TRAUMA AND TRAUMATOGENIC INSCRIPTIONS IN NIGER DELTA POETRY

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by Blessing Ochuko Esamagu in the Department of English, University of Ibadan.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to God Almighty, my fountainhead of inspiration, without whom this thesis would have not been a reality.

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ABSTRACT

The discourse of environmental degradation captures monumental losses which culminate in trauma, and this largely informs the content as well as the form of Niger Delta poetry. Existing studies on critical engagements with ecological issues in Niger Delta poetry have emphasised the physical destruction and pollution of the environment, with little attention paid to the subject of trauma in the poetry. This study was, therefore, designed to examine trauma and traumatogenic inscriptions in selected eco-conscious poetry collections from the Niger Delta region. This was with a view to determining the insignias of trauma induced by ecological disaster and the literary devices deployed in foregrounding this relationship.

Stef Craps' model of Trauma Theory served as the framework, while the interpretive design was used. Tanure Ojaide's *Songs of Myself: Quartet* (*SM*), Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket* (*TB*), Albert Otto's *Letters from the Earth* (*LE*), G'Ebinyo Ogbowei's *marsh boy & other poems* (*mb*), Nnimmo Bassey's *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat* (*IWNDTYB*) and Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* (*OTD*) were purposively selected owing to the insignias of trauma embedded in them. The texts were subjected to literary analysis.

Trauma and traumatogenic inscriptions are portrayed from the perspectives of triggers and manifestations. The triggers are denoted through imprinted pain and sadness, anxiety and grief (*SM*, *TB*, *LE*, *mb*, *IWNDTYB* and *OTD*), rage (*SM*, *TB* and *mb*), agitation and frustration (*OTD*), and despair (*LE*). These triggers are manifest through psychic torture and emotional distress at disconcerting memories (*SM*, *TB*, *LE*, *mb*, *IWNDTYB* and *OTD*), depression (*SM*, *TB*, *mb*, *IWNDTYB* and *OTD*), delusion (*SM*, *TB*, *LE*, *mb* and *OTD*), and illusions (*TB*, *LE*, *mb* and *OTD*). They are also depicted through suicide and suicidal thoughts (*mb* and *IWNDTYB*), self-estrangement and loneliness (*SM*), feelings of estrangement and insomnia (*TB*), mental confusion and violence (*mb*), amnesia (*IWNDTYB*), psychic numbing and hallucination (*OTD*). Stylistically, enjambment and apostrophe are predominantly used to emphasise the mental distress experienced by the poet personas and, by extension, the Niger Delta populace (*SM*, *TB*, *LE*, *mb*, *IWNDTYB* and *OTD*). The collections are also saturated with repetition to draw attention to grief (*SM*, *TB*, *LE*, *mb*, *IWNDTYB* and *OTD*), intertextuality to depict the people's contrasting conditions and misery (*SM* and *OTD*), and rhetorical questions to emphasise pain (*SM*, *TB*, *LE*, *IWNDTYB* and *OTD*). Metaphorical language and imagery are used to inscribe agonising experiences and pains (*SM*, *TB*, *LE*, *mb*, *IWNDTYB* and *OTD*); while irony (*TB* and *IWNDTYB*) and oxymoron (*SM*, *TB*, *LE*, *mb*, *IWNDTYB* and *OTD*) are used to stress the contradictions that result in trauma. These tropes mimic the effects of trauma and bear out its inscriptions. However, the series of traumatic experiences are presented in phenomenal emotional language (*SM*, *TB* and *LE*) and steeped in resistance undertone (*mb*, *IWNDTYB* and *OTD*).

Niger Delta eco-conscious poetry inscribes trauma as a stealthily ongoing disaster in the region, and the trauma is catalysed by environmental degradation. Therefore, poetry is a suitable medium for relating traumatic experiences in literary form.

Keywords: Niger Delta poetry, Trauma, Environmental degradation, Ecopoetry
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> …the poet envisages sober realities about his society which poetry can access but that authority would frown at, as it considers this view of reality an indictment. (Diala, 2015: 5)

1.1 Background to the study

Literature is often in the service of humanity; as such, its functional worth can hardly be quantified. It reflects and expresses societal happenings while bearing witness to man's experiences in the past, present and possible future. To state more clearly, literature has always been attuned to the service of man by its expressiveness of socio-political realities that have helped in shaping the history of man. Thus, utilitarianism is a fundamental property of literature and literary writings, which has the betterment of society as a whole as its end goal. Particularly, African literature wholly embraces the utilitarian function of art, as against the classical Western philosophy of aestheticism of "art for art's sake" which promotes a formalist approach, considering the historical realities and contemporary milieu of the African continent. This often requires the interaction between art and the prevalent socio-political conditions in any society, towards engendering a transformational system. Poetry, a genre of literature, has been a medium for engaging, interrogating and challenging oppressive social structures and confronting despotic authorities. In essence, poetry becomes an appropriate means for drawing attention to socio-economic as well as political predicaments affecting people, which, if conveyed through normal dialogue could spark undue criticism, rousing the suspicion of political sabotage in the government. However, poets who express critical and dissident stances in their poetry experience varied forms of opposition. Hence, writers who relentlessly struggle with their writings against inequity and injustice suffer all forms of persecution and prosecution at the hands of corrupt elites because literature is seen as a catalyst for change. Theodora Ezeigbo (2008) considers the intense harassment writers are subjected to all over the world as confirmative of the potency of literature to influence and catalyse change, which corrupt leaders loathe. It can, therefore,

be surmised that most corpus of literary works are often responses to a particular cause, which could be socio-political, economical or even religious. The cause this study, deploying selected Niger Delta poets and their works, intends to retort is traumatogenic inscriptions and trauma of the inhabitants of the region, which has been engendered by ecological devastation that arises from the destruction of nature through the depletion of resources.

The affinity mankind shares with nature cannot be dated. Although the human race has always had a fondness for nature and its representations, and although the study of nature in literature began right from the classical period, it reached its height in the 18th century with the emergence of nature poets during the English romantic period. These poets consciously appreciated and celebrated nature's beauty. They adopted the natural world as their subject of discourse and relished the pleasure of an Edenic society devoid of the evils that accompanied industrialisation. Therefore, the natural world has always been a spring of inspiration and a source of happiness for poets who derive joy in communing with nature, away from the vices of the civilised world. These poets are regarded as nature poets. To present it succinctly, nature poetry is the description of the natural world and the deliberate appreciation and admiration of nature. In Edward Hirsch's *A Poet's Glossary*, nature poetry is defined as that poetry that treats nature as theme as well as a source of inspiration (Wendell Berry, 2014).

Hirsch (2014) traces the beginning of nature poetry to ancient times when seasons formed the exact rhythms or symbolic progress of life. He refers to the Canaanite mythical poem titled "Poem of Aqhat" (15th century BCE), which revolves around changes in seasons. Also, Hesoid's *Works and Days* (8th century B.C.E) which displays particular interest in agricultural practices. Additionally, Hirsch states that there is an aeonic tradition of the rustic, beginning from Theocritus's "idylls" (3rd century BCE) which extols the unsophistication that possesses rural life as well as gives rise to such unforgettable personalities like Lycidas, the prototypal poet who doubles as a shepherd who gave inspiration to the pastoral elegy of John Milton titled "Lycidas". So also does Virgil's *Eclogues* (42 and 39 BCE) describe this tradition – featuring the tranquillity of shepherds dwelling in romanticised natural locales. The Chinese *Book of Songs* (10-5th century BCE)

is replete with poetry about seasons, as well as the Japanese haiku which started as a brief meditative poem on nature. More so, the Old English "Seafarer" and the Middle English "Cuckoo's Song", and seasonal passages in "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" (14th century) are all examples of the ancient tradition of nature poems. During the Renaissance, suave poets also tried their hands on pastoral dialogues which centre on rustic life. This is represented in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1580) as well as Edmund Spenser's *The Shephearde's Calender* (1579). Pastoral poetry thrived in retirement poems, garden poems, and landscape poems – which concerns descriptions with topography of the 17th century exemplified in John Denham's "Cooper's Hill" (1642). James Thompson's – the first significant 18th-century nature poet – *The Seasons* (1730) is permeated with in-depth descriptions of the enduring presence of God in nature. Besides, Alexander Pope guides his "Essay on Criticism" (1711) with the rule, "First follow Nature", which he denotes extols classical antecedent. However, it was the Romantic poets of the late 18th century that ingeniously addressed nature while focusing on its sceneries, eulogising its nourishing powers as well as hallowing it. Moreover, they wrote at a period in history when there was a transformation from an agricultural society to an industrial one in the English society.

G. G. Williams (1930) believes that poets and philosophers have been articulating their appreciation of the beauties of the natural world, the joy contained in communing with it, as well as the goodness obtained only in the haven away from the evils of civilised man. To him, Adam's sojourn in the Garden of Eden; Corydon's lying down under an oak while eulogising Phillis; Tacitus' comparison between the goodness of life in Germany alongside the evils of Rome; Horace, Tibullus, and Lucan chanting the beatitudes of retirement; hundreds of Renaissance songs eulogising the satisfaction stemming from rural life; plays such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *As You Like It*; and many others similar to them make up a world-old nature-movement. However, Williams opines that nature-movement began in the 18th century and concluded with the poets of the early 19th century. Although it possesses some form of resemblance with the nature movement of earlier times, he states that it is materially different. Though humanity has always displayed a fondness for nature, as earlier stated by him, it was until the 18th century the love became, in Williams' words, "an elaborate cult, a self-conscious worship". Williams gave two reasons why this "vigorous new growth" sprout out of the "age-old parent-plant": the romantic inclination to search for

actual love of nature in the early 18th century; and to pay no attention to stages of sheer interest in nature which did not amount to a level of positive love in that century. Therefore, it can be surmised that nature writing and nature poetry did not begin with the Romantic poets. It started "hundred years" before them; however, they were the ones who are acclaimed to have made very popular the subject of nature in poetry. What is crudely referred to as "nature poetry" is more often than not absorbed in a spirit of reminiscence, as it calls to mind the loss of a rural world, childhood and Eden (Jonathan Bate, 2000).

The later part of the 18th century saw the birth of romantic poets. The love for the beauties of nature characterised romantic poetry. To them, the flora and fauna of the environment were sources of joy. These romantic poets can be said to have popularised the subject of nature poetry, because, most times when the origin of nature poetry is under reference, there is almost an unconscious turn towards the Romantics. The Romantic tradition was largely dominated by the poetry of William Wordsworth, John Clare, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the like. Gradually, the continuous unbalanced relationship between humans and nature in recent times, which leaves the environment defenceless against its subjugators, brought about an upsurge of writings on ecological issues. Further, the enormity of the damage caused by anthropocentric activities has begun to ravage the environment deeply. Hence, ecopoets or ecologically-conscious poets emphasise the negative impact of anthropocentric activities on the environment, particularly because "nature is no longer the rustic retreat of the Wordsworthian poet.… [it] is now a pressing political question, a question of survival" (Jay Parini, 1993). With a primary concern for the environment, ecopoets press for the preservation and conservation of the ecosystem.

This ecological devastation, beyond being a global phenomenon, is also an African problem with severe impacts on the continent. Thus, proffering a lasting solution has become imperative. Establishing this fact, Gary Synder (1990) observes that all over the globe, native inhabitants of several communities are beginning to deal with constant invasions into their natural wilderness. Their poorly funded combat is against wealthy organisations who keep exploiting their land through tree felling, oil exploration and mineral mining. This combat, Synder also suggests, is a result of the fact that these native inhabitants do not only

see their communities as home but also revere some places as sacred. In essence, the inhabitants of these affected communities do not only regard nature as a means of survival but also as a medium of ancestorial communion. It is against this background that ecopoets or ecologically-conscious poets are relentless in their campaign against environmental degradation, despite being poorly funded and supported by the government.

Poets through their poems have been expressing concerns for ecology; however, it was not until recently that the term "ecopoetry" began to be used. Arguably, it was from the 20th century upwards, in the wake of industrialisation, that the discourse of ecopoetry was brought to the limelight. Ecopoetry is different from nature poetry and the poetry of the romantics because it confronts the catastrophe doled out on nature following the degradation of the environment. Corroborating this view, J. Scott Bryson (2002) refers to ecopoetry as a sub-category of nature poetry which upholds as well as goes beyond traditional romantic conventions in such a manner that without difficulty, allows the tackling of the existing relationship between humans and nature. Similarly, Leonard Scigaj (1999) avers that ecopoetry steadily emphasises the connection between humans and nature, which is envisaged as a dynamic interconnected chain of continuous feedback systems; though, with a sort of different outlook. Scigaj concludes by stating that the development of ecocriticism and ecopoetry in the succeeding years that preceded Lawrence Buell's text *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) does not invalidate the significance of environmental poetry as a genre of poetry, because ecocritical ideas do not replace the views of environmental poetry, rather it comes to be a fragment of a subfield of environmental poetry, and nature poetry, too.

However, Kate Dunning (2013) states that even though Scigaj does not provide an exact definition, he projects nature poetry as a wide but distinctive classification that prepares the stage for the more clearly ethics-related subdivision of environmental poetry – ecopoetry. Drawing inference, Dunning also avers that while nature poetry involves more wide-ranging deliberations about the multifaceted interrelationships between humans and nature, environmental poetry is more specific as it assumes a more active position than nature poetry. Stating further, he believes that the possibly serious variance between environmental poetry and ecopoetry is that ecopoetry aims at issuing a kind of "warning". Moreover,

ecopoetry has its goal – creating change. Therefore, ecopoetics is not simply about ecology and poetry; rather, it is preoccupied with bringing about change; and ecopoetry covers not only the current scene between humans and nature but the possible future also. In sum, ecopoetry developed out of environmental poetry, and environmental poetry from nature poetry.

Approaching ecopoetry from a different perspective, James Engelhardt (2008) refers to ecopoetry as a connection. To him, ecopoetry provides the means through which the world is involved through language. While ecopoetry might be careful with language, at its epicentre, it accepts that language is a developed skill which proceeds from us and is proximate to the hub of our personality in the world. Correspondingly, *Encyclopedia Britannica's* definition of ecopoetry states that ecopoetry employs language to consolidate a feeling of the presence of nature in our existence, and these incantations of the presence of nature commemorate the biological truth that we are nature, which proposes a comprehension of the ecology of nature and its systems. Further, James Engelhardt (2008) adds that ecopoetry has some things in common with science. Though it goes beyond the conventions of the pastoral, like science, the neutrality of nature is emphasised and nature can only be advanced with the awareness which is: non-human nature will always be non-human. Also, ecopoetry revolves around the subject of ethics, similar to other poetic forms.

Furthermore, giving a more comprehensive view is Jonathan Bate (2000) who believes that the word 'environment' started to be used in social contexts, precisely because of the feeling of estrangement associated with dwelling in the city, which was recognised by Williams Wordsworth as well as others. He also states that before the 19th century, there was no desire for a word to depict the impact of physical circumstances on humans as well as their societies, because it was obvious that individual and public personality were closely connected to the environment. However, beginning from the late 18th century and beyond, there existed a greater advertence on industry's predisposition to change the quality of the nature of our environment to the extent of impacting the air we respire. To Bate, he considers "the history of technology" as "the history of the loss of that wonder" in nature as well as a "history of disenchantment" with nature, where the solidness of things is substituted for the ephemerality of products; and the poet is obliged to take the position of the ancient Roman

lares who are quotidian gods that guard the hearthstone. Hence, ecopoetics must not start as a set of hypotheses concerning specific environmental matters; rather, it should be a means through which the meaning of dwelling with nature is reflected upon. Moreover, the etymology of ecopoetics means "Oikos" (house-dwelling place) from which 'eco' is derived, and "Poesis" (making or creation) from which 'poetics' is derived. Put together, ecopoetry implies deploying poetry as a medium through which dwelling with nature is ensured. In summary, ecopoetry reveals the responsibility and the accountability of man to his environment because the earth is "ours to plough, not to plunder" (Niyi Osundare, 1986:48). Although man is supposed to be responsible for keeping the environment habitable, his insatiable selfish desire has made him shift focus to beautifying his own nest. Therefore, ecopoetry (characterised by ecocentrism) challenges anthropocentric activities that go against environmental ethics, as it advocates for the ecology. It emphasises the role man plays in the destructive process of the earth and the commodification of nature. It is invested with a desire to effectuate change, as it makes a plea for environmental sustainability, and it is infused with resistance against ecological degradation and advocates reconnection with the ecosystem.

The history of ecopoetry can be traced to the late twentieth century. Ecopoetry grew alongside the rising worldwide concern for the environment, while the word (ecopoetry) is deployed to depict the latest progress in the old tradition of nature-related poetry. This confirms that ecopoetry is a relatively recent development in nature-oriented poetry. However, highlighting four ways in which ecopoetry is different from nature poetry, Hein Berdinesen (2018) states that ecopoetry is not the same as nature poetry: "[e]copoetry is biocentric (all organisms have objective purposes), it is anti-anthropocentric (not just humans have moral rights), it is environmentally ethical (recognises and builds on ethical principles about the environment), and it presupposes an understanding of the fact that our natural environment consists of dynamic processes (nature is not static)" (1). Besides, as early as 1980, Robert Bly states that, for a long time, poets have visualised something similar to an ecological world notion. This alignment (poetic, cultural, as well as spiritual) with the world is drawn up around a feeling of interconnectedness between humans and the natural sphere. The destruction of this better all-inclusive world idea is evident in the self-conscious nature writing of Romantic poets in Europe in the late eighteenth century and the

writers of the early nineteenth century in America. Their works articulated a concerned disunion from nature, and an anxiety about the irreparable industrial, technological as well as political happenings that were influencing novel situations in the life of humans. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, ecologists engaged in the study of biological beings as a fragment of an ecosystem, and ecology as a discipline wanted to gain ground in the scientific circle as a quantitative science. The science of ecology moved from descriptions of nature, humans' involvement in the natural world, spatial metaphors as well as common notions of ecological processes to more intricate, fluctuating, imbalance and instability.

Similarly, Yvonne Reddick (2017) asserts that ecopoetry cannot anymore depict the allegedly unscathed landscapes of previous nature poetry. This is as a result of the alterations that have been made. He also states that nature poetry unavoidably preceded 'green' politics for the Romantics of the 18th century. However, the twentieth century saw the integration of environmental programmes into the politics of a gamut of parties, going from National Socialism in Nazi Germany to the environmental Marxism of 1970s and 1980s. With the upsurge of Green parties in the USA and Britain, The Greens in the Germany, as well as movements such as Buen Vivir in Latin America, environmental poets might decide to order their work with a range of ideological programmes. Consequently, concerns for the environment and the fate of the earth as a discourse are beginning to attract much attention from people all over the globe. From the foregoing, it can be surmised that nature poetry predated ecopoetry, which saw its birth in the twentieth century owing to the complicated, unpredictable and imbalanced ecological network. Hoogland and Klotz (Climate Corps Fellows) assert that Gary Snyder (1930), one of the most significant environmental writers of the 20th century and an influential figure in the ecology movement, is widely known for making popular ecopoetry.

In Africa and specifically, in Nigeria, Tanure Ojaide (1995), in his book, *Poetic Imagination in Black Africa*, opines that what gave essence to ecopoetry is the pointless obliteration of our initial fellow inhabitants, the flora and fauna, which he strongly opposes. Similarly, Uzoechi Nwagbara (2013) contends that the commercialisation of the ecosystem through worldwide private enterprise made ecopoetry necessary. He contends further that the much-

discussed environmentalism, ecopoetry, as well as ecocriticism, arise from a dogmatical source to defy the belief of the commercialisation of relationships between man and nature, facilitated through globalisation or private enterprise. Therefore, Nigerian writers deploy literature to grapple with and create awareness about this kind of ecological destruction as well as man's inhumanity to the natural world. In addition, Fortress Ayinuola and Abiodun-Eniayekan Eugenie (2016) assert that the focus of ecopoetics is on the aftereffects of this interaction of social politicking on the natural environment in Nigeria. Premised on this depressing socio-economic setting, Nigerian writers have risen to tackle environmental degradation. Thus, ecopoetics, within the purview of Nigerian writers, draws attention to the condition of the environment in the Niger Delta. Ayinuola and Eugenie also added that it was based on the massive plot to exploit the earth, malevolent ecocides by successive administrations as well as oil syndicates in their insatiate strive for economic raise, that nature-poetry of resistance, which is a novel type of poetic innovativeness termed eco-poetics arose. Before now, the ecosystem was only briefly referred to in the literary oeuvres of previous writers in the Niger Delta. Specifically, the natural world of the Niger Delta was mostly lauded by poets such as Dennis Osadebay and Gabriel Okara, different from contemporary poets such as Tanure Ojaide whose artistic production has more foreboding posture. While man occupied the epicentre on which everything rotates, the natural world as well as the Niger Delta ecology continues and still is threatened by exploitation and abandonment. It is against this backdrop that attention began to move towards the environment.

The earliest Niger Delta poetry relishes the beauty of nature in this environment. This is exemplified in Gabriel Okara's "The Call of the River Nun" where the poet reminisces over his life at the bank of the river as a child, where he could behold himself through a reflection in the water. At that time, the river was still in its immaculate state. However, with the discovery of oil, the river lost its pristineness. It deteriorated from being "silver-surfaced" to "crude-surfaced", as represented in Ibiwari Ikiriko's poem "Okara's nun" (*Oily Tears of the Delta*). This despoilment is not only restricted to the river but also to the mangroves and other parts of nature. Both the flora and the fauna are affected, and the air is polluted with noxious substances from these oil companies. Also, the natives are dispossessed of their means of sustenance because of the contamination of their rivers, and deprived of

nonpoisonous air for survival. Again, the oil companies and the enriched government thrive at the expense of the inhabitants of the land. Hence, poverty becomes their everyday song once their means of sustenance are seized. Ojaide (1996) reports this harrowing situation when he states that at the turn of the 1960s, the rivers have been dug through to take in canoes and they even had ships at the back of their houses. The company, Shell-BP, had begun to provide for the Africa Timber and Plywood Company located in Sapele. Also, streams and marshes were desiccated. Rubber trees that were sown in deliriousness to make gains were before long emptied. A kind of fish called Oware that is known for jumping over drains and roads also disappeared. Fish was not found any more in many of their rivers. The blast from the heat in Kokori and in similar places endangered their lives as well as their means of livelihood. Consequently, environmental degradation has become commonplace in Tanure's region – the Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta is a region located in the Southern part of Nigeria. It is an undeniable fact that it is a region where oil and gas abound. For that reason, the denizens have been battling despoliation and exploitation of their environment for a long time with baleful repercussions. These nocuous consequences that attend environmental degradation cannot be overstated, and it is the distressing reality that informs their poetic oeuvres. The corpus of poetical works from this environment that is termed in this work as Niger Delta poetry. Niger Delta poetry has become a household name for poetry relating to the devastation meted in the area. It is poetry that concerns the Niger Delta population and their quagmires, and many of the poets who hail from this region, have written in response to this ubiquitous condition. Through their poems, they draw attention to the fate of the environment as well as the inhabitants in the face of oil exploration and exploitation. Therefore, environmental justice is being championed by these ecopoets, not only for the environment but for its populace who are recipients of such destruction. These poets include, but not limited to Tanure Ojaide, Ogaga Ifowodo, Nnimmo Bassey, G'Ebinyo Ogbowei, Ibiwari Ikiriko, Ebi Yeibo, Sophia Obi and Faith Brown.

The poetry of these poets, and from this region metamorphosed from an enthrallment with nature to a combative status against those oppressive coalitions and systems engendering environmental degradation. This is attributed to the fact that the natural resources of the

Niger Delta region, which was supposed to be a windfall, have become a bane to the people and their ambience. Certainly, this is not without the monumental loss of their pristine environment, source of livelihood, uncontaminated air and rivers to gas flaring and oil spillage, even their hearthstones in extreme cases, which culminates in traumatogenic effects and trauma for the populace because of oil politics in the Nigerian polity.

Environmental degradation is manifested in industrial pollution, depletion of resources, felling of trees, contamination of rivers and seas by oil spills from oil companies and holey decrepit oil pipes, and the disemboguing of untreated waste into water bodies, thereby, contaminating the communities' source of water, and gas flaring which pollutes the air. These result in hazardous repercussions, which can be tangible and intangible. The physical consequences of environmental degradation include poverty, displacement, famine, weather extremes, acute and medical illnesses, etc. Studies have shown that environmental degradation has a significant effect on the health of humans as it gets them directly exposed to these noxious agents, or indirectly by the displacement of humans through the destruction of the ecosystem as a whole, which aids in preserving human life (Kyriaki Remoundou & Phoebe Koundouri, 2009). Particularly, environmental degradation engenders the materialisation of air-borne and water-borne diseases. Therefore, environment degradation impinges on the health of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region in diverse ways.

The Millenium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) synthesis report warns that the wearing down of the ecosystems may increase the incidences of extant diseases as well as make the environment run a high risk of outbreaks of new diseases. The situation is worse in developing countries like Nigeria, as there is yet a struggle to upgrade medical facilities and grant access to proper health care. These environmental risks only aid in complicating matters and worsening living conditions rather than abating and improving the status quo of humans. Also, the destruction of the environment debilitates the body of humans immunity, thereby exposing it to all manners of diseases. Thus, it can be said that a significant threat is posed to human health through environmental degradation due to the interrelationship between the environment and health, as an oppressive dominance of the former undoubtedly affects the latter. Eventually, man becomes the architect of his fellow humans' miseries through the roles played in the destructive process of his environment by

his deleterious anthropocentric activities. As such, the ensuing effect of environmental degradation on the host community is devastating, and the long-term consequences remain colossal. Moreover, land for the colonised man is a thing of utmost value because it supplies his basic survival needs as well as accords him the desired dignity (Frantz Fanon, 1967). As a result, the loss of land which equates to the loss of dignity may incite chronic stress on the psyche and lead to more severe consequences.

Consequently, beyond the aforementioned tangible consequences, ecological devastation also results in trauma. Indeed, it can be implied that beyond the health and physical implications ensuing from ecological destruction, the people of the affected communities also experience trauma. Trauma, which originated from the Greek word, means "wound". Simply, trauma refers to any severe injury done to the body as a result of an accident or violence. Though trauma might not always result in physical pain even though the pain may be traumatic. An extended definition of trauma could mean an emotional wound which results in psychological injury. It can be surmised, therefore, that trauma causes one form of injury either to the body or psyche. William James succinctly captures it as "a thorn in the soul" ("Entry" *Oxford English Dictionary*). Thus, trauma connotes more than an injury inflicted on the body; it is more of an injury to the psyche. Traumatogenic, on the other hand, is an adjective which means something that leads to trauma. This study establishes that traumatogenic potential of environmental degradation. Environmental devastation generates traumatogenic and traumatic aftereffects such as anxiety (anticipatory anxiety inclusive), depression, delusion, illusion, rage, anger, suicide and suicidal tendencies, war, abuse of human rights, high rate of crimes; and addiction to violence against self, others, and nature, etc. Sadly, psychological aftermaths accompany trauma which might linger for a prolonged period and social tie becomes fordone because resistance to integration into society becomes the order of the day (Frechette Christopher, 2015). This might be regarded as the possible reason behind the nascency of Niger Delta militancy and impending ecoterrorism because the loss of land is not only frustrating but also traumatic.

Also, some communities are compelled to desert their abode in search of another home owing to the destruction of their habitat. Therefore, this forceful dislodgement of humans from their place of habitation, family, and traditions causes a vicious disorder and creates a

dearth in the domain of ecobeing which might engender violence as time goes. The continual resistance, violence (outburst of repressed feelings, hurts and angst) and threats of violence in the Niger Delta area is a natural offshoot of these dynamics. Displacement forms the basis of their original trauma because their stakeholders' rights to their natural habitat have been infringed upon. For that reason, the Niger Delta people experience what can be termed displacement-induced trauma, and the continual devastation of their land paves the way for constant retraumatisation.

More so, from the social point of view, Jenny Edkins (2003) avers that trauma is the betrayal of one's confidence by the authorities one has always regarded as instrument of protection. This definition alleges that trauma happens when the people are betrayed by their representatives who are supposed to protect their rights. This is a description of the Niger Delta scenario where there is a breakdown in the existing relationship between the people and the authorities, because the leaders who are supposed to protect their interests against multinational corporations are busy feasting with the despoilers. Under this circumstance, the people of the Niger Delta become susceptible to all forms of violence because of the urgent need to vocalise their hurts in the absence of their trustworthy spokespersons. Likewise, the absence of the means of livelihood or low family income predisposes the Niger Deltans to all forms of criminal activities, which they think would ransom their economic situation. In addition, internal displacement and the abandonment of homes due to environmental despoliation promote a high rate of criminality and violence, because war could break out in a bid to secure their land. Therefore, ecological abnormalities encourage human violence and more often than not, endanger the resources which aid in fostering the health of humans in such affected communities (Mary Harvey, 1996). In the end, due to the close interactions between man and nature, the destruction of the environment builds up the intensity of trauma in humans.

Traumatic stressors (events that cause a strain on one's mental state) are not limited to large catastrophic incidences such as the Holocaust, Rwanda genocide, Vietnam War, World wars, natural disasters (Hurricane Katrina), slave trade, colonialism, and sexual assault, amongst others; man-made environmental degradation can also be a traumatic stressor. It is interesting to note that trauma is characterised by loss, whether of lives, property, freedom,

dignity or land. The loss of land and the experiences that accompany such loss, in the wake of ecological devastation, lends credence to its traumatic status. Hence, eco-conscious writings have been at the forefront of the campaign against these unwholesome activities that encourage the pillaging of the earth. Many of the poems analysed for this study are lyrical laments and mourning for the wasted lands in the Niger Delta, as well as resistance against the continual destruction of the environment while stating the traumatogenic effects of this despoilment. To conclude, while literary works addressing ecological despoliation across countries in the world may not in themselves be able to overthrow and overhaul the systems that encourage anthropocentric activities and pillages at the detriment of the environment, mulling over them (through literary representation) might cause a stir, awaken the consciousness of humans to the resultant effects of such actions and the need to seek other viable options that could assist in reforming the defective systems (Lawrence Buell, Ursula Heise & Karen Thornber, 2011). Hence, art (poetry) remains potent in its deployment to ensure retributive justice.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Existing studies have examined the effects of ecological degradation on the Niger Delta environment, which have been represented in Niger Delta poetry. These studies have largely focused on the eco-conscious nature of Niger Delta poetry, which has been registered through their thematic preoccupations and stylistic engagements. Kufre Usanga (2018) refers to Ojaide's *Songs of Myself* as songs of eco-engagements, as it draws attention to the appalling exploitation of the Delta. Eco-abuse, marginalisation, environmental spoilage, protest, and the battle for liberation from environmental devastation, amongst others have been examined in Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* (Kontein Trinya, 2011; Oyeniyi Okunoye, 2008; Bernard Stephen, 2017; Dumka Bie, 2017; Margaret Nutsukpo, 2018). Isidore Diala (2015) observes that in Ogbowei's *marsh boy and other poems*, an intimation of the great revolution is foretold due to environmental despoliation. Similarly, Odingowei Kwokwo (2018) acknowledges that Ogbowei's *marsh boy* is embedded with revolutionist tendencies owing to the subjugation and suppression of the Niger Delta populace through the destruction of the environment. Christabel Onyema (2011) examines the forfeiture of land as a result of the unscrupulous exploration of oil in Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket*. In their discourse of eco-activism, Prince Ohwavworhua and Mathias Orhero (2019) focus on

man's resistance and remonstration against environmental deterioration in Nnimmo Bassey's *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat* and Albert Otto's *Letters from the Earth*. They also examine the ecological difficulties that characterise the unearthing and exploitation of oil in the Niger Delta region in Otto's *Letters from the Earth*. Despite the volume of scholarly attention given to the works of these poets and others from the Niger Delta and the increasing concern about the psychological impacts of environmental devastation, adequate attention has not been paid to traumatogenic inscriptions and trauma of ecological ruptures that suffuse eco-conscious poetry from the region. This is the gap in knowledge that this study seeks to fill.

1.3 Aim and objectives

This research examines traumatogenic inscriptions and trauma owing to ecological disaster as depicted in Tanure Ojaide's *Songs of Myself*; Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket*; Albert Otto's *Letter from the Earth*; G'Ebinyo Ogbowei's *marsh boy and other poems*; Nnimmo Bassey's *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat*; and Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*. To achieve this aim, the study attempts to:

1. examine the traumatogenic (events and incidents) developments that lead to trauma;
2. identify the various manifestations of trauma induced by ecological disaster, which are registered via the insignias of trauma in the collections of poems;
3. analyse how prevalent literary devices and forms are utilised as not only creative ornaments but also deployed to foreground trauma; and
4. compare and contrast the different representations of trauma by the poets in the poetry collections under study.

1.4 Research questions

This research seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the traumatogenic (events or incidents) developments that lead to trauma?
2. What are the various manifestations of trauma induced by ecological disasters, which are registered through the insignias of trauma in the selected collections of poems?
3. How are prevalent literary devices and forms utilised in foregrounding trauma in the selected collections of poems?
4. What are the similarities and differences in the representation of trauma by the poets?

1.5 Scope of the study

This research deals with Nigerian poetry, specifically, contemporary Niger Delta poetry. The deterioration of the earth as reflected in these texts is apprehended as a microcosm to articulate the gradual destruction of the ecology of the Niger Delta, as it also reflects the traumatic effects on the inhabitants of the region as depicted in the texts. The texts for the study are Tanure Ojaide's *Songs of Myself: Quartet*; Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket*; Albert Otto's *Letter from the Earth*; G'Ebinyo Ogbowei's *marsh boy and other Poems*; Nnimmo Bassey's *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat*; and Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta.* They were selected using a purposive sampling technique owing to their representation of traumatogenic inscriptions and trauma engendered by environmental devastation.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study contributes to the corpus of postcolonial re-imagining of trauma studies, as it supports Stef Craps' proposition that trauma does not always result from a sudden disastrous event, but can be caused by endless diurnal kinds of cruelty as well as subjugation which affects lower groups. In other words, the study multiplies the number of existing critical reviews and criticisms against classical trauma theory, as it draws attention to the potential application of trauma theory to environmental-related problems. Therefore, this study makes an important contribution to the growing field of research on postcolonial trauma theory. Also, it validates the fact that environmental degradation is destructive, affecting both man and the ecosystem while raising grave concerns such as climate change, global warming and other natural hazards. In addition, it demonstrates that environmental studies can be evaluated using other theories other than ecocriticism through which it has been repeatedly engaged in times past.

Moreover, literature has been referred to as a catalyst for change in society, because it creates awareness and brings about transformation through thematic preoccupations as well as literary aesthetics, and African literature has been committed to such change. Although the expected change might not be instantaneous, its plausible status for change makes it progressive and achievable. This encapsulates the significance of the study as it provides an evocative picture of the predicament of Niger Delta people, with a mind geared towards positive change. Besides, the findings of the study will not only increase the series of current

studies on the progression of a blueprint for a postcolonial trauma theory but also encourage and provide an exciting opportunity to advance further research on trauma studies. Further, the findings from this research will be published in journals, festschrifts, chapters in books, newspapers and other reputable media platforms through which government and implementers of government policies can better understand the sufferings of Niger Delta inhabitants.

1.7 Justification of the study

More frequently, scholars interested in trauma narratives engage novels and their elements in reading trauma. However, this study examines the potency of the genre of poetry alongside poetic devices (demonstrating poetry's ability in representing and expressing pain rather than silencing it) in articulating trauma. Using poetry as a form of testimony, the study focuses on traumatogenic inscriptions and trauma owing to environmental destruction in the Niger Delta region, where oil becomes a metaphor for death and the exploitative activities of the multinational conglomerates in collaboration with the government, as well as local representatives, which then cause a reversal from opulence to indigence for the populace of the region. From this viewpoint, poetry is seen as a means of reclaiming an unclaimed experience through its devices. Moreover, Niger Delta poetry has been repeatedly studied within the ambits of ecological devastation and ecocriticism. Hence, this study charts a seemingly new path by focusing on the traumatic impacts of environmental devastation. Importantly, the need to foreground trauma as a corollary of environmental degradation informs the study.

1.8 Definition of terms

i. Inscriptions are marks or indications that suggest the onset of trauma or the presence of traumatogenic events that can give rise to trauma.

ii. Niger Delta Literature (Poetry) is a literary work that carries the spirit of the Niger Delta and the determination to resist majority oppression as well as exploitation by the oil companies and the Federal Government. Niger Delta poetry is a subgenre of the emergent Niger Delta literature.

iii. Trauma results from exposure to an incident or chains of events that are emotionally distressing or life-threatening with long-lasting adverse effects on an individual's functioning mental health.

iv. Traumatogenic means experiences or events that lead to trauma or cause a (emotional) damage. Traumagenic is a variant of traumatogenic.

1.9 Organisation of the study

The study is divided into five (5) chapters. Chapter one comprises the introduction to the research under which the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions, the aim and objectives, the scope of the study, the significance of the study, the justification of the study, definitions of terms and organisation of the study is presented. Chapter two is the review of literature, which examines related works of other researchers and their informed criticisms, the conceptual framework and the theoretical framework. Chapter three focuses on the methodology deployed for the research while emphasising the research design, setting, research population and sampling procedure, method of data collection and data analysis. Chapter four caters for the analysis and interpretation of traumatic motifs and tropes found in the data, which in this context are the six (6) collections of poems and the summary of findings. Chapter five, the concluding chapter, covers the summary of the study, conclusion, contribution to knowledge, and suggestions for further studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

> … a comprehensive review of prior research regarding a specific topic… shows the reader what is known about a topic, and what is not known, thereby setting up the rationale or need for a new investigation. (Denney and Tewskbury, 2013: 218)

2.0 Chapter overview

This chapter centres on the conceptual framework, empirical review and theoretical framework. The conceptual framework reviews trauma and traumatogenic/traumagenic, as it seeks to examine the key concepts underlying the study. Also, it foregrounds the relationship between trauma and literature, and trauma and poetry, which are fundamentals of this research. The empirical review focuses on the current state of knowledge by examining appraisals on the collections of poems selected for the study, as well as the historical reality of the Niger Delta region. The theoretical framework describes the theory that supports the research, which is trauma theory. However, Stef Craps' theory, which is a subset of the postcolonial strand of trauma theory was deployed for the study. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a summary of the reviews.

2.1 Conceptual framework

2.1.1 The concept of trauma

Over time, varying definitions of trauma have been proposed by health professionals and practitioners of other fields of knowledge. In simple terms, trauma is an injury to the body. It can also be referred to as negative incidences that induce pain, as well as the pain itself (John Briere, 2006). However, trauma is not limited to physical injury. The psyche can also be injured. In clinical psychology, trauma is a sign of a perturbing experience that the individual's psyche is yet to come to terms with, an event that is not taken in, and trauma deposes temporal sequence when the past is collapsed into the present (Humphrey, 2010). More than that, trauma is an articulation of our humanness, which is equally discerned by

the world. It is no longer just a medical state identified by professionals in the field. Trauma also pertains to the experience of brutality and vestiges of brutality in the body. Besides, trauma has turned out to be a font of legitimacy got from the genuineness of suffering, trueness of individual witness, and, as Paul Ricoeur asserts, verbalisation of the affective sources of inequity. Other legal and moral demands are formed through a traumatic lens. Trauma also constructs violence and demystifies the consequences of it. Moreover, traumatic experiences tend to be upsetting and terrifying. Brown (2008:3) declares, "to be traumatised is to be doubly haunted by two realities: that of the violent event and that of not fully knowing that violence".

