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Revisiting Environmental Challenges in Niger Delta: A Survey of Tanure Ojaide's Poetic Historicism

Mary Enwelim-Nkem Okoh

Lecturer, Department of Languages School of General Studies, Delta State Polytechnic,
Ogwashi Uku, Delta State, Nigeria

Solomon Onovwiona

Lecturer, Department of Languages, School of General Studies, Delta State Polytechnic
Ogwashi Uku, Delta State, Nigeria

Abstract:

*Environmental challenges in Niger Delta of Nigeria arising from oil spillage, loss of mangrove forests, depletion of fish population, water hyacinth invasion, natural gas flaring amongst others caused by the activities of oil multinational companies have been at the top burner of academic discourse for more than three decades now. Many literary artists and critics from different dimensions – drama, prose, and poetry have written scholarly works challenging these situations. Notable among them is Tanure Ojaide. He has used both the mediums of prose and poetry to decry the evil of environmental degradation to the people of Niger Delta in particular and the overall long effects on the Nigerian economy in general. The seriousness of this theme has resulted in many critical and appreciative works done on the poetry and prose of Tanure Ojaide and the Niger Delta environmental problems. The present study takes a step further by giving a historical survey of the features of environmental challenges in the poetry of Tanure Ojaide from his early collection *Children of Iroko and Other Poems (1973)* to *Songs of Myself (2015)*. The purpose is to establish Ojaide's consistency or otherwise to the course of exposing environmental problems suffered by the people of Niger Delta and attendant solutions in virtually all his poetry collections. The study is anchored on eco-criticism as a theoretical framework. The choice is premised on its occupation with the exposition of the relationship existing between literature and the natural environment. The poems for this study are purposively selected from around twenty collections. The study established that the exposition of environmental problems and solutions are consistent and recurrent themes in Ojaide's poetry. The study foregrounded Ojaide's dogmatic determination in using his artistic works to champion the course of environmental challenges and bring about the desired solutions in Niger Delta and Nigeria.*

Keywords: Survey, environment, poetry, Eco - Criticism, challenges

1. Introduction

The core Niger Delta region is defined as comprising the area covered by the natural delta of the Niger River and the areas to the East and West which also produce oil. The Niger Delta region has been in the news for some decades owing to the increasing exploitative activities inherent in the region, which have left the area impoverished, degraded and devastated than it was in the early times. It is truism that man is inseparable from his immediate environment because his relationship with his surrounding makes up his entire being. Unfortunately, the destruction of the natural habitat surrounding man is caused by man himself by the sole acts of creating and re-creating his environment.

In essence, the process of exploiting developing worlds is responsible for the environmental and ecological damage done to the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, which has been made prostrate following the several incidences of oil spills, loss of mangrove forests, depletion of fish populations, water hyacinths invasion, natural gas flaring amongst others caused by the activities of oil multinational companies. The resultant effect of the aforementioned is the upsurge of ecological imperialism which has given rise to underdevelopment, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, environmental degradation and a lot more. Corroborating the above, Ekpu opines that:

The story of the Niger Delta is the story of a paradox, grinding poverty in the midst of vulgar opulence. It is the case of a man who lives at a bank of a river and washes his hands with spittle. It is the case of a people who live on the farm and die of hunger (Ekpu 10).

These challenges give nature poets like Ojaide the spur as a social critic to imaginatively set the stage on painting the picture of the Niger Delta region realistically through the diverse experiences of the people in his poetry collections. His poetry therefore has generated serious academic researchers from literary scholars interpreting the ills of environmental degradation with a view to finding lasting solutions for the Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole. The present study aims at over - viewing the collective body of Ojaide's poetry vis a vis some contributions of scholars in this perspective. The purpose is to interrogate Ojaide's level of consistency to the course of the exposition of environmental challenges within Niger Delta and Nigeria for over four decades of his literary career. The work also aims at establishing

Ojaide's dogmatic determination in using his artistic works to champion positive changes in the face of environmental problems.

