The Saro-Wiwa Motif in Niger Delta Poetry

Udeme Eno Inyang & Mathias Iroro Orhero

Abstract

This study examines the recurring metaphors, symbols, and images that allude to Ken Saro-Wiwa in Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues* and Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*. Niger Delta poets have portrayed images and reflected on the ideologies associated with Saro-Wiwa in different ways, thereby establishing a motif of Saro-Wiwa in Niger Delta poetry owing to his significant role in the history and literature of the Niger Delta region. The manifestation of Saro-Wiwa's significance in Niger Delta poetry has not attracted ample critical attention. Using an eclectic approach, this work interprets the image of Saro-Wiwa as an environmental archetype, thereby buttressing correspondingly on ecological and archetypal criticism of the selected texts. The paper underscores the influence, legacy, and immortality of Saro-Wiwa as an artist strongly alluded to by other artists who consider Saro-Wiwa as their immediate predecessor in respect of shared experiences and vision. The findings of this work reveal that Saro-Wiwa is employed as a motif to thematise ecological devastation, political persecution, Niger Delta activism, and minority politics in the selected poems by Ojaide and Ikiriko.

Keywords: Ken Saro-Wiwa Motif, Niger Delta Poetry, Archetypes, Ecocriticism

Introduction

The traditions of African poetry groom the artist to muse on societal experiences and conditions for the articulation of his creative imagination. The contemporary African poet has been bequeathed with roles from traditional repertory where the poet manifested either as the griot whose song satirised the ills of society, the priest who rendered esoteric incantations to bridge between the worlds of the dead and the living or the panegyrist who eulogised the achievements of kings and warriors. The forebears of African poetry were carriers of culture, advocates of justice and social agents who committed their artistic intuitions to the welfare of their immediate environment. African art has always been an artistic response to the dynamics of the society; and African poetry has been in form of reaction, revolt, or protest to emerging socio-cultural, political, economic, and environmental conditions of the African society across eras.

The unique African experience necessitates activism for the African writer. He or she writes from the antecedents of slavery and colonialism; showing the impact of these events on the African culture, image, and integrity; and how they have configured the psychology of the artist towards resistance to

domination and exploitation. The struggle for emancipation of both society and the people from forces of oppression is a major thrust of African art. Contrary to the idea of art for art's sake, Tanure Ojaide asserts that African poetic aesthetic advocates for functional art, involving the people's culture, history, and distinctive styles that convey the African experience (*Poetic Imaginations,* 17).

The deplorable condition of the Niger Delta has raised the consciousness of poets who feel accountable to the environment as part of their ethical orientation. According to Onukaogu, Allwell and Ezechi Onyerionwu, "The new Nigerian poet has embraced such concerns as historical reconstruction, contemporary reality, love, the Niger Delta crisis, the Nigerian city and womanhood" (144). Specifically, the Niger Delta crisis has produced Niger Delta poetry, which is mostly concerned with the exploitative exploration of oil by Western multinational companies, the insensitivity of the corrupt/greedy Nigerian government, the degraded state of the region and the silencing of heroes.

Land is a symbol of life and livelihood and also an ancestral link between a people, their ancestors and gods. Africans are spiritually tied to their land as an ancestral symbol of identity and honour. Ojaide underlines the African value for land in the assertion that "Land sustains the corporate existence of Africans, and families quarrel over a piece of land, sometimes with casualties" (9); this has been illustrated by the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo in *Weep not Child* and *Petals of Blood* that "writers can be arrested, jailed or even hanged as Ngugi wa Thiongo, Jack Mapanje, Wole Soyinka, and Ken Saro-Wiwa [...]" (Ojaide, 68).

