

POETICS OF RESISTANCE: ECOCRITICAL READING OF OJAIDE'S *DELTA BLUES & HOME SONGS* AND *DAYDREAM OF ANTS AND OTHER POEMS*

Uzoechi NWAGBARA

*Department of English, Faculty of Communication, Media and Broadcasting,
Limkokwing University London*

ABSTRACT Nigerian written poetry spans about six decades, from its inception, and has been a medium of engagement, decrying colonialism, cultural imperialism, socio-economic oppression and political tyranny. Tanure Ojaide's poetic enterprise follows in the footsteps of this mould of interdiction, which can be called resistance poetics. Particularly, his collections of poetry, *Delta Blues & Home Songs* and *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems*, are illustrations of ecocritical literature. Ecocriticism in literature is a form of aesthetics that concerns itself with the nature of relationship between literature and the natural environment. Ojaide considers the ecocritical art of poetry as a kind of public duty, which he owes to the Nigerian people, to expose, reconstruct, and negate the actualities of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The author argues that since Ojaide's poetry intersects with the realities of ecological imperialism, it is thus a dependable barometer to gauge the Nigerian environmental/ecological experience.

Key Words: Ecological imperialism; Ecocriticism; Resistance poetics; Niger Delta; Tanure Ojaide.

INTRODUCTION: NIGERIA AND ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM

Following Nigeria's political independence, there have been serious crises of societal and economic development. Having experienced these unwholesome conditions, Nigeria is at present, more than ever, embroiled in environmental and ecological menace over resource control issues (Ojakorotu, 2008: 95), neglect of the oil producing regions or states as a result of ethnic apathy (Nnoli, 1980: 30; Osaghae, 1994: 9) and impropriety by the political class in the management of affairs especially in the Niger delta, a region marooned in the Nigerian social space.

This is arguably Nigeria's most important political issue in recent times. According to a leading Nigerian sociologist, Inya Eteng:

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 relations between the Nigerian 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 (Eteng, 1997: 21).

In the wake of the unbridled assault on the Niger delta environment informed by the dynamic and logic of ecological imperialism, this region's traditional economies, cultural practices and socio-political wellbeing were mauled into disquiet. The region, which is the economic base of Nigeria, has witnessed one of the uncanny forms of neglect and marginalisation—and yet 90% of Nigeria's foreign exchange comes from oil exploration, exploitation and marketing by the multinational corporations (Oyesola, 1995: 62).

Following such a polluted socio-economic landscape, Nigerian writers have risen to the occasion—by using art to address as well as to bring to the knowledge of humanity this form of environmental devastation and inhumanity. The poet, Tanure Ojaide is one of them. The hallmark of Ojaide art is to use literature to engage the realities in his milieu. For him, literature is a reproduction of social experiences; it is a refraction of the totality of human experience. The statement of the Nigerian literary critic, Amuta, dovetails with this position:

As a refraction of social experience through the prism of the human imagination, the ontological essence of literature is to be located in terms of the extent to which it recycles social experience and transforms it into an aesthetic proposition (Amuta, 1986: 38-39).

Above all, Ojaide uses literature for environmentalist purposes. He places premium on the biotic community—its sustainability and preservation. Glissant, the Caribbean writer and poet offered a statement that yet again corroborates this literary pattern that Ojaide is committed to: “aesthetics of the earth” (Glissant, 1997: 149). It is a literary blueprint that is environmentally conscious and ecologically sensitive to the plights of the people and their environment.

In this light, Ojaide reasons with Aldo Leopold, the American ecologist, who said in his classic work, *A Sand County Almanac* that “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (Leopold, 1966: 262). With the emergence of ecocriticism, Ojaide's writings have come to be considered environmentally conscious texts because they show serious connection with the natural world as well as foreground how man's activities affect his environment and ecology. In arguing this, the author points out that Ojaide's poems dealing with nature are a direct outcome of his physical observation growing up in the Niger delta region of Nigeria. In this sense, Ojaide's Green Wave poetics or activism that he mainly engages in with his ecopoetry is borne out of the harsh living conditions of his people. He thus envisions change as a function of environmentally committed literature. In buttressing this, a Nigerian environmental expert, Ojatorotu, affirms that:

