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**Alter-Native Press: Implicating Subaltern Discourse in Ogaga
Ifowodo's Ecological Poetry**

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Abstract

As need to overcome the failure of mainstream press to represent the challenges, anxieties and dedications of subaltern groups, alternative media as protest press provide radical and concentrative perspectives on autochthonous experiences and give voice to subordinated group members. Using an eclectic methodological approach that involves Rob Nixon's Theory of Slow Violence, Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model, and Critical Discourse Analysis, this paper is focused on how Ogaga Ifowodo appropriates axes of environmental experiences of the Niger Delta area of Nigeria as information content in his poetry, and evaluates the effectiveness of the various discourse strategies he devises to communicate the lachrymal experiences of dwellers in the micro-minor niche to a broad mass of the people. Through a pragmatic reading of linguistic notations, significant discourse choices this poet makes are correlated with extra textual anxieties and dedications of the Niger Delta communities as subaltern group. Analysis of texts show that although poetry is art form traditionally valued for its intrinsic motivation, Ifowodo's eco-poetry functions as info-activism and advocacy media which draw attention to environmental rights challenges in the area through deliberate selection of content, rhetorical features and discourse framing that provide counter-hegemonic information fit for instant global reportage .

Key words: alternative press, critical discourse analysis, eco-poetry, Ogaga Ifowodo, subaltern discourse.

Introduction

Alternative Press and the Niger Delta Eco-poetry

Basically, conventional media consist in dominant press forms such as radio, newspaper, television, etc., traditionally created for propagating informational content as well as factual and investigative reportage to a broad mass of the people. They are conservative in their propagation of state policy, conventional and predictable in their tendency to provide and project information through rhetorical strategies that represent mega state, (multi)national and majority hegemonic interests. In other words, there are informal and cultural pressures, which propagate a dominant and hegemonic public sphere, usually controlled by the interests of state, the powerful majority and multinational conglomerates that exclude the subaltern group from participating in public discourse, and thus engender their discourse exclusion and the spiral of silences on their identities, situation, needs and interests.

As need to overcome the shortcomings or failure of dominant mainstream press to represent the challenges, interests, anxieties and dedications of particular audiences or groups, alternative media as protest press provide radical and concentrative perspectives on autochthonous experiences as alterity that give voice to subordinated group members. Thus, alternative media aim to provide counter-hegemonic informational content and structural aesthetics that challenge mainstream media. They provide and project information that represent interests of marginalized groups, foster horizontal linkages among communities of interest, promote subaltern discourse through deliberate selection of content, rhetorical features and aesthetics, as well as device structural framing that engenders close audience relations. Such media serve to create multiplicity of publics, as marginalized groups tend to create their own space thereby venting what Fraser (1990:56-80) calls “subaltern counter publics”: “spaces where they can discuss their own identities, opinions, and interests”.

Members of subordinated social groups use such alternative spaces as text messaging, u-tubes, twitting and protest literature to massify information that propagate their interests and messages, circulate counter-discourses and project issues about concentrative environmental crisis and minority rights campaigns. This way marginalized groups assert their realities and interests by creating or expanding discourse through counter public content that challenges the dominant public sphere, which tends to be constricted by state interest, dominant conglomerates and majority interest-serving opinions. This is moreso as, in the words of Clemencia Rodriguez (199), "citizens have to enact their citizenship on a day-to-day basis, through their participation in everyday political practices...As citizens actively participate in

actions that reshape their own identities, the identities of others, and their social environments, they produce power" (p.12). So, it could be said that by creating alternative media, subaltern groups are indeed expressing their citizenship, producing their power, and letting their voice be heard. It is against this background that the informational content in environmental rights campaign poems by Nigerians of Niger Delta extraction such as Tanure Ojaide, Ogaga Ifowodo, Chris Onyema, Ebinyo Ogbowei, Uche Peter Umez, Sophia Apoko-Obi, Ibiwari Ikiriko, Onookome Okome, among others, can be appreciated as alternative media deliberately contrived for voicing the environmental challenges and anxieties of people of the area as discounted victims of extreme ecological distress.

The Niger Delta area of Nigeria, which constitutes mainly of minority ethnicities that lie in the Eastern and Southern-most parts of the country, is inhabited by communities that harbour the various tributaries through which the River Niger empties its waters into the Atlantic Ocean. This area has been described as one of the world's greatest ecosystems, Africa's largest and the world's third largest mangrove forest; the most expansive fresh water swamp in western and central Africa, Nigeria's major forest concentration of high biodiversity and the centre of endemism (Saro-Wiwa,1995). There are large deposits of oil and gas in the Niger Delta area that contribute to about eighty per cent of Nigeria's income and place the nation as one of the major exporters of oil in the world. Since the discovery and exploration of oil in this area from 1958 till date, the people of the Niger Delta have been subjected to acts of bioterrorism through the destruction of their aquatic and terrestrial reserves. The inhabitants of this region exist under travails of oil pollution, gas flaring, and extreme pristine conditions, and survive without good food, roads, electricity, clean air and good drinking water. There is forcible exploration of oil from the area by multinational oil companies with the support of successive military and civilian regimes and powerful majority ethnicities in a manner that impoverishes the ancestral owners and devastates their environments.

