

**ECO-PEDAGOGY IN A POSTMODERNIST'S READING OF
MBAJIORGU'S *WAKE UP EVERYONE* AND DANDAURA'S
*VENOM FOR VENOM***

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Abstract

This paper examines postmodern playwriting and eco-pedagogy in Nigeria; especially in the wake of environmental challenges the country now faces. Environmental degradation, climate change and global warming have occupied both international and local discourses in the 21st century. No doubt, the impact of climate change is real on every part of the globe. Hence, the focus of this paper is to explore the new parameters for which we can begin to seek the relevance of drama and the dramatic text to issues of contemporary importance such as the sustainability of the Earth for future generations. The objective is to prove that drama can be used as a pedagogic tool to question and seek answers to the fast eroding life-world. Mbajiorgu's *Wake up Everyone* and Dandaura's *Venom for Venom* are among the many examples that the concern for the environment is now taking centre stage in Nigeria's contemporary drama. The paper investigates the preoccupation of theatre practice in Nigeria and its relevance to the eco-challenges of this sub-Saharan African nation. It further makes a case for the engagement of Nigerian theatre in the global quest for environmental sustainable development thrives. The study reveals that human activities contribute to environmental degradation. It concludes that postmodern approach to playwriting can help the enlightenment campaign on environmental degradation.

Keywords: Ecopedagogy, Ecocriticism, Drama, Conflict and Ecology

Introduction

Climate constitutes the total experience of weather and atmospheric behaviour over a number of years in a given region. Rafferty says it is not just the "average weather" and variability and the frequency of various occurrences (2). As natural as it may sound, yet, it can be affected by

human activities. As Rafferty put it, “no region is untouched by human influence” (2). The release of waste products from domestic and economic enterprises (burning fossil fuels, synthetic chemical use, trash production,) alters the composition of the atmosphere, and gases and particulates related to these activities travel to all parts of the globe. Therefore, from the simple method we dispose of waste from homes and offices and the smoke that emits from our generators and cars, we are either killing the earth or sustaining it.

Climate change on the other hand, is a product of cumulative anthropogenic releases of heat-trapping gases that consequently warms global climate. This is popularly described as a crisis (Glover 1). Losses to ecological values and human societies due to climate change are potentially catastrophic, and will be long-lived, largely irreversible, and remain for the most part unpredictable. Climate change also refers to the changes in the composition and behaviour of the Earth's atmosphere. Mintzer and Leonard state that the last 10,000 years has seen a constant concentration of the most important gases in the atmosphere but the last two centuries, human activities – including industrialization and agricultural expansion have caused the release of large quantities of gaseous pollutants into the atmosphere (xi). These emissions have affected the average temperature at the Earth's surface.

The impact of climate change are felt today in the areas of agriculture and food security, access to water resources, impacts on human health and geopolitical relationships (conflicts due to competition for resources) (Richardson, Steffen and Liverman 102). This predicament is the outcome of modernity and the contemporary issue born out of industrial society (Glover 1). It is a global crisis yet with a local impact. Every part of the earth feels the effect of this ecological catastrophe. Climate change is considered as a gradual but devastating threat to the continued existence of life on earth. It is a subject that calls for everyone to wake up.

Todd traces Africa's experience with climate change to six millions years ago when one of the most dramatic set of changes on Africa's ecological stage took place at the end of the Miocene epoch. For millions of years Africa had been in lush tropical forests, offering easy travel, safe shelter, and abundant water and foodstuffs here. Then the Ice Age, which had begun in the middle Miocene, drastically altered the African continent. Though the ice itself never reached Africa, falling global temperatures cooled the continent significantly. As more and more water became locked

up in ice, sea levels plunged – the Mediterranean shrank to an inland sea – and Africa experienced an extensive period of acidification. The net effect of this climatic change was the devastation of Africa's rich Miocene forests (Todd 27).

No doubt the planetary crisis speaks of the greatest mass extinctions of all time. Harthaway and Boff paints the picture thus:

The combined dynamics of the deepening poverty and accelerating ecological degradation are creating a powerful vortex of despair and destruction from which it is becoming increasingly difficult to escape. If the postmodern dramatist who is the contemporary dramatist fails to act with sufficient energy, urgency and wisdom, we will soon find ourselves condemned to a future in which the potential for living with meaning, hope and beauty has been immeasurably diminished (2).

The literal meaning of postmodernism is “after modernism” and in many ways postmodernism constitutes an attack on modernist claims about the existence of truth and value – claims that stem from the European enlightenment of the 18th century. Quayson relates postmodernism to a literary and philosophical tradition of representation which could be said to have its own peculiar historical and social trajectory in Western thought (647). He further typifies this theory as a vigorously anti-systemic mode of understanding with pluralism, borders and multiple perspectives being highlighted as a means of disrupting the centralizing impulse of any system (649).

