

Ecotopianism in Recent Nigerian Eco-Poetry: The New Threshold in Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey's Eco-Poems

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Abstract

The poetry of environmental excoriation, otherwise known as ecocritical poetry, which has subsisted over the last two decades in Nigeria, appears to be overtaken by a new kind of eco-sensitive writing, but this time by ecotopian poetry. The problem with ecocritical poetry on the one hand is that it draws attention to ecological problems without suggesting solutions to them, leaving the reader with the sense of hopelessness, fear and defeat. Ecotopian poetry, on the other hand, rekindles the hope for environmental reclamation, resuscitation and in fact, redemption. This essay, analytical and prescriptive, explores ecotopianism in recent Nigerian eco-poetry with the aim of demonstrating the new consciousness in eco-sensitive poems. The poems of Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey are examined as they are contained in Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* and Bassey's *I Will Not Dance to Your Beats*. The essay exploits the critical theory of Ecotopianism to interrogate Osundare and Bassey's presentation of their eco-vision on the environment. Equipped with this theoretical insight, the essay concludes that Osundare and Bassey propagate environmental protection, eco-vigilance and eco-activism as positive responses to eco-challenges confronting Nigerians.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Eco-poetry, Ecotopia, Eco-vigilance, Eco-activism and Environment

I. Introduction

Recent environmental poems, written by Nigerians, are beginning to exhibit new consciousness, new ideological direction and new artistic vision. The emergent poetry does not only bemoan the degradation of the environment but also expresses the possibility of redeeming it for posterity. While recognising the destruction done to the ecosystem, the new poems mobilise humanity to wake up to the reality of environmental preservation, the responsibility to keep an eye on the environment and above all, the duty to secure it for the benefit of humanity. Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey are proponents of this brand of eco-writing. Their poems bubble with enthusiasm and hope for environmental redirection, resuscitation and revamp. However, a great deal of studies on Osundare and Bassey's eco-poems approached them from an ecocritical perspective ignoring their ecotopian sensibilities. This has led to inadequate interpretation of their poems especially their thematic and artistic qualities. This essay therefore reads the poems of Osundare and Bassey from the perspective of ecotopianism. The study sets out to investigate the various aspects of ecotopian ideals present in the poems. Also, it examines the responses which the poets propagate through their poetic compositions.

Osundare and Bassey have many poetry collections to their credit. Not many of them are focused on expressing ecotopian ideals. Therefore, this study is restricted to Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* as well as Bassey's *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* because they deal essentially with

ecotopianism. These texts will henceforth be abbreviated as ETE and DTB respectively. The study employs the qualitative method. The poems in each collection are carefully read and studied to understand their ecotopian content. Then the poems are classified into their various categories which helped in dividing the study into their respective sections.

This essay employs ecotopianism to interpret the poems under study. Ecotopianism is derived from ecotopia which is also known as ecological utopia. The study of ecotopia is a recent and pertinent contribution to utopian scholarship. The term was coined by Ernest Callenback in 1975 which was the title of his novel. The concept is a direct contrast to Thomas More's *Utopia*, which stoked the desire and pursuit for material wealth across Europe and America. Ecotopia on its own recognizes the danger that success and material prosperity wreaks on the environment and its consequent threat to humanity. Thus ecotopia is concerned with examining the ecological issues that underpin a literary text advocating alternative responses and vision in order to combat environmental degradation, and mitigate the consequences of climate change.

Lyman Tower Sargent (2009:280) argues that Callenback's novel *Ecotopia* reveals the essential ingredients of ecotopian theory thus:

The principles behind Callenback's description and the rest of the utopia he presents in Ecotopia include closeness to nature, illustrated by the plants inside the train; knowledge of the natural world, as shown by the passengers' ability to name the plants; and recycling.

At the heart of the theory as Sergent has identified is the centrality of nature and the need for increasing awareness about the environment in order to bring humanity to a closer relationship with the natural world. The purpose of this closeness is to establish as well as engender compassion for the environment such that humanity becomes the preserver of nature itself.

