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Environmentalism of the Poor and the Environmental Poetry of Nigeria

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

The need for the scholarship on African literature to be attuned to the issues that affect the environment has become urgent in the event of the massive degradation and destruction of the environment caused by uncontrolled resource extraction in postcolonial Nigeria. This contribution adopts Rob Nixon's theory of environmentalism of the poor in order to explore how Nigerian poetry represents the interconnectedness of the environment, social justice and human rights is violated in the clash between members of the official landscape with the inhabitants of the vernacular landscape and how these poets have developed an African version of ecocriticism accustomed to specific interests of their society. We engage in a close reading of the texts in order to expose a dual vision of the environment that goes beyond natural physical one and extends to the issue of social injustice.

Keywords: Environmentalism of the poor, social justice, ecocriticism, dual vision.

Introduction

This study is animated by current interest to apprehend issues that affect the environment and attempts to shift away from abstract issues to a consideration of the environment within the specific interest of a society in the postcolonial context. This entailsquestions about how the environment is rooted in a society's unique experience. This is why Vidal (2008) and others have surmised that even though ecocriticism has deep roots in North America, there is no "good reason not [to] develop an African [version of] ecocriticism (p.88). Such a version will be attuned to the specific interest of a society to nature while revealing the link with the past.Vidalshow that ecocritical reading in African literary scholarship must "pose African questions and find African answers". Thus, he insists that ecocritical oriented critique must be "rooted in local [regional] concern for social life and its natural environment" (p.88). He illustrates how this can be achieved in his re-reading of J.M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*and proves that it can be read "ecocritically from and for South Africa".

Vidal's call for an emphasis on the local is reinforced by scholars such as Heise (2008) on the need to "reinvest in the local" (*Sense of Place*, p.21) and the case that the resistance in the global South including Nigeria is entangled with the view that the

devastation of nature is linked to colonial appropriation and its aftermath (Heise, 2019: p.282).Also, Amatya and Dawson (2020) underscore that extreme extraction and the persecution of frontline communities exacerbate incidents of environmentalism of the poor. They recall the "attacks on Indigenous people in the Amazon as part of a global trend linked to extreme extraction and the persecution of these frontline communities" (p.2). Extreme extraction and its effects on the Indigenous population in the Amazon serve as a tipping point of the effect of extraction in other parts of the South. Apart from the Niger Delta where extreme extraction of oil and gas continues to inflame conflict between the local communities, the state and extractive interests, extraction in the form of grazing has become a key burner generating incessant conflicts between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers in the North Central and South East parts of Nigeria. These conflicts have generated the ongoing debates about ranching and the anti-open grazing bill at the highest level of legislation.

In specific terms, this study will examine how environmentalism of the poor has engendered consciousness-raising creative endeavor in order to foreground not just the environmental destruction attendant to development strategies in Nigeria but the pervasive social injustice in its wake. The discussion equally highlights the underlying histories rooted in Euro-Western colonization as the motivating political unconscious of a culture of social injustice even in the postcolonial era.Unlike in the work of critics that focus primarily on the surface of physical environment and its destruction, this study has a dual vision of the environment that goes beyond natural physical environment and extends to issues of social injustice and its historical archive in order to understand how it has contributed to the destruction of the living and non-living, animate and inanimate environment. This is in line with the view of Huggan and Tiffin (2010) that "environmental issues cannot be separated from questions of social justice and human rights" (p.53).

In their preliminary discussion on the work and death of the Nigerian environmentalist activist and writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Huggan and Tiffin recall one of the axioms of postcolonial ecocriticism thus: that "there is no social justice without ecological justice"(p.35). We highlight this assertion here not in relation to the work of Saro-Wiwa, but in order to link it with the work of a female Nigerian poet, Halima Amali. Unlike most female Nigerian writers who are preoccupied with the issues of gender rights and inequality, Amali shifts her poetic vision to the interconnection between the environment and social justice including gender inequality and alienation of the woman in the scheme of things. She laments about the manifest negative impact of environmental degradation but probes into the underlying culture of injustice and the exclusion of the woman and the poor. What we witness in Amali's poems is an extension of her consciousness-raising creative endeavor in order to foreground not just the environmental destruction attendant to development strategies in her context in North Central Nigeria, but the pervasive social injustice immanent in its wake.Accordingly, this study will focus on a selection of poems from the works of these poets, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide and Halima Amali.A poet like Osundare adopts what Buell (2005) has called "indigene pastoral" (p.29) especially in the opening sequence of poems in *The Eye of the Earth*. However, Osundare's adoption of "indigene pastoral" and the shape it takes to present his childhood experiences especially in the poems, "Forest Echoes" and "The rocks rose to meet me" forms an integral part of his overall program to secure an "alternative tradition" in modern Nigerian poetry (Aiyejina, 1988: p.122). What we will see in this regard is Osundare's proposal of an organic unity between man and nature, between the past and the present. Yet these underlying themes are central to his evocation of an anti-colonial pastoral which as Caminero-Santangelo (2014) highlights "… has been a crucial ground condition for those struggling against the environmental implications of modernity's narrative of development" (p.36).

