is to place some value on the non-human elements of the world to be able to relate with them in ways that will not only confer respect on them but that will ensure their dignity and preservation. To this extent, animism and its offshoots such as paganism and fetishism and such other nature oriented religions are seen as dimensions of ecology or ecocriticism at least to the extent of the value placed on nature.

There are also those who believe in the non-animistic tradition. They do not suggest soul or spirit for natural entities yet ascribe intrinsic and utilitarian value to nature and therefore reverence nature as important in the earth sojourn but they do not worship it. Graham Harvey advocates that the contemporary pagan "world view is one in which everything that lives deserves honor and rights not normally given to other-than-human life" (133). In a similar vein John Mbiti (1992) further confirms this when he says:

Outstanding mountains and hills are generally regarded as sacred, and are given religious meaning. Information about this comes from many parts of the continent The Bavenda and Shona consider the Matoba (or Matopo) mountains to be the place of God's special manifestation. Five high mountains, including Mount Kenya, visible from Gikuyu country are believed to be sacred and the dwelling places of God when He visits the earth. Mountains, hills and the high standing earth formations, are in no way thought to be God: they simply give a concrete manifestation of His being and His presence. ... They are points of contact, drawing together, not only people in a given region, but also men, spiritual beings and God. Among many societies, mountains and hills are associated with spirits of divinities... Certain caves and holes are given religious meaning (55).

Yet, there are others, who see nature as mere materials and therefore deal with nature on a framework that only attaches use value to it. Donald Worster however says "denying to non-human entities a soul or indwelling spirit . . . helped reduce man's perception of nature to the status of mechanical contrivance" (29). However, Thoreau shares a different view. He believes that the closer one is to nature the better understanding of it one has. This, he figured assisted the Indians in presenting a more accurate rendering of natural workings than that delivered by Western science. (Krech et al 56).

Animist belief stems from the world view that nature is inspirited and that ultimate reality is spiritual and not material or physical. Animism distinguishes the sustaining

relationships between humans and the environment, and grants that relationship an ontological status; it demonstrates how all human life exists and perpetuates itself only within life-world relationships; it also establishes how separated thinking can account for much needless human and environmental suffering, and waste. A core factor in animism is the truism that nature energises the world with its constant fluxy nature. Alf Hornborg, in his essay 'Animism, Fetishism, and Objectivism as Strategies for Knowing (or not Knowing) the World' asserts, 'We might begin by suggesting that the 'object' – in the sense of a material intrinsically meaningless, but essentially knowable reality – is a thoroughly modern invention' (27). Man cannot, but therefore, interact with the fluid nature of the world and attempt to cope with the challenges that nature streams from time to time.

However, since animism especially as practised by the indigenous people has been pejoratively conjoined with paganism and primitiveness and its disarticulation of other levels of ecology beyond the spiritual essence that it offers, there is a new wave of animism that is blowing across the world. This new wave has supplanted the traditional animism and its vigour stems from categorising traditional animism as paganistic and primitive. Bruno Latour quoted Mattar in justifying the new mode says "there is no way to devise a successor to nature, if we do not tackle the tricky question of animism anew' (137). The 1990s witnessed a surge, characterised by a review and a revival in animism. Philippe Descola, Nutri Bird-David, Eduardo Viveros de Castro, Tim Ingold and Lantour reworked the efforts of earlier critics such as Marilyn Strathern to hatch a new animism on the world (Mattar, 139). These people, according to Mattar, 'renegotiated understanding of relations within an animated pulverise that carries the name 'animism' without its stigma of belatedness' (139). These critics thereby expound the corporeality of animism beyond the primitive space, to the age of science yet stretching the horizon and the importance further, even beyond now and showing potentiality to always push science to the rear.

.Animism was a term ethnocentrically promoted by E. B. Tylor in *Primitive Culture* to describe primitive religion as worshipping spirits (Lowie 264) and to stigmatise the so-called primitive people. This probably was the reason for Paulin Hountondji coining the term 'un-animism' (17). Hountondji quoted in Rooney justifies the term when he says there is a myth at work, the myth of a primitive unanimity with its suggestion that in

‘primitive’ societies – that is, to say, non-Western societies- everybody always agrees with everybody else (17). This deconstruction is to unravel the fallacy of hasty generalisation that this definition commits by its crass universalising and the general misconception about the African thought that it suggests

Garuba, rather than deny the presence of animism, in Africa, provides a rigorous vindication of its practice as intricately organic in the culture and worldview of the people. In the essay, ‘Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading /Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society’ Garuba provides the needed manifesto as the lens from which African literary and cultural articulations bordering on animism can be assessed. He argues that animism is part of the windows through which the African mind conditions reality and one through which the African worldview can be approached. The essay therefore beyond anything, provides an indication, a window through which the works of Garuba himself and other writers with similar ideology can be analysed and understood. To this extent, Harry Garuba’s *Animist Chants and Memorials* (2017) is an illustration and crystallization of the arguments marshalled in the essay above. It is also instructive to note that Harry Garuba’s effort in this essay is a direct response to Patrick Chabal’s provocative essay titled ‘The African Crisis: Context and Interpretation’ in which he launches a misplaced attack on Africa suggesting a noticeable backpedaling of Africa into a retrogressive traditionalisation of the past. Harry Garuba quotes him thus:

I refer to the accounts given recently of the ways in which Africans appear to outsider observers to have “gone back” to some of their “age old traditions” and the consequences of “such regression” for African politics. Although much nonsense has been published in the media about Africa’s “backward” civilization, it will be unwise to dismiss all the accounts of what I call “re-traditionalisation” simply because of these crass and gross simplifications. There is undoubtedly something going on in Africa but here again we (outsiders) are uncertain what it is and, especially what it means’ (265).

Chabal’s insidious remarks about Africa and his misrepresentation of the African worldview, thus created the platform for Garuba to ‘provide a model for accounting for this all pervasive phenomenon of modern African society’(265). Garuba, in his response, espouses the African worldview in relation to animism and argues that the re-emergence of traditional and cultural beliefs in Africa goes beyond mere ‘nationalistic

appropriations' but has 'a much deeper level, a manifestation of an animist unconscious, which operates through a process that involves what I describe as a continual re-enchantment of the world'(265). Garuba therefore and rightly goes to the core of how animism is a part of the African culture and world view that cannot be evacuated from the African consciousness. It is a way of life and it cannot be willed or wished away hence because it has been consciously or unconsciously imbibed and embedded, it forms part of the psyche and would always constitute the philosophy behind human actions and thought in Africa. It is a way of engaging a changing world hence the protean nature of animism itself.

Garuba stated his concern in the essay in 'the manner in which an animist mode of thought is embedded within the processes of material, economic activities and then reproduces itself within the sphere of culture. (269). This temper is better captured by Cooper when she asserts that ' African writers very often adhere to this animism, incorporate spirits, ancestors and talking animals, in stories, both adapted folktales and newly invented yarns, in order to express their passions, their aesthetics and their politics'(40). To Africans, animism is an acceptable mode of relating and interacting with the world. Wole Soyinka quoted in Garuba writes that "the deistic approach of the Yoruba is to absorb every new experience, departmentalise it and carry on with life" (264). This practice should in no way be viewed as worshiping inanimate objects as Tylor's definition of animism suggests and this bias is still shared by some European scholars. This act is not more than bowing and curtsying for the queen or standing up to sing or respect a national anthem or better still saluting a national flag. They are mere interactivity with objects, livable experiences and cognition of meaning in a complex roll of animate and inanimate mix.

Animism and nature share close affinities indeed the subject of animism is nature. There cannot be animism without nature. The inseparability of animism and nature is better viewed from the deadly confrontation in the Peruvian Amazon between the police and the indigenous Awaj'un protesters over President Alan Garcia's decrees concessioning their territories to oil, timber and hydroelectric corporations. Most instructive in the episode is the justification provided by Leni the leader of the protesters quoted by Mario Blaser that:

We speak of our brothers who quench our thirst, who bathe us, those who protect our needs – this [brother] is what we call the river. We do not use the river for our sewage; a brother cannot stab another brother. We do not stab our brothers. If the transnational corporations would care about our soil like we have cared for it for millennia, we would gladly give them room so that they could work here – but all they care about is their economic benefit, to fill their coffers with wealth. We do not understand why the government wants to raze our lives with those decrees (33).

From this outflow of Leni, a metaphor that goes beyond seeing animism as primitive and epistemologically challenged becomes easily discernible. Animism is a way of life, a window of creating and viewing reality. It is inextricably embedded in the culture of the people. Garuba in 'On Animism, Modernity? Colonialism, and the African Order of Knowledge: Provisional Reflections' also draws on the connection between nature and animism when he asserts that animism has become 'a platform for political action, particularly around issues of ecology and the environment' (1). By this he shows that animism reflects in everything that the African mind does. It moves from the spiritual to the economic and indeed to politics. Garuba further argues that the 'new interest has overturned the old prejudice which equated animism with everything that was childlike and epistemologically challenged, everything that was the negation of the mature, the modern, and the civilized' (1). This is the view of animism that will be held in analyzing Remi Raji's *Sea of My Mind*. It is the view that animism encompasses the entire life pattern and shape of the African mind.

The title of the collection 'Sea of my mind' seems to reflect the wide expanse of ideas that the poet has to write from. It may also be an indication of the maturity that the poet has attained in many years of writing and teaching poetry. The 'Sea of my mind' may also be a metaphoric description of the world from which the experiences celebrated in the collection are derived. The world is full of different strides and falls and only a determined mind can pull through. The collection as mentioned earlier consists of four sections namely: waves, ebbs, flows and recessional. These are descriptions of the activities of the sea. A wave manifests an up and down movements in the sea. Sometimes it can be calm and sometimes it can be turbulent and this is a true reflection of what the real world affords. The section therefore consists of poems reflecting this temper. They are poems that deal with the personal trials, travails and the triumphs of the poet in life's many vicissitudes.

Similarly, the ebb section of the collection like the name suggests comprises of poems which tend to deal more with issues in the environment of the poet. They reveal in varied forms, distressing matters confronting the society and which have created enormous environmental, security and general infrastructural challenges, among others, for the generality of the masses. The 'flow section consists of poems reflecting love and admiration for some people dear to the heart of the poet. Some of the poems therefore, characteristically exude friendship and affectations. The last part of the poem is 'recessional' with which the poet concludes the collection.

As a ground clearing approach, it is instructive to note that Remi Raji thrives so much on orality in the collection and this creates rich resource armour base for the poems. It also must be mentioned that orality is the product of an oral tradition. It is therefore not surprising the avalanche of the oral materials found in many of the poems.

