

ANTHROPOCENTRIC-REALISM IN THE NIGER-DELTA

REGION: A STUDY OF RUKY DIVINE OGEDE'S *FESTERING*

WOUNDS

Michael Onyeisi Ejiodu

Department of Languages (English and Literary Studies), Faculty of Arts, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria.

michael.ejiodu@unidel.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between literature and the environment. The major focus is on the anthropocentric attitude and activities of man, and how these impinge on the environment. The paper tries to x-ray some concepts such as anthropocentrism, biosphere, earth, environment, man and the Others. The paper argues that the concepts in their physical manifestation are cardinal for the existence and survival of humanity as well as themselves. In addition to these, the paper looks at the effects of the degradation of the environment on mankind; the interrelationship between the degradation of the earth, corruption and protest among the citizenry. Another aspect examined is the political implication of the despoliation of the environment. These could be summed up in the perennial and circular flow of corruption and the attendant suffering and degradation of human life, leading ultimately to resistance among the populace. The text of analysis is Ruky Divine Ogede's *Festering Wounds*. The paper concludes that mankind no longer seems to understand or realise that humanity cannot exist nor survive in isolation. Another conclusion is that the environment's response to the degradation of the earth is a prelude to youths' restiveness and social revolts.

Keywords: Anthropocentrism, Biosphere, Earth, Environment, Man, Niger-Delta, Others

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1. Introduction

The Biblical injunction to man, "... subdue it [earth]: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (*Bible*), however violent it may sound ought not to be taken to mean destruction in the name of harvesting for the sake of human sustainability. But unfortunately, mankind has taken it literally and therefore every one of his efforts has been geared towards the destruction of the earth and all it contains. The greatest manifestation of this attitude, arguably, could be found in the sub-Saharan African continent, especially Nigeria where a subsistent lifestyle is prevalent. In addition to other environmental degradation activities, oil prospecting has generated the reality of the despoliation of the earth and has contributed immensely to it.

Since the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in 1958, Nigeria, and especially the Niger-Delta region has witnessed a lot of destructive manifestations ranging from oil spillage, deforestation, water pollution, air pollution, desertification, and flora and fauna extinction. This has assumed a gargantuan magnitude, especially in the last three decades. In the last two decades, flooding, arising from a multiplicity of factors, some of which have been mentioned above, has taken the centre stage in havoc wrecking. The first major one was the flooding of 2012. In this perspective, a large portion of the southern part of Nigeria, especially the Niger-Delta region was badly affected. But in the light of the devastation of the 2022 flooding, that of the 2012 seems like an introduction.

The second flooding is that which ravaged from the central to the southern part of Nigeria, especially the Niger-Delta region again. (This reaction of the earth is just a decade away from the first, and if nothing is done to avert it in the near future, the next episode of flooding might be geometrically aligned in devastating, if not more.) This does not suggest that there are no other forms of the manifestations of the earth's reaction against the eco-degradation ravaging the earth, especially the Niger-Delta region. Humans have exhibited excesses in the handling of the elements, and so the earth has manifested negative reactions. For example, there have been poisoned air, polluted waters; excessive heat, rain, hurricane, erosion, flooding, fire, rising ocean level, etc. These have come as a result of the actions of man consequent upon the depletion of the ozone layer and life-

sustaining properties. Today, the earth is lacking in the energy and resources needed to sustain humans and the “others”. The reversal of the trend is necessary, not only to stem the tide of destruction, but also to rejuvenate the earth. Speaking about the despicable situation of the Niger-Delta, Chris Onyema writes:

Since the discovery and commercial exploration of oil in the area in 1958 until date, the people of the Niger Delta, who are mainly fishermen and farmers, have been suffering from acts of bioterrorism, oil pollution of the lands and waters, gas flaring, hunger, diseases and poverty, as a result of the general destruction of their aquatic and terrestrial reserves. Poverty breeds prostitution, gas flaring breeds cancer and respiratory diseases, while lack of commensurate duty of care, by the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies, breed “bunkering” and further oil spillage, militancy, unemployment and youth crises, arm proliferation and hostage-taking of foreign and local oil workers (189).