Environmentalism of the Poor

Our understanding of the Environmentalism of the poor is derived from the work by Nixon (2011). It entails the various agitations and acts of resistance against the negative effects of the hunger

for raw materials for industry and for capital especially in the former colonized communities in the global South. Therefore, what we call Nigerian environmental poetry amounts to the various distillations through poetry of the destruction of the environment. This assumption buttresses the argument of Vidal (2008) that an African oriented ecocriticism must of necessity be local rather than universal. Guha and Martinez-Alier (n.d.) uncover the root of environmentalism of the poor by cancelling out the standing notion in the Northern hemisphere that the expression of environmentalism is an indication of a mark of acceptance into the club of the rich nations. Their main contribution is that they subvert this pervasive and exclusivist view of environmentalism. On the contrary, they show that the poor and developing areas of the world especially of the South express a strong sense of environmentalism. At the core ofthe environmentalism of the South is a disinterest in the mere protection and conservation of the wild species and natural habitation. There is a clear understanding of the environment to extend beyond the physical, lived and built environment in order to include other aspects that equally animate our sense of the environment. These aspects include the political, the economic, and cultural environment within which human beings interact and exist indifferent contexts.

The attendant injustice often compounded the local communities at the receiving end of the process which will have no other channel for redress except direct action by resisting both the State and the foreign industrial concerns through a variety of strategies.It is within this kind of background that environmentalism of the poor emerges. According to Martinez-Alier (2002), environmentalism of the poor is also called "popular environmentalism and the environmental justice movement"(p.10). In the same vein, Nixon (2011) affirms that the pervasive culture of "ecological and human disposability" precipitates "resurgent environmentalism of the poor" (p.4). Also, Nixon assents that "extreme assaults on resources … intensified resistance whether through isolated site-specific struggles or through activism that has reached across national boundaries…" (p.4).

In a section of his book entitled "The Environmentalism of the Poor and Displacement in Place", Nixon provides a clear model for apprehending the nature and feature of environmentalism of the poor. Thus, he affirms, "the environmentalism of the poor is triggered whenan official landscape is forciblyimposed on a vernacular one" (…)Describing a vernacular landscape Nixon shows that it is shaped by the affective, historically textured maps that communities have devised and shared over generations. These maps are replete with names, and routes; theyare alive to significant ecological and surface geological features. Besides, a vernacular landscape, though neither monolithic nor undisputed is integral to the socio- environmental dynamics of community rather than being wholly externalized. The official landscape, by contrast, is marked by corporate interests, the state and its agents, that encroach into the indigenous vernacular landscape with the intent to acquire resources. In Nigeria such "encroachment" is complicated by law inscribed in the Land Use Act of 1978. Its provision spells out that land belongs to the state. In line with the observation made by Guha and Martinez-Allier (n.d.), such a provision, as in the Nigerian case, grants "agents of resource-intensification preferential treatment by the State through grant of generous long leases over mineral … or the provision of raw materials".As Nixon asserts, with such legal provision in its favor, the official landscape writes the land in bureaucratic, externalizing and extraction driven manner that is often pitilessly instrumental (…). Earlier, Udumukwu (2023) has described how this imposition and endorsement of the activities of the official landscape by the State paves the way for "the privatization of the primordial public sphere that worsens the breakdown of the social contract" (p.5). We witness the inevitable clash that ensues in an incident from the novel, *Tides*, by Okpewho (2003). In this regard, a first-person narrator and character, Tonwe, narrates the ugly incident that involves a group of fishermen from Ebrima, a rural and indigenous community, a typical vernacular landscape, and their encounter with Atlantic Fuel, a drilling company and an official landscape. Tonwe narrates that the group of fishermen approach the oil rig followingtheir concern about the negative effect of the search-lights from the company's oil rig on the fish. Rather than a show of sensitivity and humanity, officials of the oil drilling company call in security

agents that beat up the fishermen into silence (*Tides*, p.11). The lesson that emerges from the representation of the fishermen's distress in Okpewho's novel is that theirs is a candid plea due to a genuine threat against their survival and the destruction of their longstanding way of life. This stress on survival is indicative of a major motif of environmentalism of the poor. Harvey (1996) hinges this engagement "upon survivability in all its sense" (p.390).

In the next section, therefore, we will begin with the poetry of Ojaide. Our discussion is guided by the representation of how the interconnectedness between the environment, social justice and human rights is violated in the prevalent clash between members of an official landscape with the inhabitants of a vernacular landscape.