In Remi Raji's *Sea of my Mind*, one is able to discern a privileging of animist beliefs as represented in Yoruba orality and spirituality. The Yorubas, like many African people believe in ascribing agency and spirit to inanimate things bestowing unto them some natural powers. They are therefore able to tap from these agentic forces powers with which they improve their human conditions as they desire. The collection starts with 'The sojourner's pledge' in which the poetic persona charges himself for the task ahead. He writes /Arise my feet, do not go where the landscape suffers a rift/ do not hide, when the libation with earth is due, do not shift./ (1-2). The poet in a fashion that is characteristic of Yoruba traditional griots or minstrels makes a powerful rendition in the form of incantation to the gods or to the wind in communion with some imaginary gods. This is to ensure that he has a good outing.

The approach is informed by the animist belief that there are supernatural agencies that pervade the human environment and who are potent enough not only to grant human desires but are powerful enough to change equations in the cosmic realm. And as in worship, the poet persona addresses an unseen god who can cause him favour. He writes: / I make a pledge this day, to rekindle hope in the hard ground/ To swim in dreams, breathe life, to find rhythm where a river is found/ (3-5). The poet thus enumerates what his task would be in the collection; he would give hope even though the situation seems

hopeless and that he would praise in acknowledgement of where there is such effort at display.

Such exciting animist beliefs transfuse the entirety of the poems in the collection. The poem 'Untold' sees the poetic persona displaying his readiness to begin to create images with his powerful rendition. This is another feature of the griot for as he prepares to launch out, he indulges in making a stream of boastful proclamations to show his readiness for a befitting and wonderful performance. This affords the griot the necessary confidence and it is also a strategy to continue to whet the appetite of the audience. Remi Raji, who is also the poetic persona in the poem bemoans his silence for some time. He writes: 'Like the canary forbidden to sing for a century, / Now feed, I want to burst into an ocean of songs' (1-2). The poet must have been pulled into silence by strange happenings around him. Now, he is ready hence he is conceited in his readiness and ability to deliver. This accounts for why he wants 'to burst into an ocean of songs (2). He further brags when he says 'I have killed a conspiracy of impotence... ' (5), 'I ate the guts of the sunbird/ I have swallowed the throat of the robin' (8-9). The eating of the gut of the sunbird and the swallowing of the robin are further testimonies of the underlying animist beliefs that run through this poem as eating these birds suggests a transference of the poetic features of those symbols in the poet. The poet therefore, can thus begin to sing like the birds. This practice is common in orality and is also alluded to by Ohaeto-Ezenwa when he says 'my ancestors were minstrels I have continued in the same tradition' (8). The practice therefore, is part of the oral tradition of the people which must not be forgotten. Commenting on the oral tradition of the African people, Sharon Wilson (2003) says that most African societies place great worth in oral tradition because it is a primary means of conveying culture. It is also a mode of transmitting feelings and attitudes ... Oral tradition delivers explanations to the mysteries of the universe and the meaning of life on earth (23).

Part of the beliefs in the animist world is that natural qualities, found in certain elements are transferable through some supernatural powers. This is why the poetic persona relies on the transference of the power of nature to trust in the appropriation of these powers by consuming the animals. It must however be noted that the eating may or may not be in the real sense of the word. It may be a spiritual dramatization, a form of ritual yet the efficacy is never doubted by initiates and is passed on from generation to generation. Indeed the

adoption or the call to service of natural elements in support of oral performance has become intrinsically coiffured into the art of chanting and praise-singing and it has become part of the value-added to the enchantments. The poet persona further deepens his reliance on animism when he says: 'What the rainbow said to me, I will teach you / What the riverbird whispered to me, I will tell' (11-12). Nature in animism is seen as the ultimate agency, the model of creation, it is out of this belief therefore that people draw power, imagination and experiences from nature. The tutelage that the poet has received from these natural beings spurs his confidence and enhances the mastery of his art.

The poetic persona concludes what appears to be a ritual as he says, 'I have come to your door, penitent, poised for your potent prayer' (21). He seems to have concluded his prayer ritual and is expectant of a favourable response. In 'The god of poetry' the poetic persona sees the poetry god as capable of doing all things. In the poem the unnamed god of poetry is the strength and the source of the poet's fecundity. He writes:

The god of poetry works
in wondrous ways
he cuts a babel of tongues
among the horsemen of shit
he set the gift of fire
in the house of hunger (1-6).

The poet finds in the god of poetry an ally, a trusted alter ego who is wont to take any task on behalf of the poet. This is akin to Wole Soyinka's connection with Ogun, the god of iron, in Yoruba mythology. Wole Soyinka in many of his works such as *Idanre and Other Poems* and *Myth, Literature and the African World* among others has established the creative impetus that Ogun imbues to creativity. With the reverence and the submission that Raji seems to have given to the god of poetry, one can rightly assume that there is a spiritual connection between the poet and the god of poetry. It is this kind of reverence that new animism plays on. New animism is soused in a renewal and awakening of the reverence by people and religions especially in Africa and Asia, for the environment to achieve environmental conservation. The shift was borne of the conviction that Judeo Christian religion and Islam are partially too steeped in anthropocentric justification of humanity, being at the centre of creation. The poet concludes the poem thus:

Now the fires of confessions burn them all
They who broke the diviner chain.

I count their cries and lick their tears,
So crisp, so crocodile saltry
The god of poetry is my sweetener. (27-31).

At the core of the major belief system amongst the Yorubas is animism. The Yorubas believe that everything has a god that controls it. For anyone, to have fortune in an area therefore the god of such an area must be appeased. It is such a belief system that could provide the justification for the poet to have come up with a poem on the god of poetry. It is also such a belief system that could provide the rationale for arrogating such mystic powers to the god of poetry. It is this kind of conviction that accentuates the indispensability of animism not minding the technological advancement or the level of the sophistication that the society has attained. It is something beyond the reductionist labelling of primitivism, it is a phenomenon that resides in every society. For instance, the salutation of flags is a common occurrence among humans and in reverence of their national anthems people stand in attention. Nothing can be more animistic because the flag and the anthem being venerated are inanimate and mere human creations. This is an affirmation of the mutual dependence of the human society on animistic practices and it is also an indication that the human society may not be easily divorced from certain animistic practices.

Nature to Remi Raji represents peace and an effectual comforter to humans in moments of stress. In Snapshot V, the poet presents nature as capable of taking humans away from their violent activities and its attendant troubles. The poet writes:

finally, the mountain will appear to you
finally, the mountain will appear to you
as the happy path, the valley of dreams
you will walk, away from the war game, with me (1-4).

People run to nature when their human environment becomes compromised by their activities. For instance, during wars people run into the bush for cover and protection. The poet reckons that nature is ever ready to assist humans. The poets' portrayal of nature as benevolent and a model of peace and optimism is similar to the one expressed by David Thoreau as quoted in Robert Francis that:

Who shall describe the inexhaustible tenderness and immortal life
of the grim forest, where nature though it be a midwinter, it ever
in her spring, where the moss grown and decaying trees are not

old, but seem to enjoy perpetual youth, and blissful, innocent nature, like a serene infant, is too happy to make a noise, except by a few tinkling, lisping birds and trickling rills? (25).

Humans run to nature for various reasons, yet they tend to forget its usefulness when they descend on same destructively for selfish reasons. For instance, African history is replete with how in the past during the wars people hid in caves and on mountains to protect themselves from the ravaging opponent. The poet, indeed in line 6, of the poem says that ‘Even the birds are singing differently, because of you’ which is suggestive of the connection between nature and human experiences. This connection offers a guidance system for functioning in harmony between the cosmos and the human world. Animism stems and is sustained by the belief that nature has a way of directing activities in the human world. This accounts for the reverence that some people have for nature.

Similarly, in “The road to Gombe”, Remi Raji beyond using the poem to document his road trip to Gombe where the road / Is filled with the uncertainties / Of potholes /. The poet uses the opportunity to espouse the paucity of infrastructures especially good roads in the country. The poet condemns the depraved state of many Nigerian roads which have become a source of fatalities in the country. The poet persona is troubled on the road not only by potholes but also by the numerous check-points that dot every spot of the journey. To this extent, the poem becomes similar to Wole Soyinka’s ‘The road’. Bhagarvi Vasishta says Wole Soyinka’s ‘The Road depicts the Nigerian experiences during the middle of the twentieth century, and it reflects the roles played by drugs, criminals, corrupt policemen and unscrupulous politicians’ (1). Raji writes ‘the fireflies are soldiers over the unknown, / and the check-points, too many, so many to remember ‘ (15-16). This is a reflection of the general insecurity that pervades the entire length and breadth of the country which has drafted the soldiers that should concern themselves with maintaining the territorial integrity of the country into internal civil breaches.

The Jos crisis has particularly been difficult to handle and it was only the intervention of the military that restored peace in the once peaceful plateau. This accounts for why the poet persona is able to list many locations in Jos municipal where many of these check-points are erected. Many Nigerian environments have become largely combustible with actual violent convulsions and palpable threat to life and property. Insecurity and fear pervades every inch of the Nigerian landscape. Olabanji Ewetan (2014) asserts that

security need was the basis of the social contract between the people and the state, in which people willingly surrendered their rights to an organ (government) which oversees the survival of all. (42). The general spate of insecurity is so high that according to Ewetan ‘a confirmation of this is the low ranking of Nigeria in the Global Peace Index’ (41). The poem reminds one of the salutariness of road travels especially as it affords the pleasure of appreciating nature in her immense form. It offers a wonderful sight-seeing and familiarity with nature, the greens, the forests, the mountains, the rivers, the birds and some other animals that may par chance stray into the road. The poet says further ‘At Godon Waya, I behold the breasts / of table mountains, shrouded by the evening mist/ (34-35). The poetic persona gets so much engrossed in his romance with nature that he bemoans the interruption of some politicians who disrupted him. The poet writes / then the crazy convoy of campaigners, what mad rush? / They spoil the sight of busy mountains and tender trees’ (30-31). This seems a metaphoric indictment on the part of our so-called leaders who often for selfish reasons despoil nature or serve as accomplices in nature destruction agenda.

After the long journey with its attendant stress, the poet persona retires into nature to enjoy the therapeutic essence of nature. The poet writes ‘I must dismount and go gently into the night’ (46). This reverence and the thrusts of optimism that looking up to nature in moments of despair and utter hopelessness affords a spirituality though not in the primitive mode of animism but one that is almost at the threshold of it and in sequence with the new animist fervour. This new wave of animism spans across race and colour and it locates animistic practices as a common human feature. It also signifies the inseparability of these forms of practices from innate human behaviour.

Is there a religion that is completely devoid of animistic practices? There seems to be something in the ‘beingness’ of humans that is in tune with animism. Christians and Muslims use many materials to worship God. For instance, among other things, the Christians use rosary and images to worship God while the Muslims use *tesbih* to pray to God. Hinduism respects cows and they are considered sacred hence they worship them. The Ifa priest and divination have different materials such as 256 ‘Odu’ and ‘agere Ifa’ among others with which they worship. Also, the Shinto religion is animistic in the sense that it believes kami, the spirit of nature exists everywhere. In England everybody bows to the Queen and as to kings in many places where monarchs are revered, probably not to

their persons but to the stool that they represent. Animism can thus be seen beyond the primitivistic claim to be a spirituality inherent in humans transcending colour and the creed divides.