According to the Centre for Posttraumatic Health (Australia), any incident that exposes a person to real or possible death, grave injury, and sexual violence possesses the capability to be traumatic. Also, individual trauma arises from incidents, successions of incidents or clusters of events witnessed by a person as injurious or life-threatening physically or emotionally, and leaves long-term negative effects on a person's performance and all-encompassing well-being (SAMHSA, 2014). Similarly, in the words of Herman (1992:33), "traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity or a close personal encounter with violence and death". Besides, when trauma happens, there is always an agent. To conclude, traumatic occurrences encompass a wide range of experiences such as war, genocide, disaster, abuse, loss, and even environmental degradation, amongst others. Regardless of its catalyst, trauma elicits varying responses in different people. For instance, the poets' reactions and responses to the traumatic experiences that plague them, their people and their communities differ, and this is represented through their poems. While some of the poetic texts are lamentations, others incite a revolution and some others are a combination of both and more, as will be examined in this study.

2.1.2 The concept of traumatogenic/traumagenic

Traumatogenic is an adjective, which means the development of trauma. Traumatogenic also means something that leads to trauma, and trauma denotes injury either to the body or psyche. In other words, traumatogenic suggests something that can inflict a wound. Another variation of traumatogenic is traumagenic. *American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology* defines traumagenic as "describing or relating to the dynamics by which a

traumatic event (e.g., childhood sexual abuse) may have long-term negative consequences, including the development of a mental disorder" (https://dictionary.apa.org). It is also referred to as "a system whose creation/origin is the result of one or more traumatic events". In other words, traumagenic "generally refers to anything originating in trauma" (https://pluralpedia.org). Lastly, traumagenic is "a word used to define a mental impairment or condition caused by trauma or traumatic experiences" (https://www.urbandictionary.com). To summarise, traumatogenic implies something that possesses the capability to lead to trauma.

2.1.3 Trauma and literature

One of the central concerns of literary and cultural studies is representing the pain (trauma) of others. Literature and pain typically possess a similar extended history, as fiction and plays reveal the most awful tragic experiences of blood, violence, torture and sexually provoking accounts of other people's ill-treated bodies (Freiburg, 2011). On the other hand, "… literature has also always displayed a soothing nature…with which the destructive forces of immense suffering could – if not be cured – at least be alleviated" (Freiburg, 2011: 172-173). Though narrations on dispossession, subjugation, relegation, and physical and psychological trauma are not new, the humanities' peculiar devotion to these problems has attained a novel eminence (Modlinger & Sonntag, 2011). Bowie (1988), invoking Freud and Lacan, says literature is more than a mere means or entity for enquiry; it is also a theory of the subliminal in itself. Although this does not apply to all literary texts, it establishes literature as a suitable medium for expressing trauma. Besides, literary texts are construed in contemporary trauma studies as an object of utmost importance to its study. Substantiating this view, Ramadanovic (2001) affirms literature's appropriateness as a means for representing trauma:

> What makes literature into the privilege, but not only, site of trauma is the fact that literature as an art form can contain and present an aspect of experience which was not experienced or processed fully. Literature, in other words, because of its sensible and representational character, because of its figurative language, is a channel and a medium for a transmission of trauma which does not need to be apprehended in order to be present in a text or, to use Felman's and Dori Laub's term, in order to be witnessed. (2)

Similarly, a unique vinculum exists between literature and trauma because traumatic experiences are often expressed through a defying language which is often quite literary, even though it might be difficult to comprehend (Cathy Caruth, 1996). This is one of the characteristics of literary language, especially typical of poetry. In the opening pages of *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth's (1996) double quotation underscores the significance of literature for theorising, since similar to psychoanalysis, literature is also drawn to the intricate relationship between what is known and what is unknown. Moreover, the use of repetition in literature caters for what is referred to as traumatic neurosis experienced by traumatic victims, because in trauma, there is always some form of repetitive re-enactments. Therefore, literature's language is a language that dares, even as it invites discourse comprehension. Besides, in trauma, there is always some form of complexity as the victim is not able to come to terms completely with the experience; hence, there is always a repeated and belated response. Also, the failure to imagine trauma can only be remedied by an imaginative medium such as literature which can "gain an insight into [the] historical reality, as well as into the attested historicity of [the] unimaginability [of trauma]" (Murray, 1992: 105). Thus, the aptness of literature in representing trauma cannot be overstated and is incontestable.

What is more, there is usually a gap created between traumatic experiences and the general understanding because when a traumatic incident occurs, the victim cannot fully comprehend it; hence, the response is often belated. Therefore, trauma always requests for an "interpretation and re-interpretation from both the survivor and the listener of her testimony" (Elina, 2007:16). The idea of interpretation and re-interpretation connotes in some ways, repetition. Little wonder, repetition as a formal literary device in recounting trauma is emphasised, and literature comes as an appropriate medium for carrying out such interpretation and re-interpretation of the traumatic incident. Thus, for those who desire to investigate the traumatic experiences of people and their influence on society, literature provides such an avenue for the discourse (Neeves, 2008). Besides, Rodi-Risberg (2010) avers that both Cathy Caruth and Shoshanna Felman stress that literature is an incomparable field/discipline for representing traumatic experiences. Hence, literature happens to be an avenue for the tardy response inherent in trauma, and it serves as a form of testimony of what can be referred to as the unclaimed trauma's moment.

Also, trauma studies deal with representing traumatic experiences that are vicious, appalling and unfathomable, garnered from the testimonies of either first-hand or second-hand witnesses. A testimony has more in common with a performative speech act than it does with a simple statement (Felman, 1992). Referring to John Langshaw Austin's famous theory, Elina (2007) asserts that a performative speech act involves action and de-emphasises the veracity or mendacity of whatever it alludes to. Therefore, testimony is not aimed at giving a perfect narration of a traumatic incident because "[a]s a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full recognition, events in excess of our frames of reference" (Felman, 1992: 5). Rather, testimony seeks to influence reality, or the audience. This is certainly what literature does. It recounts human experiences, though not exactly as they must have occurred to preserve the place of creativity. Literature is used as a means to influence society and the intended audience. Felman sees a connection between literature and the performative nature which marks texts as testimonies. Besides, Felman (1992) also alleges that "testimony opens the way to the understanding of the impact of historical events, as well as the action in history that arises from the influence of trauma beyond the traumatic event and the individual survivor". Additionally, Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub (1992) suggest that literature can become a crucial vehicle by functioning as 'a witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated, witnessed in the given categories of history itself' (xviii). Correspondingly, Felman (1992) states that "[l]iterature bears testimony not just to duplicate or to record events, but to make history available to the imaginative act whose historical unavailability has prompted, and made possible, a holocaust" (108). Therefore, the collections of poems under study are testimonies of the traumatic history of the Niger Delta people.

In sum, one way in which trauma narratives can ensure a feeling of reality for their readers is through realistic portrayals and more literal representations of experiences that are traumatic, and many scholars believe that trauma literature can make its way into the traumatised psyche through a more experiential method. Moreover, trauma literature is not defined by insistence on truth nor is it delimited by the constraints that restrict real-life testimonies; hence, it is free to explore ways of accessing the traumatised psyche. One of it

is the use of symbolic language, through which trauma can be represented, though within the scope of the restrictions advanced by the traumatic experience (Rodi-Risberg, 2010).

2.1.4 Trauma and poetry

The idea of unrepresentability of trauma that most classic trauma theorists argue is premised on their postulation that "language fails in the face of trauma, trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency" (Leigh Gilmore, 2001:6). However, Cathy Caruth (1996) states that trauma can be expressed through defying language, which is often literary, and this is distinctive of poetry. Literary language is the figurative form of language; a language that engages various figures of speech or tropes. Poetry, amongst other genres, engages with a high use of literary tropes. This makes poetry suitable for expressing traumatic experiences. This also implies that to understand trauma and literature, tropological analysis is crucial. Besides, trauma victims might not be able to recount the whole truth; hence, testimonies of traumatic experiences are not geared towards an exact allusion to reality, even when it deals with historical events. Poetry can easily cater for this. This is why even when poetry records a historical incidence, the reportage is not given as exactly as it occurred; rather, there is some fictionalisation, which establishes it as an imaginative text and preserves creativity. Also, trauma relates to a complicated situation in which the victim only responds to the experience at a belated time, because it takes some time for the victim to take in the experience, and "[p]oetry is eminently a literature of memory" (Charles Armstrong, 2020: 296). Because of the space created between a traumatic experience and its response, poetry can in a way be viewed as a form of belated response. Besides, "the parts of lyrical, poetic language with its poems and recurring images or tropes are evidence of the state of the narrator-author-witness in a process of reintegration and transference through the trauma narrative" (Johan Anker, 2017: 1).

Similarly, poetry as against prose, many times, does not conform to linearity in narration. Hence, in poetry, logicality in narration is discarded, thereby, ensuring disjointedness (Gubar, 2003). This makes it an apt means of relating trauma because the tale of trauma thrives in disjointedness as the survivor is not fully able to comprehend the experience; thereby, a chronological narrative is unachievable. Corroborating this view, Murray (2009) states that trauma is not available to the victim in a coherent, linear narrative because of its

peculiar trait of temporal elusiveness. Again, poetry is also not interested in making exact allusion to reality; rather, it deals with the psychological, political, ethical and aesthetic effects of the traumatic incidence, not without acknowledging the influence of history (Gubar, 2003). Poetry becomes trauma expressed in literary form because of the similar characteristics of temporality and illogicality in narration in many poems.

Besides, poetry has also been said to be a form of testimony in itself. Felman, regarding Paul Celan, asserts that poetry can be seen as a type of testimony, though, not in all cases (Elina, 2007). It is evident in instances where poetry aims at looking out for an addressee, even in obvious situations where it rehearses historical realities and the idea of an addressee is practically impracticable. This also materialises when poetry takes into cognisance its limitations and quit hinging on its self-sufficient ability and verity. Poetry, then, might be considered a "testimonial project of address" (Felman, 1992:38). Similarly, Felman avers that "[p]oetry becomes, precisely, the event of creating an address for the specificity of a historical experience which annihilated any possibility of address" (38). Besides, Kaplan (2005) avers that when a work of art is used as an art of witness, it is done in such an aesthetic and rhetorical way that the reader can relate to the traumatic experience of the victim and get a bigger picture of the height of injustice meted out on the victim, more than the victim possesses of himself at the same time. Accordingly, a work of art, bearing witness to a traumatic situation, keeps the memories of the experience alive. Through literature, the reader is made to encounter the traumatic experience afresh. This arouses in the reader some form of responsibility for the traumatised.

Whitehead (2004) argues that "[o]ne of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is the device of repetition, which can act at the levels of language, imagery or plot. Repetition mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression" (86). Therefore, repetition is deployed as a formal literary device for expressing traumatic experiences. Also, the use of repetition as a literary device shows Freud's idea of repetition compulsion that the victim of trauma observes as an obligation. In sum, the effect of trauma may be effectively delineated in literature by imitating associated structures and signs. These can be achieved through the deployment of non-linear narrative techniques, repetition (consequent on distorted

thoughts), etc. Besides, trauma victims do not recollect a traumatic experience in detail, which necessitates going back and forth in time when narrating the experience, suggesting non-linearity in narration. Also, writers are not completely in control of writing, and neither does it emanate from a place of full consciousness. Moreover, literary critics emphasise a connection between literary representations and dreams because they provide other ways of relating to physical reality, but that this appears to be more poignant in the poetry genre of literature. As a result, psychoanalysis remains a veritable tool for approaching psychic distress, despite the latest developments in medicine that ensure the provision of chemical help for mental distress. Humanists are persuaded to place a high premium on "the talking cure" above drugs (Howarth, 1996).

In conclusion, poetry also becomes a haven through which traumatic incidences can be represented. Poetic texts produce a safe place whereby a state of relative equilibrium in trauma is normalised and observed. Through poetry, the most profound and most dreadful can be exposed as well as also secured; the poetic text can also enclose awful experiences without being consumed totally by them. Besides, the act of imaginative creation gives room for the most dreadful and frightening to be studied from an unscathed distance, similar to rites and ceremonies or even psychological treatment. Moreover, the language of poetry penetrates through the repressive machinery presented by language and memory, to reveal the slices of trauma shut in inside. It possesses the power to reconstruct an out-of-order existence and offers novel forms of articulation (Dudai, 2016). In his article, Dudai summarises that the ability to access memory from a perspective that can accommodate and investigate it, which is given and promoted specifically through poetic language use, and which allows for a clever kind of disremembering and perchance, the likelihood of releasing trauma.

2.2 Empirical review

2.2.1 Niger Delta region: a glimpse into its reality

The Niger Delta region spans a wide area of 70,000 kilometres with about 12 million denizens (approximately 15 percent of the 140 million inhabitants of the nation derived from the 2006 census). This part of the nation is believed to be one of the most enriched regions of the world. The region comprises nine (9) states: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa,

Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. Two undeniable realities about the Niger Delta region are the fact that it is advantageously significant to national and international economies and it possesses massive wealth, yet is impoverished (Paul, 2011). Also, the region has one of the largest oil reserves on earth. More than 34 billion drums of black gold are found in the Niger Delta region (USGS Open-file report, 1999). However, any attempt to represent the quotidian reality in this area is often greeted with a very pressing environmental condition so much that the writer's creativity cannot but tilt towards an eschatological depiction of such reality (Aghoghovwia, 2016).

The Niger Delta region is faced with a plethora of crises triggered by the dissatisfaction encountered by the residents over several problems associated with oil exploration and exploitation. This crisis has been in place since the oil trade began (Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 2011). The region, despite enriching the nation, is a pitiable sight to behold. Ray Ekpu (2004:10) reports on the pathetic state of the region:

> The story of the Niger Delta is the story of a paradox, grinding poverty in the midst of vulgar opulence. It is the case of a man who lives on the bank of a river and washes his hands with spittle. It is the case of people who live in the farm and die of hunger. (qtd. Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 2011:52)

More so, the economic denial goes with the destruction of the environment, which endows the crisis in the Niger Delta a struggle of epic magnitudes that has hitherto constituted a subject of discussion at the global level. Furthermore, the human resources, potential and land of the Niger Delta altogether have experienced significant inadvertence from succeeding governments in Nigeria (Nwahunanya, 2011). Painfully, the condition of the inhabitants of this region is disheartening owing to egregious social and individual penury. The situation is not only common to the populace of this region but also to the land and the assets that could have served as means of maintaining the opulence accompanying the oil deposits (Balogun, 2011). Onyema (2011) validates the aforesaid view in his description of the Niger Delta region, which he refers to as "…an area in the South-South and part of the South-East parts of Nigeria, where the discovery with exploration of large crude oil deposits, has remained largely exploitative, and leaves the people, their waters and lands devastated" (422). Consequently, the inhabitants become callously endangered to such a

high level of physical and psychological instability, and agony in contrast to the region's endowment.

The reality that defines this region evokes pity and pain. The Niger Delta region has been averred to possess one of the greatest ecosystems in the world, the largest mangrove in Africa and the third largest mangrove forest in the world. It houses West and Central Africa's most expansive fresh marsh, with the main forest accumulation of high biodiversity and the hub of endemism in Nigeria (Saro-Wiwa, 1995). Besides, the region harbours oil and gas in large proportions, which adds to approximately eighty percent of Nigeria's revenue, and positions the nation as one of the main exporters of oil in the globe (Onyema, 2015). However, this is not without severe repercussions for the inhabitants of this region as "…oil exploration has spelt doom for the Niger Delta instead of the anticipated boom" (Nwosu, 2011: 463). Balogun (2011) asserts:

> The 'milk' and 'honey' deposited in the region are there to enrich, fatten, nurture, mentor and mature the inhabitants of the region. Thus, the contrary visible there is a negation of care taking. Thus, the desirability of a sincere interventionist approach inherent in the previous and current literary discourses on the region as panacea is urgent. (563)

It was declared that since the espial and exploration of oil in this region in 1956, the denizens have been exposed and made to contend with different forms of terrorism on their ecosystems making the region "… the hotbed of resource-conflict" (Gomba, 2016:137), which is registered through the devastation of the aquatic and terrestrial resources that are yet to be exploited. Moreover, in this area, there is a violent exploration of oil by multinational companies with the aid of successive military and civilian governments, and the support also of the main *ethnic* groups in a way that pauperises the ancestorial possessors and depletes their ecosystems (Onyema, 2015). In other words, this is a region whose resources have been employed to expand other regions of the nation and beyond, while the natives are pauperised.

The crisis in the Niger Delta region has drawn attention from the international community, owing to the increasing threat to security in Nigeria, and specifically, its influence on the international trade cost of oil (Ojakorotu, 2009). The Niger Delta region, formerly a place to behold with its virgin lands and unsullied beauty, has become a mere shadow of itself

since the birth of the oil boom and exploitation. Despite the several struggles of the sons of the soil (Saro-Wiwa, Isaac Boro, amongst others) for their lands, years after their deaths, environmental degradation still lingers and every new government get preoccupied with their sales at the international market, rather than the deteriorating state of the masses (Dick, 2016). As a result, Ojakorotu (2008) states:

> Since the discovery of oil in commercial quantities by Shell-BP in Ijaw community of Olobiri in Ogbia Local Government of Bayelsa State in 1956, the inhabitants of the region have persistently engaged the oil companies and the Nigerian State in a series of protest…At the heart of the struggle for participatory environmental governance is the question of resource control. (95)

Thus, the battle for human dignity and relief from subjugation in the Niger Delta region started in the mid-1960s. The climax of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970 ushered in another war spearheaded by the Niger Delta people, but this time around, it was a verbal war used for the emancipation of its residents and their resources from the rapacious hold of the greedy political leaders (Darah, 2009).

While there is a global environmental crisis, the Niger Delta's plight as a result of the depth of environmental degradation and the complication of the crisis is extremely appalling (Akpobibibo, 2008). The natives in the region are greatly oppressed, suppressed, repressed and marginalised. Yet, the wealth of the Niger Delta region in natural resources cannot be overstated. The Niger Delta community is well endowed with natural resources, particularly, oil and gas and it "…is home to one of the lushiest vegetations in Nigeria despite calculated attempts to deprive it of this noble attribute" (Nwosu, 2011:456). The land and the river, which were in time past, relishing to the populace of this region are at the moment fountainheads of their decrepitude and distress. Also, the agricultural land which provided the inhabitants with the necessities of life and survival is now polluted by oil spillage. Also, the river that contained fishes serving both subsistence and commercial use has undergone petro-chemical vitiation. Yet, the people of the Niger Delta attach spiritual value to their land and river, which are considered sacred. Their survival and continual existence are hinged on the salvaging effects of those sacralised natural icons. Consequently, the infringement of the oil companies results in the extermination of humans who depend on it for spiritual, physical and psychological sustenance. The result is hunger,

which leads to terrorism (demonstrated by insurgency in the Niger Delta) in the end because of the high level of mistreatment, maltreatment and mishandling.

The exploitation of the region has left severe trauma in its wake. Balogun (2011) argues that, undoubtedly, the trauma experienced by the natives of the Niger Delta is a premeditated scheme by the top echelons in Nigeria politics to debase the lives of the dwellers. Their land is typified by anguish, agony, alienation and marginalisation. Until the advent and evolvement of practical ways to tackle the palpable menace dogging the region, there will be no end to the social upheaval present in the Niger Delta region. Balogun concludes that the troubles of the Niger Delta are not natural disasters or features of the spirit world, rather it is that which is deliberately fashioned out by agents determined to maintain capitalist interests. Therefore, ecological imperialism has resulted in, amongst others, underdevelopment, loss of plants, animals, and trees, as well as pollution of rivers, environmental deterioration, and impoverishment of the natives and Nigerians as a whole (Chinaka, 2011). There are several definitions of ecological imperialism. However, this study supports Opperman's (2007) description of ecological imperialism as "the intentional destruction, through exploitation, extraction and transfer of natural resources of the colonised lands in the interests of scientific and economic progress" (179). Similarly, Ushie (2011) notes that the Niger Delta has been the cynosure of dual main catastrophes, as the combat zone for displaying international greed by the West dating back to the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade and as the nation's continually trodden ethnic minorities by successive ethnic majorities' oppressive administrations ever since Nigeria's independence, alongside the vivacious involvement of a small number of political elites from the region over time. Consequently, the Niger Delta happens to be a metaphor and testimony to the failed state of Nigeria and its pipe dream of achieving nationhood, despite the attainment of independence.

The coastal positioning of the Niger Delta region and its assets, which are represented in palm oil and crude oil that are supposed to be a source of blessing, have become a curse by humans and their activities. While its seashore position has created a doleful medium for human labour and the transatlantic slave trade era, its palm oil wealth has also become another avenue for the depreciation of the life of humans, which alongside crude oil wealth,

re-introduces another round of noxious hegemony. At the same time, gas eruption, acid rain, dilapidated infrastructure and communication amenities glower at the denizens of the affected area. Ojaruega (2011) describes the Niger Delta condition vividly when he states that the activities of extracting crude oil and flaring gas have resulted in the pollution of the land, water as well as air. Consequently, it has exposed the natives to various diseases, besides the gradual extinction happening to the once rich biodiversity. Furthermore, the physical scenery is swiftly losing its lush flora and fauna. Numerous incidents of oil spillage because of pipelines that are not well laid and defective equipment have the land irremediably mutilated. Also, farmers experience poor harvests, year in, and year out because of the nonnutritive soils. It is the same for people whose means of livelihood are the water bodies in this region. Thus, people have been forced to give up their main source of living, which further limits their means of subsistence. The Niger Delta dilemma is lucidly a typical instance of a blessing that has become a curse, because the natives are continually browbeaten and abandoned in a marginalised condition, even though they are the source of the nation's revenue. Surprisingly, a great deal of the generated wealth is diverted to advancing other regions in the country and making rich a group of politicians and government officials. Heading this group are foreign international companies, as well as past military coteries and civilian governments.

Therefore, Niger Delta literature (poetry in particular) has been a reaction to this degraded state and a protest against the brutal acts of men. Specifically, Niger Delta poetry has been a principal breeding ground amongst Nigerian literary researchers and critics of ecocriticism (Ushie, 2011). Ushie projects that the continued traumatisation of the people of the Niger Delta by the traumatic conditions is likely to result in an insurgency. Besides, Niger Delta literature often includes linguistic choices crafted to depict the people's distinctive experiences through aesthetic phrases that describe the repudiation, destruction and agony in the land, and the trauma the people undergo (Onyema, 2015). In tandem with the foregoing, Onyema also states that the traumatic experience to which the oil drill has predisposed the people of the Niger Delta is expressed using words of destruction and brutality. Hence, the Niger Delta has given revolution-inclined writers a real active ground. They have also proposed the dialectics of force as the ultimate solution to the Niger Delta's problem, as a prolonged lament, in addition to other approaches, have failed (Onukaogu &

Onyerionwu, 2011). While Ushie makes reference to a probable upheaval as a rejoinder to trauma in Ogbowei's poetry, Onyema's generally emphasises the deployment of linguistic choices in Niger Delta literature to depict trauma suffered by the Niger Delta inhabitants owing to oil exploration and exploitation. Moreover, the continual desecration of nature becomes traumatic as it leaves the populace psychologically affected (Dick, 2016). However, this study treats the subject of trauma in six selected poetry collections in Niger Delta region namely: *Songs of Myself*; *Tears in a Basket*; *Letters from the Earth*; *marsh boy and other poems*; *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat*; and *Oily Tears of the Delta*. In addition, it expresses in detail the representations of trauma exemplified in poems in these collections, which opposes the passive mentions in the earlier critical essays, as it employs not only diction but also other literary devices in foregrounding trauma. As a result, trauma has become a recurring phenomenon amongst the Niger Delta natives enunciated in Niger Delta literature.

Besides, Niger Delta poetry possesses a lachrymal tenor and threnodic fervour, as it is a reaction to a lethal exploration and exploitation of crude oil in the Niger Delta region in Nigeria, represented in literary form. In sum, the Niger Delta situation is a result of the 'triangulating greed' which includes the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism (Ushie, 2011). As a consequence, the tone of Niger Delta poets is militant, as they engage art in a protest against the exploitation and expropriation of their land. This informs and influences Niger Delta protest literature. Trinya (2011) recounts the history of Niger Delta protest literature as that which predates the existing abandonment of the region, in terms of development, by the government and multinational companies and goes as far back as the pre-colonial era. The nature of the protest moved from being very nonviolent and tactful to the unavoidable taking up of arms, with the activists, such as Isaac Adaka Boro, dubbed 'dissidents' and 'cultists'. This is the battle creative writers have also engaged in, with their armament, as representatives for the unrepresented "minorities".

To conclude, at present, Nigerian poetry is not complete without the discourse of ecopoetry which is pioneered and championed by poets from the Niger Delta area. This deals with the issue of environmentalism, which is gradually but appreciably interlacing Nigerian poetry (Bala, 2011). Poets who come from the Niger Delta are the maestros as well as advocates

of this style of poetry where a textually and linguistically varied opulent locale is interlaced into a bigger cultural map, while still being very mindful of its aesthetics besides the continual existence of its ecology and culture in a setting that is politically, economically and socially independent, and developed. The Niger Delta region is in a deplorable state. As such, the wretched state of the Niger Delta environment has left different marks on the imaginative consciousness that is perceptible in Niger Delta poetry, which is characterised by the theme of mourning for a once-endowed area ruined by the collective greed of strangers; mourning for the 'goose that lays the proverbial golden egg' that is being destroyed while laying the egg by the masters for which sake the egg is laid (Trinya, 2011). Also, in terms of stylistic features, Niger Delta poetry tends to be lyrical. Nonetheless, the subject of protest against underdevelopment which the writers have in common remains unalloyed, just as the denials that incited those lyrics have not considerably altered. Besides, the stance of the writers explicates that these establishments have not ameliorated the fate of the ordinary fisherman; rather, the region is exploited to improve the lot of other lands and persons, in addition to the risks the people of the region are exposed to as a result of the activities of these multinational oil companies. Presently, Niger Delta poetry does not only vocalise the experiences and visions of the individual poets from this region but also put in plain words the collective desires of the people of the region for fairness (Okunoye, 2008).

2.2.2 Appraisal of the poetry collections

In Niger Delta literature, the lachrymal often coexists with the revolutionary. This is primarily to demonstrate the cause-and-effect logic that provides an image of a browbeaten and repressed people, suppressing their desire to cause an insurrection after noticing that their tears did not bring forth the needed results, particularly, when shed for a cruel class. The lachrymal rationalises the revolutionary, and vice-versa, suggesting equilibrium of instruments for tackling the crisis in which they are located. Ojaide, who has possibly been the most dedicated and unwavering literary advocate of the predicament of the Niger Delta since the publication of his *Children of Iroko* (1973), is lachrymal and revolutionary (Onukaogu & Onyerionwu, 2011). His poetry, just like his entire literary oeuvre, constantly showcases his lachrymosity and revolutionary inclinations in dealing with frantic matters about the Niger Delta.

Tanure Ojaide is a foremost pioneer of environmental poetry. He belongs to the second generation of Nigerian poets, whom Harry Garuba (2005) calls the "Marxist-Nationalists". They are regarded as second-generation poets, a generation distinguished from their predecessors not by their thematic preoccupation but by their deviation from the euro-stylistic tendencies of the first-generation poets, favouring a more African indigenous poetics that depended significantly on orature, and simple diction (Sule Egya, 51). Ojaide is also one of the poets whom Aiyejina (1988) adjudges to be from the "Alter/Native tradition". Aiyejina refers to them as such because they worked towards demystifying poetry and advocated a return to African indigenous tradition through their deployment of African idioms, orature and other indigenous folklores in presenting their message. Ojaruega (2011) substantiates Aiyejina's view, classifying Ojaide as a member of the modern Nigerian poets who pioneered the alternative tradition in poetry in Africa. Apart from resorting to their rich traditional heritage for materials for their artistic works, these poets also write in a simple language for their audience, in stark contrast to their predecessors, amongst whom are Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka, whose poetry modelled the euro-modernist techniques that were incomprehensible, disjointed and extremely cerebral.

As one of the pioneers of the 'Alter-native tradition', Ojaide's poetry, free of eccentric expressions and esoteric images, depends on parables and allusions to folkloric rituals fitted to contemporary usages, which include his campaign for the reclamation of Niger Delta's ecosystem and the amelioration of the populace's condition of living in the region (Aghoghovwia, 2014). Thus, Ojaide embarks on a mission as both a cultural and an environmental redeemer. He takes over as the poet persona from the oral tradition to verbalise the predicament of his people. In essence, his conscious resort to oral traditions from his homeland as a source of material for his poetry, discloses the truth that Ojaide is a man who possesses an abundance of knowledge of his traditional tradition and he is also up to date on the happenings of his people (Ojaruega, 2011). With this substantiating evidence in Aghoghovwia and Ojaruega's viewpoints, Ojaide does not possess a lopsided personality and activism. As he makes recourse to his tradition, he places it next to the current happenings of his society. Ojaide utilises these oral traditions to expose the heinous activities of the despoilers and reclaim his once-unsullied land. His deployment of oral

traditions, apart from being part of the "Alter-native tradition", can also be said to be the need to identify with his people and their traditions, while articulating their predicament, and making the gap of his distant abode invisible. Typical of Ojaide's art, his collection of poetry that will be examined for this study also deploys oral traditions in articulating the dilemma of the Niger Delta inhabitants. However, the emphasis of this study is not on the utilisation of cultural resources, but on the ways through which the destruction of the environment in the Niger Delta region traumatises the residents.

Ojaide, a poet who is very conscious of his environment, makes room for social realities that characterise the environment where he once resides to be represented in his oeuvre. This is also typical of the style of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the poet who was put to death for his eco-activism (Ayinuola & Eugenie, 2016). To Ken Saro-Wiwa (1995), literature in a critical situation such as Nigeria's cannot be divorced from politics. Indeed, literature must serve society by steeping itself in politics, and by intervention, and writers must not merely write to amuse or take a bemused, critical look at society. Rather, they must play an intervention role. Ojaide's poetry takes into cognisance this intervention role as he makes use many times of a fictitious character as his poet persona through whose point of view Ojaide peregrinates the span of his homeland reflecting on the different social and cultural experiences (Ojaruega, 2011). Besides, Ojaide's poetry has been described as centre on political discourses and subject matters on environmental degradation similar to that of his contemporaries (Awuzie, 2017). Having political matters and ecological devastation subjects as the focus in his poetry implies an aim: seeking to intervene in the cause of the people. In the same way, Darah (2009) asserts:

> The poetry of Tanure Ojaide… fits into the tradition of outrage against political injustice, exploitation and environmental disasters. On the basis of sheer output, Ojaide is the most prolific in the Niger Delta region. From his titles, one can discern an Abiding concern with the fate of the Niger delta people. (12)

Thus, Ayinuola and Eugenie, Awuzie, Darah and Ojaruega confirm Ojaide as an interventionist in the Niger Delta quagmire; while it can be inferred from Awuzie, Darah, Ayinuola and Eugenie's choice of words, Ojaruega states it explicitly. This intervention is crucial because the degradation of the environment has also begun to impact the lives of the denizens psychologically, which this study will foreground.

Also, Ayinuola and Eugenie affirm that Ojaide feels indebted to the populace of Nigeria, which is why he views eco-conscious poetry as a type of responsibility, which is to reveal, rebuild and reverse the realities of ecological devastation in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. In sum, he employs literature to serve the environment as he gives priority to the sustainability and conservation of the biotic community. Ojaide is a poetic model who is ecologically aware and responsive to the populace's predicament and that of the environment. Ayinuola and Eugenie observe that the Niger Delta community which was once inactive unexpectedly turned out to be active, and it was this surprising activeness that birthed what Ikiriko (2000) metaphorically regards as 'oil tears' and as a result, the exploitative feeding on the blood of the people and environment end in opposition, defiance, violent behaviour and more despoliation of the constructed and natural ecology. Whereas Ayinuola and Eugenie suggest Ojaide's feeling of indebtedness as the reason for his eco-sensitive poetry, they believe that it is the activeness which replaced the once inert Niger Delta that produced Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*. Though Ikiriko is a later comer to the field of ecological discourse in the Niger Delta, decades after which Ojaide had begun his career, the message is still unchanging because the conditions are still the same.

Further, Orhero (2017) refers to Ojaide as a dynamic poet whose reputation as a relevant figure in African poetry has not changed since his debut in the 1970s, although his thematic preoccupations and techniques have changed overtime alongside the history and trepidations of his people. Orhero adds that the varied critical commentaries that Ojaide's works have attracted, establish him as a poet of many colours, a socio-political activist, an ecocritical campaigner and a cultural poet par excellence, amongst others. Corroborating the idea of Ojaide's relevance, Ojaruega (2011) avers that until recently that Ojaide took upon himself the position of the poet persona to grapple with personal concerns and predicaments of his people, he has unwaveringly contended with problems facing the Niger Delta since the start of his career in writing in the early 1970s. Likewise, Charles Bodunde describes Ojaide as possibly the most creative African writer from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and discloses that he began writing in the early seventies as a reaction to what he refers to as the unpalatable condition of catastrophe present in the Niger Delta environs (qtd. Onukaogu & Onyerionwu, 2011). Therefore, Orhero, Ojaruega and Bodunde affirm the fact that Ojaide is very relevant in both national and international scenes, and to the discourse

of environmental devastation in the Niger Delta. However, while Orhero establishes his relevance not just to the local community (Niger Delta), but to the international public (African society and the world at large); Ojaruega admits that Ojaide's significance is central to the Niger Delta situation (local community). Bodunde also declares that the Niger Delta crisis provided the impetus for Ojaide's poetry. However, for him to be relevant to African society, he must have been relevant to his home.

Ojaide is the author of sixteen poetry collections, three novels, two collections of short stories, one memoir and numerous scholarly works. Given these, Ojaruega (2011) describes him as a prolific writer, with many works narrating the quagmire his people and homeland are contending with. Several of his poems address issues confronting the advancement of the Niger Delta area and its inhabitants who have experienced more harm than good from the discovery of a treasure on their land. Several scholars confirm that he is one writer who has taken it as his main responsibility to bring to public awareness, both nationally and globally, the plight of this area and the denizens, which is as a result of the horrible activities of the past federal governments and their accomplice, the oil multinationals, who persistently exploit and subjugate the people. Correspondingly, Nwagbara (2010) remarks that Ojaide views ecopoetical discourse as a form of civic duty which he is obligated to fulfil to the Nigerian citizens, by exposing, reconstructing and negating the realities of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region. Besides, writers like Ojaide whose works clamour for the restoration of a more virginal environment for the region, despite the constant oil exploration activities, are regarded as intellectual activists interested in ennobling environmental rights and justice. Identifying with this view, Nwagbara also refers to Ojaide as an environmental rights campaigner because he uses art (poetry) to interrogate the politics of the environment. He decries the destruction of the environment through oil exploration and exploitation and seeks a world free from this depredation. Therefore, while Ojaruega refers to Ojaide as an intellectual activist, Nwagbara calls him an environmental rights campaigner, which together connotes Ojaide's activism. Ojaide's intellectual activism is steeped in environmental equity.

Ojaide's activism indicts both local and foreign exploiters for unashamedly enriching themselves with the revenue got from oil and gas, while the land and its dwellers languish

in abject penury. Given that, several of his poems focus on the conspiracy of the aforementioned set of persons who commit all manner of atrocious crimes to amass wealth. Hence, Ojaide stops at nothing to attack tyrannical leadership which methodically keeps the people perpetually impoverished and subjugated to the whims of the elites in society and foreign conspirators (Ojaruega, 2011). The bedrock of his activism is the harsh conditions Niger Delta and its people are subject to. Besides, Ojaide foresees change ensuing from his ecologically committed art. According to Nwagbara (2010), for Ojaide, poetic art that is responsive to the predicament of the Niger Delta people and Nigerians as a whole, as their ecosystem vanishes off the face of the earth, is momentous. Nwagbara also adds that "among recent poetry in Nigeria, perhaps, none is more charged with environmentalist alertness, and none more self-consciously steeped in anti-imperialist terms than Tanure Ojaide's poetry" (22). Time and again, the responsiveness of Ojaide's art to the realities that describe the lives of the Niger Delta people is recognised by both Nwagbara and Ojaruega. Though Ojaruega identifies Ojaide's poems as extending to the oppressive authorities that shamefully enrich themselves while the people sink in poverty, Nwagbara refers to his poems as depicting the plight of the Niger Delta people, Nigerians and their ecosystem. Nevertheless, the fact remains that in a discourse on the condition of the Niger Delta, even without Nwagbara stating it explicitly here, the role played by those despotic authorities will always be implied because there is no effect without a cause.

Furthermore, Ojaruega (2011) avows that Ojaide is still into the art of writing with several of his poetry collections addressing the Niger Delta region which he depicts has environmentally transformed from its initial unsullied state, as a result of the injurious activities of oil companies and irrational beings. Nevertheless, Ojaide does not think that the damage is beyond repair, because measures can be put in place to inhibit the damage and bring back the environment in fine fettle again. In tandem, Nwagbara (2010) affirms that Ojaide believes that the ability to make a new earth, free from environmental devastation and political oppression lies in the resistance rhetoric, which contradicts the prevailing spirit of the era. From Ojaruega's and Nwagbara's submissions, it can be inferred that Ojaide believes in the renaissance of a new earth. However, without being specific, Ojaruega refers to measures which must be put in place to effectuate, unlike Nwagbara, who specifically cites resistance rhetoric as the necessary measure. The deployment of resistance

rhetoric in Niger Delta poetry as a response to the traumatising conditions in the Niger Delta region will be underscored in this study.

Without a doubt, Tanure Ojaide is a Nigerian, though an African poet who possesses a distinctive voice that chants about the Niger Delta people's condition. What is more, the exigent environmental, social, economic and political state of his people has required Ojaide to set apart his poetry, in its widest sense, to depict the dilemma facing his people as it has made him renown as, among other things, the activist writer of the region. Also, Ojaide is referred to as the "poet laureate of the Niger Delta", given his persistent perturbation about his region, which according to him is an exposition of worldwide and human concerns (Ojaruega, 2011). Likewise, Nwagbara (2010) remarks that one of the distinguishing characteristics of Ojaide's art is his engagement with literature in expressing the realities of his locale. For him, literature is a representation of social realities and a reflection of the entirety of human experience. Thus, both of them acknowledge the distinctiveness that characterises Ojaide and his oeuvre in portraying the predicament of his people. While Ojaruega focuses on Ojaide's voice, Nwagbara examines his art. Nevertheless, Ojaide's voice cannot be divorced from his art because the uniqueness of his voice is represented through his art. However, this study will examine how environmental degradation generates traumatogenic experiences and trauma for the inhabitants of the affected communities in the Niger Delta through Ojaide's art (*Songs of Myself*), amongst other selected collections.