This activism can be attributed to frustration (on the part of the region) arising from both state and oil companies' negligence and destruction of the Niger delta's ecology, which is the basic structure that supports life in the region, as elsewhere. It may be said that the struggle by the people of the region have been predicated on certain fundamental issues, namely: their exclusion or marginalisation in terms of access to oil revenue; their struggle

for greater access to resource sharing (known in Nigerian parlance as resource control); environmental degradation; and egregious human rights violation (Ojakorotu, 2008: 93).

By extrapolation, Ojaide's activist artistic enterprise, finds ample expression in using poetry for resistance dialectics, which culminates in environmentalism and cultural reaffirmation. His eco-poetry is a testament to this artistic commitment.

Virtually all literary works by Tanure Ojaide have the same abiding sensibility anchored in ecocriticism as well as environmentalism. Thus, even *The Activist* (2006), an Ojaide novel has some ecocritical bearing. It is a contemporary novel about oil politics in the Niger delta region of Nigeria and environmental predation by the political class in partnership with the multinational corporations. The main poetry collection considered in this study is *Delta Blues & Home Songs* (1997b) and *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems* (1997a). Ojaide's poetry works include the following: *Labyrinths of the Delta* (1986), *The Blood of Peace and Other Poems* (1991), *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live* (1998), *The Tale of the Harmattan* (2007) and *Waiting for the Hatching of the Cockerel* (2008), among others. Ojaide's poetics of ecocriticism has earned him some laurels, which include the BBC Arts and Africa Poetry Prize Award in 1988, thrice the Association of Nigerian Authors' Poetry Prize (one of which was in 1988) and Commonwealth Poetry Prize for the African Region in 1987.

Darah argues that:

The poetry of Tanure Ojaide... fits into the tradition of outrage against political injustice, exploitation and environmental disasters. On the basis of sheer output, Ojaide is the most prolific in the Niger delta region. From his titles, one can discern an Abiding concern with the fate of the Niger delta people (Darah, 2009: 12).

UNMASKING ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM

Ecological imperialism in the dispensation of neo-colonialism is more monstrous and sinister, while it takes a subtle, malleable form. This is because the present language of colonialism, which uses neo-colonialism as a veneer, makes it intractable to understand the peril of ecological imperialism as it comes in the guise of foreign donor packages, international development aids, business operations multinational corporations, foreign partnership deals and other hues. These constitute a subterfuge that hampers attempts to identify the evils that accompany this contemporary form of colonialism, which has left the Nigerian society environmentally battered and socially comatose.

Against the backcloth of the relations of power and administrative mechanisms of convenience bequeathed to Nigeria by the imperialists, the political class in Nigeria have sought to maintain these structures as they undermine the place of the minorities (Wirth, 1945: 347), who are landlords to the bulk of the resources

in the country. This has subjected the Nigerian social and geographic space to a nationwide underdevelopment. There is no gainsaying the fact that “since the discovery of oil in commercial quantities by Shell-BP in Ijaw community of Olobiri in Ogbia Local Government of Bayelsa State in 1956, the inhabitants of the region have persistently engaged the oil companies and the Nigerian state in a series of protest... At the heart of the struggle for participatory environmental governance is the question of resource control” (Ojakorotu, 2008: 95). And accordingly, Mayowa, the Nigerian political scientist has said that violence and ethnic agitation in Nigeria can be described from environmental and economic perspectives. It shows its origin from very harsh living conditions of the masses (Mayowa, 2001: 1). Thus, this development is in the main, “the trouble with Nigeria” (Achebe, 1983: 1), to borrow Achebe’s famous phrase. Also, the mainstay of ecological imperialism is to “fashion a new ethic sanctioning the exploitation of nature” (Merchant, 1983: 164).

