

OIL POLITICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN IBIWARI IKIRIKO'S OILY TEARS OF THE DELTA

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Abstract

Poems provide a unique window into diverse perspectives, cultures and experiences, promoting empathy and understanding. This paper therefore, examined oil politics and environmental degradation in Ibiwari Ikiriko's Oily Tears of the Delta. Ikiriko's Oily Tears is a collection of thirty poems, twenty-three of which are on the oil motif. Out of thirty poems in the collections, twelve were analyzed and used for this study. These are; "Evening Already", "Oily Tears", "The Call of the River Nun", "Okara's Nun", "Okara's, Delta Tears", "Remembering Saro-Wiwa", "For Ken", "Ogoni Agony", "To Alfred Diete-Spiff", "Rivers at 25" and "Oily Rivers". Ikiriko is seen as an important Nigerian poet from the Niger Delta who has published a lot of poetry collections that expose the problems of degradation, oil exploitation and environmental pollution. Minority rights appear to be more contentious wherever resource-distribution is contested. Oil and Power are linked inextricably in the poetry that Ibiwari Ikiriko has written on the Niger Delta mosaic. Power determines control and dispossession. Thus, the poet has depicted the attitude of the state and its centres of control towards the condition of the oil-bearing communities. The exercise of state might is cast as a strategy of repression which is designed to ensure accumulation for the state and its privileged entities. This paper is to examine the extent to which the poems of Ikiriko, stand as mirrors on various sites of tension and conflict in the Niger Delta.

Key words: Oil, Politics. Environmental degradation

Introduction

As a people we have developed a life-style that is draining the earth of its priceless and irreplaceable resources without regard for the future of children and people all around the world". At the heart of the struggle for participatory, environmental governance is the question of land control and preservation. Mayowa (2008), the Nigerian political scientist opined that violence and ethnic agitation in Nigeria can be described from environmental and economic perspectives. The search light of eco-poetics is on the consequences of this interplay of social politicking on the Nigerian natural environment. Based on this dismal socio-economic landscape, Nigerian writers have risen to the occasion. It brings to the fore the environmental state of the Niger delta. This trademark is also characteristic of the style of Ken Saro-Wiwa: the martyred

poet and eco-activist. Saro-Wiwa was killed by the then Sanni Abacha military regime for daring to stand for the natural environment against the wanton destruction of the Niger Delta eco-system by oil cartels.

Doki (2009) observes that the African poet occupies a very prominent and unique place in the literary firmament in his capacity to use orature as a medium to re-enter the essence of his tradition and culture. According to Doki, the African poet stands tall above others because of “his ability to employ in African poetry elements from African flora and fauna and devices from traditional African images.” His imagery, themes and symbolisms are also drawn from a communally accessible pool and he can express himself in a truly African idiom. He observes that what distinguishes the African poet from the European poet is that “Africans are more closer to the natural environment than the West are. The African poet, he opined does not distinguish himself absolutely from other objects of nature such as, fauna, flora, mountain, etc. On the contrary, the European poet is detached from the object and this tendency tends to isolate man from his environment. It is from this attribute that African world view that we can better appreciate the greatness of African poetry and creativity. These same attributes have earned the African an eminent place on the literary map.

“Doki’s’ position may be true to a point but not wholly true for a European nature-poet like John Keats who in one of his letters to Richard Woodhouse in 1818, observes that “The poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no identity – he is continually in for – and filling some other body, - the sun, the moon, the sea, men and women who are creatures of impulse, are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute. – the poet has none, no identity, no self” (Gittings, 1987). Based on this position, Keats, Ojaide, Osundare etc, are the most unpoetical of all things: They are not “detached from the object nor isolated from their environment”. They are “more closely related to the object” and do not distinguish themselves from objects of nature like trees, mountains, rivers, stars, moon, etc. The study by Ezenwa – Ohaeto (1994) continues the discussion on the interaction between literature and nature, but it only makes passing remarks on literary ecology. Its focus is on morality in Nigerian poetry. Niyi Osundare’s and Obiora Udechukwu’s poems are effective because they portray the environment of modern Nigerian poetry in terms of craft. They combined in their artistic rendition African oral poetry and foreign poetic elements. Their poetic craft are fresh and innovative and so can be classified as modern Nigerian poetry. Ezenwa’s observations are obvious in respect to Nigeria nature poems. This paper looks into the areas where nature poets, especially those from the Niger delta use a combination of personal experience, poetic artistry and foreign poetic elements to project and promote the cause of the Niger delta environment.