These have been the experiences of the people of the Niger-Delta region which has now cascaded to the other geopolitical regions of Nigeria and even into other sub-Saharan African countries. Therefore, an immediate reorientation of humanity is of great importance so that the negative trend could be reversed while there is still time.

To place the situation in proper perspective, it was necessary to examine some of the concepts of concern, viz: Niger-Delta, Earth, Environment, Biosphere, Flora, Fauna, Man (Human), Ecocentrism, Anthropocentrism, Realism, and Others.

2.1 Niger-Delta

This is the oil-rich region of Nigeria made up of nine States of the Federation. This region accounts for over ninety percent of the crude oil production of Nigeria, and as such it is the mainstay of the economy of the nation. The states are largely in the south-south region. Other regions involved in the Niger-Delta region are the south-west and the south-east geo-political zones of Nigeria.

2.2 Earth

This relates to the earth in the ordinary sense as well as the hidden treasures and entities on, in, and around it. It is within this domain that one can talk of such concepts as biosphere, flora, fauna, the environment, others, as well as man.

2.3 Environment

According to Felix E. Okieimen and James M. Okuo, environment is “everything that is around us ... the sum total of biophysical and sociocultural condition that influence and is influenced by organisms. The natural environment consists of four inter-related systems: the atmosphere, hydrosphere lithosphere and biosphere” (1). Continuing, Okieimen and Okuo says of the lithosphere:

Lithosphere is the basic solid sphere of the planet earth. It is the sphere of hard rock masses. The land we live in is on this lithosphere only. All other spheres are attracted to this lithosphere due to earth's gravity. Lithosphere is a massive and hard solid substratum holding the semisolid, liquid, biotic and gaseous molecules and masses surrounding it. All geomorphic processes happen on this sphere. It is the sphere where all natural resources are existing. It links the cyclic processes of the atmosphere, hydrosphere, and biosphere. Lithosphere also acts as the basic route for all biogeochemical activities. (1)

This is the layer that is mostly endangered by human activities.

2.4 Biosphere

According to Okieimen and Okuo, biosphere is

... the biological component of earth system; and includes all living organisms on earth together with the dead organic matter produced by it. As a key component of the earth's system, biosphere interacts with and exchanges matter and energy with other spheres, helping to drive the global biogeochemical cycling of carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, sulphur and other elements. Biosphere is the global ecosystem comprising the totality of biodiversity on earth and performing all manner of biological functions, including photosynthesis, respiration, decomposition, nitrogen fixation and denitrification. The biosphere is dynamic, undergoing strong seasonal cycles in primary productivity and the many biological processes driven by the energy captured by photosynthesis. Seasonal cycles in solar irradiation of the hemispheres is the main driver of the dynamics. The biosphere has evolved since the first single-celled organisms originated 3.5 billion years ago. Billions of years of primary production by plants released oxygen from carbon dioxide and deposited the carbon in sediment eventually

producing the oxygen-rich atmosphere we have today. (17)

This is how rich and important the biosphere is. It is the main sustenance of life on the planet earth. Therefore, any act or inaction geared towards not maintaining her portends disaster for the earth and all occupants.

2.5 Flora and Fauna

These refer to plants and animals, respectively. This is the totality of living organisms living on, in, beneath, and above the earth. They help replenish the earth, thereby making it capable of sustaining both humans and the “others”.

2.6 Others

As Michael O. Ejiodu states elsewhere (PhD Thesis), “Others” imply all other things in existence except humans. From this perspective, it is clear that this incorporates both the flora and fauna, land and water living creatures, from the smallest microbe to the biggest of mammal, be it mammoth or whale, for land or waters respectively. According to Ejiodu, “Others”

... simply refers to all other creatures other than humans. It involves the nonhumans, ranging from the biggest in size to the smallest; the living and non-living things; the vegetations and non-vegetations; bacteria, viruses as well as elephants; all land dwelling beings as well as the land with all its minerals and nutrients; the waters and the water-dwelling creatures and the minerals therein, the air and everything in existence. It is these that ecoliterature tries to salvage. (46)

A look at the terms discussed above indicates that there is little or no difference between and among them. To say the least, they could be used interchangeably in some circumstances.

