FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OTUOKE

WRITING NEXT DOOR TO (S)HELL: OIL AND ENVIRONMENT RIGHTS DISCOURSE IN THE NIGER DELTA

An Inaugural Lecture

By

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Writing Next Door to (S)hell: Oil and Environment Rights Discourse in the Niger Delta

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DEDICATION

This inaugural lecture is dedicated to Chief Johnson Onyema and Dr. Promise Onyema

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PROTOCOL

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Ladies and Gentlemen

PREAMBLE

1. 0 Mapping out the Issues: Language, Literature of Power and Critical Discourse

Writing Nextdoor to (S)hell: Oil and Environmental Rights Discourse in the Niger Delta is focused on the discourse of ecological literature as a dimension of language situation, and 'petrolcene' as a critical but diminished ecological challenge. The presentation aspires to articulate how writers contribute to global environmental rights communication by appropriating currents of ecological impact assessment of oil exploration activities in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region as creative facility. The strands of eco-content and discourse stratagems devised to express unethical oil exploration activities in the region are then used to underline the extremely adverse environmental rights abuse in the area and position Niger Delta-based creative writing as a potent category of subaltern press and world environmental literatures. The phono-grammatical choice of "(s)hell", rather than being a playful exercise of creative energy, is actually an adaptation from Ken Saro-Wiwa's rendition that "flames of shell are flames of hell", an apocalyptic parable that Niger delta dwellers know.

Shell D'Acry, forerunner of Shell Development Company, foremost prospector for oil and largest multinational company in Nigeria, has become a metaphor for other oil firms like Exxon Mobil, Texaco, Agip, Elf, Chevron, *etcetera*, whose mindless exploration and exploitation activities have brought devastating ecological consequences and transformed the Niger delta spruce econiche of yore into a living hell.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, in this presentation, I will examine, analyse and characterise the peculiar and significant discourse choices writers make, and evaluate the effects of such choices on environmental rights communication. In order to situate this lecture in its proper context, a brief survey of language, literature and the Niger Delta situation is imperative.

The major function of language is communication, communication being the transfer of information or message from the source to the target audience. Language has been defined as a human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols (Sapir, 1963: 15). It is described as non- instinctive and voluntary because it is organized, patterned and purposeful. Human beings express their thoughts, actions, beliefs, desires and emotions through language. It is an instrument by means of which humankind express content, construct situationally relevant texts, and achieve aesthetic purposes. Language so permeates the entire social structure that the study of a people's language, whether in spoken or written form, can be used to reveal the social situation under which the language is generated. Language can be used to reveal the environmental, socio-political and ideological stasis of a people, as well as the contextual constraints that determine the linguistic choices writers or speakers make.

Language is used in three different ways to fulfill its communicative function: to express content; to establish and maintain social relations; and to construct situationally relevant texts. In grammatical terms, these are called ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of language. Halliday (1985) refers to these "meta functions" as "parameters for the semantic organization of all natural languages.

Basically, in discourse and stylistics analyses, while the ideational function relates to the thematic and ideological content of a text, the interpersonal, interactive and textual functions relate to the manner and strategies adopted to encode the theme and message. Thus, description or content analysis of major chunks of text to examine the language functions and forms, such as prose, drama or poetry is based on insights from discourse and stylistics analyses.

Discourse analysis, "the study of language in use" (Brown and Yule,1983:3; Johnstone, 2008:2), especially at the level above the sentence, involves a pragmatic interpretation of significant linguistic choices by drawing attention to their deep layer meaning, connotative idioms, prejudices and mannerisms as well as extra textual anxieties and dedications that generate such choices. It favours an eclectic approach, which involves a conglomeration of critical discourse and linguistic theories, as well as lexical, structural and supra-sentential representations of meaning. Discourse analysis takes cognizance of the language form and function as well as ideology in its study of language use. Johnson (1998:99) views Discourse Analysis as "the study of how stretches of language used in communication assume meaning, purpose and unity for their user." Onyema (2012:19) upholding the same view states that "Discourse Analysis is the study of language in use." From these instances, it is evident that Discourse Analysis encapsulates all the instances of language use in communication and recognizes the users of language as essential elements or ingredients in the interpretation of communicative intent of a text. Jaworski and Coupland (1999) add that discourse analysis does not depict only language reflecting social order, but language shaping social order as well as individual's interactions with society. This way, Discourse analysis deals with the critical investigation of embedded political, social and cultural life and reflects the context sensitivity of text to real situational contexts, such as adverse psychological and/or ecological situations.

Thus, it is possible to understand and explain the ways that language intersects with and implicates traumatic situations, by examining the language of the victims themselves as formal representation of their consciousness, how they can or cannot speak of the atrocities that they have witnessed or experienced. Discourse analysis with its certain link to the pragmatic reading of notations is a demonstration or a product of the totality of concerns and considerations that go into the production of

effective communication, whether written or spoken. Certainly, communication does not happen in a vacuum, it is situation that humanizes and actualizes it. The situation or context in which communication takes place is a compendium of both linguistic choices and extra-linguistic constraints that pattern the product of the exchange. Thus, Aristotle spoke of forensic, epidectic and deliberative types of discourse (products of the purpose and context of situation) as modes of rhetorical communication. These products refer to analysis of discourse as form of language use while the purpose and context refer to the function of the communication event.

In the main therefore, discourse can be defined in formalistic and functional paradigms. According to the formalists, discourse is defined as structure above the sentence. In this regard, the sentence is no longer seen as the highest unit of grammar that is in the structural ladder that stretches from the morpheme as the minimal unit. The structure above the sentence suggests that just like words combine to form phrases, phrases form clauses and clauses for sentences, sentences also combine to form discourse. Such formalists as Stubbs (1983) van Dijk, and Harris (1951) disregard what is generally called the functional relations of language and preoccupy themselves with grammatical analysis, the relationship between linguistic units, constituents of structure, schematic patterns and so on.

However, for the purpose of this lecture, discourse is interpreted in terms of the functional relations with the topic, situation, intention and background knowledge that the participants in a speech event bring to bear in the negotiation of meaning. Language and society are inseparable and any realistic analysis of language must meet the communication needs in society. This dialectical relationship between language and society has been expressed at various moments by Fairclough (1989), Foucault (1982), Schifrin (1994), among others. For instance, Schifrin (1994:31), following the functionalistic perspective of discourse, states that linguistic analysis

"cannot be independent of the analysis of the purposes and functions of Language in human life".

In his functional interpretation of discourse analysis, therefore, Gorge Yule (1996) states that the field of discourse analysis is related to the programmatic reading of linguistic notation especially as it concerns the way language is used rather that what its components are. According to him, the domain of discourse analysis considers such issues as how language users interpret what other language users intend to convey; how language users recognize connected as opposed to jumbled or incoherent discourse; how participants successfully take part in and make sense of the complexities of conversation, etc. In the words of Brown and Yule (1983:27) therefore:

> A discourse analyst has to take account of the context in which a pale of discourse occur… because the analyst is investigating the use of language in context by a speaker/writer, he is more concerned with the relationship between the speaker and the utterance, on the particular occasion of use, than with the potential relationship of one sentence to another, regardless of their use.

The conviction of the functional approach is that linguistic analysis "cannot be independent of the purposes and functions of language in human life" (Schifrin 1994:31). Essentially, though, in as much as discourse analysis considers the main layers of linguistics analysis as well as supra-sentential relationships, it does not study these aspects in isolation from communication contexts.

Discourse depends on both the language and physical contexts for its interpretation. Much of what we hear and read depend on the physical background, time and place in which the speech event takes place, but it

is on the context of the world that much of the pragmatic reading of notations, which is the hallmark of discourse analysis, derives. There is an inalienable nexus

between language and social setting, content, participants, ends, medium, genre, background belief and norms of the social context. The importance of inputting context or situation of language use in decoding meaning brings pragmatics to the forecourt of discourse analysis. Philomena Ejele (1996:35) is apt in her definition of pragmatics as "the study of language usage". When taken in conjunction with the definition of discourse analysis as the study of language in use, it becomes obvious that pragmatics is actually at the crux of discourse analysis.

Generally, the factors necessary for a pragmatic meaning of a text include the topic under discussion, the situation in which the text is written or utterance is made as well as extra-linguistic devices employed by the speaker or writer. Others include the shared knowledge or background/cultural beliefs of the interlocutors, the linguistic context of the discourse encounter, and the intention of the source person, i.e. the specific behaviours s/he intends to elicit from the target audience. In the vocabularies of Traugott and Pratt (1980:226), language use "is governed by a wide range of contextual factors, including social and physical circumstance, identities, attitudes, abilities, and beliefs of the participants and relations holding between participants".

The analytical interest in relating language meaning to social and physical circumstances, identities and beliefs of participants suggests a combinatory of ideology and language in use. **Critical discourse analysis (CDA) focuses** on relations between discourse and other social elements as how discourse figures in ideologies and power relations. CDA, is thus interdisciplinary or 'trans-disciplinary' in character and adopts critical social analytical approach to 12nthropoc existing reality on normative grounds (e.g., unfair distribution of environmental goods and burden) and seeks to explain it in terms of the effects of posited structures, mechanisms and forces (e.g., the workings of anthropocene, capitalcene and 'petrolcene', a sub-set of toxicity). To interpret Norman Fairclough

(2010), CDA, from this ambience, views social reality as conceptually mediated: it is events and practices, but it is also ‘ideas’, and theories, conceptualizations and construal of these events and practices. The ‘objects’ of critical social analysis are ‘material-semiotic’, and its concerns are with dialectical relations between the material and the discourse or semiotics of ideologies, power relations, institutions, social identities, etc.

CDA, a form of trans-disciplinary social analysis, lays emphasis on how mega language patterns are deployed to convey existing social realities as humanly produced constraints which in certain respects unnecessarily reduce human flourishing or well-being and increase human suffering; give historical explanation of how and why such social realities have come into being, and suggest possibilities for transforming existing realities in ways which enhance well-being and reduce suffering(Fairclough, 2009b).**This way, CDA addresses** the ideological character of discourse (Fairclough, 1989), such as the construal projection of ecocidal acts, implication of complicit agencies, call for remediation and need for a ecocentric attitude.

As an approach to criticism, CDA is deployed in the interpretation and evaluation of literary artifacts in order to find out what aesthetic experience or perception of reality the work is attempting to convey. The primary concern of the critic is to explicate the individual message of the writer and decipher the message encoded in an unfamiliar way and express its meaning in familiar and communal terms.