Environmental degradation in Ibiwari Ikiriko’s *Oily Tears of the Delta* became imperative and of such Ikiriko sees degradation as the act of lowering someone to a less respected state. He also belongs to the renowned prolific African poets who use literature as a medium of exposing the evils committed by the upper class against the poor people in their society. Such evils according to them are environmental degradation, exploitation, deprivation, loss of self-respect, intimidation, suppression and corruption which the lower classes of people go through in the region. This prompts Watts to say that:

The prominent place the Niger Delta occupies in national and global consciousness is linked to its strategic importance as the source of over 75 percent of Nigeria’s petroleum production and exports. The Niger Delta presently hosts Nigeria’s oil industry, including oil multinationals, state and local oil companies, oil service companies, thousands of kilometers of

oil pipelines, ten export terminals, four refineries and a massive liquefied natural gas (LNG) sector (639)

The above shows that Niger Delta is (Nigeria's main source of oil and gas) and the importance of gas in Nigeria's economic growth and political stability cannot be over emphasised. As Niger Delta writers, they expose the sad situation of the Niger Delta people as they go through miserable standard of living and that calls for immediately. To them, parasitic relationship between man and the environment where humans prey on nature will not only be injurious to the environment, but also man as well. They also write on the harsh realities that characterize in the Niger Delta region where the oil boom in Nigeria has meant a doom for the Niger Delta people. This concurs with the view held by Opko that:

The Niger Delta region has over the years suffered from environmental crises based on oil spills from oil pipelines. The entire Niger Delta has had persistent cases of oil spills which till date do not have a lasting solution. Spilled oil from Shell Petroleum Development Company (SDPC), TOTALFINELF, Chevron, Mobil, and account for great ecological declines, it accounts for poor agricultural products (209).

The above exploitation and experience of the people of the region have stimulated and authenticated plethora of different attempts by Niger Deltans. Looking on the above mentioned exploitation, brutality, torture and killing as grounded in the poem their focus is on the historical past to an examination of the current socio-political problems of corruption and social inequality in contemporary Nigerian society. The poets also expose the fictional situations explored in the Nigerian society as well as the harsh socio-political realities of contemporary society. In Ikiriko's *Oily tears of the Delta*, he portrays the ecocides and exploitations of the poet as a protester against social injustices of his society and his clarion call on the people for unification in tackling the problems of the region. It is on the above mentioned issues the article is triggered to examine oil politics and environmental degradation in Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* with a view to analyzing the effects of social injustice, economic inequality, and environmental degradation, as well as human violations in the life of poor masses of Niger Delta.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, poets, playwrights and other activist have cried about the poor condition in the oil booming states which is known as Niger Delta but little or no attention has been given to this cry by both the past and present government of the day. Researchers and scholars both from the region and out of the region have carried out investigation on the poor health, basic amenities, such as good roads, drinking water, good schools nor good means of livelihood except by those who are involved both legally and illegally in oil extraction.

It has also been observed that many researchers have carried out findings on the poetic work of Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* but little or no attention has been paid to oil politics played on the soil of Niger Delta, nature of environmental degradation caused by the exploration of natural resources, geopolitical injustice and marginalisation and devastated landscape in "*Oily Tears Of The Delta*" which are the silent aspect that this work seeks to examine.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this paper Eco-criticism theory was adopted with emphasis on Glotfelty's definition, is the theoretical framework of this paper. Eco-criticism is a study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Most eco-critical work shares a

common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems. This awareness sparks a sincere desire to contribute to environmental restoration. Glotfelty (1987) subsequently makes a case for the inclusion of eco-criticism in the canon of literary studies. Slaymaker (2007) supports this notion by noting that, "...environmental literature and ecological criticism are a resonating dynamic signal generated by concern for the health of the earth and its resources" (691).

From the forgoing, it is obvious that eco-criticism takes a holistic and inclusive view of nature or earth, perceiving nature as being constituted by humans and nonhumans. Hence, Cheryl Glotfelty has asserted that "eco-criticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies". More sarcastically, Kate Scope asserts that, "it is not language that has a hole in its ozone layer; and the 'real' thing continues to be polluted and degraded even as we refine our deconstructive insights at the level of the signifier" (Rigby "Eco-criticism" 154). There is no question about the fact that these criticisms are directed to structuralism and post-structuralism. On the other hand, eco-criticism poses itself as a critic of modernity and science. As Ursula K. Heise puts it:

Environmentalism and eco-criticism aim their critique of modernity at its presumption to know the natural world scientifically, to manipulate it technologically and exploit it economically, and thereby ultimately to create a human sphere apart from it in a historical process that is usually labeled 'progress' ("The Hitchhiker's Guide to Eco-criticism" 507).