Ojaide, the Environment, Social Justice and Human Rights

Ojaide is born of the Urhobo ethnic group, a major ethnic group in the core South-South region of Nigeria in the heart of the Niger Delta. In a foray of the representation of birthmarks in Ojaide's poetry, Shaka (2011) has described the poet as a "wandering griot withhis heart at 'home'…" An Urhobo compatriot himself, Shaka explains that "home" for Ojaide is the Urhobo ethnic origin "which helped to nurture and nourish the poet's imagination inspiring him to imbibe the classic practice of *Udje* song poetry" (p.525).That Ojaide's heart is at home resonates in more significant ways. His poetic imaginationis nurtured by his cleavage to his roots. Thus, his poetry is a sharp arrow at the heart of Nigerian modernity. Nigerian modernity is animated by a policy of *othering* that separates the majority ethnic groups as the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani, from the minority. The term "minority" itself acquires negative political and economic significance by promoting a culture of exclusion within the broad neocolonial scheme of things in Nigeria. Therefore, the Urhobo as other marginalized groups in the global South continues as Amatya and Dawson (2020) have shown to be "scapegoated as broad social crisis [in the nation especially in the era of military dictatorship] is pinned on their backs" (p.6)

A major idea in Ojaide's poetry, therefore, is how the crisis on the environment has bred incidents of social justice and the negation of rights.In representing the effect of this crisis on communities, Ojaide remains alert to the rhetorical strategies of his roots. This crystallizes in several poems from his numerous collections. But we begin here from the poem, "Annals of the Tribe" which appears in the collection, *Blood of Peace* (1991).As the title of the poem indicates, "Annals …" is a truthful archive and chronicle of the contemporary reality that has befallen the poet's ethnic community but also by implication, other politically marginalized and excluded groups in theNiger Delta and in the Nigerian nation at large.

Structurally, the poem appears in free verse and forty-one lines. These 41 lines are constructed in eight sentences with the prevalent subject matter of "losses" and "wails".The community has lost "heights" (l. 2), and "empty spaces/where hearts had stood as powerhouses"(ll. 4 to 5). Besides, it has lost "fire and hearth" (l. 6); it has also lost "the salt streams and mountains" (l. 9) and painfully, it has lost "gods and shadows" (ll. 29 to 37). At the same time, we should note the frosty and hostile comments in ll. 27 and 39, namely: "They did not love themselves" (l. 27) and "they loved losses" (l. 39).The attentive reader wonders why the speaking voice shifts from the empathetic tone that characterized the early lachrymal section of the poem to this hostility. It is possible that Ojaide relies on verbal tenor of the Urhobo oral tradition or perhaps he is engaging in a possible transliteration of the local language for a special rhetoricalforce. While that effect may be easily accessible to the native speaker, it may not be apparent to the non-native speaker of Urhobo language. Yet on the other hand, the hostile comment as it appears to the non-native speaker may equally be a reference to the claim that agents of extraction in their bid to intensify extractive policies and activity reveal the underlying crisis of neocolonial capitalism. Amatya and Dawson re-affirm what Antonio Gramsci has called "the organic crisis of Capitalism". It is "a crisis that is at once economic, political, and ideological". It manifests by

"scapegoating socially marginal groups, pinning broader social crisis on their backs (p.6).Within the context of the state neocolonial ideology in Nigeria, the "Tribe" the referent of Ojaide's poem forms the trouble makers because as the persona tells us "They did not love themselves" and as such "they love losses".

In terms of content,the poem, "Annals…" laments and condemns the consequence of the "politics of dispossession" in the face of the pervasive extractive activities especially in the Niger Delta. By "politics of dispossession" is meant the reproduction or the obverse side of the politics of representation (Bassey, 2011: p.17). Furthermore, it is characterized by "peripheriality, isolation, and negation perpetuated through a system of domination…" In terms of its structure and subject matter, the poem qualifies as part of what Nwahunanya (2011) has called "a blossoming of jeremiad, a lachrymal literature that bemoans the travails of a people marooned in a suffocating environment…" (p.38) The lachrymal tenor of this literature, Nwahunanya affirms, "is encased in a tone of lament or mourning" (p.39).

The speaking voice recounts the numerous losses that have befallen the inhabitants of the "vernacular landscape", to recall Nixon's (2009) earlier distinction between the vernacular and official landscapes. Accordingly, the persona parades before us a list of "losses" including, "their heights" implying their fundamental sense of dignity. The loss extends to their "fire and their hearth" (l. 6), that is their homes, their place of comfort andsuccor. The image of their lost fireand hearth is also indicative of their displacement and alienation on account of years of "slow violence" unleashed on their communities due to extractive activities. Nixon (2011) explains "slow violence" as the incremental and physical destruction of the physical environment and human and nonhuman lives as a result of pollution from extractive activities. What is foregrounded in "Annals of the Tribe" is the social, cultural and economic dislocation of indigenous communities especially within the poet's ethnic community, as a result of petroleum exploration and extraction.The references in the poem to "lost fire and hearth", of "lost gods and shadows" and the possibility of "making a mess of their praise names" are indices to the impact on the cultural life of the people.

