

A PRAGMA-ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF SOME SELECTED POEMS OF TANURE OJAIDE'S THE TALES OF THE HARMATTAN, HUMPHREY OGU'S ECHOES OF NEGLECT AND WILSON WADAGO'S THE SOUTH-SOUTH LAMENTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Poets of the Niger Delta extraction of Nigeria often reflect the despicable experiences of the region's people in their poetries of resistance. This paper examines the prevalent ecological conditions of the regions since the discovery of crude oil in 1956 in selected poems of Tanure Ojaide's The Tales of The Harmattan, Humphrey Ogu's Echoes of Neglect and Wilson Wadago's The South-South Lamentations. Despite the numerous studies on Niger Delta literature, there is a need for a focused analysis of how contemporary poets from the region use their works to address ecological degradation and its impact on their communities. This paper investigates the extent to which environmental degradation is emphasised in the selected poems of the three poets under study. As such, the objectives are to illuminate the concomitant effects of gas fumes, soot, the depletion of the biosphere, lithosphere, and the entire atmospheric conditions in the region; the new order of dislocation, the status of the ecosystem, and to explore the dynamic reaction of the poets from the region to these issues, with an intent to liberate the people and the land from further ruin. Dell Hymes' principle of Context in Pragmatics and the Ecocritical Theory of Literary Criticism are considered most appropriate for this study. These frameworks allow the poems to be analysed based on the physical environment, and the socio-cultural, psychological and linguistic contexts. The findings reveal that the poems strongly emphasize the severity of the harm caused by oil drilling activities. The poets vividly depict the destruction of the ecosystem and the devastating impact on human, aquatic and agricultural elements. The paper concludes that oil drilling activities should be stopped or reduced so that the region may reclaim the purity and beauty of the physical environment, calling for immediate measures to mitigate the gross ecological damage.

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Introduction

With the advent of ecocriticism in 1978 as coined by William Rueckert in his essay entitled “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism, literary works of prose, poetry and drama have continued to expand the frontiers of the discourse on the relationship between people and the environment.” The Encyclopedea Britannica states that environmental studies emphasises human relationship with the environment and the social and political dimensions thereof, making it distinctive from environmental science which involves more of Meteorology, Biology, Chemistry, Engineering and Physics.

Furthermore, Green Wiki (1) opines that any writing that comments intelligently on environmental themes, particularly as applied to the relationship between humans, society and the environment, any writing that espoused care and concern for the environment, thereby advocating a more thoughtful and ecologically sensitive relationship of man to nature is classified as environmental literature. Whether poetry, prose or drama, a writer's intention is influenced by the environment, the psychological state of mind, the internal and external experiences and the language power at the disposal of the writer at the point of writing. Thus, no writer writes in a vacuum or writes just for the sake of writing and this presupposes that every form of writing takes place within a given context. Context, according to Luo (1), is the interaction between all the elements of language, and communication activities including the intra-textual co-text, the environment in which the communication occurs and the mutually shared interaction of the shared information, the culture, background and world knowledge of the locutors.

Pragmatics is concerned with meaning interpretation within the situational context of an utterance in which the interlocutors share a mutual background. Syal and Jindal (157) describe pragmatics as an attempt to relate meaning to context in utterance; it views language as an action which is performed by speakers. In Austin's book *How to Do Things With Words* (qtd in Syal & Jindal 157-158) he asserts that when an utterance is made, the speaker enacts a force which he classified as locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary where the locutionary force is said to be the literal meaning while the performative meaning, the action enacted is described as illocutionary and the expected response is the perlocutionary force. Searle further characterises the illocutionary force as direct and indirect speech acts, the speaker is said to stating, affirming, judging, committing, warning etc.

According to Crystal (120 qtd in Olaleye 2) pragmatics studies the factors that govern our choices of language in social interaction and the effects of our word choices on others. From the foregoing, it is noteworthy that pragmatic concerns exceed the pattern and manner in which a thing is said but elucidates the factors ascribed to the selection of the method of delivery – the word choice and context and that explains why a speaker/writer uses certain words within the specificity of purpose. Hence, Tanure Ojaide, Humphrey Ogu and Wadago Wilson, burdened by the devastating ecological conditions of the Niger Delta chose poetry as their tool for expressing the myriads of concerns bedeviling the Niger Delta.