Similarly, "science is viewed as a root cause of environmental deterioration, both in that it has cast nature as an object to be analyzed and manipulated and in that it has provided the means of exploiting nature more radically than was possible by pre-modern means" (509). It is to this end that Walter Benjamin has observed that there is "no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (Rigby 153). Man, over the ages, has been laying claim to being the master thereby arrogating himself the right to exploit nature to his selfish end. Ecocritics see that claim as fundamentally false. They maintain that man has no right whatsoever to exploit nature the way he does; since in actual fact, nature precedes human existence. Kate Rigby addresses it this way, "The physical reality of air, water, fire, rock, plants, animals, soils, ecosystems, solar systems et cetera, to which I refer when I speak of 'the natural world,' nonetheless precedes and exceeds whatever words might say about it" (154). Eco-criticism therefore poses itself as an ethical discipline that mounts a discursive resistance against man's unbridled and wanton exploitation of nonhuman earthlings through the interpretation of texts. Ecocriticism is therefore suitable for dissecting the environmental issues raised by the poet in their collections of poetry, referred to from here on as *Oily Tears*.

Synopsis of Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*

Ikiriko's *Oily Tears* is a collection of thirty poems, twenty-three of which are on the oil motif. Given that the poet has said that the other seven poems have been added to the collection to "sublimate the stench of gasoline on the pages" (7), whatever that means, it is obvious where the premium lies. The poet has stated that the poems in the collection "are a witness to the depredations of the Delta and a support for a claim of courage to halt the pillage" (7). This is the position which gives deep insight into the problems of the oil-producing region. Ikiriko says that this concern has been marked on his poetry for "almost two decades; the first of them ('Evening Already') having been written in 1980, and the last 'Odi' in December 1999" (7). The poet is very precise about his objective: "The oil boom in Nigeria has meant a doom for the Niger Delta.

The doom is now beginning to burst in blood. Decidedly oil in feel and deal, a great majority of poems in this collection ought to assist the staunching process, if ever it will come” (7). The poet has declaimed his purpose in clear terms, a sense of mission towards the Niger Delta, stoked by the urgency of the situation. “Evening Already” has the indices of that urgency. The persona grapples with his “cares / Clamping weight of cares” (26-7). And he is “resolved / not to be wasted by time” (53-4) because “it is evening already / And the arena is past ready” (114-15). The persona carries the burden of a message, and he feels that time is running out. He reiterates his mission in the third segment of the poem: “Let me tell / The story... / Of the mini minor” who is: “Marginalized by the mighty and plenty. / Of pipes that / Forever pipe out, never in (92-3,100-03). The persona is angered by the marginalization/dispossession of the nations of the Niger Delta. He is anxious to get involved, to tell the story as a form of engagement. In the last segment of the poem, he curses the oppressors and their progeny to suffer in the same manner as they have treated the Niger Delta.

Oil Politics in Ikiriko’s *Oily Tears of the Delta*

In the aspect of oil politics, the following poems shall be analyzed based on the politics played by government on the soil of Niger Delta; “Odi”, “Remembering Saro-Wiwa,” “For Ken” and “Ogoni Agony”

The poet portrays the level of politics that our leaders play in the Niger Delta region to safeguard their corrupt oil businesses in the region. Ikiriko portray it in the poem “Odi” laments the destruction of Odi by the Nigerian military expedition in 1999. “Odi” is provoked by the facts of history. The matter that led to this unbridled show of state terror has become common knowledge. Some soldiers and policemen were killed in the Odi area by restive elements. But that did not justify the scale of destruction inflicted on Odi. The poem says: “O, a brazen demolition of our land and lives / has replaced the foxy looting of our lot / as the tactics shift from marginalization to pacification” (24-6). In spite of this brutal programme of repression, the people’s will is said to be unbroken: “as no tears can rend a calabash of community will, / so will Odi rise again” (27-8). Odi has joined the list of Niger Delta communities that have faced the destructive fire of the Nigerian state on the account of oil. And the poem represents a grievous example of state extremism in the Niger Delta area. For a government in search of purported criminals to destroy an entire community is as crazy as a man who burns down a house full of people just to get at rats. The poem condemns the act of state terror, and avows that Odi will rise again. It evinces hope that Odi’s cry will one day come to a stop, like the cry of the Niger Delta in “Oily Tears.” “These oily tears,” says the speaker, “Dripping down the tears on your depressed face / Will one day be staunched, / I swear!” (2-4). Why does the persona swear? What is the anchor for such a faith? Is it hoped that the Federal Government will be more sensitive in the future? Is it hoped that the transnational firms will become humane in their industrial practices in the years ahead? Is it faith in the capacity of the nations of the Niger Delta to keep up the fight and to remain unbroken in the face of oppression? How is this kind of hope to be gauged given that people suffer more pain each time they rise in protest? Odi calls up the case of Ogoni. The Ogoni experience is just as fresh as the Odi saga, and both experiences are similar. Both experiences show that the path of freedom is the path of sacrifice. Losses and pain are key indices of resistance. And faith is necessary in any crusade for civil rights; faith in the values of the struggle. That kind of faith is what the persona sees in the lot of Odi. It is also seen in the career of Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni too.