Moreover, Nwagbara maintains that Ojaide's poetry is a reliable barometer for measuring environmental realities in Nigeria, as a result of its constant engagement with the actualities of ecological imperialism. In addition, Ojaide's art has been regarded as a literary prototype that takes cognisance of the environment, while being ecologically sensitive to the dilemma of the populace and their ecosystem. Thus, without incertitude, Ojaide believes in the potency of literature (poetry) to bring about change. Therefore, he opines that "poetry must be a functional, aesthetic and ideological tool for environmental agitation" (Nwagbara, 2010:23). Also, his writings have come to be acknowledged as ecologically sensitive texts with the introduction of ecocriticism, because they demonstrate a strong affinity with the natural world while spotlighting the impingement of anthropocentric activities on the environment. Chinaka (2011) shares a similar view with Nwagbara when she admits that,

amongst others, Ojaide's foremost attainment is the dexterity he displays in interlacing his craft with the poetics of environmental defiance, which is anchored on the aesthetics, survivability and betterment of the environment. He also employs ecocriticism to question the effacement of the environment, which is endangering the lives of humans. In their critiquing of Ojaide and his opus, Nwagbara and Chinaka agree that the aesthetics of Ojaide's poetry is lodged in environmental resistance, and there is a palpable deployment of ecocriticism in Ojaide's poetry. Although Nwagbara asserts that the introduction of ecocriticism in Ojaide's poetry portrays the relationship between literature and ecology while emphasising the destructive effect of human activities on ecology, Chinaka avers that Ojaide's poetry applies ecocriticism to challenge the effacement of the environment and its effect on the existence of humankind. However, it can be inferred that there is an obvious chain of relationships. The vicious activities of humans affect the environment, which, in turn, jeopardises human lives, and this study will establish that these destructive activities translate into trauma for the inhabitants of the affected communities.

Consequently, Ojaide and other writers from the Niger Delta have deliberately wielded protest literature as a result of the constant ecological crime committed against the lands of the Niger Delta communities, and applauded by the ruthless government institutions (Uwasomba, 2014). Ojaide has been commended by critics for his outspokenness when expressing the Niger Delta reality, specifically the exploitation and aftermath abandonment; also, his poetry's ability to determine Nigeria's opinion and that of Nigerians, in general, is extolled (Edwin et. al., 2019). Similar to the protest nature of Ojaide and other Niger Delta writers, Bie (2017) maintains that Ibiwari Ikiriko's, another Niger Delta poet, vision in *Oily Tears of the Delta*, similar to those of other poets from the region, is that of protest. He further opines that the wholly protestant nature of Ikiriko's poetic vision in this poetry collection is a result of the need to struggle against socio-environmental degeneration that is experienced in the Niger Delta region. Nutsukpo (2018) affirms that through *Oily Tears of the Delta*, Ikiriko does not only create awareness but also uses poetry as an instrument through which he contributes personally to the battle for the liberation of the Niger Delta region. Similarly, of Ogbowei's poetry, also another Niger Delta poet, Anyokwu (2019) says that it is centred on two primary subject matters, love and agitation, over the apparent or assumed official desertion of the Niger Delta, which is also referred to as the oil-endowed

region. Corroborating this, Adebiyi-Adelabu (2020) states that Ogbowei's versification in *marsh boy and other poems* dwells within the conventions of the poetry of resistance as well as love, with each of these subjects occupying the two divisions that the collection consists of. Emphasising these aforementioned subjects, he affirms that the poetry collection is, undeniably, a remedial intellectual activism against the disturbing experiences engendered by environmental devastation, and also an aesthetic contemplation on love as well as affection.

All the critics together have established the recurring protest tradition and activism in Niger Delta writers exemplified in the works of Ojaide, Ikiriko and Ogbowei. Although, Uwasomba asserts that Ojaide protests against the crime committed against the Niger Delta ecology, Edwin et. al. state that Ojaide remonstrates against exploitation and the desertion that follows. Also, while Bie reports that Ikiriko's protest is hinged on the destruction doled out on the Niger Delta society and environment; Nutsukpo avows that Ikiriko's battle is for the liberation of the Niger Delta region. Anyokwu acknowledges that Ogbowei's protest is against the abandonment of the Niger Delta resource-endowed region. Lastly, Adebiyi-Adelabu confirms the protest tradition in Ogbowei's poetry. This environmental activism and combat are an immediate rejoinder to the undue freedom enjoyed by the despoilers of the environment, the infringement on human rights, and the seeming abandonment of the region by the Nigerian government on one hand, and the employment of unremitting ecological hazards inflicted on the Niger Delta localities stemming from the multinational oil companies' activities on the other hand (Ojakorotu, 2009). Though, this study will go further to emphasise protest, rather than melancholia and mourning, as reaction to the traumatogenic experiences and trauma suffered by the Niger Deltans owing to environmental degradation.

This environmental activism laced with revolutionary aesthetics is emphasised further in Ikiriko's poetry. Ikiriko is a blunt and active social activist whose poetry can be revolutionary and can move to the level of radical opposition (Onukaogu & Onyerionwu, 2011). More than a few poems in Ikiriko's collection introduce and establish the need to muster for and embark on an insurrection, maybe because the lamentatory approach was not effective. To Ikiriko, revolution seems to be the only means for rescuing something from

the present crisis in the Niger Delta for the sake of the future. Similarly, of G'Ebinyo Ogbowei, Okafor (2019) observes that his ecocritical plan, as regards the degradations facing the Niger Delta environs and populace, is confrontational, lamentational and insurrectional. Consequently, Onukoagu and Onyerionwu (2011) as well as Okafor ascertain the presence of the use of the lachrymal and revolutionary approach in the Niger Delta literature, which is represented in the poetry of Ikiriko and Ogbowei. However, Ikiriko's deployment of revolutionary aesthetics was unprecedented, as shown by many of his poems in the only collection he has to his credit. He adopted a revolutionary tone long before Ogbowei. This could be hinged on his nature as a frank and energetic activist. It was as though he had a premonition of his early death and was spurred to therefore leave no stone unturned and refrain from procrastination. Ogbowei, in addition to revolutionary inclinations and lachrymosity, which are characteristics he has in common with Ikiriko and Ojaide, is confrontational, a characteristic that could sometimes be conflated with revolutionary tendencies.

Revolutionary aesthetics is sustained in Ikiriko's poetry, and his poetry is considered as, possibly, a deviation, a cultural vestige that was mainly created to undermine the consequences of those signposts that are power-bearing, which is disseminated among typical expression of political discourse as well as in localities where fittings of oil are found (Aghoghovwia, 2014). Similarly, Aghoghovwia (2017) opines that Ikiriko's poetry urges the reader to reflect on cartography which is represented by signposts and boundaries as the obvious indicators of the methods through which neoliberal globalisation sets up and runs oil enclaves in the Niger Delta area. In sum, Aghoghovwia states that Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* might be viewed as poetry which employs dialogue and alters its very use, which arises from, reacts to and reviews the type of globalism that makes up the oil mining sites. Thus, Ikiriko can be said to be someone who loathes oppression and is intolerant of whatever method through which it is executed. Consequently, he challenges those oppressive philosophies, structures, systems as well as methods.

Besides, foregrounding Ikiriko's use of figurative language, Trinya (2011) compares him to Ebi Yeibo whom he describes as a songster because of his lyrical inclinations which, though, go beyond the alliterative to the onomatopoeic. He also states that the poetry of Ibiwari

Ikiriko, who exited from the world in 2002, also made use of straying alliterative effects; however, he utilises it to his benefit than others as he still retains a firm grip on the theme of exploitation experienced by his people and region, inflicted by mean foreign coalitions who disguise to be governments and multinational conglomerates. Ikiriko who hails from Okrika in Rivers State, which was the hub of the 'oil war' alongside its oil wells and spills with numerous perils, records from his twinge of first-hand witnessing, the asininity of the abuse of the land about which he screeches in *Oily Tears of the Delta*, his only volume of poetry that was published. Also, alluding to Ogbowei, Trinya also avows that the Niger Delta hallmark on Ogbowei's poetry does not only impress his theme but also his diction. In both Ikiriko and Ogbowei's poetry, Trinya emphasises their use of language. While he states that in Ikiriko there is a glaring employment of alliterative language in representing the subject of exploitation, the Niger Delta trademark influences Ogbowei's diction, but Trinya does not expatiate how. Consequently, it can be deduced that whatever aesthetics the poets of the Niger Delta employ in their poetry, they do that without losing sight of the exigent matter at hand. Similarly, this study will examine the deployment of figurative language and devices in not only expressing the Niger Delta predicament, but also foregrounding trauma as a corollary of environmental degradation in Niger Delta region.

Ibiwari Ikiriko is regarded as the foremost voice of the generation after Ojaide in the new school of poetry; and his poetry concerned itself with intense politics as it unreservedly vociferates the spoilage, terrible environmental, economic and political difficulties plaguing the Niger Delta region (Stephen, 2017). Similarly, Stephen describes Ogbowei's versification of the calamitous engravings of oil discovery in the Niger Delta area as heartrending like Ikiriko's. As such, it can be stated that Ikiriko and Ogbowei have some things in common, specifically, concerning their articulation of the Niger Delta crisis. However, Ikiriko seems to be of a higher echelon compared to Ogbowei. He has made so much impact and attracted a lot of commentaries with just a collection. Though, Ogbowei seems to be carving out his niche in the literary world of the Niger Delta region, and Stephen (2013) refers to him as part of the burgeoning number of poets who are natives of the Niger Delta region – the oil-rich Nigeria's home. Predictably, much of Ogbowei's poetry is influenced by his own experiences as well as the wealth of information he possesses about the region, mainly, the exploration of crude oil by a conglomerate of companies and the

environmental difficulties that accompany it, which the populace has to deal with. Also, Ogbowei's literary corpus presents mental pictures of the numerous socio-economic and political challenges plaguing Nigerian society besides the Niger Delta issue. Although from the series of issues he concerns himself with, it appears that Ogbowei writes better when he expresses matters regarding the Niger Delta. As such, his poetry fits into the body of works where the Niger Delta situation is the kernel of their discourse.

Ushie (2011) also avers that Ogbowei's poetry is a clear depiction of the ecological condition of the Niger Delta area with its inconceivable aftermath on the plants and animals of the area. Likewise, Okafor (2019) remarks that Ogbowei's vivid portrayal of the deplorable condition of the Niger Delta reveals the appalling state of its ambience, as well as validates the fact that their land is beleaguered by environmental and economical jingoism. Therefore, both Ushie and Okafor establish that Ogbowei gives a lucid representation of the ecological situation of the Niger Delta region. This insinuates, possibly, that for Ogbowei, clarity of thought and expression is invaluable for the desired effect to be achieved.

Moreover, Diala (2015) refers to Ogbowei when he declares that while expressing his thought for the younger poet as against the older poet, the predictive component of poetry takes on quick action as expected. Indeed, more critical, he says is that in Ogbowei's poem, an intimation of the great revolution prophesied is recorded given the unhealthy attachment of the oppressed to the flora and fauna in the end. In like manner, in his analysis of Ogbowei's *marsh boy,* Kwokwo (2018) avers that images of the Niger Delta predicament and the conversion of the marsh boy to a revolutionist are created. Also, he states that *marsh boy* is satiated with accounts of subjugation, suppression, mistreatment and unfairness meted on the Niger Delta populace by the Nigerian government. Hence, his poetry does not only comment on the socio-political problems that the Niger Delta people have to deal with but also proposes resistance. Without a doubt, the poetry of resistance is *marsh boy*. Thus, as he reveals the abysmal condition of the Niger Delta, he places resistance next to it. Perhaps, he believes that for this condition to be upturned, then, the people must take the right turn to freedom – resistance. However, this study will examine resistance, opposed to

"unspeakability" by classic model theorists of trauma, as a response to traumatogenic realities and trauma in African societies, particularly, the Niger Delta region.

Further, Bassey, another poet considered for this study, is a foremost environmental rights activist from Africa, particularly, Nigeria. He is an articulate crusader. Aghoghovwia (2014) asserts that Bassey's poetry provides a convincing review of petro-modernity on an international level; aside from the fact that he ably engages and captures the much-evaded aspects of environmental wreckage on local landscapes and hoi polloi in a way that a solely environmental text or political advocacy cannot attain. Holding a contrary opinion, Adebiyi-Adelabu (2020) states that certainly, a person could stake that the representation by Ogbowei of the calamity visited on the Niger Delta environment as well as its folks executed by the oil conglomerates and the Nigerian Government, is among the finest recently. This certifies the fact that not only Bassey's poetry but also Ogbowei's is in the business of representing the dire condition in the Niger Delta environment.

Stating further, Aghoghovwia (2016) affirms that Bassey's activism zeroes in on social and ecological justice in connection with oil extraction, and reveals the colossal mutilation executed on local communities in his nation, Nigeria and various parts of the supposed Third World countries such as Angola, South Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, amongst others, where oil is obtained. Likewise, Nwosu (2011) affirms that although Bassey's poetic voice evolved from the Niger Delta, the reverberations resonate throughout the world. In a similar vein, Diala (2015) states that in Ogbowei's *marsh boy and other poems* (2013), his vision ordinarily goes beyond the nation, though it is hinged on the Niger Delta. In essence, he registers the Niger Delta region as a microcosm of the world. Therefore, it can be implied that because Bassey speaks as a voice for the voiceless in not only his community but also that of other Third World nations which are plagued by environmental crisis, it earned him high global positioning and reckoning. Besides him is another Niger Delta poet, Ogbowei, who has been awarded a bit of international repute because of how he handles the subject of environmental degradation. From all of these, it can be garnered that Niger Delta poets do not restrict their poetry to cater for their society's predicament alone, but also other societies outside the nation which are confronted with similar dilemmas.

Similarly, Aghoghovwia (2014) avers that Bassey happens to be the ideal mouthpiece for the marginalised and environmental rights all over the globe in the last decade. Concerned with the subject of oppression, Aghoghovwia (2017) also remarks that Ikiriko's poetry is given to the service of the oppressed society and its ruined environment because of his deliberate aim to interfere in the politics of the economy of oil mining in the Niger Delta. Through the employment of many voices, Ikiriko's poetry is socially imbued and politically resolute. Therefore, Aghoghovwia confirms Basssey's concern for the downtrodden, though Aghoghovwia stretches his view to include those beyond Bassey's nation. This might also be a result of the way Bassey views oppression and his duty as the spokesperson for the oppressed. For him, it might mean that it does not matter where the oppressed is located, once it is oppression, it is a thing to stand against. Moreover, the subject matter is the same (oil-related exploitation and domination of the natives), though the oppressors might be in different vestiary. In the same manner, Aghoghovwia, three years later, validates Ikiriko's agitation for the browbeaten. Thus, this certifies the fact that Niger Delta writers, of which Bassey and Ikiriko are part, are not indifferent towards the predicament of the oppressed.

Besides, Aghoghovwia (2016) states that Bassey uses poetry to focus on the collective anarchy and environmental crimes imposed on the lands in the localities that produce fossil fuel for the oil mining trade. Bassey's record of the environmental crimes visited on the land is lucid and authentic because he has transversed these places to view personally how the oil mining enterprise and other large establishments have made a shipwreck of local landscapes. In a similar vein, Onukoagu and Onyerionwu (2011) also affirm that Ojaide has created an unflinching repute for himself as a devoted communicator of the pains and pangs of the Niger Delta using poetry. His use of such fictitious element has, possibly, provided him the freedom and space to investigate issues more ornately. Emphasised is the use of poetry by Niger Delta writers (Bassey and Ojaide) as an appropriate medium for communicating the Niger Delta situation. Little wonder the volumes of poetry collections on environmental degradation seemingly surpass prose texts or dramatic works. This could mean that the urgent need to enunciate this crisis made the writers turn to poetry compared to others.

Aghoghovwia (2014) also remarks that the poetry of Bassey can be considered to be birthed from a realisation that African literary imagination is constantly stalked by the residuals of colonialism. He appears to infer that the work of the biosphere of the Niger Delta region which involves the production and exploitation of oil by the Big Oil is a repeat of the exploit-driven journey that was the end product of colonialism. On the other hand, in his analysis of Ikiriko's *Oily Tears,* Aghoghovwia concludes by stating that his poetry appeals as a frolicsome opus of a highly imaginative but questioning text, which is used to examine historical records of economic mistreatment and geopolitical oppression influenced by the discovery of oil. The people of the Niger Delta are given second place in a country where they belong and are economically maltreated, despite their wealth of resources. Okunoye (2008) confirms this when he states that in his first and only collection of poetry, *Oily Tears of the Delta,* Ikiriko attests to the fact that the Niger Delta region occupies the position of the Other within the Nigerian environment, time and again; and the tactic employed is making it seem like there is no wall separating Niger Delta as a geographical place and its dwellers. In essence, Aghoghovwia, referencing Bassey's and Ikiriko's oeuvre, admits that their poems are responses to the historical accounts of exploitation and oppression that characterise the lives of the people in the Niger Delta region, as a result of oil discovery. Also, Okunoye's attestation, considering Ikiriko's poetry, bears witness to this marginalisation and domination. Though, Aghoghovwia mentions that according to Bassey, he refers to the present predicament as a replication of history in allusion to colonialism. This is seemingly true because colonialism appears to have not ended; it is only the appellation that has been modified.

Again, still on the discourse of eco-activism, but as represented in Nnimmo Bassey's *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* and Albert Otto's *Letters from the Earth*, Ohwavworhua and Orhero (2019) observe that both poets are impassioned about reality and the environment, as may be gleaned from their poetry collections. They also note that the poems focus on the remonstration and resistance of humans against ecological depreciation and deterioration. Furthermore, Ohwavworhua and Orhero (2019) state that Otto and Bassey dauntlessly and boldly report the condition of the environment and the probable consequences on humanity. Besides, they assert that the title of Otto's collection, *Letters from the Earth* suggests an appeal by mother earth for freedom from the grip of despoilment. The poetry collection

recounts the different ecological difficulties that define the discovery and abuse of oil in Nigeria, particularly, in the Niger Delta area. More so, in support of the earth, Otto loudly bewails man's destruction of the earth and the unfair treatment meted out on her, as a way of championing the cause of the environment. Consequently, Otto cries out for justice and rationality and concern on the part of man for the despoiled state of the environment, because man's continual demonstrations of eco-injustice will imply disaster, as the earth might not be able to supply means of sustenance for man again. In essence, it can be surmised that Ohwavworhua and Orhero consider Bassey and Otto as concerned with the plight of their community, perhaps in varying degrees, as their poetry speaks of eco-activism, eco-resistance and eco-abuse.

Still alluding to environmental activism, Usanga (2018) affirms that Ojaide, in *Songs of Myself*, emphasises the awful exploitation of human as well as nonhuman nature, and contends for the preservation of plants and animals including all living organisms in the Niger Delta. Besides, his continual plea for an end to the obvious exploitation of nature is a direct rejoinder to the unrelenting and increasing ecocide bedevilling his province of birth. Also, Usanga observes that when appraising Ojaide's poetics, his dogged concern for the despoliation of the Niger Delta environment continues to be firm as well as activistic, beside his profound synchroneity with Urhobo Orature's aesthetics. This activism, on the one hand, and love for the natural habitat, on the other hand, is replicated in Bassey's poetry. Nwosu (2011) affirms that Bassey's poems are poignant and combative. Also, he is a prestigious rights activist of the environment who advocates sturdily against climate change besides being an activist par excellence against insalubrious oil exploration around the world. As a sapient lover of nature, Bassey challenges anything that seeks to perturb ecological balance. The combativeness in Bassey's poetry might be said to have been portrayed through, according to Egya (2014), his deployment of combative metaphors in his poems which he says emphasise their involvement in the harangue that aims at liberating the Niger Delta from the shackles of military domination. His poems appear to represent the need for action by the people, as their dirge winds up in resistance and summons to combat. Both Ojaide and Bassey are lovers of nature; however, Bassey's love is stated overtly by Nwosu and even demonstrated visibly. Confirming this, Nwosu (2011) refers to Bassey as the co-founder of Environmental Rights Action in Nigeria and Chairperson of Friends of the Earth

International. The two are Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are internationally known to make a case for the environment. Ojaide's love, on the other hand, is covertly inferred from Usanga's statement and can be implied from his contention for nature's preservation. Therefore, this could mean that Romanticism did not end with 18th-/19th-century poets but is replicated in the Niger Delta terrain. Besides, Ojaide and Bassey are environmental rights activists who are represented in their poetry, though, in varying degrees. Bassey seems to take his activism to another level as he calls the people to combat, which is similar to this study. Though, this study will go further to establish resilience and resistance as a psychological defence mechanism and, possibly, a means of recovery, in response to the degrading experiences suffered by the Niger Deltans.

Similar to Ojaide's and Bassey's concern for the preservation of the earth is another poet, Sophia Obi. Commenting on Sophia Obi, Onyema (2011) states that Obi's *Tears in a Basket* and *Floating Snags* consist of poems that deal with environmental difficulties in the Niger Delta region, in addition to the historical as well as socio-political features that characterise the ecological reality. He also maintains that Obi alongside Brown and Umez employ linguistic choices that are intended to arrive at positive environmental awareness, particularly, as it impinges on the difficulties confronting the ecology as a result of the exploration of oil in the Niger Delta. Thus, they deploy their poems as a medium to gain people's awareness as regards the ecological difficulties belabouring the Niger Delta where both human, earthly and marine creatures are eliminated in such a way that results in a large number of deaths of biotic creatures or massive migration to other land and water habitats. Similar to different species of birds moving away from a contaminated environment, they lament the destruction of a pristine past from where everything breathing disappears. In sum, Onyema holds a similar view that Niger Delta writers advocate for the creation of some form of awareness. This is owing to the fact that environmental degradation does not only result in physical damages but also psychological impacts on the inhabitants, which this study will ascertain.

To conclude, the reviews of the literature on the poets and their collections of poetry reveal their ecological concerns for their lands, which have been registered via their thematic preoccupations. However, little attention has been paid to the representation of trauma in

contemporary Niger Delta ecopoetry. Therefore, this research seeks to depict traumatogenic inscriptions and trauma, which is underscored through the thematic preoccupations and represented by the use of literary tropes, in the collections of poems under study.

2.3 Theoretical framework

2.3.1 Trauma theory

It is however, with Stef Craps' model of trauma theory that this study effects its analysis. Sigmund Freud, who himself time and again resorted to literature to explain his ideas of psychosexual growth and their probable correlation with neurosis, originated the trauma theory alongside Josef Breuer in *Studies in Hysteria* in 1895 (Modlinger & Sonntag, 2011). However, while referring to Ruth Leys' *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Radstone (2011) highlights the differences between trauma theory and psychoanalysis thus:

> Psychoanalysis avoids any radical differentiation between the 'normal' and the 'pathological.' Trauma theory, on the other hand, does tend to distinguish between the 'normal' and the 'pathological.' One has either been present at or has 'been'-traumatised by a terrible event or one has not. Second, whereas psychoanalysis take the 'darker side of the mind' for granted, emphasising the ubiquity of inadmissible sexual fantasies, for instance, trauma theory suggests, rather that the 'darkness' comes only from outside. (78)

She comments further that according to Felman and Laub (1992), testifying to trauma requires a witness, and this can only be achieved within the ambience of attesting that testimony to trauma. Though some testimony can be made to the 'traceless traces' of trauma, it must be emphasised that trauma theory should transcend the logical, independent, conscious subject of modernity to become a model of subjectivity, predicated on the gap between witness and testifier, making it possible to attest to the unknown. The model of subjectivity engraved in theories of testimony corroborates the stance of Leys (2000) that the subject's lack of knowledge does not have to do with trauma's unconscious process but the unremembered traumatic event. Besides, Felman and Laub acknowledge that it is the inexperienced makeup of the traumatic event that engenders post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). More so, Leys states that Cathy Caruth, Soshanna Felman and Dori Laub are indebted to deconstruction, post-structuralism and psychoanalysis, on the one hand, and informed by the survivors' experiences of trauma on the other hand (Radstone, 2011).

Trauma theory emerged in literary studies in the 1990s. In simple terms, trauma is defined as a wound. A wound has been described by Balogun (2011) as a bearer of that which is off-putting, distinguished by pains. In medical and psychiatric terms and, particularly, Freud's text, trauma is described as an injury perpetrated not on the body but on the psyche (Caruth, 1996). Caruth states further that Freud's emphasis on the "wound of the mind" denotes the "breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world", which is not similar to "the wound of the body, a simple and healable event" (Caruth, 1996:4). Drawing inference, Caruth asserts that the kernel of Freud's writing on trauma considers trauma as more than a disease or a simple illness to an injured mind, rather construing it as the tale of a sore that calls out, which acquaints us with an unavailable truth or reality. This unavailable truth, Caruth believes, "in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (4). Caruth (1991) acknowledges that "trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (181). Traumatic incidents, because of their overpowering, unparalleled and gruesome nature, lack narrative structures that can convey the purpose and lives of the victim. Rather, trauma is foregrounded by disruptions in the narrative structure which are expressed through gaps in the self-narrations. This could inform Caruth's (1996) idea of the potency of literature to convey trauma, where she expresses that trauma "…must, indeed, also be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (5).

As much as victims, observers or participants in traumatic incidents attempt suppression of trauma, the memories constantly interfere with their consciousness, not as an uninterrupted, comprehensible account but as disjointed pictures that will not cooperate and unify (Kent, 2009). Interestingly, the traumatic event is experienced belatedly because it takes time for the victim to come to terms with the experience. Consequently, the traumatic experience can only be understood belatedly and in fragments, as the ghostly presence of that psychic wound has been compellingly subdued, revealing the difficulty inherent in verbalising trauma. Hence, though comprehending the traumatic experience is a herculean task it is also satisfying. This belated address is what has been referred to as the reason for repetition

compulsion. Substantiating this view, Styvendale (2008) expresses that Felman, Laub and Caruth share a similar opinion that the repetitive and performative reenactment in the present emanates from the individual's incapability to understand trauma when it happens, and this is somewhat based on the medical model of trauma and poststructuralist's idea of referentiality. Foregrounding this view, Laub (1992) states that "[w]hile the trauma uncannily returns in real life, its reality continues to elude the subject who lives in its grip and unwittingly undergoes its ceaseless repetitions and reenactments" (68). Similarly, Caruth (1996) affirms that "[t]he repetitions of the traumatic event – which remain un-available to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight – thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing" (92). Besides, Freiburg (2011) proposes that the contiguity of pain and death when the traumatic incident occurs gives no place for recounting and delineation; however, immediately the affected can take cognisance of his personal history of suffering or immediately witness to the event and focus on this, a novel process begins. Therefore, typical responses to trauma include patterns such as repetitive compulsion, sublimation through arts, mourning and fragmentation.

In her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Caruth (1996) refers to Freud's idea of a belated action in producing signs of trauma, which states that a disremembered event that has been housed in the unconscious, gains traumatic importance through a rework and repetition from the psyche, typical of all historical experiences. Kent (2009) confirms this by advancing that trauma should be treated historically because its expressions are upshots of the time and circumstances of life from which it materialises. In a similar vein, Radstone (2011) admits that the emphasis given to questions of testimony and witnessing validates the relevance of trauma theory to humanities as well as the practice of history. In other words, the theory of trauma is connected to recourse to memory in history and humanities usually. She proceeds to refer to trauma studies within the humanities as a form of tertiary witnessing because it plays the role of bearing witness to society's extension of attesting to trauma, through media which include film, visual arts and literature together with historians' practices. Without a doubt, trauma theories, testimony and witnessing influence literary, film and media studies. Hence, trauma analysis sets to

reveal the methods through which texts might be committed to representing trauma's belated recollection. Also, trauma analysis takes sides with the witness to trauma and grasps that it must promote cultural recollection and aid in coping with trauma whose missing presence characterises the evaluated text. In essence, trauma has enjoyed wide representation in the humanities. Trauma theorists assert that one's connection to traumatic memories that suit a prototype that is informed by images of devastated and disjointed things and people comprises one's identity in reality. On the other hand, several neurobiologists state that the images and emotions the victims invoke can be passed on from one individual to another, which justifies the reason persons who are not actual victims of the traumatic incidences may integrate the mental pictures and feelings of the victims (Caruth, 1996). In other words, those who are not direct victims can testify to trauma. Ramadanovic (2016) proposes that "to testify means to recognise that the firsthand witnesses had an overwhelming experience in which we, their descendants, are unwitting participants" (16).

However, Ramadanovic (2016) believes that a literary trauma theory is not historical, as many scholars popularly profess, neither is it a medical theory; rather, it is first an aesthetic theory – a means to express feelings and experience. He further argues that trauma theory is futuristic, contradicting the views of scholars who view trauma as recounting the past. Ramadanovic asserts further,

> I mean that trauma theory is about the future in several ways. First, in the very simple sense that trauma is about the future connotes a disruption of the continuity between the present and the past. Without such continuity, trauma's temporal dimension is indeterminable. Since the survivor has survived, we are, however, bound to see the dimension of time "after" a trauma as a future. Second, I mean it in the sense that trauma theory is a theory of interpretation the first task of which is to set terms for understanding, which, by force, is a project that determines what is not yet, how we are going to, at some point, understand the bygone. (2-3)

In summary, while supporting Caruth and Felman's works, Ramadanovic opines that literary trauma theory's vital aim seems to inform us concerning this novel and atypical state in which the past ruckus appears to possess only one temporal perspective which is yet to be determined, and scholarship relies on the future to gain access to the past. This contradicts the stance of scholars such as Leys, Dominick LaCapra and other theorists, who

posit that trauma theory seeks to demystify representations of the past. Besides, Ramadanovic avers that repetition compulsion experienced in trauma is represented in the future and not in the past, while he reinforces that in trauma, there is no threatened annihilation of "I"-subjectivity, as some other scholars believe, rather the annihilation of trauma itself, if it takes place. It is the residual trust in the future which is the existing entity that was left. Consequently, trauma should be referred to as an "event" and visualised futuristically, since it is typified by the disruption with the past, rather than sternly speaking of it as a feeling or an experience. Moreover, Ramadanovic states that Caruth departs from Freud, as she proposes listening to the voice of the victim which Freud's theory did not cater for. She suggests new-fangled requirements for interpreting trauma. The outcome of this novel mode of interpreting trauma is that the recognition of the victim's voice is not contingent on the past or repetition compulsion but on how we read a text.

Thus, according to Ramadanovic, the difference between Freud's and Caruth's theory is that the former recognises the cause of trauma in the past while the latter is a hermeneutic theory, a theory of interpretation which has as its place and cause, the future. For the former, "the claim of a repeated trauma, essentially, is a historical claim that has to meet the standards of historiography to have merit" unlike Caruth's theory, which is premised on the assumption that temporality is disrupted and chronological narrations of events would not suffice for her questions which borders on the likelihood of understanding an interruption. Hence, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, is devoted to thinking up terms for how an out-of-order incident can be claimed in the future. This incident is uncompleted, not only because it is ongoing, but considering it is also consequent on a disruption. While that is ongoing, it does not carry on with another incident. This is in addition to the fact that there is no frame of reference to ascertain its inception, end and duration. Consequently, we classify it as incomplete and the experience unclaimed. In tandem with this, Laub (1992) asserts that "[t]he traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of the "normal" reality, such as casuality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it a quality of "otherness", a salience, a timelessness and a ubiquity that puts it outside the range of associatively linked experience, outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery" (68-69).

Approaching trauma from a different perspective, Aleida Assmann (2011) builds on Margalit's supposition when he suggests experimentation with four exclusive models for dealing with a traumatic past, which include dialogic forgetting; remembering in order to never forget; remembering to overcome; and dialogic remembering. He emphasises in his third model that remembering is proposed as a means of therapy to purging, healing and reconciliation, not employed to commemorate a past event to a vague future. Remembering "…is not pursued as an end in itself but as a means to an end, which is the forging of a new beginning" (50). Assmann furthers his discourse by drawing a comparison between remembering and Christian confession on the one hand and remembering and the Aristotelian artistic concept of *catharsis* on the other hand. In the former, he states that forgetting is introduced through remembering because the sins committed have to be openly confessed before they can be erased through the priest's remission. Likewise, for the latter, through a public performance of an excruciating incident, a traumatic past is capable of being communally re-experienced and overcome. In addition, he avows that forgetting through remembering informs Freudian psychotherapy because a throbbing past has to be represented through language and be brought to consciousness, to advance and forget the traumatic past. This is similar to a witness at the court who advocates through his testimony the legal process which is geared towards veracity and judgement, and in the end, leads to the ultimate erasure of the occurrence from the minds of people. Similarly, Hubert Zapf (2011) states that trauma is not only depicted as imitation and a form of remembering sufferings of the past and ill-treatment but also viewed from the standpoint of survival and rejuvenation. Besides, trauma has been observed to be a beginning juncture for not just only the procedures for strong personal recollection, and communication, but also creativity – 'ecotherapeutic counterforce'.

In the same way, Rubin Suleiman (2008) asserts that "only by finally remembering the repressed trauma can the patient finally move on to recovery, that is, to "mastery" and healing". Recovery takes place for the patient only when repressed trauma is remembered (277). To him, trauma is chiefly a "drama of survival", not only a "drama of past events" (280). Therefore, survival is key to trauma literature. It is in survival that the writing of trauma is defined and confined. Put clearly, writing in itself is a form of survival, testimony, monument and encoding (Courtney Gildersleeve, 2019). Literature is that writing that bears

testimony to trauma. Supporting this view, Roger Luckhurst (2008) opines that psychoanalysis and literature are specifically suitable forms for representing the disturbing contradictions of trauma. Literature makes room for the horrifying to be verbalised. Besides, Zapf (2011) asserts that trauma studies have turned out to be a vast area of interdisciplinary research defined by a wide variety of subjects, strategies, and directions, including the inputs of diverse disciplines such as medicine, psychiatry, law, political science, history and cultural studies. Trauma can be a result of an external (accident, abuse) or internal (absence or a loss of someone or even something) cause.

2.3.2 Postcolonial trauma theory

Balaev (2014) believes that trauma studies in literary criticism began attracting noteworthy attention in 1996 with Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* and Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma.* Since the inception of the concept of trauma, a lot of conflicting theories and numerous controversial arguments have been recorded. This change in literary trauma theory has given rise to several critical practices that centre the specific social workings as well as cultural settings of the traumatic experience. They could be commonly referred to as pluralistic prototypes of trauma, owing to the number of theories as well as styles engaged, though these contemporary styles are extensive in scope. Some alternative models challenged the classic model's view that trauma is unrepresentable, and agree to a set of representational options. For instance, Felman (1992), acceding to unrepresentability about Holocaust, believes that "[t]he truth of the inside is even less accessible to the outsider. If it is indeed impossible to bear witness to the Holocaust from the inside, it is even more impossible to testify to it from the outside. From without, the inside is entirely *ungraspable* …it is not really possible to *tell the truth,* to testify, from the outside. Neither is it possible, as we have seen, to testify from the inside" (232). However, postcolonial trauma critics moved from trauma's unrepresentability to concentrate on the particularity of trauma that finds meaning through a better contemplation of the social and cultural circumstances of the experiences of trauma. They also dispute the definition of trauma about universal traits and results. These critics are referred to as revisionists. Trauma results in an interruption, as well as the reorientation of consciousness; nonetheless, the ideals involved in this experience are affected by various specific cultural factors which alter with time. More so, instead of regarding trauma as an inaccessible

psychoanalytic system, the revisionists deploy theories and critical practices which advocate that the function of trauma in literature and society is more diverse and inquiring than first thought of by early proponents.

Furthermore, the notion that experience cannot be claimed by either the person or the society has been contested by these theorists, who explain likely approaches (psychological, linguistic and social) to claiming the unclaimed experience. Though, the classic concept of trauma as rather uncanny or completely unintelligible is theoretically beneficial for specific intents; for instance, it emphasises the harm inflicted, and the pluralistic method underscores the extending ideals as well as illustrations of trauma in literature and society, stressing not only the damage produced by a traumatic occurrence but also the numerous fonts that influence the meanings, depictions, as well as aftermaths of a traumatic incident. Besides, Caruth's claim that trauma is by no means just the possession of an individual and that everybody is linked to everybody's trauma, implies that the striving to take in everybody as victims of trauma runs the danger of taking everybody as culprits. Deeds bring about aftereffects which are felt directly or indirectly; however, the risk of making joint the particular feeling of a faction or person in the past is to bring on an unnamed act plus consequence as well as an unknown connotation of feeling**.** The understanding that social practices are part of the background of even the most personal brutality is different from the assertion that everybody is associated with one another's trauma, because the former agrees to the various background features of trauma, even though it also shows that trauma is a survived incidence, one that is recognisable to a larger or less degree. More so, instead of asserting that language cannot successfully depict trauma, pluralistic styles view linguistic affiliations; if the bigger social, political as well as economic activities that impact violence are the triggers of a traumatic experience, then the meaning of trauma is locatable, instead of being forever misplaced. Further, trauma's repetitive and suppressed character does not hinder it from being expressive, instead, these components permit it to be enunciated.

The foregoing critical views have been expressed on postcoloniality and trauma theory, which Michael Rothberg (2008) in his article "Decolonising Trauma Studies" summarises, as he questions trauma theory's ability to provide a fitting framework for representing the bequest of violence in the colonised or postcolonial society. Besides, critics such as Ewald

Mengel and Michela Borzaga identify the convoluted interrelation between trauma, power and politics in postcolonial literature, as they point out that social activism and political protest are possibly fundamental consequences of trauma of colonisation and decolonisation (Irene Visser, 2014). Moreover, Visser says that Mengel and Borzaga in their book, *Trauma, Memory and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel* (2012), faults the deconstructionists' views of Caruth, Laub and Hartman which exclude the possibility of healing for the victims of trauma. Supporting this view, Visser argues for the inclusion of the recuperative potential in trauma theory, without opposing Derridean's view of the unintelligible and inexpressible make-up of the whole traumatic experience while trying to recount the incident.

More so, in trauma analysis, there is also a pending question as to what events, experiences and texts are to be categorised as traumatic and which are to be left out. Berger (2004) points out that while some events are earmarked as traumatic, others are not. The traumatising experiences of those that the West considers as 'Other' do not get to be attended to using trauma theory; thus, it becomes a theory that champions politicised constructions. Consequently, Radstone (2004) makes a case for attention to be paid to this stance of trauma theory's politicisation. Based on this, not only tragic events, such as the Rwanda Genocide, US 9/11 or the Holocaust, should be labelled as traumatic experiences, but the ecological devastation plaguing the Niger Delta environs should also be seen in this light, as the loss of land, dispossession and displacement of the indigenes are traumatic experiences to the Niger Delta dwellers and the African man in general. In essence, trauma is not restricted to the loss of loved ones, war or rape cases, it can also be historical trauma of displacement of the indigenes of a particular setting, deprivation of one's rights and more. In varied forms and diverse ways, trauma can be represented in the normalising of an anomaly, as "…trauma is omnipresent, trauma is normalcy; being hurt and injured, being humiliated and deprived of one's rights, being sexually abused or misused by the administration to wage an anonymous and absurd war that sends one home as a future victim suffering from PTSD – this seems to be the normal state of things" (Freiburg, 2011:196).