According to Chang Hui-Chuan (2005:251), ecotopia is a sub-genre of utopia which queries the “corporate and technological exploitation of nature and the ensuing environmental degradation and extinction of species”. One of the remarkable qualities of this theory is its critical orientation. The study interrogates the unabated quest for wealth at the expense of nature which often results in environmental degradation and the consequent destruction of both the flora and fauna organisms. Additionally, Hui-Chuan remarks that ecotopianism is concerned with articulating “an alternative vision the interconnectedness among humans and nature and the need to maintain the balance between economic pursuit and ecological concerns”. Therefore, ecotopia expresses the interplay of “literature” and “ecology” and that the aim of literature is to convey ecological issues for the purpose of offering solutions to them. Literature thus sets a watch over ecology for the benefit of humanity.

David Pepper (2007:18) considers ecotopianism to be “the utopia of radical environmentalism” such that the literature envisions “biologically egalitarian society” as well as promoting “harmony with nature”. This situation propels the urge to fight in protection of the environment because it is perceived as the home of humanity.

Gerry Canavan and Robinson Kin Stanley (2014:32) write that ecotopia endorses the idea of “ecological economics,” or “sustainable economics” and adopts several measures to reduce the harm done to the environment under capitalism. The major interest of ecotopian studies is “the aspiration to live in balance with nature and treat the earth as a mother”. This vision presupposes the need to protect the environment from harmful activities. Vital to this is the revival of hope in the safety and welfare of the earth. The view is anchored on the belief that the earth can be sustained or better managed to serve humanity well.

Osundare’s poetry has attracted several critical remarks but this study is restricted to comments relating specifically to *The Eye of the Earth*. Emmanuel Ngara (1990:177-178) comments that the collection “celebrates the richness and preciousness of our planet” and accuses profit-hungry money makers” of destroying the earth aided by less sensitive political leadership. Ngara (1990:180) considers this collection as “virtually unravalled in African poetry”. Ngara’s assessment of Osundare’s poems is agreeable to this researcher. One needs to quickly point out that Ngara’s critique of Osundare’s collection clearly avoids the ecotopian vision of the poet. Ademola Omobewaji Dasylva (1998:73) describes the collection thus:

His complete intellectual grasp of the historical and socio-economic reality of his society in relation to the African past (The Eye of the Earth) combined with his awareness that intellect, poetry and commitment, though different, are related, help to establish the uniqueness of his poetry.

Dasyuva's view is agreeable to this critic and ecological devastation apart from being a global concern is equally a national threat. Dasyuva may not have addressed the ecotopian interest of Osundare but his understanding of Osundare's poetic consciousness is commendable. Thus one has to pay critical attention to this new view as a way of drawing attention to the new intellectual direction in ecological studies.

Gamal Muhammed A. Elgezeery (2013:72) examines Osundare's preoccupation with memory and homecoming and writes:

Osundare does not romanticize the past, as he is aware of its elusiveness, and he is conscious that the sea of memories may turn out to be a flood that may drown the present and the future altogether. He only enlivens these memories as a bridge that moves him to a better future.

In Elgezeery's opinion, Osundare employs memory as an instrument through which the past and the present can be harnessed to reach the future. Thus Osundare employs the environment as poetic idioms in projecting a better landscape. This position seems to hint at ecotopian vision but it is not given sufficient elucidation. This has necessitated the need to do a comprehensive study of ecotopianism in Osundare's poetry.

Udemedu Nwagbara (2012:67) examines the earth in the balance and commodification of the environment. The critic laments the ruin done to the environment as he canvasses the need for eco-balance by suggesting a "return to a pristine environment that has been rendered comatose in the wake of capitalist activities". The quest for

money has led oil companies to pursue their economic interest without the least concern for the welfare of host communities. It seems therefore that Nwagbara's interest is not with ecotopian sensibility of the poet.

