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Toward A Postcolonial African Ecopoetics

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Introduction: Toward A Postcolonial African Ecopoetics

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The necessity for a change in attitude towards the environment is globally recognized and accepted especially because “[t]here is virtually no landscape, no ecosystem on this planet that has been untouched by human intervention, by technology and its byproducts” (Arigo, 7-8). Human ways of thinking and interacting with the environment are “inadequate and anachronistic” (Clark, 2010) thereby necessitating what Mike Hulme describes as “more constructive and imaginative engagements” (2009:361) in how “we grapple with the changing relationship between human society and natural environment” (Lidstrom and Garrard, 2014:37). However, purely Western discourses of how to experience, perceive, communicate, represent, interpret, and interact with environmental forces will be problematic in Postcolonial context because societies have different connections with the environment. The society’s environmental beliefs and values as well as the place of the environment in its ontological philosophy significantly determine how the people view and treat nonhuman entities. Anglo-American definitions, methods and approaches to making, appreciating and appropriating place/space whether through creative expression or critical enterprise are bound to be largely different from those of postcolonial societies. In relation to ecocriticism, Simon Estok adeptly argues that “American ecocriticism will differ significantly in its material implications from, say, a Korean or a Canadian ecocriticism” (2009:84). While people and writers think globally of the environmental crisis, the response is often within the background of local cultural signification of the material circumstance and social conceptions. The way an American ecopoet conceives of nature, views nature, interacts with nature, approaches nature and
responds to the calls of nature are without doubt different from
the way an African eco poet does. Although the general tendency
is to adopt the praxis of Western criticism and literary approaches
in the reading of postcolonial text, the environmental crisis is
uniquely important because local/regional activities have global
consequences and so writers/critics must respond in ways that
best reflect their cultural philosophies and individual perceptions
of the environment.

Lynn White (1967) is unequivocally right in her assertion
that “What people do about their ecology depends on what they
think about themselves in relation to things around them” (1205).
Based on White’s assertion: can an American who sees and treats
his dog as his child or family have the same relationship with a
dog as an African who considers his dog to be nothing more than
a hunting partner? Or can an American who sees forest/trees in
the light of flowers, seeds and touristic attractions have the same
relation to a tree as an African who sees in the forest/trees the
spirit of his ancestor or family god? The forest to the American
is an aesthetic function or commercial value, whereas to the
African it is an existential and spiritual life force. The
relationship of the American to the tree is that of awe and
wonderment, whereas that of the African is reverence and
devotion. To the Western mind, “the forest is a place of exercise
and a reserve of building material and paper” whereas to the non-
Western it is “an autonomous sublime landscape” (Peters and
Irwin, 2002: 7). The difference in approach to ecological and
environmental lives results from “beliefs about our nature and
destiny” (White, 1205) as well as our sense of need.

Postcolonial African eco poetics provides insight into
other-than-Western environmental realities by showing how
African writers reconcile their personal/subjective environmental
experiences with ontological ecological philosophies and culture
environment norms as well as a history of environmental
violence in a language that is strange but culturally rich and
dense. Postcolonial African eco poetics extrapolates the
hermeneutics and poetics of the poetry of other cultures (mostly
African/colonial) to show how writers from such cultures use
language and form to create encounters that reveal the historical,
cultural and personal realities which shape individual’s environmental experiences. This ecopoetics uses new Englishes and other regional languages, as well as oral/written poetic forms to account for and preserve unique personal, physical and transcendental experiences with the environment. The question therefore is: how does African writing blend the equivocality of postcolonial poetic imagination and innovation with the critical and radical impulses of ecological thinking to provide a matrix for understanding the environmental crises from the perspective of the African milieu and language?