Charles Nnolim explains poetry as a “patterned form of verbal or written composition in concentrated and rhythmical terms” (qtd in Ken-Maduakor 3). This definition means that poetry is rhythmical with a patterned system of language. On the other hand, T.S Eliot observes that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. However, of course, only those with personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things." This assertion means that poets try to escape from their physical world of pain into the imaginative world of peace through writing. This is what the three poets under study intend to achieve in their works.

Wellington Nwogu opines that “a poet is a storyteller, though in verse” (ix). Nwogu above reveals that the art of storytelling is not limited to novelists. It extends to poets who tell stories prevalent in their time in verse form just as the poets in this study tell the story of contemporary Niger Delta in metred and unmetred verses of poetry. According to Darah, “the geographical Niger Delta refers to that region of Nigeria that borders the Atlantic seaboard and stretches from Cross River State near Cameroon in the east to the western boundary of Delta and Edo States near Ilaje country”(3). Chronological and political records prove that the region was the first to meet and interrelate with the European countries dating back to the late 15th century. It can be said that the region was the first to record graduates in the nation. For instance, Birinengi Eferebo Edoniboye, an Ijaw from Opuama (formerly Harry's Town) in Rivers State and Amiel Modupe Fagbulu, a Yoruba, were the first two graduates produced by the University College, Ibadan, in 1950. So, it can be true that the Niger Delta was the first to attain tertiary education (3-5).

Darah goes further to say:

My position is that the region's importance should not be measured only by the presence of oil and gas hydrocarbon reserves. Yet the truth must be told repeatedly that the Niger Delta oil and gas provide over 90% of Nigerian government revenue. Let us recall the point that the Niger Delta was the foundation of modern Nigeria. By virtue of its strategic importance to the survival of Nigeria and her numerous beggarly neighbouring countries, the Niger Delta is to Nigeria what the Nile River is to Egypt. Just as there can be no Egypt without the Nile, so also there can be no Nigeria, as presently constituted, without the wealth that flows from the bowels and waterways of the Niger Delta (6).

Apart from being an oil-producing region of the nation (Nigeria), the Niger Delta, from Darah's assertion, has grown old and, from the eyes of history, the first, not second, to meet with European countries and the first to produce graduates. If this is true, why is the region fraught with untold neglect and maltreatment? "There is so much environmental lamentation in Nigeria's recent poetry. Naturally, much of this is from the environmentally blighted Niger Delta itself, home to youths roaming in anticline and syncline" (Anele, Ihuoma, 239). Put succinctly, poets like Ojaide, Ogu and Wilson decry the environment dislodgements in their poetries. The Niger Delta states include Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ondo, Abia, Imo, and Edo states. This paper will analyse the poems of Ojaide, Ogu, and Wilson based on the physical environment, the socio-cultural, psychological and linguistic contexts culminating in a pragma-ecocritical analysis.

The Niger Delta Literature

As earlier established, literature does not exist in a vacuum. It takes from society and also gives back to society. More simply, that shows that literature and society are intertwined, and none can exist without the other. During the old order era, when the environment was void of pollution and, the air was crisp, refreshing and resplendent with the natural ambiance of flora and fauna, the region's writers exalted and appreciated the gorgeousness of the environment and the culture of the people, such as farming, hunting and fishing, to mention a few. They did not produce the revolutionary kind of literature seen today. The new order of environmental dislocations owing to the discovery of crude (black gold) and its miserable outcome on the people and the environment has initiated

the revolutionary reactions to the people's plights. In the words of Ibiwari Ikiriko:

Take a look, dear reader, at the map of Nigeria and behold the giant country sits, suppressing the Delta, which serves it the functions of Support and sustenance. As it is on the geographical expression, so it is in the political, social and economic expression (qtd in Ogu, 16).

The researchers completely agree with Ikiriko's observations. A critical look at Nigeria's map reveals the Niger Delta region as one being trampled upon by the nation. The location of the region, as seen on Nigeria's map, depicts it as the burden bearer of the rest of the nation as other states seem to be resting comfortably on it. So, it may not be wrong to say that the repression of the Delta is simply traceable to the nation's historic amalgamation of 1914.