Imilarly, Emmanuel Ngumoha (2011:132) examines the poet as rainmaker revealing fertility and pluvial aesthetics in Osundare's poetry. Ngumoha through the poems call major stakeholders of the society to pool resources in order to restore "the earth to its natural responsiveness". What this means is that the earth is not worthless. The critic notes that the earth has a self-replenishing ability. There is the call by the critic to make the earth conserve its energy and grow by itself. Also, like other critics, there is no sustained study of the ecotopian interest. Hence, there is need to discuss Osundare's ecotopian sensibilities. Echoing Ngumoha's similar position, Charles Bodunde (1997:93) writes that Osundare possesses "vision of the restoration of lost unity with earth". The theme of redemption is felt throughout his poems. As it seems, we have contemplated the rationale for such a restoration. It is clear enough that we need to protect the environment from ruin.

Nnimmo Bassey's poetry has received some critical attention. Here are few of them. Philip Aghoghovwia (2013:113) examines poetry and activism as new modes of eco/environmental inflections in Bassey's poems. Aghoghovwia comments thus:

Bassey walks through a thin line between poetic commitment and socio-environmental activism in bringing into the public sphere issues of socio-cultural and environmental justice. The poetry collection carries the tone of subversion and

defiance and the mood of anger provoked by a deep sense of denial, a collective deprivation of the people from access to the commonwealth which the oil brings.

The poetry of Bassey provides sufficient background to ecocritical reasoning and it has influenced the need to pay heed to some of the issues that he presents. In the words of Aghoghovwia, Bassey is angered by the disregard to the environment. His poetry shows that he is committed to reversing the trend. While looking at the eco-issues, we are drawn into the vortex of socio-economic deprivations that the Niger Delta indigenes are subjected. Although one is impressed by the critic's range of understanding of Bassey's poetry and of course, the depth of ecological challenges, he however fails to recognize the ecotopian dynamism in the poems. This situation has opened up a gap which this study proposes to fill.

Another critic, Patrick B. Naaghton (2009:16) examines Bassey's poetry from the perspective of the poet on the run. This position is not unconnected to his anti-government posture which drove him into exile. Thus the critic writes concerning Bassey's poems:

his other two collections, we thought it was oil but it was blood (37 poems) and I will not dance to your beat (33 poems) are largely "environmental poems", in them, the poet protests against the brazen destruction of the environment in the name of oil and gas extraction in the Niger Delta of Nigeria and other places.

Naagbanton understands the vagaries of ecocritical impulse in Bassey's poems. The critic shows the protest style of the poet but fails to address the pervading sense of ecotopianism in the poems examined.

Obari Gomba (2016:141) examines minority rights and resource-conflict in the poetry of Ibiwari Ikiriko, Nnimmo Bassey and Ogaga Ifowodo. Gomba shows the relationship between the poet and his inclinations and ideology:

Bassey is a seasoned environmental activist of global standing and his activism has rubbed off on the poems in this collection although his concern is quite broad, some of the poems are addressed specifically to the Niger Delta situation.

What can be inferred from Gomba's statement is that Bassey is unable to hide his activist inclination in his poems. Also Bassey's poems are suffused with protest or activism. In the context of the essay, the poems are concerned with the Niger Delta predicament specifically environmental degradation. Like Aghoghovwia and Naagbanton, his essay is not concerned with ecotopian dynamism.

Finally, Joyce Onoromhenre Agofure (2016:94) looks at modern Nigerian poetry and the environment paying critical attention to the poems of Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and Nnimmo Bassey. On Bassy's poetry, Agofure remarks: "The poet's critical lens focuses on ecological degradation of Nigeria's landscape and the role of multinational corporations in it". The theme of environmental degradation is the focus of Bassey's poetry. This is done with a view to suggesting ways out of the

predicament. This explains why ecotopian streak appears to run through the poems. However, Agofure is not interested in it. A thorough reading will reveal the dominance of ecotopianism in the poems.

The above critics have examined the various aspects of the two poet's poetry. As deeply entrenched as the subject of ecotopianism is in their poems one is surprised that these critics have not given attention to the issue. Therefore, this study is undertaken to fill this gap. The present study demonstrates that Osundare and Bassey propagate environmental protection, eco-vigilance and eco activism as vital aspects of ecotopianism.