Onega (2011), referring to Tim Woods' *African Pasts: Memory and History in African Literatures,* also comments on the limiting interpretation of trauma theory and trauma

analysis, which does not encompass African historical trauma and should include African literature as a matter of fact because, in Woods' words, African writing is referred to as "an art of trauma". Hence, he advocates for an inclusion of African experiences where colonial and postcolonial discourses are basic traumatic experiences in themselves that saw Africans injured, tortured, imprisoned, stigmatised, and maltreated by the colonial masters and fellow Africans in the postcolonial era, respectively. Onega acknowledges further:

> This definition of African literatures brings to the fore the limitations of the standard dedication of trauma studies to the analysis of Holocaust, Vietnam War and African-American literatures, acting as a salutary reminder of the narrowness of the field under Western eyes. Indeed, contemporary African literatures must meet the challenge not only of providing healing narratives for the trauma of colonisation but also of its aftermath, since the process of decolonisation has been characterised by such dramatic and horrifying episodes of genocide and displacement as the Hutu massacre of Tutsis in Rwanda, the massive killings and exodus in the Congo civil war, or the Saharaius' thirty-year exile in the desert. (202)

Onega affirms, bearing in mind the words of Caruth and Wood, that African writers' self-assigned and herculean duty of verbalising the trauma of colonisation, like in the case of South African writers' and the trauma of apartheid, is informed by a desire to make known the unknown and aching realities which will serve as a means to contain and cure the wounds occasioned by it. Similarly, ecocritics, most especially African ecological writers have taken upon themselves the self-assigned task of putting to words the traumatic effects of ecological devastation with a mind geared towards not only containing the pain but also healing the wounds sustained as a result of it.

2.3.3 Stef Craps' model of trauma theory

Stef Craps is one of the revisionists of trauma theory whose model is deployed for this research. Craps (2013) states that in such a disastrous age like ours, Caruth opines that trauma makes available the actual connection between cultures. Surprisingly, the pioneer texts in this field, among which Caruth's text is highly influential, miss acting in accordance with this pledge of ethical engagement between cultures. They fall short based on at least four allegations. First, the traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures are disregarded, that is, persons who live outside hegemonic, affluent nations such as the United

States, (Western) Europe, Canada, and Australia, and those postcolonial indigenous factions and disenfranchised racial and diasporic sets who live in Western countries. For instance, this is glaringly portrayed in Caruth's reading of the murder of Clorinda (the Ethiopian woman) by Tancred (the European Crusader). She frames the injury inflicted on Clorinda as a trauma suffered by Tancred. Consequently, the trauma of the non-Western is squelched and not recognised. Also, commenting on Caruth's default to live up to the promise of trauma's ethical engagement amongst cultures, in her definition, Radstone (2004) affirms that the miseries of those who have been classified in the West as 'other' are likely not to be treated by trauma theory. In this regard, trauma theory becomes a theory that promotes politicised structures between individuals with whom testimonies through traumatic sufferings can be counterfeited and individuals from whom such testimonies are withdrawn. Correspondingly, Andermahr (2015) avows that for a while now, postcolonial critics have been contending that trauma theory has not met up with its pledge of cross-cultural ethical involvement, nevertheless, trauma theory has certainly provided several perceptions into the correlation between psychic pain and cultural delineation. A constricted Western canon of the literature of trauma has surfaced; this canon accords a superior position to the agonies of White Europeans and ignores the particularity of the trauma of non-Western as well as minority cultures, instead of building affiliations of sympathy and oneness with non-Western cultures.

Second, Craps (2013) criticises the dominant delineations of trauma, which he asserts are culturally unsympathetic and ostracising, and critiques the uncritical cross-cultural employment of trauma ideas that are Western to international (non-Western) contexts in humanitarian catastrophe alleviation programmes. He states that the hegemonic notions of trauma as well as recovery have to be reviewed and extended if it is to effectively cater for the ignored psychological hurt experienced by several disempowered factions. Similarly, Hinrichsen (2013) asserts that there has been an inadequate examination of how theoretical and diagnostic prototypes of the West transfer into non-Western settings, and also how ideas of memory in backgrounds that are non-Western confront as well as review overriding Western notions. Additionally, a restricted concentration on the individual psyche neglects and disregards unchallenged circumstances that facilitated the traumatic mistreatment. Certainly, the individualisation of social distress promotes the notion that recovery from the

trauma's telling on the people of relegated factions, is essentially a subject of the person attaining lexical regulation over his or her hurt (Craps, 2010). Also, Vickroy (2014) states that trauma has an array of causations and repercussions that shift from an emphasis on subjective remote psychic components encountered in the conventional trauma method, and heads for a nonconventional trauma form that considers the interface of social and behavioural conceptions connected to trauma. Therefore, the social environment has an impact on the causes and effects of traumatic occurrence in a multiplicity of methods. This is the condition from which trauma is generated and could make available or decline the desirable backing for recovery.

Moreover, fundamental political or economic issues are medicalised, and the persons affected are pathologised as sufferers, devoid of agency, and victims of a disease which can be healed via psychological counselling. However, when these issues are not placed against their bigger historical background, it is capable of resulting in psychological recuperation being endorsed above the alteration of a malevolent political, social, or economic system. Similarly, Buelens, Durrant and Eaglestone (2014) state that by tightening the focus on the level of the individual psyche, one tends to leave unquestioned the conditions that enabled the traumatic abuse such as racism, economic domination, or political oppression. An example is Craps' (2010) criticisms of the work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), deployed for victims of apartheid. He states that by describing victims as solely those whose human rights have been dishonoured by murder, torment, kidnap and other cruel maltreatment (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Vol. 1, Ch. 4, Para. 53), the TRC is unsuccessful in appropriately tackling the unfairness of apartheid as a legally recognised structure of subjugation that had wrecked the daily lives of several millions of South Africans. What is more, its use of curative as well as theological notions of healing and recovery for the benefit of an apparent nation-building programme resulted in the indictment that the TRC tried to enforce these notions untimely, closing the past. TRC made use of the testimonies of apartheid victims to achieve their goals which Craps queries. He expresses that whereas their testimony is employed to resolve the situation as well as rescue the South African nation, their pain which is merely partially owing to the traumatising occurrences concerning which they bore witness, continues for the most part

unmitigated. Because psychological therapy and interpersonal resolution appear less facile to give in the short time, compared to their material and political equals, it made practical common sense from a government's perspective for the TRC to emphasise the earlier aspect at the cost of the latter, as a way of delaying providing material solutions until they are ready.

In the same vein, Dalley (2015) believes that whereas the word (trauma) offers a base for analogy across national, religious, racial as well linguistic limits, the particularity of these experiences cannot be constricted to a unified prototype because not every trauma is the same. Thus, for trauma theory to be efficient for postcolonial analysis, it would have to be complemented by a critical materialism that concentrates on the particularities of location, which is aware of the pecking order of power that discriminates experiences as well as establish what is increscent in one setting and decrescent in another. Besides, Visser (2014) presupposes that underscoring rituals as well as ceremonies, which are outside trauma theory's structure, are always contained in the traditions of indigenous narrative and means of portraying trauma which is a significant deliberation. Trauma theory has been criticised for not appropriately conceptualising spirituality. Visser refers to this as one of the other boundaries of trauma theory that requires an extension. Corroborating Visser's view, Kurtz (2014) states that traditional African communities are well-endowed with means for trauma cure and are characterised by an all-inclusive outlook on humanity, premised on a solid feel of spirituality. The wide-ranging social ideas endorsed by African intellectuals, with notions such as pan-Africanism, Negritude, Ubuntu, and African humanism rely on African cultural means as a medium to facilitate social cure, and in various modern dispute conditions in Africa, a notable variety of traditional machinery for conciliation and settlement has been called upon as replacements to Western approaches, for treating those disputes as well as their traumatic effects. For example, the deep and included rituals of mourning that are known to several African communities provide means for cure since they involve one of the important phases of trauma recovery which is the admission and memorialisation of previous pains. In sum, this assertion emphasises that examining the writings of Achebe, Ngũgĩ, Ba, Armah, Mda, and countless others writings, fictional and factional works, for their end as well as on their conditions (according to Craps), provide the medium for reviewing and reframing the study of trauma from an African viewpoint.

More so, Craps (2010) states that it is imperative to enlarge the perception of trauma from unexpected disastrous occurrences that befall persons in socially controlling capacities to include unending, quotidian kinds of brutality and subjugation having an impact on lower factions. Trauma theory keeps holding to the conventional event-based representation of trauma, which states that trauma arises from a sole, unexpected, disastrous event. By implication, the traumatic effect of racism and other types of current subjugation cannot be sufficiently treated within the theoretical structures provided by trauma; hence, Craps advocates a review of the definition. In the same way, Rothberg (2014) states that considering the destruction carried out through human-caused climate alteration, as well as environmental destruction, trauma necessitates a shift past event-centred tales of brutality, as Rob Nixon proposes with his notion of 'slow violence'. Nixon (2011:2) contends that we have to understand "a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales", to comprehend the effect of environmental catastrophe on the ecology of world's poor, in essence, those same persons who are mainly directly and severely influenced by the neoliberal government of accumulation. This 'violence of delayed destruction,' an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all' also ends up, as Rothberg puts it, in additional recognisable or 'visible' kinds of trauma such as wars and immediate ('natural') disasters. Climate change is a place of tangled as well as equally reliant frames of brutality; also, as in the preceding situation, the direct effect of both delayed and immediate kinds of brutality can be traumatic, similar to the conditions of abuse and factory fires.

Third, the prescription of a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia, as exclusively appropriate for the duty of testifying to trauma, is challenged (Craps, 2013). Though, Buelens, Durrant and Eaglestone (2014) remark that theorists of trauma frequently give good reasons for their focus on anti-narrative, disjointed, modernist styles by directing attention to the resemblances with the psychic experience of trauma. Sharing a similar view, Luckhurst (2008) opines that the impact of trauma defies the narrative knowledge's ability. When a traumatic event happens, the effect of the fright makes trauma anti-narrative; however, it also brings about the frenzied construction of introspective narratives that aim at explaining the trauma. Besides, the aesthetic theory that governs this field has its root in

the works of Lyotard and Derrida, as well as in Caruth's review of Paul de Man. Therefore, trauma is interpreted as an aporia of delineation, as impenetrability, break and unfeasibility are given prominence, time after time, approving experimentation with aesthetics. In the meantime, Luckhurst says, our culture is inundated with tales, which view trauma not as an obstruction but as an upbeat stimulant to narrative. Consequently, if trauma is in a dilemma of illustration; then, this produces narrative potentiality exactly as much as unfeasibility—a compelling expression of efforts to construct narrative knowledge.

Furthermore, Forter (2014) states that modernist techniques are deployed in novels both to compare the interruptions of traumatised consciousness and to reclaim what that consciousness has been compelled (by social brutality) to not remember in a contemporary postcolonial reality, which is contrary to the traditional psychoanalytical view, in which recollection of the past does not bring about a recurring forestalling of knowledge. Thus, if modernist styles will keep on being of importance to postcolonial forms of trauma, it is partially for the reason that they coordinate this encounter with an enrapt past which till the present might have lived solely in our ideal tomorrows, but that this ending calls us to reclaim – and thus to render "tomorrow" today. These modernist aesthetics are neither condemned by Craps as inherently Eurocentric nor does he propose a specific alternative as a postcolonial solution. Rather, according to Craps, trauma theory should take into cognisance the particular social and historical contexts that birthed the trauma narratives and where it is read, and be responsive and mindful of the various approaches to illustration and resistance that are welcomed in these contexts. For instance, to the founding texts of trauma theory, because the traumatic experience surpasses the likelihood of narrative knowledge, by implication, it will mostly be characterised by a narrative failure (anti-narrative). However, Craps maintains that this supposition, which is remarkably rigid, could result in the creation of a constricted trauma canon, as exemplified by nonlinear and modernist texts by typical writers from the West. In addition, the sense of partisan urgency informing African traumatic literature, giving examples of Ishmael Beah's memoir, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007); Uzodinma Iweala's novel, *Beasts of No Nation* (2005); Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) amongst others, might, to an extent, provide explanations on their dependence on a "no-frills" as well as an aesthetic that is realistic, which makes them different from the evolving canon of

trauma literature: the concern to pass the message across and to marshal supersedes; and more pressing is the reality that some of these traumatic incidents are yet unending.

Approaching the modernist aesthetics of classical trauma theory from a different perspective, Kurtz (2014) opines that the distinctive character of the literary history of Africa provides new understanding which might result in a more profound perception of trauma as well as the potential for change and cure. One of the main indicators of trauma is its inclination to fragmentation as well as disarticulation: its ability to, in the words of Achebe, 'put a knife to the things that held us together'. Every facet of contemporary African writing which include the producer, its language of articulation, its preferred style, its dominant themes, its readers, manner of publication, certainly every of the term of its production as well as consumption, spring from the background of an enormous, worldwide experience, and profound societal trauma. As might be expected, colonialism is one of the other four overwhelmingly traumatogenic experiences in current African history, which comprise (1) slave trade in Africa; (2) colonialism and its abnormalities, with its particularly virulent form in South Africa apartheid; (3) the distorting changing aspects of the East-West world power battle post-independence; and (4) the present affairs of globalised capital where physical backwardness demotes Africa to a current combat field with myriads of difficulties, which comprise colossal lack, ethnic skirmishes, civil wars, maladministration, inadequate health care, environmental degradation, as well as political impotence. African writers and critics have since categorised their ordeal as disjointed without alleging that it results in inscrutability. The exact names of several milestone texts of contemporary African literature depict a past of fragmentation as well as violence. Amongst them are Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Armah's *Fragments* (1970), Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* (1964), and Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1973). Oripeloye (2014) responds to Kurtz's misapplication of modern European theory to argue about trauma's position in African literature. While alluding to Kurtz's situating of the literary pointers of African literature in the narrative landmarks of traumatic happenings such as colonialism, warfare, lack, and maladministration, Oripeloye asserts that trauma is somewhat natural; however, the only disparity lies in its theorisation, for trauma is ingrained inside diurnal excessive indulgence as well as calamities that humanity has to confront. More so, about the modern aesthetics of trauma theory, he adds that the form of ascertaining trauma in Africa is connected with

fragmentation coordinated through forces both inside and outside the continent, whereas, in another place, particularly in the West, it might be perceived as the desire to try out with or feel the accretions of modernity.

Fourth, the affinity between metropolitan and non-Western trauma is usually overlooked. Consequently, instead of advancing cross-cultural harmony, trauma theory risks the perpetuation of the same ideas, practices, and frameworks which uphold present unfairness and inequities (Craps, 2013). Therefore, if trauma theory is to act per its pledge to ethical engagement between cultures, not only will the traumatic colonial histories be recognised more completely, for their end, and in their conditions, but also with traumatic cosmopolitan histories or the histories of the First World. Moreover, if trauma theory is to follow through with its ethical ambitions, the miseries of those who belong to non-Western or minority cultures ought to be paid appropriate attention. Besides, Craps invokes Caruth's opinion in *Unclaimed Experience*, "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own… history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's trauma" (1996:24). Consequently, not only should the traumatic colonial histories be given recognition more wholly, for their end, as well as in their conditions, but they, too ought to be regarded as in connection to traumatic municipal or histories of First World for trauma studies to possess any anticipation of saving its pledge to ethical efficacy. Moreover, "[a]nd to identify with and partake of another's trauma, must the phenomenon not be seen to address specific contexts instead of being seen to exist in a form of an omnipast in the sense that the past is everywhere in traumatic symptoms?" (Rodi-Risberg, 2018:3).

Attempts towards achieving the aforementioned is made, according to Craps, by theorising the complexity of the Holocaust and colonial trauma against the backdrop. First, there is the current expansion of the focal point of the domain of memory studies where trauma theory is a subspecialty, from the national to the international level. Second, there are serious attempts to collapse a disciplinary partitioning between Jewish studies and postcolonial studies, which would stop the Holocaust and slavery histories, as well as colonial oppression, from being viewed in a familiar structure. These days, those who experience violations of their human rights and look for acknowledgement of their suffering repeatedly compare what they go through to the Jews' experience of the Holocaust, likening the

executors to the Nazis. Thus, the pogrom of the Nazis serves as a worldwide narrative model that is employed for conceptual interpretation and to insist on the acknowledgement of the oppressed or the neglected doings of unfairness and the histories of the traumatised over the world.

Against the structure that comprehends collective memory as competitive memory, Rothberg (2009) proposes that we think about memory as multidirectional. This shift in perspective permits us to observe that whereas both Muhammad and Michaels frame the Holocaust memory as an obstruction to the recollection of slavery and colonialism from examination (the form of competitive memory), in reality, the existence of extensive Holocaust consciousness is employed as a medium to express an idea of American racism then and now. The interface between dissimilar historical memories which demonstrates the dynamic, intercultural vibrancy is what Rothberg terms multidirectional memory. Thus, he asserts that far from obstructing other historical memories from scrutiny in a cutthroat fight for acknowledgement, the appearance of Holocaust memory on a universal level has added to the expression of the histories of others, some of them preceding the Holocaust, such as slavery, or happening at a later time, such as the Algerian Independence War (1954–62) or Bosnia genocide (the 1990s). However, excessive emphasis on the singularity of the Holocaust at the cost of its resemblance to other occurrences may obstruct the acknowledgement of past and present genocides. Moreover, colonialism and racism bring about troubling resonances of the Holocaust, as well as a type of neocolonialism (rise from colonialism), whereas every intercultural recollection does not promote cross-cultural understanding, similarities, comparisons, as well as other multidirectional summonses, which are unavoidable fractions of the fight for fairness. Therefore, Rothberg presents the multidirectional alternative which is a principled foresight, founded on a vision based on the dedication to revealing the relationship between histories, while dealing with the part similarities and contradictory assertions that make up the annals of memory, in addition to the domain of politics.

According to some critics, such as Bennett and Kennedy (2003), work has started on cultural experience and the portrayal of memory, as well as trauma pledges to update cultural study in a postcolonial future in a far wider sense than was formerly comprehended. However,

several things must precede this change. First, the parameters of trauma studies need to be reviewed, as it is currently structured around a frame of mostly research that is United States-centred. It has to change from a monocultural field into a means of investigation that can bring up-to-date the exploration of memory within a universal setting that is changing. Therefore, it must go past its concentration on European and American incidents to an inquiry that has as its beginning, the multiethnic, as well as diasporic frame of modern culture. More so, fields like postcolonial studies that are beforehand supported by a well-versed examination of modern universal politics, ought to, as they are starting to do, employ trauma studies to develop additional multifaceted outlines for the investigation of memory. This will promote enlargement of trauma and memory discourse and produce novel logical frameworks that are acquainted with a postcolonial feeling. To achieve this, Bennett and Kennedy (2003) have copied French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's phrase 'world memory'. The phrase is projected to resonate with the globalising inclination of media accounts stemming from the cultural and economic axes. Instead of involving the global range of traumatic incidents and the numerous structures that testify to trauma, there is a risk that trauma studies are being restricted to an array of texts that depict a fairly constricted selection of traumatic incidents, histories and cultural structures. Texts are being chosen for investigation based on how efficiently they demonstrate trauma and memory theories in some instances, instead of their presentation of new knowledge into a global scope of disasters and traumatic incidents, as well as the diversity and cultural unpredictability that illustrations of traumatic incidents hold. Therefore, rather than concentrating wholly on the literary or modernist delineation of trauma, we bring in the idea of languages of trauma that includes both aesthetic and vernacular illustrational practices. The word language can be employed to comprise verbal and non-verbal, literary as well as non-literary representations of trauma. This facilitates the consideration of how "visual art, cinematic, literary, autobiographical and testimonial texts" together constitute unique trauma languages (11).

Besides, Visser (2014) avers that postcolonial literary engagements with trauma portray that what trauma theory invented has failed to advance as a theoretical prototype in postcolonial analysis as a result of its intrinsic boundaries. Hence, at present, there is a glaring request for a novel form for interpreting and comprehending trauma that would allow other distinguished and more culturally and historically precise annotations, as well as make

available means of interpreting collective trauma. Sociology and anthropology, which possess a better theoretical receptiveness to collective trauma owing to their enduring conventions in theorising universal communal reactions, have been earmarked as disciplines that can offer this novel model. Therefore, it appears sensible to reflect on theories advanced in sociology and anthropology for their conceptualisations of combined rejoinders to trauma, distinct from the present prevailing notion in trauma theory which includes social crack, isolation, as well as a dwindling of social unity, which is not the only, nor possibly the main features of trauma. Whereas trauma might result in disunity, it can also foster a more potent feeling of belonging and is truly able to produce community. Thus, trauma is a complex incident. It is severe and event-based, as well as long-lasting and non-event based; it can be incapacitating and upsetting to persons as well as societies; nonetheless, it is also able to bring about a stronger social unity in addition to an improved sense of individuality. In summary, postcolonial literary texts frequently deal with trauma in modes not imagined in the traditional trauma theory, or in modes that are contrary to the supposition of trauma theory, for example, the representation of victims' tenacity, opposition, plus a final victory over trauma, or an augmented unity and improved sense of individuality following a traumatic experience.

Similarly, an American Sociologist, Erikson (1995) proposes a review of the classical definition of trauma and its theorisation. He begins by stating that in classic medical usage, "trauma" is described not as the hurt wreaked but as the event that caused it; not as the condition of mind that arises but as the occurrence that triggered it. Moreover, the phrase "post-traumatic stress disorder" is a conformation to that medical tradition. However, in clinical as well as general applications, that difference is getting blurry. Whereas, the dictionary on Erikson's desk defines trauma both as "a stress or blow that may produce disordered feelings or behaviour" and as "the state or condition produced by such a stress or blow." He observes that the focus of importance on the term has been fluctuating from the former to the latter, and he is not merely making good use of that change at this point, but promoting it for common usage. The motives are good. The historian who desires to know where a tale begins, similar to the therapist who wants to detect the aetiology of the wound to treat it effectively, will be concerned with the genesis**.** However, the historian and therapist do not extend details of the history or aetiology of the wound to everybody

(besides, they are not even very significant), for the reason that it is in what way people respond to the traumatic event and not what they are, that bestow on events whatsoever traumatic worth they can be believed to possess. The fiercest wrestling in the sphere holds no clinical standing, except they hurt the mechanisms of a mind or body; thus, it is the harm inflicted that describes as well as provides a form to the initial occurrence. In essence, the harm caused confers its designation.

More so, to serve as a commonly suitable notion, "trauma" has to be comprehended as ensuing from an assemblage of happenings in life as well as from a distinct experience; from a continuing circumstance as well as from an incident. In effect, trauma possesses a social aspect**.** Erikson begins by proposing that trauma can engender communality. This seems paradoxical until further introspection. When people are labelled traumatised, according to the traditional definition of trauma, it is to say that they have recoiled into a type of protecting covering, an abode of silence, painful solitude, in which the traumatic happening is dealt with as a private encumbrance that requires to be obliterated by acts of renunciation as well as opposition. Is there anything that possibly will be less "social" than that? However, traumatic situations are not similar to the other material predicaments. They shift to the epicentre of one's existence, thereby providing victims the sensation that they have been separated as well as esteemed**.** It is the community that mitigates the effects of the pain, provides an environment for affection and functions as the storehouse for requisite traditions. Then, once the community is deeply afflicted, one can talk of an injured social being almost similar to the way that one would talk of an injured body.

Employing a feminist perspective, Brown (1995) takes off her criticism from the description of trauma in the American Psychiatric Association (1987) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM III-R), psychiatric diagnosis bible, and to the standards for a diagnosis of PTSD which is the psychiatric syndrome that arises out of the experience of trauma. She queries that the array of human experience turns out to be the array of that which is normal as well as common in men's lives of the overriding class, which includes "white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men". Consequently, trauma is seen as strictly that which interrupts these specific human lives. Moreover, events such as war as well as massacres that are the doings of men and male-dominated culture are accepted to be

traumas, alongside natural catastrophes. However, the woman that has been in a pummelling relationship is dealt with rather otherwise (in an inferior way), compared to a person who survived the wreckage of a train, even when the giving indications are alike. This feminist analysis also interrogates the descriptions of humans as well as highlights how the images of trauma have been constricted and structured within the happenings, as well as the circumstances of the overriding factions in cultures. Besides, it is this dominant group that writes the diagnostic manuals and enlightens community discourse on the premise that images of "real" trauma have been constructed. "Real" trauma is always solely that type of trauma where the overriding faction can participate as a victim instead of the culprit or agent. Also, she postulates that trauma is an ongoing background clatter instead of a strange event. Fundamentally, a feminist analysis of the psychic trauma experience demands that we modify our outlook of what "human" entails to a more comprehensive image, and that change will aid in moving us towards a revolutionary reviewing of the way we comprehend the human condition. It is when this reality is recognised that our professions are made radical; the status quo is called to question and we are involved in the progression towards social change.

In conclusion, similar to all the revisionists of trauma theory, Craps advocates an inclusive delineation and representation of trauma theory that caters for postcolonial traumatic realities, which in this context is environmental devastation. Besides, environmental devastation is fast becoming a major trauma of history, on the scale of slavery, colonisation and the Holocaust. This is owing to the fact that environmental degradation displaces people and leaves them homeless like the returnees from war or victims of slavery and colonisation, while some lose their lives, property and cultural landmarks as a result of it, which could be distressing.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter began with a review of key concepts related to the research, which are trauma and traumatogenic/traumagenic. Also, it examined the relationship between trauma and literature, and trauma and poetry, which are also significant notions that needed to be foregrounded in the study. Afterwards, related works to the collections of poetry selected for this study were evaluated to establish the current state of knowledge, and the Niger Delta

region was examined to underscore its historical reality. Undoubtedly, the Niger Delta region has been a region bedevilled with exploitation, deprivation and dispossession since the discovery of oil in the area. Besides, the reviews for the selected collections of poems revealed the representations of ecological devastation owing to the unearthing of oil, with little attention paid to the subject of trauma as a by-product of environmental degradation. Finally, appraisals on trauma theory pioneered by Cathy Caruth, Felman Soshanna and Dori Laub amongst others; the postcolonial strand of trauma theory, which arose out of the criticisms of some of the tenets of classical trauma theory; and Stef Craps' trauma theory, which is a subset of postcolonial trauma theory and the model anchoring this study, were critically engaged with.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

> Research is the systematised effort to gain new knowledge. (Redman & Mory, 1933)

3.0 Chapter overview

This chapter describes the research design, setting of the study, the research population and sampling procedure, including the methods used in collecting data and the techniques employed in analysing the data.

3.1 Research design

The study adopted the interpretive design. It focused on identifying and interpreting intersubjective views of human experiences related in textual contents of six (6) collections of poems from different poets. This was done from both literal and metaphorical perspectives.

3.2 Study setting

The study is situated within the tradition of African literature. Within this tradition, the study examined modern African literature, specifically the emergent Niger Delta Literature with a focus on contemporary Niger Delta poetry from which six (6) poetry collections were purposively selected.

3.3 Research population and sampling procedure

The texts for this research are *Songs of Myself: Quartet*; *Tears in a Basket*; *Letters from the Earth*; *marsh boy & other poems*; *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat*; and *Oily Tears of the Delta*. However, not all the poems in the collections were used, as only those poems with traumatic underpinnings owing to environmental degradation from each collection were isolated and analysed for the sake of this research. The numbers of selected poems from each collection are *Songs of Myself: Quartet* (13); *Tears in a Basket* (9); *Letters from the Earth* (7); *marsh boy & other poems* (10); *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat* (11); and *Oily Tears of the Delta* (9). The purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting eco-

conscious poems with particular characteristics related to the subject of trauma. Also, ecological poets from the Niger Delta, with poetry collections not later than the year 2000, focusing on the Niger Delta quandary were put into due consideration. These collections are: *Songs of Myself: Quartet* (2015); *Tears in a Basket* (2006); *Letters from the Earth* (2007); *marsh boy & other poems* (2013); *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat* (2011); and *Oily Tears of the Delta* (2000). In addition, the research sought to be representative regarding the choice of poets from both genders. However, the ratio of 5:1 in terms of gender was unavoidable because of the seeming scarceness of Niger Delta female poets who emphasised ecological issues with the potential to generate trauma, except Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket*. Besides, similarities in the styles of writing were also well thought-out, as the selected poetry collections that presented poems in simple accessible language, against the "undue eurocentricism, obscurantism and private esotericism" of early Nigerian poets, were deployed.

3.4 Method of data collection

The data were purposively selected owing to the insignias of trauma embedded in them. The data sources include the following poetry volumes: *Songs of Myself: Quartet, Tears in a Basket, Letters from the Earth, marsh boy & other poems, I Will Not Dance To Your Beat* and *Oily Tears of the Delta*. Data were collected by giving attention to thematic relevance, aesthetics appreciation/interpretation (images, sounds and connotations), and comparative applicability of the texts.

3.5 Method of data analysis

The study is qualitative research, which focuses on close reading of the texts. Close reading is a technique of literary analysis based on critical textual scrutiny. The critical textual analysis emphasised thematic and stylistic reading. However, both readings are integrated simultaneously, not done in isolation, for precision and thoroughness as they also complement each other. The comparative approach, in terms of similar linguistic presentations in the texts, was also deployed in analysing the data. Moreover, some of the assumptions of Stef Craps' model of trauma theory were used as the guide for the analysis, which contradicts the classical model of trauma theory. Stef Craps' trauma theory is anchored on the inclusion of quotidian kinds of brutality that happen to groups of lower

factions, as he also advocates for a comprehensive delineation of trauma contrary to the restricted dominant descriptions of trauma and traumatic occurrences.

Copious references were made to the primary source of data – the selected poetry collections. However, secondary references such as textbooks, journals, articles and online materials that are significant to the treatise were also consulted. The analysis of the poems is geared towards eliciting the distressing experiences of the Niger Delta people resulting from environmental devastation.

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter concisely presents the systematic process through which data were collected and analysed for the study. It begins with the design adopted for the research which is the interpretive design; the description of the setting of the study, which is contemporary Niger Delta poetry, a subgenre of emergent Niger Delta literature, situated within the larger frame of modern African literature; and the research population, which include all the six (6) collections of poems from which a specific number of poems with varied presentations of trauma were drawn using the purposive sampling. Subsequently, the method of data collection which is hinged on thematic relevance, aesthetics appreciation and comparative applicability; and the method of data analysis were considered.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRAUMATOGENIC INSCRIPTIONS, TRAUMATIC MOTIFS AND TROPES IN SELECTED NIGER DELTA POETRY

> If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. (Caruth, 1996: 3)

4.0 Chapter overview

The unearthing of oil in the Niger Delta and the resultant environmental degradation have made traumatogenic and traumatic experiences the stark reality of the Niger Delta people. Thus, oil has become a metaphor of pain for the people since its discovery and exploitation over six decades ago in the Niger Delta region. This exploitation is perpetrated by the multinational companies in cahoots with the Nigerian government, formidable forces (who have been driven by an insatiable quest for material wealth beyond reasonable limits in exploring the local natural resources). As a result, the Niger Delta history is marked by traumatic dispossession, displacement and deprivation. Indeed, this is not without severe repercussions on the inhabitants, as the experience takes a toll not only on their physical and material being but also their psychological well-being, causing trauma. This chapter focuses on narrating traumatogenic experiences and trauma, with particular attention paid to the motifs and tropes in Tanure Ojaide's *Songs of Myself: Quartet*; Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket*; Albert Otto's *Letters from the Earth*; G'Ebinyo Ogbowei *marsh boy & other poems*; Nnimmo Bassey *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat*; and Ibiwari Ikiriko *Oily Tears of the Delta*.

4.1 Lyrical lamentations in Ojaide's *Songs of Myself: Quartet*

The stories of trauma rehearsed anew provide the voiceless with a voice because it gives evidence to an earlier historical and cultural segregation, and literature has been an invaluable means for articulating many traumatic states and capturing their outcomes (Rodi-Risberg, 2010). Ojaide, in *Songs of Myself* (*Songs*), recounts past and current painful

experiences of the Niger Delta people owing to environmental devastation. *Songs of Myself* comprises four (4) sections, namely, "Pulling the Thread of the Loom", "Songs of Myself", "Songs of the Homeland Warrior", and "Secret Love and Other Poems". Only the poems in the third section, "Songs of the Homeland Warrior" are analysed, as they concentrate on the thematic concerns of this study. In these poems, Ojaide is vociferous in his emphasis on the consequent traumatogenic effects and trauma of environmental despoliation on the people, because the end product of silence is unsaid questions and evaded tales (Novak, 2008).

The nature of the environmental devastation which has become the endless diurnal realities of the Niger Delta people opposes Caruth's (1996) description of trauma as an experience resulting from a sole unexpected disastrous occurrence. It aligns with Craps' (2010) reference to trauma as unending, quotidian kinds of brutality and suppression, and this is epitomised in the poems for this study. The daily destruction of land, loss of loved ones and means of livelihood, as well as other fundamental threats to life, traumatise the Niger Delta people deeply. These experiences dominate the recollected memories in the poems. In the poem titled "If those called militants" (*Songs,* 112), the poet persona, in a pensive mood packed with strings of unspoken reflections, soliloquises:

> if the laboring poor
> had the power to overturn their suffering
> they would make servants of their lords (*Songs*, 112)

Unfortunately, the conditional clause introduced by "if" expresses the Niger Delta people's impotence in the face of anguish, and the poet persona and his people are psychologically pained by this disquieting reality. Indeed, there is heightened strain on their emotions owing to the disparities between the distressing reality and the disturbing conceit. The people are handicapped and powerless, whilst their present pathetic predicament lingers. The disconcerting memories of the people as they run over one another, represented through the poet persona's voice, is underscored by the use of enjambment as a poetic device and the deployment of interior monologue. The poem captures this deeply distressing ruminations, which are only hinged on assumptions, implied by the use of "if", because the poet persona's expectations, as well his people's, contradict their reality. However, their mental distress is perhaps cushioned by these assumptions, connoted above by the use of "if".

Further, the people find emotional respite in the hope that once they gain power over their oppressors and access the right media, their condition would change. Unfortunately, this has proven to be a pipe dream, as they struggle with their antithetical conditions. The oxymoronic phrase "labouring poor" in the above excerpt from the poem further emphasises their contradictory living, as their toil is not commensurate with their wages. Although the poet does not immediately provide the reason their toil is not commensurate with their wages, knowing the Niger Delta situation, it can be argued that what the poet alludes to is the poverty of the people owing to the destruction of their lands and surrounding aquatic habitats. Thus, the picture the poet persona paints with his allusion is that the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region labour in vain. This is even so, taking into account that their occupations as mainly farmers and fishermen are constantly jeopardised by oil spillage, gas flaring and other mining operations. Nixon (2011) even observes that the multinational companies, in need of manpower, look to other neighbouring communities or remote places instead of creating employment opportunities for the host communities directly plagued by their extraction activities. Thus, it is not just that the people of the Niger Delta region have been denied and prevented from making a living from their main occupation as farmers and fishermen, they have also been marginalised from benefitting from the job opportunities available in the multinational oil companies. In other words, they are exploited without being replenished or compensated. Consequently, they are disadvantaged on several fronts. With all these, the poet persona frustratingly hypothesises that:

> if the homeland warriors called militants
> had their own CNN and Aljazeera
> they would call their robbers monsters (*Songs*, 112)

These lines subtly overturn the quotidian stereotypical labelling of the Niger Delta as militants. The lines show that the criminalising of the activities of the Niger Delta people is as a result of the unequal power relations between the Deltans on one hand, and the multinational companies and the government on the other who are in control of the media. Therefore, the unsettled state of the people is connected to the denial of justice and the media invisibility of the poet persona's people, since news reports only eulogise the multinational corporations as well their accomplice, the government. Yet, for 50 years, the communities in the Niger Delta region have endured the coordinate of an "Exxon-Valdez sized spill" per annum and in spite of this long-term, accretive catastrophe, the explosions

have not made news headlines (Nixon, 2011). This implies that environmental degradation is scarcely mentioned in the media, and when it is, the extent of destruction and the effects on Niger Deltans is grossly under-reported. If only the Niger Delta populace had the right platforms, they would have appropriately channelled their grievances against the despoilers; and "they would ask nations/why they fought for independence" and "why they fought against enslavement" (*Songs,* 112), because the dividends of independence are lacking, as independence has not provided the deserved freedom in the poet persona's country home. On the contrary, the lives of the people are characterised by an ironical situation which saddens the poet persona's heart. The people are supposedly free, yet enslaved in reality. Besides, they are disillusioned at the present post-colonial and post-independence realities, which includes both environmental devastation and deprivation. The poem concludes on this imaginary interrogative-dialogical note with the victims asking the despoilers "enough questions to embarrass them/and prick their benumbed conscience/into waking from villainy" (*Songs*, 112), towards recognising the Niger Delta people's right to gainful living. However, of what use is pricking to a dead conscience? Hence, the poet persona and his people only tuck away their griefs in trophies of wishes.

In the same way, the poet persona and his people are distraught by the depth of destruction occasioned by the depletion of the environment in the poem entitled "If they had their gods here" (*Songs,* 113), a sequel to the "ifs" series, which paints a picture of disturbed humanity. The depressive mood which permeates the poem is heightened by the sensations of anger and linguistic choices:

> if they buried their ancestors here…
> if their muse drank from here
> if their arts were inspired by this landscape
> if they made their living from this soil and water…
> if this land affirmed their humanity (*Songs*, 113)

Land is a fundamental feature of identity because it is a symbol of a person's selfhood or individuality (Balaev, 2008). This holds especially true in Africa, where man is defined by his land. Hence, the loss of land implies a loss of identity, that is, displacement, which can be traumatogenic and heighten the possibility of psychic trauma. In essence, the African's existence is hinged on his land, so also is the affirmation of his humanity, and the loss of it makes him desolate. This forced displacement has defined the recurrent loss that is the

reality of the people of the Niger Delta and it poses the threat of eventual extermination, which is quite dreadful. Therefore, such a loss builds up the fervour of trauma in the people due to the symbiotic relationship between man and nature, and the people of the Niger Delta region are embittered by this destruction. Beyond physical displacement, the attack on their resources has occasioned imaginative/creative displacement as well. Literature (art) is commonly referred to as the reflection of the society. Thus, the absence of an enabling environment for nurturing creativity leaves them incapacitated. Eventually, these traumatogenic experiences suffered by the Niger Delta people lead to various kinds of trauma generated by the loss of their means of livelihood and land, displacement and inarticulateness of such agonising experiences. They are not only physically tormented, but also imaginatively deprived and psychologically drained. The poet persona believes that if the reverse was the situation and the despoiled land was for the plunderers, they would employ every strategy, use "the most offensive weapons/in their secret arsenal" (*Songs*, 113) to regain their lost land, regardless if their oppressors hurled invectives at them. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The deployment of anaphora, expressed through the repetition of "if" at the beginning of successive lines in the poem, draws attention to their grief and profound uncertainty.