In 'Kiagbodo' a poem written for J. P. Clark, the poet expresses the views of a poetic persona who finds himself on the creeks. The poem is a treatise on environmental pollution by the profit-driven oil companies operating in the Niger Delta area. The environmental pollution stems from the oil exploration and ceaseless gas flaring that go on in the area. The poet persona obviously almost drowned as he is paddled on, laments the flaring of gas and the general condition of the area. He writes:

...down there, two giant candles on iron stilts
Following the sheen-path of fugitives oil.
Two giant thunders bellowing through the village night.
The carbon heat kissed my breadth in the morning
I am scorched like the earth,
The sunbird and the river greet me still (19-24).

The Niger Delta region has been bedevilled with extreme environmental pollution. Though the struggle has been internationalized, and the Federal Government is now showing some semblance of seriousness the area is still a far cry from being a conducive environment for humans and nature. Gas that is supposed to be a good money spinner for the country to provide basic infrastructure for the people is being interminably flared away. This smacks of inexplicable wastage of the natural resources of the country making the people in the area suffer utter neglect and injustice. The poem reminds one of Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp Lamp* a collection that also thematises the Niger Delta crisis. The reference to the 'oil lamp' (27), is therefore significant and illustrative. The poet also makes allusion to J. P. Clark's Riverbird in 'Streamside Exchange'. One should not also forget that the poem is written for J. P. Clark who is from Kiagbodyuo roughly translated into Kiagbodo.

The poet persona ends the poem with a call on nature using the riverbird to tell him more about the suffering of the people and the land. The poet writes:

Tell me more about your wondrous woes,
Riverbird, riverbird
Tell me more about your histories of scars (31-34).

The poet perceives of nature a witness to the calamity in which humanity is surrounded and of course in which nature itself is a victim. The trust and the reverence that the poet has in nature drives him into preferring the narrative of the riverbird being, since it is also a victim. In J. P. Clark's streamside Exchange, a child inquires about the return of her mother. The two poets therefore, believe that nature is a reliable repository and that it is capable of providing information on things unknown to humans, while explicating issues ordinarily beyond human observation or comprehension. Nature is thus expected to be treated as neighbours instead of seeking her destruction. This is the theme that Remi Raji seeks to espouse in 'Soft bite' (to PC, persona companion) a poem that laments the privileging of artificiality over nature. The poem moans what the world has turned to – the prioritisation of technology over nature:

I love your bits and bytes,
And the binary punch captures it all

Scribbled, my fingers sing across the monitors of life,
These words strut, stream and sigh across the sea
In the silent hums of hard disks, in full flight of the winged
Hour

all our life is tied to these tiny things – open books and faceless
groups (3-10).

The poem explains how technological devices have become human companions. Nature has become distant. Humans have forgotten that they are part of nature and that the more humans get closer to nature the more natural they become and the better for them. Technology is fast replacing nature and many experiments to replace nature continue. If this state is not checked, the world may soon witness a total destruction of nature. In the words of the poet in 'Soft Bite' he says 'all our life bound to things not green'(11) . Humans have completely misplaced their priorities. Nature that should be of immense benefit to humans is being destroyed and geometrically being replaced by a crass artificiality that is harmful and injurious not only to humans but also to nature. Olaoluwa observes that ' the emergent awareness of the devastating consequences of the blind pursuit of technological advancement without thought for nature or the human other, has resulted in an anthropological scholarship in the twenty-first century' (199). The poet compares the heavy reliance on technology to a 'poem' and rhetorically asks:

When this poem is done, and the batteries of our energies explode,

Like H-bomb, we shall not be saved on earth, in hell or
Heaven...

Who or what shall we delete, where or when shall we repeat
The song of Origin: let there be light, without destruction! (15-19).

The present deification of technological materialities and others can only advance human desire and propensity to make the world artificial which is a way of distancing the world away from its naturalness. The glorification of materialities has set the world on a seemingly irretrievable animistic mode to the extent that all humans worship consciously or unconsciously one device or material or the other. While some worship cars, some worship different technological devices, some worship science and its craze to insert chips in humans or replace humans with robots and other artificial intelligence technologies. In many places natural food has given way to engineered plants with some of their attendant risks yet unknown. According to Iovino and Oppermann 'this perspective sees materiality, or all objects, forces, things natural and cultural systems, and processes as players in co-creating social and cultural meaning (85). There must be a conscious effort by humans against their present lackadaisical and destructive approach to issues of the environment. This is the only way to save the world and the entire humanity from a pending annihilation.

In 'Run, country run', Remi Raji calls on the magical powers of animism to come to the rescue and save the land from the greedy politicians who are wont to set the country on the path of destruction. The poet in the poem laments the upturn of morality, in the society. He condemns the culture of violence that has enveloped the country like an inferno. He rejects the enthronement of sleaze, that has become institutionalised in the Nigerian society and in such other societies. The poet writes:

The flood is still rising...
Blood still dripping from the paintings
In our museum of misery... (1-3).

This is a portrayal of an inclement environment. It is a reflection that the Nigerian society is tempestuous. The 'locusts and the termites' (13), an euphemism for the politicians who have turned the country into one big hellish enclave through their greed, selfishness and massive corruption. Corruption has become a big industry in Nigeria which has grounded the country into paralysis. Some of its attendant consequences include bad roads, poor

health, pauce social amenities and pulverizing poverty which has turned some of the citizens into the living deads. The new spate of violence that the country has just added into her catalogue of woes and it is one dimension that is scary and has become a major threat to the existence of the country. The poet however, evokes his animist belief by his call for the perpetrators of these ills, that is the leaders to be cast into fire and water, for them to receive divine healing and change for the better. In a similar vein, Achebe says ‘The Trouble with Nigeria’ is:

simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air, or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership (1984: 1).

Raji, sharing the opinion of Achebe that leadership is the bane of the Nigerian Society calls for the baptismal of such leaders in the elements of nature. He writes:

Into the fire
Into the fire
Into the waters
Into the waters
Be healed, be healed. Run, country, run. (14-18).

The poet’s call, for the assistance of the healing powers of these natural elements further corroborates the potency and the belief that these elements have souls and are capable of changing the course of events in the physical realm where humans reside. The Nigerian poet’s thesis is that politicians have been so thoroughly infested with corruption that it would take those natural elements to rid them of the affliction. When an individual steals the money that is meant to provide health infrastructure for the people, the person can only be afflicted by a kind of madness to do that and only recourse to nature can bring such a person back to sanity. In Nigeria of today there are so many killings in the name of Boko Haram, farmers/ herdsman clash, political violence and general insecurity. Human and natural life cannot thrive in a crimsoned and an unsafe environment or What Odia Ofeimun in ‘How Can I sing’, calls ‘morbid landscapes’ (23). People therefore, tend to move to saner climes and this portends many challenges to the world. The world already seems overburdened by the refugee crisis and the increase in the migration rate, across the globe, can only accentuate an already overstrained international system.

The poet's reliance on nature is further accentuated in the 'Sea of my mind', the eponymous poem is written for the mother of the poet and the heavy reliance on nature is noticeable. The poem paints the picture of a dying mother and the poet finds an associative semblance for each action of the woman and the poetic persona in nature in a patterned couplet. For instance, the poet metaphorically draws a parallel between the voice of the dying mother and the rock. The poet writes: 'The rocks roll gently / Your voice going faintly'(3-4). Similarly, the poet says 'Naked, the day bright, you looked beyond me into the skies...' (12). It is the belief of the Yoruba as well as many Africans that God resides in the sky. It is therefore a common phenomenon, for Yorubas, to look into the skies for help in moments of prayer. Looking into the sky is part of the animist practices that humans have imbibed howbeit unconsciously. The poet in the last line says 'Naked, every day I drink water, I remember you' (21) and this reflects the inseparable attachment that the poet has for nature. Water here becomes an object of remembering his mother who at death has become a 'goddess (20). This belief is at the heart of African worldview, how the worlds of myth, ritual and literature interconnect. This theme has been properly elucidated by Wole Soyinka in *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976). It is part of the African belief that when their old people die, they become ancestors that can be venerated to get showered with blessings, luck and good life.

It is pertinent to note that animism with its superstitious and sometimes superfluous beliefs, has become inextricably associated with humanity and there is no letting go of animist thoughts and practices. As long as there are people and as long as there would be religious longings and spiritual engagements and indeed religions there shall always be animism though may come in variegated dimensions. Even at the height of science and technological breakthrough there shall be some inadequacies, some lack in effectual spirituality yearnings by humans for which modern science and technology would fall short. Even in the current age that science and technology seems to have taken over, there is still plethora of animist practices observable in the so called age of science. Otto Friedrich notes in Time Magazine in 1987 that 'a strange mix of spirituality and superstition is sweeping across the world (sic). Many people still believe very strongly in astrology and horoscope. Footballers, for instance, request for luck and favour by kissing the ball. Harry Garuba refers to the 'larger than life statue of Sango, the Yoruba god of lightning in front of the headquarters of Power Holdings Plc. People place their hands on

television, radio or handset to receive miracles in forms of prosperity, healing and exorcism, people buy new cars, build new houses and others would touch them with their heads or hands to request for same luck or favour so they can achieve similar feats. The list is endless. Indeed, animism, as far as there is creation, shall continually be the neckline of existence

5.6 Mapping Parallel Ecological Constructs In Fish and Humans: A Reading of Ahmed Maiwada's *We're Fish*

Ahmed Maiwada is a lawyer, a writer and a poet, whose drive for experimentation is boundless and charming. Maiwada's major preoccupation in *We're fish* is to create a parallel and a juxtaposition that humans and fish are the same in quite a number of regards, especially, now that humans have descended into beastly conducts. The notion of perceiving all living elements, as members of the same ecological community, is an eco-centric one that finds reception in deep ecology a term coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973. The doctrine postulates biospheric egalitarianism that is all living things have the same right to live and flourish. (Naess 24). William Grey sheds more light on the philosophy of Deep Ecology when he says:

a central doctrine of deep ecology is that all living things are members of larger biotic or ecological communities and the well-being of these communities is not just a question of prudential concern for human well-being but a matter of moral concern. This conception of the essential interconnectedness and interdependence of life forms is derived from an understanding of the biological science ecology and is often characterized as 'ecocentric', in contrast to the anthropocentrism of traditional views (45).