2. A Brief Biography of Tanure Ojaide

Tanure Ojaide is undoubtedly one of the strong voices from the Niger Delta region in literary perspective. In his commitment to the course of the Niger Delta area, he has written several literary works which project his voice in the discourse of the plight of his people. This is as a result of the fact that he is connected to his roots and has not failed to articulate the woes betiding the Niger Deltans. He is regarded as a socio-political and eco-critical poet.

Born (1948) in the oil rich but economically impoverished Niger Delta area of Nigeria, Tanure Ojaide was raised by his grandmother in a riverine rural environment. He attended a Catholic Grammar School and Federal Government College, Warri. Ojaide was educated at the University of Ibadan, where he received a Bachelor's Degree in English and Syracuse University where he received both the M.A in Creative Writing and Ph.D in English. He is a fellow in writing of the University of Iowa. His poetry awards include the (Commonwealth Poetry Prize for the Africa Region (1987), the All-Africa Okigbo Prize for Poetry (1988, 1997), the BBC Arts and Africa Poetry Award (1988) the Association of Nigerian Authors Poetry Award (1988, 1994, 2003 and 2011) amongst others.

3. Methodology

The study is eco-centric based in poetic discourse. It involves a historical survey of Ojaide's poetry since his first publication in 1973 to 2015. From this perspective, poems that centre on environmental challenges ranging from oil spillage, loss of mangrove forest, depletion of fish population, water hyacinths invasion to natural gas flaring are purposively selected from across virtually all his poetry collections. These collections include:

- Children of Iroko and Other Poems (1973)
- Labyrinths of the Delta (1986)
- The Eagles Vision (1987)
- The Endless Songs (1988)
- Poems (1988)
- The Fate of Vulture (1990)
- The Blood of Peace (1991)
- Daydream of Ants 1 (1997)
- Delta Blues and Homesongs (1998)
- Where it no Longer Matters Where You Live (1999)
- Invoking the Warrior Spirit: New and Selected Poems (2000)
- In the Kingdom of Songs (2002)
- I Want to Dance and Other Poems (2003)
- In the House of Words (2005)
- The Tale of the Harmattan (2007)
- Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel (2008)
- The Beauty I have Seen (2010)
- Love Gifts (2013)
- Songs of Myself (2015)

It should be noted that in the body of the work, the title of these collections are written in full while the titles of poems selected from them for analysis are shortened and represented by the first nominal class in each title thus:

1.	"The Music of Pain"	"The Music"
2.	"The Goat Song"	"The Goat"
3.	"The New Warrior"	"The Warrior"
4.	"When Eagerness Wanes"	"Eagerness"
5.	"Granny's Blessing"	"Granny"
6.	"Labyrinths of the Delta II & III"	"Labyrinths"
7.	"Children of Iroko"	"Iroko"
8.	"We Keep Watch Over Them"	"Watch"
9.	"For Our Own Reasons"	"Reasons"
10.	"The Power of Victims"	"Power"
11.	"Enter My Dream"	"Dream"
12.	"The Warrior Spirit"	"Warrior"
13.	"Amulets"	"Amulets"
14.	"When Green was the Lingua Franca"	"Lingua Franca"

Table 1

Descriptive analytical method is applied to the interpretation of data subjected to basic keys of eco-criticism models of Dobie (2009), Jimmy's (2015) and Mambrol's (2016) citations of eco-criticism analytical keys by early eco-critics. The choice of eco-criticism model is premised on its interest as an organised methodology aimed at studying

literature from the environmental perspective. All the poems selected for analysis are basically rooted in environmental issues. Eco-criticism therefore becomes indispensable in this regard.

4. Review of Relevant Literature

Environmental challenges since twentieth century have assumed a global dimension. Mambrol notably observed that countries experience one form of environmental problem or the other. Notable among these problems on his list are nuclear war, depletion of valuable natural resources, population explosion, proliferation of exploitative technologies, conquest of space preliminary to using it as a garbage dump, pollution, extinction of species among others. The numerous environmental problems listed above have elicited reactions in writings across different fields-sociology, history, economics, environmental science and literature. In the field of literature especially in the Nigerian setting, a form of poetry recognised as eco-poetry developed to address some basic environmental issues. Ayinuola & Abiodun-Eniayekan related how notable Nigerian poets have deployed eco-poetry as a medium to create national and international awareness to the realities of ecological imperialism and exploitation of the Niger Delta region. Their study reemphasized the relevance of poetry to the socio-cultural institution and a great tool in decrying neo-colonialism, cultural imperialism, socio-economic oppression and political tyranny.