1.1 Literature of Power and the 'Righter's' Burden

Common written texts can be categorized as literature of knowledge and literature of power. Thomas De Quincey's "The Literature of Knowledge and the Literature of Power’’ articulate the major and continued impact of literature on the development of society. Literature of knowledge, such as writing of basic essay types, is designed to *teach*; it is a rudder and speaks to mere discursive

understanding. The function of the literature of power is to *move*; quite like an oar or a sail, it speaks ultimately to the higher understanding or reason, but always *through* affections of pleasure and sympathy.

Literature of power restores to the human mind the ideals of justice, of hope, of truth, of mercy, of retribution; its focus is on the elements of its own creation, and with materials flexible to its own purest preconceptions. In its lowest term, therefore, Literature (of power) is an artistic representation and imaginative depiction of man in society through various techniques of linguistic expression. It communicates attitudes and emotions, by means of which the writer aspires to entertain and move the reader. Thus, literary communication consists in expression of content through significant lexical and structural choices, figures of expression, eloquent phrasing and vivid imagery in expressing sensations, perceptions and themes. **Literature is seen** as a potent tool for enriching human experience and fostering universal truths. Akin to the Audience-Reception Theory or encoding-decoding model of communication, textual analysis in literary communication examines how readers connect “factionally” and emotionally to the life-world and anxieties and dedications of characters' economic, social, historical and environmental situations in the text. According to Holub (1984), this entails, first of all, that readers construct a mental representation of the narrator's knowledge, perspective, and goals; and second, that they cooperate with the narrator by interpreting the characters and events in the described world in a way that makes the narrator's stance rational and justified. The relevance of a writer is determined by the useful role he or she plays in the portrayal of the social reality of the time. In order not to become an ‘artist of the floating world’, the committed writer functions as the conscience of society and it falls on him or her to make the audience aware of the audience aware of the environmental social, economic, and political challenges, as well as the causes and possible cure of such challenges.

This "righting" task is the African writer's burden that follows from the classical understanding that art is for human's sake, rather than for art's sake. The African writer takes off from the oral culture with tradition which supports the pedagogic and social consciousness roles of the artist. Thus, it is possible to understand African literature through the prism of pre-colonialism, colonialism and post-colonialism as experiential stasis and disruptions, because the creative writer, according to Chinua Achebe (1977), is a historical, socio-political, economic and ecological witness. It is this immersion in the artist's environment –psychosphere, sociosphere, etc., that grants the work autochthony and swells the harvest of global literature from local/ ethnic repositories, such as the Nigeria's Niger delta area. Thus, Saro-Wiwa (1995:81) warns that literature specifically:

Must serve society by steeping itself in politics, intervention, and writers must not merely write to amuse or take a bemused, critical look at society. They must play an interventionist role… Therefore, the writer must be I'homme engage: the intellectual man of action. He must take part in mass organizations. He must establish direct contact with the people and resort to the strength of African literature – oratory in the tongue. For the word is power and more powerful is it when expressed in common currency.

Today, literature (of knowledge) based on the Niger delta area abounds. The situation portrayed in the texts serve as context for effective pragmatic reading of creative notations which intertextually and extratextually resonate the environmental challenges, anxieties and dedications of her people.

1. 2. Contextualizing the Niger Delta Goose and Her Golden Egg

When God created heaven and earth, He also created the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which comprises communities and ethnicities that inhabit the area through which the tributaries of the River Niger empty into the Atlantic Ocean. Okaba (2005) explains, however, that rivers other than the Niger tributaries, such as Rivers Nun, Escravos, Forcados and Urashi, further enlarge this area.

The Niger Delta area of Nigeria measures about 70,000 square kilometers and lies in the southern-most part of Nigeria (Ekpo, 2004). It stretches from the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary in the East to Ondo-Ogun State boundary in the West. This region, comprises about 1,600 communities in Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers States (Ekpo, 2004). The region has been described as one of the most densely populated parts of the world and 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 and Nigeria's major forest concentration of high biodiversity and the centre of endemism (Ken Wiwa, 2001:45). The major occupations of the people of this area are fishing and farming. Literature abounds on the histrionic and durée of exploitation and rights violation of the region from pre-colonial to postcolonial times (see Dike,1956; Ekpo, 2004; Okaba, 2005; Onyema, 2010, etc.).

There are large deposits of oil and gas in the Niger Delta area both on-shore and offshore. Since the discovery and commercial exploration of oil in this area in 1956 and 1958, the multinational oil companies that operate in this area, such as Chevron, Mobil, Agip, Elf, Texaco, Ashland, and especially Shell have become a metaphor for the exploitation of the people and the devastation the ecosystem. The people of the Niger Delta have been suffering from acts of bioterrorism, oil pollution of lands and waters, gas flaring, hunger, diseases and poverty, as a result of the general destruction of their aquatic and terrestrial reserves. The region is

spilled with health hazards, deprivations of land and soil quality alteration, due to the unethical activities of the multinational oil companies, and poverty due to neglect of the people by the Federal Government. 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, unemployment and youth crises, arm proliferation and hostage-taking of foreign oil workers. There are also angst reactionaries that cause regional restiveness, oil pipeline vandalism, disruption of exploration operations, kidnapping and hostage taking, as well as endless demands for monetary compensations by hungry and angry youths. Yet, propelled by global energy greed and determined, as it were, to protect her oil revenue at all cost, the Nigerian government uses maximum military force to quell pockets of restiveness in the area.

1.3Petrolcene: Oil as a Shade of Green

Green or Ecological literature is a sub-genre of writing that focuses on the relationship between literature and the environment. It explores the creative predilections of works that focus on the environment, especially in relation to both flora and fauna. A study of this relationship between literature and the environment as it is explored in any creative work is called ecocriticism. This definition follows from **Cherry Glotfelty's** seminal definition of eco-criticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment (in Slovic 1999:1092-3). The source also states that ecocriticism is “the study of explicitly environmental texts by way of any scholarly approach or conversely the scrutiny of ecological implications and human nature relations in any literary text”. Ecological literature, also called nature or green literature, implies a multidisciplinary interaction among the natural environment, cultural imagination, history and politics. (Onyema, 2013)

A critical discourse reading of environmental rights writing involves a praxis that interrogates the interrelationships among literature, language and the embedded ecological ideology. Heise (in Onyema, 2010a:11) adds that ecocriticism examines how the concept of nature is defined, what values are assigned to it or denied it and why, and the way in which the relationship between "human and nature" is envisioned. According to this writer, green criticism therefore investigates "how nature is used literally or metaphorically in certain literary or aesthetic genres and what assumptions about nature underlie genres that may not address this topic directly". The word ecocriticism has been traced to William Rueckert's 1978 essay entitled "Literature and Ecology: An experiment in Ecocriticism". However, it was made more popular **by** Cheryll Glofelty's and Harold Fromm who state that "ecocriticism" is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment" In their seminal definition of ecocriticism, **Glotfelty and Fromm (1996**) state ecocriticism "takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of languages and literature; as a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land, as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and non-human". (*Wikipedia,* 2001). Thus, Eskok has argued that ecocriticism is not "simply, the study of nature and natural things in literature; rather, it is any theory that is committed to affecting change by analyzing the function-thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical or otherwise- of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents, (literary or other) that contribute to practices in material worlds" (*Wikipedia*, 2001).

Eco-literature has adopted various foci over the years, among which two broad perspectives clearly stand out: the deep and the social ecological theories. On the one hand, deep ecology, a bio-centric perspective, is the first wave of nature writing. It follows the romantic tradition and travel writing that represents the

pastoral, the wild and environment removed from human habitation. Deep or jungle green is the deep shade that suggests the flow of natural fecundity, which embraces those environments at furthest remove from human habitation – the pastoral and the wild or jungle (Bennett, 2004). It interrogates the irrational acts of man such as specie debasement and degradation, which engender ecocide, alienate humanity from true nature and circumscribe place. According to Cohen (in Slovic,1999:1092-3), deep ecology writing is "a praise-song school" that "seeks to find hope and comfort in nature" and offer meditative scenes for reconciling the wilderness, culture and nature, and evoking nearly religious and timeless harmony that goes "beyond rational scrutiny". It is from this perspective that **Onyema (** examines Nnedi Okoroafor-Mbachu's *Zahra the Windseeker* (2007) an adolescent fantasy novel which diminishes anthropocentrism and accords high value to nature in order to engender the logic for its conservation and preservation. The text of the narration is to move from ego consciousness to eco-consciousness.

On the other hand, social ecology writing, which is the focus of this presentation, is interested in "the impact of race, class, gender and sexuality on how we use and abuse nature" (*The Wikipedia Encyclopedia*). The environmental justice movement influences this new wave of ecological literature. According to *The Wikipedia Encyclopedia*, environmental justice is the confluence of social and environmental movements, which deals with the inequitable environmental burden borne by groups such as racial minorities, women, or residents of developing nations - a holistic effort to analyse and overcome the power structures that have traditionally thwarted environmental reforms.

The proponents of **environmental justice** see the environment as "where we live, work and play", and struggle to redress inequitable distributions of such environmental burdens as pollution, crime and hunger. They also clamour for access to environmental goods such as food, clean air, health care, education, safe

jobs, transportation, recreation and clean water. Self-determination and participation in decision-making are the key components of environmental justice, just as the root causes of environmental injustices include "institutionalized racism, the commoditisation of land, water, energy and air; unresponsive, unaccountable government policies and regulation, and lack of resources and power in the affected community". In fact, the pre-occupation of the environmental justice movement with the approach of social ecology summarizes the major themes explored in most contemporary Niger Delta writing. Thus, Oil or social green is socio-economically contrived to confront acts of exploitation, depredation of land and general loss of biotic lives consequent upon pollution of the environment. Social ecology, associated with the ideas of Karl Marx and the works of Bookchin (1999), features environmental (in)justice, distribution of environmental burdens and goods, self-determination, political participation, race, land and minority rights in affected communities or "econiche".

Thus, while toxicity is a subset or hyponym of ecocriticism, 'petrolcene' is a critical subset of toxicity discourse. As a hyponym of ecocriticism, toxicity discourse is 'an interlocked set of topoi whose force derives partly from the exigencies of an anxiously industrializing global culture and deeper-rooted western attitude". Primacy is given to the "threat or the death of nature from industrialism and/or post modernity" rather than or in addition to" ethno-political commitments to protection of the endangered natural world and recuperation of a sense of how human beings have been and might be imagined as reconnected with it (Buell, 2005:639-40). Thus, in toxicity discourse, there is interdependence of ecocentric and anthropocentric values, which gives fillip to concerns for human and social health in environmental discourse.