II. Environmental Protection

Nnimmo Bassey considers environmental ethics from the ecotopian perspective. The poet challenges unethical practices which stretch the environment beyond human benefit. In "I will not dance to your beat", Bassey demonstrates the love for the eco-world and expresses his intention to combat environmental destroyers:

*I will not dance to your beat
If you will call plantations forests
I will not sing with you
If you privatise my water
I will confront you with my fists
If climate change means death to me but business
To you. (DTB, 11)*

The speaker's defiant tone reveals the critical posture of the poem. There is the readiness to engage in combat with despoilers of nature's resources as well as profiteers from environmental abuse. For example, the speaker reproves those who treat "plantations" as mere

“forests” to be destroyed. Also, the speaker intends to fight those who turn “water” meant for everyone to private property. Finally, the greed of man is exposed when the persona challenges those who make money from “climate change” and ignore the threat it poses to human lives.

The poet indirectly calls for the protection of mineral resources from massive degradation when the persona remarks thus: “I will expose your greed/If you don’t leave crude oil in the soil/Coal in the hole and tar sands in the land/I will confront and denounce you/If you insist on carbon offsetting and other/do-nothing false solutions” (11). The speaker considers it greedy for humanity to exploit “crude oil”, “coal” and “tar-sands”. There is the intolerable attitude to “carbon offsetting” which has taken a national proportion. Many of the “solutions” which have already been proffered lack tangible substance. This situation justifies the use of the expression “do-nothing false/solutions”. The underlying meaning is that no solution is better than environmental conservation. The speaker of this poem is an advocate of environmental protection:

*If you endorse genetically modified crops
And threw dust into the skies to mask the sun
I will not dance to your beat
Unless we walk the sustainable path
And accept real solutions and respect Mother
Earth
Unless you do
I will not and
We will not dance to your beat. (11)*

In the above stanza, two environmental challenges are articulated. Firstly, the speaker condemns the

approval of “genetically modified crops”. These crops end up poisoning the environment (human and physical). Secondly, environmental pollution remains a threat to the environment. The poet ends the poem on a note of warning. The poet encourages the people to strive towards sustainable development. There is the call on all to “respect Mother Earth” and hence, propel the society towards social change in the environment.

In another poem entitled “Do watchmen sleep?” Bassey presents the poet as a watchman of the earth. This image is sustained through the use of rhetorical question. The poet frames his statements, ideas and opinions in the mode of questions giving the impression that the poet is merely asking instead of actually declaring or stating his position. Here is a typical example: “Watchmen on watchtowers, do you sleep?/When the tale bearers come do you/spot their steps and read their runs?/When the dams crack do you announce the deluge?/What do you watch, the retreating moon/or the rising sun?” (DTB, 19)

The tone of cynicism is subtly deployed to articulate the need for the poet to be alive to his responsibility as guardian of the environment. According to the speaker, it is the responsibility of the poet as watchman to “announce the deluge” each time “the dams crack”. The aim is to warn humanity of the on-coming danger or threat when they notice any change in the environment. In a mock tone, the poet jolts the watchman out of his reticence remarking that his job is not to “watch” the “retreating moon” nor the “rising sun”. His duty is to be the steward of the earth.

The speaker adds: “Watchman, what is your time?/Watchman, what is your task?/To uncover the

climate criminal/Or to cover the polluting goon?" (19) This poem is sustained by rhetorical question which enables the poet to reveal certain truth about the role of the poet in society. Bassey declares that the time has come for the poet not just to "see" the threat to the environment but to "say" what he has seen in order to protect humanity and the environment from ruin. As part of his responsibility, the poet must "uncover" those who constitute themselves into "climate criminals" as well as those who work to pollute the environment. All such individuals must be exposed as a necessary step towards environmental protection. Finally, the poet must:

*Arise
Sound the alarm
Or would you rather
Do you climb down and sleep
Or will you remain of your watch, watchman? (19)*

There is a strident call on poets and other environmental enthusiasts to "Arise". This wakeup call involves reminding environmentalists to "sound the alarm" when the environment is under threat as a way of preserving the earth and its occupants. Thus Bassey calls on the poets, environmental campaigners and lovers of the environment to "remain" at their "watch" and ensure that they help keep the environment safe.