Notable among Nigeria poets that have made environmental issues topical in their works is Tanure Ojaide. Irantiola recognised him as one of the most ambitious and significant poet to emerge in Nigeria after Clark, Okigbo and Soyinka due to his prolific vastness in poetry. According to him, Ojaide's poetry recreates a natural environment and communal existence with certain characteristic features that define them in their originality. From this angle Ojaide delves into the contemporary world especially addressing issues and challenges of post-colonial Nigeria and Africa. He further equipped that Ojaide's poetry may be considered simple but each line is loaded with aesthetics and meaning.

Buttressing the position of nature in the poetry of Ojaide, Ojaruga reaffirmed the former's leaning on Urhobo Folkloric background to successfully achieve his purpose. Ojaruga highlighted how Ojaide deploys fauna and flora in their Urhobo originality such as "Akpobrisi", "Uwara", "Eyareya" and "Iroko". He also uses legendry Urhobo personages like "Ogiso", "Arhwaran", "Aminogbe", "Ayayughe" and "Ogidigbo". All these natural features have carved a cultural identity and a common humanity for his work.

Aside the naturalness of the Niger Delta environment usually created in Ojaide's works, the style reveals the intimacy that exists between the Niger Delta people and their land. A degradation of the land therefore implies a degradation of the people that own the land and a security challenge to the entire nation (Okoh and Osborne). Osborne explained that Ojaide's major preoccupation in *Delta Blues* is the exposition of the suffering, pain, and injustice suffered by the people of Niger Delta as a result of the activities of the oil prospectors. She remarked that the vices identified are not limited to the Niger Delta alone but that the entire country is sick and in a deplorable state of 'sleeping in a makeshift grave'.

The views of Osborne are encapsulated in Edebor. All the environmental challenges associated with oil exploration are categorized into three major types by Edebor citing Dawodu. These include:

- Environmental pollution.
- Destruction of eco-system and the life of the people.
- Impoverishment of the oil producing communities.

Nwagbarare-echoed Ojaide's tireless efforts in exposing environmental and ecological predation in the Niger region of Nigeria. In his view, "since Ojaide's poetics intersects with the realities of ecological imperialism, it is thus a dependable barometer to gauge Nigeria's environmental ecological dissonance for sustainable development" (Nwagbara 1).

From another perspective Uwasomba interrogated the politics of oil in the Niger Delta in particular and the Nigerian post-colonial state in general. He deployed Ojaide's *The Activist* to explicate the struggle of the Niger Delta people against a vampire state working with entrenched interests. Interestingly, Aghoghovwia; Nnamdi, Gomba and Ugiomoh assuredly forecast dimensions of hope in the face of these challenges. Aghoghovwia asserted that literary and cultural rejuvenation can offer some solutions in addressing the environmental and social injustice occasioned by the oil encounter. The trio above emphasized a synergy between aesthetics/environmental education and social function as significant in tackling environmental problems.

From the foregoing arguments, it is imperative to recognise that Ojaide's poetry for decades has brought to public attention the level of environmental degradation experienced in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and the implications for the region and Nigeria as a whole as detrimental to the overall development of the Nigerian nation.

5. Theoretical Background

The theory that underpins this research is eco-criticism. It is a form of literary criticism that out-rightly investigates the connection, link or relationship between humans and the natural world in literature. It deals with how environmental and cultural issues concerning the environment and attitudes towards nature are presented logically and analysed. One of the main goals in eco-criticism is to study how individuals in society behave and react in relation to nature and ecological aspects. Basically, this form of criticism has gained a lot of attention and concern in recent years due to higher social emphasis on environmental destruction and increased technology. It is therefore a fresh way of indepthly looking at literary texts with the sole objective of heralding new dimensions to the field of literary and theoretical studies. Some of the most widely known eco-critics are Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, Simon C. Estok, Harold Fromm, William Howarth, William Rueckert, Suellen Campbell, Michael P. Branch and Glen A. Love, Hojjat and Daronkolae. They noted that

eco-criticism as a term emerged in the world of critical study in the late 1970s by combining criticism and ecology. They further noted that M.H. Abrams believes that eco-criticism designates the critical writings which explore the relations between literature, biological and physical environment conducted as an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities.