Ikiriko has three poems on Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni in *Oily Tears*. The poems are “Remembering Saro-Wiwa,” “For Ken” and “Ogoni Agony.” The poems depict Saro-Wiwa and Ogoni as resistant-entities who have suffered for their agitation. The speaker in “Remembering Saro-Wiwa” states clearly: “Let’s not forget / that Saro- Wiwa / was a writer” (1-3). The point here is that a writer is a “righter.” The next stanza makes it clear: “Let’s not forget / that Saro-Wiwa / was a fighter” (6-8). The poem goes further to say that the writer/writer is hanged for the sake of “oil-wells” (15), and that his death sticks to “our conscience / like sludges on mudflat” (19-20). Saro-Wiwa’s death is described as a great loss in the poem entitled “For Ken.” The poem calls him a “wordsmith” and a “compressed giant” whose essence is larger than his size (1-6). The same terms are used in “Ogoni Agony,” a poem which really links Saro-Wiwa’s activism to his people. “Ogoni Agony” speaks on the marginality of the Ogoni: “Except on oil field charts / The land is hardly on the maps” (1-2). The lines point to state neglect. This situation motivates Saro-Wiwa – “a compressed giant” (8) and “a wordsmith” (11) – to sow “seeds of awakening” (12) which has pushed the Ogoni “to [the] centre stage / of international understanding” (33-34), until eventually the awakening “is de-rod / and ditched” (36-37). Although the Ogoni activism has been ditched by internal cracks – instigated by government and transnational interests – the poem evinces faith in the resilience of the people: “the ditch is but tentative” (48). It is a strong sense of faith to believe that a repressed people will rise from a ditch and keep the fight alive.

Geopolitical injustice in Ikiriko’s *Oily Tears of the Delta*

Geopolitical injustice refers to the type of injustice that is perpetrated against a given geopolitical zone. In this study, the injustice is done on the Niger Delta which mainly consist of the south south geopolitical zone in Nigeria. In this aspect, the following poem will be analyzed to portray the level of injustice done in Niger Delta; “Evening Already,” “Okara’s Nun,” “Oloibiri,” “Ompadec,” “Ogoni Agony” and “Odi.” And “Under Pressure”.

“Evening Already” sets the stage for the rest of the poems in the collection. The poems that follow can be put in loose categories. There are general poems that take a broad sweep at the Niger Delta situation. There are poems on specific places/institutions like the ones entitled “Okara’s Nun,” “Oloibiri,” “Ompadec,” “Ogoni Agony” and “Odi.” There are tribute poems/incidental poems like “To Dappa-Biriye on the Jubilee,” “For Ken,” “Remembering Saro-Wiwa,” “To Alfred Diete-Spiff” and “Rivers at 25.” There are poems that stop at telling the woes of the Niger Delta. And there are those that evince hope. Like “Evening Already,” there are poems of the participant “I/We” speaker, and there are also poems of the omniscient voice.

The “I” speaker in the poem entitled “Ikikali” is a personification of the “rocket-seed...of the mangrove” (1-3). It states the circumstances of its birth and the challenges of its environment gas flare blinds it and oil-sludge chokes it. “Ikikali” connects “Oily Rivers” in that the speaker in the first can be argued to be extended to the latter. As the title indicates, the speaker in “Oily Rivers” is of the Oily Rivers, and he speaks of the Oily Rivers, a pun that draws on centuries-old of oil-determinism in the Niger Delta. He decries the degradation of his environment: “the base Delta / where things are made base / and beings become base” (4-6). This is because the Delta is run by “policies / crude as petroleum” (8-9). The matter is further accentuated in the second stanza where the persona introduces himself: “I am of / the Oil Rivers...” (10-11). He says that the Oil Rivers is a place “where rivers are / oily” and where rivers “can / neither / quench my thirst” nor “anoint my head” (12-18).