2.7 Man (humans)

The placement of Man as the last of the items under consideration is deliberate. This is to mitigate the high premium placed on humans in the order of things, since he, of all the beings, is one of the weakest. Also, he contributes less, if not least, of all the creatures in existence. Talking about the weakness of man, he and only a few other creatures cannot survive at birth or infancy without care; neither can he protect nor fend for himself even till the age of about five. So, when man brags about his superiority among living beings, apart from the biblical authority, one begins to wonder at the rationale. Consequently, the argument about “higher” or “lower” animal is a mere contraption of man. The “others” may have justified their superiority according to their species, if we could understand their reasonings and documentation methods.

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical Framework is the theoretical background upon which a work is developed and subsists. It is the foundation upon which a literary analysis stands. According to Tendai M. L Njanji, “theories are proposed explanations as to why certain patterns of events occur as they do” (129). Continuing on the same page, Njanji quotes Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007) as asserting “that theories are explanations constructed by human beings and by extensions which are virtually tentative (129). He then states that “Ecocriticism is the study of literature and its relationship to the environment, to consider environmental situations and think of possible solutions for correction of the contemporary environmental situations (129). According to Ejiodu, “Ecocriticism is a term that has to do with the interrelationship between literature and nature, the use of literature to re-order the attitudes of man towards adjusting his way, so as to make him recognize the symbiotic affinity needed to forge a new and better relationship between man and “other” aspects of nature” (21). The ““other” aspect of nature constitutes what is generally studied in ecology.

According to M. H. Abrams, ecology is “the science that investigates the interrelations of all forms of plant and animal life with each other and with their physical habitat” (71). Abrams further states that, “Ecocriticism (or by an alternative name, environmental criticism) designates the critical writings which explore the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, considered with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities” (7). According to Njanji, “...roughly defined Ecocriticism is concerned with environmental representations in literature” (129). Gomides presents a working definition that is far-reaching as he says that Ecocriticism is “the field of enquiry that analyses and promotes works of art and raises moral questions about human interactions with nature while also motivating audiences to live within a limit that will be binding over generations” (16).

These highlight the importance of ecocriticism in the modern era. Humanity has come to a crossroad almost without realising it. Current literary cannons are therefore seeking ways to salvage the earth and humanity. This

is the duty which ecocriticism has come to fulfil.

Among the ecocritical theories of literary criticism is ecocentrism. It is one of the two most recent theories of literary criticism. According to Ejiodu, “ecocentrism is a reaction to the conditions generated by the situation of anthropocentrism as demonstrated by human beings. It focuses on the presentation of the earth as being inherently beautiful and rich, and calls on humanity to see the environment as valuable, and so treat it with tenderness” (46). The implication is that it negates the other half which shall be discussed shortly. Abrams says that ecocentrism is of “the view that all living things and their earthly environment, no less than the human species, possess importance, value and even moral and political rights” (73). An observation such as this, according to Ejiodu, “is the root of ecocriticism and ecoliterature... [it] “is a focus on the interrelationship between literature and the environment or the ecosystem (46). It was necessary to talk about ecocentrism as it will further the understanding of the concept of anthropocentrism.

3.1 Anthropocentrism

It is the other sprout from ecocriticism. It, like its counterpart ecocentrism, deals with the relationship between humans and the environment on one hand, and the environment and literature on the other. Therefore, a tripodal relationship that is intricately tangled exists among them. According to Ejiodu, “anthropocentrism has to do with the human assumption of superiority over other parts of nature (the nonhumans) The advocacy in the anthropocentric mode is the human opposition to the nonhumans, as well as human superiority over “others” and his freedom” (44). Continuing, Ejiodu says,

this idea is deeply rooted in *The Bible*, the sacred books or documents and teachings of other religions and Western philosophies, which have accorded man the dominant position in the scheme of things, with the exception of some of the religions of the Far East (the Orientals) which accord the animals some measure of equality with humans, at least in the spiritual realms. (45)

Recent inquiry has revealed that some religious modes in Africa give prominence to some animals as totems of worship, while some make them the actual object. According to *The Bible*, God gave man

²⁸...*dominion* over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth”. And God blessed them [Adam and Eve], and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and *subdue it*: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. ²⁹And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat and it was so [emphasis mine].