In "Revolutionary Pressures in Niger Delta Literature," Darah states:

The Niger Delta political space's radicalisation has affected the themes and rhetoric of works by the region's writers, activist thinkers, and cultural mediators. In the last 20 years, the researchers have written passionately about the situation in the Niger Delta region through the mass media and in public lectures and discourses. The common theme that runs through interventions all these years is that a revolutionary process is unfolding in the oil-rich but economically and politically colonized Niger Delta (*From Boom to Doom*, 2).

From the foregone, it is obvious that the sufferation of the region is loathing, and writers, especially poets express their displeasure in their verses, condemning the despicable fate of the Delta.

However, this research limits itself to selected eco-poetries of Tanure Ojaide's *"The Tale of the Harmattan"*, Humphrey Ogu's *"Echoes of Neglect"*, and Wadago Wilson's *"The South-South Lamentations"*, who speak against man's inhumanity to man, degradation, spillages, exploitation, conflagration and in fact, the destruction of the environment to mention but a few.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical proposition of this study is enunciated in Pragma-ecocriticism which is combination of the ecocritical theory of literary criticism and pragmatics, particularly, context in pragmatics. The major concern of pragmatics is meaning interpretation when utterances are made, taken into cognizance the mutual background of locutors at the time of communication. According to George Yule (qtd in Salinas 2) Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning communicated by a speaker or writer and interpreted by a speaker or reader. This means the circumstance that led to an utterance is considered highly important in the interpretation of that utterance. Pragmatics, succinctly put, is the study of how people make sense of each other linguistically (Anthony Salinas 3)

The notion of context in pragmatics has attracted several expositions from eminent scholars such as Firth, Halliday, Hymes and Ellis. (qtd in Osisanwon 78). Amongst the aforementioned, Dell Hymes model on context in pragmatics stands tall and is considered most appropriate for this study. According to him, to assist the identification and labelling of the components of a linguistic interaction, and to speak a language correctly, one needs not only to learn its vocabulary and grammar but also the context in which the words are used.

Furthermore, Hymes identified the following as features of context.

a). Participants:

A speech event typically involves communicative exchange between the speaker or writer who plays the role of the addressor, and the hearer or reader who plays the role of the addressee. In the event of a third

party listening or overhearing as the audience, it plays a contributory role to the context of situation.

b). Topic:

The topic is the subject of discourse. That is, what is being talked about and for proper interpretation and analysis, the analyst must be familiar with the subject matter. In this case, the ecological conditions of the Niger Delta and their effects on the people and the environment.

c). Setting:

The setting is a compendium of a lot of factors as no utterance or discourse is made in a vacuum. Hence, the place, time of speaking and the physical relations of the participants concerning facial expressions, mood, gesture and posture contribute immensely to the interpretation.

d). Channel

Every discourse is transmitted through a channel-speech, writing(genres),sign or even signal.

e). Code:

The code is the language, dialect or style used to deliver the message.

f) Message form:

The message form could be a chat, debate, story, sermon, song to mention a few. Osisanwo notes that generally in pragmatics, context comprises physical, socio- cultural, psychological and linguistic context which have been well embedded in Hymes classification of context in pragmatics. (79-81)

According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, ecocriticism “is the study of [literature](#) and the [environment](#) from an [interdisciplinary](#) point of view, where literature scholars analyze texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of [nature](#)”. Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the fathers of ecocriticism states that, "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). This definition underscores that the theory concerns itself with the connection sandwiched between works of literature and the environment.

According to him:

Consequently, ecocriticism did not become a presence in the major institutions of power in the profession, such as the Modern Language Association (MLA). Graduate students interested in environmental approaches to literature felt like misfits, having no community of scholars to join and finding no job announcements in their area of expertise (xvii).

From the above statement, the reasons for existing in isolation made ecocriticism lose the prominent presence it would have gained in the core organization of power in the literary profession, particularly the Modern Language Association (MLA). Students fascinated by environmental approaches to studying literature became stranded, seeing no organized group of scholars for membership to hone or grow their interests. However, the field of ecological literature became fully established consequent to scholars' interest in the field as they started writing joint works in the middle of the 1980s. The field had rapid growth from about 1985 when Frederick O. Waage edited the work, "Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources", containing course descriptions from nineteen vibrant scholars; in addition to this, they tried to advance "a greater presence of environmental concern and awareness in literary disciplines" (xvii). The efforts of these scholars, no doubt, won the attention of many universities as they had no option but to enshrine courses of literature in their ecological-oriented studies plan.