Hitherto, before Deep Ecology anthropocentric considerations have often guided human thought and actions. Anthropocentric ethics privileges human beings as the only morally considerable agent and thus have authority over nature. But since deep ecology other evaluations of the traditional anthropocentric posturing of humans have also sprang up challenging the hitherto monolithic construct that privileges humans as the only agentic force. Some of the new concepts include ecofeminism, Eco Justice, and Eco-liberalism among others. It is in line with this inclusive consideration, of the other, that Maiwada's collection should be seen, read and analysed.

Maiwada's portrayal of humans, as fish, stems from an attempt to deflate human ego and to provoke a feeling of sympathy akin to that of vegetarians. Maiwada wants humans to have pity on the fish and such other natural elements that humans have always looked down on. Elizabeth Grosz opines that 'the relegation of the animal to man's utter other, is an other bereft of humanity'(44). In a similar vein, Alaimo quoted in Vera Coleman (2006) contends that 'physical similarity between humans and other organisms may in fact provoke a rich ethical sense of kinship' (694). Coleman claims that 'the hybrid beings that abound in oral and literary traditions, of Latin America, largely pose a challenge to Western culture's propensity to subjugate the human "others" (44). Same can be said of African Literature, which thrives primarily on the oral tradition that is replete with stories of animals and such other hybrid beings. The Yoruba moral fables are rich in animal characters from which moral lessons are educed. These animals include tortoise, dogs and birds, among others. There are also stories around 'Yemoja' or mermaid and gnomes, as the Yorubas acknowledge the presence and the inter-border crossing of these elements, as links in the interstitial space of humans and other organisms.

Maiwada's fish leitmotif, is also akin to anthropomorphism, that is an attribution of a human form or personality to god, animal, or thing. Eileen Crist in *Images of Animals* (1999) defends anthropomorphism 'as a genuine source of understanding: in the hands of impeccable observers of animals' (7). He further opines that 'the anthropomorphic perspective deserves serious attention, for it discloses the nature of animal life with the power and internal cohesion that real worlds possess' (7). Also, Alaimo, quoted in Coleman (2018) asserts that Alaimo's theory of trans-corporeality rejects the dubious separation between human and non-human and on the contrary, emphasizes their mutual entanglement through the spatial temporal permeability of corporeal boundaries. (698). Maiwada uses the fish metaphor to draw a parallel between humans and the fish. He argues that fish, just like humans, are subjected to a lot of hardships, inclement weathers, exploitation, environmental disasters and so on. He experiments with concrete poetry and remixes which until now is found in music and this creates a novelty and a curiosity around the collection and its subject matter.

In an *avant garde* mode, Maiwada shocks the reader's sensibilities by drawing a parallel between humans and the fish, equating humans and fish as sharing the same agentic force, attitude and lifestyle semblances. Indeed, if one has to make a pun of Thomas Nagel's

‘*What Is It like to be to a Bat ?*’, the title of the Collection would have been’ *What Is It like to be a Fish?*’. To the anthropocentric mind, this kind of treatment is not only deriding, it would be considered as faux pas, as it violates the basic understanding and relational convention between humans and nature. It is this mode of thought that Maiwada seeks to question, retrofit and supplant with a new, strange and probably preposterous mode through an unswerving insistence that fish and humans share a lot of similarities.

Maiwada’s content, in the collection, is not the only ‘bizarre’ element that adds to the creative fervour in the collection; he also introduces the idea of remix, which hitherto was common in songs and music. The poet elastically expands the rhythmical and musical attribute of poetry, to create a remix of some of the poems in the collection, helping to create different effects with the same poem. This innovation is fascinating and helps to forge meanings left unnoticed in the original poem to be feasible in the remix with the use of emphasis and the strategic placing of some words in the remix. It must be said that remix is a popular phenomenon in pop music. It is a piece of media altered from its original state by adding and removing some items. It is a subset of audio mixing in music and song recordings. In Maiwada’s case, having written some of the poems in the traditional ways, he then goes ahead to produce the remix of the same poems. The poem thus takes a new shape and pattern and sometimes acquiring different layers of meaning.

In a similar vein, Maiwada’s reintroduces concrete poetry into his craft and indeed into recent poetry in Nigeria. Concrete poetry helps Maiwada to achieve a heightening of the fish experience encountered in the collection by the reader. It is part of the poet’s design to bring the fish into the consciousness of human sympathy and to draw in the people pity and reconsideration of their relationship with the non-human elements. Concrete poetry is a term used for ancient type formerly patterned poems. They create a concord between visual shape of poems on paper and the content or theme of the poem. M. H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* records that ‘some Greek poets, beginning in the third century B.C. shaped their poems to represent an object which the text signifies or suggests’ (31). It is also reckoned that during the Renaissance and 17th Century, patterned forms then called emblem poems were fashionable. Examples of concrete poetry include George Herbert’s ‘Easter Wings’ and ‘The Altar’. Also is Mallarme’s ‘Un Coup de des’ (*A Throw of Dice*) (1897) and Guillaume Apollinaire’s ‘*Calligrammes*’ (1918), (Abrams 31).

Eugen Gomringer, the Swiss poet is often regarded as the father of concrete poetry. He is the head of Institut für konstruktive Kunst und Konkrete Poesie in Rehau, Bamberg, Germany. A major feature of concrete poetry is its terseness in work use. The poem is usually shaped along a particular image with the image being the fulcrum or subject of the poem. It forces the attention of the reader to the image. Sometimes concrete poetry can be difficult to read while sometimes they cannot be read in the conventional ways. They may consist of one word, phrase, fragments, syllable, single letters, numbers and punctuation marks. They may also consist of different fonts, sizes, colours, drawings and photographs. M. H. Abrams (31) says ‘some of their shapes are called ‘kinetic’ in that they evolve as one turns page after page’. Ezra Pound in his Vorticist tradition and E. E. Cummings’ poem pictures are also said to have been written as patterned poetry in the typographical experiments in the American tradition.

Yet another innovation to the collection is the one structure nature of the poem, which makes *We’re Fish* a collection as well as a book of just one poem, an experiment that the poet started in *Saint of a Woman* (2004), the poet’s first collection. Maiwada continued the experimentation in *Fossils* (2008) and *Eye Rhymes* (2013) and it finally matured in *We’re Fish*. The one structure poetry technique offers the collection to be received in a linear denotation. The whole poem can be read as a book that presents not only a thematic unity but one that also achieves organicity. The poet frowns at the idea of a collection containing different poems that present diverse themes. In an interview with *The Sun* Newspaper of 24th June 2017, Maiwada says:

I started the paradigm shift from a poetry book of straggled poems in *Fossils*, My second poetry book, which contains what is arguably a redesigned epic poem. My next poetry book, *Eye Rhymes*, continues the journey with the title poem itself running through the entire book, though different individual poems are sandwiched in-between the stanzas.

The collection, *We’re Fish*, therefore, is about the fish and it is not surprising that the fish motif runs through the whole book though in different shapes and nuances. The collection attracts attention to the fish evoking sense of sympathy and empathy in the reader through the sensuous portrayal of different types of horrendous conditions similar to human vicissitudes that the fish undergoes. The collection has seventy-one poems untitled but labelled in Roman numerals. The introduction to the collection is instructive. It is a three

letter sentence which reads ‘save our sea...’ (v). It therefore shows that the poems in the collection are parts of a campaign by the poet to save the sea. The advent of eco justice has led to the birth of many environmental bodies such as Eco justice’s demand for ecological responsibility from all organisations that may engage in activities affecting the health of the earth and environment. This has been the basis upon which numerous environmental bodies take up different issues of nature and build their advocacy around them. The concerns of eco justice are properly articulated by William Gibson when he says:

the well-being of humankind on a thriving earth,...an earth productive of sufficient food, with water fit for all to drink, air fit to breathe, forests kept replenished, renewable resources continuously renewed, nonrenewable resources used as sparingly as possible so that they will be available [to future generations] for their most important uses...On a thriving earth, providing sustainable sufficiency for all, human well-being is nurtured not only by the provision of these material necessities but also by a way of living within the natural order that is fitting: respectful of the integrity of natural systems and of the worth of nonhuman creatures, appreciative of the beauty and mystery of the world of nature (25).

It is in line with this pre-occupation that many individuals and non-governmental bodies began to pick their different areas of interest and try to defend it for posterity and for the sake of humanity. Maiwada’s concern about the sea can be located within this precept and it coincides with the campaigns of Save Our Seas Foundation and the Save the Ocean campaign by Mirpuri Foundation, Plastic Ocean International and the Marine Ocean International. These bodies are at the forefront of the campaigns and research aimed at saving the seas and the oceans. Our lands, the oceans and the seas have been subjected to degradation; profiteering and exploitative activities to the extent that a lot of species have gone extinct, while many others are on the verge of becoming extinct. A study by Roland Geyer, Jenna Jambeck and Kara Lavender Law reveals that in 2010, around 4 to 12 million metric tons of our plastic waste enters the ocean from land each year’ (3). Plastic waste has been described as dangerous for ocean species and humans; it would therefore be advisable to consider reusing the plastics other than turning them into disposable convenience. If we do not hearken to this advice, we do so at the peril of the oceans and at the peril of humanity.

The collection opens with Poem 1 which focusses on some fishes dialoguing on what the effect of a dead sea would mean to them and the world. They reckon that the death of the sea will mark the death of the fishes. This dialogue of the fish is a major hint to the reader, from inception of the collection, the poet's disposition to nature. The poems in this collection, help to piece together the poet's predilection for nature especially the sea and the fish therein. The fishes in Poem 2 are seen frolicking in their natural habitat 'Gametes in semen/ headed for the ovum/ fish in our own water' (2) only to encounter different kinds of dangers yet escaping into the realm of freedom. The poet likens the sea to the world within which human live, a world that is characterized by challenges curtailing human freedom, testing human resilience and endangering human lives.

Poem 3 is a remix of poem 2 and it is presented in the shape of fish semen swimming in the form of a tadpole or a polliwog. The poem is almost the same as poem 2, but for a few words in Poem 2 that have been removed. The poet talks about the conception of a fish, starting from the semen just as human conception commences from the semen. The poet draws a similitude between the conception of fishes and human beings. This, also, is a reference to the initial activity preceding the fetus in the formation of human which is swimming. Indeed, in this regard, the spermatozoon is a famed swimmer. It is the entirety of this process that the poet tries to capture in words and shape in this poem. The poet further reckons that it is through swimming that humans escape from the gonad to the ovum to commence the process of becoming human beings. Swimming therefore which is the first activity of humans as gametes is what the fish do all their lives. Swimming therefore becomes a mutual activity between humans and fishes and while fishes do this for the rest of their lives, humans grow into the world to continue their own kind of swimming.