Insightful studies like Graham Huggan’s and Helen Tiffin’s *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2009) and Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley *Postcolonial Ecologies* (2011) have made veritable attempts at introducing “multiple perspectives” (Durrand, 2002:59) in ecological critical discourses. In relation to ecopoetics, Elaine Savory’s essay articulates a Caribbean ecopoetics through a reading of what she calls “Walcott’s language of plants” (2011:80). In the article, Savory discusses Caribbean ecopoetics from the perspective of aesthetics. She writes about postcolonial ecopoetics as “a reading of literary text not only in relation to ecological themes, but with regards to aesthetic strategies.” (81). Relating her discourse of postcolonial ecopoetics to the poetry of Derek Walcott, Savory notes that her focus will be “to investigate how environmental or ecological consciousness manifests in his [Walcott] aesthetic decisions.” (81). What Savory misses here is the recognition that to the postcolonial poet, the environment is not an “aesthetic decision”; it is part of the poet’s existential worldview, and ontological historicity. The history and destiny of the environment is intricately linked to that of the poet, and so he/she does not have a choice but to think, speak, write, sing, and breathe the environment. The postcolonial ecopoet does not make a decision to write about environment, the environment is already overwhelmingly present in his consciousness and being to the extent that poetic discourses on politics, economics, religion etc. are dense with natural images. To a poet like Walcott, the sea, for example, is indispensable in the understanding of his philosophy of a Caribbean identity.
The Making of Place: Poeticizing the Local(ity)

The etymological explanation of ecopoetics points to one fundamental idea – that it is the poetics of place. Hwa Yol Jung in “Toward the Definition of Ecopoetics” states that ecopoetics is a linguistic combination of ecology and poetics which foregrounds the intertextuality and interdisciplinary that typify ecopoetic discourses as well as the “ecological imperative that in the UNIVERSE everything is connected to everything else” (1983:25). Situating his definition within a “technomorphic civilization”, Jung argues that the ecopoet is a deconstructionist whose intent is to “deregulate the monopoly of established truth and demand transformation” (25). The ecopoet is impassioned with the desire to “uproot the way of the world of men” especially in their relationship with the ecosystem and replace it with “something new” (25). The eco and poesis of ecopoetry suggest the making of a place in terms of spatial location which the poet has inhabited and/or experienced, and of which he/she has sensual images of the textures, sounds, and smells. Lawrence Buell's observation in The Future of Environmental Criticism that the centrality of place in ecopoetics points “toward environmental materiality, toward social perception or construction, and toward individual affect or bond” (2005: 63) is sufficient grounds for clear distinction between Western and Postcolonial ecopoetics. The concept of being and writing in/about a place is of prime importance in ecopoetics as Marcella Durand in “The Ecology of Poetry” opines that

“[e]cological poetry recycles materials, functions with an intense awareness of space, seeks an equality of value between all living and unloving things, explores multiple perspectives as an attempt to subvert the dominant paradigms of mono-perception, consumption and hierarchy, and utilizes powers of concentration to increase lucidity and attain a more transparent, less anthropocentric mode of existence. (2002:59)

Postcolonial ecopoetics must therefore be grounded on the “environmental materiality” of the society as a way of subverting
Postcolonial ecopoetics considers “how the physical elements of a landscape are expressed in text” and “how the invisible or non-physical aspects of experience are expressed for each individual” (Nolan, 2014:89), but it is also grounded on the long history of colonization, victimization and brutalization of the environment by colonialism. Postcolonial ecopoetics is a poetics of resistance as well as a poetics of lamentation. The language might celebrate what was and even what is left of the wreckage of colonial incursions, but it eventually becomes ineluctably confrontational as it ties the historicity of human subjugation to that of environmental violence. It is the poetics of eco-salvation – a deep and personal cry for the need to save the environment from anthropocentrism of neocolonial machinery and the greed of postcolonial leadership.