It is noteworthy that "despite the broad scope of inquiry and the varying levels of sophistication, all ecological criticisms share the same fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (Glotfelty xix). That is to say that culture which is the way of life of a people was born with the environment where people dwell. He again states that "ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature. 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). As stated above, nature suggests the nonhuman components of the environment, such as trees, animals, fish etc. Glotfelty maintains that they have a relationship or connection with the people and their culture. It is no doubt that ecological concerns have been there, even though scholars of the century did not talk about them in their essays, except later that literary scholars started making publications on the issues that concern the environment. Glotfelty asserts further that:

While related humanities disciplines, like history, philosophy, law, sociology, and religion, have been "greening" since the 1970s, literary studies have remained untainted by environmental concerns. Moreover, while social movements, like the civil rights and women's liberation movements of the sixties and seventies, have transformed literary studies, it would appear that the environmental movement of the same era has had little impact (xvi).

That means other humanities disciplines mentioned above flourished dating from the 1970s but literary studies, which is also one of the humanities, appeared not to have flourished like others. If this is the case, it does appear that the ecological or environmental pressure group of the same Age has made little or no waves. It is to be noted, however, that:

...individual literary and cultural scholars have been developing ecologically informed criticism and theory since the seventies; however, unlike their disciplinary cousins mentioned previously, they did not organize themselves into an identifiable group; hence, their various efforts were not recognized as belonging to a distinct critical school or movement (Glotfelty xvi-xvii).

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that a pragma-ecocritical analysis is a linguistic literary model of analysis which involves a combination of two interwoven approaches. The context of eco-criticism is the physical environment, ecological conditions resulting from human interaction with the environment and this involves evaluating commentaries in prose, poetry and drama while the core of pragmatics is context-dependent interpretation of language in use. Therefore, in this paper, the researchers, who are also the proponents of pragma-ecocritical approach to literary criticism posit in a qualitative analysis of the poems under study describe pragma-ecocriticism as a linguistic-literary approach that bothers on the contextual presentation of a writer or speaker, together with the mode of expression that distinguishes him or her as a voice in environmental literature.

Pragma-ecocritical Analysis

The communicative exchange in this study is between two participants in each of the eight poems which comprises the poet (addressor) and the readers (addressees), in this case, the researchers. All poems are written on the same topic—environmental degradation as a result of oil exploration activities in the Niger Delta and the outcry by poets of the region to advocate for a retrieval of the lost shine of the region which could enhance the lifestyle of region's people and the drastic reduction of mortality rates. The setting of the poems is multifaceted. Though the physical setting of the poems is the Niger Delta region, they speak of the two distinct dispensations known as the old order and the new order.

The Old Order of the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region used to be celebrated for its proximity to nature as a result of the lush vegetation of the mangrove forest, the gorgeous rivers, seas, estuaries, lakes, ponds, beaches, winding creeks and breathtaking scenery—peaceful, calm and fascinating allure. A foremost tourist attraction. It was the hub of small- and large-scale fishing activities because of the exciting and profiting presence of a rich aquatic life such as diverse species of fishes, shellfishes, and other kinds of seafood. In addition, the atmosphere was pure, crisp and clear. Rainfall and sunshine adhered strictly to the natural order of seasonal appearances. The soil was fertile, and farmers enjoyed uninterrupted bumper harvests. The environmental configurations of the Delta's were predominantly natural and there was peace and harmony. In *The Tale of the Harmattan*; in a poem titled “Swimming in a Waterhole,” Tanure Ojaide writes:

We grew up to love rivers and lakes, open refuge that saved children from the hard labour at home-

Every parent knew where to look for a missing child before ever alerting the town crier to beat the drum (38).