The tone of “Oily Rivers” is downright plaintive, perhaps despair is the word and this is recurrent in many of the poems in Ikiriko’s collection. The Niger Delta is depicted as a region

that has no grip on its condition. In “Baseless Compass,” the speaker states that all of the Niger Delta’s “rights / and benefits [are] suspended” (3-4) as it sails in Nigeria’s “ship of state” (10). In poems like “Under Pressure” and “Top Upon Bottom,” the personae enunciate the burden / pressure on the Niger Delta. The last two lines of “Under Pressure” read: “O what a full tide of pressure / Brim they over our land and persons” (12-13). The pressure comes from oil facilities that have upset traditional means of livelihood and have created no alternatives. The Niger Delta bears the pressure of Nigeria’s economy, and the economies of allied nations. The graphic example is accentuated by Nigeria’s map – the entire country sits on the Niger Delta, “Top Upon Bottom,” as the poem says. This suppression is a game of numbers. It has robbed the Niger Delta of the power to control its affairs. The poem entitled “The Minority Man” says that the “Minor Minority Man” is impotent in Nigeria because of numerical disadvantage.

Oil production is one of the major sources of Nigeria wealth but the big question is how does the oil exploration companies treats the host land which this oil is extracted from? However, it should be noted that these oil firms exploring crude oil in the region are doing so without taking into consideration the environment. The environment is a major source of comfort and inspiration to man and other natural elements. The Niger Delta is the eco-region of Nigeria because of the presence of distinct biodiversity of flora and fauna from which the country taps her revenue. However, the pristine life of the Niger Delta ecosystem has been lost to oil exploration and other anti-eco-friendly activities. Ever green home of birds, animals, and man destroyed by the exploitative and profit driven oil prospectors and the military is a paradox of hunger in the midst of plenty. The truth remains that any eco-catastrophic activity carried out on the environment is inimical to man and nature. The harsh social realities which the region is being exposed to have invoked critical protests. “*Evening Already*,” the poet persona portray thus:

*I had listened
To the voices within me
To the voices around me
hat I am a time-bomb.
Now I realise
hat I am only a landmine.
I had listened
To the voices within me
To the voices around me
hat I am an oil bean seed
Now I realise
hat I am only a coconut!
I cannot detonate
Without external pressure
I cannot disperse
Without external agency.*

From the above lines, the poet decries the level of injustices done by those destroying the environment that seem to feign the cause and solution to the problems of the region. The beauty of the homeland is gone. The manner in which the government carts away billions of naira from the land without recourse to the damage done to the environment is the same manner in which the life and beauty of the land that was once a home of serenity and tranquility have disappeared without trace.

So sad that instead of our environment receiving worthy treatment and care from the power that be, obscurity and darkness saturates her. The position of the environment in national development can never be ignored. But the impunity with which the Nigerian State and her multinational cohorts keep treating the issues of our environment with levity indicates the high level and climax of irresponsible and mediocrity of these two institutions.

“Under Pressure, “where Ikiriko conjures up these signs, symbols and images to challenge the mechanisms of power at work at the environment of oil extraction, especially the oil transporting pipelines that populate the region. The poet questions the manner in which these signs and images operate to control and contain local communities in their everyday lives:

DANGER!
 High pressure oil pipeline – keep off!
 Don’t anchor!
 DEATH!
 High tension gas pipeline – keep clear!
 No ishing!
 WARNING!
 High pressure pipes – keep away!
 No berthing! (51)

The poem articulates a particular process of systematic intrusion that the signposts perform in the Niger Delta. At least three levels of this intrusion may be construed and they all operate to alienate the human population from the oil ecology of the Niger Delta. His first identifiable level is that of physical, spatial intrusion. This impedes and destabilises the very physical space of human existence. It operates to govern agency, local agency, in that it restricts human presence and freedom. It inscribes and constitutes for itself, within itself, a spatial demarcation, a form of physical segregation between the oil resource and the local population. This distinction is clearly delineated by the fact of the announcement of the physical presence of the pipelines. Even when the pipelines are underground, the inscriptions announce their malicious presence through the signposts by their instruction to the public to “keep off!” and steer clear. This form of intrusion operates to restrict the daily physical movement and mobility of the local populace. It dictates to the local human subjects that inhabit this landscape where to venture, when and how to move and loiter, and where not to.

