



## **PUBLIC AWARENESS AND DIGITAL BROADCASTING IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF SELECTED BROADCAST MEDIA IN CALABAR METROPOLIS, CROSS RIVER STATE – NIGERIA**

### **THE ECOCRITICISMS OF TANURE OJAIDE'S DELTA BLUES**

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#### **Abstract**

*This paper is an ecocritical study of Tanure Ojaide's Delta Blues. The study brings to bare the analysis of language use, symbols and images employed by the poet to establish the mood and tone infused in the message and the vision of the poet. In doing so, the purpose of the study is to analyze the ecological degradation as it affects the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Ecocriticism model is adopted as a theoretical model of analysis for the study. The study shows how the poet through images and symbols captures the human, political and environmental degradations in the region. Arising from the findings, the study recommends that the environment should be properly guarded to reduce the level of degradation in the region. The socio-political activities should be adequately improved to reduce the high level of marginalization, which the people of the region have been subjected to. The environmental experts should collaborate with government agencies to reduce the oil spillage, gas flaring among other environmentally adverse activities, which have affected the lives of the people in the region.*

*Key words: Public awareness, digital broadcasting, media*

#### **Introduction**

Right from Nigeria's Independence in 1960, the injustice against the Niger Delta people prompted Isaac Adaka Boro, the young radical nationalist, an Ijaw born revolutionary and master campaigner of resource control to champion a revolt against the oppressors of the people of Niger Delta to effect a change in the environment so that "man can be man." Consequent upon this fact, on February 23, 1966, he proclaimed the Niger Delta Peoples Republic with himself as Head of State to liberate his people from the mess.

Boro launched a guerrilla war against the then Federal Military Government with a group of one hundred and fifty nine comrades. He defeated the Nigerian Police Force but was later defeated by the Nigerian Armed forces on the 12th day of the battle.

This according to Ogede, it "gave rise to what is today known in political history of Nigeria as the twelve day revolution"<sup>1</sup>. By popular perception, the marginalization and balkanization of the people of the Niger Delta, the despoliation of their environment and the resultant conflict have their roots in the discovery of crude oil exploitation and production activities by oil multinational in the late 1950s.

Ogede further observed that, "the Niger Delta, a lush of mangrove swamps rainforests swampland, the site of rich oil and natural gas reserves in Nigeria Oil accounts for about 90 percent of Nigeria's export and more than 80 percent of government revenue". He concluded that: "despite being the richest geo-political region, in terms of natural resource endowment, the Niger Delta's potential for sustainable development however remains

unfulfilled and is now increasingly threatened by environmental devastation and worsening economic conditions.”<sup>2</sup>

According to King Francis in his critical appraisal of the poetry of Tanure Ojaide,

What currently prevails in the Southern oil enclave is a specific variant of internal colonialism, the specific, highly exploitative and grossly inequitable endowment/ownership exchange entitlements relation between the Nigeria state and the oil-bearing communities in particular, which explains why the enormous oil wealth generated is scarcely reflected in the living standard and life chances of the peasant inhabitants of the oil bearing enclave.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, there arose many groups from the Niger Delta region agitating for their constitutional right and environmental sanity. Apart from Boro's group, from 1990 - 2017, no less than twenty four ethnic based minority rights group emerged in the Niger Delta region mostly radically bent. These include the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Chicoco Movement, Ijaw Youths Council (IYC), Ijaw Peace Movement (IPM), Isoko National Youth Movement (INYM), Itsekiri Nationality Patriots, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), and Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) among others.

Paradoxically, the socio-economic location of the Niger Delta in Nigeria has largely created solidarity among diverse ethnic groups, fostering a culture of resistance in the process. The growth of a literary tradition in this context, especially in the poetic genre, is worth exploring as it is capable of enriching our understanding of a unique cultural practice in the Niger Delta. Appreciating this necessitates recognizing the enabling values for the making of a trans-ethnic literary culture in this context. Until very recently, shared ethnic values alone served as basis for studying the works of writers from any part of Nigeria as these were seen as having the potential to account for trends in their creative sensibility.