Niyi Osundare in "Ours to Plough, Not to Plunder" expresses the need for environmental protection. The poem opens with a tone of certainty that the earth is humanity's property which calls for prudent management: "The earth is ours to plough and plant/the hoe is her barber/the dibble her dimple" (ETE, 48). Two words "plough" and "plant" are important to the discussion of protection. To protect, according to the Oxford Advanced

Learner's Dictionary, is "to make sure that somebody or something is not harmed, injured, damaged etc" (1179). This is the point being made through these words. The sense of "plough" presupposes the opening of the ground either by digging or by hitting the soil to open. It also refers to the process of preparing the land for use. The word "plant" draws attention to farming. In simple words, the "earth" is to be farmed. One way this can be done is to clear the grasses. Thus the expression: "The hoe is her barber" is a metaphorical construction which enhances the point of clearance. The "dibble" is compared to "dimple". The earth is personified here. The "dibble" is the instrument to dig the earth. In the speaker's opinion, the holes made on the earth's surface is compared to the dimple on human faces. This is brilliantly captured and it attests to the poet's rich poetic evocation and artistry. The beauty of the above stanza rests with the poet's presentation of the earth as a human being which makes it an object to be protected against destroyers. Soil cultivation offers protection to the earth. The poet reinforces the above point in the stanza below:

*Our earth is an unopened grainhouse,
A bustling barn in some far, uncharted jungle
A distant gem in a rough unhappy dust
This earth is
ours to work not to waste
ours to man not to maim
This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder. (49)*

The poet presents the earth as a treasure worthy of protection. The phrase "unopened grainhouses" captures the sense of abundance. It is a "house" full of grains, in fact, it is a "barn" growing with abundance. It is thus an "uncharted" or untrodded "jungle" but full with gems.

Given this picture, the poet calls on humanity to “work” the earth and not “waste” its abundant natural resources. It requires us to “man”, that is, manage the resources of the earth for the benefit of humanity. This explains why the poet concludes that the earth is ours to “plough”, not to “plunder”. It seems Osundare’s poem is preoccupied with the propagation of ecological or environmental protection. The ecotopian imagination of the poet is perceived in the affirmation of the need for humanity to preserve the environment from degradation. This is the crux of the ecotopian poetry. By ecotopian visionary impetus the poet envisions the possibility of the environment being rescued from destruction.

Also in the poem, “Our Earth will Not Die”, Osundare expresses the ecotopian optimism that the earth will not be destroyed. In other words, it expresses the possibility of the earth being protected from ruin. Running through this poem is the certainty that the earth will not die. The poem opens with threat to the environment but uses a refrain to assure humanity of the earth’s protection:

*Lynched the lakes
Slaughtered the seas
Mauled the mountains
But our earth will not die. (ETE, 50)*

The stanza above is replete with images of violence which can only be experienced by humanity. By ascribing to the natural environment these human suffering, the poet has personified the earth. The verbs “lynched, slaughtered” and “Mauled” suggest threat to the environment. We see the excerpt “the lakes”, “the seas” and “the mountains” which represent the environment being exposed to destruction. Despite these ecological

threats, the persona is upbeat that the “earth will not die”. This utopian perception about the environment is borne out of the belief in environmental preservation.

In the next stanza, Osundare recounts the various ways human activities pose serious threat to the environment:

*Here There Everywhere
a lake is killed by the arsenic urine
from the bladder of profit factories
a poisoned stream staggers down the hills
coughing chaos in the sickly sea
the wailing whale, belly up like a frying fish,
crests the chilling swansong of parting waters. (50)*

The image of a poisonous chemical is used to show the danger human activities pose to the environment. The “arsenic urine” is deliberately used to implicate humanity particularly those who own “profit factories” from where the arsenic chemicals come. This point suggests the poet’s position that the environment should be protected from chemical poisoning or industrial pollution.