From the opening lines in particular, the Niger Delta region is described as a suitable dwelling place where children “grew up to love rivers and lakes.” The poem is a subtle reminder of the natural state of the river, decent for swimming and harmless to the people. Parents knew where to find their missing children, even. This suggests the socio-cultural indices prevalent at the time and further implies the peaceful and communal nature of the people of the region. Nothing seemed to take them unawares; the river served as a source of drinking water and high-protein foods—fish, shellfish and an assortment of organic seafood. The persona states that “many of us did not concentrate at school in anticipation/of going straight to swim until dusk when eyes turned red” (38). This statement shows that people enjoyed swimming in rivers. The persona continues to say that rivers and lakes must have cried themselves into silence-
/we spent nothing of our millions of earnings to save them (Ojaide, 38). The ruins on the river also make it unfit for all nonhuman elements living in it.

The New Order of the Niger Delta

The discovery of crude introduced the new order of environmental degradation, untold hardship, conflict and comatose experiences. The so-called cash cow of the region became its undoing and sadly so and that informed the ecocriticism commentaries preponderant in Niger Delta literature. With the discovery of crude, the region became the centre of attraction which unfortunately opened it up for massive exploitation of its natural resources. The new order of the Niger Delta is troubled with oil spillages, gas flaring, intra and intercommunal conflict, degradation and the destruction of the atmosphere, biosphere, and lithosphere, which together form the frame of the Delta land.

It is against this backdrop that the three poets under study present their poetries. Ogu's poem, entitled “I Know Why Our Harvest is Lean” is a poem of two stanzas. The poet asserts:

The earth is
Ours to work, not to waste
Ours to man not to maim
This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder

(Niyi Osundare qtd in Ogu, 19).

The first stanza are lines quoted from the poetry of a renowned African poet, Niyi Osundare. The poet feels Osundare's lines would help him express his thoughts clearer to his readers. From the poem above, it is obvious that the earth was not made to be destroyed by man; rather, it was made to be maintained by man. Ogu, through his persona, shares the same thought with Osundare and observes that man has already destroyed the earth (Niger Delta environment). That is why in stanza 2 he says:

Our farmland lost its fertility
after decades of degradation
rape and abortions
by those who explore and exploit
the blood in the veins of our soul (19).

The above stanza reveals that the environment has been destroyed, probably beyond repair. The consequences are exemplified in stanza 2. The fertile Delta soil has lost its fertility prowess to oil exploration activities, spillages and the politics of clean-up contracts. The indescribable incidence of degradation imposed on the land by those who exploit and explore the Delta crude is a harsh socio-economic reality.

In addition to the physical setting (context) the psychological state of the poets is loud in their expressions. Their angst and sorrowfulness is visible in their words. For instance, In Ogu's "Crude oil, he is sorrowful that "the vehicle of the Delta coughs out phlegm of fumes" and Wilson addresses crude as "Cursed Blessing." Furthermore, the poems are rendered in strong nostalgic renditions of a time that was and still could be if the relevant agencies were willing to consider repairing the damage to the environment.

The lamentations of Ojaide continues in, "Swimming in a Waterhole," from line nine, which asserts thus: "With the oil companies only looking after profit margins,/oil slicks easily found their way to bury the waters alive." (38). Ojaide creates the picture of an aching region full of polluted rivers where people no longer find clean drinking water, gorgeous rivers to swim and source fish as was the tradition of the people prior to the advent of crude and the new state of decay. In the poem "Market day" in *The Tale of the Harmattan*, Ojaide enunciates the market as a representation of the seat of wealth of the region where people come to buy and sell from far and wide, whereas the people (owners of the marketplace) are incapacitated such that they cannot shop from their market. For instance, the persona says, "...welcomes strangers to our midst, welcomes/even our dead now costumed in alien habits" (26). The aforementioned lines reveal that the region welcomes the arrival of strangers who somewhat displaced and impoverished them as they are no longer the primary beneficiaries of their common wealth. According to the persona: "In this market, I can no longer get my needs,/the same market that filled my forebears (Ojaide, 26).

The persona is grieving the loss of his identity as a one-time proud and affluent native of the region, the disappointments and dissatisfactions. This entails that the people's basic needs are neglected while the visiting strangers become primary beneficiaries of the good of the land to the point where the indigenous people can no longer afford the luxuries of their own Delta market. Further down the poem, the persona calls on the god of the Delta wealth for help. This shows that man has failed to proffer solutions to his problems. The poem reveals that

oil companies are only interested in profit-making. They are not concerned about the welfare of the people who own the crude oil they suck.