Man has always presented as the justification on the authority given by God to man over the Others in existence. Responding to this, Ejiodu says “a philosophy such as this, in the hands of humans who think only of their comfort, could produce nothing less than the destruction of the harmony that ought to exist between the humans and nonhumans, and also further the subjugation and exploitation of the nonhumans. Humanity seems to have lost sight of the injunction to ‘replenish the earth’ and have [sic] concentrated on the phrase ‘subdue it’” (45).

Abrams sees Anthropocentrism as an orientation in “the interests of human beings” (72). The hallmark of this, according to him, is “to exploit natural resources and animal species for their own purposes” (72). It is therefore not difficult to fathom why the degradation of the environment has continued to fester unabated.

3.2 Realism

According to Arthur A. Stein,

Realism is a tenet that views the world as it is, and not in terms of an unrealized ideal. It emphasizes the constraints of the real world and the need for pragmatism and prudence. Applied to international politics, realism sees a conflict-ridden world of states concerned pre-eminently with their security and pursuing power as the means to assure their survival. Realists therefore see the distribution of power as the major determinant of state behavior and international stability. Within this broad rubric, realists have developed alternative formulations, emphases, and distinctions. (12812)

This means that, “... realism does purport to explain the set of forces that then would come into play to return the system to equilibrium” (12813).

Discussing the amendment of American constitution, Laurence Burgorgue-Larsen, talks about realism as “a

realistic approach”, which according to him “must be considered” (45). Much talk on realism has been from the political perspective. However, the domain of attention in this paper is that which has to do with the practical application of things, the physical manifestation of things around man in this universe.

The theories applied in this study are anthropocentrism and realism. These are applied in the analysis of Ruky Divine Ogede's *Festering Wounds*.

4. Anthropocentric-Realism in the Ruky Divine Ogede's *Festering Wounds*

The novel opens on a note of devastation. The scenario is disastrous, ridden with devastation and dilapidated in outlook. There is a physical revulsion, and the environment is revolting. This is manifested in the opening sentences which lay the dominant atmosphere observable in the novel: “As the darkness thickened, the night birds chirped, splitting the silence of the morning. The heavy rain that fell in Ofousu the previous day began again as time glided to 4:00am. The plantain trees that were planted at the back side of the dilapidated buildings fell on the ground, the wind banged intermittently against the wooden roof as the whooshing soughed through them” (9). But the people have no choice as they are incapable of another residence. Consequently, they succumb to the devastation ravaging within and around them. The narrator says,

The occupants of the mud houses drooled despite the bangs; and who, in spite of government warnings and many jingles on radio, television and all the papers for the people of the communities to relocate from the water-logged areas to settle down in the areas free of water, had remained adamant. The exterior of the building was as full of water as a lake. The inside, almost like a mouse hole was totally intolerable. The walls were smudged and the ceiling was cobwebby. (9)

This explains the life of the characters and the people of the Niger-Delta. It is a life of penury, one of near destitution. A graphic description is given of this thus:

A half worn out carpet was covering the floor. A kerosene stove, plates, pans, plastic buckets and other cooking utensils were carefully arranged at the left side of the one room. A small transistor radio and stale newspapers were kept at the head of the precarious wooden bed on which Munabo's parents were sleeping.

A rickety ceiling fan was turning slowly with a loud noise in the house. Whenever Muna wanted to spread his mat on the floor to sleep, he would move the centre table gingerly to one corner of the house because of the unsteady nature of its legs. (9)

The black and white frame which was hung on the wall housed a picture of Muna's parents when they got married in 1993. Chief Ronami, his father was smiling in it like a wrestler that had just won a gold medal. (9)”