Contrary to classical trauma theorists' and Caruth's (1996) view of the unspeakability of trauma, Pederson (2014), supporting McNally's (2005) postulation, affirms that memories of trauma are unforgettable as well as speakable; and literature has been a very useful tool in representing hurtful memories, and recollecting repressed memories. In fact, literature brings to consciousness suppressed memories (Whitehead, 2004). Supporting this, Caruth contradicts herself when she claims that figurative language (literature), rather than literal language, can reclaim trauma, which confirms that memories of trauma are both accessible and speakable, and reinforces the testimonial potency of literature. These traumatic memories delineated with anguish are expressed in Ojaide's "Can i still call from the River Nun?" (*Songs,* 114-115). The poem establishes intertextual relation with one of Gabriel Okara's famous poem "The Call of the River Nun". The beauty of the poet persona's environment, which was once found in Okara's poem but is now lost, inspires the poem. This underscores the fact that the production of a literary oeuvre necessitates interaction with other texts. In Okara's poem, the poet persona, with a nostalgic feeling, recalls his

childhood memories and life at the River Nun's bank "…where river birds hail your silver-surfaced flow." However, the River Nun Okara eulogises, suffused with calmness and beauty, is absent in Ojaide's poem. Through the intertextual relation, the contrast between the conditions of the river foregrounds the poet persona's grief as well as his people's. Intertextuality is, indeed, emphasised in several fictional works that thematise trauma (Whitehead, 2004). In an atmosphere enveloped in melancholy, the poet persona bewails this huge loss as he cries out in despair:

> can the legendary labyrinths of the Delta
> take the fisherman to work and back with songs…
>
> can the fish population fondly called children of gods
> stop the poisoning of their resident water by oil workers
>
> can the air that sustains the living in this blessed portion
> insulate itself against the vagabond flares of raging gas (*Songs*, 114)

Through the deployment of interior monologue technique, the poem portrays the poet persona struggling with multiple unanswered questions. He is haunted by a distressing past as well as physically tortured by the current realities of labyrinths of polluted swamps and rivers, destroyed fauna and flora. Painfully, the environment has turned into an embodiment of constant threat to the poet persona's and his people's survival through the continual exposure to contaminated air. Meanwhile, the present has become nightmarish so much that night, which provides repose from the day's stress, is "now in flames" and divested of its tranquillity. On another level, they are heartbroken by the death of friends and family instigated by the destruction of the environment. While some, such as Ken Saro-Wiwa and the eight other Ogonis, were killed due to their insurrectionary activities and dissidence against the government and despoilers of the environment, some were overtaken in the quagmire between the government and the militants, when villages were raided and destroyed. Some lost their loved ones to diseases contracted from grimy environments, while others got drowned in polluted rivers. In light of such devastating condition, the poet persona asks: "can the remnant population of the abused land still/live meaningful lives after the death of companions?" (*Songs*, 115). This is almost impossible because of survivor's guilt, which is symptomatic of trauma. In essence, the Niger Delta inhabitants who survive incidents in which others died experience a state of continuous psychological and emotional distress.

Frantz Fanon (1967) posits that one does not have to be injured by a cartridge to be tortured by the realities of war, both physically and psychologically. This is applicable to the survivors of the Niger Delta region, who are constantly beleaguered by disconcerting memories. Besides, survivors of collective traumas are likely to be disturbed by the desire to honour victims' death or troubled by the fear of obliterating the tale of their death through recounting their personal survival tales. Their survival narrative is inextricably tied to the narrative of the deaths of others (Robson, 2004). Thus, they are emotionally scarred on different grounds, struggling with survivors' guilt, apart from the continual thought of impermanent security. These experiences are traumatogenic and could possibly engender trauma in the end. As traumatogenic inscriptions litter this poem, the poet persona concludes on a rhetorical note, which helps to express the anguish experienced by the traumatised. The deployment of rhetorical question provides a form of relief, because they are able to vocalise their pain and confront the seedbeds of their hurt (Onyema, 2015).

Craps (2013) asserts that trauma theory should be restructured to help in bringing awareness to the suffering that have not been formerly heard of, as well as traumatic ordeals of people of non-Western cultural institutions, contrary to the traditional event-based form of trauma and representation of solely Western groups. Baxter (2015) emphasises Craps' view, proposing the need to extend the classifications by which the correlation between trauma and the inexpressible in literature is read, to engender readiness to discover trauma in unforeseen settings. He states further that a focus on a regal aesthetics of the inexpressible has paradoxically left others who are traumatised in literature disregarded. Craps' and Baxter's propositions are applicable to Niger Delta poetry, where psychological pain and torturous memories engendered by the attendant losses in the Niger Delta society, which have become an everyday and a common feature in the region, is worthy of mention. These have not only impacted their lives but also their culture. The poem entitled "Don't follow the palm wine tapper's course" (*Songs,* 116) registers the psychological hurt experienced by the poet persona, as he reflects on the ordeals of his people:

> *Odjoboro is strong but foolish—*
> *he built his canoe with soft wood*
>
> *when there's abundance of hardwood in the forest*
> *for a sturdy canoe to ply creeks and rivers.* (*Songs*, 116)

This song, an embodiment of cultural identity, was one of the folksongs popularised by the older generation, and it was deployed to forewarn fishermen of the dangers of erecting their canoes with substandard materials, when there was abundance of nature's bounties in existence. However, the song no longer has a significant and demonstrable bearing on the Niger Delta environment, because the present younger generation "see nothing even of soft wood/not to talk of hardwood or forest" (*Songs*, 116). These nostalgic flashbacks recollected in a traditional song as well as the painful realities do not only leave the Niger Deltans tormented, but also the absence of "rivers left in the land to ply!" (*Songs*, 116), which provide their means of livelihood and is crucial to their upward mobility. As a result, this reflection brings about lyrical laments.

Pederson (2014) expresses that trauma's repetitive and suppressed character does not hinder it from being expressive. In fact, these components permit trauma to be enunciated, which contradicts the proposition of early theorists (Balaev, 2014). In these scholars' views, trauma improves memory; it does not obliterate reminiscence. Although trauma might distort memory, its representations of such in warped texts might be useful cues in recognising the upshots of trauma in literature (McNally, 2005; Pederson, 2014). This distortion is reflected in Niger Delta poetry where the people are overwhelmed by the magnitude of environmental destruction in their region, and they struggle for succour in traces of memories of their once unspoiled ecology. The poem "Only in his memory" (*Songs,* 120), also by Ojaide, takes us through the poignant feeling and noticeable psychic ache experienced by a homeland warrior in the Niger Delta region. The mood of hopelessness pervades the poem, as he is afflicted by the painful memories of his formerly virginal land:

> Only in memory
> thrive the affluent residents of the wetlands: …
>
> Only in his memory
> the exuberance of his irrecoverable youth
> where he still hugs green-garmented herbs
> and walks the soil murmuring soothing chants to his soles (*Songs,* 120)

The poem reminisces on the period when the natives live in affluence as a result of their bounteous endowments and possessions, and the excitement that saturated the warrior's youthful days. Despondently, the loss of those days and beauties are irreparable, and he is

weighed down by the fact that those experiences cannot be relived, even if he so desires. The image of the "green-garmented herbs" connotes his once pristine environment, while in the tarnished present "he carries scars of burns" as he "watches his companions afflicted with toxic fumes" (*Songs*, 120). The homeland warrior is not only physically afflicted by the tangible consequences of environmental degradation; he is also mentally devastated by his helplessness and tortured by the feelings of betrayal of the trust others who are badly affected might have reposed in him. Also, the life expectancy of the Niger Delta people is shortened owing to direct exposure to lethal agents, which results in chronic health problems; yet, he cannot do anything to salvage the situation, despite his status as a homeland warrior. Therefore, environmental degradation becomes a lethal machinery with the bodies of the Niger Deltans attesting to the caustic aftermaths, as well as a constant memento of the uncertainty of life. These incidents trigger traumatogenic developments that could lead to trauma, which is hinted at in the following lines as "… only in memory brought alive in dreams/does he recover and walk a stranger to himself/that the homeland warrior recognises his lost land" (*Songs,* 120).

The homeland warrior's dreams and delusional thoughts as demonstrated in the poem, together with feelings of loneliness and self-estrangement, as he walks "…a stranger to himself", suggests his unbalanced state. This substantiates Greenberg's (1998) view that the survivor experiences a feeling of solitude which is caused by trauma, which foregrounds vulnerability to loneliness that the people of the Niger Delta region experience. Also, the homeland warrior struggles to reconcile his inner self with his present reality and external world, as the self is incapable of becoming accustomed to his post-destructive personality. Therefore, trauma disorganises the former structure of reality and the character has to reorder the self with respect to this recent reality (Balaev, 2008). In addition, his memory, which comes "alive in dreams", indicates emotional disturbance and agony, as his waking thoughts are carried over into his dreams while he strives for recovery. Although the memories seem emotionally appealing, they provide only momentary respite because he wakes up to reality and "recognises his lost land" (*Songs*, 120). Diurnal kinds of environmental degradations give rise to traumatogenic impacts such as these.

This study conceives trauma as insidious, similar to Nixon's (2011) phrase of "slow violence" and Craps' (2010) delineation of trauma as unending quotidian brutality. Such 'slow violence' is evident in the poem "Eruemukohwarien" (*Songs*, 121), where the poet persona gives a first-hand experience of the realities of the Niger Delta residents, using a community (Eruemukohwarien) as a microcosm of the Niger Delta region. The poem is presented through a narrative form, which validates Craps' (2013) review of dominant trauma aesthetics to include other alternatives such as this. In the poem, the poet persona presents a picturesque tale of the region's odyssey in ruins for years unending:

> I took close shots
> of two gas flares
> that have been burning
> for fifty years and for sure
> will go on for centuries
> if the earth's not exhausted. (*Songs*, 121)

The poem bears witness to the conflagration of gas flares for years, and one can only imagine the attendant consequences. While the incident might not immediately traumatise the poet persona or the Niger Delta inhabitants, it possesses traumatogenic potentials. In essence, just as the destruction has slow and snowballing effect, so also is the trauma insidious. With the presence of these perturbing sights of destruction, constant brooding over them could lead to trauma. Besides, the inhabitants of the Niger Delta are present victims as well as future casualties of a deteriorating environment, which is saturated with severe repercussions and dehumanising effects on humans and non-humans, as the earth becomes "blackened" and denies "plant and creatures life/with the heat hell promises" (*Songs*, 121). With the melancholic mood of the poem, the disheartened state of the poet persona and his people is underscored. Their lives are filled with many uncertainties, and the image of hell deployed in the poem foregrounds the enormity of the damage. To worsen the situation, they cannot contest this denial and destruction, which takes place "in a silenced community/begging for sentry work" from the people who were formerly "tenants/now lords of the land" (*Songs*, 121). The unwilling exchange of positions hinted at here usually upsets the people of the Niger Delta region, a fact complicated by the pain that attends their jobless state, as well as the consequent humiliation of begging the original architect of their woes for menial jobs.

Whilst the reading of most of the poems in this collection might not conform to the normative trauma aesthetic of non-linearity and anti-narrativity, this does not make it less traumatic but gives credibility to Craps' (2013) proposition that the particular social as well as historical contexts of production and reception of trauma narratives should be considered. Hence, trauma theory should be open to varied representations. Moreover, the urgency of the matter might not give room for any modernist aesthetic compliance. However, it does not lessen the intensity of the trauma, which in the Niger Delta context is environmental devastation. The poem "The zestful river lost its fine fingers" (*Songs,* 122-123), though presented in simple language and linear narrative, still bears the burden of the poet persona as well as the people. The poem is a synecdochic representation of the loss experienced by the people owing to environmental degradation:

> The zestful river lost its fine fingers
> that once pointed to ancestral wetlands …
>
> You wouldn't know this was the primeval haven,
> this home whose residents drop from agonies— (*Songs,* 122)

The magnitude of destruction as well as the ironical situation that characterise their existence, makes them "drop from agonies", which implies descent into a state of hopelessness, then depression or death when their threshold for pain eventually gives way. Indeed, their past is only an archetype of their present, which has become a caricature of the once near-immaculate ecosystem, and this grieves the people deeply. Besides, their bodies become susceptible to diverse diseases as a result of the laceration that accompanies gas flares and blowouts. Therefore, shrapnel of environmental trauma saturate their memories. This destruction of the environment takes a toll on not just the Niger Delta people's mental well-being but also their physiological, as the organs of their body lose their biological functions and become inert. On a metaphorical level, through the images of the body organs, the loss of the virginal world and its consequences are accentuated:

> The eyes of the earth, blinded by convulsive fumes,
> no longer the sentinels that kept us safe at a distance;
>
> the nose a mere facial protrusion and the tongue
> a labial outgrowth; no longer the household taster. (*Songs,* 122-123)

The use of sensory language (physical sensations), represented through visual, olfactory, as well as gustatory images, give a grander description of the extent of destruction and

traumatisation. Equally, these sensory experiences make visible the hurt inflicted on the victims of environmental despoliation. Vital conditions necessary for sustenance as well as survival are not only affected, essential organs, which are exposed to toxic discharge that damage their functionality, are also impaired. In view of the foregoing, the Niger Delta people end up with impaired bodies because they lose some of their body functionality and organs to environmental degradation. On a symbolic level, such body organs symbolise the various structures and ecosystems of the earth, which ensure subsistence in the past, but have been ruined – no longer serving their purpose. Sadly, the poet persona remarks that "these mutations stuck with us, so inescapable" (*Songs*, 123). This gives a picture of a metamorphosis that leaves a lasting negative impact on its victims. It also depicts the helpless state of the victims who are stuck with flagging conditions they are incapable of avoiding. Besides, it is depressing when one is stuck with something unpleasant.

The noxious expulsions into the aquatic and non-aquatic habitats in the Niger Delta region affect productivity in humans as it also results in malformation, complications and worse still, sterility. Consequently, environmental degradation results in the degradation of the body due to gradual degeneration of life, which in turn induces constant heightened anxiety plus sensations of intense fear. This accretive, covert as well as subtle, kind of trauma is what Maria Root (1992) refers to as "insidious trauma". However, a narrow focus on pathologising these victims of trauma depoliticise socio-political issue, thereby propagating the experience. Consequently, psychological recovery is provided without social, economic and political transformation (Craps, 2013). Craps' (2013) criticisms of the psychologising and depoliticising proclivities of classic trauma model is reiterated in Craps' and Buelens' (2018) where they state that a biased emphasis on the psychology of the individual disregards as well as overlooks interrogating the circumstances that facilitated the traumatic mistreatment. It is this overlooking of the systems and structures, which promote environmental exploitation over a long time, that catalysed insidious trauma in the Niger Delta context. The poem "Come and spend a day with me" (*Songs*, 128), also by Ojaide, presents a graphic tale of the Niger Delta people's journey through insidious trauma in the following lines:

Come and spend a day with me

see my wife close to her term…
after many miscarriages and complications
always on our knees for a healthy baby
after so many malformed births around…
in the land that raised us to this day (*Songs*, 128)

Whilst the poet persona and his family await the arrival of their child, they undergo persistent bouts of anxiety, even as they constantly pray for a well-formed child, having seen a number of malformed ones, owing to polluted air and contaminated water and food consumed by women during pregnancy. This constant state of anxiety and fear can be traumatogenic, leading to traumatic developments such as anxiety attack, anxiety disorder or anxiety neurosis. On the other hand, the people in this region may begin to feel hesitant to have children because of the fear of reproducing deformed babies who become liabilities almost throughout life. Emotionally distressed, the poet persona beckons on the reader through the use of apostrophe to "come and experience the life we live/and see for yourself the rigors we bear" (*Songs*, 128). The quality of life and life expectancy is at its best, low. The call on the reader by the poet persona is not merely to evoke empathy but to bring to the reader's consciousness his obligation and critical role in ensuring change, as the poet persona says that having experienced what they are going through, the reader should "… tell others the tale of our blues" (*Songs*, 128). This is in contrast to the classic model where the victim testifies to a truth that s/he does not fully know, while the reader responds by demonstrating sympathy as well vicariously experiencing the trauma which does not bring about any political intervention or change. Rather than just making the reader a vicarious victim, Craps asserts that the testimony should make the reader critically aware of his or her part in the present complicity to keep silent. Further, the deployment of storytelling (anecdotal) technique in the poem, as against the prescriptive modernist aesthetics of fragmentation and aporia, makes for active response of the reader. Substantiating this, Rodi-Risberg (2018) states that "[t]hrough storytelling, reading becomes a dialogic activity in the sense that readers can envision their parts in the stories: these narratives implicate the reader as a response-abled witness" (5).

In another poem entitled "I had left home with reluctance" (*Songs*, 129), which is a sequel series to "Come and spend a day with me", the sad and depressing tales of woes experienced

by the Niger Delta people continues as they go on voluntary exile from home. Home here is viewed literally as a place of abode, and figuratively as a symbol of (cultural) identity as well as reminiscence – reminiscences of oneness with the environment. Therefore, the people have to contend with traumatic feelings in the event of displacement and forced exile. Again, the poem does not favour the modernist aesthetic of anti-narrativity and 'unspeakability' in classical trauma model (Caruth, 1996). In contrast to the Caruthian model, Craps (2013) suggests that the sense of partisan exigency guiding the non-compliant texts might to an extent clarify the reasons for their dependence on a simple and unadorned pragmatist aesthetic. This pragmatist aesthetic is achieved in this poem through the storytelling narrative form. Yet again, this style does not render the overwhelming condition less traumatic. Rather, it helps in expressing the traumatic experience and promotes active witnessing, as it also anticipates a positive political rejoinder from the reader. Rodi-Risberg (2018) substantiates on storytelling when she states that "[s]torytelling, which cancels the referential foundation in Caruthian trauma theory of trauma as unspeakable, allows readers to imagine a sharing of the suffering told and inspire an active relationship to readers, and so shows that emotional affect does not preclude political action" (5). Through the deployment of anecdotal aesthetics and nostalgic motifs, the poet persona narrates a disturbing past in the poem "I had left home with reluctance":

> I had left home with reluctance and while away
> yearned daily for the beauties and abundance
> I had abandoned; blamed myself for ever leaving…
> and back I set out for the sweet home of plenty where
> I expected to wear the garlands of happiness for life; (*Songs,* 129)

In deep nostalgia for the "beauties and abundance" of his home, the poet persona recounts how he began his journey back home, only to be grief-stricken by the disturbing sights that greeted his arrival. The virginal land of those primeval times is long lost with the lustrous structure shattered and smattered. His expectation contradicts the reality he beholds as "[g]hosts of all kinds welcomed me to the homeland" (*Songs,* 129) and the images of death and dearth stare at him everywhere he turned to. Words that represent the dreadful experiences of the people of the Niger Delta recreate the past through these nostalgic motifs. The poet persona returns to his home where he likely stayed during his formative years and which were part of his growth only to see it reduced to ruins. He does not only record the

loss of the flora and fauna of his homeland, "but of the innocent mowed down in the crossfire/artillery exchange between oil lords and resource/warriors…" (*Songs,* 129) Longevity of life is not guaranteed as the innocent could be cut down unexpectedly. Moreover, the living is haunted by the memories of the death of their loved ones, as "…ghosts of everlasting dirges" (129) trouble the living. While the living is put in a state of perplexity as a result of perpetual grief with the troubling thoughts of the unfinished task of the dead, which is unconsciously handed to them, the dead also do not have "…a refuge to call theirs" (*Songs,* 129). As a result, the living and dead alike are equally displaced and affected greatly, with the survivors haunted by the calamities that befall their relatives and the need to avenge their death. All these unsettling thoughts and scenes keep the survivors of the Niger Delta region's devastation in a distressing state. The impact of this dispossession and displacement is represented through the poet persona's trauma and choice of words:

> Wherever I turn at my homecoming, ghosts
> that deny the basic necessities of life and
> lead away from playgrounds to scorched earth
> intensifying desperation with dearth and sickness. (*Songs,* 129)

The hyperbolic expression at the beginning of the above excerpt emphasises the torture experienced by the poet persona as a result of those unpleasant spectacles, with a heightened desperation foregrounding the trauma experienced by the people. Despite the present predicament, rather than seek empathy from the readers, the poet persona metaphorically makes a wake-up call to his people, as he turns "…back to raise an army to rout ghosts and/reinstate life where death has poached a number" (*Songs,* 129). Symbolically, this could possibly read as a clamour for revolution. The nature of the concluding part of this poem gives credibility to the supposition about postcolonial texts having as their prime concern the need to pass across the message as well as mobilise people. Indeed, it is mostly messages that are understood, not fragmented ones, that drive people to action most times.

However, the poet persona is not quick to dismiss the roles played by the local leaders, as he incriminates the oil multinationals in cahoots with the Nigerian government. In the poem "Maybe they are right" (*Songs,* 131), the poem describes the psychological strain experienced by the poet persona owing to the burden of thoughts of failed local

administration. The Niger Delta people are betrayed by the local authorities or representatives they rely on; their leaders are no longer mediators between the people and the government, but allies with the perpetrators of the heinous crimes on their environment. We find the poet persona consenting to the view of those who hold that his "rage is misdirected," and that he should rather contend against "those from the same home" (131). The introspective narrative in the poem provided through interior monologue, plus the deployment of apostrophe, is suggestive of the poet persona's emotional imbalanced state as well as the people's. This use of introspective narrative confirms Luckhurst's (2008) claim that when a distressing event happens, it also brings about the frenzied construction of introspective narratives that aim at explaining the trauma. In what follows, the poet persona expresses his unsettling thoughts:

> they say that I fold my arms and look on without seeing
> my lavish portion taken by chiefs and representatives…
> They say it's not that I don't have more than enough to alter
> my plight but I allow those who claim the share to squander it…
> Maybe I sit down and look on while chiefs and representatives
> hurl away from the House our portion to have their appetites sated (*Songs,* 131)

Once again, the poet persona is tortured and grieved by his inaction amid the avarice displayed by the local leaders, while he experiences a trauma of loss. The poem presents a portraiture of conflicting emotions in a situation of trauma, leading to the poet persona misdirecting his anger and frustration. The poet persona fails to come into a realisation of the appropriate agency to channel his grievances. However, this might be deliberate as it could be a defense mechanism employed by the poet persona to demonstrate anger toward individuals that are not the immediate culprits, since the perpretrators might be close kiths and kins. Also, it could be a means of lessening the potential ripple effect of his anger while still displaying his feeling. The danger is that the issues end up unresolved, like it is in the Niger Delta region. Although it might be an arduous task to stand up to these local representatives, if it is done, it is a step in the right direction towards tackling the menace of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region. Moreover, the poet persona's displaced anger is not unconnected to his inaction, which is enshrouded in a state of helplessness. Helplessness becomes a response to the feeling of loss, demonstrating the poet persona's frustration. In the same vein, the Niger Delta people's powerlessness in the face of massive destruction is recounted in another poem titled "In the theater of war" (*Songs,*

136). In the poem, there is an inner force to narrate the unnerving tale of the Niger Delta people, little wonder the use of enjambment. In trauma, the tale of a wound is often portrayed just like is presented in this poem. The poet persona mourns the enormous loss of human life as well as properties during the repeated attacks by the Nigerian military on the Niger Delta region, in a bid to wipe out so-called militants:

> In the theatre of war, death ambles after life
> for heroism in the mangrove swamps. See
> the torched camps, villages, and waterways—…
> and then who can tell blood from oil sludge?...
> no cocks crow; the dead cannot wake to flee
> coordinated assaults into refugee trails of tents. (*Songs,* 136)

The poet persona reminisces on how the inhabitants are forced to flee their lands for concentration camps where they undergo distressing experiences, owing to recurrent attacks by the Nigerian government. The Niger Delta region became a place for the Nigerian military to display heroism, where the battle is set in array against mostly unarmed citizens, leaving behind a pathetic sight of blood commingled with "oil sludge". Therefore, the region becomes an area marked by repeated and extreme violence with different communities taking turns in the assaults. The poem recounts how "[i]n Warri the dance of death raises songs of sorrow/at the waterfront" with "the port peopled with ghosts" (*Songs,* 136). The personification of death humanises the intensity of pain experienced by the people, and the images portray the magnitude of loss involved. The denizens of the region were not only displaced but also panic-stricken as nowhere became safe, and "[c]alls come from far and near, asking 'Are you/safe?'" Unfortunately, "there's no safety anywhere in the land" (*Songs,* 136). While the people contend with massive destruction, the terror is intensified as the lawmakers in Abuja demand more: "… '[f]lush them out also in Bayelsa and Rivers!'/To them, they are militants who cry foul of Bell Oil" (136). The just cause of the region is termed "foul" and the people fighting for this cause are tagged "militants", who are haunted everyday while the pillagers walk about freely, wreaking more havoc. On one hand, the description sickens the mind and triggers traumatic feelings incited by graphic and gory sights, thereby causing the reader to experience some form of "vicarious trauma". On the other hand, the poem also seeks to make interventions in power relations and bring an end to the incessant attacks on the Niger Delta region as a whole, a tendency which Craps advocates, but which is contrary to the classic model of trauma.

In spite of the present dilemma of his people, the poet persona, as well the Niger Deltans, nurses and nurtures hope in the presence of grief, displayed in the poem titled "In wake keeping" (*Songs,* 137). The bond of unity and hope that characterise the collective trauma in the Niger Delta region gives credence to Visser's (2015) presupposition that trauma should not only be conceived as sudden, individual, and arising from a single incident, but also as collective as well as long-lasting, possessing the capability to enervate persons as well as groups, while having the potential to bring about an enduring sense of identity and an improved communal unity. It is this comprehensive intricacy of trauma in its particular cultural, political as well historical settings that postcolonial literary studies articulate and recreate. This strong sense of identity and enhanced social cohesion is demonstrated in Niger Delta, where the trauma is collective, and this is connoted through the use of the first-person plural pronoun "we" in the poem. The traumatic situation strengthens unity among groups of people as well as bolsters relationship that possibly outlive the moment of albatross. This is demonstrated in the poem where the people of the region, in the midst of pain, "cast jokes to cheer the heavy heart" (*Songs,* 137). Perhaps, it only makes sense to hold on to a drab ray of hope which possibly provides transitory respite and appeals to emotion, because the title of the poem already betrays an imagistic portrayal of a grieving scene. This has almost become a common sight in the Niger Delta terrain. However, the people's intense sense of optimism is depicted in the following lines:

> in the dirge-filled atmosphere
> we sing blues and drink songs
>
> in the wide expanse of pain
> we seek acreage of relief (*Songs,* 137)

The Niger Delta people employ various means to cope with their grief and escape mentally as well as temporarily from their immediate circumstances. They "…dream of resplendence" (*Songs,* 137) despite the gloom around them. Their comportment is typical of an African man who seeks other means of dealing with his pain, a cultural tendency that recalls African-Americans' coping strategies (work songs and spirituals) during slavery. As is well known, the word "blues", a derivative of spirituals, originated from African-American history of slavery in the 1860s. This representation corresponds with Craps' (2013) insistence that the hegemonic notions of trauma as well as recovery have to be

reviewed and extended, if it is to effectively cater for the ignored psychological hurt experienced by several disempowered factions. Similarly, Kurtz (2014) states that traditional African communities are well-endowed with means for trauma cure, which is all-inclusive and premised on a solid feel of spirituality. "Blues" and "drink songs" are part of those remedial machineries for coping with trauma, and perhaps, ensuring cure. They could also be a form of defence mechanism, as trauma is redirected. However, their fantasy of "resplendence" opposes their reality, as the time and possibility of attaining such grandeur is yet unknown. Still, they hope amidst hopelessness as they profess that their "…potent weapon is not in Camp 5" (*Songs,* 137), should the despoilers in alliance with the government think that they have finally defeated and silenced them. Camp 5 is a hideout that belonged to Tompolo, a militant leader. The camp was destroyed by federal troops in a combined air and sea assault. This same atmosphere of hope is foregrounded in the next poem "For the wind that still blows" (*Songs,* 139). The poem paints some auspicious scenarios, which give meaning to the essence of their optimism:

> For the wind that still blows
> and the eyareya grass that dances…
>
> for the water that still flows
> and the promise of entering the sea…
>
> for the soil we still walk and work
> and the firmness that sets in (*Songs,* 139)

Regardless of the depths of despair and heights of hopelessness confronting the Niger Delta people, with the presence of undying natural cycles, they "…dream/and hope" (*Songs*, 139), as depicted in the poem. Although the time of rejuvenation and regeneration does not seem in sight, which is vividly inscribed in the contention with the ongoing devastation in the region, their lives are marked by great optimism. Probably, the thought of renaissance helps in cushioning the impact of the distressing feelings and gives meaning to their continual existence, as well as confidence in their futuristic victory, besides preventing them from suicide and suicidal tendencies. Furthermore, the repeated use of "we" in the concluding part of this poem underscores the traumatic experience as a collective one. Consequently, as the Niger Delta people have been collectively traumatised by serious devastation and terror that perforated the epicentre of their identity as well as humanity, so also do they,

together, hope for a rebirth. This redefines the classical model of trauma, from solely being individualistic to include collectiveness. It is in tandem with Irene Visser's (2018) position that theorists working on studies that are non-Western should comprehend the phenomenon as a collective, political as well as cultural situation with expansive physical and non-physical amplitude, rather than only individual, psychological and physical reaction.

4.2 Agonising torments in Obi's *Tears in a Basket*

It is also this collective situation of trauma of the Niger Delta people that Sophia Obi takes up in her own collection. Sophia Obi is a female eco-conscious voice on the eco-literary scene, who voices her concern about the catastrophe meted on the Niger Delta region. Since silence facilitates forgetting, Obi takes on a self-appointed duty to verbalise her people's hurt, regardless of the succinct description and sparseness of poems in *Tears in a Basket* (*Tears*) which cater to this subject. The collection is divided into two parts. However, the focus is on the first part, where some of the poems address environmental devastation. Through these poems, Obi not only gives a voice to the traumatised but also reinforces the testimonial potency of literature to trauma. Also, the unclaimed traumatic experience(s), in Caruth's words, is reclaimed through poetry, as the poet gives an account of a history of violence and repeated exposure to environmental devastation, which leaves in its wake traumatised people whose continual tears have yielded no significant result. This is succinctly captured in the title of the collection of the poems, "*Tears in a Basket*". This description of trauma and the traumatised in the Niger Delta region depicted in this collection aligns with Visser's (2011) view where she, critical of Caruth's (1996) conceptualisation of trauma, proposes that an all-inclusive definition of trauma is required to conceive combined, continued as well as accumulative experiences of traumatisation.

The trauma of the Niger Delta people does not arise from a single unforeseen disastrous event like Caruth (1996) would want us to believe in her conception of trauma; rather, it is a progressively unending event (ecological destruction) that leaves in its process devastating traumatic implications. Although the trauma is not engineered by a sole destructive incident, it does not make it less hurtful because, as Kaplan (2016) asserts, pain cannot be quantified and compared. In the opening poem, entitled "Tomorrow's debris" (*Tears*, 12), there is a picture of troubled humanity owing to environmental devastation. The poet persona,

overwhelmed by sorrow, chronicles the tale of repeated destruction visited on her people as she calls attention to "wolves/who wine and dine on the toil/of the weak and wasted" (*Tears,* 12). The multinational corporations as well as the conniving government authorities, in further cahoots with the local allies, display animalistic actions, which earn them the metaphorical representation of "wolves". Typical of wolves, they feast on the labour of the feeble. Unfortunately, the poet persona recognises the presence of these wolves (plunderers), yet she is incapable of resisting their atrocious activities just like the Niger Deltans, which confirms their powerlessness. While the animal metaphor emphasises the cruelty of the plunderers' brutality, the use of pun and alliteration is intentional, as the pun seeks to cushion the intensity of pain projected by the mental picture which the alliterative verse has drawn the reader's attention to. What is more, the poet persona is tormented by the "wailing of thirsting souls" stemming from "battered thatches" who "… till and toil" (*Tears,* 12) with no rewarding gain. The torture the poet persona experiences underscores the fact that even survivors of the region's crisis are constantly tormented by resonances of imaginary wails of their comrades. In addition, the terrestrial and aquatic habitats are not exempted as "the soil and rivers mourn/heavy with the weight of the dead" (*Tears,* 12). The deployment of personification makes the abstract palpable and visible, so much so that the reader can feel the weight of their pain and the depth of destruction. Besides, this incident also distresses the earth because of the burden of the decomposing humans it is made to house, and a distressed earth reproduces distressed inhabitants owing to the symbiotic connection (Narine, 2015). To make it worse:

> … orphans bury their agony
> in their baffled hearts
> their screams, sharp as the missiles
> that torment them day and night
> erode their plastic smiles (*Tears,* 12)

People whom society considers minors, and as a consequence, should be protected from the travails of the world, are not immune from life's contingencies. They lose their parents to the massive destruction of the environment and are deprived of grieving their dead. Rather, they conceal their loss and anguish in their bewildered hearts, incapable of fully comprehending their loss but stricken by the vacuum created. Many times, in the absence of mourning, relief becomes unattainable, because mourning is a process of ventilating

accumulated negative emotions. Little wonder that the children experience consistent torments, which slowly wear away their outward appearance of wholesomeness. This hurts "like a heartless bullet/rips apart their very existence" (*Tears,* 12). Life cannot be the same again for them, as every component of their existence shatters, foregrounding the magnitude of their loss, and figuratively, emphasising their hopeless state. The disappearance of caregivers is a common feature in the Niger Delta region, which is described in the poem as "the infinite wail of orphans/echoes in search of dispatched parents" (*Tears,* 12) at fishing harbours, towns as well as deserts. The aged, on the other hand, cling "to the shovel of hope", symbolising consolation and fleeting soothing relief, and "dig into the depths of their minds", suggesting the onset of depression. Besides, the survivors of several bouts of bombardment by the Nigerian government and their ally seemingly gain victory, but it is only a "painful survival", with the orphans wailing "their endless agony/among tomorrow's debris" (*Tears,* 12). Their victory, in this context, is not of final conquest or defeat of the oppressors, but of eventual survival after the wreckage. Additionally, the orphans bewail their unending agony among "tomorrow's" ruins. This confirms the fact that the trauma experienced by the Niger Delta people stems from an ongoing event, which possesses present repercussions as well as futuristic shocks. As a result, the people are faced with present fear and future anxiety of a shrinking world subjected to consistent flames and traumatising corollaries from environmental degradation.

Similarly, in the poem titled "Oloibiri" (*Tears,* 13) the poet persona is dejected and mentally tortured by the agonising irony that characterises her life and her people's, which is occasioned by the belated imaginary freedom because the dividends of freedom are mere platitudes without privileges. The poem is titled after the name of a particular community in the Niger Delta region, Oloibiri in Bayelsa Sate, where oil was said to have been first discovered in large quantity in 1956. The poet, Obi, is a native of this community which in a way certifies the authenticity of the facts recollected through fiction (poetry) that she recounts. Unfortunately, the community that once led the path to Nigeria's wealth has become abandoned and forgotten, after much exploration and exploitation of oil over the years, with no trace of her mineral-rich past. This abandonment provided the natives of the community with some sort of freedom from the despoilers, since at last they could claim

ownership of their environment. However, it was only a sour taste of freedom which makes them free from servitude but

> Desolate like a wealthy aged whore
> Wrapped up in gloomy attire,
> I lay on the altar of a faded glory,
> Oily tears rolling through my veins (*Tears,* 13)

Populated with imagery, the poem describes the supposed freedom gained after compound wreckages by the oil companies. The image of a "wealthy aged whore" is employed to describe the extent of use and re-use, which echoes the exploitation of the Niger Delta land, before being dumped on "the altar of a faded glory". More so, the desolation that pervades the land is compared to that of an abandoned old slattern, emphasising the state of gloom, together with the suffering that attends to the trauma ensuing from the destruction of the environment. The poem describes the freedom further as "the coated freedom of torment/When anguish enfolds joy" (*Tears,* 13). Their freedom is enshrouded in torture and happiness draped in agony, such that life cannot return to normalcy after the devastation. Besides, the intrusive thoughts of the poet persona, as she relives memories of the past, keep afflicting her body and mind simultaneously, which is manifest through her hallucinatory moments:

> … the echo of years gone by
> In my vicinity, there is the quake of discovery
> A zebra string of pipelines running
> Through my belly,
> Causing me to ache from relentless exploitation. (*Tears,* 13)

The poet persona and her people are psychologically tormented by the thoughts of irredeemable loss of the near pristine past owing to oil exploration, which leaves only vestiges of the past in the aftermath of the destruction. Therefore, meditations on the past trigger some fear about the present and also anxiety about future doom. The poet persona is not only mentally affected, but also bodily impacted, as she suffers ache from perceived persistent abuse literally, underscoring all kinds of diseases which the people have had to wrestle with owing to polluted rivers and streams, and figuratively suggesting the magnitude of destruction the environment suffers from due to eco-abuse. The "string of pipelines running/Through my belly/Causing… ache" also suggests the adverse effects the placement of conduits can have on the ecosystem and surrounding habitats. What is more, the

munificence of the land "hangs" the people of Oloibiri "on the scale of extinction" (*Tears*, 13), which confirms them as endangered species besides the contamination of their water. They live in fear of a future dreadful episode–extinction, which Kaplan (2016) refers to as "pretrauma". In their agitated state, they struggle to "… survive the torment", while dealing with the anguish that comes with enriching others and impoverishing self. The poet persona vividly describes their present state:

> O, I have lived a grey life of despair
> Now with my fertility gone,
> I carry a begging bowl
> Unable to form a sovereign body to build
> A monument to my forsaken glory (*Tears*, 14)

The mood of depression pervades the poem as the present condition of the land and its inhabitants is a memorial to their former magnificent haven. Also, sterility, in terms of body physiology and land productivity, becomes the order of the day with an overwhelming presence of destitution. In other words, the pollution of the environment and the expended resources jeopardise human fertility as well as land fecundity. In the midst of this, the poet persona is awakened to consciousness by the tears of her nation, Ijaw, and she hears the merriment, happiness and "joyful uproar" which "comes/With controlling the blessings/Of my God-given inheritance" (*Tears*, 14). Reality contradicts the fantasy of the poet persona because the people of the region are yet to gain control over their God-given endowments (if they ever will). Nevertheless, her cognitive dissonance makes her hear "joyful uproar". Traumatogenic situations as this predispose them to fantasy. Even the oxymoron in "joyful uproar" underscores the presence of an illusion. Thus, the poet persona is deluded by optimism (a form of mental fantasy), as the poem ends with her fantasising thoughts, and the Ijaw nation is a synecdoche of the Niger Delta region. However, the nursed hope, perhaps, provides momentary relief for the poet persona, and by extension, the people of the Niger Delta, while the environment grieves over the recurring bouts of ruination.