Though toxicity discourse is basically founded on environmental poisoning and the potentially serious consequences for public health, it acquires expanded imagism in

postcolonial eco-poetics to occlude lethal physiological, physical and psycho-social dis-eases. Thus, pollution, infestation of the physical environment and the human body by arsenic substances, noxious fumes and carcinogens; trauma and death from violence, hunger and lack of basic amenities, defamiliarizations and dislocations from familial niche as well as a myriad of subaltern experiences all feature in toxicity discourse. As Buell (2005: 646) has noted, studies of contaminated communities report a picture of an awakening that is sometimes slow and reluctant, and a horrified realization that there is no protective environmental blanket, leaving one feeling dreadfully wronged. Characteristically, rather than invent lethal phobia that tends towards an apocalypse, toxicity discourse invokes and anticipates a problem before it becomes an irreversible crisis. This is followed by a gamut of possible reactions such as outrage, acquiescence, impotence, denial and or desperation.

Taken together, it is aspired in this presentation to discern the intersection between toxicity as a genre of ecocritical ideology and the discourse techniques employed to persuade and manipulate both individuals and social groups, and engage them effectively in communication that works towards social and environmental justice.

Much of the recent ecocritical discourse in Nigeria is focused on works by writers from the Niger Delta area (Onyema, 2010; Ushie, 2006, etc.)They write in a way that tends to give Nigerian eco-literature a monochromatic view of distraught sensibilities from eco-oppression, toxicity and pollution as a result of unethical oil exploration activities in the area, powered by global energy greed. The fact is that writers from the Niger Delta area appropriate both deep and social green poetics in articulating such ecological concerns as wilderness ethic, loss of biotic lives, environmental degradation/pollution, acts of bioterrorism, and challenges of (post)colonialism qua globalization, to reflect as it were mottled voices and visions or shades of green. Nonetheless, both approaches tend to congregate as strategic

rapprochement. Rather than deeply indulge in the "praise-song school" of romantic green, Niger Delta writers praise nature as nostalgic memorialization that instills a psychological throwback to the eco-harmony that prevailed in the "pre- crude" Delta, in order to give fillip to the degree of loss, devastation and suffering spilled by crude (oil) exploration. Here, we have traumatic ecological and psychological experiences worth sharing and ecological or green ideals worth attaining; there, we have those paying with their lives. Especially, Niger delta eco-literature has become a *locu classicus* for prevalent postcolonial African environmental writing which is mainly focused on social ecology, and partularly on toxicity and petrolcene, as subsets. Niger Delta eco-writers focus on social ecology akin to fighting pollution and forms of environmental injustice spilled by crude oil exploration and unfair distribution of economic goods and burden. This brand of literature flows currents of pain that stream in torrents of crude oil under currents, massive as the numerous oil wells and shards of hunger and denial in the wetlands.

Generally, therefore, the ecocritical perspective prevalent among Niger delta-based writers is that of oil toxicity or petrolcene. Especially, primacy is given to how oil flow as national blessing has disrupted the people's genial environment of yore and brought crude curses on the people. It also appropriates the responses of the Niger delta people against the spates of political marginalisation, economic exploitation, social neglect and environmental degradation, that doom them in an oil boom niche. Thus, the Niger delta question is encapsulated in the illogic of the curse of oil. The paradox of oil flow and crude curse is the dialectics of petrolcene. Oil exploration activities in the Niger delta area have thrown up many environmental challenges, coping strategies and angst reactionary which form currents of *narreme* that writers appropriate as creative writing facility. There are currents of discourse like pollution of terrestrial and aquatic lives through gas flaring, mindless exploitation and expropriation of resources, unemployment and underemployment,

as well inadequate infrastructure and amenities and general lack of duty of care by the Nigerian Federal Government and the multinational oil companies. These writers are preoccupied with drawing attention to the environmental, socio-political and economic problems in the region.

Consequently, as an environment-conscious art, Niger Delta literature portends an array of discourse manipulation contrived in an attempt to devise functional language that conveys their environmental or ecological challenges, ideas, anxieties and dedications. This way, writers—poets, dramatists and novelists—decry petrolcene, an endemic Niger Delta environmental situation as creative facility. They tend to use literature, a socially conscious art, to wage a non-violent war against the destruction of their land, the mindless exploration of oil, and against hunger, sickness and death in the land. These writers regret how the discovery of oil in their land has become more of a curse than a blessing, the utter neglect of the golden-egg laying goose, and the use of unnecessary military force to quell restiveness and oil pipeline vandalism by hungry and angry youths. Thus, petrolcene consists in the "raw realities" that confront the creative writer from the Niger Delta, and thus the "raw materials which he must refine into his art". In the words of **Ushie (2005:15)** "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 bio-graphy, a memoir or a letter, they are what he recollects".

Niger Delta Eco-Poetry, for instance, is deployed as alter-native press for environmental rights advocacy. **Onyema's (2017)** study of Ogaga Ifwodo's *The Oil Lamp*, reveals the discourse strategies adopted by the writer to deploy eco-poetry as alter-native press for environmental rights advocacy. 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 more so as, in the words of Clemencia Rodriguez (199:12), "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". 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, Obi Yeibo, 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. Thus, from the ambience of subaltern communication Onyema (2018) studies the ecological dis/contents and discourse strategems in Ojaide's *Waiting*, while Onyema (2016) is focused in eco-trauma and reparations discourse in Nigeria's Niger Delta Ecological Poetry. Similarly, Onyema (2015) explores Ogaga Ifowodo's ecological poetry as alternative press and subaltern communication, while Onyema and Onyema (2015) undertake a critical discourse reading of Tanure Ojaide's *Tale of the Harmattan* as environmental rights communication.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, what follows is an exemplification of textual mapping and other discourse strategies devised to appropriate varied Niger delta crude ecological *narrames* as creative writing facility in prose texts by select writers,

whose adroit choice of content, discourse stratagems and idioms of feeling are well able to advance the Niger delta eco-rights communication.

2.0 Petrolcene: Toxicity Communication and Discourse Stratagems in Habila's *Oil on Water*

From the ambience of literary discourse, communication about the threat of toxification, a supraordinate of petrolcene, has been on since the industrial revolution **with Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring,*** as textual trigger. The text chronicle actual incidents and factional fables that fluff up postindustrial imagination, project environmental apocalypse and trigger symptoms of the risk society. The iconographic refraction of toxicity through fiction is an effort to focus the incremental effects of industrial poisoning on humanity, especially in subaltern communities, by staring them as subject fit for frontline screaming reportage. To appropriate Ulrich Beck, what results is a global awakening to general condition of citizen 'immiseration' following from "solidarity from anxiety" over the lethal consequences of everyday life (in Buell, 2005: 641-42).

Thus, Onyema (2019) used a theoretical synergy of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Lawrence **Buell's Toxicity Discourse**, a hyponym of ecocriticism to interrogate how the Helon Habila appropriates environmental poisoning, especially pollution of terrestrial and aquatic lives as a result of unethical oil exploration practices, and the implicit impact assessment of environmental burden on the Niger delta ancestral dwellers in the niche. Though Habila is not from any of the Niger Delta states, his work is based on the ecological experience of the area, even as he deploys various discourse techniques to express the fear of a Petrolcene, raise awareness against ecological desecration and interrogate the hazardous use of nature by humankind.

The kernel of the narration is about a group of journalists journeying into the heart of the Niger Delta in search of Mrs. Isabella Floode, a British and wife to a multinational oil company engineer, being held hostage by militants believed to be fighting to protect their environment from rabid exploitations and ruination. But as Zag, the most experienced of the journalists, tells Rufus, his mate and eponymous narrator, "the story is not always the final goal" (*Oil,* 4). This plain declarative is the core- pragmatic code that binds the axes of narration in this fictional journalism and accords it both coherence and cohesion. As discourse move, what Zag reveals is that the real meaning of the story as well as the texture of the narrative can located at the deep layer meaning, especially by decoding the stretches of implicature in the functional *narrames* as axes of connotation. Consequently, beyond the surface structure narrative is a horrendous tale of a niche drugged by arsenics of pollution and spilled with psychological and social dis-eases by the brutal mechanics of global lust for oil and the crude machinations of petro-business. Especially, this novel recreates the challenges of toxicity and pollution, loss-induced melancholy, and portrays the ancestral dwellers in the Niger delta niche as symbolic body and mind in physical and psychological pain.

The tapestry of *Oil* achieves content fidelity to petrolcene as a strand of toxicity discourse. The grandeur of the narration is literary advocacy focused on the devastation of the land—the blighted productivity of the earth's flora and fauna and the untold suffering of a dispossessed people, as a result of unethical oil exploration activities, environmental/land rights denial and unfair distribution of environmental goods. In this waterside narration, the title, *Oil on Water*, is a deliberate violation of selection rule contrived as sustained metaphor for pollution, devastation of waterways and degradation of the entire waterscape. By pragmatic extension, it is implicature for corruption and irresponsible practices that disrupt the grandeur of waterside dwelling and decenter the spruce Niger delta

environment of yore. Despite the thin disguises of reality, that is the hallmark of factional representation, Habila uses the Niger delta scape as functional geography to lament humanity's mishandling of nature everywhere and attain a universal discourse on toxicity as source of slow violence and persistent global trauma. Through the discourse of dissociation, the narrator recants the near morbid stasis of the Niger delta niche 'this oil after'. Thus, *Oil* runs intertextual consonance with such other texts like Isidore **Okpewho's *Tides,* Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist,* Inno Ejike's *Oil at My Backyard* and *Chiemeke Garrick's Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, among** others, that focus on environmental pollution and ecotrauma—an overwhelming environmental and emotional experience that is physiologically, physically and psychologically distressing.

Using the journalistic trope as creative canvass, Habila emplaces the facticity of investigative reportage as rhetorical and ethical proof and confers believability on his narration as investigative reportage. Investigative reportage, quite like features, also affords the writer the opportunity to permeate the sensibilities of both the reader and audience in order to create an authentic narration that is, albeit, endlessly interesting. The adoption of the journalism trope tends to affirm that expressions of ordinary citizens' anxiety about environmental degradation can have substantial influence on public policy, especially when the media are watching. Thus, Habila leverages on the eponymous narrator, as voice-over tracking, to discursively bond different axes interfacing discourse of toxicity using the Niger delta niche as functional geography: The curse of oil and the global petrodollar greed, the Niger Delta people whose ancestral lands and waterways are damaged beyond repairs, multi-militants groups styled as freedom lighters; the complicity of oil companies and government agencies in poisoning of the Niger delta environment; and the psychological stasis of the ancestral dwellers in the polluted niche. For instance, through measured sensitivity to details, the narrator stars a

nightmarish pollution and devastation of the wetlands populated by “dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil, dead fishes bobbed white-bellied between tree roots.” The devastation of the ecosystem is fatal and total, just as the portrayal of the niche is rife with fecal imagery of rancidity and miasma. To sustain the (inter)national oil flow, villages are not only demolished and without people, but there are “chicken pens with about ten chickens inside, all dead and decomposing, the maggots trafficking beneath the feathers.”(*Oil*, 8) Thus, quite like riverside narration, the eponymous water actually portrays an islanded description that implicate currents of the curse of oil in the Niger delta, a group of subaltern communities micro-minored, as it were, by their natural location and deliberate inter/national ecological policies that tend to infect them with extreme environmental dis-eases.

