

## Niger Delta Poetics and the Politics of Environmental Rebranding

Lawal Marvelous Adedoyin<sup>1</sup>, Megbowon Funmilola Kemi<sup>2\*</sup> and Uwah Chijioke<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>General Studies Department, the Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, P.O. Box 136,  
Saki, Oyo State, Nigeria

<sup>2,3</sup>Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of Fort Hare, Private Bag  
X9083, East London Campus, Eastern Cape, South Africa 5201

E-mail: <sup>1</sup><lawamarve@yahoo.com>, <sup>2</sup><kemimeg@gmail.com>, <sup>3</sup><CUwah@ufh.ac.za>

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**ABSTRACT** The Niger Delta extends over 70,000 km<sup>2</sup> and makes up 7.5 percent of Nigeria's land mass. The region has experienced the bad side of mineral exploitation with the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities with only a meager share of the dividends. This study delves into how literary artists particularly poets in Nigeria have articulated their dissent against the excruciating age-long suppression. While many scholars have looked into the Niger Delta issue from socio-political angle, an ecological platform has been purposively chosen, beaming the search light on Albert Otto's *Letters from Earth*, Tanure Ojaide's *Tale of Harmattan* and Sophia Obi's *Tears in my Basket*. This research work is based on ecocriticism, a theoretical framework that engages nature, looking into the untoward cultivation of natural resources. Niger Delta poetry therefore exposes hard core challenges on environmental degradation with oil pollution, gas flaring, desert encroachment, animal extinction, acid rain and sea pollution subsumed. The poets in their different poetic input unite in adopting a fearless stance as worthy activists as they mediate between mother earth and her age-long traitor. This study use intellectual resources toward reversing all actions enhancing despoliation of the earth. Hence, it squall for immediate rescue of the hitherto perishing valuables nature enables.

### INTRODUCTION

Eco-activism began as a major activity of the decades on 20<sup>th</sup> century and has gone on to the present. It sought to create awareness of the contradictions within the society, particularly concerning the desecration of the ecosystem, by agents of the state, even individuals and organizations. This phenomenon is generally seen as paradoxical, especially in the western world (Kershaw 2002: 119), a contribution stemming from perceived opposition between "culture and nature, spawned from cultural actions that influence the environment" (Taiwo 2009). This research work is based on ecocriticism as a literary theory for a meaningful textual analysis.

The first person to use the term 'ecocriticism' was said to be William Rueckert in 1978, whose purpose in doing so was to suggest that ecological terms and concepts can usefully be applied to the study of literature. This, however, is not the dominant meaning of the term. It tends to be interpreted more loosely as a general term for the study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment. Although a number of critics such as Leo Marx and Raymond Williams have considered the importance of the environment in literature, it was not until the late 1980's and early 1990's that it became a recognizable sub-branch of literary and cultural studies (Buchanan 2010: 143).

Buchanan (2010) also stated further that ecocriticism defines itself as a practice of reading literature from an earth-centered (rather than human-centered) perspective. There is also an activist dimension to ecocriticism; at least part of the reason eco-critics want to discuss the centrality of nature in literature is to raise awareness more generally about the need for concern and indeed action with regard to the environment. It is, however, not surprising that many

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\*Address for correspondence:  
Megbowon Funmilola Kemi  
Department of English and Comparative Literature,  
University of Fort Hare Private Bag X9083,  
East London Campus, Eastern Cape, South Africa 5201  
Cell: +27603734641,  
E-mail: kemimeg@gmail.com

eco-critics are also active in the environmental justice movement, whose concern is the uneven and general inequitable distribution of the burden of environmental degradation. This research work covers the reactionary stand of the Niger Delta pen militants against the social-economic ills that threatens to deny their existence.