The Postcolonial ecopoet has the obligation of poetizing the ecological crises within the confines and dictates of the local material circumstance, cultural perceptions and personal relationship to the natural environment. This emphasis on a postcolonial local ecological interpretation contradicts Ursula Heise's globalist thinking and call for a shift in environmental “cultural imagination from a sense of place to a less territorial and more systematic sense of planet” (2008:56). It is plausible to agree that “Understanding global risks as shared environmental realities” (Heise, 123) is important but arguing for a global or planetary approach is grounds for marginalization of postcolonial societies because such global theories and approaches will inevitably come from the West. Postcolonial ecopoetics must view the environment from the standpoint of the cultural philosophy and belief system of the writer’s dwelling place. An example of such is the Cameroonian ecopoet Nol Alembong who sees in every aspect of human life an indivisible union with nature. He interprets human life cycle almost purely through the use of different natural entities and ecological forces. When a child is born basic elements like salt, palm oil, corn flour, palm wine and pepper take on a divine essence in the life of the child, the mother and the forebears. Alembong’s ecopoetics ties these
elements to the life of the individual thereby suggesting that the depletion of such valuable natural resources will adversely affect the life of the community. The postcolonial ecopoet thinks globally but writes locally because the effects of environmental degradation can be understood better in the context of what the poet sees, smells, taste, hears and feels. Ecopoetics is an imaginary response to what the poet perceives as the environmental problem of his particular dwelling place within the global crises situation.

In his seminal study, *The Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate presents the purpose of the book in a manner that draws attention to the specificity of the locale in the experience of nature. He states that it is “about modern western man’s alienation from nature” (2001: ix). Bate recognizes that “western man’s” encounter and interaction with nature cannot be the same with that of non-western men. By emphasizing the region of the earth, Bate avoids the temptation of generalization or of imposing the form of alienation of western men on all men everywhere. In stretching his discourse, Bate makes another statement which is valid and acceptable in most contexts about ecopoetics as “the capacity of the writer to restore us to the earth which is our dwelling place” (ix). However, the restoration takes different forms in different contexts because people in different places experience nature differently.

Using the experience of children in a New Zealand school, Michael Peters (2002) establishes an interesting distinction in the peculiarity of understanding the “relationship between place, poetry and bioregion” (3). He contrasts two distinct localities – the British Lake District of Wordsworth’s poetry and the New Zealand “land and seascape” (3) – and notes that the New Zealand students forced to memorize Wordsworth’s poetry “did not understand his poetry because they did not appreciate the local topography and landscape of the Lake District” (3). The experience of the students brings forth the centrality of situating one’s ecological consciousness or ecopoetic/ecocritical imagination in/within the local reality. Ecopoetics must fundamentally echo the aesthetics of the locality where the poet dwells or has dwelled. Poetry’s function in the
ecological/environmental crises is to orient people’s minds towards positive change of attitude because it is only when attitudes change that policy (or ecopolitics) can be effective. For humanity to “lighten our footprints in a world where all of nature matters vitally”, poetry can “quicken awareness” (Felstiner, 2009: xiii) and it does so better through language experience.

**Filling the “metonymic gap”: The Language Experience**

Another aspect that is indispensable to an ecopoetic endeavor is language. Within an epistemological frame, HwaYol Jung is of the opinion that ecopoetics must use language that is “attuned to the world of people and things” to create what he calls “epistemology of moods between humans and their surroundings” (1983:26). The importance of language to the ecopoet is brought to full focus when one considers Susan McCaslin's (2011) idea that “[t]hough humans have evolved as creatures of language, filtering the world through a human lens of consciousness based on concepts and words has too often frustrated our desire for union with the other-than-human world.” (64). In the context of postcolonial ecopoetics, the question of what language to use, which has been debated by several critics, is not the immediate focus. The challenge which the postcolonial ecopoet faces is not that of choice of language but of how to use the language available to capture or describe the most innate and intimate experiences of the environment. Here, Terry Gifford's (2012) questions provide solid grounds for understanding the relationship between the language of the poet and his ability to adequately represent the place from which and within which he is writing. In discussing the “multi-dimensional ecopoetics of place” from the perspective of “English view of Spanish place”, Gifford poses these questions (amongst others).