As the Niger Delta environment grieves, so also do humans because of the intrinsic relationship between both. It is this environment that assists the people in negotiating their shelter, income and sustenance. Certainly, the depletion of the resources of the environment means a decline in living standards for the people. However, do these plunderers put measures in place to constrain themselves from excessive and unmindful exploitation? Do

they also provide means for compensating the natives in the event of any undue usage of the land? Although this region, without mincing words, paved the way to wealth for the nation, the visceral pain of indigence cuts so deep for its indigenes. The poem entitled "Swamps of our time" (*Tears*, 18) describes this ironical scenario, where "with the milk of her breast/she moulds dusty earth into mansions". Nonetheless, "her children peep through tattered huts" (*Tears,* 18) owing to destitution and desertion. Worried about the state of being of the environment, the poet persona asks:

> O' delta of our beginnings, how has the past left you?
> How is the present treating you?
> What is the future of your ecosystem?
>
> Can you turn back the swamps of time? (*Tears*, 18)

The poet persona struggles with multiple unanswered questions demonstrated through rhetorical questions, which possess the potential to engender mental breakdown. However, the answers to the rhetorical questions are evident with the poet persona desirous of the turning back of the "swamps of time". For one to desire a reliving of the past, then an unsatisfactory present might have been the cause. It is this current troubled state of the environment in the Niger Delta region that makes the poet persona desire a reversal to the beginning of times, when the environment was in its near pristine state. The poem concludes on a threnodic tenor with Niger Delta grieving for "her children who give bountifully/Yet feed on remnants" (*Tears*, 18).

Tears in a Basket is a revelatory text as well as an expressive testimonial to the lives of the Niger Delta, which has been sacrificed on the altar of greed by their forbears. This is recounted in the poem entitled "Tears in a basket" where the poet persona does not fail to indict the local representatives for their role in the damage to posterity. In the opening lines of the titled poem of the collection, "Tears in a basket" (*Tears,* 19), the intermittent repetitions (refrain) of "*[w]e are the sacrificial leeches/waiting to be squashed*", draw attention to the present condition of the Niger Delta populace whose future has been merchandised by their forefathers – sabotaging leaders. Unfortunately, the situation seems irredeemable with the paradoxical title of the poem underscoring it. They are afflicted by unbearable memories of the past as well as thoughts of futuristic extermination. The burden of loss is overwhelming to the extent that the poet persona confesses:

Winds of bitter memory slap me silly…
Naked dances and dreams have been dampened…
Drunk with anxiety,
I flip through the memoirs
Of our ancestors…
Who, unceremoniously, gave our fate away
On a stained platter of gold (*Tears*, 19)

Rather than save the future of generations of the Niger Delta region, greed made the forebearers blind drunk and form an alliance with the pillagers in aiding the destruction of their territory, leaving posterity to reap the proceeds. This shocking and painful revelation subjects the poet persona to psychic torture, which dominates her being with anxiety. Also, the painful realisation of crushed dreams owing to neglect, and "communal disorder" engineered by their forefathers, leave the poet persona devastated. At the moment, "deep scars of memory/wrapped in cobwebs of pain" are the only vestiges that "bind us to mother earth" (*Tears*, 19). What could be more descriptive of a devastated state? The unfathomable emotional sore stemming from recollections, enshrouded in webs of ache, confirms the presence of trauma, since trauma has been simply defined as an injury to the psyche. Also, the distraught state of the poet persona is a prototype of her people's plight. Every essence of their being and existence is affected to the extent that the poet persona ponders:

How do we think
When our thoughts are images lost in muddy streams,
Dangling on hooks that mock our existence?
How can we sing
When our folksongs are distorted grunts
Raking up our sorrowing lungs? (*Tears*, 19)

The linguistic choices demonstrate the psychological impacts of their endless agony owing to the destruction of their most cherished treasure. Regrettably, the possibility of dealing with trauma and accessing healing of trauma is strangled, because even their folksongs which are supposed to serve this purpose, have become warped murmurs and have, as a result, lost their remedial potentials. As earlier referenced, songs are one of the means Africans and African-Americans cope with and work through pains, which supports Craps' (2013) review of classic trauma theory in its recognition of alternative or multiple means of recovery, rather than the hegemonic Western notions. However, the indispensable role of folksongs is displaced in the Niger Delta region as the existence of the people is sorrow-

laced, with “plastic joy” concealing their pains. This establishes Kaplan’s (2005) view that when the emblematic organisation within which human beings exist, as well as make meaning of their lives is destroyed, it brings about demoralising consequences. Thus, the last thread of hope is seemingly lost and this is insinuated through the concluding part of the poem, as it ends on a bleak note; “*We are sacrificial leeches*/*waiting to be squashed*” (*Tears*, 19).

“Regrets” (*Tears*, 20) is a sequel to “Tears in a basket”. In the piece, the poet persona expresses the regrets that accompanied the vending of their future by their precursors. The traumatic memory of this merchandise is multisensory, a tendency that recalls Pederson’s (2014) notion of trauma victims’ inclination to chronicle not only optical clues but also “aural, olfactory, tactile and gustatory ones”. The deployment of sensory organs in the poem helps in engaging our senses in feeling the hurt that has been vocalised in the following lines:

> I can hear the cacophonic laughter
> I can see the peering eyes of gossip
> I can feel the anger of our frailty haunting us (*Tears*, 20)

Fear interfused with anger becomes response to the devastating conditions, as the pent-up emotions grow palpable. The image of a disturbed personality, as if hallucinating is accentuated through multisensory bodily response, which doubles as multi-vocal chords. In other words, there is an obvious intense reliance on sensory details to express some depth of hurt. The region has become a laughing stock to even the plunderers and a subject of discussion for gossipmongers. Thus, the poet persona is consumed with an intense sense of collective guilt over the destruction of their future, which she underscores when she says, “We’ve strangled our destiny” (*Tears*, 20). As the poet persona does not seek to exonerate herself from the crime committed against the environment through the use of the first-person pronoun (plural) “we”, so also does she draws the reader’s attention to the role(s), perhaps, he/she might have played in promoting this quandary. Though, the poem also alludes to the forebears of the Niger Delta area who compromised the destiny of their people. As a result of this impasse, the people are “overfed with hunger/…bloated with sorrow” and have become “strangers in our world” (*Tears*, 20). The images represented in the poem foreground the presence of starvation (extreme hunger) as well as deep distress. In essence,

the Niger Delta people not only suffer severe repercussions of impoverishment but also experience a distressing emotional state as well as the dilemma of estrangement, precisely because their identity is empathetically tied to the earth. Given that, there is a diminished feeling of control over their lives and land, loss of purpose due to unattainable goals towards securing their environment, and loss of cultural identity owing to the forfeiture of the distinguishing character that defines them, which is their land. In the long run, they suffer alienation from their once nature-based environment.

This study corroborates Nixon's (2011) conception of "slow violence", which is in tandem with Craps' (2013) criticism against the universal validity of Western definitions and application of trauma. This is based on the fact that the nature of trauma evident in the Niger Delta region is a silently ongoing violence that possesses accretion of grime, and it is represented in the poem "Mama's winning colours" (*Tears,* 24). The poem addresses an environment in disaster, as the poet persona recounts the regressive state into which the earth and the people alike have been subjected, and this is occasioned by the daily exploitation of their environment without any reparation:

> I have asked for the basic fabrics of amenities…
> You tear my heart to shreds
> With this fat attitude of yours
> Imagine the clumsy network of electric lines
> Roads bare of drainage (*Tears,* 24)

The inhabitants of the Niger Delta region do not only contend with attritional attacks on its environment, they are also denied essential infrastructural facilities, which validates Nixon's (2011) view that affected communities oftentimes struggle against corrosive violation of their lands, as well as denial to contemporary necessary infrastructural amenities that could provide options to escape indigence. The irony in "fat attitude" is deliberate as the poet persona amplifies the characteristics of the plunderers, with the successive lines contradicting their supposed attitude. Painfully, the poet persona watches her land "regress from year to year" and marvels if "…green still stands for productivity? /White, purity? and green again for prosperity?" (*Tears,* 24) This retrogressive metamorphosis of the land that the poet persona as well as the Niger Delta people are compulsorily made to experience possesses traumatogenic potentials, which can breed trauma. Besides, the intrusive images, which are suggestive of the poet persona's disturbed

mind, conjure nostalgic memories of the past where the greenness of the environment announces productivity and prosperity, but this is not the situation again, which is now only green around the gills. Furthermore, the poet persona's impotence in the face of the regression of her land tortures her, and this is a vivid illustration of the Niger Delta people's condition. They bear witness to the destruction of their communities but are unable to stop the plunderers. The colours (white and green) draw attention to the loss of the fecundity, immaculacy and richness of their land. Also, the deployment of rhetorical questions and dejected tone provide some cues to the poet persona's distressed condition. "Mama winning colours" is no more, but have become colours that are only reminiscent of past years and this is due to the advent and exploitation of the Niger Delta area by the oil multinationals.

Indeed, the contact between the Niger Delta region and multinational conglomerates, which left the denizens of the region traumatised, was a result of the expropriation and exploitation of their land and resources. The encroaching group (oil multinationals) saw the region as a place to plunder and not to plough, and this informed their disposition and activities. Sharing similar sentiments, Kaplan (2005) states that a relationship gets disquieting once, for instance, an encroaching group resolves only on appropriating the aboriginals' environment as well as resources. In such a situation, the encroachment, she argues, never leaves the natives the same; rather, it wreaks havoc on the host community. The Niger Delta community epitomises this situation, as recounted in the poem entitled "Consolation" (*Tears*, 31):

> I still wear this grey apparel…
> his death fetched me…
>
> by foes who feasted
> on the booty
> of his greenish harvest (*Tears*, 31)

Years after the long-sought freedom from oil exploitation or the abandonment of some areas after excessive abuse by the despoilers, many communities in the region are yet to recover. They still carry the burden of despoliation, with the environment's deplorable state and the people's pathetic conditions testifying to it. As these harrowing memories flood her mind, the poet persona finds comfort simply from the "…remnants of his love and laughter" that "echo in my heart" (*Tears*, 31), which provides some sort of closure from her grief.

Metaphorically, the bits and pieces of environmental nostalgia of her once pristine land, provide succour for the poet persona's forlorn condition. However, the titling of the poem "Consolation" confirms the presence of pain and loss because, in the absence of distress, there would be no need for consolation.

Moreover, an event does not have to inflict bodily injury on the victim for it to be traumatic. Researchers in the field of trauma concur that a traumatic experience must not necessarily involve physical hurt, as it is not often physical for the majority of people who survive it (Adebiyi-Adelabu & Aguele, 2017). The history of the Niger Delta region is a picture of that scene where some people, who did not sustain physical injury from the wreckage visited on their environment, groan from psychic hurt. "A taste of tomorrow" (*Tears*, 45), another poem by Obi, gives a foretaste of this emotionally scarred humanity, typified by the poet persona's hysterical state. She is seriously haunted by "[m]emories" that are "rusty as fossilized rod" because she "… paid her dues in borrowed coins" (*Tears*, 45), which in popular usage is referred to as "robbing Peter to pay Paul". This explains the region's dilemma where their leaders trade away their tomorrow for today's gain. Now, the people groan under constant distress. These haunting memories keep the poet persona in a frenzied state, which is captured in the lines below:

> Yet, as time throws its
> blanket over the skies
> I toss and turn on my tired bed,
> sleep miles and miles away from me.
>
> O memory,
> do not burn the cells of my mind
> in the smithy of forgotten pain (*Tears,* 45)

The disturbing thoughts plague the poet persona's mind; deprive her of sleep as she struggles with insomnia, a development that suggests a condition of mental disequilibrium. The tranquillity and rest after exertion from the day's work which comes with nightfall is beyond her reach, as the poet persona loses sleep and experiences a psychological breakdown owing to mental pictures of devastation. In other words, she experiences a state of sheer sleeplessness, while terrifying memories severely torment her to the extent that she pleads for ease and cries out "[s]ave me, O save me/from this ache of a bitter history" (*Tears*, 45). The deployment of apostrophe draws the reader's attention to the magnitude of pain

the Niger Delta populace undergoes. The poem does not only seek to evoke sympathy from the reader but also pursues intervention to salvage the situation. This is what Craps (2013) describes as, perhaps, the essence of the non-fragmentary mode common in postcolonial text. The poet persona seems to be haunted not only by the loss of her near virginal environment but also unconsciously by the memories of the past mistakes committed by their forbears, which Kaplan (2005) describes as a form of "unconscious vicarious trauma" (106). Therefore, it only makes sense for the poet persona to anticipate a better tomorrow, which she expresses as the "fresh egg I feel on my tongue" and "the welcome taste of tomorrow" (*Tears*, 45). Although the tomorrow never seems to come in reality, nurturing hope while confronting despair probably brings about some remedial, if fleeting effect.

Certainly, the effect is only fleeting because in the succeeding poem, the poet persona relapses into anxiety – a pre-traumatic state. Pretrauma, which is anxiety concerning the future, is symptomatic of a distraught personality. The poet persona experiences pretrauma, and fear spreads through her being as a result of an already imagined terrifying impending disaster, possibly global warming or threat of extinction, occasioned by current environmental degradation in her society. This is inscribed in the poem titled "Resolve" (*Tears*, 46). In a moment of interior monologue, the poet persona's pretraumatic state, which is a result of severe anxiety, is revealed:

> I am sitting on the edge of anxiety…
>
> I am gazing into the mist of tomorrow
>
> Blurred and shapeless,
> images spring into the
> black void of my eye
> holding no answers for the million questions… (*Tears*, 46)

The pretrauma that bedevils the poet persona is expressed through her current extremely anxious state as she looks into the bleak future. In addition, she is troubled over myriads of unanswered questions concerning what the future holds for her region in general, and her community in particular. She is already "[t]ormented by thoughts of the future" (*Tears*, 46). Yet, she decides on momentary relief as she resolves "… to live today for what it's worth" and "paint Judas in lighter colours" (*Tears*, 46). The deployment of Biblical allusion is aptly thought-out, as it underscores the attitudes of the local leaders of the Niger Delta who

betrayed their people for immediate selfish satisfaction, similar to Judas's betrayal of Jesus. Also, the poet persona finds an escapist route as well as soothing respite for her disturbed mind in religion, which Karl Marx avers, is the "opium of the masses." This is demonstrated in the concluding part of the poem: "[a]nd with your eternal lamp in my hands, Lord/my path is forever bright" (*Tears,* 45). To conclude the analysis of this collection, Obi translates the pains (trauma) experienced by her people, generated by ongoing environment devastation, into words (poetry), and it becomes an outlet for working through trauma - an act of winning with words. This corresponds to Adebiyi-Adelabu's (2021) statement that "…since pains triggered by a traumatic experience often recur, one of the ways by which to overcome them is to imaginatively write about them…" (16)

4.3 Otto's lettered trauma from the earth

Albert Otto, like other poets considered for this study, portrays convincingly the trauma of the ecosystem (ecosystem as a macrocosmic abode for mortals as well as other species) and ultimately, that of man, through his sole collection *Letters from the Earth* (*Letters*). This collection of poetry documents the travails, traumatogenic experiences and trauma of the earth as well as the people in the face of massive ecological degradation. Therefore, *Letters from the Earth* becomes an avenue for representing the traumatic experiences of the earth-people and a means for articulating their pains, confirming Allport's (2009) view of creative writing. Allport states that the creative writer's task is not to rehearse sternly autobiographical narration of trauma; rather, it is a way of expressing trauma via the representative background of literary inventions. Through Otto's *Letters from the Earth*, endless testaments to the trauma that accompany ecological devastation are recounted with one purpose, which is to recall the past and its rubbles so that a new path could be charted for the present and the future. Sharing similar sentiments, Herman (1992) states that typical of the traumatised, the past needs to be comprehended by us for the present and future to be regained. Besides, recollections and revelations of the truth concerning horrific incidents are fundamentals for reinstating societal order, as well as for restoring the health of individuals and communal casualties. *Letters from the Earth* is divided into four sections, namely "Moods of the Earth", "Women of the Earth", "Earth Tales" and "Earth songs at Twilight". For the sake of this study, poems are mostly drawn from "Moods of the Earth"

because of the specificity of their description of the thematic preoccupation of this study, which is trauma.

Craps (2013) argues that trauma theory fundamentally fails in four ways to act per their pledge to cross-cultural engagement; one of which is that they relegate or disregard the traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority groups. As a result, the daily horrific experience of the Niger Delta people which has become a permanent state of affairs is not acknowledged as traumatic, because trauma has been universally referred to as that which results from an unimagined disastrous event and environmental devastation does not qualify as one. However, Craps (2010) states that the description of trauma should be reviewed to include daily kinds of brutality that people from the lower-class experience. Until that is fully achieved, environmental devastation might continue to be a norm in the Niger Delta region, without national and international bodies recognising the traumatogenic impacts on the residents and region alike. The Niger Delta space has been subjected to various destructive burnings which have been ongoing for years unending, with both tangible and intangible acerbic effects on the people. Yet, this degrading environmental cycle has not been interrupted or halted. The poem entitled "The conflagration" (*Letters*, 21) testifies to such acrid realities, which deserve the world's acknowledgement and urgent intervention. The poem reads:

> On this stillborn and dusk-patched dawn
> I see cancerous smoke and smog…
> Conflagration crackles and shrieks indignantly…
> Fire begets fire; upon blasting of crude missiles
> They vomit dark dollops of deleterious soot (*Letters*, 21)

The poem addresses environmental disaster through the picture of a horrifying habitat, and a recourse to natal imagery. The natal imagery foregrounds the sense of lifelessness that pervades the Niger Delta landscape, and the deployment of personification emphasises the extent of the destruction wreaked on the environment. There is an abnormal release of unhealthy chemicals directly into the atmosphere, contaminating the air, which is caused by industrial pollution and conflagration from oil mining activities. The health implications of this destruction for the natives are unimaginable, as it exposes the people to different kinds of diseases such as respiratory problems, and cancer, amongst others. Yet, the poet persona laments and watches helplessly as "… fair Delta burns/At the bottom of old Niger" (*Letters*,

21), corroborating Herman's (1992) view that the casualty is made defenceless by overpowering forces when trauma occurs. If it is caused by a natural force, it is referred to as disaster. If it is triggered by humans, it is addressed as atrocities. A typical example is the Niger Delta situation whose disaster is man-made, and induced by the quarrying of oil. However, the natives are powerless as they cannot interrupt the destructive process. This powerlessness subjects them to "ecological grief". Expatiating on this idea, Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) express that "[a]n inability to prevent the degradation or loss of land can also negatively affect notions of personal identity and generate experiences of ecological grief" (278). Therefore, it is this helpless state of Niger Deltans that invokes "ecological grief". Sharing a similar view, Albrecht (2017) asserts that "[p]owerlessness in the face of pervasive change agents such as multinational corporations and authoritarian governments is another factor in the new mourning. Within the grip of such concentrated centres of power, individuals cannot direct their grief about negative environmental change towards anything or anyone in particular. Such powerlessness (personal and political) is also a defining feature of the concept of solastalgia" (297). Also, feelings of intense guilt also accompany this ecological grief and solastalgia, owing to their obsessive thought of their inactions whilst the destruction persists. In addition, environmental devastation denies the Niger Delta people the basic right to life and existence with reverberations of pillage as

> Yonder fly flames, flickering on skyline high
> Dark orbs twirl overhead; of ribbons of soot
> Clustered, like full-rigged parachutes dancing
> And heaving their bulks to an erotic soundtrack (*Letters*, 21)

A vivid image of an environment-threatening explosion on account of undue mining activities is foregrounded. Further, the comparison of the filth, discharged from combustion to dancing parachutes evokes images of the unimaginable rate of volatile compounds released into the air in quick succession, while the imagery, "[a]nd heaving their bulks to an erotic soundtrack", mimics the fear that accompanies the sounds of the incineration, and possibly, extinction. It also reinforces the idea of the destruction that attends to the degradation of the environment. Incontestably, the Niger Delta environment is steeped in a climate of fear owing to environmental degradation. Inexplicable tales of unspeakable horror attend ecological disaster, so much that the convolution of dread and tremor amongst the natives of the affected communities, which are an ever-present testament to their

traumatogenic state, is palpable. The poem fits the description of the pipeline explosion at the Oviri Court that occurred in 2000 which recalls how "earth-quaking blusters of fireballs/consume neglected pounds of/Folks in cinders barbecued, unburied, piled" (*Letters*, 21). What could be more terrifying? This is just one out of the many incidents. Sadly, the destruction inflicted on the environment does not spare any sphere of the people's existence, as it ranges from land contamination to air pollution and eventually, loss of lives, which leaves them disconsolate as their "[s]obbing eyes drab their dead in fern fronds" (*Letters*, 21).

The disconcerting images, enveloped in linguistic choices, are testimonies to the horrendous reality of the Niger Delta, which arises from the greed of oil multinational companies in collaboration with the government, and this ravenousness fans their unrestrained decimation of the environment. With the prevailing conditions, it seems all hope is lost as the poet persona sees "in the rude ominous light, silhouettes/Of crimson-eyed firebugs hurdle to obliterate/The lush and luxuriant landscapes" (*Letters*, 21). The poet persona, overcome by "anticipatory anxiety", which is one of the psychological distresses of living in precarious periods, envisions catastrophe as he foreshadows gloom rather than gleam – the extermination of their once verdant and flourishing land. In other words, the populace of the Niger Delta region lives in constant fear of possible obliteration. The emotional and mental responses of anxiety and fear to trauma triggered by environmental destruction corroborate Oorlog's (2016) proposition. He asserts that when conceiving an operational description of trauma, emphasis should be laid on the ensuing consequence on the victim, not on the nature of the experience. With the emphasis on the repercussions of trauma on the casualty, mental states of anxiety and fear are underscored in this poem as part of the psychical impacts of environmental devastation on the Niger Delta people. Despite the weight of destruction and the consequent effects, the despoilers are still "anxious to wreck…wreak/Looming, wooing through their dainty morsels" (*Letters*, 21), which confirms their unwavering commitment to destruction and denotes their impressively exaggerated and stellar promises that have been used as decoys in time past to deceive the people and destroy their lands.

Consequently, the people of the Niger Delta struggle for survival. The poem "The embattled coast" (*Letters*, 24) echoes that battle for survival. The title of the poem already provides an intimation of the experiences of the coast as well as her dwellers. The Niger Delta region has been a site of conflict since oil discovery. The poem describes it as the "spangled coast that splashes/Black oil out-glittering pure gold" (*Letters*, 24). However, the poet persona laments, "[w]hat emotion-mocking sobriquet mocks her sadness?" (*Letters*, 24) Despite the burgeoning oil market in the region, the dwellers struggle to fend for themselves under their prodigious bloom, with disquieting contradictions and ironies tainting their existence, as the "… pearls and Pisces…/Rotting and frothing to nothing…" (*Letters*, 24) Yet, the poet persona is unable to disrupt the system that grows rich by making indigents of his people. Rather,

> Fringes of derricks, like crab pincers
> Spill her oily milk ...
> And putrefaction pools for worms
> And maggots many made. (*Letters*, 24)

Here, the frameworks built over the oil wells that support the drilling equipment used by the oil companies for extracting and producing oil are compared to the claws of a crab, which gives an imagistic portrayal of the destructiveness that attend the mining activities. Beyond that, these "burrow creatures" short-change their vendees by selling the oil at an inflated rate, making them two-time exploiters. The scatological images evoked here underscore the depth of grime the rivers in the Niger Delta region have been converted into. Notwithstanding, it seems that the pillagers' unconscionable quest for wealth is not yet gratified, because in addition to spilling her oil, exploiting the people and polluting her streams, they also "maim her men/And draw fierce forces daily" (*Letters*, 24). This validates Craps' (2013) description of trauma to include quotidian brutality, and Kaplan's (2005) view when she states that the daily experience of torment might not be like the form of classic trauma experienced by victims or survivors, but to disclaim these experiences as traumatic would be a mistake. Rather, she extends trauma to include experiences of torment. This is the description of the diurnal experience of the Niger Delta populace, where the people groan from anguish and the land has become a caricature of her former self, with mangroves, the foundations of their inimitable ecosystems withering "[l]ike the wrinkled and ripped wrapper/Of a wizened widow" (*Letters*, 24). The image of wretchedness depicted

helps the reader in comprehending the agonising conditions of the people, recalling Gyula's (2004) assertion that through literary imagination, one can understand another person's anguish as well as distress. Rather than the glee that accompanies resource abundance, Niger Deltans are overpowered by feelings of anger and thoughts of regret, which is represented in the following lines:

> Her wretch hiss of wrathful dwellers beneath
> Some oil-bean tree, and as the oblong fruits
> Cracking thunder across the ears of folks
> They grow pensive, famished, ear
> And scrawny as sun-seasoned skeletons
> For these: she has regret in superfluous store. (*Letters*, 24)

The impact of environmental degradation is also deeply felt by the flora. The flora experiences failing vitality as the fruits of once flourishing trees become wizened because the environment has been divested of the required nutrient for the productivity of these plants and trees, owing to pollution. For that reason, the people of the Niger Delta are given to melancholic thoughts, which progress into regret because their lives have been upended. In essence, the condition of the Niger Delta region predisposes the inhabitants to traumatogenic stages, which can culminate in trauma. This poem gives a picture of distressed people living in the murk of environmental devastation. Just as the environment bleeds from oil spillage and incineration, so also do the residents agonise over severe destitution because the repercussions of oil spills are accretive – gradually decimating the livelihoods of the present inhabitants, as well as those of several generations to come.

In another poem titled "Townspeople wait" (*Letters*, 25) by Otto, which is similar to the aforementioned poem "Conflagration", the effect of destructive burning ensuing from the mining operations is emphasised. Unfortunately, this unmonitored conflagration spreads like wildfire to their farmlands where "corn field crackled with loony fire/bursting with fireflies" (*Letters*, 25). It draws the reader's attention to the fact that the land does not only suffer from spillages, it also contends with endless smouldering affecting farmlands. Their farmlands, which are perhaps their sole source of sustenance after the pollution of their fishing ponds and rivers, suffer a similar fate. Within these unbearable conditions, the people could not "… suture" their "forked lips/With the strings of silence" (*Letters*, 25) anymore. Thus, they arose to resist the powers that muffle them. Instead of being silenced

by fear, activism becomes an outlet for venting this maltreatment. Perhaps, they came to the realisation that silence only emboldens the perpetrators to persist in their malevolent acts. Therefore, they took to protest to challenge the status quo that promotes violence against the land, as well as the people, which is a recurring dynamic in the Niger Delta region. Moreover, "[t]raumatised victims could be active agents in preserving a nation's collective memory and passing it down to future generations so as to bring about political change" (Salam & Mahfouz, 4: 2020). This is testified to in the poem where the poet persona recounts how "[a]t dawn", they gathered their "fatherland to war/with words" (*Letters*, 25) and,

> We set forth, pounding our bamboo legs.
> We waded across crocodile creeks
> and plunged past balding grasslands…
>
> Some lopsided hands sought to muzzle
> the brave ox that breeds the corn. (*Letters*, 25)

Tired of political repression and environmental despoliation, crocodile-infested creeks and bald grasslands, lacking natural coverings and adornments, the people retaliate. This dispossession and displacement inform the confrontational disposition that defines the Niger Deltans' existence. However, some of the natives who had already joined forces with multinationals, particularly their local representatives who had sacrificed the lives and livelihood of their folks, seek to silence the opposition. This is captured through the imagery of a muzzle on an ox. As the people refused to be deterred, they "reaped baskets of gains and pains" (*Letters*, 25). Is that not the case in the Niger Delta region where any attempt at opposing the plunderers meets with pain? The deployment of oxymoron underscores the paradox inherent in their situation and forces the reader to pause and think of the complexities that pervades the Niger Deltans' lives. Part of the gains could be the increased media visibility that the opposition by the natives promotes, while one of the incidents of pain alluded to is the execution of the Ogoni Nine in 1998, who resisted the oppressive powers. Despite this, activism has not ceased in the Niger Delta region, as writers and activists alike have not stopped giving voice to their traumatic experiences and that of the people. Writing became an instrument of struggle against oppressive forces. Also, since environmental degradation continues, writers will not stop articulating their grievances. Yet, the destruction of the region continues as many residents in some of the communities have

been forced to desert their homeland and return when they assumed that "… the squalid season" had "died away--", as

> Figures say nature is undiluted and undefiled–
> only to crash aground and wrecked
> our threshold, sandwiched between
> the excrements of oil and gas– (*Letters,* 25)

Unfortunately, their expectations contradict their reality on arrival as they are unassimilably shocked and deeply saddened by the condition of their environment. Consequently, they are repeatedly traumatised by this ongoing reality. To make matters worse, the news media (supported by the plunderers) peddles all manner of falsehood, either for fear of the government or for the sake of their own lives or their selfish gains, denying the existence of environmental pollution in the land. In the end, the denizens have their homes and sources of livelihoods reduced to rubble and stuck between oil and gas waste with the media underreporting it, and leaving them to grief for their ecology.

Undeniably, ecological grief has become concomitant with environmental degradation. Ecological grief was propounded by Cunsolo (2018). He defines it as "the grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including loss of species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change" (275). This ecological grief enshrouded in nostalgic feelings is articulated in the poem, "Okworo river" (*Letters,* 33), where the poet persona laments the loss of his rivers in their once natural state. Through the imagery of an Egyptian pyramid, he underscores the tale of environmental devastation (disintegration). He expresses the fact that he has to "frame his song/like Egyptian pyramids" to prevent the chronicle of the present state of the river from choking him to "a fall". This largely suggests the overwhelming feeling the narration of the rivers' condition imposes on the poet persona's psyche and, by extension, the Niger Delta people. Besides, the deployment of the Egyptian pyramidal structure might be a means of toning down the pain on the part of the poet persona to prevent psychic disintegration, as the artistic display distracts a bit. However, this does not make the message meaningless nor the effect less traumatic. In fact, through a blend of aesthetics and art, the poem describes this disintegrating process the Niger Delta environment has undergone, as the poet persona struggles with nostalgic feelings. Indisputably, nostalgia is also a recurring feature in Niger

Delta writings because there is always a tale of loss. Through Rodi-Risberg's (2018) concept of storytelling narrative strategy, which challenges Caruth's (1996) notion of "unspeakability" and prescribed mode of trauma theory's formalist criteria (aporia and fragmentation), the poet persona reminisces the beauties that once tinted the rivers before the onset of unbridled resource extraction in his community. The following lines capture it succinctly:

I
recall,
in those days
raffia palms towered over
ferns, boiling with sweet wine at
Ohiamini Okworo: creek with sludge of
leaves and wood pieces, when you walked through it,
floating about like tea. And we sang to the river birds (*Letters,* 33)

The poet persona yearns for a past that was unspoiled, which is only recollected in his memories, before the unsolicited ecological transformation associated with resource extraction. These reminiscences support Kaplan's (2016) assertion that "[m]emory is indeed the past made present, but with a view to provoking thought about the future" (108). Deploying anecdotal aesthetics, the poet persona recollects the Niger Delta's estate to provoke the readers to ruminate over their complicity or otherwise as regards the condition of the Niger Delta environment and, ultimately, to make people see the need to forestall the degrading processes to ransom the present and prevent a catastrophic future. No doubt, the beautiful recollections are underlined by a wistfulness for the past. The rivers and their environs were a beauty to behold before the invasion of oil multinationals in the wake of oil extraction. Now, the poet persona is deeply sad and grieves over the present state of the river, which he returns to, after being away for some time, and all he "found were raging dredgers/that dredged life out of my river", and the "only sign of life were trekking shadows on the new bridge" (*Letters,* 33).

Despite the prevailing devastation, the poet persona in the poem "Hope lulls the earth" (*Letters,* 38) nurses hope in a renaissance and rejuvenation of the Niger Delta region, which is similar to the natives' disposition. Rather than lapse into depression, the poet persona sees the "[v]ision of vivacious children/Shouting and shedding their/Smoke-stained clothing" (*Letters,* 38) acquired through anthropogenic environmental degradation of the Niger Delta

region. It is relieving for him to envisage a rebirth of their once Edenic haven, with the image of spirited children discarding contaminated clothing, signalling transformation. Also, dreaminess is associated with trauma as the victim is satisfactorily distracted from immediate reality. Although the hope seems like an illusion, it serves the purpose of temporary comfort, because the Niger Delta region is still stuck in the murky process. However, the poet persona keeps envisioning:

> I see everything beautiful–
> After a long chemical holocaust
> Caked our earth and ruined lives–
> Crystal-clear streams, animals
> Edifices, evergreen forests, and
> Well-watered parks…
> And hope lulls the Earth. (*Letters,* 38)

The historical allusion to 'holocaust' recalls the Jews massacre and foregrounds the depth of destruction that precedes environmental devastation. It emphasises further that the environmental degradation of the Niger Delta region equates to the Holocaust (a classic model of trauma). In other words, the poem articulates the relationship between metropolitan and minority traumas, thereby corroborating Craps' (2013) condemnation of trauma theory for largely ignoring the affiliation between metropolitan and non-Western or minority trauma. Craps proposes cross-cultural solidarity, with differentiation intact, as the trauma of others is considered for their end and in their way. Until this is achieved, the traumatogenic conditions of the Niger Delta people will continually be trivialised, without any action promoted in its favour. Besides, while the carnage experienced by the Jews was a one-time historical event, unfortunately, the destruction of the Niger Delta region as well as the termination of the residents' lives has become their quotidian reality. So, there is a need to nip this situation in the bud. Interestingly, the poet persona does not fail to recall the destruction that was meted out on the affected communities, because it is in this remembrance of the past that recovery is achieved, change is engendered, and a better community can be created. Assmann (2011) validates this when he states that throughout humanity, deeds of recollection are at present integral components to the plan of setting up the bedrock of a better upright community as well as an improved future. In the absence of this, the aim of literature in representing trauma is beaten. Thus, the poet persona hopes at the heart of grief.

Following the train of thought, there is a feminine twist in representing the visceral pain and mental anguish associated with environmental devastation. Through the juxtaposing images of a woman and a barren lake, the physiological and psychological impacts of the destruction of the environment on humans, particularly women, are underscored. The trauma experienced by the female folks is multiple, as they not only contend with the loss of livelihoods and displacement but also infertility, in the poem titled "Sterility" (*Letters*, 43). The poem reveals the miasma of despair that clouds the Niger Delta people's existence, particularly the women's world, as they struggle for survival in a degraded environment. With the deployment of apostrophes and rhetorical questions, the thoughts of the poet persona, which are preoccupied with the rhythm of pains, are expressed:

> You of fair feminine grace that shines against
> The ageless darkness of womanhood
> Why brooding and flooding with tears?...
> Why keep frozen with burning despair? (*Letters*, 43)

The poet persona, consumed in thoughts, laments the contrastive condition between the present and former states of being of the feminine gender (represented by a woman), owing to environmental degradation. The women despair for the future owing to uncertainty, and possibly, anticipated future losses. In a string of metaphorical words, he expresses grief over the distasteful excessive ingestion of contaminated greens into the woman's body, when the poet persona states that the "boughs" of the woman "cloy with green foliage". The violation of the woman's body becomes symptomatic of the violation of the land, and by extension, the people of the land. This is not without grave consequences as it results in the woman hoarding "her ovary in vain, in pain?/Quarantined by this barren lake…" (*Letters*, 43) This is suggestive of the woman's health, which deteriorates with the presence of environmental pollution. In addition to the physical as well as physiological impact of environmental degradation on the reproductive organ of the female is the emotional strand, as she suffers from feelings of isolation and alienation, making her vulnerable to loneliness. This isolation could be psychical with manifestations such as estrangement from others, specifically regarding marriage. This could result from the thought of the worthlessness of a woman without functional ovaries in a marriage institution, particularly in African society where a woman's relevance is defined by her procreating abilities. It could also be physical, in terms of her sick body keeping her away from the sight of others. This emphasises the fact that

health (mental health inclusive) and ecological systems are interconnected, which means the destruction of the former could leave a lasting impact on the latter. Frustrated, the woman can only hope that the "worthless flaw" committed by man in destroying the environment does not "mar" her "flawless worth". The play on words (pun) in the poem is deliberate, as it strives to mitigate the effects of the pain engendered by environmental degradation. The poem ends on a consolatory note:

> Dear lady, make merry in misery
> For life is even a desert plain where
> Dry dews give impression of torrential rain
> And manifold are the woes of the earthly being.
> But you ever can be sure some hour
> They would cease, with God, the Mighty Maker. (*Letters*, 43)

The call to happiness amid distress supports the general philosophy of life that nothing lasts forever, as well as recalls Karl Marx's position on religion being the opium of the masses. These comforting words might have been deployed for the sake of temporary respite, and to meet the need for inspiring hope as well strength in the hearts of the Niger Delta people, especially women, while the distressing period lasts.

In another poem entitled "Mirage" (*Letters*, 70), the poet persona is distraught at the present condition of the stream in his community which has become a "mythic mirage, ghostly stream…" (*Letters*, 70) He recounts how in the past, whenever he paid a visit to the stream, it "… rippled/Like a lake…", but now "… naught abode real in truth" (*Letters*, 70), only an imaginary appearance of a pool of water. The place does not only evoke sad memories but also inflicts pains as well as "… haunt[s]…" him. Consequently, the sense of haunting and reminiscences have a disquieting effect on the poet persona because he slips into delusion. Deploying apostrophe, he addresses the despoilers:

> Listen now, you mirage-hearted, as tricky
> As a magician anxious to yield, out
> Of a monarch, a marionette; I sparkle as
> Stars and gems could do. Even yet, with your
> Armies of vicissitudes, in vain you strive! (*Letters*, 70)

His expressions are only wishful dreams and desires for the rivers of his communities which are yet to materialise; that is, if they ever will do. This is so because while he claims that the rivers glitter like stars and gems, in reality, they suffer from contamination and

murkiness. The environmental condition in the Niger Delta region engenders traumatogenic states such as daydreams, delusion and illusion for the poet persona, and by extension, the Niger Delta inhabitants. Moreover, he brags that despite the destructive attempts on his land, it has proved abortive whereas, in the next stanza, the poet persona asks: "When will you dare to leave, O my fate?" Then, he wishes he has fins to "… swim in hope" and "… soar like a box-kite, and for all atone" (*Letters,* 70). The plunderers have wreaked havoc on his land so much that he desires their departure, and yearns for reparation, but all of these are not happening soon. To summarise, this poem as well as other poems in this collection recreates a portrait of the Niger Delta's condition where the people only cling to a drab ray of hope, even when the contradictions are more evident.

4.4 Traumatic echoes in Ogbowei's *marsh boy & other poems*

Another collection that x-rays the Niger Delta situation is Ogbowei's *marsh boy & other poems* (*marsh boy*). Like the other collections already considered, it centres on the trauma that conditions the Niger Delta people's existence. The people are deeply distressed by the destruction and disinheritance that confronts them following environmental devastation. As a result, the writers (poets) from this region and beyond engage literature (poetry) in articulating the pains of the people, which have been formerly silenced, and this aligns with Rodi-Risberg's (2010) submission that the requisite task of literature, as well as literary criticism, is to resist silenced traumatic ordeals to give at the least the possibility of bringing about change. This implies that literature is a helpful means through which the unclaimed can be claimed. Substantiating this view, Pederson (2014) agrees that literature will continue to be useful in the struggle to retrieve most aching ordeals, though it might not be the sole method of articulating trauma. *Marsh boy* by G'Ebinyo Ogbowei is a traumatic re-enactment of the anguish that attend the cataclysmic event (environmental degradation), which has lingered on the Niger Delta shore. The collection is subdivided into two sections namely, "marsh boy" and "moonlight blues". However, the poems mostly analysed are from the section titled "marsh boy", as they cater to the subject of trauma.