### **The Niger Delta of Nigeria**

The Niger Delta extends over about 70,000 km<sup>2</sup> and makes up 7.5 percent of Nigeria's land mass. Historically and cartographically, it consists of present-day Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers states. In the year 2000, however, Obasanjo's regime expanded its definition to include, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Ondo, Abia, and Imo states. An estimated 31m people of more than 40 ethnic groups speaking some 250 dialects live in the Delta, the Ijaw being in the majority. Their livelihoods are primarily based on fishing and farming. Paradoxically, the coastal delta experienced mixed fortunes with the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities from 1956 onwards; but the minority status of its inhabitants remained intact as the political configuration that developed after the country's independence titled power and authority in favour of the three biggest ethno-regional groupings: the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the west and the Igbo in the east. The situation is made worse by the fact that oil exploration has adversely affected the local economy. Thus, oil was an issue in the quest for self-determination by minority groups in the Niger Delta, as exemplified by the grievances they brought before Henry Willink's Commission of Inquiry into the Fears of Minorities in 1958. Since then, however, when oil became the fiscal basis of the Nigerian state from the 1970's, the grievances have assumed more vociferous and dangerous dimensions, particularly with regard to the need to correct the lopsided revenue allocation in favor of the federal government or the debate on resource control (Ukeje 2011).

Some two million barrels a day are extracted in the Niger-Delta. Since 1975, the region has accounted for more than seventy-five percent of Nigeria's export earnings. Much of the natural gas extracted in oil wells in the Delta is immediately burned or flared, into the air at a rate of approximately 70 million m<sup>3</sup> per day. This is

equivalent to forty percent of African natural gas consumption, and it forms the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions on the planet.

The environmental devastation associated with the industry and the lack of distribution of oil wealth have been the source and/or key aggravating factors of numerous environmental movements and inter-ethnic conflicts in the region, including recent guerilla activity by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta. People of the Niger Delta have become ecological refugees because of these eco-unfriendly activities. On the global scene, the present devastating natural disasters, such as cyclones, earthquakes, landslides, among others, have been blamed on the disposition of these 'enemies' of the natural world (Taiwo 2009).

Delta oil communities harbor deep-seated resentment against government, and multinational oil companies, aggravated by the curious irony that they host vast oil and gas reserves but still live, for the most part, in abject poverty, acute unemployment and poor health (Ukeje 2011). Invariably, conflict began to brew and escalate during the 1990s, against the backdrop of past failed promises, growing marginalization and frustration that reliance on non-bellucose community-based actions to draw attention to their plight had yielded little, if any, positive result.

### **Objective**

This paper seeks to look into the concerns of the Niger Delta people and how they have transferred the burden into poetic scribbling. It also delves into the thematic preoccupation of the Niger Delta poetry which is environmental sensitization of the citizens and canvassing for healthy cultivation of the earth devoid of pollutants in a world of growing technology like Nigeria, making the selected poems a template. This work is necessary and relevant to the present political dispensation as more militants are forming a formidable league to fight their supposed common enemy- Nigeria. It is a paper that brings to bear the past of the Niger Delta linking it with the present predicament of the people with a view to make the Nigerian government and other critical stakeholders re-examine the environmental issues to forestall further degeneration of the ongoing crisis in the region.

### METHODOLOGY

This research work is basically the textual analysis of three purposively selected texts based on ecocriticism as a theoretical framework. The tenets of ecocriticism are looked into in the selected texts sampled.

### OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis will be done with reference to Sophia Obi's (2005) poem titled *Tears in a Basket*, Tanure Ojaide's (2007) *Tale of the Harmattan* and Albert Otto's *Letters from the Earth* (2015).

#### Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket*

*Along  
the portals  
of my coasts,  
the smoke and stench  
of oil  
crudely desecrates  
my marine reserves.* (Obi 2005: 1)

The poet is one of the worthy African poets that assume the responsibility of sanitizing the environment which has over the years suffered a myriad of ills along with its inhabitants. A poem that really brings to the fore the heartache of the poet and by extension the land dwellers in the pool of the collection is titled 'tomorrow's debris'. The weighty title appeals to all concerned stakeholders to check on all actions that can hamper tomorrow's bright entreaties.