THE CULTURAL AND IDEO-AESTHETIC IMPERATIVES OF OJAIDE’S ENVIRONMENTAL ART

In man’s quest for freedom and self-actualisation lies the tendency to resist or protest against oppressive, repressive ideologies and to re-create wholesome landscape. In engaging this re-creation process, literature is at the heart of it all, it is a veritable tool for engaging “... reality through signification and aestheticisation” (Amuta, 1986: 129). This is because literature is one of the institutions of change through which ideologies, values, education and cultural paradigms are imparted thereby sensitising the people about exploitative, authoritarian regimes.

For Ojaide, a “society cannot prosper without stable institutions...” (Fried, 2007: 149). And literature is one such institution. On this, Maduka comments that to Ojaide as to:

Most African writers... there is a direct relationship between literature and social institutions. The principal function of literature is to criticise these institutions and eventually bring about desirable changes in the society (Maduka, 1981: 11).

Since poetry in Ojaide’s perception is an instrument for change, therefore attacking the ideological, aesthetic and cultural arrangements that have characterised the depersonalisation of man as well as the despoliation of his environment through ecological imperialism could advance the human condition. This was at the heart of the imperialists as the creators of their colonialist literature engaged in the evangelical crusade to propagate the superiority and hegemony of occidental values, culture and mores to the detriment of the colonised. Such anthropocentric schema and literary representation also served the cultural project of control. Together, ecological imperialism and cultural colonialism unleashed an intricate interplay of what Dirks, the American historian called “coercion and hegemony” (1992: 4), and this largely made the imposed “Otherness” of the natural environ-

ment appear likely. In advancing this point, Bhabha, the Indian postcolonial theorist wrote that:

The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction (Bhabha, 1994: 101).

In this fashion, colonial fiction valorised and legitimated the tendency to exploit the natural environment and its resources. This is perhaps best articulated in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), where sheer cruelty and crass inhumanity are meted to the elephants and the native inhabitants alike in the Congo Basin. This double harshness technically underscores the process of commercialisation of the African and Nigerian ecosystem and landscape (Myers, 2001: 100). The warped rhetoric of anthropocentric messianism was behind other colonial fiction that propagated the colonisers' supremacy. Such fiction includes D. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), R. Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) and G. Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1934) among others that orchestrate the process and mechanics of environmental exploitation, ideological attrition of the colonised and their cultural atrophy.

Consequently, the mainstay of Ojaide's ecological literature of protest is markedly negates the above position, untainted by the artistic-cum-ideological scaffold of the imperialists. He is, in the main, on a cultural and environmental redemption mission. In this sense, Bamikunle, the Nigerian literary critic asserted that:

His poetry takes off from the present in desperate search for values to redeem its malaise. The search takes him to the immediate past in the history of colonialism, and beyond that into the pre-colonial ancestral history and culture... (Bamikunle, 1991: 81).

In illustrating Ojaide's poetics of ecological imperialism, the literary critic, Okoro, in his review of the recent poetry collection, *The Tale of the Harmattan* (2007), added credence to this:

The Tale of the Harmattan is Ojaide's 15th poetry publication. Part one of the book, much like Ojaide's previous poetry collections, narrates and reflects on local issues with global implications. We are introduced to the disturbing tale of the oil saga that continues to plague Nigeria's conscience. Ojaide references an array of struggles for a clean environment, multinational sensitivity to local people in their business dealings, minority rights, rights of the people to be treated as humans, and the legacy of grandmothers (Okoro, 2007: 1).

There is an extension of the logic of "the legacy of grandmothers" in Ojaide's BBC prize-winning poetry, *The Fate of Vulture & Other Poems* (1990). In the title poem Ojaide remonstrated with the fugitive politician, Aridon, in protecting

the bequest of nature and the gifts of the natural world, which his forefathers left behind: “O Aridon, bring back my wealth from rogue vaults...” (p. 11).

By way of intertextuality, I notice a recrudescence of this premise in another poem, “Wails” in *Delta Blues & Home Songs* (1997), where Ojaide refers to the same “Aridon” for props to tear the stronghold of imperialism and elite culture:

Aridon, give me the voice
to raise this wail
beyond high walls.
In one year I have seen
my forest of friends cut down,
now dust taunts my memory...
I must raise the loud wail
so that each will reflect his fate...
The boa thoughtlessly devours
its own offspring, Nigeria’s
A boa constrictor in the world map (p. 18).