The poet also exposes the devastation of the environment from particularly the pollution of the aquatic life and resources. Although the stanza appears to present the ruin of the environment, it is however suggesting the need for humanity to preserve the environment from arsenic chemical poison. This is underscored by the refrain: “But our earth will not die” (50). This line crystallizes the whole message which brings us to the ecotopian nature of the poem. As already established, the ecotopian poem bubbles with excitement and makes the point that no matter what threat the earth is facing, it

cannot be destroyed. This ecotopian vision is what flows through this poem. Osundare concludes the poem with ecotopian sensibility:

*Our earth will see again
eyes washed by a new rain
the westering sun will rise again
resplendent like a new coin. (51)*

The image of resurgence surges through the above stanza and sustains the entire ecotopian ideology. The language of this poem exudes with certainty, possibility and futurity which are the hallmarks of ecotopianism. Apart from this, there is the images of newness and freshness which suffuse the stanza and convince the reader that environmental preservation is possible. Still revealing the ecotopian sensibility, the poet writes:

*The wind, unwound, will play its tune
trees twittering, grasses dancing;
hillsides will rock with blooming harvests
the plains batting their eyes of grass and grace.
(51)*

The image of bloom, vitality and growth reveals the poet's ecotopian imagination. The "wind" is presented as a kind of energy that will unleash on the earth the power to produce growth. Therefore, the trees are presented as dancing to the music of nature. There is also the hint at the possibility of "blooming harvest" which is associated with the wind. The interdependence of language and ideas is an overt concern of Osundare's poem. This is demonstrated through this poem which essentially is built on ecotopianism.

III. Eco-Vigilance

This section deals with the need for humanity to be awake and sensitive to the changes going on in the environment as one of the ways of ending threats to the environment. In Bassey's "Watchful in the box", the speaker raises some ecological questions as a method of making sensitive statements:

*Watch night!
Where on earth were you
When bulls dozed our forests?
Where in the sky were you
When men gassed and flared our skies? (DTB, 17)*

The main point which the poet wishes to make in the above excerpt is that we all should be watchers of our environment. This point is sustained through the plethora of images relating to watching or carelessness of watchers. There is emphasis carefully encoded in the stanza to express the need for eco-vigilance. Thus friends of the earth are the "watch night". The poet seems to reveal his displeasure at the spate of deforestation. This fact is conveyed through rhetorical question. The poet appears disappointed that watchers of the environment in their negligence of duty allow deforestation. By doing nothing to stop it, they have unwittingly permitted deforesters to deprive the environment of its natural trees. Also condemned is the persistent flaring of gases into the atmosphere. Bassey queries humanity for condoning this environmental despoliation. The lexical choices employed in this poem assume a frightening proportion to express an equally frightening devastation. The mere thought that "men" actually and deliberately "gassed" and of course "flared our skies" presents the need for eco-vigilance in order to prevent ecological destruction.

In another poem, Bassey takes our attention to the need to be watchful of what we eat as genetically engineered and modified food products have flooded the market. This point is made thus:

*Mountains of food
Oceans of hunger
We stand on mountains of food
Yet food aid is forced on us
GE corn... GE soya and what have you
Many more still undergoing tests...
Where did you see such milk of wickedness? (DTB,
28)*

This poem dwells on the paradox that faces Africans where there are mountains of food but the people swim in ocean of hunger. Africa is home of agriculture, yet she is the highest receiver of food aid. According to the speaker, “food aid is forced on us”. The word “forced” suggests that Africa is the dumping ground for all deadly food products manufactured in western countries. Also the fact that “GE corn”, that is Genetically Engineered corn and soya are still being tested in order to determine their suitability for human consumption shows how dangerous these food products are. Thus what could be seen as milk of human kindness on the part of aid givers is described as “milk of wickedness”. The poet is unhappy at the alarming rate these food products are being sent to Africa to destroy humanity. By presenting this issue, Bassey seems to be sensitizing the people to be ecologically vigilant to the subtlety and wickedness of food aid givers from the west.