*I pop up my head in the midst of wolves,  
who wine and dine on the toil  
of the weak and wasted.* (Obi 2005: 12)

The poet casts her aspersion on the ravening wolves in the nation, who find joy in feasting on the reserve of the weak and wasted breed. She further bears out her mind in these poetic lines:

*From among the battered thatches  
I hear the wailing of thirsty souls  
Who till and toil,  
Hungry for love.* (Obi 2005: 12)

'Among the battered thatches' as used by the poet signifies the battered tribe, the Niger Delta folks that are being relegated, abused, disabused, forsaken and pushed to the background of Nigeria's developmental goals and ambition. 'I hear the wailing of thirsty souls who till and

toil' portrays a tribe that is bent on working hard to reap the dividends nature affords. They are also painted as a tribe in agony suffering from unrequited love. Hence, they look thirsty for nurture and mutual love of her fatherland that now view them as an unfortunate minority, inconsequential in government scheme. Painful as it is, this is a tribe that longs to be cherished and treated with tenderness just the way a child gets the attention of his/her parents. It is however obvious that the poet bemoans the usual perception of the average Nigerian towards this dying tribe. The people now feel being used and thrown away after outgrowing their perceived productivity.

*The soil and rivers mourn,  
Heavy with the weight of the dead.* (Obi 2005: 12)

This couplet resonate the weighty message and it transfers the accumulated anger of the inhabitants to the readers. It is however pertinent to note that this land in question is now a famished land that threatens to spew out her inhabitants due to the depth of environmental degradation in the area. The people tilling the land do it to their own selfish advantage only to impoverish the land dwellers who by nature have been confined to certain professions. The farming and hunting expeditions are now fruitless tales since their natural assets are now working against them. The rivers and soil take a mournful look as they now accommodate dead beings. Ultimately, this leads to multiple deaths of human beings who sustain themselves with the stipends from fish farming and soil tillage.

*And orphans bury their agony  
In their baffled hearts  
their screams, sharp as missiles  
that torment them day and night,  
erode their plastic smiles.* (Obi 2005: 12)

The psychological torture is incomparable as children in the Niger Delta zone are not left out in breaking the unwholesome burden. Just before these children took to the streets with arms to fight their rights, their hearts have already become a dumping ground. Their tender hearts have long accommodated so many missiles which have torn turned them apart like rifles. They no longer smile because they now lie helpless, wailing their 'endless agony'.

Olobiri is another poem in the collection that readily captures the readers mind. The history behind Olobiri is not told, yet the poet vividly makes it a reminder of the ills of adventure mingled with discovery.

*'Olobiri'*  
*I frown*  
*Yes, I frown at the daily discovery*  
*Of unrequited oil returns*  
*The harvest belongs to the tyrant*  
*And so I frown. (Obi 2005: 13)*

The poet lends her support for a dying tribe that is at the verge of extinction. It is a war of pen against the so called tyrants who exploit a particular set of people to take care of the other populace in the name of 'brotherhood' or worst still, nation building.

*I hear the echo of years gone by*  
*In my vicinity, there is the quake of discovery.*  
*A zebra string of pipelines running*  
*Through my belly,*  
*Causing me to ache from relentless exploitation. (Obi 2005:13)*

The poet goes further by reiterating the effect of this sporadic exploitation in the days gone by. She pours out her affirmed hatred considering the fact that this dastardly act takes place in her own vicinity, the only place she can call her own. 'The quake of discovery' soon turned into an endless ache from series of relentless exploitation. The poet announces that the pipelines run through her belly, desecrating her sacred terrestrial body. She laments the exploitation that is capable of sniffing life out of her poor soul. She laments the exploitation that is capable of snuffing life out of her poor soul.

*Yet, brimful of unanswered complaints,*  
*I supply the wealthy parameter*  
*Of many a nation.*  
*Diminished by the effluence of my flow,*  
*My generosity hangs me on the scale of extinction.*  
*And because my crude oil flow is poisonous*  
*to my children*  
*Restive, they fight to survive the torment.*  
*(Obi 2005: 13-14)*

Sophia Obi brings out this alarming irony, the part of the nation feeding the whole nation remains famished. They remain poor to make others rich. Her generosity now brings her on the verge of extinction. She patiently explains the reason the children from the embattled coast now take to arms. They stay restive since several negotiations have turned to their displeasure.

Another poem in the collection worth taking note of is "A scale-pan of indecision".