This “voice” that “Aridon” offers, is part of the ensemble needed to wage the “ecological war” that the martyred Nigerian eco-activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa adumbrated. And for Ojaide, poetic vocation that is sensitive to the plights of the Niger delta people—and Nigerians by extension as their environment and biodiversity disappear before their very eyes is crucial. In another poetry collection, *Daydream of Ants & Other Poems*, there is a clamour for change. Here the change needed has to come via revolution—this is in congruence with Udumukwu’s thesis about change as being “...borne out of different levels of conflict” (2006: 274). The layer of conflict referred to here is crystallised by revolution and violence captured through imagery, innuendo, paradox, aphorism and contrast, among others. Such poems including “Daydream of Ants,” “Aridon’s Call,” and “The Power of Victims” exemplify this revolutionary rhetoric by Ojaide.

DIMINISHING THE FOOTPRINTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS: OJAIDE’S POETRY AND ENVIRONMENTALISM

Among recent poetry in Nigeria, perhaps, none is more charged with environmentalist alertness, and none more self-consciously steeped in anti-imperialist terms than Tanure Ojaide’s poetry. His poetry highlights the system of exploitative environmental policies that place the multinational corporations—represented by Shell, AGIP, Texaco, Chevron, and Mobil as well as the political elite above the people (the subaltern), thereby destroying the Nigerian environment. In this light, “the destruction of the environment as in most of Ojaide’s poems dealing with nature is symbolic of the destruction of African (Nigerian) culture and values” (Shija, 2008: 2).

Following Nigeria’s mired political state and environmental crisis, Ojaide has re-engineered the possibilities of his poetics so as to ensure that the leadership

problem of this nation does not subsist. In his view, poetry must be a functional, aesthetic and ideological tool for environmental agitation. One defence against the “meddlesomeness” of poetry in the politics of the day is the urgency of the situation that it addresses. Thus, the idea of the poet in Nigeria as duty-bound to confront the political matters of the day harks back to the notion of the poet in the oral tradition as the spokesman for the common people in the court of the powerful.

In retaking the traditional responsibility to speak for the people, the contemporary Nigerian poets are aware of the public duty of an artist. I argue that this oracular responsibility finds resonance in their technique, which mirrors the socio-economic and politico-cultural practices of the day: the content is a function of the container. One of these eco-poets, Niyi Osundare contended that:

...art has a purpose. I believe in the social status of art...
It must be used to advance the cause of humanity... I believe
that if art has any sake at all, it is human. I am a humanist.
The content is as important as the work. A work of art is
not a technical jargon. Cleanth Brooks refers to a poem as
‘well-wrought urn’. But that talks about appearance per se.
A container without content is empty. As concerned, committed
artists, the basis of all art is justice (Ogoanah, 2003: 5).

In advancing the cause of (environmental) “justice” as noted by Osundare above “against the environmental degradation of the Niger delta and the unjust system which makes the people to be chief mourners and paupers in the midst of their oil wealth” (see the advertisement for *Delta Blues & Home Songs*), Ojaide has used poetry to accomplish this.

As an environmentally conscious poet, he allows the social facts in his lived environment to find expression in his art. This trademark is also characteristic of the style of the martyred eco-activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was killed with other Ogoni eight during the Abacha junta. In this regard, the French materialist Pierre Macherey declared that “the poem... is not created by an intension (objective or subjective), it is produced under determinate conditions” (1978: 78). On this strength therefore,

Literature has to draw attention to increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots. Literature has become a weapon against the denial of basic human rights... It is understandable why the African (Nigerian) artist is utilitarian (Ojaide, 1996: 42; my word in parenthesis).

The act of portraying the true state of affairs in the Nigerian society through literary creation is a form of environmentalism against the ecological imperialism spreading in Nigeria through globalisation and information technology. From this point of view, Garuba, the Nigerian literary critic has stated that “the post-Saussurean separation of signs from their signifiers and referents has led to the valorisation of language over reality, the privileging of culture over and above

the material practices which create these cultures” (Okome, 2000: 27).