Habila employs the technique of sensitive details and adverse allusions to foreground the feeling of total poisoning of everything and purification of everywhere that get the reader retching from 'immeseration'. As he pirogues the waterside villages with the raconteur, he recants the same odious sight as "[T]he next village was almost a replica of the last: the same empty squat dwellings, the same ripe and flagrant stench, the same barrenness, the oil slick and the same indefinable sadness in the air, as if a community of ghosts were suspended above the punctured zinc roofs, unwilling to depart, yet powerless to return” (*Oil*, 9).

Conveyed in first person and omniscient narratives that permeate the sensibilities of both victims and agencies and put the reader at the frontline of feeling, the narrator recants his tale of odium in a poisoned waterside dwelling, where there is water everywhere but none to drink: from the “blackness” of the communal well, “a rank smell crafted from its hot depths and slapped” the narrator's my face. “Something organic, perhaps human lay dead and decomposing down there, its stench mixed with that unmistakable smell of oil”. Similarly, at the other end of the

village, “the patch of grass growing by the water was suffocated by a film of oil, each blade covered with blotches like the liver spots on a smoker's hands" (*Oil*, 9). In toxicity poetics as encapsulated in *Oil*, endangered peoples lament and protest their own marginality in the face of place and trans-place pollution, with narratives that implicate ecological ethnography. This way, Habila vehemently repulses at the kind of lachrymal dwelling that is the Niger delta niche, where life is debased with astonishing gusto. By etching vignettes of oil pollution as discourse focus, this writer leverages on the subaltern discourse focus to coral ugly glimpses into the horror of a polluted niche, and presents a protracted sense of devastation and loss of place.

The landscape in *Oil* is flustered with lexemes of violence and morbidity that star the discounted truncated bodies and dismembered arms of victims of eco-violence ordinarily missing in the hegemonic press. This messy feeling is unrelieved by the journalist's depressing experience as he thirsts for drinking water from a highly smudged communal well: and gets confronted by something organic, perhaps human, which lay dead and decomposing down there, its stench mixed with that unmistakable smell of oil”(*Oil*, 9). Thus, the narrator devises an antebellum exposé to convey shocking incidents that typify the fate of the victims whose life narratives inscroll an endless series of tragedies.

Similarly, through implicit consciousness impact assessment, the narrator conflates his adverse experiences as he walks the poisoned creeks with those of the ancestral dwellers who have been reduced to the state of demented sensibilities doomed to exist in a roundly poisoned niche. Thus, trauma from the extremely distressing Niger delta toxicity is aptly foregrounded through consciousness discourses of fixation dissociation, voidance, dislocation, delusional fear/apprehension, reliving as well as anxiety disorder and schizophrenia. These vertigoes of pain underlie the discourse of slow violence, with which Rob Nixon (2006) 'enframes' the

environmentalism of the Niger delta poor and other micro-minor niches, underlie the textual coherence of the narration.

Through discourse mapping that stars petrolcene and various violations of selection and category rules, and concretion of abstract and emotive terms, Habila essentializes formless threats in the niche as subject for instant reportage. Similarly, by generating various pragmatic relations that allude to or implicate violence, horror, travails and melancholia, the narrator tends to portray the characters as symbolic body and mind in physical and psychological pain. Above all, the long-lasting effect of slow violence in this grubby scape replays as acting-out in the reporter's dreams: “In my dreams I still see that lone arm, floating away, sometimes with its middle finger extended derisively, before disappearing into the dark mist (*Oil*, 34). Acting out, as a form of denial, occurs when the victim is constantly reliving the trauma or instances of it in the present and within traumatic dreams. The event does not belong to the past as the victim repeats the repressed material (Freud, 1961: 19).

In a poisoned niche, the victims who become inadvertently degraded suffer from moral turpitude and the issue of sex and seduction in the industrial area is framed as logic for disintegrating family values. Habila uses Koko's experience to portray a warped sense of sexuality as hanger for the consequences of poverty and appalling salubrious conditions, all quotidian experiences in a poisoned niche. In the narrative, Koko and her husband, Salomon, serve as maid and driver respectively to Engineer Floode, an expatriate oil worker. However, when she gets pregnant for their boss, she abandons her husband and moves in permanently with the expatriate oil engineer. Thus, the scandalous promiscuity of wives and daughters in an oppressive niche is a major part of the Delta depressing tales that pontificate their social toxicity. The narrative position tends to be that poverty-induced debauchery and the perverted decoy of plenty cannot allow parents to

exercise control and assert moral authority over their children, or husbands over their wives.

By taking over his driver's wife, Engineer Floyd, an expatriate ABZ Oil staff, tends to affirm that expatriate oil workers (that is, from A-Z, in the pragmatic reading of onomasticon), as agents of destruction, shun all nature's elements of decency and fairness and think with their guns and groins. The unfortunate situation is that the oilmen take over the resources, the wives and the lives of the ancestral owners of the land and bequeath them with a hunch-back future. It is Salomon's sincere attempt to find a definable essence for his debilitating experience of betrayal by his boss that eventually leads to the complicated story of Mrs. Floode's kidnap, a complication that further warps his future and eventually kills him. Just the same, by abandoning her husband and moving in with the oil mogul, Koko repeats at a micro level the acts of the women and girls in the neighbouring communities who indulge themselves in such high level whoring as the oil niche provides the forbidden opportunities, and, of course, driven by petro-dollar allure.

This text also fronts the challenge of dislocation as intrinsic co-text in the discourse of petrolcene as narrative disruption of an erstwhile peaceful niche rife with natural fecundity. Through Chief Ibiram's narration, the investigative reporter orchestrates a felicitous discourse designed as pragmatic decoy to dissociate the Niger delta present from her ecotone of yore when the dwellers “lived in paradise”, “lacked for nothing”, and enjoyed flourishing “fishing and hunting and farming and watching their children growing up before them, happy”. “The village was close-knit, made up of cousins and uncles and aunts and brothers and sisters and “happily insulated from the rest of the world by their creeks and rivers and forests” (*Oil*, 38).

However, as their means of sustenance dwindles, family values and family bonds disintegrate, and the men, who are doomed to fishing barren creeks, cultivating unyielding farms, or performing menial jobs, are reduced to part-time husbands or

no husbands at all. In other words, Habila's concern is that the Niger Delta ecosystem has been devastated through oil exploration activities; that government does not exercise commensurate duty of care; that oil spillage has led to poverty, unemployment, underemployment, unemployability and youth restiveness; that there is infiltration of petrodollar allure and an alien culture that gives fillip to decrypt living and threatens the moral and social virtues of the people.

By discourse extension, the eponymous narrator invokes implicit logic as causative to establish that as these ancestral communities become violated economic-shift failures, what result are massified squalor, whoring, violence and crime-prone sensibilities, broken homes and diseases spilled by want and the allure of petrodollar flaunted by the oil workers. By devising a narrative dyad where the victims vent their experiences, Habila orchestrates a down-up path of speech where the subaltern population appropriates discourse, rather than being incorporated. This device effaces the author-audience difference as well as swaps ownership of narration. In fact, as the scenes depicted become actual or potential denizens of the toxic inferno, the life narratives and experiences of the victims themselves and reality of the poisoning of their lands and waters reverse roles and claim homespun discourse authority.

The text also fronts the issue of poverty as degradation trope and important strand of petrolcene in the Niger delta depressing tales. There is implicit exposition on the trauma of pristine natives who are devastated with astonishing gusto by poverty with livelihood that has gone as low as the ebbing tides. In fact, the spread of poverty in the toxic niche is only comparable to the vast fireflies of flare and large volumes of crude spills that force the dislocated ancestral dwellers to urban shanty towns or to guerilla warfare in the creeks. Contrapuntal discourse is deployed in the text to etch the literal and psychological scars inflicted on innocent victims by global energy greed in filmic contrast to portray the formidable chasm between the

multibillion-dollar oil revenues generated in the area and astonishing multifaceted stands of poverty experienced by the ancestral owners of the land who are roundly exploited and ruined. Thus, the pedestrian existence of the waterside dwellers should not be missed in this investigative reportage. From community to community, they are welcomed by "a group of urchins with shouts and curious states", "the flare rust-red roofs helmeting similar box-like houses looking down on the central street with something like sneer" and "houses [that] seemed to belong more to the trees and forest behind them than they did to a domestic human settlement" (*Oil*, 10).

Through narrative focalization-by-contrast, Habila also brings socio-political and economic alienation of the common man to the fore, and makes bare the given and quotidian, but narratively discounted excruciating environmentalism of the poor. In this poisoned niche, the suffocating cove, that is the Niger delta dwelling, contrasts sharply with the posh oil men quarters. Thus, the brute realities of oil poison and the rude gap between the tenements of the working poor and the posh mansions of the oil executives, quite like a slice of Las Vegas in Ethiopian squalor, are essential to Habila's petrolcene narrative. The narrator paints a micro picture of a static, strange, elemental and desolate village that implicates a macro-Niger delta scarecrow-dwelling:

> An entire village on stilts, situated by the river on a vast mud flat, which at that moment was underwater, so the village appeared to float; narrow passages of water divided one row of huts from the next, like streets. The houses were made from weeping-willow bamboos and raffia palms and bits of zinc and plywood and cloth and it seemed anything else the builders were able to lay their hands on. The whole scarecrow settlement looked as if the next strong wind or wave would blow it away (*Oil*, 14).

Through a counterpart narration emplaced as contrastive report, the Floyds' house was a plutocratic expanse “hidden behind a tall, barbed- wire-topped wall”, in set “two gates” and “guarded by about half a dozen security men talking to each other on radios”. There are also a huge lawn, spacious living room and ornamental fans that signify riches and affluence (*Oil*, 94).