Nevertheless, there are still more implication in all these. We will focus on two indices of nature, streams and mountains in lines 9 and 32, in order to further interpret this relatedness of cultural life and nature. Streams as it is used in the poem connect to water and aquatic life that benefits both human and nonhuman. Both human and nonhuman derive sustenance from the streams and rivers. For the human, also, streams and the other aquatic bodies like rivers, lakes, and natural creeks are equally at the heart of traditional belief and ritual practices. It is also the source of diverse occupations and economic activities. The inhabitants exhibit skill in fishingand in local transportation. For those in the hinterland, the streams and rivers form the basis for irrigation to sustain farming. Thus, when the streams dry up due to the impact from extractive activities on the environment as we witness in the Niger Delta, that impact registers in the affirmation: "Their hearts sunk into unknown depth" (l.1). The pronoun "Their" refers to the "Tribe" in the title. Observe the juxtaposition of two antithetical images in lines 1 and 2. In line 1 we are told of "hearts" that have "sunk into unknown depths" obviously as a result of the collapse of the foundation of their life, namely: the evaporation and disappearance of streams and rivers. In line 2 the rhetorical question: "how can they retrieve their heights?" becomes appropriate. It implies that as the foundation of existence collapses the very being of the tribe dissipates. But their "heights" also implies their identity, the meaning of their life. What follows is just logical: "weeping and gnashing of teeth". They "wailed", they "flaunted the empty spaces" where hearts had stood as power houses". The life of the tribe is filled with emptiness. Observe the use of the word "flaunted" to serve asanticlimax.

Observe, also, that so far in this section we have focused on the metaphor "stream". An important lesson deriving from this is anchored on the vision in the current debates on postcolonial eco-criticism, namely: that nature cannot be separated from the entire gamut of the social framework. The relationship between nature and other aspects of

society including issues of identity, rights, economic, and even belief system are interwoven. So far, we have not made any clarification on the second important natural motif in this poem, that of the image of mountain. Recall that in line 9 we are told: "they lost the salt stream and mountains". This is repeated in line 32.

Mountains understood on a literal level do not form a part of the ecology of the core Niger Delta. The area is mainly a flat terrain with its network of rivers, streams and natural creeks and mangrove swamps. Again, if we recall the idea that every poem happens in place and place defines the poetry of its poem, we will discern that implicit in this assertion is the multiple relationship between poem, place, and poetry (genre). The being of the poem crystallizes in place. It is place that finds representation in the poem. Without place the poem cannot exist but in existing the poem redefines the being of the place. In relation to the image of mountains in "Annals…" one may ask then, how do we read an image in a poem that does not happen in the place of the poem, that is, the original context of production as Rouse (2019) has counseled (p.xi). Rouse's counsel comesagainst the background of what he has identified as priority to Historicist criticism. Even though "mountain as a physical feature of nature is not part of the topography of both Urhobo and in fact the Niger Delta, but the word *ugbenu*is used in Urhobo language to signify mountain, hills, and elevated terrains. In this regard it denotes dignity, height, and a sense of pride. With this in mind, the figurative value of "mountains" begins to crystallize. At the plain of the human and human community it implies that when the streams which are central to life vanish, there is general catastropheas the people have lost their pride, dignity and humanity. In line 31 we are told: "they lost their salt" implying that they have lost the meaning of life.If we go a bit further,we will witness that the word mountain especially used to imply height, pride, and dignity, has a far deeper implication for the Urhobo woman. We gather from oral sources in our discussion with Urhobo natives that the woman takes special pride in keeping the home while at the same time maintaining the due honorto their men and heads of the homestead. But when the streams are gone and the homestead devastated, the woman is overwhelmedby a sense of angst. It is like her mountain being pulverized and her stake and pride are diminished.

Buried Indigenous Histories: "No Longer Our Own Country"

The poem, "Annals of the Tribe" is not dated unlike most other poems in *The Blood of Peace*.At the same time, it seems to be connected in terms of subjectmatter with the poem, "No Longer Our Own Country". The later poem appears earlier in the volume and is dated. Like "Annals …" it represents the consequences of loss. Thus in lines 1 and 2 we are told: "We have lost it/the country we were born into" (p.9). While "Annals…" has used the ethnic nationas a point of reference, "No Longer…"focuses on the nation. Thus: "the country we were born into/we can now sing dirges /of that commonwealth of yesterday" (ll.2-4).

On the surface, "No Longer …" sounds as a pensive and regrettableprocess of displacement spawned by the lossof autochthonous way of being. Thus: "we have lost it/the country we were born into" (ll.1-2). On account of our loss, we "sing dirges" of yesterday, of that lost place of being. The persona recounts this loss as the outcome of the campaign of deforestation in order to furnish a particular type of mercantile agenda as "our sacred trees have been cut down/to make armchairs for the rich and titled" (ll. 7-8). In a rhetorical question he reiterates this loss thus: "Where are the tall trees/that shielded us from the sun's spears" (18-19). The restofthe third stanza iterates not only the sense of loss but also of their abandonment. Yet in spite of the loss and abandonment there is an expression of hope of reclamation.

