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Perception of Ecological Degradation and Climate Change in Selected Nigerian Literature

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Abstract

Superficially, literature and the natural science seem to be diametrically disparate fields, but this study pays attention to how literary writers express serious concern about environmental degradation in their works. It examines various ways ecological degradation and climate change can be curtailed from interdisciplinary perspective using ecocritical literary theory predicated on analytic research methodology. Ecocritical study examines the interface of literature and the ecosystem and/or the relationship between literature and the natural environment. The findings revealed that the effects of climate change can be more devastating and perplexing than HIV/AIDS, if pragmatic steps are not urgently taken to curb its causes and address the menace. There would be colossal loss of lives to hunger more than any known dreaded disease. Communities would be washed away by flood. Pestilence would be rampant. Food shortage would be adversely felt and human life span would be shortened. The conclusion arrived at is that reading literary works will help in the on-going global summits on climate change. Nigerians do not take care of their environment. Many a Nigerian City is filthy. Waste is disposed carelessly. Drainages are not constructed and the few ones available are not cleaned up. The study recommends that government at all levels should embark on serious sensitisation of the citizenry on the need to protect the ecosystem and clean the environment of mess.

Keywords: *Literature, environmental degradation, climate change, ecocritical study*

1. Introduction

Like the medical practitioners, Nigerian literary writers have consistently used their writings to save lives by reflecting diverse spheres of life and many have shown thoughtful commitments to sensitising and conscientising their audience of the need to conserve the natural environment. Interdisciplinary study in Literature and the Ecosystem is borne out of the idea that the former does not evolve from a vacuum; it is a product of the latter and, more often than not, environmental issues within the domain of a literary writer spur him/her into writing. Hence, the idea is geared towards ameliorating pernicious environmental occurrences occasioned by human actions or inactions posing threat to life. The dynamic potency of literature in relation to how it can help reconstruct, reshape and conserve the natural environment and its inhabitants come to the fore in this study. Olaniyan (2013) argued that literature is a microcosm of the macro-human world; hence, the society affects literature as much as literature does evolve from it. Literature, as a humanistic field of study, responds to myriad of contemporary issues for the betterment of the society including but not restricted to life-threatening environmental issues.

Climate change is one of the resultant effects of the systemic destruction of the biosphere through man's daily activities. Its hazard to the flora and fauna of the ecosystem as well as the threat it poses to humanity should be abated. The exploitative

inclination of man constitutes critical threat to the ecosystem, resulting in environmental peril shortening man's life span. The menace has been gradual but steady depredation of land and animals supporting man's peaceful and healthy living. The effects have been self-alienation of man from the natural ambience, physical damage of the landscape, greenhouse effect, climate change and global warming. In a 2013 article entitled *Trend in Wildlife Conservation Practices in Nigeria*, Ejidike and Ajayi noted that even places government designated as reserved areas were being encroached upon by poachers who kill animals and fall trees indiscriminately. Indiscriminate killing of animals and harvesting of trees, both in free and reserved areas, results to the extinction of renewable and non-renewable resources. It has also compelled some animals to migrate without returning back to where they migrated from. "This is exactly what happened in the case of elephants that were many in the 1980's in Kainji lake national park and its environs" (Ejidike and Ajayi, 2013). Lamenting the depletion of the forest and game reserves, Tola Badejo, in the Saturday May 1, 2017 edition of the *Punch Newspaper*, stated categorically that "it is good to maintain forest and national parks so as to preserve biodiversity". The clarion call to recapture the violated nature, to embark on environmental justice in lieu of injustice and to desist from all deeds capable of causing environmental problems is the thrust of this study. The leitmotif of the literary works analysed in this study is the covetous exploitation of the natural resources, the violation of the virgin land and the wreaking of ecological havoc on humanity.

Attention was first drawn to the depletion of the natural environment by the romantic poets who were appalled by the perceptible danger the European Industrial Revolution posed to nature. After their efforts, little or no attention is given to such hazard and how other human activities constitute danger to nature and, by extension, humanity. Hence, the interface of literature and the ecosystem and/or the emergence of ecocriticism—the study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment and the literary theories appertained—dates back to 1980 in America and the early 1990s in the United Kingdom (Barry, 2002 and Fortress, 2013).