According to the persona:

Parents still make demands of children as never before;
the ageless sun remains a master archer in the dry season

and young ones, ever restless, seek new bathing spots
to relieve themselves of the sun's scorching gaze (Ojaide, 38).

The poet insinuates that oil drilling activities have led to the depletion of the ozone layer and consequently, led to disturbing heat waves as "the ageless sun remains a master archer in the dry season." And because the rivers have been badly polluted, people, especially youths now seek new bathing spots to protect them from burning sensation of the sun. This means that the old places of bliss and fulfilment are no longer available. Such a pity that the younger generation did not have along-lasting appeal of that blissfulness.

According to the persona, "O god of gathering places, watchful but distracted eye/sever yourself from new gods that cut you down" (27). The persona is fully aware that things have gone awry and has seen that it is going to be tough for the sons and daughters of the region to fight for themselves, so he calls on the gods to avenge the trodden Delta. The strangers or enemies of the Niger Delta are referred to as "new gods" that try to cut the old god down, which suggests that nature should rise to fight whatever rises against the old order of abundance, peace and harmony

The channel of presentation is written poetry. All poems are lifted from the anthologies of Ojaide, Ogu and Wilson. The language (the code) is drawn mostly from the vocabulary of ecological studies which situates the study as a pragma-ecocritical study. For instance: "*the ageless sun...dry season...water hyacinth... harmattan*" The message form is protest poetry and within this context, the three eco poets employ the direct illocutionary speech acts by way of asserting and affirming the deplorable environmental conditions of the Niger Delta (the once natural allure of the region) which has drastically affected the customs and traditions of the people All poems are revolutionary reactions to the deplorable environmental conditions of the Niger Delta. The expected perlocutionary effect is to induce an aversion to oil exploration activities in the region. In Ojaide's *Swimming in a Waterhole*, he asserts: "For decades water hyacinth overran the pristine waterscape/ in convoys of weed and started stifling the beautiful host." Ojaide's "Oil remedies" is a poem of fourteen stanzas with two lines each. The Niger Delta was first known as a red oil producer before discovering black oil. This is what the persona attempts to establish here, reminding his audience of the Delta that was first known for her red-oil riches. He describes the quality of the Delta oil in stanzas one to ten. Then stanza eleven tells of the newly discovered black oil or (crude) oil. However, the touchiest and painful aspect of the poem comes alive in the last two stanzas:

It is we who live in the dark that gives out light.
They make bonfires of our blind ancestors' gifts
after hauling away priceless pools of abundance
and leaving us silent and roaming epidemics (29).

By way of assessing, and judging, evaluating the outcome of the atrocities of international oil companies, the poet indirectly enacts the illocutionary force that is verdictive. The persona states that the Delta owns the light that illuminates others' dark but lives in utmost darkness herself. He tries to cast some blame on the Niger

Delta ancestors, having been blinded by the strangers who at first came and raped the land. Now, the people are abandoned in plagues.

Humphrey Ogu's *Echoes of Neglect*. Ogu's poems affirm the plights of the Niger Delta people as the continued impoverished lot making other wealthy other parts of the country . For instance, in the poem entitled "Crude Oil," he poet writes:

Crude oil is callous, cruel, crude and rude
oils the wheels of the nation
lubricates the engine of the country
...jerks sputters, and stops (Ogu 18).

"Crude Oil" is a poem of two stanzas, having six lines each. From the first stanza, the poet describes the Niger Delta as crude. Crude in line 1 is personified being attributed to the adjectives "cruel" and "callous." The crude that should show kindness to the people becomes heartless and brutalizes them instead. Line 2 reveals how it "oils the wheels of the nation /lubricates the engine of the country" (i.e. supplies the needs of others, whereas its owners live in poverty and all manner of diseases as the rest of the lines of stanza one reveal). According to the poet-persona:

Crude oil, quite cruel and callous to the creeks
contaminates the air, seas and streams
exterminates the fishes...
devastates farms and crops
leaves landlords and farmers in starvation
yet overwhelms Abuja with petrodollars... (Ogu, 18).