Another feeling that emanates from the situation in Ofousu is that of struggle for survival. This is as it relates to both man and the Others. They struggle for survival through hunger and squalor. So, both man and mice compete for both space and food between and among themselves. The narrator says, “the loud noise of the mice scratching the used plates on the floor pierced through the silence of the house. One took a chunk of the leftovers and sprinted over Muna's legs. The other one raced after it screaming. If Muna was not fast asleep, he would have jumped up and tumbled on his parents” (10). Poverty and dirt are inextricably intertwined. This is palpable as everything comes crashing into the house through the wall in a mixture of “body of water”, “black oil” and “debris”: “all of a sudden, a hump-shaped mud cracked in from the walls, creating a gash for body of water swatted in black oil and debris to flow inside. Thereafter, the water flowed to Muna who was curled up in a fetal position enveloped in the cold. He sprang up quickly, looked around and saw that his coverlet had been immersed in the water (10). (It suffices to add that flooding is common in the land, and very often people are bobbed up and buoyed from their sleep.) Consequently, the young boy Muna is shocked and distressed, and so he raises alarm: “He raised an alarm, calling his parents. Ronami and his wife flung off their wrappers on hearing their son's voice (10). Water invades the house, and as such, the family is thrown into great apprehension and discomfort, and they begin to bail it out. In all these, one very important question continues to agitate the people: “*How come?*” they said repeatedly as they bailed the water. Consequently, they yawned intermittently as their bowls scraped the floor, tormenting the silence of the nascent morning” (10). Even the attempt at evacuating the water unsettles not only the house, but the neighbourhood.

Another consequence of the flooding and from the mixture of water, debris and especially the black oil is that children are deprived of playing grounds. Again, Muna laments. According to the narrator, “Muna emitted a loud hiss and said to his mother, “black oil everywhere, can't the oil companies find solutions to the stench of this oil? Everywhere is swampy and nowhere to play (10).” This is the first direct attack on the oil prospecting companies,

who are responsible for the oil spills. And this is critical. From this moment, the boy's countenance changes. So also, the nature and attitudes of other children. This is it that they start thinking about how to tackle and solve the problems of the community. To demonstrate the level of despondency into which the adults in the community have fallen, Muna's mother "...shunned him off with a stern look. ... She stared at him and said, *"I don't really know what to say"* [emphasis mine] (10). The people are confounded and lost. The people are dejected and they show it in their daily affairs in the society.

In addition to the dejection felt by the people, the above happenings usher in the ambience of despoliation. This feeling is maintained throughout the novel till when the destruction crystalizes and is wrecked among the people of Ofousu, a microcosm of the totality of the Niger-Delta, particularly and Nigeria as a whole.

The house is dirty, unkempt. There is a hint of water logging, water lake around the houses, the house's interior was looking "like a mouse hole" and "... totally intolerable" (9). To cap it, "...the walls were smudged and the ceiling was cobwebby" (9). In spite of the attempt by the family at neatness, the level of poverty, which reflects the state of the community, is objectively captured in the way Munabo's parents' bed is presented: "a small transistor radio and stale newspapers were kept at the head of the precarious wooden bed on which Munabo's parents' were sleeping" (9). The ceiling fan is "rickety" and "turning slowly with a loud noise..." and the centre table was not stable "...because of the unsteady nature of its leg" (9). Consequently, the centre table was usually moved "gingerly to one corner of the house" (9) whenever Muna wanted to spread his mat to sleep.

Finally, as they slept water (flood) burst forth through the wall into the house. This is a reflection of the daily rainy season experience of the Niger-Delta people, especially in the very serious flooding years of 2012 and 2022. From this moment a note of revulsion is accentuated in the minds of the youths led by Munabo. An agitated Munabo asks his mother, "black oil everywhere, can't the oil companies find solutions to the stench of the oil? Everywhere is swampy and nowhere to play" (10). Munabo's father, Ronani identifies the remote sources of the problems bedevilling the community: "You've grown up my son. Even if I tell you the problems of the community, do you have anything to do about it? The swamp, the stench of Sulphur and often gases that we inhale are caused by our leaders..." (11). This response further helps the boy discover himself as he later resolves to see to the end of the challenges.

Part of the agencies of the problems are the companies prospecting oil in the community as is exposed by the government teacher in Munabo's school. From this moment of Nirvana, things are no longer the same for the children and subsequently, the community.