*Burdened by boredom of insatiable riches,*  
*Suspended hearts on the scale-pan of indecision*

*Trail the footprints of peace*  
*In the jungle of life.*  
*It's a pleasure to trek the stretch of materialism*  
*Though accosted by greed, jealousy, lust,*  
*hatred, pain, shame*  
*Yet along life's narrow way,*  
*Few discover the Garden of Eden*  
*There peace, joy, and eternal happiness...*  
*Lie in want. (Obi 2005: 14)*

The poet now delves into the root cause of this disservice to her tribe and people. This exploitation of the natural resources is an off-shoot of bad decision. Insatiable riches is the force behind greedy accumulation of ill-gotten wealth. There is a clear-cut contrast here between the proceeds of elongated longings for materialism and the fruit of living in contentment in the Garden of Eden. However, the painful fact hammered by the poet is the unwillingness of the populace, especially the privileged few (government officials) to savor the returns in the blessed and serene garden of Eden. The Edenic garden encapsulate that quietness and sweet peace that brings with it contentment. Physically, the garden of Eden is the virgin Nigeria that needs to be cultivated tenderly. Garden of Eden is a perfect place where nature is at its best. The poet calls all a sundry to have a rethink. She beckons on all to have a penitent heart as they all journey to the Garden of Eden, the home of maximum tranquility.

The poem titled 'Routine' provides a glimpse of the duty of nature to man as he decides to nurture nature.

*The sun wakes in the morning,*  
*Yawns and stretches long beams*  
*Over mother earth*  
*The air sneaks through her nostrils*  
*Earth is radiant again, green with life*  
*As rays of peace spy into her brain*  
*To pick up her senses*  
*The sun shines to warm her cold heart,*  
*Plants grow by rapid inches*  
*To feed her*  
*Then, gradually, the moon blinks*  
*Her huge tired eyes*  
*And man goes to sleep. (Obi 2005: 16)*

The beautiful elements of nature walk in unison to make man's earth a cursory place to stay. Nature rejuvenates the mind of human beings and provides a constant source of impartation on his tabula rasa. The mother-nature also sus-

tains man by feeding him. Hence, human beings in their right senses should shun all acts that can rape nature; since nature has deeply contributed to his wellbeing. Esteeming nature very highly is tantamount to showing gratitude as explicated by the poet. The moon solemnly lures man to a peaceful sleep. It should be noted here that the sleep is natural and beyond that, a metaphorical exemplification. It provides an insight into the sweet rest and everlasting peace that becomes of man after his ultimate assignment of tending nature.

This poet also links us to the metaphysical aspect of this poem. The original abode of man as created by God was the garden of Eden, where everything was made beautiful for the nourishment of man. However, due to man's sinful deeds, he lost his blessed estate and had to face the pangs of death. It was also God's first assignment that man should as a matter of necessity be profitably engaged in tilling the earth. So, cultivation of the earth is as old as man himself and failure to do that bidding has its own repercussion.

The poet's last poem 'One Day at a Time' reiterates the past mistakes that have plunged the country into economic recession resulting from environmental degradation. 'Yesterday's laughter' is the causative factor of today's inconveniences. This poem foregrounds the idea that environmental degradation results from temporary gratification of the flesh at the expense of the future generation.

#### **Tanure Ojaide's *Tale of the Harmattan***

One can feel the palpable anger in the lyric and elegiacs from the poet's pen, a palpable lamentation for the devastation of the once natural and unpolluted landscape of the Niger Delta. Indeed, from his opening song, titled 'Goat song', the reader inundated by the tears of Ojaide as he repeatedly cries for his beloved Delta, the 'virgin beauty of the Delta' a beauty tied to the pristine spirituality of the Niger Delta (Okome 2002: 14). That *Tale of Harmattan* is replete with eco-activist poems is perhaps a bit trivializing the issue. Yet this blend of non-rhyming couplets and quatrains opens a vista of hermeneutical poetics, opening for the first-time visitor to Ojaide's world, a binary opposition of pristine beauty and mindless desecration, but it is this reality that is encapsulated in *Tale of the Har-*

*mattan* (Taiwo 2009). It is also pertinent to note that it further dwells on the belief in the artists' role in making a meaningful and lasting impact in the society as viewed through Chinua Achebe (1966) resolve:

*A writer who feels the need to right this wrong cannot escape the conclusion that the past needs to be recreated not only for the enlightenment of the detractors but even more for our own education.*