This brings us to the focus on Saro-Wiwa, the Ogoni martyred environmental activist and writer whose embodiment in Niger Delta poetry reflects the history of exploitation, loss of resources, marginalisation, degradation and impoverishment. Only a few studies have examined the allusion to Saro-Wiwa, in terms of his activism against the defoliation of his homeland Ogoni and the agitation for environmental justice, in the poetry of the Niger Delta. This study, therefore, engages Saro-Wiwa as a recurrent motif in Niger Delta poetry in order to buttress the preponderance of allusions and adoption of images and symbols that juxtaposes the plight of Niger Delta with Saro-Wiwa's martyrdom. The poetry of Tanure Ojaide and Ibiwari Ikiriko becomes the case study.

Tanure Ojaide and Ibiwari Ikiriko are just two out of the many poets of Niger Delta descent who lament the ruination of their environment as a result of exploitative oil exploration. In varying tones such as loss, anger, revolt and protest, , the plight of Niger Delta is the common song on the lips of poet-singers. In particular, Ojaide has earned the title "The poet laureate of Niger Delta" that Onookome Okome adorns him due to his unrelenting effort to

chart the course of the Niger Delta in his poetic imagination. He is committed to environmental activism via intellectual weapon as Enajite Ojaruega observes:

> Writers like Tanure Ojaide whose work agitate for the restoration of a more pristine environment for the region in spite of ongoing oil exploration activities are regarded as being involved in intellectual activism for the enthronement of environmental rights (496).

The trend of environmental activism is one of the legacies of Saro-Wiwa. He believes that "the writer cannot be a mere storyteller, he cannot be a mere teacher; he cannot merely x-ray society's weakness, its ills, its perils. He or she must be creatively involved in shaping the present and future" (qtd. in George Odoh 157). Towing this line, Ojaide demonstrates an unparalleled interest in the flora and fauna of his environment. Indeed, one cannot deny the influence of Saro-Wiwa on Ojaide for they are both committed to their immediate environment, Ogoni and Urhobo, respectively; and both are symbols of the struggle against the ruination of the Niger Delta in the whole. In examining this connection, Charles Bodunde observes that: "Ojaide positions Ken Saro-Wiwa both as an artist and an activist who within the space of *Delta Blues* becomes the symbol of struggle and the ideal which the ordinary people envision as the restoration of the lost landscape" (196-197).

The artist-activist initiative of Saro-Wiwa has invariably spurred creative imagination in Niger Delta and provoked radical trends in poetry. Writers assume responsibility to the environment by channelling their imaginative energy toward the struggle for the recovery of their Delta from despoliation and defoliation. Isaac Udo recognises "that because the Niger Delta is despoiled, writers – poets, playwrights, novelists – would continue to contend with issues of life and death as played out in the region" (123). In fact, through intellectual environmental activism, Niger Delta has roused the world's attention to the reality of poor governance and the evil of capitalism showcased by multinational companies like Shell. Writers assume a greater sense of selfless commitment towards the society in their vision:

> The most important thing for me is that I used my talents as a writer to enable the Ogoni people to confront their tormentors. I was not able to do it as a politician or businessman. My writing did it. And it sure makes me feel good. I'm mentally prepared for worst but hopeful for the best. I think I have moral victory (Alison Baverstock, 3). [You cannot end a section with a quote that has not been expounded upon. Please sum up the section and connect it to the next section]

Niger Delta Poetry

In the context of the Niger Delta, one agrees that poetry is indeed an overflow of powerful emotions but not recollected in tranquillity as William Wordsworth suggested. Poetry, for the 21st century African poet, is an expression of the pangs of turmoil. Tranquillity is an illusion where exploitation, marginalisation, tyranny, and corruption reside. In specific terms, Niger Delta poetry is an expression of loss, pain, anger, disillusionment, sorrow and weeping, as evident in titles like Sophia Obi's *Tears in the Basket,* Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood*, Ebinyo Ogbowei's *Song of a Dying River*, as well as Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*. These collections depict the exploitation, negligence, marginalisation, and deprivation of the Niger Delta. Poets from this region deploy images, metaphor and symbols to try "to put the region on the literary map, and show the world what was and is happening [there] in terms of disastrous oil exploration by ruthless multinational companies, which, invariably results in the region's environmental degradation, economic stagnation, and wanton suffering of the populace" (Ismail Gala, 411).