Although poetry is art form traditionally valued for its intrinsic aesthetically qualifying motivation, ecopoetry in the Niger Delta has been co-opted as a kind of culture jamming info-activism and advocacy devised to draw attention to environmental rights challenges in the area. Ushie (2006) reasons that the crude and "raw realities" that confront the creative writer from the Niger Delta are the raw materials which he must refine into his art:

when he wakes up, they are what he sees, when he takes a stroll, they are what he sees, when he stares, they are what he sees. And when he sits to recollect his day's experience into a poem, a novel, a short story, a play, a biography, a memoir or a letter, they are what he recollects (p.15).

Ecopoetry as aesthetic intervention becomes a symbolic discourse, mediated channel and functional space for environmental rights struggle, and a detournement to subverting the conspiracy of silence on the eco-calamities against the Niger Delta in mainstream reportage, appropriating the relationship between literature and the natural sociopolitical and economic environments and projecting the gory spectacle of slow violence. Slow violence, as articulated by Rob Nixon (1999, pp.14-15) refers to acts that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects. Nixon studied discourse stratagems for turning “attritional calamities staring no body into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment” in “an age that venerates the instant and the spectacular”. According to him, writers give symbolic shape and plot to such “formless threats”—like toxic build up and desertification, pollution, racism and neocolonial exploitation whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across space and time. He explains that stories about pollution, for instance, may be cataclysmic, “but they are scientifically convoluted cataclysms in which casualties are deferred often for generations”. Both memory and causation fade from the frontline of attention, because of the gap between acts of slow violence and their delayed effects, in a manner that exacerbates the difficulties of effective preemptive measures. This poses an auspicious challenge to the engaged writer who must facilitate re-membering, and focus the victims that pass untallied and so not restituted.

This paper examines how Ogaga Ifowodo, a writer and lawyer, appropriates axes of Niger Delta environmental information as content, and evaluates the effectiveness of various discourse stratagems this human rights activist and author of *Madiba* and *Homeland and Other Poems* devises in *The Oil Lamp (Oil)* to communicate the lachrymal experiences of dwellers in the micro-minor niche to a broad mass of the people. According to Nixon, the writer of fiction and nonfictional literature should device ways of finding iconic symbols and narrative forms that infuse them with dramatic urgency for instant restitution, remediation, or institution of preemptive measures. This focus is also in line with Herman and Chomskys’ Propaganda Model (1998) as important dimension in the study of representation and massification of content via adroit rhetorical strategies devised towards ensuring effective communication of subaltern interests. Through a pragmatic reading of linguistic notations, the significant discourse choices this poet makes are correlated with extra textual anxieties and dedications of Niger Delta dwellers in order to evaluate how this poet appropriates his subaltern environmental experiences and puts same at the frontline of feeling as subject fit for instant reportage.

Discourse Stratagems in Ifowodo’s the *Oil Lamp*

The Oil Lamp is an award-winning collection of ten poems in sixty flowing pages with parts and subtitles—“Ogoni”, “Odi, Jesse”, “The Agonist”, “The Pipes War”, and “The Good Student”—that focus on the ecological devastation of the Niger Delta as a result of unethical oil exploration activities in the area. According to Ike

Okonta (*Oil*, blurb) the collection focuses on “the unfolding carnage in the poet’s native Niger Delta”. The poems bemoan the ecological devastation and pillage of the Niger Delta region, and express bitter criticism, lamentation and condemnation of the activities of such agents of pollution as the Nigerian Government, the multinational oil companies doing business in the area, and their regional agents such as political leaders, traditional rulers and other local representatives. Exploitation and expropriation of resources and people in the region, extreme brutalization of ancestral owners of the land compelled by multinational greed and the rabid desire by government and mercantilists to sustain global oil flows are quotidian Niger Delta experiences interrogated in the poems.

In the main, Ifowodo’s ecological poetry as alternative press is cast in form of narration that captures the Niger Delta environmental experiences across the three major phases of Nigeria’s history: the pre-colonial era, when there was ecological peace in the land, and the colonial and the post/ neocolonial eras marked by pollution and exploitation by both foreign and local agents of bioterrorism. Ecopoetry as a genre of ecocriticism, a textual praxis “with one leg in literature and the other on land” (Gotfelty, 1996), is subaltern and concentrative as writers tend to focus more on the environmental challenges that affect them the most. Thus, Ifowodo in projecting his subaltern voice evinces a literature of place through varied riverine lexemes, terms of location and imagistic expressions that are in tandem with the social, historical and environmental experiences of the Niger Delta area. For instance, in waterscape (*Oil*,1),the rich aquatic and terrestrial reserves of the Niger Delta, as eco-condition before crude oil exploration activities, are portrayed in positive terms and alluring expressions using lexemes that semiotize peace and natural fecundity:

Hung above water, hands in the air/ Whited tongues and breathing
fibrous hair/ Roots, white mangrove roots./ Blacker than pear, deeper
than soot./ Massive ink-well, silent and mute/ Water, black water/
Floating hats of lily, yellow plume,/Plankton and shrimp, egg-and-
fish in bloom:/Lakes, ancestral lakes/ Rick mud of eels, water-holes
of crab./Sink-place for fisher of dig-and-grab: /Bog mudskipper’s
bog (*Oil*, p.x)

In the above excerpt, mangrove roots, black water, floating hats of lily, plankton and shrimp, egg-and-fish in bloom, lakes, mud of eels, water-holes of crab bog, mudskippers, mangrove waters, etcetera, are cohyponyms of fishing and waterside dwelling employed to ululate the Delta niche and illuminate the bio-diversity of the area. This way, the writer circumvents the gatekeepers of conventional media to project minorities’ eco-sensibilities and variegate the market place of spaces and interests.

In this collection, the frequent recourse to riverine expressions with provincial terms and multiple appropriations of homegrown glossia, exemplifies the

idea of 'dialectic'. This discourse stratagem imbues the channel with familiar transforms, generates autochthonous discourse and familial socially or regionally defined dialects that firm up the people's voice, excite their sensibilities and enlist their support in the drive for positive eco-action. They constitute an array of significant lexemes with core significations and fringe allusions that foreground meaning and convey ecological crises and environmental rights messages to the audience. According to Leech (1969), the use of homely provincial words evokes a flavour of rustic naivety in keeping with the sentiments of the pastoral, and thus, effectively massifies information in the text. According to this source, dialecticism is also used "to depict life as seen through the experience and ethos of one particular section of society" (p.49), in this case, the Niger Delta society. Through the use of provincial terms and regularized speech behavior in the Niger Delta, Ifowodo also expands the Niger Delta repertoire by absorbing both Delta and non-Delta words into ecological discourse.

Note that as proxemics marker, the textual portrayal of this pre-crude era of peace and natural fecundity in "Waterscape" is placed at the beginning of the book to anticipate the chronological pattern of the narration and show an ecosphere that was initially at peace with itself before the agents of destruction visited. This burden of nostalgia and memory also extends from the terrestrial to the aquatic reserves through apt choices of lexemes of place. For instance, using ameliorative allusion, the poet portrays a sense of peace and plenty in the Niger Delta area of yore, a niche "in the mangrove waters, where tides/*free* the creeks of weeds, [and] fishermen *glide* home to the first meal" (*Oil*, p.x; italics, my emphasis). *Glide* as tactile and kinesics metaphor conveys peace and assurances, as opposed to the implicatures of scarcity and disconcertion in *rush*, for instance. This usage, therefore, underlies the era of peace and plenty in the area. The atmosphere of eco-fecundity is also heightened by detailed and engaging-attention to ordinary things achieved through the use of simple words and descriptions that appeal to the senses all at once. These imagistic expressions are frames of remembering devised as background knowledge of the primal peace and natural allure in the region. Inversely, these terms of affectation project the angst in the devastating effects of deforestation, pollution and lack of commensurate duty of care by timber merchants and oil explorers doing business in the area.

As historical progression designed to put the reader on familiar discourse paths and advance ethical support among the subaltern group, the next poem, "Jesse" (*Oil*, p.2), portrays the destruction of Jesse, a community in Delta State, by oil pipeline explosion in lexemes of horror, co-hyponyms of death and destruction. The extreme sense of disconcertion suffered by the Niger Delta dwellers is captured in a combination of imagistic terms as the reader witnesses "a nameless rage wagged

(against) green fingered branches (which) fell to the hungry axe” of timber merchants and firewood gatherers. The reader also recoils as “trunk after trunk snapped” and the land reduced to ‘freight of ashes’ by fire from oil pipeline explosion. There are contrapuntal implicatures that foreground the Niger delta question—contradictions in the reality of this econiche that is ordinarily rich but impoverished by state denial and ecological destruction. Fuel and kerosene scarcity is as biting as the numerous pipelines of crude oil in Jesse, a microcosm of all Delta lands, just as poverty is as wide spread as the many money-spinning oil wells in the community.