Reportage about extreme destruction and putrefaction become potent in anaysing the Niger delta polluted niche encapsulated in synaesthetic terms of violence and morbidity, which occlude a sense sublime of the feeling of “immeseration” that trigger toxicity rhetoric. The reader's sensibility to healthy dwelling is grossly violated by descriptions of bodies half covered by bamboo leaves so that the torn stomachs were only partially visible as undigested food mixed with blood cover the ground around the corpses; flies that hover and descend on the cadavers; faces of the dead squeezed in the grimace of pain, the mouth open in a voiceless howl; sights of the guns raised and pointed at humans just before the bullet ripped into them; trails of blood that started from the bodies and disappeared into the grass; bodies laying in a bush, bloody, broken and twisted, and the sounds of retching going on all around (*Oil*, 72).

Thus, *Oil*, as environmental representation, functions both as textual construct and as critical intervention. As human and plant lives habitation become threatened by oil-related poison, Rufus, the narrator, projects a toxicified niche on course a scummy drift, and transverses a village that “wasn't a village at all”, but populated in the main by pipelines of pressure: “It looked like a setting for a sci-fi movie: the meager landscape was covered in pipelines flying in all directions, sprouting from the evil smelling, oil-fecund earth. The pipes crisscrossed and interconnected endlessly all over the eerie field.” The villagers live under pipelines of pressure as they “walked inland, ducking under or hopping over the giant pipes” (*Oil*, 35).

Implicated here also are the narrames on the trauma, defamiliarization and helplessness of people dislocated from their ancestral homelands as axes of psyco-social dis-eases. As contamination of land and water spreads, economic shift and martial contestation of land rights emplace upheavals that drive the people out to other lands either by force or as necessity. This strategy replays Buell's (2005) characterization of toxicity poetics which include strategies that normatively emplace groups with a common sense of place and social identity disrupted by toxic menace. This settlement, like the one post Ibiram represents, can be quite ductile and not only historically self-identified entities. Thus, through counterpart narratives that call up distressing sensibilities, the suffering that trails oil drilling is projected through the dislocation of the community set afloat a scummy drift by the curse of oil. This discourse subversion is vented by Chief Ibiram as he articulates the trauma of being dismembered from a familial eco-niche by global energy greed:

> The rigs went up, and the gas flares, and the workers came and set up camp in our midst, we saw our village change, right before our eyes. And that was why we decided to leave, ten families. We didn't take their money. The money would be our curse on them, for taking our land, and for killing our chief. We left, we headed northwards, we've lived in five different places now, but always we've had to move. We are looking for a place where we can live in peace. But it is hard. So your question, are we happy here? I say, how can we be happy when we are mere wanderers without a home? (*Oil*, 41).

Note the tactile metaphors that implicate dislocation and shifts. Just the same, the portrayal of the options dislocation and poverty compel may seem as infra dig at the surface layer meaning because of its superficial illogic. However, as speech act construed at deep level meaning, it attains both cooperative quality and relevance

by adroitly giving vent to the creation of the Niger delta *infra hombre*. The Niger Delta *infra hombres* are people who ask for little and end up with less and so take to resilience and other coping strategies as counterpoint to their misery and violated niche and psyche. Thus, for Rufus' father, bunkering with midnight oil market makes good sense because it is a sure way to "get by" as "there is nothing else to do here". He however, charges the sun "there is nothing for you here. Go back to Port Harcourt (*Oil*, 64).

Thus, the narrator rhetorically chimes his personal experiences with that of the entire community and implicates the curse of oil in his forced relocation to Port Harcourt. His father with the entire community loses his land and his later job "just like half the town":

They all work for the ABZ oil company, and now the people, once awash in oil money, watch in astonishment as the street daily fill up with fleeing families, some returning to their homes town and villages, some going to Port Harcourt in the hope of picking up something in the big city (*Oil*, 62).

The trauma of dislocation from pollution and land grabbing by (inter)national hunters of the Niger delta oil groove, explicates a major strand of toxicity in postcolonial narrations. Thus, the land-grabbing machinations by multinational oil companies and internal government's complicity co-occur with dis-eases of dislocation suffered by ancestral dwellers forcefully uprooted and set adrift to nowhere. The reader recoils as Chief Ibiram recants in contrastive terms the Niger delta lots in spruce times of yore—when the dwellers "lived in paradise", "lacked for nothing", and enjoyed flourishing "fishing and hunting and farming and watching their children growing up before them, happy"—and the people's adverse present, 'this oil after' existence. By discourse expansion, using the experience of Chief Malabo's community, the narrator captures to wit the fate of every local fishing community that tries to resist the cunning attempts by the oil companies

and the odious pushiness of corrupt and profiteering local leaders to sell prospecting rights and ancestral lands. At the surface layer narration, Chief Malabo has resisted attempts and detected tricks by oil companies and government agencies to grab the people's land and drill oil in their farms and backyards. He is however, arrested and killed in detention to make way for the oil moguls who offer to latter buy the whole community and force the people to relocate to some disabling places.

The experience of the fictional Chief Malabo is a famous Niger Delta *narrame* that runs an intertextual conflation with the famous Ogoni writer and activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, executed by the Abacha-led Military Regime in 1995 on trumped up charges. Quite like Saro-Wiwa, Chief Malabo campaigns against and does not allow oil drilling on his community's and family lands. Just the same, Habila's *Oil* runs an intertextual resonance with Saro- Wiwa's (1995: 36) *A Month and A Day: A Detention Diary*, where he writes about "a blighted country and atmosphere full of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and hydro carbon; polluted streams, creeks and rivers without fish, high pressure pipeline crisscrossing the surface of farmlands and villages dangerously".

There is also narrative projection of the fault lines of contract deviously extracted from the natives, the presence of gun-wielding soldiers, who invariably came on 'peace' mission, as implicature for the persistence of gunboat diplomacy and narrative decoy for the doggedness of colonialisms in the Niger delta. Thus, advancing the macro discourse of colonialisms, Habila condemns the British and the American governments who care less about the suffering of oppressed peoples, but only pursue exploitative policies that ensure the steady supply of cheap source of energy for their economies.

However, even as *Oil* makes clear that ordinary citizens are victims of military, corporate, and government ecocidal activities, there is a further bifurcation of "the

bad vs. the good us in the text", in using van Dijk's (2007) frame. Thus, the narrative invective gains force by not limiting itself to a single adversary. It carefully preserves an "us-versus-them" dichotomy without absolving the people from their complicity as harbingers of violence and toxicity. Thus, the text also indicts the people's local leaders who deny them proper representation. Tn the pragmatic reading of notation, president, the lawyer, the senator, the soldiers and the white and black oil men function in the same space as cohyponyms of exploitation and toxicity.

Similarly, youth restiveness and multi-militant activities are enframed as altruistic engagement in environmental rights movement. Using the experience of Chief Malabo's community, therefore, Habila encapsulates the threat of infringement as fundamental to toxicity discourse, and fronts militancy as oppositional but consecutive discourse. As Buell (2005) explains, the chief tactic of the environmental rights movement has been to promote a self-conscious, informed sense of local self-identification, victimhood, and grassroots resistance encapsulated by the image of "communities" or neighborhoods nationwide combating unwanted industrial encroachment and outside penetration. Here, there is intertextual conflation with the frame of social ecology and its certain links with Marxism: The logic of restiveness with increasing militancy in the host communities becomes a revolution against acute exploitation by a people pushed beyond the pastel of humanism's grace. The spates of violence become, as it were, the only option for the *lumpen* proletariats, replaying, as it were, Fanon's (1968) notion of "the wretched of the earth", pushed below the poverty line by mindless state forces and exploitative brigandage of multinational (oil) companies. It is in this context that docility by the oppressed becomes criminalized and complicitous; attention-seeking violence, as campaign or engagement becomes spruce discourse, just as oil taping is enframed as tactical appropriation of rent.

3.0 Tragedy of the Niger Delta Commons: Eco-Economics in Izuka's Travails of the Black Gold

Onyema (2015b) is an expose on how Izuka uses *Travails of the Black Gold* as instrumental aesthetics and creative disruption to interrogate the challenges of economic shift among the local populace in the Niger delta area of Nigeria. The text corals rabid exploitation and forceful expropriation of their crude oil resources, exploitation by the Nigerian Federal Government and multinational oil companies, as well as the dis-eases of their pristine existence and pollution of their environment. The text focuses on such variegated challenges as economic exploitation, resource expropriation, and unfair distribution of economic goods and burden. It also indicts the political chicanery that power these ecological wrongs, and the consequent economic squalor and restiveness they generate.

The context of this narrative is the fishing communities and villages scattered in the riverine areas of the Niger Delta, represented by the fictional Jamestown and its neighbours. The debilitating economic and environmental experiences of Kalio and his friend, Takena, who go fishing with a low capacity dug out pirogue in the open sea, where they nearly get lost, is parable for the untold hardship an average Niger Delta dweller suffers. The fact is that with the intensification of petroleum operations in the domain of the fishing and farming communities, their traditional hub of economic activities is dislocated in a manner that turns them into victims rather than beneficiaries of industrialization: the quality and quantity of the fish they catch is on the decline, just as their economy with livelihood has gone as low as the ebbing tides. For instance, “a combination of the noise generated around the rigs, the search-light at night and the fouling of the waters of the creeks through the indiscriminate dumping of drilling wastes, have served to scare the big fish further to the high seas” (p.25).

Through a quasi-frame of enumeration and cause-and-effect pattern of thought development, the text catalogues ecological wrongs against the Niger Delta and their eco-environmental implications. These include:

reduced life span due to exposure to ecological hazards, pollution, respiratory diseases and acid rain; dumping of industrial wastes into the swamps, disappearance or migration of animal and aquatic species, the scorching heat of gas flaring, disruption of family values and the violation of the cradle through the preponderance of "militant teens, crime prone communities and a younger generation addicted to violence". In fact, the devastation of the terrestrial and aquatic reserves of these agrarian communities is so total that "their streams are polluted by films of oil, as well as by noise pollution from the seismic explosions and the activities of the oil companies" (*Travails*, 231).

Similarly, "the movement of the companies also destroyed the ancestral shrines and graves of their forebears" (*Travails*, 194), just as "the scorching heat of gas flaring is affecting all things in the area, plants, animals and humans alike" (*Travails*, 228). Thus, there is narrative bonding between industrialization as symbol of increased economic activity, as it were, and environmental negative externalities. Robert Neadeau (2008) defines environmental externalities as environmental goods and services that are 'external' to the market system in the sense that they are presumed to exist outside of the allegedly lawful or law-like dynamics of the system. Negative externalities, like pollution and destruction of biodiversity as environmental burden, happen when production or consumption of one economic actor such as in oil exploration activities affect another, the rural dwellers, who did not pay for the goods produced or consumed. Environmental burden reflects market failure as the cost of pollution for instance is not factored into the desires and constraints of oil-bearing communities.