One major trait of the postmodernist cultural movement is the dominance of inaccessible and impenetrable prose that characterise many postmodern philosophical texts. This is however intentional and reflect specific claims about the nature of language and meaning. In disputing past assumptions, postmodernists generally display a preoccupation with the inadequacy of language as a mode of communication. Among the major postmodern theorists are French philosophers Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.

Derrida originated the philosophical method of deconstruction, a system of analysis that assumes a text has no single, fixed meaning, both because of the inadequacy of language to express the author's original intention and because a reader's understanding of the text is culturally conditioned – that is, influenced by the culture in which the reader lives. Thus texts have many possible legitimate interpretations brought about by the “play”

of language. Derrida stresses the philosophical importance of pun, metaphor, ambiguity, and other playful aspects of language traditionally disregarded in philosophy. Thus, the author's use of language sometimes does not detect his identity. His method of deconstruction involves close and careful readings of central texts of Western philosophy that bring to light some of the conflicting forces within the text and that highlight the devices the text uses to claim legitimacy and truth for itself, many of which may lie beyond the intention of its author. Although some of Derrida's ideas about language resemble views held by the analytic philosophers Wittgenstein, Quine, and Davidson, many philosophers schooled in the analytic tradition have dismissed Derrida's work as destructive of philosophy. However, despite the disagreements and arguments on what constitutes the postmodernist paradigm, Ihab Hassan (1923-4), believes that postmodernism has its major traits that distinguishes it from modernism. These include Dadaism as against symbolism, antiformalism as against form, antithesis as against synthesis, deconstruction as against totalization, decreation as against creation, misreading as against reading, anti-narrative as against narrative, among others.

Foucault created a searing critique of the ideas of the Enlightenment, such as reason and truth. Like Derrida, Foucault used close readings of historical texts to challenge assumptions, demonstrating how ideas about human nature and society, which we assume to be permanent truths, have changed over time. From an array of historical texts Foucault created "philosophical anthropologies" that reveal the evolution of concepts such as reason, madness, responsibility, punishment, and power. By examining the origins of these concepts, he maintained, we see that attitudes and assumptions that today seem natural or even inevitable are historical phenomena dependent upon time and place (Carpenter par 4). He further claimed that the historical development of these ideas demonstrates that seemingly humane and liberal Enlightenment ideals are in reality coercive and destructive.

Though postmodernism is still epileptic in Africa, Canice Chukwuma Nwosu one of the foremost African postmodernists says that;

Creativity is the focus of African postmodern theatre; therefore, it glorifies individual, collective and communal creativity. It is important to note that creativity here is governed by the free creative spirit and devoid of conventional authenticity that fetter experimentations. The postmodern creative spirit emphasizes the

dualities and vicissitudes of life prevalent in the creator's environment. (167)

Nwosu' postmodern theory has provided new parameters for contemporary dramatist to engage in individual creativity of solo plays and exploration of environmental vicissitudes of life like climate change. Hence, we can begin to study the works of innovative Playwrights like: Sam Ukala, Emma Dan Daura, Greg Mbajiogu Kene Igwonu and so on from the postmodern point of view. The trend of eco-engagements in the arts especially drama is now taking centre stage as the global threat of a warming planet and its attendant consequences is now a matter of concern. The drive for sustainable development and protecting the earth's natural heritage provides a platform for dramatists in Nigeria to engage. Soyinka's early dramatic works such as *The Lion and the Jewel*, *Dance of a Forest* and *The Swamp Dwellers* can be viewed for any of the ecocentric dimensions. The same goes for Osofisan whose play – *Morountodun* will pass for not just a postmodernist dramatic text but can be also reviewed from the perspectives of eco-radicalism. Tess Onwueme's plays such as *Then She Said It* and *The Desert Encroaches* make a strong case for climate change and environmental justice both in the Niger Delta and the Northern part of Nigeria.

Environmental Education and Eco-pedagogic Theory

Darder's poem quoted below captures the whole essence of this study. Drama is a creative and expressive area of human activity which provides a powerful source of peace-building energy and passion that is not always apparent in the formalized processes of political conflict resolution (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 347). One of the attributes of eco-pedagogy is to educate the individual on the need to love life and protect same. This is the pathway to sustainability. Darder in his poem laments over environmental degradation thus:

We spill our unholy wars upon her belly's tender flesh, blazing
dislocated corpses, ignite her agony and grief.

Still, in love with her creations, she warns of our complacency to
cataclysmic devastation, rooted in the alienation of our
disconnection, our rejection, our oppression, our scorn.

And still, we spin ungodly tantrums of injustice against her love,
against ourselves, against one another. __ Darder (cited in Kahn x).

We live in a world where humans must struggle to regain their humanity by going back to history to locate their connection with nature and redefine their civilization. As the world now yearns for a new civilization that underscores our common heritage in mother earth and life, a critical understanding of issues in eco-literacy becomes imperative. The other dimension that gives justification to this new zeal is the fact that the poorest regions of the world have the worst ecological problems. The poorest regions of the world are or have been the most exploited regions in terms of human and natural resources. The poorest regions of the world are also the regions that have seen the worst conflicts angst by growing poverty, social injustice and the scramble for scarce resources.