But the hanging in 1995 of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a notable writer and advocate of minority rights, in the context of the struggle against environmental

degradation and dehumanization in Ogoni Land, inspired writer within the region to decry the common predicaments of their people. The occasion of lamenting the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni leaders provided the opportunity for the poets to celebrate the cause they died for and, in the process, adopt him as the hero, not only the Ogoni but also of all the oppressed and impoverished people of the Niger Delta.

A clear testimony to this is the number of poetry collections and anthologies inspired by this brutal murder and the various tragedies that have befallen the region – Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Homesongs*, Adiyi Bestman's *Textures of Dawn*, Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*, Nnimmo Bassey's *We thought it Was Oil But It Was Bloody*, Ogaga Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp and an Anthology* edited by E. C. Nwosu entitled *For Ken, For Nigeria* reveal an abiding consciousness of the immediate physical environment. This translates their works into an awareness of the interaction between humanity and nature that runs through many poems in Gabriel Okara's *The Fisherman's Invocation*, Clark-Bekederemo's *A Reed in the Tide* and Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta*. It may be argued that much of the work of poets born and raised in the riverine Niger Delta constitutes the corpus of Nigerian poetry with an awareness of nature.

Recent experiences have inspired extending and awareness of the link between the human presence and Nature in the poetry of the Niger Delta to an assessment of the damage done to the society. This translates into an almost obsessive concern with the human quest to survive in an environment that was once rich and capable of supporting life. The Nigerian society is held responsible for terminating the age-old attachment of the people of the Niger Delta to their environment. Consequently, successive Nigerian governments emerge in the popular imagination of the people as agents of destruction. Their alliance with multinational companies like Shell, Chevron, Agip and Elf with business interests in the oil industry and the ecological disasters they precipitate then constitute the basic concern of much of contemporary Niger Delta poetry in English.

Ojaide projects the collective memory of the people by stressing the tragic loss of the bond they once had with their environment. As is usual with narratives of this nature, the persona becomes a metaphor for the communal.

My roots run deep into the Delta  
area. Its traditions, folklore, fauna



*An Experiment in Ecocriticism*" (1978). But in (1989) Cheryll Glotfelty during the meeting of the Western Literature Association in Corneld revived the term and argued for its adoption to refer to the diffuse critical field that before now had been known as the study of nature writing. Glotfelty's idea was that "literary studies in an age of environmental crisis conceivably may do some good and in some ways ameliorate the environmental crisis"<sup>9</sup>.

In her contribution, Carolyn Merchant in her work *Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* maintains that, "prior to the seventeenth century, nature to her was conceived as an organic model, a benevolent female and a nurturing mother, but after the scientific revolution, nature was conceived as a mechanistic model, a mere machine, inert, dead"<sup>10</sup>. Andrew Ross does not deny the reality of environmental degradation, but he emphasizes that such degradation is largely a product of socio-economic inequalities. In his essay entitled "*Revolving Nature: Towards an Ecological Criticism*" he holds that "the issue of environmental pollution should not be seen as a political rhetoric for election winning; rather, as an avenue to address the environmental crisis in the contemporary society"<sup>11</sup>.

Simone Estok in his essay "*Ecocriticism*" opined that "looking at the relationship that exists between literature and ecology, ecocriticism is not just a means of analyzing nature in literature, but rather, as something that entails a biocentric world view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of human conception of global community to include non-human life form and the physical environment"<sup>12</sup>. The implication of Estok's statement is that an ecocritical writer, apart from reflecting nature in his or her work should be able to show how literature relates to the physical as well as the natural environment. Similarly, Michael Branch in consideration of ecocriticism in his article *What We Talk About When We Talk About Ecocriticism* maintains that "human act occurs within a network of relationships, processes, and systems that are as ecological as they are cultural"<sup>13</sup>. Branch identifies the intricate relationship between nature and human beings. This in order words means that environmental degradation can give rise to both moral and cultural degradation in the society. Human beings do not exist as independent entities rather as dependent beings that cannot survive on their own, thus, the destruction of his environment-physical and natural, may lead to man's extinction from the earth. This paper agrees with scholars that

ecocriticism treats environmental issues not as external issue, but as an issue that affect human beings and the ecosystem.