The choice of the texts selected for the study was based on how the writers perceive and highlight ecological issues, the value accorded nature in the works and how they prioritise sustainability of life. Eco-writers believe that the earth can be salvaged by decisive measures. Hence, this study employs the burgeoning theoretical framework of ecocriticism to evaluate the presentation of the natural environment—the non-human nature: animals, plants, and the outer space—presented in the selected literary works from environmental justice point of view. From the ecocritical analysis, attention is paid to ecocultural offshoot of the theoretical framework.

The ecosystem consists of all the plants, living and non-living creatures in a particular area considered in relation to their physical environment (Hornby, 2010). The environment is the outer physical and biological system in which man and other organisms live. It is made up of the soil, minerals, water, plants, animals and the climatic factors. It is the entity on which man's survival rests and on which industrial development depends. Some of the ecological resources are renewable while others are not. These resources: plants, animals, water, air and other macroscopic organisms contribute significantly to healthy living. For instance, the impact of the butterfly in pollination cannot be underestimated; so also, is that of the earthworm in aeration in the soil. Unfortunately, however, as man populates the earth and his needs increase, he inordinately over-exploits the resources and overlooks the sustainability of natural resources.

In the face of climate change characterised by excessive heat and flood, loss of land nutrient and low farm produce, aridity, earthquake, volcanic eruption and other threats, research on environmental conservation should be continuous until the universe is saved from the imminent calamity. This is why a lot still needs to be done on how literature can be of help to curtail ecological degradation and climate change from interdisciplinary perspective, to establishing confluence between literature and the natural science, in spite of what previous researchers have done on ecocriticism. Literature and the natural science appear to be two disparate fields. Combining the two disciplines for research looks odd especially to people outside the literary circle, because it is not everybody that is aware of the fact that literary writers express serious concern about environmental degradation in their works; and that reading such works can help a great deal in the on-going global summits on climate change. Be that as it may, no one can gainsay the fact that the climate is changing rapidly, Nigerians are contending with environmental threats in recent years and the gravity of such threats mankind deals with in contemporary time calls for interdisciplinary approach to the measures towards curbing those actions causing the menace. There is urgent need for educative research that will expose the causes of global warming and proffer sustainable solution to the problem. To achieve this, ideas and/or strategies towards curtailing the threat effectively must be harnessed from different fields of study. Therefore, this project deconstructed the layman's perception of the scope of literature, which hitherto consigns the discipline to fictional endeavour, by highlighting the link between literature and the natural science in the face of environmental problems.

The impetus for the study was derived from the ongoing global ecological crisis and measures towards addressing climate change. Some species of animal and plants are endangered, climate is changing and human population continues to grow daily as a result of some cultural practices with rapid increase in environmental pollution, emission of toxic chemical into the atmosphere and poor living condition. It is noteworthy that Slaymaker (2001) in Olaniyan and Quayson (2007) observed that critical reviews of Niyi Osundare's poetry in previous studies do not examine in detail his ecological and environmental themes which are evident in his 1986 collection of poems entitled *The Eyes of the Earth* and the same probably seems applied to other writers whose works are of environment concerns. He maintained that although Nwanchukwu-Agbada's (1994) thesis is that Osundare's best work, *The Eye of the Earth*, connects Nigerian wisdom lore and folklores with sympathy for all exploited people of the world including the oppressed working class and the peasant

farmers, only momentary attention is paid to environmentalism in his poetry. This oversight, the cursory attention to ecocritical stance of ecopoets to promote an invaluable aesthetics through which literary expression in poetic grandeur assumes a base for environmental conservation and change, is as a result of individual critic's level of consciousness.

2. Theoretical Framework/Methodology

Ecocritical literary theory (otherwise known as Ecocriticism) was used to analyse the presentation of the natural environment—the non-human nature: animals, plants, and the outer space—presented in the selected literary works from environmental justice point of view. From the ecocritical analysis, attention is paid to ecocultural offshoot of the theoretical framework. Ecocriticism is the study of Literature and the environment from interdisciplinary point of view, involving the analysis of literary texts of environmental concern and examination of the various ways nature is treated in such works. Estok (2001) postulated that ecocriticism is committed to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study. It is aimed at effecting attitudinal change towards nature by analysing the natural environment as reflected in literary works. Gomide (2006) offered a working definition of ecocriticism that is both all-encompassing and discriminating, differentiating it from what it is and what it is not, by referring it to be field of enquiry that analyses and promotes works of art which raise moral question about human interaction with nature and also motivate audience to live within a limit that will not endanger humanity over generations. Analytical research methodology was adopted for the study. Analytical research methodology is text-based and it is more suitable for literary analysis.