William Rueckert is believed to have coined the term “eco-criticism” in 1978, which he defines as the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature. However, it was only in the 1990s that eco-criticism emerged as a separate discipline, although it is a fact that the relationship between man and his physical environment had always been interesting to literary critics (Barry cited in Jimmy 370).

Dobie reviewed the works of Lawrence Bull and Estok on eco-criticism. The centrality of their views is that eco-criticism is committed to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study. She opined further that what all these perspectives on the field have in common is that they are interested in examining the relationship of literature and nature as a way to renew a reader’s awareness of the non-human world and his or her responsibility to sustain it. Dobie also noted that reading or analysing as an ecocritic involves being attentive to environmental issues that have been traditionally relegated to the background. Thus, she listed out what one should look for while analysing a work using eco-criticism. She stated that one is expected to show in his or her essay why the work or issue one has chosen to discuss serves that end. In the course of the research, one should answer the following questions to come to the conclusion that eco-criticism is suitable for one’s research work:

- What insights about the natural world does this text or writer have to offer?
- Does it raise questions or issues about nature or the environment that readers should be concerned with?
- Does the work deal with environmental issues that are addressed in the study of history, philosophy, psychology, art or ethics?
- What has been over looked in traditional readings that can enrich public awareness of humankind’s impact on the natural world? (Dobie 244)

These keys listed above by Dobie are relevant in the analysis of data in this study.

Barry’s contributions to eco-criticism as cited by Mishra are also insightful in this research. Like Dobie, Barry identified relevant points or questions that eco-criticism analysis should be focused on. These include:

- Read or re-read the major as well as other works of literature with a view-finder to trace the natural representation in the writing.
- Praise the authors, poets and intellectuals who put nature on a higher pedestal than other themes.
- Give importance to the writings with an eco-centric perspective such as travel memoirs, essays about places, intellectual writings containing visual landscape in texts etc.
- Not conform to the traditional notions of literary theory that suggests linguistic or the social build and thus walking through the classic lane of ‘world beyond ourselves’.

Closely related to the foregoing points are the views of some early eco-critics referenced by Mambrol. Eco-criticism application to literary works should be interested in these key questions:

- How is nature represented in the novel/poem/play?
- What role does the physical-geographical setting play in the structure of the novel/poem/play?
- How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? That is, what is the link between pedagogic or creative practice and actual political socio cultural and ethical behaviour towards the land and other non-human life forms?
- How is science in the form of genetic engineering, technologies of reproduction, sexualities open to critical scrutiny terms of the effects of science upon the land?

A synthesis of these important keys of eco-criticism is imperative in this research. In summary therefore, eco-criticism strives to challenge the status quo, to change the injustice that are meted out on the environment by man. Thus, it is a revolutionary theory that tries to retrace man’s steps and strives to stop him from destroying his environment.

In spite of the huge importance of the foregoing propositions and arguments on eco-criticism it is pertinent to mention that they are mostly from the perspectives of the Europeans. In the African context, the concept of environment is arguably viewed differently. For the Africans, environment includes the land and the supernatural forces. For instance, Gogoi (2014) avers that in *Things for Apart* Chinua Achebe has elaborated on the relationship between the Igbo and their land in the eastern part of Nigeria; and this include not only the physical relationship but also, the spiritual relationship. Gogoi further explains that nature from this perspective is a living entity. Therefore, “the Igbo’s agricultural life, religious beliefs, festivals, their ideas about the world and human life are all intertwined with nature”.