Eco-pedagogy hence, emanates from these contentions as a body of scholarly discourses in the field of critical pedagogy. Martin and Te Riele believe that it is an outgrowth that is not older than 30 years and owes a lot to works done by Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. It has been at the centre of efforts “to construct social alternatives that are both credible and compelling. This has included creating new social contexts and encounters that value alternative meanings, knowledge and actions” (23). This allusion of a three-decade eco-presence in literature may be true for Western literature but in Africa and particularly Nigeria, eco-pedagogy has been present in our dramatic writings for more than half a century. Some of the works of Soyinka used in this study were written in the 1950s and in them we find images and messages that challenge the injustice done to the environment by humans.

Environmental education is a multi-discursive field. It is a space of both struggle and opportunity for the reconstruction of a web of relations between humans and the environment and with each other. This web has faded with the advance of civilization, but could enable us to develop new treaties between cultures, societies and nature and give rise to new values, languages, and meanings that could lead us responsibly to the social change that is so critical at this time (Gonzalez-Gaudiano & Meira-Carter 14).

Eco-pedagogy is a form of non-formal popular education which Kahn says is borne out of developed ideas and practices of environmental preservation and conservation that centres on self-consciousness, awareness and the need for action by self-realization (5). As an outgrowth of critical pedagogy, it questions the status quo, and liberates the mind towards change from dehumanization to humanization. The world's

economic structure as well as the adoption of globalized capitalism has no doubt created a serious dichotomy not only in the distribution of wealth but also in the human environment. In the same earth, we have those who live in affluence and comfort and those who battle with diseases every day. Such is the dehumanization which Freire says marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it (44). This he said, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human and “this distortion occurs within history; but it is not a historical vocation” (44). He further believes that the world as we have come to terms with today is engaged in a struggle led by the oppressed peoples of the earth against those who made them less human and was quick to advise that this struggle to regain their humanity must not turn the oppressed to become oppressors of the oppressors. This is quite reminiscent of the flashes of several agitations we have seen in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. The militarization of the struggle and the seeming criminality this struggle takes all in a bid to free the area of further exploitation takes the wind off the sail of genuine efforts at resolving the evident eco-crisis in the region. For Freire, both the oppressed and the oppressor have lost their humanity and the struggle should be aimed at restoring the humanity of both (44). This is one problem eco-pedagogy and eco-literacy seeks to address.

One strong strand of the concept of eco-pedagogy is the love of all ‘life’. The last three decades have been a seemingly wake up call for all peoples of the Earth to consciously embrace lifestyles and attitudes that promote the sacredness of life. But everywhere we look “social relations of oppression and contempt for human dignity abound” (McLaren 22). For McLaren, gobbling up the global life world in the quest for an endless accumulation of surplus value has produced some world – historical excretory excesses, turning the world into a global toilet of toxic waste while adding legions of Marx’s reserve army of labour (20). While this remains the true story of many developing nations, the arts in most cases have celebrated the apollonian heights humans have achieved but at the expense of a dying earth. This is what brings to light the need for an eco-literacy that is place – efficient and can serve the needs of local communities.

Nanda and Warms in this light draw our attention to the position that national narratives show history as a march of progress:

They celebrate the founding and development of corporations rather than the violence that often accompanied such events. They focus on

the lives of the wealthy and powerful or sometimes, the infamous. The lives, the struggles of families, of members of ethnic and religious minorities, of women, and of children are often omitted from the record. Their voices are silenced (343).

Such is the scenario when we have an art that is not only classicist but marks the semblance of the ethos of a bourgeois society. Ecopedagogy hence seeks the reversal of this trend and pursues the emergence of a new body of knowledge and the awakening of a multi-disciplinary approach to peace, safe earth and sustainable development. As the world continues to grapple with the reality of depleting resources, the battle rages on for the remaining natural resources. Standlea believes that an unprecedented expansion of human population coupled with an America-styled propagation of unlimited economic “growth paradigm” is forcing a critical historic transition portrayed by ruthless competition over Earth’s remaining natural resources (1). “It is unlikely that the current state of affairs and the rate of greed and acquisition, especially characterising American economic consumption, will prevail at this pace without forcing severe environmental and social conflict and chaos” (Standlea 1). It is quite obvious as recent global events have proven that where there is oil, there is war. Where there is diamond, there is blood. We cannot extricate the world’s deadliest conflicts from the quest and struggle for natural resources as exemplified in Nigeria’s Delta regions and elsewhere in other African countries as well as the Gulf nations. The politics of these conflicts have been the continued desperate quest especially by Western nations for these resources. Sadly enough, these conflicts or wars have left in their wake environmental havoc of the worst kind not to mention the devastation the continued exploitation of these resources bring to local communities.