2.1. Environmental Pollution and the Hazard in Nigeria

From time immemorial, the creator's love towards mankind, animals and plants of all sorts has never ceased. Out of his infinite love, God provided a splendid ambience characterised by varieties for human's survival. The thick forest with its amazing flora and fauna of different sizes and colours, the bobbing seas and the oceans, the mountains and the valleys, the acrobatic display of the birds and the diving of fish seen around attest to the magnificent of the creative ingenuity of God and his desire that humans should not lack. Unfortunately, however, man's actions and inactions make him suffer in the midst of plenty. This is because man, to his own detriment, has continually shown little or no concern for the management of the environment.

The environment is the outer physical and biological system in which man and other organisms live with many interacting components such as animals, minerals, water, plants, etc. It consists of natural and man-made resources available at a given time for the satisfaction of human needs. Holistically, the environment is, therefore, the entity on which human beings subsist, and on which the entire agricultural and industrial development depend. The environment meant therefore is the biosphere, a thin layer of land, air and other resources on the surface of the planet.

Regrettably, as human beings multiply through procreation and their needs increase, and as technology advances, they have endangered the planet earth. The end products of many of the human activities in the environment thought to be done with and in good intention turn out to be inimical to life. Farmers and Herders for instance inadvertently burn bushes for the cultivation of crops and regeneration of grasses during dry season; in the process, forest and wildlife are destroyed for a transient gain. In sheer ignorance, communities litter their surroundings with garbage, dumping sewage and industrial wastes into streams, which serves as sources of water to other communities. Ironically, the money thought to have been saved in the course of dumping the sewage in the stream rather than detoxifying it is later spent on purifying the same contaminated water for later use (this explains the absurdity and irrationality in human's nature especially in the sales of the so-called pure-water when there is water everywhere and also the paradox in the situation of the contemporary Ogoni land that needs urgent clean-up). Houses are intentionally built on waterways, sometimes in display of wealth. In the late twentieth century and the twenty-first century, there has been colossal destruction and over-exploitation of the natural resources all-over the globe. The problems and dangers this poses to mankind are real, felt always and transcend national boundaries into intercontinental affairs. The outcome of the devastation—global warming and climate change—have become global threat which no nation can be isolated from nor such that a single nation can solve. Discussing the causes, consequences and logistics towards addressing the challenge, ideas must be harnessed from different nations and disciplines. This explains the regular global summits on climate change.

Nigerian literary writers have lent their voices to the global awareness about the threat of environmental hazard. They do not go by mere rhetoric in their writings warning that environmental pollution is bad but they unflinchingly present things Nigerians are evidently doing that constitute environmental pollution. Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006) exposes the devastating effects of oil spillage and its effects on the people of the Niger-Delta region. The novel opens with the scene revealing the narrator's mother's loss of farmland, the only means of livelihood, to oil spillage. Oil spillage is a common phenomenon in the Niger-Delta part of Nigeria. Funnily enough, it is not Zilayefa's mother alone that loses her means of livelihood; almost all the farmers in the village lost theirs. The farmland had been lost though for years according to the narrator even before the spillage, "because each season yielded less than the season before". The effect is not restricted to the loss of farmland but the villagers 'had gradually lost, year after year, the creature of the river to oil spill, acid rain, gas flares' and other toxic emissions. The cause of this problem is not farfetched. Nigerian economy depends largely on oil extraction and exportation from the Niger-Delta and, as such, it seems to be a good intention. This seemingly good intention has turned sour to the people of the host communities where oil companies operate. Environmental pollution caused by the activities of the oil

companies in the communities has resulted into loss of farmlands and rural-urban migration. Children of those who have lost their farmlands move to cities in search of jobs that are usually not available. Indigent ladies resort to prostitution to earn a living. Rather than being a blessing for the improvement of the life of the people of the host communities, oil spillage exacerbates their suffering.