Ojaide’s commitment to the literature that points to this “signifier” as well as the one that addresses the imbalance in Nigeria is well documented. The uninhibited capitalist onslaught on the bioregion of the Niger delta and the aftermath of this uncanny state-sanctioned assault are given effulgence in “Delta Blues” one of the poems in the collection, *Delta Blues & Home Songs*:

This share of paradise, the delta of my birth,
reels from an immeasurable wound.
Barrels of alchemical draughts flow
from this hurt to the unquestioning world
that lights up its life in a blind trust.
The inheritance I sat on for centuries
now crushes my body and soul...

My nativity gives immortal pain
masked in barrels of oil—
I stew in the womb of fortune.
I live in the deathbed
prepared by a cabal of brokers
breaking the peace of centuries
& tainting not only a thousand rivers,
my lifeblood from the beginning,
but scorching their sacred soil was debauched
by prospectors, money-mongers?

My birds take flight to the sea,
the animals grope in the burning bush... (p. 21).

I have quoted the poem above at length that distils the horrors and tragedies of multinational corporations’ presence and activities in the Niger delta region of Nigeria. Their activities crush the biodiversity of this region. Ojaide’s Ojaide’s eco-poetic intensions are captured in bold relief by the use of imagery, contrast, irony, hyperbole and other poetic devices to depict the “immeasurable pain” that his environment is subjected to.

Ojaide’s poetry collections are dialectical; they flow into each other in a manner that brings to the fore one major concern, the dangers posed by man’s activities on the environment. In another collection of poetry, *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems*, Ojaide continues to highlight the same message in his environmentalist poetics. In one of the poems, “The AT & P, Sapele,” he reconstructs the damage done to the flora in the Niger Delta environment in Sapele, home to the famous sawmill in Nigeria that provided timber for export:

When I first entered the AT & P
on excursion from St. George’s,
it was next to the largest sawmill

on earth...

The planks smelt fresh,
sardine-packed for export;
they came in raft by water...

When decades later I went home
to the delta of hardwood,
a big clearing welcomed me... (p. 30).

Evidence of this “clearing” and loss of flora is captured poignantly in another poetry collection of his, *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*. In the title poem Ojaide paints a gory picture of the flora and fauna on the heels of the oil exploration going on in his world.

Thus, for Ojaide oil exploration and prebendal politics have left a balance sheet of ecological imperialism and socio-physical disaster, as evident from this versification:

Choking from the season’s flagellation,
droves of wailers comb the breath of the land...

Wild fires consumed barks and herbs
What are the chances of catching the lion alive...? (p. 77).

The image of a nation on fire is portrayed with density and piquancy in the above poem. In his foray into imagery, the poet used such words as “choking,” “flagellation,” “wailers” and others to crystallise in the readership the impression of the intensity of the worsening living conditions of the masses and the environmental predation that have visited the social, geographic space of Nigeria.

The preservation of the fauna and the agitation for the rights and the wellbeing of the people are part of Ojaide’s humanist ideals. Through the poetic creation of asphyxiating landscape in the third stanza of the poem “On the World Summit for Children at the UN, 1990” in *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems*, Ojaide called forth the same mantra against the deplorable condition of man and the fauna:

Dogs will never shed enough tears
to tell their sorrow,
goats will never sweat enough in a rack
to show the world their desperation.
Babies suffocate from the game
of loveless elders of state... (p. 70).

The above poem calibrates the smothering condition under which the politicians called elders of state in the poem are maltreating human beings and animals.

Ojaide likened the loss of feeling for nature with decline of poetry as a genre,

since he reckons that the basic function of poetry is to galvanise, even to educate the emotions (Nwagbara, 2008: 231). As he elevates his poetic vocation to environmental as well as social causes, Ojaide draws attention to the polluted atmosphere, the choking in the air and the battered environment. Also “the gnarled barks of the trees” alerts the reader of the perils of deforestation and “babies” and “goats” point toward the evil of imperialism and corporatism wrought via blowouts, gas flaring and oil leaks in the Niger Delta—and Nigeria by extension.