The collection *We're Fish* therefore is the narrative of a fish coming into existence but which gets caught in the throes of death. This fish together with other fish emanating from the river and the lakes, embark on an expedition into the sea to taste the sea salt and to acquire a wide space to grow into whales. This is compared with the quest of humans into mother earth as they swim into the green earth from their mothers' wombs to grow into adulthood nursing different ambitions. In the pursuit of this, some die, some are maimed and some become utterly dissilussioned in the process. However at different intersections in this quest the fish is faced with different experiences ranging from the

good, the bad and the ugly in a manner that the human sojourn on earth is characterized by many unpredictability and vicissitudes of life.

Shelter is often regarded as a basic necessity for all creatures. However, because the term shelter is often too used exclusively for humans, and also because it in a way carries the implication of appearing as an exclusive preserve of human, the term may not serve well in the present context. The term, habitat, will therefore be the operative word here. Habitat according to Mcdermid et al, 'is the resources and conditions present in an area that produces occupancy for particular species and population or orgasm (474). A major inference inherent in this definition, is that, all living things have shelter. Another implication of this definition is that what constitutes shelter may vary from human to human, animal to animal and plant to plant among others. While, for instance, some humans live in mansions and palaces, others live in huts, stalls and under bridges. Similarly, every creature also has its natural habitat. The fish's natural habitat is in the water but the water can be categorised into rivers, seas and oceans among others. The many abodes of the fish is revealed by the fish persona in Poem 4 when it says"

We live in aquariums –
In big gonads and gonads small,
Caught in glass
Caught in sacs (1-4).

As some fish are made to live in conditions that are harmful to their existence so are some mortals. Some people are kidnapped and made to live under severe conditions while others arrested by poverty live like animals in ghettos and shanties. The spirituality associated with luck and fortune in this transcendental world turns humans to pray to God for a better living condition. It is, therefore, not surprising, that as humans pray for food so do fishes. Similarly, as humans sometimes have accidents in search of their livelihood, so do fishes too. The fish persona retorts that 'We knocked our Dory mouths against the boulders' (4). Fish like humans struggle for the good things of life, hide in moments of danger and pray against lack and insufficiency generally. Fishes, like humans, encounter diverse challenges, as they move from one environment to another. The fish persona captures some of the wanderings of the fishes when it says in poem 5 that:

We're in the water swimming,
In the river swimming through rods,
Through the bridge legs of the road

Jumping over water.

We passed the road and the river, clogged in a love corner (1-5).

The poet tries here to show that the fishes embark on different journeys, for various reasons just like humans move from place to place for sundry motives. They determine and identify locations and are able to make sense of the goings on around them. This is therefore a challenge to those who would argue that only humans should possess rights and certain privileges. For instance, anthropocentric ethics claims that only human beings are morally considerable in their own right. They argue that extending rights to non-human agency is part of the articulation of the liberalism and green moralism school of thought even though the principle of right extension to nonhuman elements is tethered to John Locke's classical liberal view of rights and responsibilities of individuals. Correspondingly, Alan Carter quoted in Clark also argues that 'the injustice to future generations, as well as many non-human lives, is now more serious and the environmentally destructive syndromes of world politics and economics so deeply entrenched that civil disobedience is a duty: the environmental crises are so pressing that we do not have time to wait' (110). Robyn Eckersley's suggestion of an 'ecological' democracy in her *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty* curious is this direction. Eckersley suggests that all interested parties including human and non-human parties are brought together to take decisions. Similarly, Kristian Ekeli in *Green constitutionalism: The Constitutional Protection of Future Generations* proposes that non-human elements must be in attendance in issues of future concerns. She opined that such non-human elements can be represented by environmental activists. Many have however argued against the absurdity in this position.

The fishes continue their vicissitude 'loathing', 'running', 'crashing', 'flinging floods of memory', and 'whispering dreams' (7) to one another. The poem thus shows the troubles that the fishes go through. The poet also portrays their inner recesses and takes the reader through their reasoning processes and what conditions their thinking among others. Indeed if the fishes could speak and humans are able to listen to their narratives they may be free from being consumed by mortals. The presentation of the actions of the fishes in the continuous tense shows the habituation and the constant flow with which these actions occur. The many uncertainties that fishes face are akin to what humans encounter in their day to day activities too only if they could speak. It is pathetic that aside from the natural

disasters to which fishes may be subjected, many of human activities in water create the greatest inconvenience and destruction for the fishes. Maiwada in Poem 7 captures the sea as saying:

We are borne, bearing the murals of the
Merchant of flora,
The tide-borne troupes,
The circuses, the durbars,
The carnival veiling... (1-5).

... We suffer the fists of Katrina;
The unrests she is sea baking,
The ballets au naturel... (14-16).

We bear the murals of those who dropped the fossils... (22)

From the conception stage, fishes are subjected to a lot of hardship from man and from nature with only a few of them being able to escape to adulthood yet they continue to encounter the dangers of existence. Human beings destroy lots of the fishes by killing them and by destroying their natural habitats through greed and exploitative activities and especially through science and technology particularly in the creation of submarines and explosives. For instance humans create ships, canoes, speed boats that move on waters. Again, dangerous weapons are tested in seas and oceans. Admittedly however, some fishes too are killed by fishes and other water creatures that feed on them. It is this kind of fish-eat-fish behaviour that the poet said inspired him to write the collection. He laments the attitude of man on man that has come to be the manner of existence for humanity. Maiwada reasons that humans kill one another at the slightest opportunity and this he argues is one of the reasons for the collection; to use fish as mirror for humans to see their foibles, imperfections and their descent to barbarity: Maiwada says:

The state of our world in a free-fall into Armagedon became my concern, and it was my view that people all over the world have found it quite easy to kill, steal and destroy because their victims possess some qualities different from them. A difference in colour makes the next man not only a stranger to today's human being, but also a log of wood. Same is the case when he is of a different religion or sect, ethnicity or geographic entity etc. The only check to our cannibalistic nature is the sameness we see in others. (The Sun)

The poet is obviously appalled, by man's cruelty and man's inhumanity to man. He therefore, chooses to reveal that which is animalistic in human hence the reduction of

humans to a fish. The poet, must have been convinced that only animals can indulge in all the malfeasance that has come to form man's present character and attitude. It is this reductionist ecology that makes the poet to compare human actions to that of fishes in various forms, shapes and shades. In Poem 10 for instance, Maiwada compares and concludes that humans and fishes share the same foibles and frailties:

We flounder in mud and in crystal,
We speak in tongues. We talk rubbish,
We're vegetarians. We devour our own flesh.
Therefore, we're fish
We school. We roam, have fish hobbies.
We're sharks, rays, eels and gobies;
We, shapes, we, sizes, we, match for ish. (1 – 7).

The poet because of the ignoble things that humans perpetuate likens them to fish as these indecent behaviours are what the fish indulge in. It is instructive to note that the title of this collection may have been taken from this poem. The poem is so central to the theme that the poem almost summarises and draws parallel for all human actions in fishes. As there are shades of fish so there are humans in different characters, modes and sizes. As fishes are susceptible to dangers, so are human beings. Just like fishes eat one another, so are there cannibals amongst humans. Cannibalism has been defined by Liubov 'as a human being who eats human flesh; an animal that eats its own kind (12). It is therefore established that cannibalism cuts across human and animal dimensions. Though this may not be excusable among humans, it is a fact of life that some humans indulge in cannibalism. Lukaschek, also agrees with the notion of cannibalism and indeed claims it has been an ancient practice since the ancient days. He says 'stories of cannibalistic gods or acts of cannibalism exist in mythological systems all over the world from the very beginning' (6). Liubov further says 'cannibalism has existed since the dawn of history' (6). Anyhow considered, it is really beastly for humans to devour one another. It is this beastly behavior that is at the core of cruelty and bloodletting that has taken over the human environment today. In Nigeria, blood-letting, has become a major problem. This has created a huge security challenge for the country. Imhonopi and Urim attest to this when they say 'the number of violent crimes such as kidnappings, ritual killings, carjackings, suicide bombings, religious killings, politically-motivated killing and violence, ethnic clashes, armed banditry and others has increasingly become the regular

signature that characterizes life in Nigeria since 2009 (2). There is a serious need to reverse this trend before the situation degenerates further.

Other challenges that fish encounter and that are similar to human experiences are mentioned in poem 18 when the poet writes that:

They're pain, they're mirages,
They are two sides of a silver motley.
They're spirits, they're mortals.
They are buried, they are exhumed.
They're stones, they're umbrae
Our faces are redwhiteblackbrown shoes (9-14).

The poet tries to show that there exist a lot of similarities between the fishes and humans. He therefore tries to draw sympathy to the fish so that humans can begin to be compassionate to not only the fish, but to some other natural elements. The poet seems to be saying that if only the fish and by extension, other natural elements, could talk, humans would know that those non-human elements too have their stories to tell. This poem summarises the travails of humanity in the journey of life yet in it all the indomitable human spirit soldiers on. Truly human faces are 'paperbackhardcover' (18) where diverse yet unlimited human experiences, can be read about and learnt. The poem is a recall and a record of the different shades of human experiences

Indeed the semblance between humans and the fishes, seems inexhaustible, as the poet goes on drawing similar parallels in human and fish activities. This, probably, accounts for the indistinguishability of voices in this poem between the fish narrator and the poet persona. The poet may have done this deliberately on the excuse that the reader should by now have been convinced of the man fish blend a theme that he has established in preceding poems. The poet therefore chooses to use the fish as a mirror to humans and also as their metaphor, based on the many attitudes and characteristics that both share. By this he indulges in a kind of reductionism, that sees humans operating at a level lower than what they really are. This is to check the arrogance and the puff with which humans treat and subjugate other non-human elements in the universe. This approach like Deleuze and Guattari's posthumanism precept of 'becoming animal' (233), seems to create a lowering of the human sovereignty and superiority.

It is in this wise that Maiwada in *We're Fish* seeks to defamiliarise the human conception against what Clark calls 'an undermining of 'specieism' and a potentially revolutionary ethical appeal against the brutal human tyranny over the animal kingdom' (199). Maiwada's portrayal of the fish, their nuances, ecology and biology reveals something becoming of fish by a man who must have studied fish and fish ecology. The poet affirms in *The Sun* interview that he has been hugely influenced by Sylvia Earle, the American marine biologist explorer and author, who has dedicated her whole life to oceanography. Sylvia Earle is the American Oceanographer who has dedicated her life to the protection of the oceans. She has always argued that the oceans and the seas serve more stabilization roles in balancing the ecosystem of the world than merely providing habitats for fishes. Ocean and sea protection activists are at the vanguard of campaigns geared at protecting the oceans and the seas from plastics and such other polyethylene materials that have continued to pollute and alter the eco systems of the oceans and indeed destroy them.

The destruction of the sea by humans, is the focus of Poem 40. The poet portrays the sea as completely destroyed albeit by human activities. The sea cries for help and the inhabitants too like fishes and frogs also lament what has become of their situation:

B r e a t h i n g...
The sea has stopped
B r e a t h i n g...
The rivers no longer giving
East wind has raged against her –
The flesh has raged against the spirit (1-6).