In Nigeria, gas flaring and oil spillage remain serious concern for the environment and environmental expert as well. This challenge against nature is rampant in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. According to Afinotan and Ojatorotu (2009) as well as Ejiba et al (2016), the Niger-Delta region comprises nine states: Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Imo, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Abia and Ondo. Ejiba, Onya and Adams (2016) opine that oil pollution affects Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta and Akwa Ibom more than other states. Ejiba et al (2016) traced the beginning of oil exploration in Nigeria to 1956 when Shell Petroleum Company discovered an oil well in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State. Between this period and 1958, more oil wells were later discovered at Afam, Bonu, Ebubu, Ughelli and Kbori (Idiege, 2017). Consequently, this discovery led to the arrival of more oil companies such as Agip, Mobil, Elf, Texaco, Chevron, etc. into Nigeria. Ever since, Nigeria is among the countries with viable mineral resources in commercial quantity. At present, Nigeria is regarded as the 5th largest oil producing nations in the world and 80% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) comes from the Delta-Delta region (Ejiba, Onya and Adams, 2016). Unfortunately, in spite of the immense benefits of the petrodollar to the country's economy, the aftermaths of the exploration are deadly to the inhabitants of the region. This is because crude oil contains toxic components capable of killing human beings, plants and animals. Corroborating this view, Kadafa (2012) affirmed that all aspects of oil exploration and exploitation have adverse effects on the ecosystem and local biodiversity. The toxic effects are associated, according to Agbonifo (2016), to poor maintenance of infrastructure, failure of equipment, human error, vandalism, corrosion of pipes, etc. Annually, total averages of 23,000 barrels of oil spill and, since 1958, between 9 million and 13 million barrels of crude oil have spilled in the Niger-Delta (Ejiba et al 2016). It is possible that the figures quoted here have changed.

Worthy of discussion in this regard is illegal oil bunkering that causes more harm than profit in the country. More often than not, people who engage in it do employ traditional/local method to refine their stolen crude oil from damaged pipelines thereby leading to spill in the process. Agbonifo (2016) attributed illegal oil bunkering in Nigeria to high level of insurgencies in the Niger-Delta region, high cost of crude oil in the international market, scarcity of refined petroleum products in Nigeria among others. He asserted that 75% of oil spill is caused by theft. As earlier mentioned, gas flaring and oil spillage are having destructive impact on the region. Ojaide (2015) best describes this in his poem entitled *Quatrain Suite*:

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The rich among us used to boast of the many
barrels of palm oil they produced in the season
of industry.
Then came spills and flare that burnt out palm trees
Today the government and Shell toast their oil fortune

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The birds and beetles lost their refuge as people
of the creeks lost their sun, moon, and stars to fumes
Why are survivors of the globalization assault
only the insignia of commander-in-chief, vultures and cobra?

From the stanzas above, the poet makes us understand that agriculture is one of the occupations of the Niger-Delta people. In the time past, the region used to account for a large production of palm oil and other agricultural products. But today, all of that has become history due to the menace of environmental hazard borne out of gas flare and oil spillage. In stanza 15, the poet informed us about the unspeakable damage oil exploration and exploitation has caused and is still causing in the region.

Similar scenario is depicted in Niyi Osundare's *Our Earth Will not Die*, a poem in his collection entitled *The Eye of the Earth* (1986). In the poem, Osundare outlined some parts of the biosphere threatened by daily human activities. The lakes are no more hygienic and the sea. These water sources have been poisoned by industrial discharges. In the process, the aquatic animals are killed. One cannot but wonder why fish is imported into the country in spite of the abundant freshwater in Nigeria. The poet wrote that rainwater is no more suitable for consumption because it has become acidic. Such water is not only harmful for humans' consumption but it also kills plants:

And the rain
The rain falls, acid, on balding forests
Their branches amputated by the septic daggers
of tainted clouds.

The use of toxic gas does not help matter. Released toxic gas reduces the life span of man, animals and plants and as such: Fishes have died in the water. Fishes.

Birds have died in the trees. Birds.

Rabbits have died in their burrows. Rabbits.

In *Ours To Plough, Not to Plunder*, a poem in Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), the poet advised that the duties of man are to manage the earth effectively to benefit but not to endanger his life. He described the potential of the earth and how humans can use plants to maximally support their living. He maintained vehemently that:

This earth is
ours to work not to waste
ours to man not to maim

This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder

Among contemporary Nigerian eco-poets none displays environmentalist's alertness, and none is more self-consciously steeped in anti-imperialist terms than Tanure Ojaide. 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). In Ojaide's view, poetry must be a functional, aesthetic and ideological tool for environmental agitation. Discussing Ojaide's poetics of ecological imperialism in his collection entitled *The Tale of the Harmattan* (2007), Okoro (2007) affirmed that the collection narrates and reflects on local issues with global implications. In the collection, one is introduced to the disturbing tale of the oil saga that continues to plague Nigeria's conscience. Ojaide referenced an array of struggles for a clean environment, multinational's sensitivity to local people in their business dealings, minority rights, and rights of the people to be treated as humans. Ojaide's poetics is sensitive to the plights of the Niger-Delta people—and Nigerians by extension as their environment and biodiversity disappear before their very eyes. Niyi Osundare in *Ogoanah* (2003) averred that:

...art has a purpose. I believe in the social status of art... art 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.