Agbor (2009) states succinctly that the past with all its imperfections, never lacked dignity. Ojaide's eco-radicalism is born from his Urhobo cultural affiliation, particularly the satire of the tribe which usually takes a fierce stance against its object of disdain. Taiwo (2009) posits that it is instructive that the poet's stance in this collection as in some other works is satirical and critical, because satire is militant in nature if he is to create the desired impact. Steeped as the poet is in this Deltan cultural semiotics, he exploits these practices in creating social relevance not only for himself, but also in creating a synergy between culture and environment, so as to highlight the evil in the contradiction between culture and nature in the west, a situation that has caused the devastation of the eco-system. Although there is no perceived opposition between the Niger Deltans and nature, Ojaide's poetics appears directed at the apparent transfer of this opposition into the Delta by the West in collaboration with some individuals and state apparatus. With this serving as the background, the poem titled 'priests convert and gods' is one of the action packed lines in *Tales of the Harmattan*.

*Priests, converts, and gods*

*Pentecostal converts burnt down the primeval grove-*

*There, they believed, witches metamorphosed into owls. (Ojaide 2007: 10)*

Ojaide takes a swipe at the ignorant worshippers who now behave like fanatics. They no longer see nature as sacred and something created by the God they worship.

*The developers tore down the forest that covered us*

*With green foliage, trashed the natural canopies. (Ojaide 2007: 13)*

The series of havoc that civilization brings to bear is brought to the fore. The trees that should naturally serve as wind breakers and shelter from nature when it runs wild is now toyed

with by the visionless developers. The developers argue foolishly that infrastructure like roads, basic amenities such as schools and recreational facilities like sporting centers worth more than our lives that is now at incomparable risk.

The poem titled 'Quatrain suite' x-rays the splendor of the nation Nigeria before its rape by the wicked poachers who think backward. The poet reminisces and quietly admires her landscape as a groom savours the beauty of his beloved bride with passion.

Hence,

*My memories chase out the army of poachers  
In their green outfit of old seasons they  
restore  
the tattered map of the country. Now the  
starving  
amongst us trip over carcasses they won't  
even touch.* (Ojaide 2007: 18)

The thought of the good old days hunts the poet as he vividly brings back the virgin Nigeria. He graphically presents the reader with the image of an army of poachers whose full time job is to rip Nigeria of her honour, strength and remaining dignity. The poet now admits that the map of the country is tattered, signifying that not only the Niger Delta zone is battered. The despicable nature of these poachers is highly appalling as brought as observed by the poet. The nation now stinks as there are so many carcasses across the landscape.

*The map of my homeland has changed  
The cartographers blot out forests and rivers  
Oil wells and flares dot the new landscape-  
Now nobody recognizes the beauty queen's  
face.* (Ojaide 2007: 18)

The poet bemoans the fall of nature. This homeland has always been a quiet terrain for proud adventurers. The beautiful home nature made has been a therapy to the distressed, discouraged and the feeble. It has yielded a series of inspiration to those who beckon for it. Why will the cartographers leave out the masterpiece originated by an orderly God himself? How healthy can the inhabitants live when dangerous oil wells and flares replace mother of all living- nature? Can a new landscape suffice a nation that brews with human faces? When beauty fades away and cruelty echoes, then we are all on a suicide mission.

Tanure Ojaide, equivocally summons concerned people to answer some mind boggling questions:

*When the migrant birds return, how will they  
know*

*Their homes from others in the wilted do-  
minion?*

*If they stray from the native soil, its because  
Flaring winds blew them to where nobody  
lives.*

*In town there are new roads and signposts  
As well as waves of rats and migrants-  
Democracy demolished monuments of dic-  
tators.* (Ojaide 2007: 21)

The migrant birds used by the poet pictures the proceeds of nature, the bounties nature provides humanity. The effect of despoliation of the earth can make the migrant bird stray from its native soil in search for tranquility. The migrant birds can also be business moguls and tycoons from the world over, who are engaged in restless adventure to nest their business ventures. The poet points out some fearful but hallowed truths. Now, we can now boast of some new roads and signposts but deep down, people still sigh for the good old days where peace reigns sublime.

The message that Ojaide seeks to relate in the poem titled 'For my grandchild' cannot be ignored.