Ifowodo also exploits pragmatic connections to foreground ecological messages through various kinds of indirect references and comparisons or metaphors. For instance, he uses concrete, animistic, anthropomorphic, dehumanizing and synaesthetic metaphors to convey the devastation of the Niger Delta environment. There are concrete metaphors that attribute concreteness or physical existence to an abstraction. Thus, the reader witnesses the “*bitter* memory of unusable fragments” (*Oil*, p.29), and “the *wild music* of deprivation” (*Oil*, p.6), as inhabitants of Jesse become victims of pipeline explosion. An animistic metaphor draws attention to its message by attributing animate characteristics to inanimate objects, and Ifowodo puts this technique to good use. In projecting a graphic detail of the “Jesse” pipeline explosion, for instance, “fire *raced* ahead of many and *going where it wished*” (*Oil*, p.14), and “the rivers now on fire *rushed*/to the sea for a *dip* floating/ along the *land's burning question*” (*Oil*, p.12; italics, my emphasis). Using humanizing or anthropomorphic metaphor, the poet also heightens the effect of the message by attributing human characteristics to non-humans. Thus, “the fence (of fire) *twirled* by the *smoke* round its *infernal alter* (*Oil*, p.10), just as “enwrapped arms flung in fright at the *surprised air*” (*Oil*, p.7). This avalanche of anthropomorphic and humanizing metaphors are in tandem with the discourse of dissociation common in trauma narratives, where the victim's sensibility is set off from the point of anguish impartation in order to contain the psychological distance needed to speak of the diseases, distressing vertiges, and overwhelming sense of morbidity.

To advance the discourse of ecocide and morbidity, and draw urgent attention to slow violence in the Niger Delta, there are dehumanizing metaphors in the text which ascribe animal or inanimate properties to human beings, and underlie the degradation and destruction of human life in the area. For instance, in this niche seething with lachrymal consciousness, we find “bloated bodies *fished* from creeks” (*Oil*, p.14), “village *sent to sleep by hunger*” (*Oil*, p.10), and hear “the [chilling] shrieks of the *scavenging crowd*” (*Oil*, p.14), among others. Furthermore, there is use of synaesthetic metaphor to transfer meaning from one domain of sensory perception to another and make the feeling total and overwhelming, as we perceive the “venomous scent of charring bone” all over the Niger Delta (*Oil*, p.10).

Ifowodo laments the problem of youth restiveness, deprivation and neglect of Niger Delta lands through imagistic terms of death, destruction, pain and torture. He sees youth restiveness as reactionary, that is, as a product of the deprivation, destruction and neglect of the environment. The parable of Jesse is that poverty from denials suffered by people of the Niger Delta breeds 'bunkering' and further oil spillage, gas flaring breeds cancer and respiratory diseases, while lack of commensurate duty of care, compensation or corporate responsibility by the multinational oil companies breed militancy, unemployment and youth crises. Worse still, the hungry populace helplessly driven by their pristine existence into "the wild music of deprivation" are made "roast dinner" for the president and his guests by explosion as they scoop spilled kerosene and petrol from crusty oil pipelines.

The writer also draws attention to the collaborative activities of local allies which make it impossible for victims of eco-violence to ask for restitution from the former colonialists and international allies for their historic pillaging of the economy and expropriation of crude and palm from the Niger Delta. This subject of reparation as postcolonial sentiment in African discourse also occurs in *Oil* (p.28) where the persona laments the destruction of Delta lands by Nigerian soldiers who are supposed to protect them: "When British soldiers looted and burned Benin, /we cursed strange men come from beyond the sea, /from the land of the dead, so evil they had no skin. /But who shall we curse now, who is the enemy?"

Here the twin challenges of post colonialism, internal racism, defamiliarization and reparations are brought to the fore in a manner that tends to underlie that Niger Delta dwellers are "casualties of joint occupying powers: the transnational oil corporations and a brutal extortionist Nigerian regime" (Nixon, 1996, p.4). By focusing on both internal and external racism, Ifowodo tends to aver, quite like Saro-Wiwa, that "skin color is not strong enough to stop the oppression of one group by another. Sometimes it reinforces oppression because it makes it less obvious" (Saro-Wiwa, 1995, p.18). Thus, Ifowodo, *ala* Nixon, draws urgent attention to the fact that "international and intra-national contests over this finite resource can destabilize whole regions" (Nixon, 1996, p.18). By discourse extension, the Jesse saga, bears an inter-textual resonance to palpable tales of Odi, Umuechem, Ogoni, Egbema, Oguta, Escravos, and other communities, in Nigeria's oil bearing region infested with ecological violence, a popular kind of slow violence unleashed by global energy greed, breeding discounted victims of terror flows deserving of urgent attention, care and restitution.

The sense of violence and dislocation in the econiche is put to the fore in the co-occurrence of generic events and their sudden disruption by ecocidal actions that underlie the lachrymal consciousnesses of the ancestral dwellers. Thus, the pervading parable of dislocation and dismembering in the text is as effusive as the dismal metaphors of morbidity. For instance, in "Odi" (*Oil*, p.20), the reader cannot but

recoil when “prayer and pity lost their step” (*Oil*, p.9) as a bomb lashed “mother and child” during an oil-crazed Federal Government punitive expedition against Odi, a defenseless Niger Delta community in Bayelsa State.