The poet paints the picture of a dying sea that needs human rescue. Overfishing, exploitation and irresponsible environmental littering of the oceans and the seas especially with plastics have continued to create horrendous havocs to the seas and the oceans. It is the common responsibility of the whole of humanity to save the seas and the oceans lest humanity will be the worst hit when the damning consequences begin to manifest. One sees the fish lamenting the turn of events. The lamentation indeed attracts pity and empathy in the reader:

I'm here a free fish, waiting
To be one with my mother

To be one with the sea
To be cold and still, and stop
Breathing... (15-19).

It is instructive however to note that the seas and the oceans are the major sources of fish production and supply. They also provide the natural resources upon which many human activities such as transportation and fishing. Also, they provide materials for the construction industry through marine sand and gravel that are mined in the seas. So also are metals such as iron, copper, zinc, gold and silver are extractable from the seas and the oceans. The seas and the oceans also serve as sources of renewable energy such as generating electricity through waves and tides. Also biodiesels are made from marine algae.

The poem is rich in biblical allusions and it has become the strength of the poet to embellish his poems with biblical materials. In line 5 the poet makes reference to the East wind. He says that 'East wind has raged against her'(5). The East wind is a biblical allusion and is derived from Genesis 41 in Pharaoh's dream that Joseph interpreted. It can also be found in Exodus 10 and 14 when Moses summoned the East wind against Pharaoh. Similarly in line 6, the poet writes that 'The flesh has raged against the spirit'. This line is a rework of Galatian 5: 16-18 which states:

But I say, walk by the spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.

The poet further laments the destruction of the sea and the earth and reminisces on the better life that was before the world is allowed to go bad. In poem 64, he writes:

Before this Dead sea,
Before East wind,
Before this blood,
There was our blue sea – (1-4).

It is, therefore, imperative for humans to save the seas and the oceans so as to save humanity from an impending calamity. It is important for the world to be restored to its idyllic past. The use of different materials by Maiwada shows that he is a poet with a

wide horizon and he is therefore able to view issues from various perspective. This has enriched his poetry a great deal and it is indeed commendable.

Maiwada's use of remixes in the collection is fascinating and it is indeed novel. It reminds one of the melopoeic or song natures of poetry. The musicality of poetry is realizable through the instrumentality of rhyme, rhythm, metre and such other figures of speech having to do with repetition, emphasis and flow. Song and poetry are intrinsically related. Indeed many great songs today started first as poetry. A major connecting point for these two arts is their auditory nature. Dryden quoted in Bryan Goosh says:

Musick and Poetry have ever been acknowledg'd Sisters, which walking Hand in hand, support each other; As Poetry is the harmony of words, so is Musick of Notes; and as Poetry is a Rise above Prose and Oratory, so is Musick the exaltation of Poetry. Both of them may excel apart, but sure they are most excellent when they are joyn'd because nothing is then wanting to either of their Perfections: for thus they appear like Wit and Beauty in the same Person (69).

There is a cautious overlapping between poetry and music and this appears to influence Maiwada's introduction of a concept that previously absolutely belonged to music. The poet himself affirmed that he had only been encountering remix in popular music particularly Rhythm and Blues. He says in the Sun interview that:

The only place I have encountered the "remix" concept is in popular music, particularly Rhythm and Blues. I may therefore, conclude that it made its debut appearance in poetry in *We're Fish*. The thinking behind it is associated with my desire for fusing one or more genres outside poetry into the genre. This desire stretches across my entire writing career. It started in *Fossils*, where I used the mediums 'Acts' and Scenes from drama to present the poetry in the book.

Remix is a piece of media that changes a text or material from its original state by introducing and removing other materials to create an embellishment of the original material. Sometimes a remix produces a better result than the original while at different times, it produces a lesser artistic effect. The infusion and the extrusion of new material may change the colouration and the import of the text; it may intensify the value and it may vitiate, it depending on the quality and use of the material added or removed. When remix is adeptly done however, it has a way adding great value to the remixed material.

Maiwada's use of remix is mixed with concrete poetry which creates a marriage and sometimes it also creates a little or no difference between visual poetry and sound poetry. The remix however artistically helps in creating a semantic cohesion of meaning. The combination of the visual and the auditory has a way of impacting on the message of poetry and of extracting meaning from poetry. It is in this wise, that Maiwada's exploration of remix and his graphical drawing in words of the subject of his poetry should be viewed. Poem 9, otherwise titled Whorl remix exemplifies the temper being discussed here. The poem is rested on Poem 8 which forms the basis of the remix. Poem 9 is characteristic of the pop music from where the remix is imitated. It thus plays on many words and draws rhythms from them unendingly. Poem 9 being whorl truly is a pattern of spirals or concentric circles spinning words into some artistic creations of tiny fishes and all together giving an overview of a whorl.

Poem 9 is a beauty to behold though difficult to read. This difficulty in reading stems from the haphazard arrangement of words and the unconventional breaking of words. For instance and in line 34 'and' is broken into 'a' in line 34 and 'nd' in line 35. Such is the disordered arrangement of words in the poem to form the desired pattern of a school of tiny fishes playing with the waves to form patterns. Similarly Poem 11 is the remix of Poem 10. Poem 11 also titled 'we're fish' presents the image of a gold fish which also in a way gives the picture of a human being as fish with the emboldening of 'we're fish' at major intersections of the poem. The remix of this poem, beyond emphasising the theme of the collection reveals the importance of poem 10 as the source of the title of the collection.

In all, twelve poems, in the collection, are remixed, with each designed to portray different realities. Poem 15 also titled 'Face Eye' poetry remix is another version of Poem 14. It suggests that fish faces are books of different shades such as hard cover and paperback and that the letters inside connote different things. The poem depicts the picture a human being facing the East a geographical area which is often reputed for its richness in knowledge. The poem with one speaking voice narrating the story of many fishes points humans in the direction of fish for knowledge implying that there is wisdom locked in fishes that humans would do well to seek and understand. The fish persona seems to be saying that fishes are a books that contains unlimited knowledge and understanding. Unlike other poems occasioning a remix, poem 14 has two remixes. This

is because Poem 16 also titled 'Face Eye' poetry remix is also another remix of Poem 14. It contains the shaping in words of two human heads superimposed on each other one facing the right and the other directly facing the reader which if taken together is like a fish swimming.

This simulacrum that fish faces represents, can be many things at different times, especially as suggested in poem 15. The fish face like the human face, can be a book, a firmament, a waterfall or a sugar cube among others. What the fish is at a time, is the function of the experience it is going through at a particular point. The fish, therefore, can mutate along the lines of what it experiences at a given time. Fish faces similar to humans represent the various colouration of the problems, happiness and the travails of existence. Poem 37 or 'Fish in Pan Remix' is written in the image of a frying pan which is another experience that some fish go through. This poem is the remix of Poem 36 which shows the utter helplessness of the fish and man in the face of uncontrollable nature such as the 'East wind fire' and 'death' (41). This state of vulnerability is what Poem 39 or 'Sea Storm Remix' further discusses. It depicts the experience of the fish in the face of wild storms breaking 'fish mountains', 'breaking fish rocks' (41). In the poem, the poet also refers to Rwanda which at a time experienced genocide. Rwanda here can be regarded as one of the storms that humans face in their existence too. The allusion to Rwanda is also a reminder of the carnage that took place in this relatively small country in the years past

The poem, 'Sea Storm Remix', points to the fact that as fishes are disturbed by wild storms, so also do humans have their own storms too in different shapes such as wars and disasters. Some of the images emphasised in repetitive forms, in this poem, include living city, metropolis, aqua Ruwa Rwanda, planet blue heart and blood among others. These images portend the different human struggles and the attendant challenges that characterise the earthly world in which humans live. It is instructive to note that these poems in order to achieve the effects that they are designed for, break all the known rules of syntax and grammar. This is justifiably so, because of the concrete nature and the remix experiments that the poems represent.

Beyond the knowledge that the poet is convinced that humanity, can gain from fish, he also feels that humans can tap knowledge from other natural elements too. Art in different genres, from photorealism to abstractions has always seen nature as quintessential and as

a source of inspiration from where ideas and ideals are carbonized. For instance, paintings and sculptures are copied from the natural world. Even architectural designs are moulded after natural patterns. Similarly, poetry among other things writes about nature and presents many of its wisdoms for the moral rectitude of mortals. The point being made here is that ecocriticism inspires humans to learn from animals. Ecopedagogy according to Hung 'refers to ecophilia-oriented education' (1387). Hung hinges this learning on three aspects namely 'learning about nature, learning in nature and learning from nature' (34). This, exactly, is what Maiwada does in some of the poems. For instance, he draws attention to using time wisely and judiciously. In poem 13 he writes

And, we know how time flies –
The chariots to our surplus and lack,
We know how it glides:

By wings,
By will,
It's gone! (1-6).

The poet again advises that nature especially time like the breeze, flies past the efforts of man and therefore it is unstoppable. It glides away not minding what one does with it. It is therefore important for humans to make good use of their time, especially in their youth. Humans should make use of the energy of their youthfulness to prepare for their old age when they may no longer be active. Again, time is a metaphor for other natural resources that must be used judiciously, and in ways that would not jeopardise the future of humanity and other natural elements.

The poet also warns of the violence that has engulfed the world and which has made it very unsafe. He particularly refers to how combustible the human society has become and it is obvious the poet is vexed with humanity that he in Poem 38 uses such images as Dajjal (6) and Cylops (9) to refer to humans. Dajjal is an evil figure in Islamic eschatology while Cylops are members of a race of savage one-eyed giants. Truly, the incessant waves of violence in the world have reached an alarming stage and the whole of the human society is in turmoil. There are killings, kidnappings, wars, insurrections and terrorism is spreading across the globe like a wild fire. The world is far from being the safe habitat of humans that it used to be. In Poem 35, the poet refers to terrorism as one of the developments threatening the world peace:

We see the slain throats of the soldier.

We see the wild man and his dagger.
Malala lies in the red sea of her blood
In Taliban land.
We see Kabul in bubbles,
Bombs – his harvest, held in holy hands (1-6).

While one may tend to query the relevance of this poem to the one book poem status of this collection, the significance of the poem to the theme of the collection is located in the argument of the poet that the human world is characterised by tumult as a result of lack of love to accommodate the differences that are found in other humans. the poet talks about Yousafzai Malala, being referred to here is a female activist whom the Talibans shot on her way back from school and whose attempted assassination the whole world rose to condemn. She is the youngest Nobel laureate and a prominent citizen of Pakistan. The poet makes reference to /even Cameron land/ which is a synecdoche for the United Kingdom. He also refers to other activities of humans that are injurious to the world:

We see Ozone ruptured – the umbrella,
Broken, the arrowheads head seawards;
Blood answers the water,
Wormwoods swell the beaches, as
As in John's vision of that island. (18-22).