In what seems like the testament and thesis of the poem, the poet captures his poetic thought this way:

*Mountains of food
Oceans of hunger
The secret is out!
The farmers are awake!
Consumers arise!
Vigilance is the word...
Grab your night vision goggles
Surveillance is the key. (DTB, 29)*

This stanza captures the tenet of ecotopianism quite effectively. Ecotopian poetry canvasses the need for watchfulness, vigilance and surveillance in order to keep violators of the earth in abeyance. The farmers are now said to be “awake” which means they have now resorted to farming in the natural way. Thus they have put science and technology, genetics and biotechnology aside. For this reason, the poet calls on “consumers” to “arise” and be eco-vigilant. They must be careful of what they eat. For this reason, “vigilance” is said to be “the word” that must regulate the behaviour of both farmers and consumers. Beyond vigilance, the poet also recommends surveillance in order to monitor and keep watch over the environment.

Bassey ends this poem on a note of mobilization: “Mountains of food... Oceans of hunger/Brave people... proud liberators/We populate the earth/Farmers, consumers, helpers, environmental warriors/Inspired by the land... we raise our fists/And sound the alarm/Never again shall we be taken for a ride!” (30) This stanza is a direct call on the stakeholders to be alive to their responsibilities. They are invited to summon the courage to liberate the earth of ecological polluters. They are invited to be prepared to fight to end threats to the environment. There is the call on the people never to allow themselves to be “taken for a ride”.

IV. Eco-Activism

In strict ecotopian sense, eco-activism is crucial in the fight to rescue the environment from destruction. Ecotopian poets call on eco-activists to get together and fight to project the cause of the environment. This is the point which Bassey seems to be making in the poem, “I will take issues with you”. The speaker in this poem is ready to fight promoters of artificial products which harm the environment: “I will take issues with you/Unless we walk the same path/I will take issues with you/If you step on my trees/I will take issues with you/If you gulp up my water (DTB, 44). The poet-persona expresses the desire to combat enemies of the environment. The “trees” represents the ecological world for the poet and he is ready to take issues with those who will “step” on them (the trees).

Also, he wants to fight those who will “gulp” the water. Both trees and water represent the ecological environment that the poets want to protect from ruin. “I will take issues with you/If climate change makes you smile/I will take issues with you/If you can’t stop drilling for oil/If you call dirty development mechanisms clean/I will take issues with you” (44). Bassey turns to the need to employ poetry as weapon for combating climate change. He wants the reader to know that the fight to sensitize the people to the reality of climate change cannot be taken lightly. This is why the speaker’s anger is targeted at those who sneer at efforts to conscientise people about climate change. Similarly, the reliance on fossil fuels draws the ire of the speaker who condemns oil explorers and exploiters. There is also the anger against those who call “dirty development mechanisms clean”. What this means is that whatever developmental efforts that “pollute” the

environment cannot be accepted. This is what the line above means. Therefore, eco-activists are angry with those who spoil the environment:

*I will take issues with you
If you burn up my sky
I will take issues with you
If you pile up ecological debt. (44)*

Eco-activists frown at activities which pile up gases, smoke and heat in the sky. These activities constitute serious danger to the environment. The poet believes that people should desist from destroying the environment by changing their attitude to it. All such actions constitute serious problems to the environment. The issue of “ecological debt” entails actions that deplete the natural environment. The tragedy of such a “debt” is that lives are at risk of destruction. Finally, the poet ends the poem on the note of caution:

*I will take issues with you
If you endorse genetically modified crops
I will take issues with you
Unless we walk the sustainable path
... Together. (44)*

Artificial food is a threat to lives that is why the poet rejects “genetically modified crops”. He is of the view that these crops are injurious to humanity. Humanity cannot sustain eco-cidal practices for long. Hence, the poet calls on everyone to “walk the sustainable path/... Together”. By this, we will be contributing to ecological development.