To the eco-environmentalists, prices are right when economic actors in a market system make optimal decisions that factor in the prices or values of environmental goods and services as well as externalities. Thus, Izuka draws attention to the economic losses associated with decrease in the consumption of environmental goods and services, and the need to grandly minimize the environmental costs. This position extra-textually resonates the eco-economists' concept of Pareto optimality, that is, a hypothetically idealized state or condition where it is impossible to reallocate resources to enhance the utility of one economic actor without reducing that of another (Neadeau, 2008). In the context of Izuka's narration, *Pareto optimality* as a level of efficiency cannot be attained since the utility of oil production and exploration appears weak beside the economic burden of environmental costs and sundry negative externalities.

By etching vignettes of oil pollution, this writer corrals ugly glimpses into its horror, and presents a protracted sense of devastation and loss of economy and place. In the main, the prettifying palliatives of the pre- crude era in the Niger Delta as given information are overshadowed by the torque and bite from new information: pollution and toxicity harbingered by crude (oil) exploration activities bereft of professional ethics and commensurate duty of care in the oil boom era. This counterpart narrative implicates contrastive discourse and tends to underlie the eco-economists' matrix that increased economic output has some very destructive environmental impacts, and accounting for the deprivation of natural capital is a necessary part of the economic process. The boundaries of the economy remain within the boundaries of the ecosystem. Thus, rather than being treated as an abstract input-output system, environmental goods and burden should be factored in accounting for the state of the economic system.

Thus, Izuka demonstrates that environmental economics has close affinity to environmental justice, environmental justice being social transformation directed

towards meeting basic human needs and enhancing the quality of life of individuals by ensuring economic equality, adequate health care and housing, as well as human rights and environmental protection (Estok, 2005). In linking environmental and social justice issues, the environmental justice approach seeks to challenge the abuse of power that leads to poor people suffering the effects of environmental damage caused by the greed of others. The focus is on how minority populations with few economic alternatives or limited economic powers are subjected to environmental hazards. The kind of transformation ecojustice seeks is based on basic human needs and enhancing the quality of lives of individuals in the areas of education, economic equality, health care, housing, crime and unemployment as well as environmental protection (*Wikipedia*).

Taken together, the poaching multinational companies (with the conniving Nigerian government) become, as it were, industrial capitalists that inevitably subdue pastoralism, and pollute natural habitats dizzy. As discourse implicature, this pervading trope of social ecology is narrative inversion and a paradigm shift from the Delta deep green past, and foregrounds environmental degradation and land rights abuses as ecological devastation and devaluation. Thus, the narrator comments on the present global environmental challenges by urging the need for economic actors to stop the reckless and profligate fossil fuel economy and urges industrialists bent on making mindlessly large profits to embrace some environmentally friendly practices that maintain life rather than bring down the ecologically sustaining systems. Through the use of descriptive details, this writer projects an environment that has become a crude victim of industrialization and which is at the spasm of extinction, as well as brings to the fore the trauma of those paying for the cost of eco-devastation and rabid industrialization with their lives.

Thus, through implicit discourse subversion, Izuka rejects the narrow self-interest economy practiced by oil companies by bringing the blunt narrations from broken

pipelines, ravaged farmlands and polluted waters and impoverished dwelling of the Niger Delta people to the fore. This way he forges powerful narrative empathy: the power to imagine oneself in another's place. This textual responsiveness makes it easier for the reader to envision a world that is dangerously slipping away as a result of petrolcene and serves as fillip towards propagating the end of pollution, life of squalor and econometrics of selfishness, where the price of environmental degradation and the attendant distress on its dwellers are not factored in the matrix for computing the real cost of production. It also brings to the foreground the need to re-examine every economic activity that is bound to wreck the world inset an environment that is certainly not infinite.

By analytic extension, there is an intertextual resonance here: This position aligns with an eco-ecological postulation that accounts of gross domestic product and gross national product should reflect the costs of pollution, general environmental degradation and deterioration of environmental resource base in order to reflect real pictures of the relationships between human systems and environmental systems. For instance, in the World Bank Report of Environmental Accounting and Sustainable Development (1989), a measure of sustainable income is required in standard GDP measures which should include not only income derived from production, but also income from depleting natural costs such as forests, soils, and mineral resources, petroleum depletion, forests loss, soil erosion, as well as defensive expenditures such as costs of cleaning up oil spills or dealing with radioactive wastes.

The text draws attention to the wider economic inequalities where the poor bear the costs and the rich and powerful gain disproportionate economic benefits from activities that destroy the environment and debase life. Izuka tends to implicate that conventional economic rating of the purported gains of the oil boom does not reflect true economic growth or development as it falls short of considering

national environmental problems and the selective impact of the gains that favour the rich but impoverish the poor waterside dwellers who bear the extreme cost of environmental burden, and economic defamiliarizations that further alienate them from mainstream business.

Conveyed in third person and all-knowing narrative that put the reader at the frontline of feeling, the text portrays close witnessing of the sufferings of the ancestral communities who live below the poverty line in a squalid environment without portable water, electricity and medical facilities despite the exploration of the liquid gold in their backyard. Taxi, one of the youth activists, adroitly paints the extreme distress from the denials of ecological goods of the ancestral dwellers who must watch strangers drill the oil God has placed right under their feet. The grime analogy here taxes the local idiom of feeling: "Pit or bucket, there were just no latrines around. Children were passing feaces into the water on one side of the port and drinking the same water from the other side… the same water that provides home for all manner of human excretion supplies both the domestic and drinking water" (*Travails*, 45-6).

There is copious dig into the oppression and abject poverty of the rural dwellers in the oil drilling econiche as an oppressive system that barely supports the economic and environmental needs of the ancestral owners of the liquid black gold. For instance, through the Ogbaa of Ogbaland, textual attention is drawn to the people's odious economic and environmental experiences:

> Yes my people are also victims of this new wealth… my people have lost their farmlands to the oil companies. The heat coming from the flares has scorched our economic crops. Our streams no longer provide drinking water to my people. A film of oil from the drilling waste permanently covers the surface of the streams" (*Travails*, 268).

By focusing on the environmental impacts of oil exploration activities on the Niger Delta econiche, Izuka tends to affirm through discourse extension that production is awash with concomitant wastes that make apologists of neoclassical economics and their sense of indefinite economic growth quip frivolous and counterproductive. Global costs like climate change, mass extinction, pollution, deforestation, and toxic movement should be factored into real calculation of economic growth and cost of production. Thus, eco-economics quite like the environmental justice movement "secures ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting profitable economic and social development" (*Wikipedia*). The unfortunate situation in the Niger Delta area is such that the oilmen take over their resources, their wives, their lives, destroy their culture and bequeath their children with eco-economic disaster and a hunched-back future of confused legacy.

Through a pejorative rhetoric of denial, Opuyi, one of the activists and victim of economic emasculation, laments the lack of duty of care by the government and oil firms doing business in the area. These government agencies and oil firms expropriate the gains from the resources to develop other lands while the oil-bearing communities wallop in degradation, abject poverty and squalor. It is thus regrettable that "the money they get from the oil is changing the lives of many people in other places both in Nigeria and the Whiteman's home except here" (*Travails*, 118).

By projecting a gruesome image of the extreme exploitation and expropriation of oil resources in the poor and minority groups, Izuka draws attention to the tragedy of the commons in the way the upper class—the white oil drillers, the government agencies, the military administrator and even local chiefs—provoke the suffering of the poor through their over-consumption and gruesome exploitation of natural resources. According to Hardin (1968), a commons is any area where property

rights regimes do not apply and users have open access to its exploitation. He used the example of a common grazing land where each cattle owner continues to enlarge his or her herd as long as doing so increases his income. Since each owner derives all the economic benefits from the sale of his cattle, and since the loss of grazing resources consumed by the cattle is borne by all the other owners, the tragedy is that all owners will increase the numbers in their herds to the point at which the grazing capacity of the land is utterly depleted or destroyed.

The ecological challenge here is that exploiters of common resources have little incentive to conserve them and a great deal of incentive to recklessly exploit them before others can do so. Thus, Mr. Harold, a foreign oil company executive, confesses ironically that they are "here to stay" because "the profit margin is still very attractive in spite of the eighty-five per cent PPT rate and the constant extortions by the communities." He also explains that "there is no other place in the world you make as much profit as you do in this country", especially as "the government participates in the funding without having adequate capability to monitor the operations especially with regards to the manner the money is spent". Moreover, "it is only in this country that [oil] services are priced for and paid for in foreign currency" (*Travails*, 140-1). Adopting Hardin's (1968) analogy, each exploration company quite like each cattle owner in a common grazing land continues to enlarge his herd or production base as long as doing so increases his income because each company or owner derives all the income benefits from the sale of his cattle or crude. And, since the cost of grazing or exploration resources consumed by his cattle or company is borne by all the other owners, the tragedy is that all owners will increase the numbers of their herds to the point at which the grazing capacity of the land is utterly depleted or destroyed. The implicature here is an exploitative ethos that semioticizes the polemics of mindless institutional

expropriation and ecological pillage. Thus, to the oil company, the ultimate desire is to "win contracts, to make profit and stay in business" (*Travails*, 126).

4.0 Petrolcene and Eco-trauma in Unigwe's *The Phoenix*

Onyema (2010**)** is focused in part on the trauma and violence the indigenes of the Niger delta suffer as a result of oil exploration activities in the area, as appropriated in Chika Unigwe's *The Phoenix.* On the surface narration, *The Phoenix* is about Oge, a Nigerian living in Belgium with her (Belgian) husband, Gunter, and trying hard to survive the feelings of loneliness, lowliness, and distraught sensibilities she suffers. In addition to the psychological vertigoes she undergoes as an immigrant totally dis-located from her primeval place, Oge's distraught sensibilities come from the environmental challenges in her Niger delta home too.