Beyond this manifest surface in the poem lies a deep level of meaning. In order to make sense of this deep turn in the poem we must be alert of an active sense of a "political unconscious" that animates the lyrical fervor of Ojaide's poetry. Following Jameson (1989), this is realized in "detecting the traces of the …uninterrupted and repressed and buried reality of history" in this poem (p.20). The history in question as the persona reports

is the suppressed histories and experiences that date back to the time even before formal British colonialism of the area now called Nigeria. Such suppression follows in the path of the cultures and the histories of colonized people in the Niger area to justify and sustain colonization. This buried history goes further back to 1826 with the influx of British merchant shipsin the Bonny River. The British gained the mandate after the Berlin Conference of 1885 to acquire Niger Delta area. This was followed by the renaming of the region as the Oil Rivers Protectorate with a charter given to the Royal Niger Company "to administer, make treaties levy customs and trade in all territories in the basin of the Niger and its affluent" (Coleman, 1986: p.41). What followed was a gradual and piecemeal acquisition of territories, protectorates and colony that was eventually called Nigeria after the bill on the Royal Niger Company in the House of Commons in 1899. It is important for us to underscore that the colonial project from its onset in the 1800s manifested on the basis of agglutinations –the appropriation of diverse and disparate lands and people under the mandate of the British Crown. This underscores the fact that the policy of land distribution and resource acquisition has deep traces to the period of colonization.

The account above is indicative of the suppressed history in Ojaide's poem. From what that historical purvey indicates, "we live in a country [land]/that is no longer our own". Nevertheless, the specific history in question in this instanceis not of the appropriation of lands and people under a direct British mandate. Rather it refers to a new kind of colonial appropriation that is animated by an economic mandate described by Amatya and Dawson (2020) as a "global epidemic of deforestation sparked by an intense wave of resource extraction" (p.1). This global epidemic, they show, is "linked to extreme extraction and the persecution of frontline communities … [comparable to] a wave of genocidal violence" (2).It is in this broad sense and its extended layers of histories that we can make sense of Ojaide's poem. Accordingly, the persona affirms:

we live in a country

that is no longer our own (ll.14-17)

"No Longer Our Own Country" serves to render visible the muted histories and materialitiesand to problematize the immanent violence wrought by the wave and culture of extraction on natural environment and on human and nonhuman lives. The persona asks in arhetorical question: "Where are the tall trees/that blow hot winds?"

This question contains an instance of what Iheka (2018) calls the "aesthetic of proximity" in the interface between human and nonhuman (p 22). At work in this section of Ojaide's poem is the sense of proximity on the basis of kinship. In their natural function as "earth beings", according to Iheka, the "tall trees … shielded us from the sun's spears". But the elimination of the trees and consequent condition of deforestation has unleashed destructionupon the natural kinship served by the treesto shield human and nonhumans from the scorching effect of the sun.The result is desertification as the "hot winds/blow parching sands".Besides, this poem is exemplary of how Ojaide engages in a subtle filiative reiteration of current Nigerian historical experience based on extractive economy and its origins in colonialism. In this regard Ojaide mobilizes poetic techniques in order to excavate the underlying history of extraction in the country. In the lines above headopts a rhetorical strategy in order to pinpoint a specific extractive practice that is based on timber logging and the effect on the environment and on the population.

Writer, Writing and Environmentalism of the Poor

Osundare emerged as a prominent poetic voice in modern African poetry as he epitomizes the alternative tradition in the later part of the 1970s. The alternative tradition formed the basis for the reaction against an earlier tradition celebrated as the Euro-modernist tradition. The essence of this shift from Euro-modernism to the alternative tradition is Osundare's responsibility to appeal to his readers. In this sense, Osundare is attuned to the mandate of Jean-Paul Sartre that "the writer appeals to the reader's freedom to collaborate in the production of the work" (Sarte, 34). In a fundamental way, this is a function of environmentalism of the poor. But our

main interest here is how Osundare accomplishes his appeal to his readers to their freedom by appropriating the gains of indigene pastoral and the discourse of alternative tradition. Caminero-Santangelo (2014) has described an earlier shift that manifested in environmental literary discourse from Africa. He has traced the relationship in the environmental writing of Maathai, Ngugi waThing'Ó and p'Bitek in East Africa. In the same vein Osundare's adoption of indigene pastoral and the discourse of alternative tradition is a commitment to give voice to silenced and marginalized groups in particular communities in Nigeria, in this case, his Yoruba ethnic community. Although the tone of indigene pastoral resonates a relapse to traditional past, it nevertheless positions his poetry to deflate universalizing tendencies that often exclude the poor and marginalized groups.