This position is taken up by Bassey in another poem entitled, “Bio... safe ... tea?” The title of this poem reveals

the poet's rejection of anything biologically enhanced. This poem is a call on everyone to get involved in the fight against eco-cidal manifestations: "We will not give up/We will not despair/A people united can never be defeated." (45) One important quality required in fighting against despoilers of the environment is unity of purpose. The people are summoned to fight against "despair". There is no need giving up the fight. There is the ring of certainty that permeates this poem. It demonstrates the ecotopian nature in which the poet shows enthusiasm and confidence at the possibility of overcoming eco-challenges.

The poet sounds a cautionary note when he writes: "Biosafety frameworks/could be fragile/... watch your steps!!/Trends, threats, opportunities/Disrespected protocols... precautions discarded" (45). A good reason to engage in eco-activism is provided in above stanza. The unreliable nature of bio-centric products occupies the heart of this poem. There is irony in the word "Biosafety". The point is that "Biosafe" agricultural products are in actuality not safe. Thus they are "fragile". The speaker queries governments and industrialists as well as warns them to be careful while emphasising the vagrant disregard to "protocols" and "precautions". These "frameworks" are meant to safeguard the environment from polluters.

The poet remarks that "Biotech presidents" push for the acceptance of their products which "CONTAMINATE" the environment. They spend much money to convince governments to "LEGALISE" their bio-products for them to "COLONISE" our world. The poet advises thus:

Together we must stand

*Together we will win
The fight may be long
but victory is sure. (46)*

The fight against violators of environment will require collective efforts. Hence the persona calls on everyone to stand together. The ecotopian sensibility which undergirds the stand is forcefully expressed in the statement: “but victory is sure”. One must admit here that Bassey strives to integrate his sense of optimism with the message because he is aware of the contribution that each makes to the other. The success of this poem lies in the easy flow of words which he achieves through repetitive word structure:

*We will not give up
We will not despair
Activists united can never be defeated!
Two days gone
A lifetime to go
will you drink poison
just because you're thirsty? (46)*

The eco-activist spirit continues to run through the poem mobilizing the reader to rise in the defence of the eco-world. It calls on all “activists” to be “united” so as to defeat forces wreaking havoc on the environment. The rhetorical question summons the reader to a new awakening in order to posit the unacceptable nature of environmental despoliation. The poem is embellished with the use of parallelism which emphasises the collectivist inclination of the activists represented by the repetition of “we”. Beside this, there is the tone of defiance which upholds the resistance to environmental degradation. This poem thus propagates unity of purpose among eco-

agitators to work together in order to achieve a world free of environmental devastation. The poems studied thus far affirm the belief in a future where the environment will be free from pollution.

IV. Conclusion

The major focus of this study is the reading of Osundare and Bassey's poems from ecotopian perspective. Two important factors influenced this study. First, the researcher was influenced by the urge to expand the frontiers of ecotopian studies. Secondly, it was inspired by the need to examine these poets' poetry from a clearly different angle. All these have opened their poetry to new interpretations which are germane to the study of environmentalism, ecocriticism and ecotopianism. Two main aspects of ecotopianism are examined in this study. The first is based on the need for ecological protection. Ecotopian critics argue that in the future the environment will be a safe place. This safety depends on how we treat it today. Through their poems, the poets canvass the need for the government to make laws and take steps that will improve environmental protection. Bassey for example calls for ecological vigilance and portrays the poet as the steward of the earth. Osundare on his own projects ecological protection by portraying poets as environmental campaigners. It is the responsibility of the poet to mobilize humanity to rise in defence of the environment from total ruin. The poet in his opinion is the "Eye of the Earth" and that to play this role, he must draw attention to alternatives particularly on environmental conservation mechanisms.

Apart from projecting ecological protection, the poets also recommend eco-activism. The two poets call on

humanity to combat those who threaten the earth and the place of man in the safety plan. The poets present eco-activism from the perspective of showing the economic value of the trees and natural resources. They call on man to respond to the issue of climate change. Above all, they frown on oil drilling as they suggest clean energy as the way to go. They reject biologically modified crops and encourage humanity to embrace green revolution and eat natural food. They also call on all environmental activists be united in order to achieve success in this regard. In the opinion of these poets, a world free from carbon debt, climate change and pollution is possible if eco-agitators stand on the same page and keep watch on the environment.

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