The author skillfully explores the mind state of Oge, the prime representative of victims of environmental dislocation and diaspora distress, through narratives that are couched in bleak and compelling details. Following Unigwe's narrative logic, as the world globalizes, what flows is not only multiplicity of linkages and interconnectedness in commerce and communication. The cultures of violence, crime, pollutants with the psychological and physiological dis-eases they spill, also flow. Thus, the novel in imaging transcontinental and peripatetic dislocation also marks the integration between traditional place-centeredness and global displacement, as well as the resultant harvest of pains. It laments an idyllic regional environment torn apart by dis-location and change, as humans are pulled apart from their familiar cultural econiche. This situation alludes to a different kind of alienation where a sense of forced exile impacts on even home dwellers because of loss of land rights, deprivation of ancestral territories, and feeling of defamiliarizations by the new meanings imposed on the native populations by oil exploration activities. Poaching national agencies and multinational oil companies

spill pollution, hunger, multi-militant angst reactionary in the Niger Delta, and so impose a sense of rupture and estrangement, which disable the native populations from consummating an authentic sense of homeland and belonging. Pragmatically, therefore, the novel replicates what Lawrence Buell (2005:44) calls "the environmental unconscious" in its covert engagement with nature[i]. Thus, the dislocating and distressing effects of environmental (oil) pollution represent the dialectic of environmental injustice and land rights abuse in Nigeria smuggled in immanently as intrinsic green co-text. The relationship among land, cancer, AIDS and death is mapped as narrative fusion with discourse of morbidity, which accentuates the position of Wes Jackson that "soil is as much a non-renewable resource as oil", and as Nixon adds, "international and intra-national contests over this finite resource can destabilize whole regions"(18). To Unigwe, this is the palpable parable of Biara, a factional town in Nigeria's Niger Delta area, an 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. In the words of Nixon, by incorporating this strand of narration, Unigwe "makes visible the overlooked causalities of accumulative environmental injury"(25).

The fecundity and peace that marked the Niger Delta stable and arable land of yore is spilled with "oil curses"—dis-eases from pollution, poverty and angst reactionary. Thus, as Shell ruins the town with oil spills from crusted pipelines of pressure that crisscross the land, the people with their land are spilled as it were with "A stamping upon. /A show of might. /Air pollution. / Land pollution"(*Phoenix*,39). These frames for pollution and violence, articulated in snatches of telegraphic expressions, depict the devastating manner at which the people's existence is truncated and their lands and minds polluted with spill and traumatic vertigoes. The use of terse and disarticulated structures orthographically

replicates the disaggregation of the speaker's consciousness by distressing experiences.

The imaging of pollution, poverty, destruction and death as home-prone experiences is equally distressing and stalls any desire by an immigrant to venture a return. Similarly, the anti-pollution demonstrators that "sweat rained down on" "tasting of salt and suffering", a placard that labels shell and the Nigerian government "murderers", "destroyers of homes", and a protesting crowd insisting that "Shell must pay"(*Phoenix*,134), are precursors to Bookchin's idea of social ecology. In the discourse of petrolcene in Nigeria, Shell is metaphor for the exploitative activities of multinational oil companies, their unethical method of operation and utter disregard for the barest standards of duty of care. Intertextually, this resonates the popular chime by Ken Saro-Wiwa, Nigeria's foremost environmental rights martyr of the Niger Delta extraction, who laments that "the flares of shell are flames of hell", and bemoans "the curse of oil" in the "cursed neglect" of the ancestral owners of the land by "cursed shell"(Saro-Wiwa,1995:79).

The complication in the African environmental challenges is such that whether at home or abroad the neocolonial African is a micro-minor barely visible on the global economic flow, unless as platform for gauging marauding transnational exploitation; for there at home, they are "casualties of joint occupying powers: the transnational oil corporations and a brutal extortionist Nigerian regime"(Nixon,1996:4). By focusing on both internal and external racism Unigwe believes, 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,1995:18).

The issue Unigwe raises here is informational. Despite the global significance of crude flows and consequent eco-devastation in the Niger Delta, this "regional

conflict" is 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. The tactical silence over the Niger Delta experiences by the Western powered global information network suggests the neocolonial deepening of the brutalization of humanity. This silence offers the kind of cover needed to further the blatant exploitation of the people's ancestral resources by (inter)national forces, even as the multinational oil companies further unfair terms of trade, and flaunt state laws contrived to deny the landowners meaningful rent. Also implicated in this slight dig into toxicity discourse is the fact that as oil flows westwards, crude pollution, hunger, diseases and angst reactionary are retained in Africa as dizzying pollutants that bequeath the ancestral niche with further shards of green.

The problem of police brutality as potent source of ecotrauma and strand of violence in the Niger delta also comes under intense critical fire. This is couched in hate speech and implicated in the needless show of force by "the government's dogs", against defenseless citizens that only "fight back with spit and sticks" (*Phoenix*,139). Phonoaesthetically, Unigwe's reference to the *thud thud* sounds of baton landing on people at the point the police clash with the protesting women sounds like police whips landing on protesters. It also emits sounds that equate the recurrent "doom! doom! doom! doom!" in the Delta as Shell pipelines destroy farms and kill crops. This onomatopoeic conversion doubles as the resounding of guns in the violated niche, and the disaster oil pollution has brought in the Delta region, all of which Oge's mother experiences as Biara seethes with violence and pollution.

By analytical extension, Biara sounds like Biafra a political niche in south-eastern Nigeria doomed and targeted for genocide, as it were, because of oil boom.

Fictional Biara, like the politically marginalized Biafra, is a place of martial conflicts, destruction, pillage and plunder of the resources of the weak ethnicities by the mega Nigerian state, the more powerful other. Thus, Unigwe makes allusion to pipelines, destruction of farm, crying, complaining, crops killed, cursed oil, demonstrated, placards, painstakingly, denounced, military dictatorship and bad roads, all of which represent the gory tales of the curse of oil exploration in the Niger Delta at a glance (*Phoenix*,139). Generally, poverty, pollution, martial conflict, youth restiveness and total pillaging of the flora and fauna, destructive flares of (s)hell fire, as well as the unethical practices of the multinational oil companies, and the complicity of the Nigerian government, occur and recur in this gory tale of crude doom in an oil boom era.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, as a scholar from the humanities, I am only sharing the human burden, our collective burden, using the appropriation of environmental rights campaign in the Niger delta literature as contact point. Using the Niger delta niche as a devastated ecotone, the writers project 'petrolcene' as critical eco-concern and warn that the world is dying as a result of global greed for fossil fuel. Humanity, like children with mock buckets and spade in hand build and destroy the castles of their imagination; we are with a gigantic saw, ravaging our econiche with mega testicles of flare. With mindless crude pollution of our aquatic and terrestrial lives through unethical oil exploration activities and inequitable distribution of environmental goods and burden, we are ravaging the fauna and flora, we are sawing off the branch on which we stand.

The crux of Petrolcene is that global energy greed has brought in its wake chaos and destruction and that humanity is subjecting themselves to slow poisoning by the pollution of the environment through unethical oil exploration activities. Thus in terms of fidelity to content or textual purpose, Niger Delta writers capture such axes of petrolcene, as ecological devastation and devaluation as well as their attendant consequences to wit: trauma, reduced life span due to exposure to ecological hazards, pollution, respiratory diseases and acid rain; dumping of industrial waste into the swamps, disappearance or migration of animal and aquatic species, the scorching heat of gas flaring, disruption of family values and the violation of the cradle through preponderance of militant teens, crime prone communities and birth of a younger generation addicted to violence. There is also conformity to standards of textuality, acceptability, intentionality, informativity, as well as situationality and intertextuality implicated in the various discourse stratagems adroitly devised to project the incremental effects of petrolcene. These include devising the frame of investigative journalism in-set creative writing as

functional space; provincial narration; the them-us narrative contrast, hate speech and the victimhood trope; discourse conflation, counterpart narrations, narrative subversion and decentering. There are also narrative bonding of physical and psychological distress, narrative logic, artistic and rhetorical proof, narrative balancing, down-up communication technique, as well as the quest/ journey motif sewn as yardage of knowledge about the poisoning of the Niger delta niche. This way, the compendium of dis- eases that petrolcene harbingers is told in shrill urgency to unmask the slow violence in the area, save a poisoned land and engender urgent remediation. By projecting the environmental wrongs in the oil-rich ethnicities, these writers engender a conscientization that bridges the fatal gap between the rhetoric of ecosophy and attitudinal acceptance of the same through fellow-feeling, justice and equity required to heal the land.

The facticity encoded in literature of power can be deployed to speak truth to authority in order to escape the preplanned iron trinkets of angst reactionary christened violence, selective bars of hate speech and guillotines of treason. The creative writer, is never guilty because s/he nothing asserts. Moreover, the world s/he creates as functional geography is not, and never, within the contemplation of any law existing in waking reality, even with very thin disguises. The informed discourse analyst is equipped to break into the writer’s code and avail society with the meaning of meaning. The astute communication analyst contemplates the pragmatic import of the writer's significant linguistic choices in order to permeate currents in his or her sensibilities in an attempt at writing what s/he means and meaning what s/he writes. Mr. VC, Ladies and gentlemen, investing in this functional utilization of language for effective communication and promoting environment peace is exactly what I have been professing.

Mr. VC, Kindly permit me to end this lecture with the following highlights, each with considerable overlap:

1. Literary “chronicling and interpretation of the Niger delta ecological present constitute a poetics of confrontation with humans meant to raise awareness about the destructive machinations of global craze for fossil fuel energy flow, the petrolcene. It is consciousness-raising mechanism rooted in didacticism and activism and designed as prelude to concrete action needed for change serves to facilitate the process of conscientization by promoting a reflective awareness and thoughtful understanding of the environment”. As Ngongkum, 2020:101-2) urges, the urgency for environmental repair cannot be “a future action but one in the here and now”
2. Toxicity discourse is not exclusive to science. It is a human term and only collective human –art or science –can deal with it. If we stifle humanities and live the life of test-tubes, chemicals and steel, who would benefit from the research findings, who would live in the many houses that architects draw and that Civil Engineers build? Science is for humanity and not humanity for science. For science and arts let's have a 50-50 ratio to give our budding academic and solution-seeking researchers a chance or freedom of choice to study, to do, to be. Inventors and discoverers are first and foremost in the **humanities** the spark and hunch that give birth to discoveries is not a scientific claim. It is *apriori*. What science does is *posteriori*; it studies those humanistic inventions, and quickly puts a stamp on them. Humanities seems to be diminished because hunch and spark of life, unfortunately are not protected by copyright laws. We cannot heal the world, but the humanities at least, makes the world go around, and language, communication is the oil that greases the hub of existence. Essentially, **the role of the humanities** as conscientizing agency is implicated in literary discourse which employs words that “shout consciences awake”. Thus, exploiting the traditional role of the writer as a social and environmental gadfly, the Niger Delta writers

awaken humanity to the reality of "petrolcene" by representing emotion, zeal, creativity and motivation. They tend to support Bill McKibben's (2020:8) observation that "**Science alone** can't make change, because it appeals only to the hemisphere of the brain that values logic and reason", devoid of emotion: We are all creatures of emotion, intuition, spark, and **mechanistic science** is not everything. Words, music, song and imagination effectively excite human emotions, charge individual and collective behaviour for positive eco-action. Thus, while the nexus between literature and the environment is not immediately self-evident, eco-conscious writers devise content and techniques that reveal "the arts effectiveness in humanity's response to the planet's intensifying biodiversity crisis. **(Ngongkum, 2020: 203).** Through affect and activism the writers in the Niger Delta draw attention to the slow violence in the area and make a "global" call for positive eco-ethics, accountability, cleanup and restitution.