The foregoing view corroborates Moolla’s suggestion that an African eco-criticism must be informed by specific material and cultural conditions on the continent of Africa and not simply drawn on a supposed more universal post-colonial framework. The following postulations are summed up in Wu (2016, p.i) that an African-focused Eco-criticism is the perspective that includes as part of its tenets criticisms on the impact of colonialism, neo-colonialism and globalization on various African environment. This summation is the perspective on which data is interpreted in this paper.

6. Analysis of Selected Poems

A number of related approaches in eco-criticism are harmonized in the analytical survey of data in this study. Jimmy’s observation of suggested models by early literary eco-critics such as Barry is insightful in this work. These basic strategies referenced by Jimmy are linked up with Dobie analytical keys and Mambrol citation of some critics’

identification of relevant tools in eco-criticism analysis. The summary of these approaches are embedded essentially in the following.

- The representation of natural environment in the poems.
- The influence of the natural environment on the lives of the people – the relationship that exists between the people and their natural environment in the poems.
- Environmental issues relating to the effects of science and technology (activities of man) on the land and the people. In other words, what our different approaches as human beings do to the natural world.
- Recommendations for solving environmental problems.

As earlier mentioned, our study is a survey of Ojaide's poetic historicism aimed at establishing his consistency in the course of exposing the level of damage done to the natural environment of the Niger Delta, Nigeria and Africa. This is juxtaposed with the greenness and naturalness of the environment before the onslaught of vicious human activities on nature.

In the first part of our analysis, we explore Ojaide's birth and growing up in the rustic village of his maternal home under the loving care of his grandmother. The poet persona reminisces the peaceful communal life in his village spiced with local attractive games he enjoyed as a child growing up in a serene natural Greenland: "fireflies lit my childhood" (line 61), "The Delta was a cloudless sky of rains" (line 67), "I pinpointed the cricket's hideout/ from its needless cries" (lines 69-70) and "I waited for the smoke – scourged rabbit" (line 73). With pride, he relishes his relationship with grandma who taught him so many lessons of life: "That life's not all wholesome and there's need for self-denial / of what others covet in their lives - / nothing's good at all, nothing all bad" (lines 42-45) ("Amulets" in the collection *Nomadic Songs*).

The naturalness, and beauty described in "Amulets" was not peculiar to the persona and the grandma. It was a communal gift bestowed on the entirety of the people that bind them together in unity to commune in one lingua franca: 'greenness is life'. This foundational beauty of existence is further pictured in the poem "Lingua Franca" from the collection *Delta Blues and Home songs*. Before the onslaught of the oil prospectors, Niger Delta spoke one language of beauty, freshness, greenness and naturalness of plants and animals. Excerpts from stanza I summarize these beautiful experiences of the old Niger Delta:

I remember erhuvwudjayorho,
such a glamorous fish
but denied growing big
Earthworm, communal name
for the kind of women seeking
to flourish in soft sports
Uwara, beauty that defies
tyranny of Akpobrisi
forest manic and reduce –
what flesh or fiber fails
to capitulate before charm

Beside this beauty, the people experienced orderliness in their daily life activities. They make supplications to their gods for protection and good harvest before commencing each planting season. In this simple life, they achieved progress and procreated maximally and enjoyed good life expectancy:

A year is gone past
After rains, harvest and suns
Hair has gone greyer without
New entrance to the grave-fields
Women have groaned not for grief
but in begetting more sons
And children are saved from pythons
And puff –adders

(From the poem "Iroko" in the collection *Children of Iroko* lines 14-21).

The foregoing illustrations largely demonstrate the influence of the natural environment on the lives of the people. It is a wholesome relationship that impacts greatly on the very existence of the Niger Delta people. In *Labyrinths of the Delta* the poem "Granny" recalls the intimate relationship between the poet persona and his grandma. The grandma is a symbol of the old order of originality and beauty of the Niger Delta. Burying the poet persona's birth cord beside an iroko tree is a clear picture of the affinity existing between the persona and his natural environment of birth. In the *Labyrinths of the Delta* parts II & III, the affinity described between the persona and his environment is portrayed as not only personal but communal. The people are close to their rivers where they derive freshness and joy: "Let us go to the river with drums, goats and cowries" (line 22-23), "let us go to her/she called us this way/ And we came, absorbing accents/ into our tongue (lines 26-29). Their land is the sole of their existence. The flora and fauna are their close companions in this natural world "you stood here waiting since the beginning of time/ O soil, to give yourself to us and here we are (lines 44-45). The iroko is a symbol of their strength and growth: "When we came to the iroko, we saw ourselves in full light/ and grew taller by several fingers" (lines 46-47).