The relevance of eco-poetry as alternative media intervention here is that despite the global significance of crude flows and consequent eco-devastation in the Niger Delta, the gory experiences of the people and their land are discounted, orphaned and denied attention from the ambience of political discourse, environmental impact assessment, and clean-up campaigns. Consequently, the region is starved of financial restitution, and other forms of humanitarian and informational assistance. In the words of Nixon” (Nixon, 2006,p.25), by incorporating this strand of narration, the writer “makes visible the overlooked causalities of accumulative environmental injury” and hands over, as it were, an environmental impact assessment of a land over drilled by (multi) national greed. Generally, therefore, rather than focus on the romantic predilections of “the praise-song school” of nature writing or “deep ecology”, Ifowodo’s investment in ecological poetry is in tandem with the tenets of social ecology, a shade of green writing that features environmental (in) justice, distribution of environmental burdens and goods, self-determination, political participation, race, land and minority rights in the Niger Delta area.

For effective dissemination of informational content, Ifowodo adopts plain and colloquial speech style, needed to project the Niger Delta subaltern voice and massify information, rather than the flatulence of ‘grand’ technique common in poetic discourse. There are nonce formations, neologisms and environmental shibboleths employed to project Niger Delta *narrames*, and vent eco-distressing vertigoes in the area. Thus, expressions used in these poems portray multiglossic formulations that implicate down-up communication repertoire and embody information from the Delta socio-political and ecological environments. Thus, martial terms and deliberative expressions common in conflict situations like decrees and edicts, treason, lawlessness, esprit de corps, bombs, landed, soldier, grenade, battalion, guns, traitors, Kaima Declaration, Ogoni Bill of Rights, Ikwerre Declaration, stamped and sealed, among others co-occur in the poems. These lexemes highlight the diverse impacts of ecological challenges such as angst reactionary and articulation of suppressed declaration of rights among communities erstwhile silenced by conventional media reportage. The familiar local expressions and nonce formulations add up to plain blunt speech that is accessible to a cross section of the community, successfully expose the stark realities of the area and effectively involves the common man in land rights campaign. From the ambience of rhetoric, plain or blunt speech as ethical support, achieves political heightening in its matter-of-fact tenor and associative signification of sincerity of purpose; and, in its contemporary form, makes the issues embodied in the texts topical and urgent.

By semiotic extension, the cable of simple speech in which Ifowodo's ecopoetry is conducted is in tandem with an important tenet of alternative press, which is the use of ordinary language to convey the group's quotidian experiences. However, the use of the "language of ordinary men" in alternative press reportage does not lapse into banality. Language use is creatively devised within the established possibilities of usage. Colloquialism and slang expressions are elevated as fit medium of expression with idiomatic familiarity of tone in popular eco-poetry. This pattern of plain blunt speech, is the hallmark of ecological poetry adopted by early romantic writers, who argued that poetry should be written in the language of ordinary men. Eliot (qtd. in Leech, 1969,p. 23) explains that "every revolution in poetry is apt to be... a return to common speech". As counter-hegemonic discourse, this protest and 'green rage' poet has overthrown the old paraphernalia of poetic expression and orthodox restrictions to realize in an apt and illuminating form the common experiences of man, and this serves as sure device for mass information dissemination.

To facilitate the pragmatics of eco-discourse, the poet exploits the advantages of extratextuality and intertextuality as cohesive strategies to link the historical, political and ecological experiences of the people. For instance, intertextual resonances from published texts, social and historical experiences are re-echoed in exploring the experiences of the ecologically challenged and gendered spaces. There are intertextual resonances in the poets' implicit or explicit allusion to places, persons or ideas for association or comparison. Thus, personal onomasticon and landmark terms like Oloibiri, Odi, Jesse, Eleme, Oleh, Saro-Wiwa, Isaac Boro, among others, which recur in Niger Delta *narrames*, embody references/allusions to historical places, events and people as well as their implicature in articulating the Niger Delta crude environmental experiences. Through this technique of overt familiar representation in creative writing, described by Emenyonu (2008, p. x) as "faction", the poet aspires to take literature into the streets by taking the streets into literature and tends to speak above those who seek to silence the people. Thus, despite the guiding principle of imagination as ground norm in creative writing, the poet fuses real events, real places, and real people with imaginary ones. Even the deliberate immersion in the language of indirection appears weak beside the forceful evocation of the Niger Delta environmental realities: It is not hard to know who and what are mentioned, or when and where are referred to in such thin poetic disguises. For instance, in "Ogoni" (*Oil*, p.31) the subtle mention of Major Kill-Them-All, as alias, is significant and conveys high factional relations. This onomasticon is a neologism from Major Paul Okuntimo, a notorious commander of military surveillance reputed to have terrorized the Ogoni lands and raped their daughters and wives during the Abacha Regime. Major was said to have played a leading role in the frame-up charge that led to the execution of nine prominent indigenes of Ogoni,

including Ken Saro-Wiwa, for visibly speaking up against the extreme ecocidal acts of Shell, the dominant multinational company drilling oil in the area. He was credited as boasting about having some “two hundred and twenty-one ways to kill a man” (*Oil*, p.38). Through subtle insinuation and adroit stream of consciousness that portrays his “excess zeal” and horrendous articulation of “two centuries of killing skills” (*Oil*, pp.38-9), the reader is let into the histrionics and evil machinations of “Major Kill-Them-All” as veiled reference to the dastardly activities and unnecessary use of extreme force by the Nigerian military who have turned the Niger Delta area into a war zone in a mindless zeal to protect crude oil flows.