which language would be chosen by a speaker to describe their most intimate bioregional experiences of place? Would the use of a language that is not of the place itself alter the speaker’s ability to describe an intimately known place? Would such a description in a different language feel adequate to the speaker to convey the
essentials of a subjective sense of place? (2)
These questions are as valuable to Gifford's Spanish view as they are to the postcolonial ecopoet who is trapped between the language of the place and the language imposed by the colonial master (or masters as is the case of Cameroon which was colonized by the Germans and then by the French and English). In the multilingual space, the postcolonial ecopoet finds him/herself in the creative linguistic dilemma of representing reality in a language that is itself not real to him. However, since Ngugi wa Thiongo’o (1994) believes that “language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner” and that “language was the means of psychological subjugation” (9), language then must be used as a means of liberation. The question of the language to use lies not in the philosophies of critics but in the ability of the writer to most appropriately reveal the innate connection between himself, his community and the environment.

Given that language is embedded with attitudes and significations that are culturally and individually charged with meanings, can the postcolonial ecopoet convey his relationship with the environment without betraying his cultural perceptions and belief? In other words, can postcolonial Cameroonian ecopoet, Nol Alembong, write ecopoetry that is not culturally dense with proverbialized artifacts? The answer is No, and the reason is simple. In his culture, proverbial language is indispensable to the interpretation and understanding of life in general and human relationship with nature in particular. Proverbs to Alembong is what Achebe describes as “the palm oil with which words are eating” (7) - an expression which is itself ecologically conscious. When Matthew Takwi writes about “trees on the match past” or when MacViban Dzekashu engages an ecopoetic elegy in “Rethinking the Land” and connects the fatherland, Promised Land and mourning land/nature are there any cultural significations that express meaning beyond the limits of the simple English phrase? The answer is Yes, and the reason is simple - “match past” and Promised Land/fatherland have cultural and historical implications that are linked to the colonial and postcolonial identity of Cameroon. It is English but the
cultural, historical and political relevance transcend the semantic borders of the phrase.

The language of postcolonial ecopoetry must be densely vested in the environment and should link the experience of the human to that of the environment and the realities of the environment to the experiences of humans because the typical rhythm and imagery of African languages keep the natural - birds, animals, plants and the earth – always present in the human and the human always present in the natural. To fully capture the sensory effects of an environmental encounter, the poetics should be grounded in traditional rhythmic elements of expression. While Tanure Ojaide's poetic language is suitable in speaking about the dangerous excavations created by oil companies in the Delta region of Nigeria, Emmanuel Doh's language is suitable for expressing the worries of Cameroonian who are accustomed to watching truckloads of timber head towards the seaports or who have seen deserts created by unchecked timber exploitation. Both poets come to a similar conjecture when they both talk about helpless animal and birds whose habitats have been invaded either by the oil merchants in Nigeria or timber merchants in Cameroon. These poets experience and encounter the environment and/or environmental crises differently, but tune the language to accommodate the experience from the stands of their immediate communities. While writing in a language that is foreign to the experience, the ecopoet should be able to refresh the language of the colonial master in the context of his personal and cultural expression. The poet should feel comfortable to break away from or disrupt/corrupt the pattern, form and rhythm of colonial languages to more appropriately reveal the environmental experience. The most important aspect for the postcolonial African ecopoet is “search for a language that most accurately conveys the immediate sensations of experience” (Sarah Nolan 18), whether the language is African, foreign or hodgepodge.