### **Environmental Degradation in Selected Poems**

Environmental degradation is the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water and soil, the destruction of ecosystem and the extinction of wild life. It has also been thought of as the reduction of the capacity of the environment to meet social and ecological objectives and needs. Most ecopoets share this common motivation: the awareness that human beings have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of our actions are damaging the planet's basic life elements. This awareness rekindles a sincere desire from the ecopoet to contribute to environmental restoration.

In 'Delta Blues', the poet shows this awareness by first identifying with nature and sharing in the problem facing his society- the Niger Delta. The poet laments the destruction of the Niger Delta which he terms a 'shared paradise' and its environment is stressed in the poem. As a seeming ecologist, the poet does not condemn development but he shows that there is a clear distinction between development and destruction of ecosystem. The Poet states: "in the Niger Delta, there is the breaking of the peace of centuries and tainting not only thousand rivers... but scorching the air soil."<sup>14</sup>

This appears to be a lyrical poem in which the poet expresses disappointment over the state of his environment. Blues therefore depicts a song of lamentation and distress. The poet uses the term to suggest the agony, lamentation and diseases that have affected the Niger Delta region.

The poem is written in eleven stanzas but without a regular rhyme scheme.

The poet makes use of musical devices to enrich the musicality of the poem. For instance, in the last three lines of the fourth stanza of the poem, there is the use of alliteration. The repetition of the sibilant sound in 'brokers' 'centuries' and 'rivers' sounds pleasant to the ear and adds to the beauty of the poem. Apart from the musical components of the poem, the poet's diction captures ecological concern. For instance, the poet makes use of words like river, draught, palm oil, scourge, etc. These words carry ecological tone. These devices are also made use of by the poet in the poem 'Lingua Franca'.

In 'Lingua Franca', the poet reflects on the Niger Delta environment and observes that man's

occupation is harmful to the ecosystem. Before now, all the planet's basic support systems were in their natural state, but with the coming of Shell and other extraction companies, the bond that bound these elements was broken. As the persona in the poem observes, oil exploration is the major harm that the present technology has caused the ecosystem:

The shell broke the bond  
with  
Quakes and a hell of  
flares<sup>15</sup>

Now, after the bond was broken, what is obtained in the Niger Delta region is violence. The exploitation of the Niger Delta and its environment is not only a threat to non-living forms, but, as the poet shows, it is also the relationship between physical and spiritual world that is broken. Thus, as an ecologist, Ojaide calls for the restoration of this relationship.

The poet shows that toxic wastes from these companies in the Niger Delta pose a serious threat to human health. The neglect of the Niger Delta and its environment makes the poet assume the responsibility of a singer. In the poem 'The Singers Wish', the poet asserts that he has the duty of announcing these ecological problems in the society. As the persona of the poem opines that he wants to pull every ear to the street. In this lyrical poem, the poet expresses his concern for the environment. Through the deployment of devices like metaphor and apostrophe, the poet shows that our environment is human that needs our protection and preservation. It is through the poet's identification with human plight and ecological problems that the persona of the poem assumes the role of a singer, that sings to draw our attention to nature. As the persona of the poem asserts that he wants to pull every ear to the street.

### Human Degradation in Selected Poems

Human degradation has to do with the lack of respect for human dignity and worth. This concern for environment and human condition is stressed in the poem 'Wails'. This is an elegy in which the poet laments the death of his friend, Ken Saro-Wiwa. The title, of the poem depicts the poet's heartfelt loss of a friend. The poet makes use of symbols, like the elephant. In the poem, the poet describes Saro-Wiwa as an elephant that was committed to defending the environment. Elephant as used in the poem is a symbol of agility and courage, which was shown by Saro-Wiwa.

The poet stresses his role as an ecopoet and a critic of his society, when the persona of the poem asserts:

If I don't open my mouth, I will be a  
dumb - and - deaf who's unable to fore  
warn after a bad dream.

The world needs to hear this: there's one  
absent in the assembly, the singers will  
never be complete without the elephant  
in their midst.<sup>17</sup>

The poet re-enacts this warning about the deplorable state of the environment about which nobody cares. As a critic, the poet laments the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa who is described as an elephant beheaded for his stand against the destruction of the Niger Delta and its environment. Thus, the death of Saro-Wiwa for the poet is an ecological call, which stresses the fact that our environment is decrying our destructive habits against nature; the poet shows that these habits also affect our physical environment.