The Niger Delta originally was made up of six states namely, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers before three more states: Abia, Imo and Ondo were added to sum the nine oil-producing states. Geographically "Niger Delta refers to that region of Nigeria that borders the Atlantic seaboard and stretches from Cross River state near Cameroon in the Western boundary of Delta and Edo state near Illaje country" (Godini Darah, 102). In his own poetic interpretation of the map, Ibiwari Ikiriko asserts that "the giant country sits suppressing the Delta which serves it the functions of support and sustenance" (Foreline n.pag.). It can also be added that the position of Niger Delta at the bottom of Nigeria's map with thick mangroves and vegetation signifies its place as the root that holds the nation and as well as the source of latent potentials that nurture the entire country.

In the article 'Revolutionary Pressures in Niger Delta Literature", Darah describes the region as "the first area of Nigeria where the British initiated the process of cloning together what became Nigeria in the late 19th century [...] one of the cradles of modern European education". He further asserts that "[...] there can be no Nigeria [...] without the wealth that flows from the bowels and waterways of the Niger Delta"; but regrets that the region's "stupendous wealth has emboldened the neo-colonial ruling class in Nigeria to exploit and impoverish the Niger Delta" (99-122). In a more pragmatic sense, Jide Balogun states that

> As a matter of fact, the people of the ND [Niger Delta] do not have access to any meaningful social, political and economic comfort despite the availability of abundance of wealth symbolized in their oil deposits and reserves. It becomes more devastating as their cultural life, the

> fabric and cord upon which their being is hung is painfully eroded by a conspiracy of the successive Nigerian Government (Military and Civilian) and the parasitic oil cabals (560).

Many other critics also view the region as a paradox. Niger Delta is a stereotype of other climes where resources become curses, potentials promote penury, and the oil boom brings doom. These conditions inform the struggle for justice and equity in literature that represents the oppressed. The poetry that emanates from the region is characterised by the tone of lamentation, and is replete with painful metaphors and portraying images that show "a clear evidence of neo-colonialism, deliberate government neglect and marginalisation of the minorities, and a manifestation of the merger of foreign bourgeois interest [...]" (Nwahunanya xvii-xviii). The suppression of the people in their own territory while their resources are looted by outsiders triggers the trend of revolt in Niger Delta poetry.

Ken Saro-Wiwa: The Name and its Signification

In the book, *Ken Saro-Wiwa: A Bio-critical Study*, Femi Ojo-Ade captures the life, achievements, ideologies and the execution of Saro-Wiwa in relation to his environment and the politics that claimed his life. In the preface, Ojo-Ade recounts his meeting with Saro-Wiwa during an academic get-together in the United States and discloses how "the necessity of struggle" was paramount to Saro-Wiwa who would use any opportunity to indict other Nigerians (especially those in diaspora) for running away from the problems of Nigeria. Following such indictment, Ojo-Ade remarked "They will just kill you for nothing". The execution of Saro-Wiwa makes this remark a prophecy which confirms the opinion that,

> Saro-Wiwa was unjustly incarcerated and later hanged in 1995 for making the ruling junta uncomfortable with his dogged agitation for environmental justice because of the plight of his Ogoni people as a result of negative fallouts of oil exploration activities (Enajite Ojaruega, 498).