Pederson (2014), acceding to McNally's (2005) position, argues that trauma is speakable and provides an alternative model for articulating trauma. He advances that theorists of trauma should search for proof of "augmented narrative detail", suggesting that trauma

should be represented with plethoric facts as well as pulsating ardour. Therefore, Pederson proposes the deployment of vivid, detailed descriptions to demonstrate the effects of trauma in text. *Marsh boy* is replete with such detail, which is presented through the preponderant use of metaphors, as "[t]rauma theory is, in many ways, ultimately a theory of metaphor; it is a way of thinking about how some extreme event or experience that is radically non-linguistic, that seems even to negate language, is somehow carried across into language" (Berger, 2004: 563-564). Since the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta, the people of the region have been experiencing a two-fold tragedy: poverty and denial of rights, which have been excruciating. The poem "marsh boy I" captures this concisely when it recounts the agonies of the people who are "locked in the prison of poverty" as well as "denied the right to rise/out of holes in sighing swamps" (*marsh boy,* 21). The depth of poverty is emphasised, while the agonising metaphor of incarceration and the personification of grief register trauma in the poem. Kennedy (2011) states that the discourse of trauma has turned out to be a preferential metaphoric medium employed by writers in investigating ordeals, as well as reactions to individual and communal brutality and inequity. Destitution and deprivation accentuate the poverty-ridden state of the Niger Delta residents. This condition results in deep distress and sadness for the people, and the dirge-like mood created by this gamut of experiences, represented in "marsh boy 1", is underscored by the linguistic choices in the following lines:

> humble hungry hunter
> pushed out of the dining hall
> by buccaneering brothers
> like locusts have overspread the land (*marsh boy,* 21)

Through the image of a buccaneer, the poet persona recounts the predicament of the Niger Delta people, who are forced out of their ancestral lands, deprived of their possessions and left in starvation by the despoilers. They are displaced and dispossessed with no social support. The traumatogenic effect of displacement and possible relocation is that it shatters any sense of a meaningful past and might result in a hybrid identity, which the people dread. In addition, poverty and displacement are interwoven, because forceful displacement by eco-catastrophe from one's source of livelihood results in poverty. Moreover, poverty is connected to the subject of trauma because trauma is defined by various kinds of loss: lives, properties, land, and even dignity; and the loss of their land, which provides their means of

sustenance, often results in destitution. Hence, the people are traumatised by these ecological losses. More traumatising is the ironical standards, which characterise the Niger Delta people's existence where their expectation contradicts their reality as seen in these lines:

> we'd be decked in royal robes
> but you dress us in shrouds…
> but death a liberator
> the grave a leveller (*marsh boy*, 22)

The extent of the torture is described as they see death as a means of liberation and escape from their sad reality. Also, the equality that the grave grants to all mortals temporarily soothes their pain. Meanwhile, the dejected state of the people, represented by the voice of the poet persona, is underscored through the deployment of interior monologue and apostrophe in the poem. In addition, the use of the apostrophe, where the poet persona addresses the imaginary listener, emphasises active witnessing of the reader, not passive witnessing promoted by classic trauma theory. As the poem progresses, the poet persona experiences a moment of epiphany, which leads to a sudden turn of events as the poet persona's dejection gives way to emotions of anger and rage while he announces: "I am the marsh boy/quick and handy with a gun/" chasing "beneficent tyrants/…who see in our" devastation "their prosperity" (*marsh boy*, 23). This is a picture of the Niger Delta region where following continual dispossession, some of the Niger Delta denizens resolve to engage in violence and have become addicted to it, which is one of the insignias of trauma, to wrestle their lands from the plunderers. Consequently, there is a shift from "unspeakability" of trauma, a notion propagated by Caruth's pioneering traumatic text, to resistance in the region. This has birthed militancy in the Niger Delta region where the people are infuriated at the fact that rather than boom, their endowment has got them doom. The "infernal crowns" have become "a curse to our coast", which has rendered

> *the delta…a death parlour*
> *a place of grief*
> *where we're gathered to hear*
> *the ghouls decide how you deserve to die (marsh boy*, 24*).*

In the poem, the Niger Delta region is metaphorised as a "death parlour" to heighten the features of destruction into which it has been converted. It also evokes one of Pederson's (2014) views of trauma being represented with "vibrant intensity". Also, as a result of the

destruction of the environment, many of the residents, who are mainly fishermen and farmers, are affected as they cannot fend for their families and loved ones. When the condition of the struggle for survival remains a constant, the people become persistently overwhelmed with sadness, which gives rise to depression and culminates in "suicides without sufficient safeguards" (*marsh boy,* 24) to get away from the site of torment. Depression and suicide represent the mental and psychological impacts of environmental devastation. This corroborates Rodi-Risberg's (2018) emphasis on the representation of the impact of trauma, challenging the theory's prescriptive formalist criteria, which depoliticises suffering and promotes apathy. In her words, "testimony is seen to presuppose unrepresentability. Thus, literature becomes an exclusive site for bearing witness to trauma through experimental postmodernist forms that reflect and pass on rather than represent the impact of the phenomenon to readers in its literality. These prescriptive formal sine qua non requirements for representing trauma and its reverberations, however, have been criticised for depoliticising social suffering" (4).

The sense of traumatisation is further heightened with the poet persona's delusion where he sees "… the elusive army of the debased/take the burning brand to the pernicious precinct" with "a wailing bullet burying a complicit consul" (*marsh boy,* 24). The elusiveness of the army denotes the mental confusion that the people of the Niger Delta, represented through the poet persona's voice, are subjected to. The poet persona becomes delusional as he loses touch with reality, and visualises the destruction of the despoilers' and accomplices' camp; whereas in reality, it is his land that suffers from unending devastation. However, the poet persona's fantasising thoughts might be a result of the urgent need to provide a personal temporary relief. Still in distress, the poet persona presents a monologue of destruction and marvels at how the despoilers who wreak this damage live in peace, after the magnitude of the devastation that has led to loss of lives and property. As if beckoning on the readers, the poet persona says:

> now hear traumatised territories…
> see sullen rivers carry their cargoes of death
> to the sea's exhibit room
> where wailing widows wait for sons and spouses
> whose footprints the sour sea has washed away (*marsh boy*, 25)

Many times, the memory of trauma involves the five physiological senses, such that the wounded might inscribe not only ocular clues but also other sensory hints (Pederson, 2014). This is demonstrated as the poet persona not only calls us to hear "traumatised territories" but to also "see" the "sullen rivers", which portrays the use of two sensory organs in underscoring harrowing memories. The use of personification in "traumatised territories" humanises the trauma inflicted on the environment and by extension, humans because they make up these territories. The mood of grief spreads through the poem as the image of death imbues it as well, where the seashore has become an exhibit room now for displaying dead bodies for loved ones/relatives to identify, as against its former use. Previously, the seashore was an exhibition centre for different sizes as well as various kinds of fish caught, either for sale or possibly for pride and fulfilment from spectators. This is not obtainable anymore. More traumatising is the "…palm-greasing patriots" who flirt "…through breached bunkers/to the hall where history is made" (*marsh boy*, 25), betraying their people because of their insatiable quest for wealth. Hence, the people are overcome with intense sorrow as they mourn their losses.

In another poem, "welcome to our smouldering swamps" (28). The titling of the poem represents the ongoing brutality inflicted on the Niger Delta environment as the poet persona, in an apostrophic address, welcomes the readers to their "…smouldering swamps/…swamps of death", where the plunderers could kill just to gain access to "oil wells and gas fields" (*marsh boy,* 28). However, this is not just an address to the reader to solicit sympathy; rather, there is possibly an urgent political need (pricking consciences), and literature has always been instrumental in satirising societal ills. While destroying the environment, the pillagers try to build infrastructural facilities in the region, perhaps as a means of reparation but of what use "…are schools and clinics to the vanishing ones" when "this running sore" keeps "draining your sick soul" (*marsh boy*, 28). Where social support is seemingly provided by the plunderers, it makes no difference because the springboard of degradation remains, which keeps eliminating the people for whom these facilities are created. The quality of remediation carried out by the oil multinationals makes the victims unenthusiastic. Hence, the people become mentally exhausted almost to the point of collapse. What is more, art which could have provided some form of therapy for the devastated people cannot thrive any longer. The poet persona painfully reports this:

what use is tchaikovsky to the deaf
can't sprout his dreams in his smouldering swamps
can't play deep-thinking hamlet…
with acquisitive cousins always must win (*marsh boy,* 29)

The poem alludes to Tchaikovsky, a Russian composer, whose music was said to have made a lasting impact globally, to foreground the potency of the arts. However, for the Niger Delta region, art loses its therapeutic significance and potentiality because of the greediness of the pillagers. Also, in the event of destruction, safety becomes the first port of call. The poem recognises the potential of art as instrumental to recovery, which resonates with Albrecht's (2005) assertion that "[t]he full transdisciplinary idea of health involves the healing of solastalgia via cultural responses to degradation of the environment in the form of drama, art, dance and song at all scales of living from the bioregional to the global" (55). This also supports Kurtz's (2014) emphasis on traditional means of recovery from trauma which African communities are well endowed with, and Craps' (2013) criticism of the hegemonic Western mode of recovery promulgated by classic trauma theory. However, art, which is a means of bringing people together and enhancing communality, forfeits its communal relevance. Rather, the Niger Delta region is converted into a place where "a stolen truck wreaks vengeance on blustering braves" with "pleading moans out of heaped tiers of rubble" (*marsh boy*, 29). This is the Niger Delta's situation where the despoilers, in connivance with the government, attack environmental activists, nicknamed militants, in a bid to permanently silence them. As a result, the poet persona is sickened by the crippling effects of environmental devastation on his people as well as their cultural and artistic traditions, and consequently, he repeatedly calls his people to battle – "asawana/wana" (*marsh boy,* 29). Perhaps, the repeated call to battle is a form of emphasis on resistance, which challenges Caruth's (1996) and Hartman (1995) concept of unspeakability of trauma, and supports Craps' (2013) argument on the openness and attentiveness to the different approaches of representation as well as resistance which the particular social and historical contexts of trauma necessitate.

Similarly, in another poem titled "the cry of a disappointed doe" (*marsh boy,* 33), melancholia pervades the atmosphere as the poet persona chronicles the hysterical state of his people in the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta region is described as a "starving city" that

"has kept open the road of life" (*marsh boy,* 33), suggestive of a metaphoric journey to wealth that is continuously made available to the nation. Despite this bounty of affluence, the region, unfortunately, descends into indigence, in addition to being ruthlessly pulverised and constantly undernourished. One wonders how the producers of wealth suffer greatly from such indigence. Besides the physical impact of environmental degradation which is represented by poverty, they are also mentally tortured, as they witness the destruction of their land but are unable to stop the damaging cycle as presented in these lines: "in the eyes of the agitated/the gory glory of a volcanic rage" with "tidal waves washing short-changed shores" (*marsh boy,* 33). This disturbing sight makes them frenzied and engenders perplexing memories, while they watch helplessly at the destruction of their source of income. Going further, the poet persona digresses a bit as he recollects how,

> the dreams and obsessions of october 1
> drain into loot-loosed lowlands
> where the dragons of greed
> take shifty patriots (*marsh boy*, 33)

Following independence, illusions of freedom became crushed and hopes were dashed because of the avariciousness of a particular minority group (the leaders). Consequently, people experienced post-independent disillusionment. This digression in the poem is deliberate, as the poet persona traces back to history how environmental degradation began and continued till the present time. It was after independence that "pillagers" were "blown south by thirsty winds" (*marsh boy*, 33) who began exploiting his people of their resources, leaving the "disappointed doe" to pine for "her philandering buck" (*marsh boy*, 33). The deployment of animal imagery is used in describing the pain of exploitation. Overwhelmed by these memories, the poet persona breaks down and withers psychologically, which is represented in the poem as he begins to see all the despoilers "… coming and going/through the revolving doors of my mind…/clawing and biting" (*marsh boy,* 33). The psychological well-being of the poet persona is affected as the thoughts of the plunderers' arrival and exit, in quick succession, keep troubling him, with the imagery of "clawing and biting" foregrounding their destructive greedy mission. This avarice is pursued further in another poem entitled "the tyranny of greed" (*marsh boy,* 41), where the poet persona laments

> this smash-and-grab relationship
> that does nothing but grab and hide
> that strips us of dignity and humanity

that clobbers kills our crabby joy
scrambling into humming holes (*marsh boy*, 41)

The relationship between the pillagers and the residents of the oil-rich locale is a parasitic one because the pillagers alone profit from the encounter. The residents are divested of their self-esteem and dignity, which disrupts a coherent sense of their selves because their existence is tied to their lands. With the loss, they are plunged into a depressing vacuous life, deprived of happiness, and denied enunciation. Thus, the poet persona tells his people to avoid this set of people, who take pleasure in destroying others. Emphasising this further, in the poem entitled "avoid them" (*marsh* boy, 42), the poet persona expresses vehemently that his people should avoid parasites who "washed on to our welcoming shores" and bring with them "seasons of pain over the pliant plains" (42). This is rather befuddling, especially considering the impossibility of avoiding those who have spread their wings across their lands and properties. Their only choice is to flee from their lands, a notion that is abhorrent to the Niger Delta people. Hence, the belief that the pillagers can be avoided which the poet persona preaches to other residents, might imply a local coping mechanism and survival strategy to keep trauma in check, which overrides the hegemonic Western models of treatment and recovery. It detaches them from the reality of the despoilers who have spread themselves all over the land, causing "mangrove giants sighing in the chilling half-light" (*marsh boy,* 42) and other kinds of havoc. Not to mention

exploding seaside settlements…
soft belly balming my burning body…
heartbroken mother fishing out of furious seas
sick souls cast overboard deviant boats…

in her midst groaning and grieving (*marsh boy,* 42)

The despoilers are exploitative of humans and their ecosystems as well, causing them intense visceral pain. As a result, the people do not only contend with explosions on account of the activities of the oil companies which lead to the death of some, but they also suffer exposure to lethal agents with repercussions on their physical body as well as their mental state, leaving them to groan and grieve over their losses. Literally, "burning body" implies the impact of the volatile compounds on their physical body, and figuratively, it could suggest restiveness owing to the effect on their mental health. In other words, the poem demonstrates the physical, emotional and mental impacts associated with the transformation

of the environment, which has become a ubiquitous sight in the Niger Delta. Therefore, oil becomes a metaphor for pain, as it not only threatens the existence of people but also causes them to grieve for their ecology because of their affiliation to the environment. Expanding on ecological grief, Cunsolo (2018) states that they "contend that ecological grief is a natural response to ecological losses, particularly for people who retain close living, working and cultural relationships to the natural environment, and one that has the potential to be felt more strongly and by a growing number of people as we move deeper into the Anthropocene" (275).

The torrential outpour of emotions in the poems under study validates the notion that trauma is capable of being expressed, and not amnesic (McNally, 2005; Pederson 2014). Even though those recollections might be distorted in some ways, that does not imply an alteration of the content because a fairly accurate record of history is still provided (Pederson, 2014; Balaev, 2008). This is demonstrated in the poem "the horrors of history" (*marsh boy*, 44) where the horrifying history of the Niger Delta inhabitants is recounted through the tales of throes which pervade the poem. We are informed about how

> tyrannised territories caravan their horrors…
> starving subversives stumbling out of torture chambers…
> who took philip's bait
> sold their city-states to the macedonian menace (*marsh boy,* 44)

By this, the poet persona recounts the history of his people as "…damned by other men" (Fanon, 1967:237) who in this context are the oppressors, under the covering of oil companies. Unfortunately, while under oppression, the people of the Niger Delta region conceal their horrific experiences as they struggle with starvation as well as torture. It is more traumatising that their despairs and pains are covered up, rather than expressed for fear of the adverse consequences in addition to being haunted by the past guilt. Therefore, their pain is mixed with guilt and this is represented in the poem through the mood of regret, as the despoilers' decoy, which they fell for, is metaphorised as "philip's bait" – a reference that doubles as a historical allusion to King Philip II of Macedonia who employed diplomatic means to gain control of all of Greece in 339 BC. Similar to King Philip II of Macedonia, the despoilers (represented by the oil companies in collaboration with the government) diplomatically took over the Niger Delta region, presenting them with

imaginary promises while exploiting their natural endowment. As such, the Niger Delta people's reliance on the promises of the despoilers for better living, became mere illusions as they plunged themselves into

> … poverty and inconsequence
> how can we now pull out the rusty hooks
> lodged in our hurting gills
> how can we now league ourselves into relevance
> our freedom sealed in his funeral coffer (*marsh boy,* 44)

They cannot get past the burden of incapacitating guilt forced by their current predicament and are inconsolable by the fact that their condition is almost irredeemable because of the extent of rot in the system. Much as they desire to redeem their humanity, regain their dignity and gain relevance, it all seems out of the way considering that their "freedom" has been "sealed" in the despoiler's "funeral coffer", which suggests a cast die that cannot be reversed. As a consequence, they become extremely distressed over the loss of their land and the pain is intensified because their identity is also constructed with the land. Hence, a loss of it implies a loss of personal and cultural identity, rendering them irrelevant as well as exposing them to solastalgia, a notion Albrecht (2005) considers universally applicable to any setting where there is first-hand contact with alteration or obliteration of the physical environment (abode) by powers that weaken an individual and communal sense of identity as well as control. Despite their reality, the poet persona talks of "dead souls singing to sorrowful swamps", rallying the "restive region" and bringing the "fragrance of freedom/to internees of concentration camps" (*marsh boy,* 44). How can the dead bring about freedom for the living? Perhaps, it is psychologically appealing to the poet persona to hang on some flickers of hope in his despondent state, and the alliterative verses create a lyrical rhythm that helps in cushioning the impact of the traumatic experiences on the reader. Another perspective to consider is African traditional cosmology, which centralises the belief that the ancestors (dead) are ever-living and capable of influencing the physical world in diverse positive ways, hence the poet persona's confidence in liberation through the dead. Also, the poem draws attention to the twin trauma of environmental devastation and refugeeism which have become commonplace affairs in the Niger Delta region. This brutal transformation from resident to non-resident has become a recurring trauma (Nixon, 2011) with those "concentration camps" visible pathetic sites of intense poverty and precarious

living conditions, in addition to the prolonged history of restiveness that encompasses the region. Disappointedly, the "…day of liberation" became "…a day of desecration", and despondently, the poet persona speaks of "how dreadfully colourful/the horrors of history" (*marsh boy*, 45) has become. The oxymoronic phrase, "dreadfully colourful", produces an evocative feeling that impresses horror-stricken images on the reader's psyche.

Typical of Niger Delta poetry, the poem does not fail to indict the local leaders of the Niger Delta region, who do not spare the people further bouts of agony, as mirrored in the poem "the fumbling king" (*marsh boy,* 51). The leaders work in complicity with the multinationals in wreaking havoc on the ecosystem. The repetition in the poem vocalises the continuous inefficient attitudes displayed by the indigenous leaders, as it also emphasises their materialistic demeanours which lead to their betrayal as co-conspirators to the unremitting distress experienced by their people. Their scramble for wealth has driven them into destroying the environment with impunity, and just when it is too little, too late, they gain seemingly full awareness of the magnitude of the rot impacting their ecological terrain and their roles played. Hence, they become:

> determined to cleanse the contumacious coasts
> determined to drain the defiant wetlands
> with flattery bribes and broken covenants
> written with the blood of her branded braves
>
> the fumbling king falls (*marsh boy*, 51)

Unfortunately, it is with the proceeds of the kickbacks got from betraying and sacrificing the dissenters in the region that the local leaders, epitomised by "the fumbling king", seek to remediate the contaminated environment, while the poet persona envisages the eventual downfall of these leaders. It might only be mentally and psychologically gratifying for the poet persona to imagine the downfall of "the fumbling king" because, contrariwise, the local leaders are still very much in the corridors of powers while their eventual defeat is still much anticipated. Thus, in spasms of irritation and with a voice ripped with anger, the poet persona calls out the "…provocative hypocrisy of self-serving patriots" demonstrated by their conniving attitudes, which keeps causing "desolating grief on harassed highlands" (*marsh boy,* 51). In essence, the actions of these duplicitous leaders inflict pain on the inhabitants of the land, causing them so much sorrow and heartache. The poem concludes

with the poet persona leaning on the power of words to indict these leaders, as he hopes that these "oily words of sharks with shiny teeth/sharper than brutus' dagger" will stab their scheming hearts until they feel "*the feral pain of pleading death*" (*marsh boy,* 51). The allusion to Shakespeare's villainous character, Brutus, in *Julius Caesar* echoes the extent to which he wants the words to pierce the local representatives' hearts into contrition, invariably establishing that they are traitors and the chief enemy of the people. This recalls Craps' (2013) critique of the Western modernist aesthetics of aporia and fragmentation when he implies that the urgency of the problem at hand in the postcolonial context might not create room for experimentation, as the need to prick consciences is prioritised.

However, the mental impacts of environmental degradation can be overwhelming. Corroborating this view, Craps (2020) states that "[t]here is indeed a growing awareness that environmental degradation is taking a toll on people's mental and emotional well-being" (2). Environmental degradation engenders traumatogenic impacts such as intense anxiety and grief. Grief is invoked by the ongoing and accumulative physical loss of land to which their identity and dignity are attached, while extreme anxiety arises from fear of anticipated obliteration of the environment (home). As inscribed in the poem entitled "on the margins of consciousness" (*marsh* boy, 52-53), the devastation of the land leaves the Niger Deltans on the edge of life and consciousness because they are constantly worried and troubled over the present condition and future of their ecology. Indeed, the title of the poem suggests the mental condition of the people, as the states of their minds are affected by "grief and anxiety" crawling "out of melancholic marshes/where the grunts and hisses of feasting vultures" muffle the "growls of dogs" (*marsh boy,* 52). The deployment of animal imagery describes the disturbing sight of the Niger Delta region where vultures feast on the dead whose lives were claimed by repercussions of oil extraction and exploitation. Oil becomes a metaphor of death as it threatens the existence of people. Also, the use of personification, which humanises the pain experienced by the people, and the alliterated verse carry with it the mood of the poem, which is melancholia. The poem makes historical allusions to past African presidents of Guinea and their sinister activities to draw attention to the attitudes and activities of Nigerian leaders (government), who are always in collaboration with the oil companies in destroying the environment. In an interrogative tone, the poet persona asks:

what do you seek in sekouba
come watch the september slaughter
come watch camara clobbering conakry
stripping the city of her dignity (*marsh boy,* 52)

The reference to historical leaders and events, particularly draws attention to a repeat of history, though in a different territory and happening to different people but with similar experiences. Like their African counterparts, the leaders would "…make the rain fall on their roofs alone" leaving the masses with "…boxes of broken promises…/of human waste and mouldy dreams" (*marsh boy,* 53). As a result, the Niger Delta residents experience a lot of hardships resulting from unmet promises and wilful as well as accidental destruction of the flora and the fauna on the landscape. Promises of reparation and remediation of their land, which, many times, never get executed, abound. Under that circumstance, the people suffer from environment-induced distress, as they still also look on helplessly while "the morning rain washes into a weary river" with a reluctance "…to carry its contraband of death/to coastal communities making each day" (*marsh boy,* 53). Forlornly, this is what makes up their daily realities as their rivers no longer house fish but have become a place of death, while the people's lives are riddled with a lot of ironies as related below:

this road paved with good intentions
takes us to the gates of hell…
takes us not to the place of dazzling transformations…
takes us not to the place of prosperity and dignity… (*marsh boy,* 53)

This is a region that constructed the metaphoric road to the journey of wealth for the nation. Yet, rather than have this region swelling and bursting with a lot of bounties, stunning metamorphoses as well as opulence, the road "carries" them "to the city of continual convulsions", "the place of humbling hardship" and "the place of horrific losses" (*marsh boy,* 53). The "continual convulsions" suggest ceaseless violent disruptions that the Niger Delta denizens undergo. In another sense, "continual convulsions" may denote the state of their mental health, as they are always seized with a constant state of anxiety and fear of imminent danger because of continual violence, besides the destitution and terrible losses they endure. Likewise, in another poem entitled "echoes out of dark sepulchral hearts" (*marsh boy,* 55), the melancholic mood of the poem is captured with the title. The poem is saturated with disconsolateness, as there are echoes and re-echoes of pains all through owing to the plunderers' feasting on "feverish infants/sloshing through surly swamps" (*marsh boy,*

55). Natal imagery is deployed in foregrounding the magnitude of destruction and describing the pain felt by the Niger Deltans. To make matters worse, the proceeds from the despoliation of the environment are not rechannelled into the region; rather, the billions are funnelled

> … to safe havens
> as fetid drains flowed into hungry homes
> rodents roaches reptiles
> cholera crawling bugs begging bowls
> unimpeachable dividends of democracy (*marsh boy*, 55)

While the despoilers have billions of naira, dividends of their despoliation, stacked in safe places for them and their posterity, the natives of the region are famished and in great destitution. The imagery of poverty is accentuated with scatological depictions projected through "cholera crawling bugs begging bowls" (*marsh boy,* 55). Consequently, rather than abate poverty, the wealth of the Niger Delta region aggravates her denizens' condition, while it enriches the swindlers. Besides, there is the proliferation of various kinds of diseases in the Niger Delta communities because environmental devastation engenders the materialisation of both air-borne and water-borne diseases. Unfortunately, the permanence of this condition is underscored in the poem by the pillagers who "have made our coasts the elegiac hunting grounds" (*marsh boy,* 55). Thus, the people's terrifying condition is unimaginable, as they are overwhelmed by the prevalent conditions of poverty and other irreversible order of things. What is left is the echo of "a howling horror in munificent marshes…/a wailing nightmare" (*marsh boy,* 57), which establishes their distressful condition, and foregrounds the elegiac mood and tone.

The profligate extraction of oil with severe repercussions on the appalling state of the Niger Delta region is alarming. In another poem titled "amnesty" (*marsh boy*, 63-66), the deplorable condition of the environment and the people of the Niger Delta region as a consequence of the greed of the despoilers is recounted. The poem recalls the pardon granted by the late President Yar'adua's government to the militants. This gesture gave them a false hope that things were going to get better for the region, only for it to become obvious to them that their lives and that of future generations have been "sacrificed on the altar of profit" for a few gentries, forcing them "…to father an illusion" (*marsh boy,* 63). At last, the Niger Delta people's conception of life as created by the figment of their

imagination does not have any objective reality. Why is that so? Typically, they thought that their possession of oil with amnesty in place was an express entry into a lifetime of abundance. Little did they know that it was a cold plunge into dearth, as their imagination of affluence negates their reality of want because what defines their present moment is "poor exile with no place to sing/poor exile sighing for spoofed slums" alongside "…pongy memories of poverty and pain" (*marsh boy*, 63). These are not only traumatogenic experiences but also pointers to the ongoing distress in the Niger Delta region, as the people contend with involuntary migration to demeaning abodes after being forced out by potentially fatal as well peremptory socio-environmental conditions. In addition, their land embodies everything that defines them inclusive of their creative muse, which is why the poet persona laments the absence of "place to sing" (*marsh boy*, 64). Therefore, they are not only displaced and disinherited, they are also tormented with the thought of possible annihilation. Entangled with trauma and unpleasant reminiscences, they grind in anguish and watch helplessly as their fate is determined by the plunderers, which is suggested in the lines below:

> …the wild goat
> with its chains of gold
> dragged into the knacker's yard
> hopelessly upward looks at the sacrificial smoke
> pluck out the punitive pole (*marsh boy*, 64)

The image of a goat with "chains of gold" led to the slaughter describes vividly how the pillagers deal vilely with the Niger Delta – the precinct that houses the gold mine of the country and her people. The land and the people are the metaphoric goat looking at the "sacrificial smoke", yet cannot escape from the butcher's hand. This is an archetypal description of the Niger Delta people who look on while the destruction of their environment lasts, possibly because, like the goat, the supposed owner now determines its kismet. As a result, the people are filled with regret over the role they played in giving off their bequest to the plunderers on a platter, which leaves them dredging up

> … mortifying memories…
> the coins with which we were bought
> the casks of wine in which we drowned
> the swords and guns with which we laid low the
> Conniving coast…
> delivered them to smart slavers (*marsh boy*, 64)

The memory of past and present loss for them is disabling as they are not only overwhelmed by the tragic loss, but also tortured mentally by their actions. They cannot get past the burden of ecological guilt and shame for the part they played in granting the desires of their foes who pulled a fast one on them. For as long as they live, they carry with them a visceral pain of everlasting loss, apart from the tormenting thoughts of the fact that they do not even have anything to show for all their losses. They are filled with guilt for submitting to slavery and not fighting off the despoilers, and for taking the pillagers in "…who trade in death" and won them over "with spoils from self-sabotaging swamps" (*marsh boy*, 64). However, it appears psychologically appealing for them to guilt trip themselves for letting loose their inheritance into the hands of the pillagers, because one wonders if they would have acted contrary, knowing fully well that the plunderers are stronger, and might eventually overpower them and forcefully take what they want should they refuse. Guilt tripping might be a form of coping mechanism in their distressed state. The poem digresses a bit as it alludes to the time Nigeria gained independence from the colonisers, and this is deliberate because it emphasises the beginning of the Niger Delta region's travails. Thus, the natives of the region experience post-independence disillusionment "where independence ends in hell" and suffer from environmental loss, as "a bleeding dream cut in two" (*marsh boy*, 65). Additionally, the people lose the therapeutic influence of art to cushion the effect of their tragic loss:

> can i like brahms
> play a requiem for ruined rivers
> perform romantic variations of the song of destiny
> for friends sacrificed to save a sick state (*marsh boy*, 65)

Because who sings when his house is on fire? No doubt, singing and performance are one of the African cultural ways of articulating grief and healing thereafter. However, in the event of massive destruction of their land, lives and property, their security takes precedence. So, the probability of healing is lost when the medium to accessing it is denied. Unfortunately, the poet persona, a symbol of his people's traumatic experience, is not only displaced but is also deprived of the opportunity to mourn his comrades who were "sacrificed to save a sick state". This cultural means of expressing grief and heartache resonates with Craps's (2013) contention that the way psychological notions, which evolved from the Western society, are applied in cross-cultural contexts ingeniously amounts to

cultural imperialism. To be certain, such a view unconsciously relegates to the background local methods of articulating sorrow, misery and recovery. The metric of misery that permeates the poem also pervades the people's lives. They do not only struggle with poverty, dislodgment, pain and regret but also betrayal and deception by the multinational companies in cahoots with the government, as the "…double-faced goliath" pushes them "…to the stake/to which" their "…father is tied" causing intergenerational trauma due to their losses. The deployment of biblical allusion aims at establishing the personality of the despoilers. Also, the people's dreams are smattered "…in the desert of greed" and they are faced with images of "…jazzy nightmare of the red rage" (*marsh boy,* 66).

While these last, the poet persona broods over a lot of wishes like "…cutting off the royalists at linares/mobilise a militia" and teaching his folks "how to live with honour" as well as "…die with glory" (*marsh boy,* 66). Yet, these are only fantasies with no physical realisation, as he ends up registering his present status— "no i'm sosa…/poor exile sighing for spoofed swamps" (*marsh boy,* 66). This is the devastating description of the traumatised state of the people of the Niger Delta region. However, the resistance undertone that permeates the poems and informs the titling of the collection – *marsh boy and other poems* (non-conformity to English rules of capitalisation of the content words) suggests that the poet (Ogbowei) advocates resistance and subversion as a response to the traumatic situation in the Niger Delta, which opposes the prescriptive modern aesthetics of classic trauma theory.

4.5 Metaphors of resilience and resistance: the response to traumatic experiences in Bassey's *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat*

Advocating resistance as a response to the traumatic situations that condition the lives of the Niger Delta inhabitants is another poet – Nnimmo Bassey. He is a forthright witness to the ongoing travails of the people in the Niger Delta region. Like many of his counterparts, he is an embodiment of distressing memories and his poems are testaments to the cruel ironies that define the lives of his people. However, Bassey advocates resilience and resistance as a psychological defence mechanism and possibly a means of recovery, against melancholia, in response to the degrading experiences to which the people are subjected. Hence, his poetic narration becomes a means of resistance and resilience, which is contrary

to classic trauma theory which favours melancholia over resistance. Moreover, this stance also substantiates Watters' (2010) criticism against the universal application of Western psychological concepts, modes for treatment and recovery, which Craps (2013) expatiates in his book, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds*. He

> critiques what he calls 'the grand project of Americanising the world's understanding of the human mind (1). Over the past three decades, he writes, Americans have exported their ideas about mental health and illness around the world without regard for cultural differences, imposing their definitions and treatments as the international standards: 'Indigenous forms of mental illness and healing are being bulldozed by disease categories and treatments made in the USA (3). (qtd. Craps, 2013:48-49)

Supporting this view, Visser (2014) posits that postcolonial literatures often deal with trauma through means not anticipated by classic trauma theory or through means that negate trauma theory's suppositions, for example by reflecting victims' grit, defiance as well as ultimate victory over trauma, or an improved unity of a society or heightened sense of distinctiveness following an upsetting occurrence. In many of the poems in *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat* (*I Will Not Dance*), Bassey reaches for a reclamation of the humanity of the denizens of this region, while he draws their attention to the necessity of defiance to save their future.

Resilience and resistance, rather than melancholia and mourning, have become responses to trauma in postcolonial contexts. Advocating the stance of resistance, Craps (2013) asserts that

> [r]ather than positing a necessary relation between aesthetic form and political or ethical effectiveness, trauma theory should take account of the specific social and historical contexts in which trauma narratives are produced and received, and be open and attentive to the diverse strategies of representation and resistance which these contexts invite or necessitate. (43)

Also, resilience and resistance are central to survival. This is a representation of the Niger Delta residents who have begun to confront their despoilers for a long time now, rather than sit back and mourn the devastation of their lands and lives, as mourning has got them nowhere in time past. Thus, the tones of insurrection and resistance are aroused. The poet persona in the poem, "They charged through the mounted troops" (*I Will Not Dance*, 12),

registers the people's resistance to traumatogenic experiences and traumatic situations through the poet persona's voice:

> Time to dust our cardboard armours and tin can caps
> Bounce back their plastic bullets, spit in their grumpy faces
> We've reached the crucial phase when clanging pots and pans
> And flying shoes to boot
> Must stand for what we know they should
> Time to detach their bloodied fangs from of our bleeding veins (*I Will Not Dance*, 12)

Instead of being crippled by fear, environmental activism has become a vent in the Niger Delta region for releasing pent-up emotions and inciting people to action. Rather than lament ecological imperialism, they deploy confrontation swathed in activism against the imperial forces. However, the oxymoronic phrase "cardboard armours" establishes the fact that the Niger Delta people's munitions are nothing in comparison to the armaments of the despoilers and their allies. Also, the imagistic portrayal of "clanging pots and pans" suggests that despite their vulnerable state, they choose to use everything within their reach to resist the despoilers, even if it requires dying while defending their lands and saving future generations. Besides, the people of the Niger Delta possibly find it more psychologically satisfying to war, than to watch helplessly as the destroyers destroy their territories, against the perpetual presence of trauma in their community. Hence, the Niger Deltans awake from their "nightmares", as "it's time to dream and to act" and "[b]reak the teeth of the blood-sucking vermin to shake off/collective amnesia" (*I Will Not Dance*, 12), which resulted from continual shock and deeply depressing moments they have had to ceaselessly contend with. Again, the "collective amnesia" might be voluntary, as they are reluctant to articulate their grief, which the affected have decided to leave behind. At the same time, trauma can be overwhelming making the victim incapable of enunciating their thoughts. Expatiating on this, Pihkala (2021) states that "[t]he psychological weight of the ecological crisis can be so great that people lose their capability to act, and their well-being decreases" (120). Also, amnesia could have been a temporary respite. Nevertheless, the poet persona beckons on his people to get rid of amnesia and "[r]ecover" their "memory of proud fighters…" (*I Will Not Dance*, 12), suggesting resistance.

Acts of resistance permeate the poems in this collection because the poet persona believes that for cultural continuity as well as generational survival to be secured and possibly recovery from traumatic experiences, the people must recognise the need to overturn the powers perpetuating the crimes against their community. Emphasising resistance while opposing Caruth's ideology of melancholia and classical trauma theory's repudiation of the significance of narrative, Visser (2015) affirms that the subject of recovery from trauma through protester resistance is incorporated in many postcolonial trauma criticisms. This is epitomised in the paradoxical poem "Watchman, what of the night?" (*I Will Not Dance*, 13-14):

> Watchman
> What of the night?...
> The morning comes
> But also the night…
> Watch day
> What remains of the day? (*I Will Not Dance*, 13)

The poem deploys rhetorical questions and metaphorical resonances, wherein day is compared to today (present) and night to tomorrow (future). The poet persona is disturbed about the makeup of today, which almost holds no hope for the tomorrow of his community because it has been sacrificed on the altar of avarice by those who are supposed to be the caretakers of the communities. They are immersed in relishing the pleasure from the returns of the sacrifice of their tomorrow that is almost exhausted already, while they postpone the night of doom which is already here as it "knocks…/Times and times…/Embrace the web of night and day" (*I Will Not Dance*, 13). With the quick passage of time, the night and the day become entangled in the same web of hopelessness, with the luxuries acquired squandered and tomorrow's bounties lost. Consequently, the poet persona warns: "Wake up/Watchman" (14) and reach out for a change.

Similarly, in "Watchman, how long is your day?" (*I Will Not Dance*, 15), a sequel to "Watchman, what of the night?", the poet persona warns against postponing the day of doom because it is only "[e]mpty heads" that celebrate at "[c]alamities postponed and banked/For none but their generations unborn" (*I Will Not Dance*, 15). Therefore, the poet persona calls on his people who are the custodians of the environment, metaphorised through the "watchman", to act fast and nip in the bud the present devastation. Otherwise, "[l]ike it was

in the days of doom" when "[m]en dined and wined and danced until/Fireballs of sulphur fell, today acid rains on placid heads" (*I Will Not Dance*, 15). The poem makes biblical allusion to the story of Noah who saved his family, leaving others (who made light of his warnings) to be eventually consumed by the flood. By alluding to this story, the poet persona draws the attention of the Niger Delta people to the need to act promptly and act now against environmental despoliation or risk acid rains with dangerous health implications for humans. Certainly, this will be achieved by environmental activism, where the people resist suppressive and avaricious forces who seek to silence them while destroying their present and possible future. The poet persona describes further the destruction meted out on his land alongside the deception fed to the inhabitants, both of which strangle the hope for a tomorrow in the poem "Sequestered carbon" (*I Will Not Dance*, 21) and necessitate swift reaction from the affected:

> To every problem a solution…
> If the pressure goes out of control
> We will throw you a life jacket from beneath your roof ...
> Just don't wear it till you are told
> Even if your head is
> already beneath the tides (*I Will Not Dance*, 21)

To "every problem", there is "a solution" is the deceptive slogan the pillagers use while wreaking havoc with long-term damaging effects on the Niger Delta communities, especially through the increased release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The poem paints the picture of a person who is trying to capture carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere, owing to the mining activities of the oil companies through carbon sequestration, with the promise of a life jacket to prevent him from suffocating. This imagery describes the fate of the Niger Delta residents (in the hands of the pillagers) who, "[w]ithout foresight perfected by hindsight" (*I Will Not Dance*, 21), could not see beyond their noses as they sunk deeper into despair with "[n]egotiated weariness" weighing "down bobbing heads" (*I Will Not Dance*, 21) due to the several "life jacket[s]" promises made by the despoilers to secure their safety and perhaps ensure reparation, despite their destructive exploration and extraction. As a result of the traumatogenic experiences, the people of the Niger Delta become overburdened and troubled by the pain of negotiating their present and mortgaging their future while only postponing the evil day because "can we[they] push the evil day?" (*I Will Not Dance*, 22).