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, 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 martyr-eco-activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was killed with other Ogoni eight during the Abacha junta. 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. This is why the African art is utilitarian. 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 *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems*, Ojaide highlighted environmental concern. In one of the poems, *The AT & P, Sapele*, he reconstructs the damage done to the flora in the Niger Delta environment, 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
The planks smelt fish
Sardine-packed for export;
They came in raft by water...
When decades later I went home
to the delta of hardwood,
a big clearing welcome me...(30)

Evidence of this "clearing" and loss of flora is captured poignantly in the poem. 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. To Ojaide, there is no alternative for the people and the asphyxiating world presented in the poems and, by extension Nigeria, except for decisive ecological conservation (Nwagbara, 2010).

From economic point of view, it is worthy of note that oil spillage does cause a blockage of regular sources of income of the people of the Niger-Delta because many of them depend on agrarian activities. It is sad to know that various farmlands and rivers in the host communities have been adversely affected by oil spillage thereby jeopardising the people's means of living. Ojaide (2015) explained the situation thus:

My children have had no scholarship;
they can't fish or tap rubber as I once did,
the river transformed into a snake of a tomb
and the forest fraught with flares and fumes.

With crude oil gushing into slave ships
 refurbishing as free market super-tankers,
 The government assures people of development
 with proceeds from export and spot market deals
 No jobs for the graduates in the oil sector
 even as wells litter the family's farmlands.

2.2. Ecocultural Hazard in Nigerian Cities and Towns

Nigerian writers do not write about deforestation, oil spillage and destruction of the ecological fauna alone but they also expose the dirty environment that is an identifying culture of Nigerian cities and towns. It is heartening that writers from the Northern Nigeria are not lagging behind in this area. Aliyu Kamal's (2010) *Women without Borders* is a classic reference in this instance. He writes about poor city planning system. The narrator reveals the situation in Kano metropolitan city. The persona writes that Maje:

was very critical of Kano. Houses were too close to the road. They closed in so close such that no space was left to dig drainage, where there were any, the dust that collected on the road easily filled them up, as they were left open. Maje mischievously thought, for the dirty black water they contained to scent the charged air with its odoriferous stench.

While one cannot rule out the effects of deforestation on incessant flood hazard in Nigeria, Kamal portrays a social realistic view of the major causes of flood. And this buttresses the fact that Nigerian novels are very realistic and that writers gain inspiration for their writing through events in their environment. Building houses on the waterways is a common phenomenon in Nigeria not only in Kano but also in other Cities (and towns) in the country—Lagos, Ibadan, Onitsha, Benin, Kaduna, Sokoto, to mention but a few. Blockage of drainage system is also very common let alone leaving the scanty drainages open. The acrid odour emitting from the gutters causes diseases. This is not all: "Maje could remember seeing the same architectural design in villages. All the village markets that he knew were erected too close to the roads". More often than not, the resultant effect is accident that claims lives every day. The narrator proceeded to discuss sound pollution occasioned by diesel engines used to generate electricity as a result of power failure. He also brings his narrative ingenuity to bear on uncanny disposal of waste by sellers and buyers of different commodities. In the business sphere, "both buyers and sellers helped to give the place its badge of untidiness. There was no dustbin to be seen, but rubbish dumps could and did materialise anywhere and anyhow all over the place". It is an ecocultural aspect of Nigerians—the interface of culture and ecological issues. Rubbish dump is the signifying feature of market places in major Nigerian cities without exception; so also, is open filthy acrid gutters. The Nigerian poor transport system does not only claim lives but also results to environmental hazard. In advanced countries of the world where there is good transport system, everybody has no reason to own cars. Aside from the traffic gridlock they cause, "they all spewed exhilarating white smoke, and the other dark-grey". The carbon monoxide released depletes the ozone layer, resulting in skin cancer, global warming and greenhouse effect.