Ken Saro-Wiwa's role as a human right activist and environmentalist vis-a-vis the Niger Delta conditions received global attention following his execution. Caminero-Santegelo observes that, African environmental activism has been brought to the world's attention through the martyrdom of Ken Saro-Wiwa (698). Rob Nixon also observes that Saro-Wiwa was not recognised as an environmental writer (by the West) as his name was not on the list of environmental writers raised by an American critic, Jay Parini, which was published in *New York Times* two weeks before the execution:

> Abacha's regime executed Saro-Wiwa, making Africa's most visible martyr. Here was a writer-novelist, poet, memorist, and essayist—who

had died fighting the ruination of his Ogoni people's farmland and fishing waters by European and American oil conglomerates in cahoots with a despotic African regime. Yet, clearly, Saro-Wiwa's writings were unlikely to find home in the Kind of environmental literary lineage outlined by Parini (715).

Kenule Beeson Tsaro-Wiwa, known as Ken Saro-Wiwa, was born in Bori on October 10, 1941. He attended Government College Umuahia and later studied at the University of Ibadan. He worked briefly as a Graduate Assistant of the same university in 1966 before the civil war. Saro-Wiwa is known to have published over twenty books ranging from novels, short stories, plays, poetry to critical essays and articles. He held notable positions like the Administrator for Bonny Island in November 1967 and the Executive Director of the directorate of Mass Mobilisation of Self-reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) in 1987. Having had a chequered exposure to national politics, his later days were dedicated to the fight for his Ogoni people, a people paradoxically blessed with enormous resources but plagued by poverty due to the politics of marginalisation that draws from the minority to feed the majority practised by the country. Therefore, he struggled against the marginalization and exploitation of the minority, seeking justice and fairness. It was in the course of this struggle that Saro-Wiwa was accused of murder and treason and subsequently sentenced to death. He was executed on November 10, 1995.

The name "Saro-Wiwa" transcends literal reference to become a literary symbol of struggle, death, loss and tears. Ordinarily, many Niger Delta youths "lost their lives "sacrificially" or "through ignorance" in the struggle to make the Niger Delta a more habitable place for man" (Nwahunanya "Introduction", v), but the significance of an artist's death places an immortal value on not just the art but for generations of artists. Examining the place of Saro-Wiwa in Niger Delta Literature, Ojo-Ade believes that "Nobody interested in Nigeria, and Africa, can avoid an opinion on the life of this man who, through his advocacy for freedom and rights of his Ogoni people, has become a beacon of popular struggle against ethnic and economic oppression" (1). He further submits that "The monster named Nigeria help to create the myth of Saro-Wiwa, and the martyr. It would make sense to say that, without Nigeria's peculiar character and its rulership's inhumanity, Saro-Wiwa might have survived and, perhaps, he would have lived an ordinary life" (4).

It is significant that Saro-Wiwa "died in his attempt to put perpetrators back on the path or rectitude" (Chinyelu Ojukwu, 84), but in "a period far too mired in the mud of corruption and selfishness to accept and understand the deep meanings of freedom, equality, and national development" (Ojo-Ade, 11).

Saro-Wiwa's martyrdom spurred many environmental agitations in the Niger Delta. To the contemporary artist, he is a predecessor, muse and god. The notion of god is peculiar to African cosmology where ancestors are equated with gods. There is a tradition in literature that the "poet must incorporate the achievements of his predecessors in his works but aware of his time and place so that his work reflects a consciousness of his own time, his own culture and that of his ancestors" (Ngara, 41). This is in tandem with T.S. Eliot's assertion that

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead (23).

To sum, the poetry that emerged after the execution of Saro-Wiwa reflects the link between the corpus of existing and emerging poetry in Niger Delta. Struggle and activism are recollected in loss, tears and grief.

Theoretical Framework

To analyse images, metaphors and symbols that portray the significance of Saro-Wiwa in Ojaide's *Delta Blues* and Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*, this study adopts an eclectic approach owing to the multi-dimensionality of these elements. To relate these elements, Maduka and Eyoh espouse Laurence Perrine's analysis that "an image means only what it is; a metaphor means something other than it is; and a symbol means what it is and something else" (46). The import of these elements is to strengthen the portrayal of Saro-Wiwa as a vehicle that grounds the Niger Delta experiences. Given that everything is connected, there is often a basis to relate or synthesise ideas and theories, especially in treatment of multi-dimensional themes. Literary criticism is dynamic, critics give varying interpretations to a work of art by applying new theories and deconstructing the earlier theories applied. An eclectic reading is an approach that synchronises such varying ideological interpretations.