Postmodern Nigerian Drama and Eco-pedagogy

Climate change and the reality of global warming has been a topical issue in literary discourse in the last three and half decades. Even so, it is a rarity to find any substantial engagement of ecological concerns in any major work of art including drama. In Nigeria, postmodern drama is still few; hence ecoliteracy through postmodern drama is still very low despite the fact that the country is gravely affected by ecological disasters in recent times. In September 2012, Nigeria’s two major rivers – the Benue and the Niger overflowed its banks and rendered many homeless and helpless. Major cities such as Onitsha, Lokoja, and Makurdi as well as the Niger

Delta were flooded. Roads were cut off and travellers were stranded for weeks. This situation is just one of the harsh realities of climate change. At the moment, the unpredictability of rainfall patterns leaves the entire populace with the gloom of drought and famine with its attendant high cost in food prices.

This reality requires a critical response and for this to be possible there is every need to question the very idea of the environment. Harthaway and Boff in their study of deep ecology came up with the fact that there is no “environment” separate from humanity. Humanity is seen as part of the natural world, a part of the greater “web of life”. “When we poison the air, water, and soil, we poison our very selves. When we diminish the beauty and diversity of the planetary community, we also diminish our humanity.” (Harthaway and Boff 63).

What then should be the major discourse of the playwright in Nigeria in the global quest to demystify the planetary crisis and create a sustainable world where all life can thrive? Drama in the last decade has woken up to this challenging question. There is a strong urgency to awaken the consciousness of society to this eco-neglect that spells doom for everyone. In the Philippines in 2008, a group of children and youths in Banaba used theatre performances as a tool for advocacy in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). Using singing, dancing and acting, they communicated their perceptions of local hazards such as flooding and river bank erosion, and the potentially destructive impacts of these hazards on people’s livelihoods, properties and lives. They also took the challenge using theatre dynamics to communicate risk reduction activities such as tree planting and solid waste management (Turner et al 62).

In other climes and indeed Africa, we have seen the role music plays in throwing up issues and contradictions within society. The Nile Project sprang up in Egypt to address the ecological concerns of the Nile. The impact the group is making clearly indicates that music can also be used to transform human consciousness towards saving the earth. Information posted on its webpage shows that the Nile project is already transforming what it called the Nile conflict by inspiring, educating, and empowering an international network of university students to cultivate the sustainability of their ecosystem (nileproject.org). This project shows that when applied, Ecopedagogy can indeed serve as a catalyst for transformational education and awareness about the global as well as regional concerns of a degrading environment. The Nile Project’s model

integrates programmes in music, education, dialogue, leadership, and innovation to engage students across disciplines and geographies on the need to address the Nile Basin's cultural and environmental challenges. Using music to spark cultural curiosity, the Nile Project engages musicians and audiences, encouraging them to feel connected to the world's longest river and to explore new approaches to its large-scale social, cultural, and environmental problems (nileproject.org).

Popular music has served as a tool for creating awareness and educating the populace in contemporary times. Yanni, a non-lyrical jazz artiste used his music to draw the attention of the world to the beauty and magnificence of nature as well as the communality of all human beings. Yanni was not only eclectic but his musical pieces served as a voice for nature. This we find in *Nightingale*, *A walk in the Rain*, *Rainmaker*, *The Rain Must Fall*, *November Sky*, *Highland*, etc. World acclaimed King of Pop – Michael Jackson also sang for the Earth in *Earth's Song* and *Heal the World*, where he drew the attention of the world to the devastation being done not only in Africa but elsewhere through war, drought and exploitation.

Unlike drama, popular music in Nigeria no doubt has engaged the spectrum of the Nigerian society, bringing to light ills perpetrated in the society. Ogaga (51) believes that Nigerian artistes have insisted on not only foregrounding the pedagogical province of art, but have equally captured the realities of everyday existence in postcolonial Nigeria. Adeola also adds his voice to these accolades saying; “popular music has been an important tool in the march towards the growth and development of the nation” (81). He strongly believes popular music has been used over the years to move the nation forward or otherwise at different stages. This is seemingly true when the music of legendary artistes like Fela Anikulapo Kuti Onyeka Onwenu, Christie Essien Igbokwe, Sonny Okosuns and the likes are considered.

However, a closer view of the present day Nigerian dramatists shows that a few of them have captured Nigerian ecological issues because environmentalism is one of the issues that postmodernity erupts at the top of the literary discourse. The artist justifies his or her relevance and lays claim to the grip of contemporary discourse through his or her engagement with the planetary crisis. Glover gives credence to this saying that despite the complexities and contradictions, there has emerged a distinct set of responses to the concepts of postmodernity giving rise to a postmodern environmentalism (19). For Glover, the term postmodern conflates at least

two possibilities: firstly, an attack on the understanding and condition of modernity; and secondly, to sketch out a future different from the present (20). It was inaugurated by the progressive triumph of the market, fluidity of identities, the collapse of communism and the “End of History” (Roberts 3). To be postmodern as Goodman puts it, “is to understand the limits of modernity and to believe that modernity can be successfully overcome only by going beyond it” (13). For her, while modernists see solutions to all our problems as potentially existing within modern parameters, postmodernists see the root cause of the problems in the assumptions of the modern paradigm. “There can be no real change unless we challenge the entire foundation of modernism” (Goodman 12). The postmodern dramatist is concerned with a rejection of the status-quo – a seeming refusal of modernity or the reinvention of the remnants of it. According to Canice C. Nwosu:

Afro-postmodernism is rooted in cultural interaction not subjugation, reflecting in the process Africa’s socio-economic, political and cultural experiential issues where modernism failed. Afro-postmodernism should be seen in the first instance in contemporary socio-cultural and economic predicament of the African. It should be a radical departure from mono-culturalism, tailored towards “commodification with commitment” and “satire with bite” (160)

The postmodern dramatist through his or her work turns history against itself to define or redefine a new path for the future. This forms the basis upon which drama in the 21st century Nigeria must critically re-examine the current socioeconomic and geopolitical structures that plunders the Nigerian ecosystem and put its future on the path of peril. This explains the resonance of ecological themes and concerns in a few play texts that managed to surface in recent times. Sam Ukala for example created *Harvest of Ghosts* to challenge the destruction by oil pollution of the environment of the Niger Delta and the execution by the Abacha regime in Nigeria of the playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa. The play while offering a graphic visual statement of these atrocities “carries a universal message about greed, corruption and the destruction of the environment” (Banham 155). Other plays include Greg Mbajiorgu’s *Wake Up Everyone* and Dandaura’s *Venom for Venom* selected for study.

Eco-Pedagogy in *Wake Up Everyone*: A Postmodern Analysis

Heim says that Mbajiorgu's *Wake Up Everyone* has a purpose:

... to support impoverished farmers, to educate, to build resilience against the effects of climate change in rural Nigeria. The information on climate change is familiar, too, the belief and disbelief, the sometimes awkward juncture of different kinds of experience, the social power implicit in different kinds of knowledge (122).

The playwright in the preface to the play writes that his effort was quite tasking as the subject of climate change is scientific and hence not easily adaptable to the stage (6). Mbajiorgu said he was quite surprised that despite the frightening effect of climate change, only a few plays have been produced on it globally.

With climate change encroaching on us and the global future looking bleak, our world is in dire need of a paradigm shift with regards to how we relate to our planet. To guarantee the future of our world, drama is one of those salient strategies we can employ. The time for jaw jaw is over. This is the time for action, let's join hands and bring about the needed change (Mbajiorgu 3).

Wake Up Everyone captures the ignorance that pervades the Nigerian landscape on the subject matter. The encounter between the local government chairman and *Professor Aladinma* in the first scene clearly shows that climate change still sounds like a fairy tale to many even leaders. In that scene, *Professor Aladinma* says: "Things are no longer the way they used to be, and even a child must have noticed the changes in our climate..." The *Chairman* cuts in saying: "But these are expected, Prof. Aladinma. Doesn't the Bible say that in the last days things like these will happen..." (13). This situation clearly interprets the ignorance that is responsible for the hesitation in tackling the eco-crisis that faces the African. There is always a religious explanation to every natural disaster rather than face the fact that these disasters are precipitated by human activities. In that scene, the professor assumes the role of an ecopedagogue as he makes a futile attempt to de-stool the chairman of his erroneous contraptions about the planetary crisis.

This three act play written in simple language brings to its audience the reality of climate change and several adaptive measures that can be employed to ameliorate its effect. In the play, we have *Professor Aladinma*, *Desmond*, a PhD student from the UK and the Professor's

Green Theatre troupe – an assemblage of fresh graduates brought together to dramatize the message of global warming. On the other hand, we have peasant farmers who dwell and depend on the land for survival and there is also the political class as typified by the *Hon. Ochonkeya*, the Local Government Council Chairman.

Professor Aladinma, armed with enough information on climate change and the pending danger it poses to *Ndoliland*, goes to the *Hon. Ochonkeya*, with a proposal on how to arrest this looming catastrophe.

The chairman pretentiously accepted to look into the proposal with the promise to present it before the legislative council but only to cast it aside soon after the Professor left his office. Meanwhile, *Professor Aladinma* returns to his rehearsal studio and with the arrival of Desmond, continues with the sensitization of local farmers. The farmers in the characters of *Odukwe*, *Okosisi*, *Nnadozie* and others were to be taught on local ways of adapting to climate change by planting drought resistant crops and other modern methods of agro-practice that takes into cognizance of reality and unpredictability of a changing climate.

However, a much bigger disaster lay in wait for the land. This is further aggravated by the refusal of *Hon. Ochonkeya*, the chairman to attend to the professor's proposal which would see the government and other international agencies working together to arrest the coming flood. *Ndoliland* lies in the coastal plains and has been under severe threat of eco-degradation owing to years of exploitation by oil companies. The topography of the land also makes it susceptible to flooding. The play ends with the flood submerging the farmlands as predicted by the professor. The farmers are enraged by this development and in the full knowledge of the nonchalant attitude of the council chairman; they decided to go for their pound of flesh at his residence.