### Sociopolitical Degradation in Selected Poems

Sociopolitical degradation can be viewed as direct or indirect neglect of the rules and regulations embodied in the constitution of a country by the ruling elites in discharging their duties over the affairs of the people.<sup>17</sup> This includes exploitation, marginalization, insecurity, election malpractices, corruption etc.

In most ecocritical writings, there is an intricate relationship between physical and sociopolitical environment. In Delta Blues, Ojaide stresses this relationship between physical environment and the socio-political life of any nation. To the poet, a problem that affects the physical environment has negative implication on the entire life of the society. Thus, the poet emphasizes the link between the environment and the soul of the nation.

In the poem "Abuja", the poet queries an organized society where there is no morality. In this beautiful and organized city, there are armed robbers, looters, and all forms of immorality. The poet shows that aesthetics without morality is meaningless. As the nation's capital, "Abuja is well arranged aesthetically, but this same city is where Chiefs celebrate on the sweat of slaves where witches plot the demise of others."<sup>18</sup> Thus, for Ojaide, the beauty of a city does not depend on the physical setting, but is also determined by the moral values of the action. "Abuja" is a satiric poem, which the poet uses to satirize the nation's socio-political systems. The poet adopts sarcastic and cynical tone to criticize vices in the society. Abuja is used both as a symbol

and as an image in the poem. As a symbol, Abuja represents the entire nation, and as an image, Abuja depicts crime, immorality and disorderliness. In the poem, the poet makes use of repetition. The repetition of the adverb 'here' in the first three lines of the poem and the pronoun 'this' in lines five to fifteen re-emphasizes the poet's message and contributes to the musical component of the poem. The poem is characterized by paradox which the poet uses to comment on the nation's political system.

This idea is re-emphasized in the poem 'Sleeping in a Makeshift Grave'. This is a didactic poem, in which the poet laments over the dead conscience and immoral acts of our leaders "there is no other way to live free here than kill or be killed."<sup>19</sup> He condemns immorality and other ecological ills in the society. Through the use of apostrophe, the poet portrays the Nigerian nation as a productive female, but destroyed through bad leadership, which the poet shows in the poem entitled 'Season' as the major problem facing the nation.

In 'Season' the poet brings several issues bothering the nation to limelight. He observes that ethnic conflicts, bad governance, violence and disease in the nation are as a result of environmental degradation. Our towns rose from riverbank of barter. Once the waters sustained colouring from oil slick. Our constitution could role remain the same again. We selected delegates to take our prayers to Abuja. But guns scared them from the promise land. If you took fins from a fish, would it still be fish?

From this poem, the poet shows that the political life of any nation is inseparable from its moral stand and it is the general functioning of the society that determines how morally sound the nation's political system maybe. This is a poem which the poet uses to express his personal feeling concerning the nation's socio-political systems. The poem is written in five stanzas. The poet elaborately makes use of metonymy. Abuja as used in the poem stands for government, where the people channel all complaints and requests. Also, gun is used as metonymy, representing anarchy and irresponsibility. It is a metaphor for bad and irresponsible government which the poet describes as 'witchcraft' in the poem '*Witchcraft*'. The persona in the poem '*Witchcraft*' asserts that 'Nigeria's closed eyes in the open world' can only be explained by the spell of 'witchcraft'. This is because "the nation suffers between life and death"<sup>21</sup>. This narrative poem on the nation's political institutions described Nigeria as a

'bewitched land' that cannot boast of an 'erect head on its crooked bush paths'. The nation's socio-political institutions as portrayed in this poem are decaying, as a result of environmental degradation.

No other shell than witchcraft  
explains  
Nigeria's closed eyes in the open  
world.  
Every day spreads such a dizzying  
cloud that people trip on stumps of  
beheaded dreads...<sup>22</sup>

In this poem, the poet makes use of paradox, 'Nigeria's closed eyes in the open world', the contradictory terms 'closed' and 'open' to stress that Nigeria's problems are caused by Nigerians and not the system of governance. Thus, in all the poems in Delta Blues, Ojaide showed that political, moral and social lives of the nation are inseparable from the nation's environment.