3. **Niger Delta environmental discourse, aspires to contribute significantly towards decolonizing the anthropocene**, by showing "how the current ecological crises in the region are intrinsically linked with the toxic consequences of rabid exploration of oil. Quite unlike the anthropocene, petrolcene, allows other voices in the **anthropocene and** engenders an ecocritical reproachment that systematically establishes differences rather than erase them.
4. Postnikov (2005:5) rightly states, however, that literature is as diverse as life itself, and that to maintain the beauty of human symphony, each voice must have its own timbre and sound, adding that many indigenous cultures have cultivated their own eco-poetics which the outside world is simply unaware of". The foregoing presentation has been focused on bringing to the fore the

nature of ecopoetics in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, and establishing the contribution of writers **to petrolcene as a specialist shade of green.**

5. **Environment studies to be introduced in schools** for effective altitudinal change and to nurture the cradle. The focus for the humanities is to critically interrogate what **Stibbes** calls "the stories we live by". The way forward is to inculcate ethics of care and biocentric attitude in youths to conscientise them on positive ecosophy. **Petrolcene** should be understood as standard usage in the glocal Niger Delta English lexicon, with the plan to regularise it for adoption into the Standard English lexicon
6. Mr. Vice Chancellor Federal University is the star of the Delta. We are ripe for an Institute of Niger Delta Studies to house the Niger Delta, historical, political linguistic and literary repositions
7. Mr. Vice-Chancellor, the **correction of language** I have in mind is not about nouns and adjectives, or even agreement, for while these may be building blocks, they cannot carry the pillar of meaning. The weight of meaning resides in the pragmatic reading of discourse notations as pillar of communication. The true "path" of speech is locating the communication boulevard through context, topic, intention/purpose, background/cultural knowledge of participants and how deliberate linguistic choices are made to effectively put the message across to sway the target audience to a predetermined direction.
8. From an eco-discoursal view point, the Niger delta does not merely ***bear*** but actually *owns* oil deposits, and this fact would trigger ecosophy as right attitude required for urgent remedial action. Thus, through lexical substitution that makes dwellers oil *bearing* rather than oil *producing* community, the landlords are consigned to passive by-standers and thus objectified. They merely *bear oil,* they neither produce nor own it. They are

sired with crude as crumbs and pollution, but denied oil wealth. The discourse logic is the incensing of angst and birth of further violence and ecocide by the helpless and hapless Deltan who resort to oil tapping and hostage taking as meaningful appropriation of rent. And, the tenant does not determine the rent, the landlord does. Niger delta is first Ijaw, Ogbia, Epie, Atissa**,** Itshekiri, Isoko, Yoruba, Igbo, Kalabari, Okirika, Andoni, Igbani, Efik/Ibibio, before being part of Nigeria, basically an associative federation of loose ethnicities, aptly described elsewhere as "a mere geographical expression". In the pragmatic reading of ceo-notations, language is re-written in a scape where boom heralds doom in associative construction; oil is crude, that is quite literally; ancestral dwellers bear rather than own the oil in their backyard; where compensation matrix does not include the cost of ancestral tombs and shrines over-drilled by mega testicles of flare; and where people are punished for their mineral sins and where oil is a curse rather than a blessing. And, the Niger Delta question provokes answerers for a long durée of historical (inter)national exploitation of a people whose lives are parceled barrel by barrel; a people consigned away oil bock by oil block; where oil is flown up North and crude pollution retained down South; where people are pushed beyond the palest walls of humanism's grace in order to privilege their exploitation; where trauma births the *infra hombre* condemned for stealing their own property. Only a pragmatic reading of eco-notations, in the Niger Delta depressing discourse of petrolcene can avail the meaning of those nuanced expressions.

9. Niger Delta literature as minority literature should interrogate the language issue. It is a shame the way Niger delta oil is drilled in English and Italian and sold in dollars. English is a corrosive force eating up the Niger delta linguistic ozone layer, while using its vital parts to nourish English. Luckily,

education is on the concurrent legislative list and states can leverage on this and legislate Niger Delta languages as language of education and oil business. Foreigners can take short courses in Ijaw, for instance, to make them employable in a new language-sensitive oil industry with the Nigerian Local Content playing an enforcement and monitoring role. The schools would need trained language teachers to execute this very crucial task. What are the Niger Delta states doing to make her languages compulsory? Is there any deliberate language engineering effort meant to attain this goal? What are the universities and colleges of education in the area doing to establish relevant disciplines to teach the language that will carry the burden of conveying the culture and speaking her reality?

10. Mr. V.C, the establishment of a Department of Niger Delta languages in FUO is long overdue. The need to protect our linguistic biodiversity is urgent, very urgent. As Kay Williamson warned; “speak your language or lose it”. How come the Chinese working in the Niger Delta speak Mandarin and install equipment with operative manual written in Chinese? Who owns such equipment as the sleepy Nigerian Local Content Act keeps mum?
11. Literature of power and literature of knowledge should be taught contemporaneously. Thus, as part of the general studies course, use of English should have the language of literature as its integral outline. Students should read and appreciate the language and content of the literary genres to widen their geography of advocacy, register mastering and open up multiple dimensions of interpretation; as well as sharpen their instincts on straight and crooked thinking
12. It is also hoped that the study will help galvanize further inquiry into the works of Niger delta writers, especially on 'petrolcene', as the people have continued to suffer from the incremental but discounted effects of their

mineral sins. Where the foregoing is on the the language of power as well as the environment and the politics of the Niger Delta, there is need to examine the language of entrepreneurship, the language of engineering, the language of science. We need to understand the language of intercultural communication and best communication practices in conflict resolution; and, of course, understand the language of law to temper the register with functional alternatives that would be less violent and toxic without diminishing the corpus of its meaning.

13. There may be need to harness the features and techniques of environmental rights advocacy using literature as alternative press in writings that focus on the ecological experiences of the aborigines of tin mining sites in Jos, coal in Enugu, gold or tantalite in Zamfara, iron-ore in Itakpe, and the excruciating trauma of herders incursion as curse of beef in the south and middle belt.
14. Mr. Vice Chancellor, I have also fallen back on my knowledge of **Legal communication** and weighed the currents of environmental wrongs in the ND**.** The crude fact is that the ND question has defied every legal answer as the dwellers and their environment are pushed to the edge of eco-precipice, surely and persistently: *Ubi juis, ubi remedium* is a trite *juris proverbia* but ND ecological destruction by government and international agencies have not attracted any remediation or eco-justice. Rather, the ND micro minor and subaltern victims in a "gated country" have remained victims of environmental rights abuse. Similarly, the explorative privilege of empire for which ND ecology is victim is a fact that speaks for itself, *res ipso locutur*. However, none has evoked this legal position to stem, or projected remediation for the facts of the odious spectacle that is the Niger Delta ecology. *Quid quid plantatum, solo solo cedit* as trite legal principle has also been banished from the ND ecozone, as none cedes the right of rent of oil

exploration to the owners of the land. What prevails is an anguished remodeling of discourse through lexical choices that privilege the denial of oil rent to the natural landlords.

15. Drawing insights from the psychology of discourse and frames of implicature and presupposition, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, ND writers do not approve of violence. Rather, they merely draw attention to the spill of the *infra hombre* as a concomitant effect of crude curse, and coping strategies as fallout from the pollution of the land, unemployment and economic shift and other kinds of denial, as well as insignia for the vertigoes of ecotrauma. The *infra hombre* are the kidnapers-for-ransom agents; the kidnappers for eco-protest and environmental advocacy; the unemployed, the unemployable and the under employed youth who hack through oil pipelines for the good plans that government has talked so much about; the displaced indigenes who have taken to the oil night market in the dangerous preoccupation of selling highly inflammable roadside fuel and gas; the oil dollar-dazed wives and daughters that swell the spill of whoredom at industrial sites and oil quarters; the defenseless protesters daily killed by government crude forces for occupying flow stations to enforce their human wrongs in a scape where there are no more rights to fight for. The *infra hombre* is every delta killed every day over trumped-up charges for their mineral sins, for being cheated and for the pollution of their everywhere

16. Mr. Vice Chancellor, the logic for self-help is hard to deny in the face of the ND question where oil gains have become crude; were oil boom dooms a people while the law remains the proverbial cobweb that catches small delta fries while big state animals walk through. Violence breeds angst reactionary and further violence and further pollutes the econiche dizzy, especially as government does not taste the egg shell of the Niger delta eco-campaigners

on the teeth before dashing it on the rock of federal might. An explanation for violence in the Niger Delta therefore, lies in the Frustration–Aggression Theory Dollard et al, (1939; cited in Onyema, 2020): When there is a gap between the level of value expectation and the level of value attainment, due to lack of capability to establish a congruence between both levels, tension builds up due to the pressure of an unfulfilled aspiration or an unsatisfied urge or need. This, when not arrested in time, leads to frustration. Frustration, when it builds up, leads to the rising up of suppressed emotions of anger which is often directed against the party considered to be the source of deprivation of satisfaction (Ehwarime, 2009).

17. The Niger delta eco-poetics bears on the 2021 Petroleum Act. The 3% allocation to communities appears glossy inadequate and should be urgently reviewed. At least, this compensation benchmark does not factor in eco-degradation, destruction of ancestral shrines and the value of the over-drilled boiling tomb. This crude matrix violates the good of the other and images the Delta as an over-grazed common land. Again, methinks that in a country of uncertain records and statistics; where the mainstay of the economy is drilled in a foreign tongue and sold in a foreign currency; in a country of volatile currency valuation with attendant galloping inflation, in a clime where population figure is guessive and based on fault lines of politically motivated projection; where local government authorities are weak and where governors, like children with mock buckets and spades in hand, create and destroy autonomous communities and change heads of their imagination; where local leaders are complicit and in cohorts with government agencies and multinational oil companies in the exploitation of their homelands, etc. There is need to first resolve the question of 3 per cent of what and to whom in the Petroleum Act before fighting over whether it is adequate or not. The

answer to these questions will actually determine the value of the offer. We should also visit history to understand the shade of resource-curse that created the internecine rancorous warfare and threw up fiercely competitive canoe houses in the ND communities during the colonial era, when handouts from the exploitative ethos of the colonial forces promoted divisiveness and enthroned the kill-and-take-head attitude in the Niger delta econiche. For now, the environmental rights campaign continues.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, you have been a wonderful audience, and I thank you

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