Thematic Concerns of the Play

One of the clear messages we get from Mbajiorgu's *Wake up Everyone* is that natural disasters are a direct consequence of human insensitivity to the plight of the environment. *Professor Aladinma* in Act one, scene one says:

What we are witnessing now is nothing else but planetary reactions to man's mindless activities, period. Our soil and rivers have become unproductive because of chemicals and oil spillages. The floods and erosions we experience are caused by our senseless attempts to

reclaim wetlands. What about the carbon monoxides from power generators and poorly maintained automobiles, and the unfriendly substances flared up into the air by oil companies on daily basis? The problems of our world today are caused by us and yet we are reluctant to find solutions to them (Mbajiorgu 2).

Natural disasters as natural as they seem do not just occur. They are triggered by humanity's actions and inactions. What the world faces now in the name of global warming, ecological degradation or climate change are nothing but offshoots of what humans do or fail to do. Quite typical of this is the level of corruption in oil politics at the expense of the land and the people who depend on it for survival. The play brings this dimension to the fore and raises questions about the so-called amnesty programme for Niger Delta militants. The disarmament of the youths to a reasonable extent calmed the frayed nerves in the region but the continued plundering and mindless destruction of the environment has continued unabatedly and the creeks smell of the filth continuous oil spillage. The chairman, *Hon. Ochonkeya* in this same scene dialogues with his long time friend and partner saying:

Chairman: I saw oil the spillage incident a grand opportunity to get back at the multinational oil companies. When the event occurred, I got a fiery lawyer that has been at the vanguard of environmental issues to institute a legal action against the oil companies. When they perceived the legal consequences and the attendant damages they resolved to invite me, as the plaintiff, for alternative dispute resolution.

Jango: Choi!! Na lie – o – o, how the mata come take disappear nah?

Chairman: Through my lawyer, of course. We agreed that they pay three hundred million naira (Mbajiorgu 11).

This situation chronicles the hypocrisy and approach to the agitations and so-called environmental activism that has been the lot of the Niger Delta for many years, the level of damage done to the eco-system in this region ends up in compensations that are largely unaccounted for and absolutely nothing is done to commit the oil companies to clean the filth and make it safe once more for human habitation.

The impact of climate change on agriculture is another matter of topicality in the play. *Dimkpa*, one of the farmers in the play draws attention to the deteriorating farms saying: “Go there and see for yourself. My farmland is dry and barren, with nothing at all to justify all my efforts during the

planting season” (Mbajirogu 16). We also see in the play that the reality of a changing climate especially in Nigeria calls for an urgent response in the area of education and empowerment. There is a great need to educate the masses and rural dwellers whose mainstay is farming on the new strategies of combating or adapting to the effect of global warming. *Ugodiya*, another farmer responded to *Dimkpa*’s dilemma blaming him for his loss saying:

You have nobody to blame but yourself. We had series of meetings with the Professor on what species of seed yam to plant and how to plant in this difficult time of change in climate. We were also introduced to different crop varieties and animal species (Mbajirogu 16).

This clearly shows that climate adaptation remains one of the remedies for Africa and Nigeria in particular. When people cannot change the reality of a warming planet, they have to adapt and the mode of adaptation remains the greatest challenge in a continent where literacy and access to information remains elusive.

Today we are seeing the effects of industrialized driven economy sparked off by the age of modernity. Emission of a greenhouse gases, deforestation, and loss of natural landscape and subsequent extinction of the life-world are just a few incidences that stare all in the face. The intellectual discourse between the *Professor* and *Desmond* in Act two, Scene two reveals a dimension to this trend that has become a reality in modern day Nigeria. Here we see in vivid pictures that the pursuit of modernity has further aggravated humanity’s crisis with the environment. The impact of climate change and its causative factors are staring all in the face even in the rural areas of Nigeria. *Desmond* blames it on the quest for so-called development fuelled by Western-styled civilization and modernity saying: “That’s why we are discharging all kinds of poisonous substances into the atmosphere in the name of industrialization and modern technological supra-efficient machines” (Mbajirogu 37).

The play also brings to light the causes and effects of climate change. Act two, Scene three sees *Professor Aladinma* using his *Green theatre troupe* to narrate the story of climate change. With his cast working in his studio, they use various dramatic techniques as a tool for raising the consciousness of the local farmers on the possible causes of climate change and the resultant effect of this crisis on human habitation. The scene of the rehearsal shows the current reality of global warming and

where the world stands today. *Obioma, Adaora, Ekene* and *Nweke* – all part of the cast engage in this dialogue:

Obioma: What have you done? Bio diversity minimization and emission of harmful and dangerous substances into the atmosphere and you know the adverse effects?

Adaora, Ekene & Nweke: We don't.

Obioma: They are numerous, where do I even start, (counting with her fingers as she lists them). Increase in global atmospheric temperature, melting of polar ice, rising sea temperatures, sea level rise, appearance of radiation-related concerns, change in the pattern of precipitation, change in agricultural yield, proliferation of a thousand other diseases and health problems..(Mbajiorgu 39).