This second form of intrusion performed by the signposts orchestrates an economic, as well as a cultural, interruption. It meddles with, disrupts, and controls the territorial economy. It declares (51): “DEATH! / High tension gas pipeline – keep clear!” his inscription decrees where, how and what daily vocations should be conducted. It forbids the local populace from their practice of maritime economy in the form of fishing, sailing, berthing, and wharving. In fact, all essential preoccupations of the local communities, given the nature of the terrain are suspended so that the global commodity of oil can be transported without hitch or hindrance to its point of consumption. The pipelines that crisscross the Delta, piping away the oil to other climes, are captured here as a societal menace, bent on wrecking the land and the people. While these pipes fleece the natural resource from under their feet, they also pose danger and frighten the local populace, deterring them from going about their domestic businesses. The local communities are thus excluded from their means of livelihood and their alternative means of survival is denied as the signposts warn them against berthing their sea-going vessels, while also threatening them with “DEATH” if they venture to fish in the waters.

Marginalisation and Devastated Landscape in *Oily Tears Of The Delta*

Under this subheading, the following poems are used to depict the level of marginalization in the Niger Delta soil. The poems are “Oily Rivers”, Okara’s Nun”, “The Call of the River Nun” and “The Palm and the Crude.” And ‘Delta Tears’

Landscape has been defined, following Scheeze, to include ‘the nonhuman elements of place—the rocks, soil, trees, plants, rivers, animals, air, as well as human perceptions and modifications.’ Therefore, to talk about the landscape in the context of Ikiriko’s poems is to talk about those rocks, soil, trees, plants, rivers, animals, air et cetera that are found in the Niger Delta region as represented in the poems. The first poem of our interest is Ikiriko’s poem entitled “Ikikali”. In this poem, the speaker is non-human; it is Ikikali a ‘rocket-seed/of the Angala, sign-post tree’. This kind of near-animistic technique where a nonhuman, the seed of a tree, is the speaker in a poem is not very common, but not unacceptable either. This is particularly interesting because, for the first time, a non-human is allowed to speak for itself in the poetry of Niger Delta. Through this singular speech of Ikikali, we get to know what non-humans feel about their state of existence and coexistence with man in the environment. The voice in the poem is not just that of Ikikali; it actually represents the landscape/environment and its constituents, particularly non-humans. Therefore, in relation to Obari Gomba’s argument that the persona ‘states the circumstances of its birth and the challenges of its environment’ (138), the voice articulates the circumstances of all non-humans, their birth and challenges in the Niger Delta environment.

Ikikali laments that having obeyed its mother’s command and got dispersed to the right place, at the right time – ‘At lowest ebb of tide’, it is ready and willing to continue the tradition of propagation: ‘I am set to span out / willing to fruit-yield’ (11-12). However, there exist barriers to that natural readiness and willingness to ‘fruit-yield’. Those impediments are flares and sludge. The flare here refers to gas flares obviously resulting from oil exploration. From this poem, one gets a glimpse of the phenomenon responsible for the impediments which the landscape suffers—oil exploration, which generates gas flares and ‘sludge’. The poem therefore sets the scene for what is going to be encountered in more vivid images in other poems.

The fact that oil extraction and its accompanying activities are largely responsible for the truncation of the natural cycle of the landscape’s flora as seen in “Ikikali” above is confirmed by the poem “Oily Rivers”. The speaker in “Oily Rivers” which we consider to be the same nonhuman voice in “Ikikali” is a typical ‘expansive’ persona (MacKay quoted in Akwanya, “Angst in Duino Elegies” (35). As it declares in “Oily Rivers,” “I come from / the bottom of / the Amalgam... / I am of / the Oil Rivers, where rivers are / *oily* / and can / neither / quench my thirst / nor / anoint my head” (emphasis added) (11-18). These lines clearly state that oil exploration is responsible for the setback, for it is the exploration that renders the river oily, so that it ‘can neither quench’ the persona’s thirst ‘nor anoint’ its ‘head’. It is that same oil exploration that produces the flare and sludge which plague the persona in “Ikikali”. This oiliness of the river and its inability to quench thirst is a recurrent theme in Niger Delta literature. A typical example is where in Ikiriko Oil on Water is, the narrator says that “in a village centre we found the communal well. Eager for a drink, I bent under the wet, mossy pivotal beam And peered into the well’s blackness, but a rank smell wafted from its hot depths and slapped my face... 8). The difference in Ikiriko’s poem is that it is not just the human thirst that is at issue; it is specifically that of non-humans, for not only humans have thirst to be quenched. In fact it does appear that the oiliness of the river affects non-humans more than it affects humans as it obstructs their growth and development.