*For my grandchild  
My children have had no scholarships;  
They can't fish or tap rubber as I once did.  
(Ojaide 2007: 23)*

The first couplet by the poet is a painful resignation to the awful realities of the moment that the poet contends with. He lashes out to the stakeholders in the government parastatals capable of molding young minds but have failed in this responsibility. There is a major shift in the occupation of the children. The anguish of the poet resonates in the following couplets as what meets the eye is not commensurate with earlier expectation:

*The river transformed into a snake of a tomb  
and the forest fraught with flares and fumes.*  
(Ojaide 2007: 23)

There is an endless lamentation from the seasoned poet who decides to lend a voice to the tribe facing the danger of extinction.

The poem titled 'Oil Remedies' logically chronicles the multi-various usefulness of the red oil before the discovery of the 'subsoil oil', the black oil. He affirms this in the opening couplet:

*Produce of the blessed palm tree, testimony  
Of industry of men and women; oil confers  
wealth.* (Ojaide 2007: 28)

Then, 'rules kept trees safe from avid cutlasses'. The trees were free from the cruel massacre of their arc enemy-cutlass. Red oil, a product of nature was renown in every household. Its praises is sung everywhere considering its weighty relevance to human existence. Just as nature preserves life, the red oil preserves life, the red oil preserves the delicate skin from the cracking harmattan. It even performs the sacred role of lightening the paths of both humans and the gods. Its therapeutic value is pointed out as it turns 'decongestant relieving patients. How priceless is a natural balm that heals wounds sustained by humanity. It also 'dispenses health in the clinic-less community'. It serves as the community's first aid when there is no doctor. The red oil was a sign of royalty that 'makes every meal a feast'. It is a hall mark of riches. How is this priceless natural balm that heals wound sustained by humanity? The poet solemnly avows.

*The oil we know has always been the... —  
Friend of the eyes, it fuels a bright spectacle  
Then came subsoil oil, no longer red but  
black,  
Converted by entrepreneurs into capital  
fuel.* (Ojaide 2007: 28)

The mood of the poem changes as the poet changes as the poet expresses his disappointment at the turn of the event. He projects the 'black oil', as a dagger that the entrepreneurs wield to enrich a minute fraction of the society. It is pathetic because this 'subsoil oil' bleeds continually from the earth flowers light.

The poet tactically lampoons the agents working against nature in a purely capitalist domain by stating the obvious fact;

*It is we who live in the dark that give out  
light  
They make bonfires of our blind ancestors  
After hauling away priceless pools of abundance  
and leaving with us silent and roaming epidemics.* (Ojaide 2007: 29)

The poet exposes the societal ills done to the people of the region by comparing the images of light and darkness. It is pitiable when the only consolation prize for the degradation of the Niger Delta is unapologetic darkness when

other communities are lightened. The environmental hazard resulting from constant plunder of the land is animated as the poet sets the data straight.

In the poem titled 'For the Egbesu boys' the poet as an advocate of change, charges the youths to stand up for their zone. He provokes them to persevere in the fight and synergize for a worthy cause. He further appeals to their youthful militant minds not to relent until the job sanitizing the environment is mutually achieved. Thus;

*With your white headband the god you serve  
recognizes your steadfast faith in his power-  
Egbesu retreats not from war thrust upon  
him!  
Supreme warrior, Egbesu runs not from a  
fight.  
Let the overloads call you obscene names.  
Let the benefactors of robbers vilify you.  
Let the favourites of tyrants harass you without  
rest,  
Let criminals and outlaws call you callous  
names;* (Ojaide 2007: 42)

By virtue of the poet's position as a warrior with the mighty missile turned instrument- pen, he aptly captures the peril the youths are likely to face in the terrain of opposition. He already knows that justice has its price, it can never come easy especially when callous souls are willing to die holding on to their loots. Like a seer, he predicts their future withdrawal of right to self-defense, safety and ownership of properties. He foresees a very tough fight but laden with triumph. He goes on to reenact the real reasons why the youths must take a fierce stand against overdue oppression.

You cannot live on your rivers, primeval providers;

*They kill the fish population with a sludge  
You cannot even drink water anywhere  
They pissed down barrels of arsenic into it.  
They flare gas to raise demands for the commodity  
And in so doing mangle every farmer's harvest;  
They set hunger on loose after you;  
They unleashed diseases to devour you.* (Ojaide 2007: 43)

The poet employs this aforementioned reasons as the justification for the confrontation. He sees the region as being left with no option

than to fight to win since refusal to resist will imply perpetual servitude and acceptance of life of misery and woes.