The decay in the community is palpable and reflects in the physical appearance of both humans and materials in the land. The level of dirt, and the poverty occasioning it, are such that even the school building which ought to be exemplary of neatness and civilization is left in a miserable state. The narrator says,

Munabo's eyes bounced around the ailing school buildings that were besmirched. The oxblood coloured paint that was used in painting it had been washed off by rain and sunshine of years. The walls were grimy with marks and mushrooms growing on them.... The inside was totally intolerable. It was all cobwebby and the walls also smudged. Whenever rain fell, the roofs dripped water on teachers and students in classrooms. (13 - 14)

These are years of abandonment and lack of care. Even the narrator acknowledges that, "the place had not been repainted for ages" (13). These are as a result of monumental corruption and lack of probity.

The neglect noted above is due to the predatory life style of the people. To objectify this, one sees that part of the games, and the only one expressly mentioned in the novel, indulged in by students was hunting of grasshoppers: "Some were hunting grasshoppers in the field under the scorching sun.... (14). There are two predators here: "children" and "sun"; and there are two devastating words: "hunting" and "scorching". The "children" and "sun" are the oppressors while the "grasshoppers" and every other organism or element in the biosphere constitute the oppressed at the second layer of meaning. "Hunting": this is what humans do; hunting from grasshoppers, fishes, the animals in the wild to fellow humans. This is a reflection of the general attitude of the people: hunting and killing. This is the life of man. Humans hunt other animals, plants and other biospheric components. In the same vein, the stronger hunt the weak, from the human perspectives. This is the reason humans are where they are. Talking at the global level, one discovers that stronger nations try to annihilate the weaker. As it is for nations, so for cities, towns, villages and individuals. Sometimes, companies are employed for the activities. This is where the oil prospecting companies get indicted after the exit of the other companies like the AT & P of the Niger-Delta area. It is on the full realization that one of the boys, Douye, tells Munabo: ".....revolution is the only solution to this problem" (14). The discussion is largely on Ofousu a microcosm for the Niger-Delta region of

Nigeria and the world at large.

Nature seems to react against the activities of man. In a kind of objective correlative, the narrator presents nature's revolt against her plundering:

It was weekend. Munabo went with his father to the river to fish. The mooring boats at the river bank rose and fell on the body of water as the wave from the deep rolled frenziedly to it. Sea creatures like crabs, periwinkles, shrimps, fishes and pebbles flowed to it along side with the waves. Birds that perched on the trees chirped and frogs croaked in the nearby bushes. Butterflies of different colours zoomed around in the sky as dolphins leapt from the water to catch them. The shrieks, grunts and hooting of the creatures around instilled fever of fear in Muna's mind as he lounged in the bank waiting for his father who was mending his fishing net. Ronami was elated to see that the water was full to the bank. Whenever the river was full to its banks, they would have a great catch and there would be enough for them to eat and sell. They entered their boat and sailed to the deep. (16)

Beautiful as the scenery may appear, in the capture of nature's presentation, embedded in it is the destruction that looms. Consequently, "Muna giggled when his hook caught a fish. He had never been that elated since he started accompanying his father to the river (16). Although to Muna's fancy, this in a way is sadistic, a reflection of the undercurrent waiting to erupt in the community.

The diction is one of violence and fear: frenzy, roll, zoom, leaping, shirking, grunting and hooting. All these lead to a situation where there is the instilling of "*fever of fear* in Muna's mind as he lounged in the bank waiting for his father who was mending his fishing net" (16). [emphasis mine]

Although everything is happening within the community, nothing overtly seems to affect the elder. However there is the undercurrent of apprehension and fear ravaging them also. This is understandable as they have been implicated in the generation of the problems bedevilling the society. It may be necessary to add here, that often a chemical such as garmalin 20 is employed in the annihilation of the fishes of the streams, rivers, seas and oceans around. To accentuate the situation of foulness in the community, even a child who is seen playing around in the river farts unto the face of another. Although in play, it elicits anger. The overall implications of this is that even humour generates anger in the land, contrary to the normal. And in the next scene, women who go to buy fish are seen fighting: Madam Akasa and Madam Odioma. To make matter worse and properly reflect the society, both women are dirty. In response to Madam Akasa's taunts, calling Odioma dirty, Madam Odioma replies, "the kettle is calling the pot black" (17). The narrator had described Madam Akasa as cantankerous, and Madam Odioma as, "looking tattered and dirty" (17). The reason for the anger in the land is lack of food. And this has been occasioned by the death and dearth of fishes (food) for the people to eat. Munabo's father Ronani sums it up thus:

You need not to fight over this, Tamara has blessed us with enough fishes to eat. If not for the deadly chemicals that are killing our fishes we would have had enough to eat. The gods will not leave us in hunger whenever the water dries up. They provided us with a whale shark when the water got dried up the other day, so they will not leave us in hunger. (18)

Man is destructive, yet nature continues to nurture him. Man does not mitigate his destructiveness nor reciprocate her nursing gestures. Rather, in the name of invention and development, he continues the destruction which in the final analysis is his own.