This shows that the eco-crisis as it is today is the making of changing climate. This eco-catastrophe is felt in every part of the globe and more so on African shores. Nigeria's response to these ecological challenges over the years has been that of silencing the voices that dare to speak out either by military might or by monetary inducement in the name of paying compensations. *Nweke* reminds us in this same scene that the nation has not responded with the right antidote to arrest this situation. She states:

Look at those men carrying heavy weapons. Look at them, all around us, murdering our heroes for daring to stop the spillage of oil and flaring of gas. And there is the mighty rig, the monstrous equipment that rapes and pollutes our waters. (*Stares in the distance*). What am I seeing? (*Pause*). What are they doing? (*Runs to the imaginary scene*).

Hei! Stop! Leave those little boys alone, they are too young, too young to handle that heavy military equipment. Take your fetish amulets off their necks! Can't go find something better to do than turning this whole land into corpses and coffins? All you know is how to shoot and maim (Mbajiorgu 40).

The Ken Saro Wiwa saga and how they were summarily executed by the than military junta comes to mind as one ponders on the scene above. The resultant militancy that grew soon afterwards, the merchants of death armed by oil thieves ferrying off stolen oil overseas is also captured by *Nweke's* statement. We also see the effects of hunger precipitated by poisoned sea life. *Nweke* further illustrates this saying: "Here in Ndoli, our source of living has gone forever, our fishermen have exhausted what is

left of our sacred waters, carting home tender fingerlings that hold the secret of future harvest” (Mbajiorgu 41).

This explains the current spate of importation of sea life. Nigeria’s waters lie empty due to prolonged and desperate quest to harvest whatever is left from a once rich and abundant sea life. Fishermen now grovel through the filth of the waters in search of fish that no longer exist. Even the famous preserved and conserved waters that once served as an international tourist destination such as the Argungu Fishing Festival has gone with the winds because the giant fishes that were the attraction of this festival can no longer be found.

The ineptitude, nonchalance and indifference of nation’s political leadership to the reality of climate change is another subject matter in the play. In Act three, Scene three, *Professor Aladinma* captures this message in this dialogue with Desmond saying:

Look, Desmond, this country is asleep. Great leaders in other parts of the world are busy, embracing serious ideas like how to produce alternative energy sources that will replace fossil fuel. Here, our leaders are busy sharing oil wells and buying fuel tankers (Mbajiorgu 50).

Desmond’s response to this statement brings to light another dimension to the eco-discourse by exposing the nation’s lack of will to adapt to the realities of climate change. He states thus:

It is despeakable, most of the cities in this country are stuffed with hotels, filling stations, shopping malls, exotic mansions, and no breathing space at all; no trees, no flowers, no parks, no forest reserves and no pedestrian walk ways. In every corner, you will find one structure or another without adequate waste disposal system, unfriendly buildings facing and suffocating one another. Yet more people are procuring cement and moulding blocks in these already congested cities (Mbajiorgu 50).

A look at our cities today reflects this reality. The slums are swelling daily as more people migrate from the hinterlands in search of a better life. As the cities grow in population, nearly non-existent infrastructure is over stretched and this also impacts greatly on the environment.

The Conflict of Greed and Eco-degradation in Dandaura's *Venom for Venom*

In another vein, Dandaura's *Venom for Venom* leads the eco-discourse further by exposing the impact of western styled companies to the degradation of the Nigerian environment. The play tackles the hypocrisy in the so-called development efforts of the West on Nigerian soil. *Kevwe*, one of the elders in the play questions this hypocrisy and flagrant deceit of these companies saying: "we believed the company which deceived us that they would turn our community into paradise overnight." (9). *Briggs*, another elder added that, "instead of development, our land has been pillaged by the company. Our rivers are no longer productive." (9).

Dandaura's *Venom for Venom* presents the subject of greed as the driving force behind all forms of environmental degradation and exploitation especially in the Niger Delta. The play explores the motivation behind the militancy and the violent approach to the eco-struggles of the region in recent years. The play opens with two central characters – *Ogenero* and *Tega* who represent different ideological divides in eco-activism. *Ogenero* is a selfish insurgent who cashes in on prevailing exploitation in his community to milk the resources of the elites and that of the multinationals through kidnappings, hostage taking and robbery. *Tega* on the other hand, decamps from *Ogenero*'s group to lead a non-violent campaign aimed at educating the people to reject the continued plundering and devastation of the environment. This he achieves by mobilizing the people through the power of art (drama).

The play further portrays the consequences of violent militancy as represented by *Ogenero* who in the end failed tragically while *Tega*'s group and their approach brought about a revolution in the hitherto restless community. The play ends with the people embracing peace and getting the needed result they deserve as everyone comes to a realization that violence is not the best antidote for achieving peace and development.

In scene two, we see the real agenda that gave impetus to the resurgence of militancy in the Niger Delta. *Ogenero*, leader of the militants in the play addresses his comrades-in-arms saying:

My brothers, they call us terrorists, but you and I know that we are not terrorists. The real terrorists are the foreign companies that have connived with our brothers uphill to exploit us. They destroyed our land, polluted our environment. Even the water, our people's means of livelihood has been muddled up and poisoned (Dandaura 13).