### Albert Otto's *Letters from the Earth*

Albert Otto is a budding poet who admits that the earth at the moment is in shambles. He posits that the earth longs for reasoning by human kind at large. His poetics covers natural entities like the state of the cosmos, the air, the sea, the orbit, the ever drying environment, the ozone depletion which is evident of man's untoward carelessness to his only habitable environment-earth.

Oha (2007) in his forward posits that Otto sees his poetry as a functional art that is not just for its own sake. Thus, there is a running activism in the entire voice of the craft. He touches all aspects of our ecosystem. The collection is divided into four broad parts according to the various themes treated in the collection, tagged parcels. The first part touches all the hard core issues about environmental degradation: Oil pollution, gas flaring, desert encroachment, animal extinction, acid rain, and sea pollution. The second part deals with other sensitive aspects of our ecosystem like gender inequality, cultural bias and injustice, infertility, nude dressing, prostitution and dearth of justice. The third part attempts at celebrating the harbingers of art, truth and justice while the last part is a call to the omniscient God to help man in his ignorant maltreatment of the environment. The final or, the fourth part 'Earth Songs at Twilight' examines the aftereffect of this environmental mismanagement.

The collection opens with a short but loaded poem of five uneven lines titled 'Moods of the earth':

*Here is a poisoned earth  
Of wastes and beheaded trunks  
Of spillages that ripple to the banks of rivers  
Of fishes fleeing from oil spills trapped  
Dead in cans of greenhouse gases...*  
(Otto 2015: 15)

The havoc done to the earth is brought to the fore in this concise poem. The accumulations of the missiles thrown to the earth have turned the only habitable space into a poisonous environment. The rivers are not spared from the unwholesome attitude of man. The fishes that signify life in the waters are now dead in cans.

The second poem titled 'The herald' prioritizes the poet's social responsibility to his immediate environment.

*Arise, arise for the crowning pen  
Heralds the dawn of mediation between  
The tractors and the trees  
The gases and the galaxies...* (Otto 2015: 17)

He calls on all stakeholders to arise and mediate between nature and its perceived foe that lurks in the dark to prey on its benefactor. The poet wields his powerful poetic weapon to mediate between 'the conqueror and the conquered earth'. He goes ahead to inform whoever cares the volume and the urgency of the herculean task of mediation that he himself has willingly taken up.

*Arise, all the earth, for now  
I clutch my eco-friendly pen  
A stickler for sanity,  
A trumpeter for tranquility.  
I clutch my saving cannon whenever  
Treaties are not treaty,  
Ecosystems are not ecosystems.  
Arise, if you love Earth green, now.* (Otto 2015: 17)

He leaves no one in doubt about his radical stance as an eco-friendly cheer leader who canvasses for restoration of sanity in an upside world. He makes bold to state that his eco-poetics is like a trumpet beckoning on supporters for lasting serenity in a world submerged in the miry clay of insanity.

Another poem that is insightful in the collection is 'The Great Palm'. This is the choice spot where the poet dishes out some helpful pieces of advice like a physician would give medication to his patients. The poem revolves around how supposed wastes in the community can be of great value.

*Dear woodman,  
If you ever cut down a palm tree  
Send the fruits and kernels to the oil men  
Of the mills, dehumanized by policy.* (Otto 2015: 17)

The poem dwells much on recycling nature and putting it in a better shape to be highly productive for humans. Being prudent in exploring our landscape, farmlands etc. is more needful in an age where human existence is further being threatened. The nation Nigeria cannot afford to waste her God given depleting resources due to willful ignorance or pure indifference and negligence:



*Dear woodman  
If you ever cut down a palm tree  
Send the trunk to the women by the roads  
Roasting foods from sunrise to sunset. (Otto  
2015: 18)*

The palm tree is just one of the several useful natural products that lie fallow or are underutilized. It can be a veritable source of employment if channeled appropriately while the chunks of Nigerian youths sing the unmelodious anthem of 'no job'. 'The great palm' is often underused by the steaming populace who seriously need an orientation from the poet. The mere thought of the oil palm brings to mind its kingly role in the kitchen.