The poet also uses variant structures to make his work logical, clear and penetrating to the reader’s consciousness. For instance, Ifowodo makes use of repetitive structures to describe how the fire from pipeline explosion burnt almost everything in Jesse town. He repetitively uses the eponymous smoke to project multiple combinatorics of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations that advance the discourse of aridity. Thus, using tactile metaphors to image the pervasive nature of ecocide in the region, the consciousness of the target audience is inundated by environmentally distressing vertigoes, implicated in the pejorative paradigmatic and syntagmatic constructs (in my italics), as: “the smoke *rose mournfully* from the ground”; “the smoke *rose cloudily* from the ground; “the smoke *rose heavily* from the ground” ; “the smoke *curled lugubriously* from the ground” (*Oil*, p.10). Similarly, in the following extract, parallel constructions are also used to give fillip to the discourse of morbidity as mordant enframing of the Niger Delta niche suffused with suffering and death:

Oil is my curse, oil is my course./..Ashes and bones: ashes and bones./..Dead in the creeks,/ dead in the lakes./..Oil is my curse, oil is my doom./Where are my children? Where is my husband?/Ashes and bones./Ashes and bones (*Oil*, p.16).

The above extract, part of the trauma-induced songs of ninety-year-old Madam Edoja widowed for fifty years by oil exploration, also exemplifies the constellation of songs, drama, declamatory verse form and folklore in Niger Delta poetry that pattern it as ‘total poetry’. Fashioned after the pattern of total theatre, *Oil* is interlaced by dance, music, drama and reader participation. These songs, proverbs and witticisms from Niger Delta local lore re-image conventional discourse, effectively articulate their real experiences and achieve discourse and thematic immersion. This autochthonous mode of imagining engages the reader by luring him or her to the intended message through familiar discourse paths. Note the combinatorics of pejorative terms, rhetorical questions and the epigrammatic finality of awe, horror and morbidity implicated in the repetitive “ashes and bones/ashes and bones”, a kind of quasi distressing fixation that trauma victims know.

Generally, parallel expressions and sundry repetitive patterns are used to set up a relation of equivalence between two or more neighboring pieces of a text as foregrounding mold that not only enhances the rhythmic aesthetics and establishes meaning relationships, but which also achieves rhetorical emphasis and memorability. To adopt Leech (1969, p.138) the seeming vacuity of tautology or repetitions can be an indirect means of conveying information about character and state of mind. Implicated in the lone-song quoted above, however, is the pragmatic appropriation of introverted discourse such as monologue, in which the poet exposes the inner turmoil, traumatized experiences and helplessness of the inhabitants of devastated lands, using fictional Madam Edoja as contact point (*Oil*, p.16). Monologue as discourse signifier implicates silences, suppression, oppression and fear, as the tongue of the victim is reduced to soliloquies, that is, the language of trauma. Just the same, use of songs (the closest folkloric genre to cry) as device for eco-communication imbues the message with spontaneous immediacy and advances the local content allure and truth condition of the information of the text.

Ifowodo adopts varied patterns of thought development to ensure effective communication of diverse ecological themes and emotions to the audience. Thus, there are different patterns of sequencing in these works which range from spatial (descriptive), propositional (argumentative) and chronological (historical and narrative) forms. For instance, through the descriptive pattern of thought development, the poet employs apt lexical choices that evoke images that appeal to the senses of sight and touch, and bring gory highlights of devastated Niger Delta lands before the reader's eyes. The impression one gets in "Odi" (*Oil*, p.18) and "Jesse" (*Oil*, p.1) for instance, is a dismal picture of towns that suffer rejection and dejection, or communities that have been reduced to theatres of war, where cannibalism is saturated and life debased. The descriptive and narrative forms confer pictorial and emotional effects on the texts, make the tenor informal and further get the audience involved in positive eco-action.

In addition to the spatial and chronological sequencing of events and experiences in the poem, there is a logical pattern that serves as binding tie in the texts. This is fostered by a dialogic structure which allows interlocutors to speak as in dramatic rendition. For instance, the poet devises the free direct speech pattern, which allows the persona advance his proposition through the rhetoric of proof or enthymeme. There are also implicit dialogues, as used in dramatic performances that embody exchange of opposition and proposition to arguments introduced with the reportorial as Ifowodo advances many forms of witnessing to account for the Niger Delta ecological challenges. For instance, to achieve artistic and logical proof, the writer advances descriptions that foreground the official neglect and destruction of Niger Delta lands as well as the acute pristine condition of the people as

informational content. By pragmatic extension, this provides logical proof or justification for pipeline vandalism, angst reactionary and, of course, oil bunkering as meaningful appropriation of rent.