Eco-criticism is a literary framework that studies the relationship between literature and physical environment. The word "Eco-criticism" is attributed to William Rueckert. By Eco-criticism, Rueckert meant the application of Ecological concept to the study of Literature" (xx). The relationship between literature and environment before the advent of Eco-criticism was initially a romantic ideal. Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth, John Keats and William Blake,, were popular for the exploration of the floral and beauty of the environment in their poetry. Perhaps, they were limited or no ecological challenges then compared to the present endangered state of the universe. Basically, Ecocriticism is concerned with explicating literary texts that respond to environmental crises such as the dumping of toxic

waste, destruction of aquatic lives due to oil spillage, gas flaring, water pollution and loss of land and livelihood, among others.

In literary criticism, the term "archetype" means "character-types, recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, images and motif or themes which are identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as in myths, dreams and even social rituals" (Jung, 115). The word "archetype" originates from a Greek word "archetypos". Arche means "root "and "origin" while typos "pattern" or "model". Archetypal literary theory begins with Carl Jung, and he most clearly addresses the topic in *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*, which contains two essays (first published 1922 and 1930) about literary archetypal analysis and one discussion of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. As early as 1912 in *Psychology of the Unconscious*, Jung analyses Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, though he never wrote a full psychological analysis of a literary work (van Meurs, 19). Jung's theory and practice require constant amplification of archetypal themes as found in literature and favoured works include Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Goethe's *Faust*, and Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The contents of the collective unconscious are called archetypes. Jung also treats them as dominants, images, mythological or primordial images, and a few other names, but archetypes are the most important ones. So, the collective unconscious is manifested in the recurrence of certain images, stories and figures, called "archetypes" which are "the psychic residua of numberless experiences of the same type." Jung indicated that myths are the means by which archetypes, essentially unconscious forms, become manifest and articulate to the conscious mind and they find themselves in the individuals' dreams. Jung perceived a close relationship among dreams, myths and art because all these three factors serve as media and this media will go through the archetypes and become accessible to consciousness. Jung observes that the man who possesses the primordial vision, a special sensitivity to archetypal patterns and a gift for speaking in primordial images that enable him to transmit experiences of the "inner world" to the "outer world" through his art form.

The Saro-Wiwa Motif

According to the *Oxford Glossary of Literary Terms*, a motif is a conspicuous element, such as event, device, reference, or formula which occurs frequently in works of Literature. This paper considers Saro-Wiwa as an immediate predecessor of the current Niger Delta poets, whose immortality is asserted strongly in the works of Ojaide and Ikiriko, especially as the poet is a hero and messiah of the immediate environment to which they all belong. The circumstance(s) that led to the execution of the poet was and is a collective heritage, so, the poet is characterised as a hero and inspiration of their poetic musing.

In the poetry of the Niger Delta, the image of Saro-Wiwa evokes pains and tears which consolidate the exploitation of the people, and he symbolises the deprivation, wound and the people's struggle for justice. The allusion to Saro-Wiwa strengthens the exploration of Saro-Wiwa motif as an element that depicts the re-enactment of the messianic role in the poetry of Niger Delta in consonance with the archetypal scapegoat motif to typify "the [lambs] who was slain" (*King James Bible*, Rev. 5:12).