The language of postcolonial ecopoetry must draw from Ashcroft’s (2001) idea of “act of engagement” by which he implores postcolonial writers to use the “dominant language” (5), or “world-wide language” (Achebe, 29) or “imperial language”
(Teke 2013:71) to “express the most deeply felt issues of post-colonial social, political, and cultural [as well as environmental] experiences”. Apart from Ashcroft, several critics like Achebe, Narayan and Teke have argued against the use or adoption of colonial languages in their ‘pure’ or standard form. They all agree with Achebe that “[t]he price world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of uses” (29), or with Narayan that “we cannot write like the English. We should not” (53). This is not merely because of the necessity to appropriate the language for reasons of cultural identity but more importantly because of what Teke describes as the “vulnerability of imperial language as transformational tool in a postcolonial transcultural discourse” (71-72). Because ecopoetics is about change or transformation of ideologies and practices that adversely affect the environment, postcolonial ecopoetics cannot rely on a language that is vulnerable. The need to fill the “metonymic gap” (Ashcroft 75) has greater urgency in ecological discourse because, before the intrusion of the forces of empire, all African languages had names for trees, birds, animals, plants, insects and all other environmental entities. As Teke notes, English or other colonial languages “have not eclipsed and may never eclipse African languages” (77) or the names of these environmental lives. In the hands of postcolonial writers, postcolonial languages must resist any such attempt to be eclipsed; they must engage in what Ashcroft (2001) describes as the “refusal to be absorbed…” while at the same time “taking the array of influences exerted by the dominating power, and altering them into tools for expressing a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being” (20) and environmental sensitivity and sensibility.

The Empire and the Environment

Postcolonial ecopoetics is also concerned with the role of the forces of empire and how they concurrently exploited and continue to exploit the people and their environments. As a poetics of empire and environment, postcolonial African ecopoetics sees from one end the colonialist (and neocolonialist/globalist) destroying the environment, and from another end it sees the environment being destroyed by the
colonialist. In this case, postcolonial history is not simply the history of human dominance but equally and importantly the history of ecological destabilization. They are both sides of a scale where one does not outweigh the other. The activities of the empire and its forces affected and still affect both the human and natural resources and just as humans now suffer the effects of environmental deprivation, so does the environment feel the effect of human actions.

Huggan and Tiffin (2009) observe that “Postcolonial studies has come to understand environmental issues not only as central to the project of European conquest and global domination, but also as inherent in the ideologies of imperialism and racism on which those projects historically – and persistently – depend” (6). Apart from Huggan and Tiffin, critics like DeLoughrey and Handley (2011), and Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic (2009) have in different ways argued that oppressive/destructive colonial practices affected both social groups and the natural world. Thus, postcolonial ecopoetics is marked by double resistance as the commodification and exploitation of the postcolonial ecologies was concurrent with the exploitation of the people. It is difficult to separate the exploitation of Africa’s natural resources from the exploitation of its human resources. The mission of colonialism was not to colonize the African people. It was to exploit the raw material to feed the growing industrial needs of the West. The balcanization of Africa was not about the separation of its people into groupings; rather it was about the partitioning of place for equitable and judicious exploitation of the ecological resources. Thus, colonialism was not actually about the African people but about the wanton desire to satisfy the anthropocentric needs of European materialists and industrialists. This involved both the exploitation of the natural and cultural resources of the colonized societies, and the corruption of their ecological systems through the introduction of other species. Huggan and Tiffin observe that in places like South Africa: “settlers arrived with crops, flocks and herd, and cleared land, exterminating local ecosystems, while human, animal and plant specimens taken to Europe from these 'new' worlds were by contrast, few and often inert in form”
In the same vein, DeLoughrey and Handley observe that the movement and/or exchange of plants and animals species across the globe was part of the colonial enterprise that significantly altered the ecosystem of the colonies. They make reference to the works of Richard Grove which investigate such movements and note that

> Our entire planet has been biotically reconfigured due to this long history of what Richard Grove calls ‘green imperialism,’ a process that foregrounds the etymological definition of diaspora as the spreading of seeds, and destabilizes our association of flora and fauna with a natural landscape. (2011:11)

This destabilization was marked by the systematic destruction of vast areas of land, forest and fauna for the introduction of crops and plants which could serve the colonialists’ needs. This explains why some postcolonial ecopoets look back with nostalgia to the ecosystem of their childhood. European farming practices were imposed on the colonized people with total disregard to their cultural attachments and beliefs about land or plants or animals.