NEGATING THE “DELTA BLUES” CONTRADICTIONS: *DELTA BLUES & HOME SONGS*

To the author, there seems to be no alternative action for the traduced people and the asphyxiating world presented in the Niger Delta, and by extension Nigeria except the alternative of what Theodor Adorno called negation. This essentially in line with the Hegelian construct of “antithesis,” which confronts the “thesis”—that I believe encompasses the contradictions in a given social ambience. In Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* (1966), he maintained that domination thrived as it attacked the objective stance of revolutionary consciousness through which it liquidated humanity as well as individualism at the basis of critical consciousness. Following the Hegelian representation of art (poetry) as a product of history, Adorno considered revolutionary or protest literature barely possible unless it experimented with negating the societal disequilibrium. In this sense, art (literature) and thought can only realise themselves fully not by asserting that a societal change was necessary, but through exploring via negation and decomposition for what be positively and systemically expressed (Adorno, 1974: 126-127).

Therefore, more than being sheer artistic representation or propagandising, literature tends to effectively oppose the deceit of the status quo. It seeks answers to social problems through its own negation of contradictions. In “I, Oniniwherhe, the ant,” one of the poems in the collection, *Delta Blues & Home Songs*, Ojaide launches the logic of negation in the midst of the pain and albatross of privation wreaked by the activities of the multinational corporations:

And this, my coveted pain...
 In days of record famine,
 I am the envy of those too dis-
 abled by nothing to venture out...
 I, Oniniwherhe, a mere ant
 have become the day’s hero! (p. 90).

In the above lines, there is a palpable song of grit in times of despair, pain and misery. The imagery of “ant,” a little creature, portrays the power of the powerless to better their world no matter what stands before them.

In another Ojaide poem in the same collection, “Dance of Defiance,” Ojaide continues the rhetoric of resistance with passion and trenchancy that is characteristic of a Fanonist “fighting phase” (third phase), when “the native turns himself

into an awakener of the people” (Fanon, 1965: 179), and begins to resist unjust order. Fanon was a cultural theorist on decolonisation. The titular choice of the poet here is a sheer demonstration of pure negation of the institutions of tyranny as well as defiance. Take note of this song of defiance in the poem, “Dance of Defiance”:

I will sing and dance at wakes...
I will still climb towards
the thin neck of the magic palm
to get my wine fresh from the top...

Let me be the *eyareya* grass
shaken relentlessly by winds
but will not fall in the frenzy.
Let me be that perennial river
that will be swallowed by the sea
but will continue to swagger... (p. 68).

ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM AND THE RESISTANCE DISCOURSE IN *DAYDREAM OF ANTS & OTHER POEMS*

Arguably, against every conceivable show of power and might, there is an equalising demonstration of the opposite. This standpoint is underwritten in this Foucauldian language by Outa, the Kenyan writer:

Power is dispersed across complicated and heterogeneous social networks marked by ongoing struggle. Power is not something present at specific locations within those networks, but is instead always at issue in ongoing attempts to (re) produce effective social alignments, and conversely to avoid or erode their effects, often by producing various counter-alignments (Outa, 2001: 109-110).

From the above, one can understand that power is fluid, and not fixated at a particular place. I argue that Ojaide’s poetic enterprise is a power project, aimed at challenging the uncharitable, biased and jaundiced account of the colonisers and imperialists, whose literary agents have represented the colonised world in a truculent, stereotyped manner.

The dream that Ojaide depicts in *Daydream of Ants & Other Poems* culminates in a discourse of a social vision that resists ecological imperialism and underlying elite-salving paradigm. Thus, the aesthetics of this poetry collection is couched in a dialectics of struggle to re-create African (Nigerian) heritage, culture and environmental philosophy devoid of the conceit of the imperialists and their compradors. Udentia, the Nigerian literary critic contended:

That struggle can never be successful if we adopt imperialism’s methodology,

ideology and intellectual heritage. That struggle could only be won by finding an alternative pedagogy of mass affirmation through a critical re-examination of our literary heritage (Udenta, 1994: xvi).