2.3. Logging/Bush Burning and their Devastating Effects

Deforestation remains one of the man's cruel actions against his environment. Hornby (2015) described it as "the act of cutting down or burning the trees in an area". In Packiam's (2015) opinion, deforestation is seen as the conversion of forest to an alternative permanent non-forested use such as agriculture, grazing and urban development; while, in a simpler term, Ogunwale (2015) defined deforestation as the clearing away of forests. Candidly speaking, the usefulness of the natural environment to human beings, animals and plants cannot be overemphasised. Aigbe and Oluku (2012) opined that forest in Nigeria occupies a total land mass area of 997, 936 km². In his poem entitled *Purgatory of grace*, Ododo (2012) gives the illustration of the indispensability of the green vegetation:

Here
 Here once stood
 Stood a greenish mighty tree
 Mothering nest of birds
 Casting thick shadow of safety....

From the above lines, forest is personified as a gravid being capable of procreating different species of bird. This is made possible by the presence of trees. Again, this attest to the symbiotic relationship of all organisms in the ecosystem. The 'greenish mighty trees' serve as shelter for animals, including the birds that make their nests on them. The "thick shadow of safety" signifies the protective and/or defensive support the green vegetation offers the planet earth. Packiam (2015) corroborated this importance by stating that seventy per cent (70%) of plant and animals live in the forest. By that estimate, only thirty per cent (30 %) of terrestrial animals are domesticated. In addition to these, Archana (2013) and Packiam (2015) posited that other benefits of the forest include:

- For human's benefit, the forest helps in the absorption of atmospheric carbon thereby purifying the oxygen in the air breathed.

- It remains the main source of medicinal plants for pharmaceutical company owners as well as tradio-medical practitioners.
- Forest helps to protect the planet from soil erosion by slowing the runoff of water.
- It is a source of timber for industrial wood products such as poles, paper, pulp, etc.
- It helps to preserve water shed and water quality and quantity for both animal and human consumption.

From the few importance of the forest highlighted above, one could imagine the great consequences of deforestation to mankind, especially in relation to global warming, food security, loss of biodiversity, etc. This dastard act of human has been justified with so many reasons. One of these is associated with human civilisation and globalisation. Man's quest for social and physical development makes him rape the environment in terms of road construction and urbanisation for example. In his poem entitled Priest, Convers and gods, Ojaide (2015) explained this situation thus:

The developers tore down the forest that
Covered us with green foliage, trashed the
natural canopies-
They argued we needed roads to go out, as
if we knew nothing of adventure or did not
visit other places.
They also argued we needed schools and football
fields, not to continue living in the bush
where they found us.

Nigerian transportation system will help reduce the depletion of the ozone layer.

In the excerpt above, Ojaide, like many other African literary icons: Ferdinand Oyono (Houseboy, 1956), Chinua Achebe (Things Fall Apart, 1958) and others, tried to satirise the hypocritical mission of the whites who, during the colonial period, hid under civilisation of Africans to justify their invasion, but were rather after the economic exploitation of the continent at the time. Today, the so-called civilisation is leading to urbanisation and all the worrisome problems associated with it in Nigeria in particular and Africa generally. Overpopulation that exists in various major cities in Nigeria is a clear evidence of mass exodus of people out of the rural areas. Idiege (2017) identified dredging, road construction and buildings, landfilling, manufacturing, mining and drilling as parts of the inimical environmentally based activities emanating from urbanisation. For instance, the more the number of people, the more the number of houses, and the creation of lucrative business for sand and timber dealers. And since people do migrate to urban centres in a quest for better living, making of money through unlawful and indiscriminate dredging and falling of trees become the order of the day. Therefore, the love for money and wealth usually blindfold many Nigerians to terrible consequences of environmental degradation at the detriment of their lives. Ogunwale (2015) blamed this phenomenon on high level of poverty and illiteracy among Africans, and most especially among Nigerians. The precarious situation against nature is still very much evident in the activities of cash crops farmers and local hunters in this country. In On do State for instance, for a long time now, deforestation of the green vegetation for agricultural activities, especially to grow cash crops such as cocoa, kola nut, palm-tree, etc. has been on-going. Annually, different forests in Ondo state along Ofosu-Idanre axis suffer in the hands of farmers from far and near states such as Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Kogi, Kwara and even Benue. The farmers are very enterprising at setting fire to deforest the forest. Not only is this archaic farming system detrimental to organic materials of the soil but it also destroys, through escalating conflagration, uncountable species of animals and plants inhabiting the forest. In a similar vein, local hunters do, illegally, kill animals in the forest in an attempt to setting fire to suffocate them in their burrows. This grave misuse of fire is, perhaps, what prompted Chakravarty et al (2012) to submit that "fire is a good servant but has a poor master".