The Saro-Wiwa Motif in the Poetry of Ojaide and Ikiriko

The spirit of Saro-Wiwa has possessed Niger Delta poets; they all seem to be determined to deploy poetry as placards of protest by engrafting activism into poetry and thus allowing the influence of pioneer activists like Boro and Saro-Wiwa to be asserted by allusion and the use of images and symbols. "Delta Blues" is the first segment in the collection *Delta Blues and Home Songs*. It is an expression of sadness and bitterness following the execution of Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni martyrs. The poem "My drum beats itself" announces the absence of the minstrel who mysteriously provokes a strange beat. "Now that my drum beats itself/ [...] inside the drum hides a spirit/ that wants me to succeed beyond myself" (10). Here, the poet implies the spiritual presence of his dead mentor in his craft as reflected in the lines:

> I foresee a thunderstorm breaking out in my head-
> I wonder how I can contain the gift in lines
> that I must chant to earn my griot's name.
> I bow to the master who never forgot my service
> (*Delta Blues* 10)

This poem aptly reinforces the influence of Saro-Wiwa on contemporary artists as earlier pointed out and established based on T. S Eliot's view in "Tradition and Individual Talent". Owing his art to such influence, Ojaide extensively mourns the demise of his mentor in the poem "Wails". Of all the poems in Delta Blues, "Wails" portrays the most in-depth sense of loss in diction that underlines pain and bitterness. The poem simultaneously mourns and lauds Saro-Wiwa, portraying how his demise leaves an irreplaceable void among the congregation of writers (ANA) which he once headed. In the voice of the persona, Ojaide reminisces thus:

> Another ANA meeting will be called
> and singers will gather,
> I will look all over
> and see a space
> .....
> I won't find one singer

When another ANA meeting will be called.
(*Delta Blues* 17).

The poem shows some similarities with the African traditional dirge. It reflects a typical poetry that death evokes from mourners in African context, which are often represented in question forms thus:

Who will make me laugh,
Who will bring Bassey and Company to life?
Who will speak to me with rotten English,
the lingua franca of the coastline?
Who will traverse the darkling plain of the delta?
Who will stand in front as the iroko shield
to regain the stolen birthright of millions?
(*Delta Blues* 18).

Apart from these rhetorical questions which underline and accentuate the tone of mourning, the poem is also rich in the use of symbols, metaphors and imagery that signify the roles that Saro-Wiwa played in his lifetime. Indeed, he is "the elephant", "the iroko", "the chief warrior" and the "true diviner" who rendered "immeasurable services" to his people and is being immortalised in lines of "wails".

Interestingly, though the poem is an elegy, one would not help but imagine the epic role of the character as hero and muse in this poetic rendition. This is further emphasised with the repetition of the line, "this death exceeds other deaths" (17), stressing the significance of the artist's death in comparison to others who died on the same course – the eight Ogoni martyrs and even Isaac Boro who initiated the struggle for Niger Delta as the poem recognises. In contrast, the poet sees death as a "savage ogre", but displays an attitude similar to that of John Donne in "Death, Be not Proud", in declaring that "Now I will not choose another course/ just to avoid death in the right path" (18). This attitude of undermining the impact of death is also reinforced in the lines, "[...] the diviner's words are never halted/ by death—Ominigbo is my witness" (19). By this, the poet resolves to continue in the same course (fighting for the right of his people), to ensure that the death of their martyr is not in vain.

"Immortal grief" and "Delta Blues" reflect on the fateful Friday when Saro-Wiwa and the other eight Ogoni "mounds" were executed. The poems capture the intensity of gloom that outshined the "hot Friday noon" in images that depict sudden twist of fate in a region once considered a "paradise" being turned to a "deathbed". The poet reflects the "immeasurable wound" on the "severed lives" of a people going through "immortal grief", where "the women sway to the sad air; the men keep vigil/ and grief exhausts the heart with burning rage". The poet did not forget to eulogise the "nine mounds for their protest and struggle against the exploitation of the Niger, setting precedence to

the rise of environmental activists who now follow the consciousness established by their priceless sacrifice thus stated:

> Nobody can go further than those mounds
> In the fight to right chronic habits
> Of greed and every wrong of power my
> The inheritance I have been blessed with
> now crushes my blood and soul.
> (Delta Blues 23)

Looking at the above excerpt, another paradoxical image has been painted, where the land which supposed to be the source of succour and emblem of protection now symbolises destruction as the persona laments: "My nativity gives immortal pain" and "I live in the deathbed" to portray the plight of the "nine mounds" sacrificed to satisfy the greed of "vultures". Nevertheless, the poem ends on a consolatory note, "Thank God that we are all mortal".