Postcolonial ecopoetics is concerned with conquest and how the materialistic philosophies of colonialism altered and continue to alter the ecosphere of colonial societies. One of its trajectories should be to take up the “geographical imperative of postcolonial literature” (DeLoughrey and Handley, 2011:5) by which it must represent the tremor of a landscape/ecosphere subjected by the forces of Empire to the trauma of colonial rape and subjugation and the fever of neocolonial domination and exploitation. The ontological aesthetics of postcolonial ecopoetics must conceive of the environment not merely as a “nonhuman witness to the violent process of colonialism” (DeLoughrey and Handley, 8) but as a victim of the same violent colonial process. After all, the essence of colonialism was founded on the exploitation of the environment. Each element of colonialism - education, religion, development, administration. - had as its fundamental objective the seizure and exploitation of the environment. Colonialism is not simply a history of human
suffering and violence; it is also the history of environmental brutalization and contamination. Neocolonialism, on its part, is not an attempt at controlling postcolonial governments; more importantly it is an attempt to dictate the pace and procedure for the continuous destruction of African natural resources. To heal the land and recover its lost value, postcolonial ecopoetics must not only resist the practical/visible exploitation of the environment but also resist “western views of the environment” which make it difficult for postcolonial societies to fully accomplish “cultural and environmental restitution” (Huggan and Tiffin, 2009:6).

The interrogation of the conspiracy between postcolonial leadership and huge Western conglomerates is another focal point of postcolonial ecopoetics which engages a discourse of how postcolonial administrative structures tele-guided by neocolonial western machinery continue to invade the environment in the guise of sustainable development. It looks through a once lush and flourishing landscape and what it projects is a wasteland - a desert where there once was vegetation, barren fields where there once was forest, sand concavities where there once was rivers. The total disruption of the environment has given rise to what Lawrence Buell (2001) refers to as “gothicized environmental squalor” where “contaminated communities” (42-43) live at the mercy of new forms of natural and toxic disasters. The recklessness of human despoliation has given rise to postcolonial societies where rain is scarce and dust has become part of the people’s existence as Osundare laments in “Let the Earth's Anger be Sooth” (28).

**Transformational Ecopoetics**

While postcolonial ecopoetics provides realms of imagination for the contemplation of destructive Western agencies in postcolonial ecosystems, it also advocates for a transformation of the relationship between humans and the environment. The ecopoet in postcolonial society must of necessity “make important political statements and redirect people’s thinking towards positive change” (Egya, 2007:112) even as he constantly experiences environmental degradation in
the face of much debate and discourse. Such advocacy should have a distinctly postcolonial natural-cultural tone. The aesthetics of postcolonial ecopoetry conceive of the environment not as an Other but as an integral part of the being of every postcolonial human. Thus, the ethics of human existence is interpreted and understood largely through the humanization of non-human species as seen in the poetry of Fru Doh, or through the proverbialisation of the environment evident in poetry of Alembong, or through the celebration of a green past opposed to a barren/desert present as in Osundare's poetry. Social justice, moral integrity and even political ideologies are carefully tied to environmental/natural entities not simply as aesthetic choices but as means of making the non-human always present and important in the life of the human. In this process, postcolonial ecopoetry “preserves the aesthetic function of the literary text while drawing attention to its social and political usefulness, its capacity to set out symbolic guidelines for the material transformation of the world” (Huggan and Tiffin, 14).

The creative imagination of these ecopoets vacillates between remembered worlds and the current world. Remembered is important here because it does not carry the same semantic relevance as imagined. Imagined has the element of literary fictionalization as opposed to remembered which deals with delving back into the wellsprings of the unconscious to resuscitate memories of the ecosystem as it was as opposed to the way it is presently. Nol Alembong says “In the beginning / was the forest… / until the fire came”. This Alembongian ecopoetic beginning has been interpreted by Labang (2013) as a reflection of the lushness of colonial ecosphere or (ecologically) harmonious pre-colonial nation before the intrusion of the colonialist fire. Labang (2015) further argues that the forest/green beginning as opposed to the fire consumed present establishes intertextual ties with the biblical Eden before the fall of Adam. In this context, the fire of colonialism becomes synonymous to the biblical snake as both forces destabilize a once harmonious ecosphere. To engage a poetics of remembered place necessitates an active engagement with the past, the present and the future in an effort to rescue the present ecosphere from the encroachment
of human activities. This is sometimes achieved by disseminating or emphasizing “traditional environmental knowledge” (Huggan and Tiffin, 64).