Similarly, there is juxtaposition of strong ideas and their subtle relation to trivialities in *Oil*. This common feature of engaged writing, exemplifies miscolocation at the level of discourse, and functions as protest against classical emphasis on logical relatedness between objects of analogy in conventional discourse of power and exclusion. As form of pragmatic relations, it implicates tactical discourse substitution that rejects an innate imposition of silences on the minority *other* in conventional and dominant media. Thus, while “Odi is flattened” and “pays the heaviest price yet”, the President is only interested in protecting the nation’s “oil wealth at all cost” (*Oil*, p.28). The acute lack of electricity in Jesse, with the developmental problems it brings, is only “mocked by fireflies” (*Oil*, p.2). Stoves merely “cooked cobwebs in cold corners” as the area is hit and devastated by acute artificial scarcity of fuel it actually produces (*Oil*, 2). Moreover, as “everything” is burnt out in Jesse by fire explosion “from rusty pipelines”, we are only shown in end-focus how “the smoke curled lugubriously from the ground/ twirled around a stairway of despair/ on which prayer and pity lost their step” (*Oil*, p.10). The reader is also distracted by “the prey birds that hunted on their wings” with “their laser vision”, “praying for good game” (*Oil*, p.12). The reader also repulses with hate at the President who describes the charred bodies of Jesse fire victims “as roast dinner” for him and his guests. (*Oil*, p. 13). This direct speech foregrounds the callous mien of Nigerian leaders, such that there is no new information when the same President justifies the destruction of Odi in similar frame terms: “We *must* protect our oil wealth at any cost” (*Oil*, p.28). Note the use of the strong modal, “must” (my italics) in this direct appropriation of voice to mark the president’s speech as authoritative and by discourse impicature, a heightening but spruce rejection of oppressive terms of suffering common in command and exploitative speech.

Interrogatives embody illocutionary forces and implicatures for confrontation, anger and fear used to provide logic for angst reactionary and militant confrontation. The aim is to draw attention, enlist support, and interrogate the Niger Delta situation by engaging the knack of the audience on deciphering implicatures of questions helplessly asked with no answers expected: “And you burn your meal to ashes?” (*Oil*, p.13); “Will the government aid the victims of Jesse?” (*Oil*, p.15); “But who shall we curse now, who now is the enemy?” (*Oil*, p. 31) “Can anyone think of the Niger Delta and not feel an ache in his heart?” (*Oil*, p.52). These expressions convey imagery of the people’s hopeless condition, foreground the fatality of the pillaging of their ecosystem and incite the emotion of the reader. In distress communication, rhetorical questions are employed by victims as easement or talking-through stratagem to

exhale their trauma shame, and become more able to articulate their distress and face the sources of their pain. As expanded imagism, these interrogatives or rhetorical questions depict the utterances of the traumatized, who vent their lachrymal consciousness through semi-soliloquies or introverted codes, and represent tactical appropriation of voice employed to foreground deep layer notations that indict human ego- rather than eco-consciousness.

Though Ifowodo's writing constitutes a mixture of patterns of thought developments, the use of narration stands out. Despite the appropriation of the poetic pattern of discourse as media space, most of the poems are prosaic in nature, narrative texture, and epical in their serious evocation of tension and fear. This is because the writer appropriates the garb of historical witnessing in tracing the ecological experiences in the Niger Delta area, and as it were, hands down their ecological impact assessment for the reader's perusal. The poet uses the first person, third person and omniscient patterns of narration to attain sincerity of purpose as the witness who knows all and sees all. Expressions like "it was in the fourteenth month of the fuel crunch" (*Oil*, p.2), "that was how the damage was done" (*Oil*, p.3), "that was Odiri's tale of the cause of the fire" (*Oil*, p.7), "hear another tale of how the fire started" (*Oil*, p.8), among others, are declamatory forms of narration employed by Ifowodo to exploit the people's idioms of feeling and pattern of communication and draw attention to the various depressing dimension of gory experiences of the Jesse pipeline fire explosion.

This rhetoric of witnessing foregrounds the message through ethical and pathetic support techniques, further realized through specific quotations and direct speech patterns. For instance, through discourse appropriation of voice, the poet also assumes an omniscient role through tactical combination of inductive and deductive extrapolations and lets the reader perceive and hate the boisterousness of the soldiers, feel the agony of the helpless delta, as well as hear the laments of social, terrestrial and aquatic lives as equal victims of bioterrorism. For instance, as the Jesse oil pipeline fire rages on, "the field of crops" screams:

It's midseason! We are not ripe! /Do not reap us! / Do not cook us!"
Creeks and ponds "soon to boil dry" also cry: "Take your cooking oil
away, / we are no pots or cauldrons! /Can't you see here's no
kitchen?/And you burn your meal to ashes?"