*The Eye …*demonstrateshow the poet links the crisis of food scarcitytothe adverse weather condition precipitated by the destruction of the environment. Osundare begins *The Eye …* with an invocation to the earth in a poem entitled "Earth". He summarises what the earth should be to everyone: "Temporary basement//and lasting roof" (lls.1-2). The basement and the roof are two parts of the house that give it strength and protection. This salute to earth ends with, "spouse of the roving sky//virgin of a thousand offspring …" (lls. 13-14). She is espoused to "the roving sky" anddiligently turns whatever she receives into a rich harvest while still retaining her innocence. This pastoral and nostalgic tie to the earth continues in "Forest Echoes" (pp.3-12). This poem is a recollection of the persona's experience as a peasant in the forest of his hometown. The poet calls this "a green desire" sprinkled with "perfumed memories." His desire is fresh, innocent, full of the sap of life and untainted by the contaminating innovations of modernity. The second stanza recalls a time when climate change had not brought about fluctuations in the length of the rainy season. "The rains have kept their time this year//Earth has (finally) won the love of the sky." This apparently refers to a time before the current era of modernity and industrialization spawned its condition of "slow violence" and the resulting toxic wastes that turned pristineNigerian forests into a waste land. The fourth stanza celebrates nature's fidelity in keeping to time. As the persona recounts "the clock, unhanded, falls// in the deep belly of woods//its memory ticking songfully//in *elulu's* sleepless throat…" (lls. 29-33). However, stanza seven marks a change to the pristine forest "of milling trees//wounded though, by time's axe//and the greedy edges of *agbegilodo*'s matchet" (lls. 69-71). "*Agbegilodo*'s matchet" which has its origin in the Yoruba language, is a reference to theextractive practice that is based on timber logging and its effect on the environment.This forest where, according to the persona, "pampered yams break heaps' bounds// and plantain leans earthwards" (lls 55-56) has lost many trees to greedy loggers. The persona goes ahead to celebrate the different kinds of trees. Each of these has its own peculiar characteristics and contributions to the society. The Iroko produces hardwood and is known as the king of trees, *Oganwo's* bark is medicinal whereas *ayunre* is good for making domestic fire for cooking. The persona also praises the palm tree for its ability to remain green and fresh all year round. The rivers Ogbese and Osun are not left out as the persona celebrates their natural race to the sea. These rivers function to maintain the ecological balance as they drain the land and contribute to the water cycle. In addition, the persona recognises the interrelationship between human and animal as he showers praises on the wild animals that abound in the forest. Thus: "A bevy of birds, a barrack of beasts, //a school of truant antelopes." (lls. 138- 139) This song of the forest touches almost every plant and animal but comes to an end as the persona's memory gradually fades away. "And now//memory//loud whisper of yester voices//confluence of unbroken rivers//lower your horse of remembrance//Let me dismount" (lls. 262-267)

In "The rocks rose to meet me" (pp.13-17) the persona is presented as a returnee that has discerned the effects of the destruction on the rocks due to mining activities. Nevertheless, the persona praises *Olosunta* for the gold it harbours. The persona advocates for a world where everyone will be given equal opportunities to enjoy the riches/gold embedded in Olosunta's belly. Thus: "The gold let us dig… so the world may sprout a hand// of equal fingers. (ll. 37-47). However, the persona realises

that they cannot mine the gold of *Olosunta* without defacing/destroying the rock which has been the home of their god. In a sense this poem "*Olosunta*" echoes the concern in Ojaide's "Annals of the Tribe". As in Ojaide's poem, Osundare's poem laments the destruction and loss of the people's items of symbolic capital including their gods as a consequence of the effect from extraction.

Environmentalism of the poor manifests in this poem as agitation is brought down to the level of the poor/uneducated man whose faith in the powers of the gods is being challenged by the desire to enrich himself and his society with the booty buried in the belly of the rock. One also sees that the persona demands that bad rulers whom he describes as "hollow chieftains" not appropriate the gold reserves for themselves. It is important to point out that the poet persona clearly understands that modernism, development or any kind of advancement in human society comes at the detriment of nature.

In "Harvestcall" (pp.18-21) which is a chant accompanied by *bata* music, the persona recalls the bountiful harvest of yams, corn, cotton and cowpea in past years and wonders why the farmers have nothing to offer the hungry masses. The persona arouses the readers' interest in the debate for food sufficiency by painting mouth-watering pictures of a plenteous era."This is Iyanfoworogi// where yams, ripe and randy, // waged a noisy war against the knife. (ll. 8-10). The sensual image evoked in these lines recalls a blissful union of the earth and sky. The persona continues "this is Iyanfoworogi// where a tempting yam sauntered// out of the selling tray// and the market became a mob// of instant suitors" (ll.25-29). The motif of marriage and consummation continues here and reminds the reader of a time when nature yielded her abundance to the hardworking farmer and was appreciated as a beautiful bride. Everyone benefitted from this blissful relationship as the patronage encouraged the farmer to give more loving attention to the earth which in turn reciprocates by yielding her very best. Just as a cordial relationship between the husband and the wife makes for a happy, joyful, productive union, a cordial relationship between the farmer and the farmlands also leads to abundance.

"Harvestcall" is full of sensual images celebrating the love story of the 'husbandman' and the earth. Phrases like "insistent sky and yielding earth"(l.21); "coy cobs rocked lustily" (l.31); "her narrow waist" (l.41); "disrobing kitchens" (l.43);" lips duly parted" (l.48)These images remind the reader that it is only when the earth gives her consent that the farmer and whoever else is a stake holder in food production can have a successful interaction with her. Unfortunately, the once beautiful mating of the earth and sky has gone awry resulting in low yield from the earth. Also, "Uncountable seeds lie sleeping// in the womb of earth//…awaiting the quickening tap// of our waking finger" (ll.70-74). Apparently, the unfaithful farmer had withdrawn his love and care from the earth which in return has clamped up her womb. Nevertheless, the sensual imagery reveals that the poor are essentially human capable of loving and in need of love.