No insurgency erupts without a cause. The insurgency in the Niger Delta was primarily angst by the growing deprivation, exploitation of oil wealth and subsequent alienation of the people from nature's good. The growing poverty index and the mass population of unemployed youths provided a ready and willing army for a violent and deadly campaign that further exacerbated the conflict in the region. In all, the environment is further left battered and bruised by the simmering rivers fuelled by leaking oil from blown-up pipelines. The creeks are left unsafe and impregnable as gun-wielding militants lurk on every side.

Venom for Venom also brings to light the true purpose of eco-activism and the environmental crisis especially in the Niger Delta. The play shows us the two strands of the Niger Delta struggle. *Ogenero* is a violent militant with a selfish bent whose modus operandi has a criminal bent. *Tega* is a non-violent activist, a social crusader with a pro-environmental ideology. The confrontation between these two characters partly explains the dichotomy that pervades the insurgency and the eco-struggles of the Niger Delta. This scenario also explains the rise of criminality within the claims and agitations of the various contending groups. There are those who took to arms to perpetuate mayhem for their selfish gains such as hostage taking, kidnappings, oil theft and vandalism. On the other hand we have those who push for the safety and productivity of the environment in the face of oil exploitation. *Tega* says: "We must not lose focus. Our movement is geared towards total emancipation of our people and the environment, not murder and arson! We must not commit same crimes that have warranted our struggle (16). Just soon after this statement, he got kicked out of *Ogenero*'s camp.

What then is the present state of the Niger Delta that catalyzed these agitations? Scene four of the play provides an answer. At a drinking and relaxation centre owned by *Mama Etteh*, characters simply known as 1st Man and 2nd Man provides a reality that has characterised the entire Niger Delta environment saying:

1st Man: My worry is that our crops have all withered.

There is this strange dust colouring every plant in the farm. Even grasses and trees are gradually dying. I am afraid we may not have any harvest this season if this problem is not addressed soon.

2nd Man: Haven't you noticed the disappearance of fishes from our rivers. The water these days is as coloured as banga soup. At

first, I reasoned that the gods were angry with us, but only this morning, my friend explained that it is oil spillage from the Company's pipes that has polluted the waters (Dandaura 25).

This situation no doubt explains the danger and uncertainty that prevails in oil producing communities. It typifies the reality that the primary source of livelihood of ordinary citizens which is agriculture is severely threatened by the activities associated with oil exploration. What this portends for future generations becomes more worrisome owing to the fact that the Niger Delta still grapples with ecological crisis till date. At the moment, there are no realistic measures to arrest this trend other than just providing amnesty for supposed repentant militants.

In the play, we also see the potency of non-violent resistance. Scene seven shows *Tega* calling on the people to shun violence but yet to courageously lead a struggle that ultimately engages the minds of the people to act for change. He says:

Do not be scared of what the powers that may be will do to us. So long as we succeed in sensitizing the people, the people themselves will decide on how best to liberate themselves. That is my problem with the violent approach; it robs the people of the revolutionary zeal (Dandaura 40).

The eco-pedagogic importance of drama was also captured in this scene. Drama is identified as one effective tool for social change with the potential to galvanize the energies of the people to change what they do not want and bring about what they want. *Tega* also amplifies this saying: "Through such performances, we could teach out people to rediscover their identities and regain confidence in their capabilities, limitations and potentials" (Dandaura 42). This clearly indicates that drama indeed serves educational functions that reinvent the innate abilities of the people to transform their societies especially their environment. This scene also provides us with a self-reflective dimension to change which eco-pedagogy brings in the discourse with forces that militate against the environment. The ideology of change according to the play should and must be seen to begin with the people and the war against these alien forces must be targeted at the conscience. We see this in the resolve of the youths at the end of scene seven who declared thus: "We shall never exploit the people or collaborate with those who exploit the people. Our weapons should pierce the consciences of our oppressors and never their bodies" (Dandaura 44).

Conclusion

The import of these plays shows the multi-faceted dimensions to the main causes of ecological disasters in Africa. There is no doubt that industrial activities largely controlled by multi-nationals have contributed in no small measure to the desecration of the once peaceful, surreal and sublime temperate Nigerian climate. The constant production of unrecyclable waste comes largely from the west and in most cases the Nigerian environment is a dumping ground of some sort.

As the world's eco-system continues to deplete with every passing day, the question remains what role humanity can play to salvage what remains of the global life world. The interconnectedness between nature and culture provides an impetus for arts especially dramatic literature to engage. The reality of climate change dawns on Africa with its attendant consequences, drama can indeed mediate and act as a catalyst not just for change but also for healing a dying earth. Dandaura's *Venom for Venom* and Mbajiorgu's *Wake up Everyone* as presented in this paper is indicative of the potency of drama in creating the needed advocacy for a safe and cleaner environment.

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