This ideological-cum-artistic discourse of resistance is determinedly surmised by the poet in the poem, “The Daydream of Ants”:

We are in league with powers
To wreck one vision
With lust for more visions
To refashion a proud world—
With the same hands... (p. 15).

For Ojaide, the capacity to create a new world devoid of environmental predation and political tyranny is lodged in resistance rhetoric that is in conflict with the predominant spirit of the times. “To refashion a proud world” that showcases Nigeria’s ecological, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing, literature has to play a role. In this regard, “literature can play a role in straightening the patterns of social change in Africa” (Maduka, 1981: 13). By wrecking the white man’s vision of conquest as Ojaide’s poetics prefigures, literature will denounce the Rudyard Kipling’s “the white man’s burden” theory that designates the harbinger of civilisation to imperialism (colonialism) as well as repudiates the “privileging of one form of History” coupled with the “suppression of the other” (Ogude, 1999: 88).

In “The Power of Victims,” Ojaide emphasises this resistance rhetoric in his literary commitment to resist domination by imperialist deadweight on the homeland:

And these are the tolls of dominion:
victims reeling with vengeance.
Cutting through stones to pathways,
arching wide rivers with rainbows,
launching dreams to people the moon
and clearing space for inevitable confrontation,
We strew our way with the victims (p. 34).

There is no vitiation of purpose in Ojaide’s environmental resistance poetics since he portrays every conceivable means of advancing man’s condition as well as bettering his bioregion. The above verse inheres in its ability to sensitise the people to take their destiny into their own hands. The entire collection of *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems* not only pays attention to language as an apparatus of domination and as a means of reconstructing reality, it also foreshadows coherence and maturity in Ojaide’s efforts regarding art, society and life in general. Here, he is not only preoccupied with the social function of poetry but is also concerned with the creative process as well as the ideo-aesthetic faculty of art to resist ecological domination.

CONCLUSION

To reformulate the key concerns of this study, I have faithfully described Tanure Ojaide's awareness of the significance of culture to man as it is being shaped by environmental, political and socio-economic realities. The author has argued that what gave rise to Tanure Ojaide's pastoral sensibilities and earth-centred poetics was the ecological cum environmental despoliation of the biotic community and biodiversity of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, his childhood provenance, as well as the pauperisation of its inhabitants. For him the art of poetry has to be in the vanguard of the attempts to winnow out the malaise that is enshrined in ecological imperialism, for environmental and social justice to hold sway. One of Ojaide's main achievements in this context is the masterly manner he handles his craft to crystallise his poetics of environmental resistance. Ojaide's overriding attempt in *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems* and *Delta Blues & Home Songs* is to bring resistance poetry to the fore in the arsenal of environmental agitation, which is crucial in order to reclaim the history of the Niger Delta people, and Nigerians by extension from the rubbles of imperial pillage.

REFERENCES

- Achebe, C. 1983. *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Heinemann, London.
- Adorno, T. 1966. *Negative Dialectics*. Continuum International Publishing, London.
- 1974. *Minima Moralia*. Translation by E.F.N. Jephcott. Veso, London.
- Amuta, C. 1986. *Towards a Sociology of African Literature*. Zim Pan, Oguta.
- Bamikunle, A. 1991. Literature as a historical process: A study of Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta*. In (C. Ikonne, E. Oko & P. Onwudinjo, eds.) *African Literature and African Historical Experiences*, pp. 73-82. Heinemann Educational Publishers, Ibadan.
- Bhabha, H. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, London.
- Conrad, J. 1899. *Heart of Darkness*. Blackwood's Magazine, London.
- Darah, G.G. 2009. Revolutionary pressures in Niger Delta literature. *The Guardian*, June 28.
- Defoe, R. 1719. *Robinson Crusoe*. W. Taylor, London.
- Dirks, N. ed. 1992. *Colonialism and Culture*. The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Eteng, I.A. 1997. *The Nigerian State, Oil Exploration and Community Interest: Issues and Perspectives*. University of Port Harcourt, Choba.
- Fanon, F. 1965. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translation by C. Farrington. McGibbon and Kee, London.
- Forster, E.M. 1924. *A Passage to India*. Edward Arnold, London.
- Fried, C. 2007. *Modern Liberty and the Limits of Government*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York.
- Glissant, E. 1997. *Poetics of Relation*. Translation by B. Wing. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Haggard, R.I. 1885. *King Solomon's Mine*. Cassell and Company, London.
- Leopold, A. 1996. *A Sandy County Almanac*. Sierra Club Ballantine, San Francisco.
- Macherey, P. 1978. *A Theory of Literary Production*. Translation by G. Wall. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London & Boston.
- Maduka, T.C. 1981. The African writer and the Drama of social change. *Ariel*, 12(3): 5-18.
- Mayowa, O.A. 2001. The state and ethno-communal violence in Nigeria: The case of