Humans deplete the Ozone layer thus causing global warming which has become irreversible since its evolution on earth. Indeed ozone layer depletion is one of the most dangerous problems confronting the world today. The ozone layer is a colourless gas found in the stratosphere. It protects the earth and its inhabitants from the harmful ultra violet rays of the sun. The production and the emission of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) is the major cause of Ozone layer depletion and its major impacts include skin cancer, eye damage and damage to the immune system of humans among others. The world must be weary of further depletion of the ozone layer before the world is turned into a furnace and the earth becomes the household of diseases.

Also instructive is the use of the fish metaphor to pass political commentary on world affairs and particularly on political happenings in Nigeria. The poet uses some of the poems in the collection to pass powerful political statements and commentary on the Nigerian political situation. In Poem 56 for instance, Maiwada using humour as tool of dispensing vitriol, mocks the failure of the Nigerian government particularly President Goodluck Jonathan for failing to show political will in directing the affairs of the country.

He in line 1 says / “Four seasons all I need – no yeast, and I’ll bake that bag of wheat”(1)
This is mockery targeted at Nigerian politicians who would promise heaven and earth during elections yet would get into office and fail to fulfil the promises made.

The poet once again goes biblical playing on names like Saul, Samuel and Jonathan. He infers that President Jonathan lacked the will to govern. He writes in line 6 that / The old Jonah missed his way for lack of the will to walk it. / He further mocks the former Nigerian leader when in lines 10 and 11 he says / Without shoes Saul could walk, but without a clue he must stumble. / Though the poet mockingly alternates the names of the leaders it is obvious that the extract refers to the popular statement made by President Jonathan during the campaign in his first term bid when he said he had no shoes while growing up depicting the humble background from which he had risen to fame and power.

The poet also used the fish metaphor to comment on the Chibok girls in Poem 57 referring to them as / Trawled fish from Chibok count as fowls, /. The Chibok girls were kidnapped by the Boko Haram terrorist group on the night of 14 and 15 April 2014 from the Government Secondary School Chibok, in Borno State. Only a few of them were rescued after a some years while some of them till date are still being kept hostage. Indeed many more have been kidnapped and attacks on different communities persist. This might have informed the poet’s suggestion that the situation instead of improving seems to be getting worse despite the fact that different governments have come into the saddle. All have failed in their promises to change the situation for the better. The poet writes:

Old Jesus shouted, “Peace, be still”
New Jesus pampers the villain.
Old Jesus fished souls missing,
The New lose
Us in billions.
Old Saul killed a
Thousand; but this, and his
Wind are killing millions. (5-12).

This is always the situation, in Nigeria, when a government deemed to have performed below expectations is changed only for the new government to perform worse. As mentioned earlier, this has been the trajectory and the tragedy of the Nigerian political

space; it is one of the major reasons the country has consistently been under-developed and why it is still a far cry from what the country should be in spite of the capital and human resources it is endowed. In Nigeria, the shedding of blood in various guises continues almost ad infinitum. Bloodletting and violence have become ingrained into the psyche and consciousness of the people as a result of the rapidity with which they are carried out so much that they now seem normal occurrences. On the one hand is the intractable Boko Haram terror cycle; on the other hand are the incessant herdsmen and farmers' clashes which continued to crimson the Nigerian space. Another challenge is constituted by the cattle rustlers and bandits rampaging and killing people indiscriminately and endangering the Nigerian environment. Aside from the civil war that threatened the existence of the Nigerian state, the current wave of violence seems to be the greatest challenge that the country seems to be facing. In recent times, many dislocated while many have turned refugees in their own countries. It has also greatly affected the socio-economic development of the country as many have been prevented from engaging in socio-economic activities.

In another vein, the poet humorously, chronicles the changing of batons amongst Nigerian leaders supplanting and embellishing the narrative with some names from the bible. In Poems 59 (broken fish remix 1), 60 (Broken Fish Remix 2), and 61 (Broken Fish Remix 3), the poet carves, with words, different scenarios that the fishes go through. These poems depict different sea creatures, ridicule the political class in Nigeria and comment on the ills and the decadence that they have brought to the Nigerian political space. For instance, the poet lampoons the way and manner 'Obj' (Obasanjo), acting as biblical Samuel picked an individual which the poet did not name but who going by historical realities appears to be, Umar Yaradua who later died during his presidency from kidney related diseases. In Poem 63, line 1, the poet talks about how his vice replaced him but he could not muster the political will to stop the 'East wind' that has jumped into the aquarium of the Nigerian political space. The poet goes further, in the poem, to describe how unsteady the ship of the Nigerian state has been. It is therefore not surprising, that Maiwada, craves for an ordered world as it was in the past, so that there can be peace on the earth. He appeals to those that have constituted themselves as agents of destruction, to desist, as the world is too fragile to be left to burn away. In poem 68, the poet says:

Be cautioned; aven-
Ging can usher wars.

Death is no vaca-
tion you follow your stars! (6-9).

The poet also appealed to some sections of the country to thread softly, so that peace can reign supreme in the land. Since the end of the civil war, true reconciliation seems to be difficult to achieve, in Nigeria, as many groups in the country still fan the embers of disunity by giving preference to regional agenda. The poet writes:

Stars burn, kingdoms crum-
ble – consumed by demise:
Oduwa is dead, will Oduwa be wise? (1-3).

The poet appears to be appealing to the descendants of Oduwa, as well as every person in the Nigerian state that death is the final thing that will put an end to all things. The poet's position is that the various agitations going on in the country should be stopped before it leads to the disintegration of the country. He suggests that even great kingdoms have crumbled and the powers behind such kingdoms have died. It is therefore instructive to remember, as humans, that whatever we do we must remember that one day we shall die. He admonishes the people of the Eastern part of Nigeria too to allow peace to reign:

East, the mourners are pi-
ning for their rising Sun,
Whose funeral was just two years eight months
And it was done (4-7).

The poet seems to be referring to the people of the Eastern part of Nigeria who once took arms against the Nigerian state and who still fan the embers of secession through Nnamdi Kanu's Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The poet however would have applied caution in the way he has written about the Eastern people and their agitation. Referring to the struggle of Biafra that took the lives of many and huge resources in a debasing manner may lead to some people questioning his objectivity especially since the poet is from the northern part of the country. It is also instructive that the poet though appeals to the Yorubas and the Easterners, his silence on the Northern agitation is a little suspicious. This may raise suspicion on the real intent of the poet. But his caution to all in poem 68 is largely instructive:

You die on arrival – like nations like men
You occupy your six feet City
Beneath the floor:
Cast to the deep Ne

Ver again to rise.
Be cautioned: aven
Ging can usher wars.
Death is no vaca
Tion you follow your stars (1-9).

This is a warning to humanity to change their ways and allow the world to return to peace which is the only thing that can guarantee continuous existence for humanity. Violence begets violence. The world is a place where variety and otherness thrive. The world has been configured to be interdependent. It is therefore instructive for humans to emulate this in order to accommodate each other's differences including that of the non-human elements too. The strength of human collectivism lies in their differences. Maiwada's position is that there is the need to forgive and forget past struggles that might have brought mortals along the path of conflicts and forge ahead. This is the only sure way for progress and advancement to be attained and sustained in the human pilgrimage on the planet earth.

The collection *We're Fish* is the demystification of humans from the arrogance emanating from the age old anthropocentric episteme that considers human as the Lord of the earth to the fish and not even Fish. The collection is a warning to the world for humanity to save the world, especially the Planet earth, from its present anarchical drift, orchestrated by human's irresponsible and unguarded attitudinal and environmental recklessness. The poet's point of contact to changing the world stems from saving the sea through the marine environmental utility that the collection preaches. Indeed, according to the poet in his interview with The Sun, 'we may start healing the world from the sea'. The sea being the natural habitat of the fish represents the Earth being the natural habitat of humans and since the collection through the fish mirrors humans, the sea therefore must mirror the green earth a metaphor for an environmentally healthy society. When the Earth is saved, humanity may then extricate itself from the present immersion to escape to other planets. These underlining trope and themes are what *We're Fish*, mediates with a picturesque innovation, quaint freshness and a charming novelty to save a dying world.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings, the summary, the conclusion and the recommendations for this study.

6.1 Summary of Findings

This work examined ecocriticism and its praxis against recent poetic effusions, in Nigeria ,inscribing some of the present and past heterogenic patterns of relationships that exist between humans and nature. It has demonstrated that there is a swell in the consciousness and the practice of ecocriticism among recent Nigerian poets. Historical realities reveal a long standing nexus between nature and culture of the Nigerian people. Indeed from the relationship, a symbiotic relationship in the social, religious and other sundry interactions can be discerned. It is apt to note that this gamut has gained prominent reflections in past literary and cultural works. But this work has been able to show that the Nigerian literary enterprise has tuned up to the modern architecture and trappings of ecocriticism beyond the usual romantic and backgrounding portrayal of nature in literature.

This study has been able to show that ecocriticism, in the Nigerian literary imagination now projects environmental issues and problems, encountered in the Nigerian society such as despoliation of the environment, air and water pollution, deforestation and desertification, oil spill, waste management and soil degradation among others. There is awareness, though not yet as much as it should be, about the issues of environment and writers are beginning to take up this challenge of creating the desired consciousness amongst the Nigerian people. Though ecocriticism was embraced late in Nigeria, the death of Ken Saro Wiwa engendered and accentuated a lot of attraction to its Environmental Justice strand, giving fervour and strength to activism and sometimes violent militarism especially in the Niger Delta. This pattern has continued, especially in the Niger Delta region of the country, where people suffer needless environmental pollution and other attendant problems associated with oil exploratory activities. This has led to a noticeable swing in the direction of eco-activism, which seems palpably popular

and has influenced ecocriticism in Nigeria most tremendously. It may be instructive to note, that ecocriticism goes beyond seeking remediation against disastrous consequences of environmental injustices; the target of ecocriticism is to foster an equitable relationship between humans and nature for the greater common good of all.

In pursuance of the objectives of this study, works of the selected poets were scrutinised to extract the eco-critical dynamics observable in them. The works reflected varied modes and temper of ecocriticism. This study looked at six collections from recent Nigerian poetry and explores their eco-critical perspectives. The texts under review here are Tade Ipadeola, *The Sahara Testaments* (2012), Tade Ipadeola, *The Rain Fardel* (2005), Ogaga Ifowodo, *A Good Mourning* (2016), Ogaga Ifowodo, *The Oil Lamp* (2005), Remi Raji, *Sea of My Mind* (2013), and Ahmed Maiwada, *We're Fish* (2017). These texts were carefully chosen and are representative of recent Nigerian poetry in English.