Songs of the Marketplace is known as Osundare's attempt to bring his art of poetry to the ordinary citizen/common masses in the society. The entire collection, therefore, serves as an organ for the environmentalism of the poor as we witness a shift from the physical environment to the environment of social injustice in which the people are the victims of their own reality. Most of the poems bring socio-political and economic issues to the market place, which is regarded as the veritable place of meeting. Thus, the persona draws everyone into the conversation by giving them the opportunity to find answers to the crises in the environment. As a place of meeting, the marketplace is an arena of opinions on the issues that plague society.

In the poem "Excursion" (pp.7-15) we witness a panorama of the daily life suffused with poverty even as 'several government people' deny its existence. This denial presents poverty as an invisible phenomenon. Thus: "several government people //have passed through these streets// several Mercedes tyres have drenched//gaunt road liners in sewer water// … but rot and *tanwiji*escape// the uniformed eye// poverty is and invisible thing (ll.55-63). The poem underscores that poverty is invisible to the corrupt rulers since they remain oblivious to the effects of poverty. Apart from those in position of authority, the religious leaders are not spared as

the persona contrasts the appearance of the hungry congregation with the opulence of the preacher. The attack is pointed to the exploitative penchant of the preacher.

The inefficiency of the ruling class has impeded access to the condition of wellbeing. Therefore, babies are born with malformed limbs because their mothers suffered malnutrition during pregnancy. Such problems are thrown back to the poor masses on account of their carelessness and lack of commitment. Blaming the poor for the absence of wellbeing reiterates what Amatya and Dawson (2020) in their reference to Antonio Gramsci describe as the organic crisis of capitalism. As we noted earlier, it manifests in scapegoating socially marginal groups by "pinning broader social crisis on their backs".

In broad term, the title of the poem "Excursions" suggests the persona's tour of the toxic environment in which Nigerians live. The corruption found in government circle has permeated every layer of the nation and has been reproduced in different shades at each level of the society.Environmentalism in this poem does not dwell on deforestation, desert encroachment or crop failure but pays attention to how the political environment has made it difficult for the masses to live fulfilled lives.

The unique feature of Osundare's poetry is the adoption of a symbolic tenor that expresses rage sharpened in visual images and forms. Thus, he denounces both the destructive tendencies against the physical environment and the culture of social deprivation.The fourth movement of "Excursions" for instance, is devoted to an expression of this discontent. This anger resonates through all sections of society: from the villages, slums, markets, university campuses, and city streets.

Amali,Social Justice and Human Wellbeing

The poems of Halima Amali adopt a different tone in their consideration of the question of social justice within the overall context of environmentalism of the poor.Her poetry bears witness to how environmentalism of the poor in its unique form of resistance against the contradictions of contemporary reality might serve to build a new form of humanity that is alert to sustained level of emotional intelligence in solidarity with others.Halimaexcoriates the consequence of self-seeking agents that are shorn of empathy and who perpetuate violence at the environment and against the human and nonhuman entities in it. Our discussion on the question of justice derives inspiration from the account by Eze (2021). The thrust of Eze's account is the urgent need to promote "wellbeing" through literary representation in postcolonial Africa. "Wellbeing" shares affinity with the Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia*meaning human flourishing or prosperity. Working with the assumption that "we, all, are human" Eze opts for an orientation that is essentially "bottom-up" in opposition to the top-down approach that is focused on legalism and governmental apparatuses.

Following from the foregoing, our task therefore is to illuminate the link between the following key expressions arising from Eze's view of social justice. These expressions are: social justice, wellbeing and bottom-up approach.In order to execute this task, we will recall the idea of Wangari Maathai that there can be no flourishing, no social transformation, "no development without sustainable management of the environment" (Maathai, 2006: p.200).Maathai's environmental work through her Green Belt Movement in Kenya is exemplary of flourishing that can be achieved through grass root action that is propelled bottom up.

It is this kind of wellbeing that underwrites the poetry of Amali. Writing as a woman from the North Central region of Nigeria where women are generally silenced and excluded from the scheme of things, Amali's purview can be rightly described as bottom up. She shifts her focus away from the ecological environment to the political milieu that is marred by the failure in governance which in turn has bred the thriving culture of corruption, indiscipline, and the sheer negation of human wellbeing and the environment Mbembe (2001) has called this a culture of the privatization of the public sphere (pp. 26-28, 32).

Faces of Shame is Amali's collection that best evokes this culture of social injusticeand its

underlying crimes against the poor and the environment.*Faces of Shame*contains 41 poems which are arranged in five sections. The poems constitute a catalogue of the outwardshow of thisculture of self-possession and privatization of the public sphere that Amali represents as "shame". The title poem, "Faces of shame" (p.24) gives us a splendid display of the articles in this process of self-possession.