Ojaide laments the on slaughter on the glamour and beauty of the natural environment that guarantee the very existence of his people of Niger Delta and Nigeria. "Power" in the collection *The Daydream of Ants* reveals the emotional, physical, spiritual and environmental damage done to the people of Niger Delta by the multinational oil prospectors. Their

activities made the environment unhealthy for the people resulting in exposure to different kinds of diseases and death: "In flame the land with flu; /inflict deep wounds, leave scabs on faces/and to be filled take away lives" (lines 9-11), "They sacrifice us to their doomed fate (line 15). The poet persona holds greedy leaders responsible for the troubles suffered by the people. By their allowing the "ocean liners to dock in our backyard" (line 17), "we would drive the mermaid into the sea; / the incensed fugitive would increase / our casualties of drowning" (lines 20-23). The mermaid in this context becomes the symbol of nature. The distortion of it results in untold hardship for the people.

This tale of misery associated with man's destruction of his natural environment is further amplified in "The Goat" in the collection *The Tale of the Harmattan*. The poem exposes the appalling condition of the masses juxtaposed with the affluence of some greedy leaders who sell off the land for distortion to the oil prospectors. They clear away "the common wealth's table" (line 9) they feed on the proceeds from oil living in their "guarded prison" (line 3) abandoning the real owners of the natural resources to be "rickety, grovelling /on sand; globules of anguish their only share" (lines 11-12). Their dead knew no peace "They incinerate our dead heroes with flare" (from gas flaring) (line 29) ,"The mind laments, its fan are burning out/ the trees have been shaved of their coiffures" (lines 39-40) in fact, everything about nature has been distorted to the detriment of the people of Niger Delta. These challenges are summarized in oil spills, loss of mangrove forests, depletion of fish population, water hyacinths invasion and natural gas flaring. Upon these troubles, the people live in "blackout" (line 36) and suffer untold hardship while the wealth of the land is used "to rejuvenate foreign cities, invigorate markets" (line 35) and lit the foreigners' land with wonders. This part ends with a note of lamentation that "government and the coalition of global lords /have snatched away..." (lines 49-50) the natural gifts of the people of Niger Delta.

In the face of these environmental challenges and experiences in the Niger Delta and Nigeria, Ojaide through the weaponry of poetry assumes a visionary and resistant posture. Outside exposing the Niger Delta exploitation by both international and domestic political and economic forces explicated in the preceding collections, his poems create awareness and educate the people on the implications to the present and future generations. His pragmatic strides in these poems open up a whole lot of panacea that will alleviate the environmental challenges. Beside collective resistance actions, individual or personal acts of resistance can also make a great impact in the structures of exploitation at the national and international levels. Ojaide no doubt has made great inputs in this struggle to free the Niger Delta, Nigeria and the African worlds from all forms of exploitation and injustice that are environmentally, politically and economically induced.

In the poem "The Music" in the collection *The Fate of Vulture and Other Poems*, Ojaide reveals his vision as a poet and literary writer. He does not create beauty alone in the rhythm of his poems for the sake of art but aims at achieving a revolutionary change in his society: "to excoriate the land's scurvy conscience" (line 5). His poetry constitutes a million of guns, bullets, machetes and all weapons employed to cleanse the land of its robbers:

I do not cry in vain
for my song I sought
the chorus of resistant cries (lines 2-4)
I dressed my words with steel shafts (line 10).
My songs became the land's infantry drawing into its veins
the strength of millions (lines 14-16)
My song has captured the roar of lions
and the jungle mortars of elephants (lines 29-30)

From this vantage position, Ojaide makes an open invitation to "The New Warriors" (from the collection *Labyrinths of the Delta*) to join him in the fight. He reveals the image of the new warriors who will fight for the freedom of their land. These warriors have attractive qualifications. They offer selfless service for freedom. They reject all trappings and baits from government offices to betray their people (stanza one). Instead "They had armed their blood against / the rabid of asinine representatives / and they went to war to save themselves / from the astute claws of social brute/ they suffered penury in battling against benevolent slavers / but they harboured no shame in their discomfort" (Lines 7-12). These new warriors' fearless fight has "deflated the colossal image of robbers in offices/ and loosened the stifling grip of the wealthy demon on lives" (lines 23-24).