Tade Ipadeola's *The Sahara Desert* treats an uncommon theme in Nigerian literature by interrogating the Sahara Desert its geography, ecology and history in charming epic quatrains. The desert, through the collection, confronts us as a site of intellectual transformation and a lens through which African and indeed human history, culture and aesthetics are narrativised. The desert therefore inclines a discursive metaphor of a kind not only for Africa but for the entire humanity with its crisscross civilisations. The study affirmed that the desert is one dreaded part of the world and that much of the narratives of the desert is scary and bewildering. Indeed, the denuded sprawl is often projected as a land of abhorrence and despair, hostile to human, animal and plant habitation. The value of the Sahara Desert, is however, evident in its agency, which Ipadeola explores to the fascination of readers.

This study investigated *The Sahara Testaments* and probed this atomistic mode and was able to retrofit this hitherto unidirectional human imagination about the desert. This study deployed eco-critical precepts, to change this structure of perception, cognition and the stereotypes hitherto associated with the desert. Also this study through *The Sahara Testaments* was able to establish the desert as a sojourn through which the desert, its ecology and the human pilgrimage are historicized in a quaint epic tradition. Using eco-critical tools, this study further revealed that the desert is not the perceived wasteland but a unique other of the earth enriched with its own peculiarities educing significant human

history, culture and art and that her story is a metaphor of the African history, specifically, and that of the world citizenry, in general.

In a similar vein, this study interrogated Tade Ipadeola's *The Rain Fardel* tracing the appropriateness of a rain trope that cuts across the different poems that makes the collection. Also, the study educes the rain metaphor as an archetypal figuring for nature to engage the human mind in a dialectics through which the various environmental failings of humans are catalogued and exposed. The high points in the collection, are the dedicated nature poems in the collection through which this study is able to explicate and expound good environmental practices and the need for humanity to take the issue of environment seriously for the good of both nature and humans. Also, the study was able through the eco-critical explications of some of the commemorative nature poems to warn of the dastard consequences of environmental degradation in the face of a continued utter disregard to nature and the environment.

This study further explains the storied matter of eco-materiality in Ogaga Ifowodo *A Good Mourning*, reminding the world of the significance and the indispensability of matter, in human community. As humans, we pretend or ignore the existential significance of matters and deliberately kill their narratives. In this way, we thus deny ourselves of the knowledge derivable in storied matter of materiality from which humans can gain immensely not only about the workings of nature but also of the numerous benefits accruable to humans therein. This study reveals through the collection that humans live in an environment where materialities play more than a passing role in human communities. The study reveals that the turn to 'agential beings' is part of the 20th century shift from subject-centred models to object centred ones which include materialisms especially as noticeable in the humanities. The study asserts that since these materialities are found everywhere in the human environment, humans must therefore engage with them as 'beings' which they are.

The study, also through Ogaga's *The Oil Lamp*, projected the Niger Delta situation, revealing how a people used to littoral lifestyle, and a luxuriously vegetated environment, are locked in a survival fix. The study exposed the dangers and the hardship that the people of the Niger Delta, are confronted with owing to the reckless and irresponsible oil exploitation and exploration and the government seeming acquiescence in the whole

scheme. The study cautioned on the damning consequences of the continued pollution, especially through the endless gas flaring and the incessant oil spillages, that have remained a permanent architecture of the Niger Delta landscape.

The study perceived animism essentially as part of ecocriticism, especially in the preservation of nature and the reverence it accords nature and her elementals. The study, admitted that animism is inextricably associated with humanity and that animist thoughts and practices would always be with humans. The study through an eco-critical reading of Remi Raji's *Sea of My Mind*, revealed a profound animation of nature and her elements. The study established a spiritual connection between humans and soulful things as agentic forces capable of causing things to happen not only in the terrestrial realm but also in the physical world. The study argued that even in the height of science and technological breakthrough, animist practices shall continue to transcend all forms of human sophistication. The study noted that even in the present age of science and technology animist practices abound and that humans still continue to exhibit plenteous animist practices.

Additionally, the study discovered that the dismantling of the age long anthropocentric episteme, upon which human arrogance is located, is the beginning of introducing a new order of relationship between humans and nature. This study through the eco-critical evaluation of Ahmed Maiwada's *We're Fish*, was able to draw parallels between human and fish ecology, biological composition and activities. The study through *We're Fish*, drew innumerable similarities between the two beings and suggested that affirming these kinds of similarities, between humans and nature has the propensity to evoke pity in humans and that these could reset the relations template between humans and nature.

Ecocriticism though another literary creation of the West, one which some critics perceive as a continuation of the colonial project to continue to tie African Literature to the apron strings of the West, the concept has many ideal beneficial to the whole of humanity. The lofty ideals of ecocriticism should therefore not be lost in some political considerations especially as a neocolonialist trick. Ecocriticism promises to be of immense benefit to African Literature. This is because, Africa is a land of rich natural resources but low technological advances. The enclave is therefore prone to exploitation and its many dire consequences but ecocriticism offers a veritable platform to project the

rich resources of the Nigerian environment. It also offers a platform to protest against bad environmental practices arising from any kind of exploitation. This would allow environmental justice movements to wade in and begin to do the needful. This approach has recorded some successes across the world though very few in Nigeria because of uncooperative institutional barriers.

The point being made here, is that, the loftiness of ecocriticism and the benefits it offers African literary imagination, of which Nigeria is a component, should not be allowed to get lost in the politics surrounding the concept. Rather African Literature should capitalise on the benefits that the concept offers. For instance, beyond the flora and fauna that it affords which writers can use as tools for attracting foreign investment in tourism, ecocriticism offers an avenue to correct Eurocentric dispositions about Africa, such as presenting the land as a den, jungle and a dangerous environment inimical to human habitation. Ecocriticism can also provide the platform for the projection of hidden or hitherto unknown ecological challenges, posing threats to humans and the environment.

6.2 Conclusion

The study, through the various texts was able to establish a strong eco-critical current running through most third-generation Nigerian poetry in English. It was able to show a synergetic relationship between culture and nature and that Nigerian literature is fast responding to the new espousal of ecocriticism. This study reveals in a number of ways how ecocriticism is opening new frontiers for Nigerian literature and has become a major cultural expression providing new material for Nigerian literature. African literature and by implication, Nigerian literature, has often been labelled sociological, largely due to its being pressed overtly into socio-political concerns. Despite the portrayal of the socio-political challenges, it is saddening that those issues are still very much present in the country today. It is therefore right and ripe for the literature to begin to explore other frontiers of human engagement.

Ecocriticism offers a new vista of opportunities for Nigerian Literature, to explore other areas which may not have been covered before or not, given the depth of coverage they deserve. This, no doubt, would make Nigerian Literature, more vigorous; detach it from old proclivities of military dictatorship, its tethered colonial dispositions, complaints

about general paucity of infrastructure, bad leadership and corruption among others. Ecocriticism would ensure a greater level of robustness in the literature as it is capable of unlocking new areas of human engagements. In doing this, critics must continue to celebrate our cultural past, present and future. They must name concepts and ideas found in our locale and not wait until the West names concepts before they begin to find parallels for such experience in our art or culture.

This, beyond offering the readers a variety of themes and wide ranging subjects, shall help reveal for instance the dangers of mismanaging environmental issues, which is at the core of every individual attitude towards the environment. The world is a planetary community and there is one environment for the whole world. It therefore follows that an environmental problem in a country has the potency to snowball into a global challenge especially if such a problem is not timely and adequately handled. Nigerian Literature must begin to create greater awareness around the issues of the environment for individuals and corporate bodies to begin to shun bad and harmful environmental practices. The citizens must be made aware of the rights that they have in law to challenge a government that is paying lip service to the issue of environment. Until the whole world realizes that the environment is a collective commonwealth, literature must continue to create the awareness.

6.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This study has been able to show that though ecocriticism is relatively new to the plane of Nigerian Literature, Nigerian environmental literature dates back well before the introduction of the concept. The study has been able to establish that certain environmental concerns, especially animism are imbued in the culture of the Nigerian people as indeed all peoples of the world. Also, the study has contributed to knowledge in the explanation that some third-generation Nigerian poets are responding to the different strands of ecocriticism. Indeed the third-generation Nigerian poets are contributing to the robustness of Nigerian literature, through their initiatives of taking up new areas and themes, that probably have not been given prominence before, in Nigerian literature.

The study has shown that poetry is a good resource of conscientising the human mind and that poetry can be useful in changing the people's attitude about the environment. It is

important to note that at the core of most environmental challenges is nonchalance and discriminatory disposition towards nature. A corrective measure to this problem must therefore come from addressing the minds of the individuals that make up the human community.

The study also reveals the inseparability of some eco-critical forms such as animism from the culture of the Nigerian people. The study shows that animism is a way of life for the people and that it is a tool for them to relate and interact with the world. This reveals that humans cannot but live and appreciate nature. Indeed the study is able to establish that there is a form of spiritual nexus involved in human and nature relations. For instance the attachment of a people to land, the worshipping of certain natural elements such as rivers, trees and stones among others are clear testimonies of the spiritual dimensions of human relations with nature.

The study is also able to show that there exists a marked semblance between humans and some animals especially the fish. The study reveals the different experiences encountered by the fishes just as humans in their day to day undertakings. The study therefore suggests that when humans begin to passionately look at other animal species as neighbours in the same planetary community, it could change human attitude towards the lower creatures and probably other creatures.

This study has also been able to establish the materiality of matter among the Nigerian people. The study reveals that matter that is often taken for granted has a way of impacting human lives positively or negatively and could constitute danger in the human environment. Indeed the study has been able to establish the importance of not only the biotic but also the abiotic elements especially matter that has the potency to affect human life in different strata from family life to social life and indeed to human health.

This study no doubt would form part of the scarce literature on ecocriticism in Nigeria and it would therefore be a good and helpful resource for any research into ecocriticism in Nigeria and beyond.

6.4 Recommendations

It is instructive that for Nigeria to achieve the kind of attitudinal change that is expected to transform human perception and attitude about nature and the environment, all hands must be on deck. Government should encourage research on issues of the environment by giving grants as incentives for researchers. Government should encourage the writing and reading of eco-poetry right from infancy up to colleges. This would engender the desired interest in nature from infancy and children would imbibe the culture of tendering nature instead of learning to destroy it. Government should commission poets to write good eco-poetry that would appeal to children and adults and make same available for general reading. Researchers should continue to probe into areas yet to be explored in ecocriticism. For instance, researchers can begin to look at testing the impact of eco-materials on the readers' attitude towards nature and the environment. This would help generate a data base of those who have become aware of the issues of the environment and those that are yet to imbibe the attitude. This would afford a re-strategising that those yet to be captured are also bagged in too. Government should create institutions and put comprehensive measures in place to secure the environment and should redouble the will to implement regulations.

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