*A beach of trash  
At a windswept beach,  
Late one afternoon,  
I met a tourist  
Unabashed, drinking, dining,  
Casting cans and beer bottles into a kind  
sea,  
I begged him to spare the sea,  
"what is it, is this sea yours?" he barked.  
"No," I echoed, "it's ours to groom and  
guard  
As though it were a newborn baby  
Lest, soon, too soon, our feet, our heels  
Should never again touch here". (Otto 2015:  
20)*

This poem takes the form of a narrative as it evokes anger from the eco-friendly critic. The persona appeals to the sense and emotions of the unabashed 'piggy tourist'. Instead of the tourist to be remorseful about his callousness to nature, he barked at the agent of change who wants to set the records straight. The poet subtly prepares the mind of those who may want to go the uncommon way since environmental pollution is a game of number. Albert Otto did not stop the poetic lines without giving a sound warning to all piggy nature users. It is either man decides to nurture nature tenderly or bear the grave consequences. The warning becomes frantic as he employs the device of repetition to elucidate the swift impending doom on humanity if they remain indifferent or adamant to the course of nature.

*Women of earth  
...male and female He created them.  
God blessed them, saying to them,  
Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth. (Otto 2015:  
39)*

Albert Otto takes his eco-activism to another perspective as he brings to the fore the purpose of creation that many now preaches passionately against. He takes a reactionary stand against individuals who are gays and lesbians by pointing to them biblical injunctions that was perceived to be in existence since time immemorial. From that biblical allusion, if the second sex is not necessary, Eve wouldn't have been created. Nature revolves around human existence; hence, man must desist from any act that can pitch him against nature.

*Cosmetic nudity  
In the old lanky cathedral  
Sacred and sacrosanct  
My eyeballs were entangled  
By a whorish maiden  
Cat-walking the sun-lit terrace  
In a beauty (dis)- contest:  
Half-naked,  
Half-clothed,  
Half-human... (Otto 2015: 46)*

The old and the new ways of life as compared by the poet are far apart just like the north is to the south. He announces an aberration inside an old lanky cathedral where the poet gets a shock of his life down her spine at the sight of a whorish woman. The evils of civilization are vividly captured by the poet in his heart rendering imagery. Anything against nature is an anomaly; hence, the whorish maiden prides herself in a beauty dis-contest, cat-walking like an animal.

The second stanza of the poem showcases the keen disapproval of the poet against anything that destroys nature. How on earth will a woman feel accepted by the society only when she glows in chlorine-bleached skin? No wonder there are several epidemics to check nature abusers! The poet sounds a note of warning to the women who take solace in eroding their god given natural endowments only to trade it for anti-nature phenomenon that can never stand the test of time. The poet argues that abnormal cosmetics will only attract the wrong sets of men. He hammers the obvious point that unnatural things cannot be used to attract true love since love does not behave itself in an unwholesome manner.

In another poem titled 'Hope lulls the earth' the poet sends a ray of hope to the readers as envisioned by him. Despite all despicable activities, he remains hopeful that in spite of the thick darkness at present, there is still light at the tunnel.

*I see the  
 Vision of vivacious children  
 Shouting and shedding their  
 Smoke-stained clothing,  
 Leaping to touch some  
 Yellow-red flowers  
 Blooming like fireworks. (Otto 2015: 38)*

The poet, having an insight of what the future holds for the recalcitrant generation, he provides the readers of his muse with the repentant nature of the younger ones. There is a complete turn-around from consuming substances that rupture their natural temples.

*I see everything beautiful-  
 After a long chemical holocaust  
 Caked our earth and ruined lives-  
 Crystal-clear streams, animals  
 Edifices, evergreen forests, and  
 Well-watered parks...  
 And hope lulls the earth. (Otto 2015: 38)*

### CONCLUSION

Restoration of hope is the cardinal drive of all the poetic lines. It is never an overstatement that in consonance with other African poets of patriotic instinct in the Niger Delta, Sophia Obi, Tanure Ojaide and Albert Otto all implore the readers through the medium of poetry, to pay attention to the seeming risk that looms for those that abuse nature or indifferent to its state, as the situation is critically a matter of life and death: The poets are all united in their strong desire for nature to run its free course.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper projects that scholarly attention be given to literary engagement of environmental concerns in order to forestall environmental hazards. It also proffers that fairness in environmental exploration be promoted in all.

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