In all these, the politicians, whether civilians or military, are implicated. Representing the civil-political class is, and especially, Chief Dogo Mok, the Chairman of the Development Union of the community. He leads the pack and embezzles more. The situation is so bad that people placed in authority only think of self-enrichment over and above every other person and thing. The welfare of the community and masses is least on their minds. This is a phenomenon festering in sub-Saharan Africa, especially Nigeria. Chief Dogo Mok concludes:

"Time is far spent my people, we have been impoverished, so it's time to eat the fruit of our labour after 16 years of military dictatorship. Our heroes who danced to the drums of the military Government met their waterloo in the struggle for the revenue generated from our oil. The military dictators manhandled, arrested, detained, tortured, and killed our agitators. But Tamuno needs to be praised for giving us a democratic rule, shunning off the dictatorial and oppressive structure that characterized former successive military regimes. Now, welcome to the euphoria of democracy. We say no to bad government, down to the clones of military dictators. If you agree to this, say ride on. (22-23)

The whole system of governance is seen in the euphoria of personal gains and a ruse of governance through democracy. It is therefore easy for the elders who should be the leaders in the communities that make up Ofousu to share the funds provided by the Federal Government for the provision of infrastructures for the people and

parcel same for their personal uses. The euphoria is only for Chief Dogo Mok and his cohorts, and this is only for a short while. This is the reality of the situations: the brevity of the thriving of the evil.

The destruction of the environment is inextricably linked with the destruction of the moral fabric and social infrastructure in Ofousu land. This is the case of Nigeria and invariably that of the third world of which Ofousu is a microcosm.

Another theme presented in the novel is deception, dominated by make-belief. This is a powerful technique employed by the ruling class for hoodwinking the masses, the less privileged in society. The narrator says,

The black and white frame which was hung on the wall housed a picture of Muna's parents when they got married in 1993. Chief Ronami, his father was smiling in it like a wrestler that had just won a gold medal. Adegadiza, Muna's mother towered on him with broad smiles on her face like a child receiving a trophy from her headmistress. There was a calendar behind the frame, advertising Higher Standard College. Pictures of male and female students were in it, wearing black and milky coloured uniforms. Their smiles spreading from ear to ear as they froze in it, staring at the cameraman and flashing their dentition. (9 - 10)

Heightening the effect is the fact that old fashion technology is employed: "black and white" photograph. This presents images that are often distorted, coupled with the fact that it is old fashioned technology. This whole idea is captured in the concept of appearance and reality which photography stands for.

5. CONCLUSION

In all, mankind has lost sight of the fact that humanity cannot exist nor survive in isolation. He needs the Others to survive. Barry Commoner well captures this where he says in his First Law of Ecology that, "everything is connected to everything else" 16. This idea is also corroborated by Aldo Leopold in this statement: "the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts (2). The implication of this is that the death of one biospheric element will ultimately bring about that death of man and every other being if not in the short-run, but certainly in the long-run.

Another conclusion one could draw from the novel is that environmental response to the degradation of the earth is a prelude to youths' restiveness and social revolts. They are intertwined This means that the protest experienced at the end of the novel is a recommendation for the people of the Niger-Delta and the oppressed everywhere. This is a warning which the author seems to put across. It is a call for caution to the rulers.

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Dr Michael Onyeisi Ejiodu is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Languages (English and Literary Studies), Faculty of Arts, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria. He studied at the University of Benin, Benin-City for his B.A (Hons) and M.A. English and Literature and PhD in Literary Studies at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, all in Nigeria. His major interest field is Ecocriticism