The poet-persona laments the contamination of the environment and how people breathe in poisoned air, leading to high mortality rates. A further read shows the damaged status of the seas and streams; from this, one could paint a picture of rivers without fishes in the region. "Abuja", as seen in the last line, represents the nation, especially the politicians who enrich themselves with the wealth of the Delta while the oil "landlords" suffer starvation and pain.

Ogu, in his "Bees Don't Just Buzz." For instance:

Dogs don't just bark and sleep in chains
while strangers steal meat from their plate

Bees don't just buzz hum and dance
while strangers steal from their honeycomb
They also sing and sting.

The persona speaks in an angry tone because; he is tired of the harrowing living conditions of his people. This is why he raises the consciousness of all affected inhabitants of the Niger Delta so that they may wake up to fight whatever confronts the Delta homeland. According to Anaele Ihuoma:

Ogu does not view the Niger Delta environment with binoculars and telescopes because he caresses it, daily, with his feet, because he breathes, oxygen-depleted and all, because

the nerves of his veins are in constant rendezvous with it, he is able to deliver a fresh but damning indictment of the region's adversaries who happen to also be her traducers. Ogu is so angst-infested that he confronts the adversary frontally. (ANA Review, 240).

The poet expresses his anger at the adverse effects of oil exploration on the physical environment of the Niger Delta and advocates a call for action against those responsible for stealing from the region's wealth. The use of "dogs" and "bees" in the poem indicates that the Niger Delta people are not a lazy set laidback individuals but fearless human species. However, he is amazed that the so-called fearless people refuse to rise up to reclaim what is rightfully theirs. He, therefore, uses his creative acumen and urges others to arise and fight for the course of the Delta.

Wadago Wilson's *South-South Lamentation*

Wilson's verse is the last to be discussed in this paper, "A Cursed Blessing" is a poem of fourteen stanzas. The poem describes the degree of degradation meted out on the land "in four and half decades/of the multi-trillions extraction" (Wilson 7). The persona further states:

Ogoni's their protective
Shades brutally cut
Jesse consumed,
In conflagration
Umuechem shudders
At the mention of oil (7).

The persona presents the shameful and throbbing circumstances of the Delta, as names of some oil-producing communities like Ogoni, Jesse, Odi and Umuechem are cited above. These communities wallow in abject poverty, irrespective of the fact that they own oil wells. We could see in the region how conflagration claimed the lives of poor people. There is pain all over the land as there is no sign to show that the region owns the oil that lights up the nation. So, for the persona, the crude, which should have been a blessing to the people, is nothing more than a curse on the people as he laments, "a cursed blessing/a liquefied woe."

In "Light and Water," the poet reveals the current hideous conditions the Niger Delta people. The poet writes:

Our nights
Are banished
In gas flares
Of roasting bodies

The roofs and crops
Overlaid by emissions
From the fryers
Become pogrom lampblack (Wilson 10).

In this poem, the poet presents the prevalent inadequacies in the region which reveals the struggles of the region's people amid gas flaring and constant pollution such that their bodies roast in helplessness. It is also

interesting to note that releasing some gaseous elements destroys the farmers' plants. According to the persona:

Our homes
Turn to troubles
Multiplying our vagrancy
Amidst dynamite oil wars (10).

The above stanza points to the fact that the Niger Delta homes "turn to troubles", meaning the region has become a homeland of assorted dilemmas. As the poem unfolds, we discover that the people's crops no longer yield well due to dynamite shoots and oil spillages. Farmers toil in vain and, at harvest times, return with empty baskets.

Conclusion

Niger Delta Literature used to be literature that centres its attention on the theme of appreciation of the beauty of the natural Niger Delta environment. However, the theme has changed to somewhat revolutionary a few decades ago since the discovery of the black gold (crude oil) that brought about untold degradation, conflagration, oil spillages, and widespread destruction of the economic environment of the Niger Delta People. These researchers have with this essay contributed to the body of knowledge having revealed a pragmatic perspective of the selected poets' works. It is no doubt that this work will be a helpful material for scholars. Therefore, the paper concludes that halting oil exploration and exploitation will be ultimately beneficial for the well-being of the Niger Delta environment in its entirety.

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