In spite of the progress made in this battle, the poet persona in "Eagerness" (in the collection *The Eagles Vision*) still urges all not to be weakened because the battle is yet not over: "We have not yet reached the rainbow's end/ where our smiles will be diamonds in the night / We have not ascended the mountain's assiduous peak" (lines 6-8). The eagerness to win the battle should be considered a necessity.

The spirit of eagerness is interconnected with strong will for resistance in the poem "Watch" from the collection *The Endless Song*. Freedom fighters for natural environment are encouraged to remain strong willed to overcome and not break down before torturers and robbers of natural wealth. The virtue of will is likened to metal:

There's metal in our will, it shows
when we meet hardships -
we do not break down before torturers,
we do not surrender our hope to robbers,
we do not groan despite the daily stabs of hunger
we do not give in to those who live on the blood
of the poor or the sweat of the strong
(lines 19-25).

The poet assures all freedom fighters that their noble engagement is for their good and good of all the people. This admonition is vividly pictured in "Reasons" (in the collection. *The Blood of Peace*). And so, no matter the ugliness of the experience they should solace in the benefits of fighting for themselves. In the line of this spirit, the people proudly proclaim that it may cost their blood but "we are not scared" (line 10) because the life they derive from their natural environment is the sole essence of their existence:

What will we look up to without birds
beating their wings above our heads,
what will we look up to without trees
thrusting their arms into the sky,
what will we look up to without the crest of hills
our roots drive deep into the soil;
they sustain us in our search for fortune.
(stanza 3)

In "Aftermath" (Collection – *Invoking the Warrior Spirit*), the poet reiterates the marriage of strong will and determination symbolized by 'Ivwri', a local Urhobo word of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The poet assuredly informed his readers and the people of Niger Delta that these two virtues are paramount to freedom from environmental imperialism. This spirit represented by 'Ivwri' functions in various capacities:

Ivwri waits at the bottom of the precipice
to caution us against a hard fall,
Ivwri fortifies the threatened with utiri
that blunts the blades of machetes,
Ivwri keeps the gun from firing at his devotees,
Ivwri snatches his favourites from peril and throws them into safety.
(stanza2)

In summary, the poet invites us to share in his dreams in the poem "Dream" (Collection – *Cannon for the Brave*). The beauty of his dreams lies in judgement for terrors and tormentors who make unpleasant laws in Abuja and give callous orders for the destruction of unprotected resistants who "have no lances against the hyena's teeth" (line 12), "No shield against bullets of soldier – barons" (line 13) and "no wand to ward off rampaging boots" (line 15) or "... capital to cash on for victory" (line 16). He is consoled by the hope of judgement of inhumanity of man to man.

7. Conclusion

The researchers through the survey carried out on environmental challenges in the poetry of Ojaide for more than four decades of his poetic career so far have illustrated various features of environmental problems in virtually all his collections. This position is boosted by historical accounts of Ojaide's work garnered from the body of literature existing in his poetry and other literary genres and critical essays.

The research has proven to a large extent the admirable level of commitment of Ojaide to the course of resistance to forces responsible for the degradation of the Niger Delta environment and Nigeria as a whole. The work revealed his forcefulness in revitalizing and sustaining the environment to improving the living conditions of the people of Niger Delta. This effort is geared mostly towards sustaining their livelihood, wealth, emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing.

In the final analysis, the study revealed that Ojaide has consistently in all his collections engaged in ecological issues challenging the peace, progress and happy co-existence of the people of Niger Delta, Nigeria and beyond.

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