Similarly, the voice in Ikiriko's "Okara's Nun" seems that of the same non-human persona. The poem significantly echoes Gabriel Okara's "The Call of the River Nun"—with the latter serving as a pretext for the former. The relationship between the two poems is not in doubt at all as can be easily made out from their titles, "The Call of the River Nun" and "Okara's Nun" respectively. That relationship is however a relationship of variation in that while Okara's poem celebrates the environment/landscape typified by the 'River Nun', Ikiriko's text is elegiac, lamenting its disappearance/loss. The 'variational' relationship is best buttressed by quoting a few lines from each of the poems. Okara's poem reads:

I hear your call!
 I hear it break the circle of these crouching hills.
 I want to view your face again and feel your cold embrace;
 or at your brim to set myself and inhale your breath;
 or like the trees, to watch my mirrored self unfold and span my days with song
 from the
 lips of dawn.
 I hear your lapping call!
 I hear it coming through; invoking the ghost of a child listening, where river birds
 hail
 your silver-surfaced flow
 Whereas Ikiriko's reads:
 Okara's
 Silver-surfaced
 Nun
 Is no more
 Now
 Crude-surfaced
 It lumbers
 Along lifeless,
 Like dead wood...
 It lumbers, reflecting nothing
 Invoking nothing...
 (25-26)

The question is, 'Why has the nun, which Okara celebrates, disappeared in Ikiriko's poem?' The answer of course exists in Ikiriko's poem. It is the crude oil that has turned the 'silver-surface' of the nun to a 'crude-surface' thereby rendering it 'lifeless' and incapable of exhibiting its natural translucence and steady flow; it only lumbers. The lifelessness of the River Nun which is caused by the crude oil is not just limited to the river, the river unwittingly but clumsily transfers the deadness 'to the sea / rendering brackish / zones barren / like poisoned ditch-water.' It also affects the kingfisher which depends on the nun for livelihood. The crude equally affects the soil and trees surrounding the river banks, as can be garnered from stanza three, "Lifeless like / the dead woods / that border /its crude soiled banks" (25) Ikiriko's 'Delta Tears' further paints a vivid picture of a near-total loss of aquatic creatures in the environment. Thus:

The mudflats [are] destitute of mudskepters....
 The sandflats [are] bereft of children....
 The mangrove floors [are] fleeced of *akanga*,

Tide-keeper crab of the scape...
 The creeks [are] arid of tilapia tail clatter
 Festal sign of fish-fairs for the Kingfisher (37- 47)

The persona of the poem is ‘the wooden drum’ – another inanimate object. The account of the environment it gives is an eye-witness account; hence, it says that “I utter not what I hear with ears / But what I see with eyes” (51-52). Aside from the loss of mudskeepers, *akanga*, tilapia, etc. which adversely affects both the children and the Kingfisher, there is yet another loss: that of the periwinkle clusters, the dangling oyster canes and the sand flies.

All these aquatic creatures, “Then the clans and clans and clans / Of life: shelled, scaly, feathered, furred and leafed” (65-66) that enliven and animate the sea and constitute its beauty and naturalness have been wiped away, their onetime presence is now replaced with “Nothing, except fagend flora and fauna, / Pale plains of sand and mud, burrowed and gaunt / Things toss[ing] up and down up and down / like dogs do with filthy rags” (67-70). All these are because of the oil business as we read that ‘The coated seascape smells / Oil and tar and gas” (71-72) causing “fishes [to] grope and gasp / for way and life, belly-up” (75-76).

This technique of recalling through meditation the prior-state of the environment is also found in another of Ikiriko’s poem, “The Palm and the Crude.” The persona of the poem lets us know that in the beginning what they had was palm oil which they owned and utilized modestly and it oiled their palm, balmed their joints, sweetened their insides and anointed their heads (17-20). Then came the crude oil which does the exact opposite of what the palm oil has done: “Then came the Crude / and the Crude / Wasted our waters / Soiled our soils / And lacerated our lot” (29-33). One can as well see the contrast between palm oil which anoints the persona’s head in “The Palm and the Crude” and the crude oil which does not anoint the persona’s head in the poem, “Oily River.” In fact, from that point, we may well extend the personas of “Ikikali” and “Oily River” further to “The Palm and the Crude,” except that in the latter poem the persona takes a plural personality as evident in the pronouns, ‘us’ and ‘we’ and ‘them’. The use of these plural pronouns, however, confirms the expansiveness of the persona: it could be a communal and consensus voice of lamentation and discontent.