- Ife-Modakeke. *African Development*, 26(1&2): 195-223.
- Merchant, C. 1983. *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*. Routledge, New York.
- Myers, J. 2001. The anxiety of confluence: Evolution, ecology, and imperialism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 8(2): 97-108.
- Nnoli, O. 1980. *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*. Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu.
- Nwagbara, U. 2008. Political power and intellectual activism in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*. *Nebula: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Scholarship*, 5(4): 225-253.
- Ogoanah, N.F. 2003. Interview. I am a Humanist: Niyi Osundare on the poetry of Niyi Osundare. *West African Review*, 4(1): 3-6.
- Ogude, J. 1999. *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. Pluto Press, London.
- Ojaide, T. 1990. *The Fate of Vultures and Other Poems*. Malthouse, Lagos.
- 1991. *The Blood of Peace and Other Poems*. Heinemann, Oxford.
- 1996. *Poetic Imagination in Black Africa*. Carolina Academic Press, Durham.
- 1997a. *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems*. Malthouse Press Ltd., Ikeja.
- 1997b. *Delta Blues & Home Songs*. Kraftgriots, Ibadan.
- 1998. *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*. Uni. of Calabar Press, Calabar.
- 2007. *The Tale of the Harmattan*. Kwale Books, Cape Town.
- 2008. *Waiting for the Hatching of the Cockerel*. Africa World Press, Trenton.
- Ojajorotu, V. 2008. The internationalisation of oil violence in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 7(1): 92-117.
- Okome, O. 2000. ed. *Before I Am Hanged*. Africa World Press, New Jersey.
- Okoro, D. 2007. Ojaide Sings the Tale of the Harmattan from Cape Town. Online. <http://www.africanwriter.com/articles/227/1/ojaide-sings-the-tale-> (Accessed October 15, 2009).
- Orwell, G. 1934. *Burmese Days*. Harper and Brother, London
- Osaghae, E. 1994. Ethnicity and Its Management in Africa: The Democratisation Link. *Centre for Advanced Social Sciences Occasional Monograph*, 2: 6-15.
- Outa, G.O. 2001. The Dramaturgy of Power and Politics in Post-Colonial Kenya: A Comparative Re-Reading of 'Form', in Texts by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Francis Imbuga. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 10(3): 334-365.
- Oyesola, D. 1995. *Essentials of Environmental Crisis: The World and Nigeria in Perspective*. University of Ibadan Press, Ibadan.
- Shija, T. 2008. Exile and globalisation in the poetry of Tanure Ojaide: A study of *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*. *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 1: 31-41.
- Udenta, O.U. 1994. *Ideological Sanction and Social Action in African Literature*. Fourth Dimension Publisher, Enugu.
- Udumukwu, O. 2006. *The Novel and Change in Africa*. University of Port Harcourt Press, Choba.
- Wirth, L. 1945. The problems of minority groups. In (Linton R. ed.) *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*. pp. 347-372. Columbia University. Press, New York.

————— Accepted December 16, 2009

Author's Name and Address: Uzoechi NWAGBARA, Department of English, Faculty of Communication, Media and Broadcasting, Limkokwing University London, London, UK.
E-mail: uzoechin@yahoo.com