3. Findings

In the course of this study, it has been discovered that interdisciplinary study in literature and the natural science geared towards curtailing the devastating effects of ecological degradation and climate change is not anomalous. In the main, the literary works analysed revealed that literary writers across the various regions of Nigeria often use their writings to sensitise and conscientise their audience of the imperative of protecting the flora and fauna of the ecosystem. This avant-garde of ecocriticism, in the Nigerian context, cherish nature, emphasise its importance for the survival of mankind and make green study a fascinating literary genre. Their works are replete with linguistic signifiers pointing to impending environmental disasters Nigeria will face if decisive measures are not urgently taken to curtail environmental degradation. From the works, the potency of literature, that is its utilitarian value of edutainment, has been made known by the writers. Efforts have been made to give a comprehensive account of the responsiveness of literary arts to building, to giving a new form to and to keeping in a safe or sound state the natural environment and its denizens.

It is revealed that many plants and animals are facing serious ecological threat. Their lives are short-lived. Some species of animals and plants are at the verge of extinction while many others have gone into extinction as a result of some inimical actions of man. The analysis of the literary texts shows the level of danger facing both living and non-living organisms of the ecosystem. The natural vegetation is depleting and human life is threatened in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria as result of oil exploration and exportation.

Nigerians do not take care of their environment. Everywhere in the country is filthy. Waste is disposed carelessly, drainages are not constructed and the few ones available are not cleaned up. They are filled with garbage emitting acrid stench causing diseases. The ecosystem is threatened by excessive logging, deforestation, gas flaring, dredging, oil spillage, bush burning and other activities. The ozone layer is being destroyed by carbon monoxide every second as a result of epileptic power supply. The resultant effects of all these life-threatening events are climate change and global warming characterised by flood, excessive heat, drought, low productivity and incessant clash between herdsmen and farmers and the death of humans, animals and plants.

There is no alternative to the planet earth for humans' survival. The clamour by some Western Scientists in recent time for an alternative to planet earth would only be a mere mirage. What the earth requires is a better treatment from all and sundry. Human beings are at the receiving end of all the hazards caused the planet earth. Man's duty is to, for his own longevity; safeguard the natural environment rather than maiming it. To this end, the continuous global summit on climate change is a right step in the right direction.

The effects of climate change would be more ravaging and perplexing than HIV/AIDS, if proactive steps are not urgently taken to curb its causes and to address the menace. There would be colossal loss of lives as a result of hunger more than any known cancerous disease. Communities would be washed away by flood: pestilence would be prevalent; food shortage would be adversely felt and human's life span would be shortened.

Fundamentally, this study employed the burgeoning ecocritical literary theory to describe and explain the role of literary artists in presenting the way the natural environment is designed and the symbiotic dependence among all the denizens of the planet earth with a resounding warning on the protective brace the green vegetation offers mankind.

4. Conclusion

This research work is a clear evidence of a strong bond existing between literature and other disciplines such as science and the social science. Irrespective of the genre on which they specialise, literary writers worldwide sensitise the public, through their writings, of events in their environments with a view to seeking social justice, especially to unpalatable situations of which environmental degradation is not an exception.

5. Recommendations

The government at all levels should embark on serious sensitisation of the citizenry on the need to maintain personal hygiene. Building plan across the nooks and crannies of Nigeria should be designed and be adhered strictly to. Building on waterways should be discouraged and offenders should be prosecuted in the court of competent jurisdiction. More National Parks should be created to have more green vegetation in Nigeria. Along with other experts in other fields, literary writers should be allowed representation in the on-going summits on climate change. The government should ensure adequate funding of the national parks with provision of sufficient personnel and equipment. The polluted areas of the oil-rich Niger-Delta should be cleaned up to secure the life span of the inhabitants. The Nigerian power sector should be made very functional so as to reduce the emission of carbon monoxide occasioned by the use of diesel engines and other power generating machines. Improvement of the Nigerian transportation system will help reduce the depletion of the ozone layer.

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