Language and Style in Ibiwari Ikiriko’s *Oily Tears of the Delta*

Style in literature is the literary element that describes the ways that the author uses words. It is also the author's word choice, sentence structure, figurative language, and sentence arrangement all work together to establish mood, images, and meaning in the text. In Ibiwari Ikiriko’s *Oily Tears of the Delta*, the poet make us of some literary element to make his poetic work unique and stand out from others such. For example

First person narrative technique: In first-person narration, the narrator is a person in the story, telling the story from their own point of view. The narration usually utilizes the pronoun I (or we, if the narrator is speaking as part of a group). For example in “*Evening Already*,” the poet persona use the first person narrative “I” as it is portray thus:

*I had listened
 To the voices within me
 To the voices around me
 hat I am a time-bomb.
 Now I realise
 hat I am only a landmine.*

I had listened.

Personification: Personification is a type of figurative language that applies human attributes to a non-human entity or inanimate object to express a point or idea in a more colorful, imaginative way. For example, the “I” speaker in the poem entitled “Ikikali” is a personification of the “rocket-seed...of the mangrove” (1-3). It states the circumstances of its birth and the challenges of its environment – gas flare blinds it and oil-sludge chokes it. “Ikikali” connects “Oily Rivers” in that the speaker in the first can be argued to be extended to the latter. As the title indicates, the speaker in “Oily Rivers” is of the Oily Rivers, and he speaks of the Oily Rivers, a pun that draws on centuries-old of oil-determinism in the Niger Delta.

Simile for example in one of the poem “Okara” stanza three, “Lifeless like the dead woods that border its crude soiled banks” (25)

The use of **flashback** was mostly employed by the author and this makes the work to be full of suspense and Uniqueness. **Example in one of the poem** “Oily Rivers” “I come from / the bottom of / the Amalgam... / I am of / the Oil Rivers, where rivers are / *oily* / and can / neither / quench my thirst / nor / anoint my head” (11-18). The river is flashing back to her origin where she came from.

Imagery: Imagery, in any sort of writing, encompasses the use of literal or figurative language to add symbolism and enable the reader to imagine the world of the piece of literature. In other words, it engages the senses to deepen the reader's comprehension of what is happening and how to feel about it. The poet makes use of some image like “Ikikali” a deity who is personified by the poet to take an action of telling the story about how it disobey the mother deity which lead to the calamity that befalls ‘At lowest ebb of tide’, it is ready and willing to continue the tradition of propagation: ‘I am set to span out / willing to fruit-yield’ (11-12)

Code mixing: Code mixing is the use of one language in another language, the mixing of two or more languages or language varieties in a speech. Code mixing usually occurs in the bilingual or multilingual communities or societies and the function (meaning) of the language cannot be clearly separated. In Ibiwari Ikiriko’s “*Oily Tears of the Delta*”, the poet employed code mixing thus; “The mangrove floors [are] fleeced of *Akanga*” (38), the word “*Akanga*” is not an English word but mixed together with English in the poem. Another example is in the poem “Ogoni in *Oily Tears*”, the word “Ogoni is mentioned in almost all the lines in the poem. “Let’s not forget / that Saro-Wiwa / was a fighter” (6-8).

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to examine oil politics and environmental degradation in Ibiwari Ikiriko’s *Oily Tears of the Delta*. Ikiriko is seen as an important Nigerian poet from the Niger Delta who has published a lot of poetry collections that expose the problems of degradation, oil exploitation and environmental pollution. The poet addressed the Niger Delta Question because of their proximity to the events and an understanding of the twists and turns of the struggle as well as the movement of history, the poems analyzed, in the main, versify the troubled relationship between the people of the region and the government at the centre in terms of the obnoxious laws that dispossess oil-bearing communities of their natural resources: marginalization and alienation of the region resulting in poverty, anger, agitation and armed struggle: the militarization of the region by the government to counter militancy: and the

seeming escalation of violence and gradual descent into anarchy and disintegration. Moreover, their poetic works also reflects on the economic, social and political implications of eco-degradation in the region as well as the eco-alienation, the sense of Separation between people and nature, which seems to be a significant trope in Niger Delta eco-poetics. These predicaments of the people are manifestations of living in wealth and dying in abject poverty.

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