The persona as narrator then coordinates the horror from the reportorial artistic distance of the third person: "The rivers now on fire, rushed/to the sea for a dip,/floating along the land's burning question" (*Oil*, p.12).

Ifowodo also employs the technique of free quotation sign to let us hear the tales of denial, devastation and anguish of the delta habitants directly from both the

victims and their assailants. This technique is also used in “Odi” (*Oil*, p.18). The parable of Odi is how government uses unnecessary military force to quell pockets of restiveness among defenseless communities in the area. Thus, as Odi (*Oil*, pp.27-8) is sacked, the news from newspapers and words of mouth scream or hush the horrific headlines conveyed in direct quotations “You have no home anymore. Go back to the sea !” (*Oil*, 27); “Odi flattened, pays the heaviest price yet” (*Oil*, p.28); “We will protect our oil wealth at any cost, says president” (*Oil*, p.28), etc. These direct speech forms enframe choices that are assertive. They also emplace participatory or interactive structures that give stylistic fillip to the message and mobilization propensity of this media platform, and set the audience in the frontline of feeling.

The tenor of *Oil* is wavy, varying from an initial tone of adoration and eulogy of the Niger Delta ecological past to that of general sorrow, morbidity and requiem in the present. However, the prevailing mood is that of bitterness, anguish, travails and frustration, sorrow, shattering bewilderment and regional perplexity. The angry diction that echoes in Ifowodo’s *Oil* protests the devastation of Niger Delta lands using the gruesome experiences of Jesse, Odi and the Ogoni as illustrations. Thus, the book of poems is dedicated to “the thousands and one/gone in the struggle/for a livable/Niger Delta/a just Nigeria” (*Oil*, p.vi).The poet in advocating for environmental justice uses evocative expressions that depict the overwhelming presence of ‘blood’ and ‘death’ and forms of hate speech common in fighting or muscular writing to advance the protest and despondent mood of the poems. He imbues mass appeal in his audience through the protest tenor and implicit thematic massification of trauma that give fillip to call for immediate liberating action among the Niger Delta victims of slow violence. The protest tenor of these poems is instructive. Michael Boyle and Mike Schierbach (2009) have stated that audiences of alternative press are likely to be more frequently engaged in protest actions than audiences of mainstream news media. Subaltern groups resist dominant power structures that reduce them to silences and passive beings in mere existence, rather than living and participatory members of society whose needs, anxieties and dedications must be contemplated in decision making.

In terms of pattern, therefore, the poems being protest works, subvert the features of the poetic sub-domain of communication. For instance, rather than the conventional intrinsic motivation in poetic mold, the dominant pattern of flowing narratives in the text is interspersed with elements of extrinsically qualifying description, exposition and argumentation, just as the tenor is protest rather than tranquil. The poet uses free verse with irregular rhythmic cadence, variation of phrases and syntactic pattern rather than the usual poetic metre. This affords him the freedom of full expression as he concatenates words and structures according to the dictates of the message rather than convention or archetypal textuality.

The lines are compact and broken whenever the poet chooses, thus giving the texts lines of varying lengths. However, shorter sentences are used to heighten communication effect. Yet, and by analytical implicature, the lines occur in bouts and spurts that implicate the kind of language used to vent the spurts of pain in the consciousness of distressed victims. The use of run-on-lines marks ecological disjunction and quick succession associated with thought and memory of the psychologically and physically challenged people of the Niger Delta. The anguish of the ancestral indigenes is also “flown”, as it were, as the all pervading course of suffering people. The dismal picture of polluted streams and general ecological devastation are captured in the disjointed lineation of thought conveying the environmental challenges that dovetail into one another through stylistic enjambment.

Conclusion

In line with Herman and Chomskys’ Propaganda Model (1988), selected ecological poems by Ogaga Ifowodo are studied in this paper in an attempt to examine the communication choices he makes using the Niger Delta environmental challenges as informational content, as well as evaluate the significant discourse stratagems he devises to communicate effectively to the target audience. Through a pragmatic reading of notations, the significant discourse choices this poet makes are correlated with extra textual anxieties and dedications that trail his subaltern environmental experiences.

Ifowodo’s eco-poetry whose subject matter, painful tenor and rhetorical stratagems read like the anthem of all the dispossessed of the Niger Delta vent the communication needs of the Niger Delta people facing varying degrees of environmental challenges, and protests against their devastated and polluted ecosphere. As alternative press, they provide shades of counter-hegemonic discourse that represent the interests of the marginalized group, foster horizontal linkages among Niger Delta communities, and promote subaltern discourse through deliberate selection of content, rhetorical features and aesthetics that engender close audience relations.

Thus, though eco-poetry quite like blogs, face book, twitter and other similar spaces are not conventional information media, they allow ordinary citizens by pass the gatekeepers of mainstream media and share the information and perspectives they deem important. As alternative media construct, Ifowodo’s eco-poetry brings Niger Delta eco-distress reportage to frontline feeling and subject matter for urgent global attention.

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