The intricate link between community life and the natural world is ubiquitous and unique in the worldview of the postcolonial ecopoet, and his poetics is that which promotes such integrality or reproaches whoever disrupts it. Ken Saro-Wiwa in *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* provides a description of the relationship between the Ogoni people of Nigeria and their ecosphere in a way that best captures this integrality. About the land, the harvest from the earth and even the planting of seeds, he notes that they all have transcendent qualities and signify more to the people than mere farming activities. He writes:

> The land is a god and is worshipped as such. The fruit of the land, particularly yams, are honoured in festivals and, indeed, the Annual Festival of the Ogoni is held at the yam harvest. The planting season is not a mere period of agricultural activity: it is a spiritual, religious and social occasion. (1992:12)

Thus, Ogoni ecopoetics which fails to capture the spiritual essence of divine dimension of these activities is barren and unrealistic. Such ecopoetics must see the land as the god it is, or show how the invasion of the Ogoni nation has altered not just the land but also the worship of and communion which the people had with their land. Talking about the significance of rivers and streams to the people of Ogoni, he writes

> To the Ogeni, rivers and streams do not only provide water for life – for bathing, for drinking, etc; they do not only provide fish for food, they are also sacred and are bound up intricately with the life of the community, of the entire Ogoni nation. (1992:12)

To the postcolonial African communities, natural forms and non-human entities are not independent of the life of the community or individuals. The people are conscious of the role of natural forces in their lives and the life of the community and so respecting the sacrosanctity of the natural was a prerequisite for
harmonious and beautiful existence. It is the beauty of such existence which, Niyi Osundare (1986) captures as he describes an intense relationship with nature that is common to most ecopoets who are farmer-born and peasant raised like him. He writes

Farmer-born, peasant bred, I encountered dawn in the enchanted corridors of the forest, suckled on the delicate aroma of healing herbs, and the pearly drops of generous moons. Living in those early days was rugged, but barns brimmed with yams fattened by merciful rains and the tempering fire of the upland sun (“Preface” xi).

Osundare is linguistically careful in his construction of the encounter with dawn and what it means to a peasant boy. He looks back at a time when a peasant boy was delighted and charmed by dawn in the forest. These ecopoets seek to create an environment that is free from the brutality of the neocolonialist/globalist present and colonial past that dehistoricized postcolonial ecosphere thereby marking them as spaces for Western/European colonization. As Lawrence Buell (1995) argues, environmentally conscious texts must show the connection between the human and the non-human environment by bringing forth the idea that “human history is implicated in natural history”. It must call for accountability on the part of the humans towards the environment and stress the fact that “human interest is not the only legitimate interest” (7, emphasis is from original text). Such text should reflect the constant change to which the environment is subjected and how the change in turn is affecting humans. The issue of change is useful in understanding the concept of remembered place. Place is constantly changing whether through human action or natural process, and it is the socio-cultural function of the poet to aesthetically preserve and represent such changes. It also stages an attack on postcolonial leadership for conniving with western multinational companies in the invasion of postcolonial ecologies.

**Conclusion**

Grounded on the idea that a hermeneutics of the cultural and
ecological perspectives of a society must have its basis on the people’s ontological views of their environment and world, the above is an attempt to outline some of the distinctive traits that mark the cultural dimensions of an African gesture to poetize about relations between human and environment or human nature and nonhuman nature. The intention is to generate some thinking about an African ecopoetics: a theoretical conception through which an African ecopoetic reading can critically appraise the cultural representation of the relations between human and the extra-human world as well as assess the role and responsibilities of Western consumerist/anthropocentrist and of postcolonial African leadership.

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