### Style in Tanure Ojaide's Delta Blues

Tanure Ojaide through his poems tries to X-ray the unconditioned conditions of the Niger Delta region from independence till date. He tries to educate the Nigerian society and the world at large on the human, political and environmental degradation meted on the Niger-Delta region since independence. He uses a narrative pattern in telling the story of the people being neglected and exploited thus the persona in the poem season says.

Our towns rose from river banks  
of batter. Once the waters  
sustained colouring from oil sick,  
Our constitution could not remain  
the same again. We selected  
delegates to take our prayers to  
Abuja, But guns scared them from  
the promise land"<sup>23</sup>.

The language used is narrative, simple and direct, it is as if the poet is telling a story to an audience. The use of simple and direct language can also be seen from Labyrinths of the Delta as the person says:

We took off without thought of  
where we are going...  
And paths, opened for our anxious  
fat  
It was not for us men and women  
split from bed...  
We rush into the vast night living not in  
our homes  
But caravanned in hope<sup>24</sup>

The language used is also narrative, simple and direct, telling the story of ugly experiences of the

Niger Delta habitats. He uses folklorist pattern in his conversation with the world and the history on the painful experiences of his people in their historic moment of dislocation that leads to the present Niger Delta habitat.

According to Ookome, “Ojaide makes use of Urhobo mythology in his poem, such myth is evident in a poem that captures all the oppressed in the ancient world of Edos, Ishans and Urhobos who are interrelated and interconnected like the labyrinths of the Delta, under the aegis of tyrannical lordship of the Ogiso”<sup>25</sup>.

Ogiso choked flaming faggots  
into men's throats  
Castrated the manly among us  
and fell on anybody he loved  
or scorned  
We ripe at night since we  
could not deny our blood in  
him  
We wept for the awfulness of  
our lives<sup>26</sup>

In other words, the mythology of the Urhobo of Delta and the Bini and Edo, in contemporary Nigeria, the Ogiso is a dynasty of the sun. He rules with selfish abandon. That same selfish abandonment by the Nigerian leaders, lack of concern about the state's environment, physical and natural of the Niger Delta region, not minding that the region is the economic hub of Nigeria became of the focus of this poem. In all the poems of Delta Blues, this concern to preserve environment from further decay is stressed. The physical well-being of the environment becomes the concern of Ojaide's poetry.

## Evaluation and Conclusion

Having attempted an application of ecocriticism to Ojaide's Delta Blues, this research have highlighted the features of the Niger Delta experiences, which include the environmental, human and most annoying the sociopolitical degradation. In Nigeria, many states in the North are naturally endowed with precious natural resources such as gold, diamond etc. that can even sustain the entire region for hundreds of years. According the governor of Kaduna state, “there are more gold in Kaduna than the whole of South Africa.”<sup>27</sup>

These natural resources for years have been under the exploration of some individuals in North and the gains go straight to their individual pockets. But anytime the negative effects of such explorations like earth tremor or landslide occurs, it is the oil

wealth of abandoned Niger Delta that is used for the rehabilitation of the victims and the region. In the case of Niger Delta, the oil from the region is what forms the economic hub of Nigeria. Nigeria as oil producing nation has no refinery to refine the oil, rather it is given to individuals who refine it abroad and sell back to the prime owner. Yet in Niger Delta, if anyone is found refining the oil locally to make end meet in the midst of the environmental degradation and abandonment caused by the multinational oil companies engaged by Nigeria government pays with his or her dear life at the spot, and the every property owned by the person including residential home (s) will be demolished. It's quite amazing to know that trillions of naira being earmarked for the development of the North-East region. We must acknowledge that we are one and if we wish to remain one we must work for the interest of the entire nation.

Through the use of images and symbols, the poet Ojaide has enumerated the ecological degradation as it affects the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. In all the poems, the poet shows that Niger Delta environment if nothing is done will completely go into extinction; thus, this work recommends that the environment should be adequately remedied (biologically through Bio-remediation or otherwise) so as to reduce the high level of dehumanization which the people of the region have been subjected to. Those environmental experts should collaborate with government agencies to reduce the oil spillage, gas flaring among other environmentally adverse activities which have affected the life of the people in the region, and that the enormous oil wealth generated should reflect in the living standard and life chances of the peasant inhabitants of the oil bearing enclave.

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