"Elegy for nine warriors" as the title suggests is also preoccupied with the execution of the Ogoni nine and the issues that gave premise to the execution. More than any other poem in the collection, the poem stresses on the immortal value of the nine warriors and their triumph over "The butcher of Abuja". The poet hurls pebbles of word at the perpetrators of the execution, condemning them to the mercies of those executed, and invoking the name of Ken to-

> [...] stir the karmic bonfire
> that will consume his blind dominion
> surely, that name will be the rod by which
> the cobra will meet its slaughter
> (*Delta Blues* 28).

In fact, this was like a prophecy that signalled the inglorious demise of Sani Abacha that could not attract the grief of the world as much as the execution of the Ogoni warriors.

> The cockroach will not live through the sun
> but those I remember in my song-
> nine marchers who died carving
> our destiny on their broadchests-
> will surely outlive the blood-laden season
> (25).

Another issue worthy of mention as expressed in the poem is the betrayal by indigenes. They are likened to "children who laugh at their naked mother" or "shit on . . . mother's grave" who are vulnerable to "the wrath of their creator-

goddess". These are the same category of people that Ojo describes as "allies of the enemy of the people" (262) and metaphorically captured in G.'Ebinyo Ogbowei's poem "for kenule saro-wiwa" as "shylock hawk" who "would demolish her hut/ to find a razor she never would return"; a metaphoric allusion to the "four old brooms" (Ogoni elders) whose murder was perpetuated to silence Saro-Wiwa in his struggle for the right of his people. Ogbowei's lines reveal that

> four chiefs pour libation
> not gin for thirsty ancestors
> but blood to bathe hands of bruisers
> setting straight faces of gory gods
> peeping out of muzzles of thundering cannons
> (*let the honey run* 58)

Odia Ofeimun describes this as "killing of four to nine" (*Go tell,* 31), an intrigue that mocks the myopic game of indigenous traitors who are akin to Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus, a typical neo-colonial lifestyle that promotes exploitation.

The last poem in *Delta Blues*, "Remembering the town-crier" still bemoans the problems of Niger Delta that culminated in the execution of Saro-Wiwa but strongly appeals for the immortalisation of his memory, enjoining that we "should not lose sight of the tear-logged day" and re- emphasising through repetition and rhyme that we "must not lose sight of the tear-sogged day" that "the world woke to the immortal wound". This preoccupation takes us to the poetry of Ikiriko which expresses the same concern.

Unlike Ojaide whose poetry collections range in thirties, *Oily Tears of the Delta* remains Ikiriko's only volume of poetry which has aired his voice and commitment towards the recovery of Niger Delta. The sound aesthetics of the work is achieved through ample use of alliteration, assonance, rhyme and repetition plus the deep portrayal of the paradoxical state of the Niger Delta makes the volume one of the best and widely quoted piece in Niger Delta poetry. In the forward of the collection, the poet vehemently states that "the oil boom in Nigeria has meant a doom for the Niger Delta. The doom is now beginning to burst in blood", implying the number of lives lost to the negative outcomes of oil exploration. This paper focuses on only four of the thirty-one poems in the collection, namely, "Delta tears", "For Ken", "Remembering Saro-Wiwa" and "Ogoni agony". Although these poems also reflect the issues prevalent in Niger Delta poetry these four reflect the mourning of Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni patriots.