The poem is arranged in 29 lines and four stanzas. The speaking voice engages the reader through a process of "de-absolutizing the dominant and powerful in a manner that re-echoes the opinion of Terdiman (1989: p.26). The basis for such resistance is the prevalent environment of dispossession that flies in the face ofthe principle of justice and the promotion of the general good. Unlike the direct dispossession perpetuated within the context of petroleum extraction, the environment of self-possession dramatized in "Faces of shame" is acted out within the corridors of power through the crass looting and privatization of the public sphere for the purpose of outward show of individual gain. It is within this kind show that we can understand the immanent binary opposition in the poem between our/we, that is the community, the public and she/her, the individual. Thus, we are told:

Canopied in tonnes of cash

Carted off our treasury(lls. 1-2)

Observe that "tonnes" in the first line evokes the multicolour of different currencies. This is repeated in a related variant in lines 15 and 16, thus:

Millions, billions, trillions of cash fly in colours

In euro, in dollar, in pound world currencies

Observe also that the speaking voice denounces the futility of the greed in amassing different currencies that guarantee little or no security. Note, for instance, "plastered unto her skin/Glittering in golden carats". In other words, the ravenous acquisition is simply skin deep, superficial with no real guarantees. It is simply, the speaking voice asserts, "an unholy shame". Thus, whereas direct extraction flames an environment unleashing direct destruction and dispossession, the looting of the treasury for personal squander goes against the grain of any form of creativity. It violates even basic principle of individual growth by propelling these individuals in "a gallant dance of shame" while violating and dispossessing the community.

A question arises as we read and work through this poem. That question centres on the fact that here is a poem written by a woman even though there is no direct linguistic clue to decipher the gender of the speaking voice as in Okot p'Bitek's*Song of Lawino* (1970). But the curious issue is that the object of the attack in this poem is a woman whose greed for materialities and superficialities is simplyinfamous. In fact, there is a deliberate attempt to objectify the female,

In another poem entitled, "Enemies of our time", the speaking voice focuses on the indices that negate communal well-being, *eudaimonia*.As such the speaking voice challenges and interrogates the agents of governance who are projected as "vultures in government"(p.22, ll.5). The apparent goal of this interrogation is to make governance more responsive to the need of the people to preserve human dignity and equity. The points of attack are the impunity, outright theft of public property, corruption and the exploitation and of the female. A common word that recurs in the expression of these points of attack is the word "unholy". Thus, we are told in relation to the culture of theft, it is precipitated by an "unholy romance with our funds". In relation to corruption it is described as "unholy theft living freely/smearing the poorwith pains". The vice of "Rape" is mobilized to "Harassing the daughter of Eve... in a carriage of unholiness/for unholy Sons..." Amali's concern is the need to diminish the forces that promote social injusticeespecially within the corridors of power.

Amali shifts her gaze to the deep-seated environment of hatred that is spawned by the culture of impunity and the attendant indices that negate well-being, *eudaimonia*. Thus, in another poem simply entitled, "Enemies of our Time" we witness anacerbic attack against the cardinal pillars of the environment of injustice that characterizes the Nigerian experience. The persona is unrelenting as she lashes at the:

Hatred

Hanging ravenously over poor lives

…

Fuelling evil

For these vultures in government (p.22)

The points of attack are the impunity, outright graft and theft of public wealth. These opening lines from testify to Amali's sensitivity to how consideration of the environment must align, as we underscored at the beginning of this discussion, with a society's unique experience. Thus rather than blurring the internecine environment of hatred that beclouds the Nigerian postcolonial experience, she foregrounds it by describing it as:

Hanging ravenously over poor lives

Eating ravenously into the pores of our survival

A perceptive reader cannot but shudder at the monstrous environment of hatred that pervades the milieu of this poem. But Amali mobilizes caustic images and words in order to delineate the agents that spawned this monstrosity. She animalizes these agents as the "vultures in government" in their penchant for "impunity", "Theft", "Corruption", and "Rape".The image of vulture which is a scavenger as a pointer to the agents of state foregrounds the depth of the violence. The outcomes of this aggregated violence are: that of "stagnating our desires to happiness", that is to wellbeing; it includes "castrating our hopes to decency", "smearing the poor with pains/Disarming them of a say..." What crystallizes here is the poet's bottom up approach in the war against. Ultimately, Amali's campaign against social injustice strives to recreate and reimagining national developmentand wellbeing in alignment with human dignity.

In summary, therefore, this discussion has traced the nuances of the immanent struggle against social injustice as a long-term consequence of "development's destructive tendencies" as represented in the environmental poetry of Nigeria. By focusing on selected poems by Ojaide, Osundare and Amali, we have examined how environmentalism of the poor can engender consciousness-raising creative endeavor in order to foreground not just the environmental destruction attendant to development strategies in Nigeria but the pervasive social injustice immanent in its wake.

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