The poem "Delta tears" laments the grievous sense of loss that characterise the Delta region. As clearly implied on the title, "oily tears of the Delta", the poet captures an endangered region, "Ailing Delta" where aquatic species are gone, he bemoans the present state where

Things are tossed up down up and down
Like dogs do with filthy old rags
The coated seascape smells
Oil and tar and gas
No starry night-any more
As salt is gasolined out
(*Oily Tears,* 35).

With a sense of nostalgia, the persona reminisces on the fauna and flora of the region "before what happened/ Happened [...]" and left the Delta "condition curved like crayfish". This situation triggered the fight for the right of the people and environmental protection championed by Saro-Wiwa.

The poem "for Ken" is a tribute, an elegiac composition that reflects the memory of Ken Saro-Wiwa, whom the poet addresses as "wordsmith" whose writings envisioned the desire to right the injustice meted on his people. He estimates that the "loss", "more than the cause/ is larger [...]/ in size", satirically alluding to the physical size of the dead poet. But in portraying his personal grief, the poet intones,

The injury is written
Deep in my soul
Leaving a manuscript
To remain and remind
Me of the deeds
Left undone
(*Oily Tears,* 38)

The poet goes further to urge others to keep the memory of the dead poet in "Remembering Saro-Wiwa", stating "that the cause" of his "hanging / is still clinging/ to the bottom of oil wells". This portraiture obviously implies the exploration of oil and the denial of the people benefits that commensurate negative outcomes like gas flaring and oil spillage which poisons the land/sea, and ultimately renders the people jobless. In rhythm that resonates within the mind, Ikiriko like a town crier cries,

Let's not forget
that Saro-Wiwa
was a righter
a righter
a righter.
And let's not forget

that his hanging
is still sticking
to the remains of our conscience
like sludges on mud-flat.
(*Oily Tears,* 39).

The issues that relate to Saro-Wiwa as captured by Ikiriko can be summed with the poem "Ogoni agony" where the image of an "over-drilled land" gives birth to the protest of the "wordsmith" whose heroic blood spilled by the "constricting Boa" evokes "mass emotion" and flooded tears recollected in poetic imaginations.

Conclusion

The precedence of Saro-Wiwa's struggle as an environmental activist has spurred ecological consciousness in the poetic imaginations of Niger Delta poets in response to the endangered state of the region due to exploitative oil exploration. The image of the martyred activist-cum-hero portrays colossal loss of both natural and human resources and thus provokes the expression of immeasurable pain, anger, bitterness, disappointment and immortal grief (as captured by Ojaide and Ikiriko). What is considered as Saro-Wiwa motif in Niger Delta poetry is the preponderance of themes that assert the vision of Saro-Wiwa and reflect the loss and tears that his execution adds to the ruins of Niger Delta.

As a symbol of struggle, Saro-Wiwa's legacies have proven that there must always be a hero who is courageous enough to drive a collective vision for justice to be attained. Ironically, those who perpetrated his fall did not envision that blood speaks as it was in the case of Abel (*King James Bible*, Heb. 11:4). This further implies that the image of Saro-Wiwa's execution in the poetry that mourns his death is an eternal indictment to those guilty of his blood while the significance of his death provides an unending repertoire for the musing of existing artists as previously noted. In fact, the literature of Niger Delta is preoccupied with this subject such that no discourse centred on the exploitation and marginalisation of Niger Delta can be successfully concluded without a direct or indirect allusion to the symbol of Saro-Wiwa. Indeed, the preponderance of the allusions generated the idea of "Saro-Wiwa motif" that this paper has examined in the poetry of Ojaide and Ikiriko; and also confirms that Saro-Wiwa remains an undying image of loss, the symbol of struggle and the metaphor of pain. Furthermore, the exploration of his struggle, execution, and memorable impact in Niger Delta poetry can as well be interpreted from a dialectical point of view as Saro-Wiwan dialectics.

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