Furthermore, the dreadful effect of carbon on the Niger Delta as a whole is registered in another poem, "Old rio is dead?" (*I Will Not Dance*, 25-26), which is a follow-up to "Sequestered carbon". The poet persona is deeply sad over the destructive effects of oil spillage and gas flaring on the environment. This evokes an emotional response of anger as he addresses his despoilers in sentences framed as interrogatives: "[o]il spills, gas flares: do they make you dance?/Don't you know that carbon sinks will sink the world?" (*I Will Not Dance*, 25). The use of rhetorical questions emphasises the destruction and triggers the required action in the possible audience (reader). The poet persona awakens his people (the Niger Deltans) to the present painful reality where, unfortunately, "[t]oday's battles were lost yesterday" (*I Will Not Dance*, 25). However, he believes that "[t]o awaken is thus to bear the imperative to survive" (Caruth, 1996: 105). Thus, the poet persona enjoins the people that "[t]omorrow's battles must be fought today" (*I Will Not Dance*, 25), or else the consequence will be disastrous, which are detailed in these lines:

> Would you use nuclear power to light a stove?
> If clean technologies roast the sky…
> Be careful people
> Snares are set in the matrix
> And this is no movie…
> Shopping *baskets* work very poorly at the well (*I Will Not Dance*, 25)

The poem relates the insidious consequences of environmental devastation. Through the use of an apostrophe, the poet persona forewarns his people about the irreversibility of environmental devastation. He draws their attention to the "slow violence" inflicted on their land, using the image of "[s]nares…set in the matrix", while emphasising, with metaphoric reference to "shopping baskets", that all those replicative options advocated by the despoilers to save a devastated environment cannot work well just as "shopping *baskets* work very poorly at the well" (*I Will Not Dance*, 25). In sum, a vivid picture of the gradual destruction of the environment and its devastating aftermaths is conjured by the poet persona through metaphor. These aftereffects also generate mental and emotional responses such as "[t]ears" rolling "down many eyes" and "shock" from the sudden change, leading to "sorrows and agony" (*I Will Not Dance*, 25), which could affect their outlook towards life and make them sink into depression. Consequently, the eco-memories of their past near-pristine lands conflate with the present shock of loss, which comingles with sorrow as well as agony, leaving the people in a lachrymal state, and the poem bears witness to this.

Critical of classical trauma theory's supposition of the unspeakable in literary representation of trauma, Banerjee (2020) asserts that "more recent trauma scholarship argues for bearing witness and "speaking out" as necessary for survival. The act of telling is seen as cathartic, necessary, and therapeutic" (4). Similarly, Felman (1992) avers that the "[c]apacity to witness and the act of bearing witness in themselves embody some remedial quality and belong already, in obscure ways, to the healing process" (4). Corroborating this view, Laub (1992) states that "… repossessing one's life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change, which has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process of survival after liberation. The event must be reclaimed because even if successfully repressed, it nevertheless invariably plays a decisive formative role in who one comes to be, and in how one comes to live one's life" (85-86). Regarding the above submissions, *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat* is that medium for speaking out and bearing witness to traumatic experiences in the Niger Delta region, with a goal geared towards social change and possibly, catharsis for the poet (Bassey) and the people, by extension. The collection of poetry articulates the continual ecological subjugation of the minority groups (Niger Delta populace) which leaves a paralysing effect on the populace but does not hinder "speaking out" as described in the poem, "Walking blind" (*I Will Not Dance*, 37-38). The oxymoronic title already suggests their mental state as it foregrounds the ironical twist that has enveloped the lives of the people who are only

> Climbing the trails of tales…
> Folks rising on survival trails
> Seas rising on suicide runs
> Monster monuments to bottomless greed
> Ruins, debts and disappearing wealth (*I Will Not Dance,* 37)

What is left of their present is only beautiful reminiscences, descriptions and images of past pristine environments, which contrast with the horrific present of survival tales and suicides. The deep concern on how to provide for the family and eke out their existence, in addition to unpaid debts, with the destruction of the environment which is their source of livelihoods, might have led some of the natives of the Niger Delta region resort to suicide. In other words, because of fear of being regarded with contempt as incapable of providing for their families, they find suicide as a means of escapism. Expressed differently, the overwhelming experience of former loss and present forfeiture could result in extreme anxiety about the

future, which births profound depression and might eventually lead to suicide. Therefore, rather than challenge the forces of decimation, their depressive state creates a situation of helplessness and frazzles the activist spirit in them. Beyond the material and psychological effects on humans as expatiated, environmental devastation also results in gory consequences for the climate:

> Climate change changes things
> Green to grey; grey to death
> Climate change changes things
> Pond becomes the sea; seas become graves (*I Will Not Dance*, 38)

Climate change causes more stress and anxiety. The symbolic use of colours depicts the regressive state to which the lives of the victims of ecological devastation have been sentenced while having to contend with the degeneration of their fishponds into graveyards. Again, anxiety grips the hearts of the people owing to the fear of the future of climate change (global warming), caused by the abnormal release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from mining activities. Concerning that, Niger Deltans suffer from a recurring state of anxiety, as they also experience "anticipatory anxiety". Suddenly, an epiphanic moment dawns in the poem as they begin to share "hopes" and shape "dreams", their "[e]yes opened, fists clenched/We must reclaim *ubuntu*" (*I Will Not Dance*, 38). This substantiates Kurtz's (2014) proposition that traditional African communities have an abundance of means for trauma cure. This is defined by an all-encompassing view of humanity, based on a strong sense of spirituality. The extensive social ideas recognised by African intellectuals, with notions such as pan-Africanism, Negritude, Ubuntu, and African humanism rely on their cultural means as a medium to facilitate societal elixir. By bonding together in their loss and sharing hopes, they desire to begin life anew and collectively escape their pain, in addition to reclaiming their lands through combined actions of resistance. In essence, solidarity becomes a solution to their traumatic experiences. This is a graphic picture of the Niger Deltans' environmental activists and corroborates Visser's (2015) view which "emphasises Craps' (2013) postulation on the need to shift from classic trauma theory's narrow focus of pathologising victims to situating the problems in the larger historic background as well as taking collective action towards total transformation of the system" (8).

Craps (2013) condemns the prescription of the modernist aesthetic of fragmentation as well as aporia as outstandingly suitable to the duty of testifying to trauma in its Caruthian sense. While he does not disapprove of modernistic styles of illustration, he proposes that it is imperative to check the haste to dismiss anything that departs from the prescribed mode as immaterial. Rather, he argues, trauma theory should take into cognisance the particular social as well as historical contexts where trauma tales are birthed as well as accepted. Moreover, the sense of partisan urgency informing African traumatic literature might to an extent give reasons for their dependence on a "no-frills" and a realistic aesthetic, as against the classic canon of trauma literature, and more pressing is the reality that some of these traumatic incidents are yet unending. The poem "Ezulwini" (*I Will Not Dance*, 42-43) is one of those illustrations that exemplifies this realistic style as the poet persona aims at pricking the consciences of those engaged in the destructive activities in the Niger Delta region. The trope of emotional distress triggered by environmental damage pervades the Niger Delta atmosphere, which is portrayed in their literary works, poetry inclusive. The poem "Ezulwini" presents the picture of a people in distress, through the poet persona's voice, who dream of a pristine environment and a seemingly utopian society like Ezulwini, which contradicts their dystopian reality as recounted in the lines below:

> In the Valley of Heaven
> We behold the mount
> Green fig leaves
> Skirted mountains of tailings (*I Will Not Dance,* 42)

Ezulwini is a valley found in the northwest of Eswatini (formerly referred to in English as Swaziland). The valley, which is also known as The Valley of Heaven, is a place of tourist attraction where nature in all its beauty and magnificence dwells with flora and fauna existing in abundance. However, this lushness contradicts the depleted state of the Niger Delta society which was once blessed with fecundity. The poet persona, whose voice is representative of the Niger Deltans, makes mention of this when he states that

> In the Valley of Heaven
> We raise questions
> How beautiful is the fish from an arsenic sea?
> What besides a new tale of horror do
> So-called free trade pacts announce? (*I Will Not Dance,* 42)

His thoughts are phrased in interrogatives, which establishes his disturbed state over the condition of things, and the ironical twist accentuates the contradiction that has been visited on his land. One ponders if an arsenic sea, which could, in the end, be toxic to human health due to the washing away of carcinogenic elements and other noxious chemicals into the waters, sustain one fish, let alone allow for the thriving of a school of them. The poet persona and his people, only dream of "The Valley of Heaven" with "[w]afts of aromas from inaccessible pots" (*I Will Not Dance*, 43), which draws attention to his imagination of a utopian and productive environment, represented through the symbolic employment of colour green that seems inaccessible. The implicature of dream is trauma because a dream is a desire that triggers all other wishes, and what is dreamt by the poet is, thus, a hopeful recurrence (Hartman, 1995). Traumatogenic conditions compel them to make a voyage from reality to imaginary. Dreams also establish the fact that they seek to evade their present condition through illusions. However, it seems their imagination and conception of a utopian society, metaphorised through "Ezulwini", provokes positive reactions because they suddenly "awake and join their fists" (*I Will Not Dance*, 43). Hence, their illusion does not only provide a means of escapism but strikes the right chords (protest and resistance) towards transformation. In another poem titled "Bottled tears" (or Water Poem) (*I Will Not Dance*, 53-55), similar to the preceding poem, the incongruity between the poet persona's dream and reality, as well the past and present, is described:

> Yesterday I could cry and shed watery tears
> I could labour and freely shoot watery sweat
> But today
> Not so, not so
> Riverbeds turned dustbowls… (*I Will Not Dance*, 53)

The unusual exposure of the environment to volatile compounds from oil mining could lead to climate change, which might contribute to drought, causing severe water shortages and turning "riverbeds" into "dustbowls". Hence, the despoilers' obsession with ultra-possessiveness, as well as insatiable appetites, has turned the Niger Delta region into an arid land, and the depth of the anguish the victims experience is underscored using hyperbole and oxymoron, as the poet persona sweats "blood" and weeps "dry-eyed" (*I Will Not Dance*, 53). In his lachrymal mood, the poet persona circuitously mourns as he ruminates over vivid images of the lost past pristine ecology, and their present precarious condition through his

statement, while alluding to their forefathers who said that water from "[s]treams and rivers, creeks and lagoons" during their time "[w]ere clear, odourless, tasteless, healthy" (*I Will Not Dance*, 53). The water at the moment is nothing close to that of the past, which comes from streams and rivers that cannot sate their taste but cause them to choke on sodium hydroxide, because the processed waters are from drill wells and effluents. Besides, the Niger Delta groans from the hurts and deceptions of thoughtless capitalists "[d]raped in dark cocoons of international financial plans" (*I Will Not Dance*, 53), as all the promises of social support and remediation never happen. As a result, the poet persona is depressed by the agonising memories which portray the dualistic division between his fantasy and reality:

> Dreams of sparkling streams evoke surrealistic brushes
> Fishes dancing past steel hooks and reedy traps…
> I look deep into your heart and see
> Fossils of forgotten dreams
> Calcified…
> Crabs long eaten, turtles hurtled
> Into distant lands (*I Will Not Dance*, 54)

Here, fantasy is prevalent over reality. Fantasy recalls the state of fecundity and productivity. His dreams, like fantasies, largely differ from his reality and the deployment of personification makes the abstract tangible such that the readers can, in some way, vicariously experience the trauma of the Niger Delta people, as it also opens our eyes to our complicity or otherwise to the Niger Delta predicament. In addition to the forced migration of sea creatures, there is also the displacement of humans which the poem records with devastating depictions; "[e]mpty shells, lifeless sockets, death everywhere/Forlorn men, backs broken, homes long gone" (*I Will Not Dance*, 54). The poem paints a gory picture, and the metaphors of pain confirm the presence of traumatogenic experiences, which the people undergo. Moreover, land is an integral part of the people's identity because their identity is constructed to their physical environment; hence, the loss of it leaves the people traumatised, besides the relocation and disconnection from families as well as communities that they suffer. Consequently, they protest against this violence on their lands and lives, as they "demand/Free our waters/Jail the water crooks/Polluters and thieves" (*I Will Not Dance*, 55). Their actions are driven by defiance as well as resistance against the exploiters. Acts of resistance, for the Niger Deltans, have become a way of dealing with the traumatogenic and traumatic impacts of environmental degradation by repelling policies

that relegate them to a powerless position. Also, their resistance might not only have been incited by the desire to arrest the present environmental situation, but also provoked by survivors' guilt. Moreover, to Bassey and others from the Niger Delta region, writing becomes a form of resistance against dominant structures of ecological oppression. Corroborating this view, Felman (1992) avers that "[t]he act of … bearing witness embodies resistance" (279), which in this context is done through writing.

Similar to Craps' (2013) censure against the prescriptive trauma canon, and the universalising and depoliticising approach of classic trauma theory, Rodi-Risberg (2018) questions: "If trauma is seen as a pathologically dissociative rupture does it not tell us that traumatised individuals and groups, not society, need to change? If trauma is conceived of as a single event that is not experienced upon occurrence and demolishes referential access, how can it be testified to, passed on to others, and shared?" (3) Therefore, for a systemic change to occur, she affirms further, the "politics is in the storytelling" (5). In the poem "He took my umbrella" (*I Will Not Dance*, 60), the aesthetic of storytelling (anecdote), which does not hinder the articulation of the traumatic experience, is deployed. Indeed, "storytelling reduces fragmentation, dissociation, and other trauma symptoms" (Visser, 2018:128). The poet persona, in the aforementioned poem, is emotionally traumatised by profound abandonment and extreme deprivation displayed by the despoilers:

> He took my umbrella on Maxiplein
> And looking not back left me in the rain
>
> Soaked to the bone
> I was so so alone
> Save for a bent pole (*I Will Not Dance*, 60)

Through the use of extended metaphor as well as euphemistic expressions, the poet persona presents a graphic story of the grand-scale environmental suffering that he experienced at the hands of the pillagers; and his trauma is representative of his people's trauma. These poetic devices heighten the evocative feelings of desolation, anguish and loneliness, though they might have been deployed by the poet to moderate the pain. The poet persona relates memories of past loss and how he was dwarfed by his possessions and drained of his resources by the regressive behaviour of the exploiters of his environment, leaving him with "a bent pole", which connotes shattered ecology. In his dispossessed state, he shouted "in

the rain" but they were all "futile screams in thunder" as he wondered "what was the gain" of shouting because, as he crawls "home alone", the plunderer "is waiting at the door" (*I Will Not Dance*, 60). The shouts imply an attempt at resistance by the victims, which was met with violence, with the exploiter's comeback. The imagery of despair, as well as hopelessness, is foregrounded here, and his trauma is also implied through the recurring images of solitude. Also, the reference to the plunderer's wait suggests that the trauma of the poet persona is an endless reality, as the former tarries to cause more damage. This poem gives a photographic picture of the depth of agony the Niger Delta people undergo owing to massive and continual destruction. However, the aesthetics of storytelling might be used by the poet to offer some form of therapeutic relief from the constellation of traumatic experiences.

Similarly, in another poem, "Kragero" (62-63), the poet persona alludes to some painful memories that have defined the Niger Delta inhabitants' reality by employing contrastive expressions in relating the disparity between Kragero and the Niger Delta region. Kragero is a town in Norway which attracts Norwegians and tourists from other parts of the world with its nature-dwelling scenery, while the Niger Delta region is an area where people are stuck in the murkiness of ecological devastation and desolation. The beautiful sight of Kragero recalls the beauty and grandeur that was once associated with the Niger Delta region, while the nostalgic remembrances of the past (at home) on his visit to Kragero is depicted as the poet persona peeped

> … into the clear waters of Kragero
> I see the bed
> And recall the crude oil crusted seabeds of the Niger Delta
> I see fingerlings and mother fishes frolic between the webs
> Of paddling toes of sated swans (*I Will Not Dance*, 62)

The translucency that characterises the waters from which the poet persona could get a clear reflection of the seabed, together with the aquatic habitats in Kragero, brings back harrowing memories of the turbidity that describes the seabeds in the Niger Delta ecology, which reflects nothing and houses almost nothing. As the poet persona muses upon the excruciating reminiscences, "[t]he sun breaks through my thoughts and the wind!/The wind gets stopped in its tracks …" This confirms his psychologically distressed state as he travels back and forth in thoughts while "[o]n the bed of this Kragero fjord" (*I Will Not Dance*, 62).

The interruption of the sun jolts him back to the reality that characterisees the Niger Delta region, where "crude oil defied the booms" and "smeared the rocks" (*I Will Not Dance*, 63). Rather than boom accompanying the exploration and expropriation of crude oil, the oil opposes such boom and, in its stead, brings about doom for the victims of the locale. Yet, the promises made by the government and the multinational companies to fund railway projects, one of their many paper projects, with the revenues from the sales of crude oil did not see the light of the day; as the poet persona remarks that they "hop on the bus/Since the rail tracks have seen been unlaid …" (*I Will Not Dance*, 63). This, among many other promises that went unfulfilled despite the continual devastation of the region, makes the poet persona experience "[s]leepless dreams slip past my mind" (63), thereby suffering from a situation of unrest.

To conclude the analysis of the poems in Bassey's *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat*, the politics of resistance over Caruthian classical theory of aporia and unspeakability of the traumatic event is underscored. Resistance recalls LaCapra's (2001) concept of "working through", against "acting out", trauma, and confirms the fact that trauma is speakable. Resistance becomes a way of working through the traumatic experiences of the Niger Delta people, and healing thereby, which contradicts the hegemonic psychological concepts of recovery. The wounded metamorphose from a state of reticence to articulateness, resilience and defiance, insisting on being heard. This is demonstrated in the poem entitled "Yasuni" (*I Will Not Dance*, 64-65), where the poet persona commands the people of the Niger Delta region to:

> Silence the rigs, hang the monster shovels, block the pipes …
> *Ubuntu* that which ties us together…
> Good living, excellent in any tongue
> We refuse to fuel the engines of wrath and pains (*I Will Not Dance*, 65)

The poet persona beckons on children of the Niger Delta land; while referring Yasuni, a National Park in Ecuador which houses several barrels of crude oil, and other oil field regions, to resist the despoilers and combat ecological damage. The poet persona believes in the potentiality of resistance in bringing them closer to their eventual victory, and this is represented through metaphors of resistance against subversive local leaders and multinational companies in the poems. Interestingly, Clark (2018) advocates resistance

(what Fanon has been criticised for as promoting violence) in all its kinds as essential to reclaiming one's freedom from traumatic experiences. Resistance is also emphasised in the titling of the collection, *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat*, with the capitalisation of both content and grammatical words, which does not conform to the capitalisation rules in book titles in English. To summarise, one wonders how close to their victory this resistance has brought them because the exploiters are still present with the exploitation persisting. Perhaps, the need to avoid posterity's censure is the guiding principle for their defiance.

4.6 Metaphoric resonance of traumatic pains in Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*

Advancing the subject of resistance to traumatising conditions that pervade the Niger Delta region is yet another dynamic poet – Ibiwari Ikiriko. Ibiwari Ikiriko is also a vibrant force to reckon with on the Niger Delta poetic landscape, and he does not mince words in representing the woes and wails that have befallen his natal home (Niger Delta region). Reading through many of his poems, we see a distressed poet tortured by memories of loss and helplessness simultaneously, owing to the shattering experience of environmental devastation which not only disrupts the existence of the people but has become the diurnal realities of his landscape. This is foregrounded with the use of the first-person pronoun "I" in almost all the poems in his collection *Oily Tears of the Delta* (*Oily Tears*). However, his experience is a prototype of the plight of the people of the Niger Delta, a people whose history is defined by pain as he speaks for them. Thus, Ikiriko's poetry is testimonial literature which bears witness to the disturbing realities of the Niger Delta denizens. Expatiating the aforementioned, Jensen (2020) asserts that testimonial literature "… is a form of witness to historical human rights violation that uses the voice of the 'I' to tell of the often-traumatic experiences of a suffering community" (323). Moreover, poems which have as their thematic focus, environmental degradation as traumatic stressor, were analysed. Even though his poems possess a subtle undertone of resistance as a panacea, while they testify to the unending decades of the painful sting of trauma, the resistance is yet to yield the expected ripple effects. Distressingly, the Niger Delta region is a perfect example of a place where people experience unfathomable suffering and loss with scathing physiological and psychological impacts because of the symbiotic correlation between humans and their environment. In the poem "Evening already" (*Oily Tears*, 11), the poet persona relates the psychical effects of the stark realities of environmental devastation:

I had listened
To the voices within me
To the voices around me
That I am a time-bomb. (*Oily Tears,* 11)

The persona hallucinates as he hears voices that seem real, but are only created by figment of his imagination. As such, he is deluded into thinking that he possesses an extraordinary ability to defeat the despoilers of his land. Sooner than expected, reality stares him in the face, and he discovers that he is "…only a landmine/…only a coconut" which "…cannot detonate/Without external pressure" (*Oily Tears,* 11), which confirms his incapacitated state as the gauze of chimaera wears out. The incongruity between imagination and reality underscores the poet persona's psychological condition while drawing attention to his helplessness as, in his presence, "… day's light" changes "… from gold/Past silver/With shadows lengthening" (*Oily Tears,* 11). This suggests the powerlessness of the Niger Deltans in the face of pandemic alterations of their environment by oil conglomerates as well as the dictatorial government. While the trauma of helplessness is mirrored, the metaphor of the decrement of day's light implies the stages of deterioration the Niger Delta and her populace have undergone to reach its current status – a shadow of effulgence. Also, the expression "[w]ith shadows lengthening" connotes a continuous state of being, but it also insinuates that the degeneration is unceasing even till this present day. Unexpectedly, the poet persona seems to have experienced a moment of epiphany as he says that he is "…resolved/Not to be wasted by time" (*Oily Tears,* 11). Besides, "[e]piphanies generally result in positive outcomes for those who choose to embrace the opportunity" (Chilton, 2015: 19). One would think that the poet persona has woken from slumber to take up the chance to effectuate the necessary change, but his epiphanic moment is short-lived as he suffers a relapse due to the "[c]lamping weight of cares" and confesses:

Cares before me
Cares behind me
Cares within me
Cares around me. (*Oily Tears,* 11-12)

The image of a disturbed personality is emphasised using the device of anaphora (a form of repetition), which reinscribes the traumatogenic experience and connotes an intense feeling of pain, as the poet persona is burdened by the weight of 'ecological grief' ensuing from the destruction of his land and its repercussions. Ecological grief has been referred to as the

natural reaction to ecological losses. This loss leads to damaging consequences of trauma on humans, such as the threat to identity (as the life of the poet persona becomes redefined by the traumatogenic incident) and mental well-being (confusion with the presence of several voices), and psychic instability (absence of relative stability with the presence of ongoing environmental losses) demonstrated in the poem. The emphasis on the thought processes in the poem reflects the state of the troubled poet persona overwhelmed by grief.

This weight of grief is carried over into the next poem "Evening already ii" (*Oily Tears*, 13), which is a sequel. Yet again, the poem draws attention to the poet persona who is extremely worried and grief-stricken by the invasion of his territory by the pillagers, and he compares the "cares" (massive encroachment of oil multinationals) that "crowd around" him to "wretched huts around/An only Queen House" existing "On a land-starved island" (*Oily Tears*, 13). His comparison validates the status of the Niger Delta region in Nigeria as the country's treasure trove. The austere experiences of the Niger Delta region are transposed into metaphors. Unfortunately, because of its existence on a "land-starved island" and being "[f]ed upon by the encroaching sea", its "[e]nshrouded Beauty" fails "to exude" (*Oily Tears*, 13). The marginalisation and pauperisation of the Niger Delta, a prodigious source of fortune for the nation, which has been depleted terribly and suctioned enormously is emphasised. The poet persona laments his state:

> I am enmeshed in cares
> Like a kite in a cage,
> Pinion clipped, feathers furled.
> Air glider ground borne. (*Oily Tears*, 13)

Through the deployment of simile, the poem voices the distressed state of mind of the poet persona who is plagued by anxiety over the situation of the region – the bearer of the nation's burden, which is now a shadow of herself because of mindless exploitation. The poem ends abruptly with a sudden turn towards determination by the poet persona to save time, by resisting the policies that put his Delta in a degrading state and securing the land from, perhaps, annihilation on account of uncontrolled and excessive extraction of oil. Therefore, oil which was once a symbol of opulence has become an embodiment of trauma for the Niger Delta populace, as they contend with "oil shock" owing to privation. This dramatic twist of deprivation amid plenty is demonstrated in another poem titled "Baseless compass"

(*Oily Tears*, 21). With a melancholic tone, the poet persona vividly describes this harrowing situation using the image of a space ship:

> We are adrift
> On a space ship
> With all our rights
> And benefits suspended (*Oily Tears*, 21)

Deprivation has become the hallmark of the people's existence in Niger Delta region, which is laced with abandonment and desertion. This deprivation leads to poverty and poverty aggravates trauma. Corroborating this, Resler (2019) states that "… poverty can exacerbate trauma caused by other stressors while also being a barrier for seeking services and help for trauma exposure" (1). As a result of their pathetic situation and poverty-ridden condition, the Niger Delta people become so psychologically drained and intensely sad to the extent that "[h]ope leaks out/From" their "insides", leaving them "…empty/As a basket of water" (*Oily Tears*, 21). The hope that they once nursed and believed in its capability to enliven their anticipation for a rejuvenation in a post-devastated society decants, making them vulnerable to depression because "[h]opelessness is a core component of depression" (Assari & Lankarani, 2016:1). Therefore, their vulnerability to depression becomes facilitated by the feelings of hopelessness. The deployment of simile and oxymoron in comparing their state of hopelessness is thoughtful, as it emphasises the magnitude of loss and bleakness. In addition, their state of destitution leaves them "shattered" as "[a] calabash of crabs/Crashed on concrete" (*Oily Tears*, 21), underscoring their psychological state. The deliberate use of alliteration and onomatopoeia emphasises the crumbling state of the Niger Delta as well as the mental breakdown of the people, as they are not only dethroned and debased from superintending over their natural endowment, but they are also dismembered. This is the traumatogenic experience the people of the Niger Delta go through, and the images in the poems are deployed as metaphors to describe the quandary of modernity.

Nikro (2014) states that "with respect to the study of trauma in postcolonial literature, the question of context becomes, it seems to me, more pressing, when we consider how trauma embodies existential experiences of atrocity and survival, of coping in the aftermath of personal and social disintegration, while disclosing the limits of narrative, reference, and representation" (2). Therefore, texts that do not conform to the overriding modernist

aesthetics of fragmentation, prescribed by Caruth and others alike, should not be dismissed, rather particular socio-historical settings that produced them should be emphasised. Also, the deployment of fragmentation in the postcolonial context might stand a risk of concealing our connivance as well as capability for malicious acts, rather than engaging us (the reader). Concerning the aforementioned critical assertions, many of the poems in this collection employ simple language and narrative style in chronicling the painful reality that defines the Niger Delta region. One of which is "Okara's nun" (*Oily Tears*, 25-26), where intertextuality is utilised to foreground trauma because "[r]eferences to another work in a text can indicate trauma…" (Blake, 2009: 195). Moreover, trauma has been described as a "potentially intertextual experience. An experience that is unrecognisable and that temporarily defies consciousness, but is bought into realms of understanding through relational means" (Wilson, 2022: 85). Through intertextuality, the contrast between the present condition of the river and the past of Gabriel Okara's famous poem, "The Call of the River Nun" is portrayed. Besides, intertextuality also presents the relationship between the colonial era when Okara wrote this poem and the postcolonial aeon when Ikiriko penned down his, as the postcolonial leaders continued the destruction of the society from where the colonial masters left off. As a consequence, the trauma of loss informs this lyrical lamentation:

> Okara's
> Silver-surfaced
> Nun
> Is no more.
>
> Now
> Crude-surfaced
> It lumbers
> Along lifeless,
> Like dead wood. (*Oily Tears,* 25)

The contrast foregrounds the barrenness and lifelessness that have visited the Niger Delta rivers, owing to oil spillage, which makes the river reflect "nothing" and invoke "nothing" but "ghosts…/Of spillage/And pillage" (*Oily Tears*, 25). In other words, there is an absence of translucency as the poet persona cannot behold his reflection through the river, contrary to what was obtainable during the time Okara wrote about in his poem. Also, due to Africans' attachment to and worship of the gods of water and other inanimate things that

they believe bring fortunes and secure their future, the pollution of their river, which resulted in the relocation or death of their gods, complicated their loss, making it a very tragic one. Referring to this loss, John and Nnadozie (2021) believe that "[t]he destruction of plants, animals and the pollution of local streams and rivers have affected the religious worship and rituals of adherents of traditional religions in the world especially in Africa and Asia" (113). Therefore, the accumulative ecological losses make the river invoke grief, in place of prosperity. What is more, the poet persona tells of "[w]ails tales" multiplied by "[p]aupers waking up millionaires" (*Oily Tears,* 26) consequent on unmindful exploitation, while his people are not only pauperised but also struggle for life itself. Besides, the span of the river, and by extension, the life expectancy of the people, is shortened through "[e]ffluent-effete, sludge-silvered" which "slop-lumbers to the sea" (*Oily Tears,* 26) leaving the region sterile.

In another poem, "For Ken" (38), the poet persona continues lamenting the sense of loss that have characterised not only his homeland but also their brave men, including a significant icon, Ken Saro-wiwa who was hung alongside eight other Ogonis for dissidence and acts of defiance against the government. Saro-wiwa was an environmental and human rights activist who contended against the destruction of his homeland and other Niger Delta communities and was sentenced to death in response to his remonstrations. This is commonplace in the region where every form of dissent against environmental degradation championed by oil multinationals, in cahoots with the government, is crushed. Sadly, the poet persona reflects on the fact that the Saro-wiwa's death has not yielded the expected outcome, rather "[i]t is equaled only/By the daily departures…/Of the famished and fed-up" (*Oily Tears*, 38), owing to the continual devastation of the environment. This displacement of vast numbers of people often leads to loss of identity, or hybrid identity, because of their exit from the land, which has been the cornerstone of identity. Consequently, they experience displacement-induced trauma as the people are forced to leave the known for the unknown with almost an impossible future because "a future is only possible, however, when the present is used as a starting place" (Oorlog, 2016:28).

Foregrounding further the potential of displacement to engender trauma, incidents of displacement as well as migration have turned out to be more conspicuous instances of trauma, which is a change that might denote a significant development in trauma studies;

while in times past, genocide, particularly the Holocaust has, till recent times, functioned as the dominant example of collective trauma (Kurtz, 2018). This exilic condition has become a source of daily apprehension for the Niger Delta people. Hence, the poet persona is not only psychologically distressed by the enforced exodus and thoughts that Saro-Wiwa's death has led nowhere, but he is also possibly haunted by extreme survival guilt. He articulates his grief thus:

> The injury is written
> Deep in my soul
> Leaving a manuscript
> To remain and remind
> Me of the deeds
> Left undone. (*Oily Tears*, 38)

This portrait is indicative of psychic injury. The disturbing remains and the reminiscences of past loss for the poet (Ibiwari Ikiriko) are enabling, as it makes him take responsibility by using his poetry in resisting injustice and seeking reparation for his land. This is perhaps the same formidable cycle the poet hopes to continue with the narrative quality of his poetry in a way that engages the reader with the poetry text and propels him or her to action, which resonates Craps' submission.

Similarly, in the poem "Rivers at 25" (*Oily Tears*, 48-50), the poet persona recollects painful memories of a time in the lives of the Niger Delta people when they had several meetings with the government, to celebrate Rivers State (a state that houses a lot of oil wells) at 25, one of the states in the Niger Delta region, to re-create a viable ecosystem for the people, which would improve their living conditions. Unfortunately, this yielded nothing but "Frustrations…/Yearnings and yells/Harassments" as well as "Further frustrations, promises/Denials and betrayals" (*Oily Tears*, 48). The emotional frustration of the Niger Delta people is closely linked to the bouts of confusing emotions at work and anger at their stark reality, as their hopes keep fluctuating thus: "[h]opes, high/Hopes. Diminishing hope", "F-R-U-S-T-R-A-T-I-O-N-S" (*Oily Tears*, 48). Just when their hopes gets resuscitated and pegged high in a proposed rejuvenated society, it ended up being momentary which led to heightened frustrations and insurrection that was "short-lived" and met with "Detentions, fires/Killings, starvation, destructions", in addition to "[l]ive-burials, deaths" (*Oily Tears*, 48-49). What picture could be more descriptive of a traumatogenic experience? It was

through these "… clatter/Of tribulations" (49) that they finally realise how helpless and powerless they are in the presence of the collaborative forces. Their clamours and protests only got them severe repercussions, which ultimately caused them mental torture. The poem concludes with the poet persona asking, "[w]ith several/Silver-surfaced" rivers of yesteryears which are "[n]ow crude-surfaced/How much silver/Is there in the/Jubilee?" (*Oily Tears,* 50) The pun is deliberate, as it tones down the pain and stresses the magnitude of loss simultaneously. Also, the use of rhetorical questions validates their powerlessness as they are troubled with unanswered questions and correlative actions.

Substantiating Craps' proposition of trauma and opposition to the classical delineation of trauma, Erikson (1991) emphasises that trauma should be comprehended as "the resulting state rather than the initiating event...so it is the *harm* that defines and gives shape to the initial event, the *harm* that gives it its name" (456). This implies that it is people's reaction to an event that gives it its traumatic quality, rather than the situation that initiated the crisis. This is demonstrated in the Niger Delta environment, where the people contend with extreme anxiety. Unfortunately, there is an interconnection between anxiety and fear, as the impact of the former leads to the latter. Therefore, their vulnerability to unusual fear becomes activated, as the environment becomes the source of anxiety. This is reflected in the poetry from the Niger Delta, which is set against the background of constant danger. A typical example is the poem "Under pressure" (*Oily Tears*, 51), which captures vividly the plight of the people living in constant fear and hypervigilance:

> DANGER!
> High pressure oil pipe line – Keep off!
> Don't anchor!
>
> DEATH!
> High tension gas pipe line –Keep clear!
> No fishing! (*Oily Tears,* 51)

This anxiety-filled atmosphere permeated with a tense mood is amplified by the use of capital letters, which emphasises the message and creates abnormally heightened alertness. Apart from the fact that these signboards are cenotaphs to ecological trauma and resemble the erection of a plaque cautionary of past as well as present danger, which serve as perpetual reminders to the people, they also engender anxiety and bring back tormenting memories of dead relatives who passed on as a result of contacts with such dangerous

pipelines. Besides, "[i]n general, anxiety has an anticipatory quality" (Ifowodo, 2013:57), which means that the traumatised might begin to envisage a future environmental apocalypse (terrifying future) or even imagine one already in the offing, which is disturbing in itself. This is similar to what Kaplan (2016:54) refers to as "a kind of pretrauma or anticipatory anxiety". Thus, apart from losing their means of livelihood to locations where these pipes are situated, the existential anxiety also causes panic attacks as the sensations of fear spread through the communities with warnings which read like threats such as "[t]respassers will be compressed. /Roasted. Melted" (*Oily Tears*, 51). This gives rise to "… full tide of pressure/… over" their "land and persons" (*Oily Tears*, 51) as their communities are made unsafe with the people living at the edge. In sum, the lives of the Niger Delta become rife with anxiety to the extent that they develop hyperalertness.

As is the natural practice of the poets from the Niger Delta region, they do not fail in representing in their poetry the connivance of the local representatives. In the poem entitled "Dinma: better dead than blind" (*Oily Tears*, 53-55) also by Ikiriko, the poet persona chronicles the trajectories of the lives of the Niger Delta people, who contend with severe distress ensuing from the trauma of betrayal by their local leaders. These are leaders whom the care as well as the protection of the people and land were entrusted into their hands. However, they are devoid of empathy as well as concern for their subjects and environment. There is no recourse to preserving their heirloom. Rather, they contribute to sabotaging and subjecting their communities to a lot of physical as well as mental anguish because of their greed, and the precarious state of the populace is revealed through the metaphors of pain and images of pangs. These metaphors give a striking picture of their predicament. This sense of betrayal and state of helplessness together with feelings of loss without closure crammed the troubling thoughts of the poet persona, which is rendered through the deployment of interior monologue:

> Lone Oasis, so
> The desert storm
> Was not tentative, afterall.
> It raged to be terminal mid-way? (*Oily Tears*, 53)

Here, the poet persona bewails the desolation that has been visited on his community in the wake of oil extraction and exploitation. He is emotionally devastated by the fact that his

imagination of the temporariness of the destruction of the environment has become an enduring state of being, with a lot of fatalities already recorded halfway. Then, the extent of damage that will characterise his society when it is past mid-way is left to our imagination. The poet persona confesses that "[t]his episode confounds me/Frankly speaking, it intrigues me" (*Oily Tears*, 53) confirming the psychic conflicts he experiences as his emotions shift from confusion to fascination owing to the traumatogenic impact of environmental degradation. This reveals the psychic dimension of environmental degradation, as it also emphasises the emotional responses to it. It can also be stated that fear and worry about the future of the environment might have led to the poet persona's confused state. Soon, he becomes "…numbed and sieged./Like eye-balls by glaucoma blinding them" (*Oily Tears*, 53). The succession of tragic ecological occurrences has benumbed him so much that he wishes to be "…dead than blind" (53), which suggests suicide ideation. The use of simile in portraying the trauma endured by the denizens of the affected communities foregrounds the magnitude of their pain. The poet persona believes that it is better to be "dead than blind" (53) with blindness insinuating a state of helplessness for the inhabitants of Niger Delta region, caused by the destruction of the environment. This is a belief that he is convinced might be shared by the physician and optician, unlike the musician because:

> For then music, all muses inspired,
> Is more melodious and massages the more.
>
> The mind and muscles of the masses
> Pupillary dregs of the retina of power. (*Oily Tears*, 54)

Just when the poet persona is on the verge of giving up, the momentary soothing power of art captures his thoughts, which foregrounds the significance of music in alleviating pains. This corroborates Craps' (2013) proposition when he repeatedly criticises the standpoint of classic trauma theorists' who tend to assume as true the universal validity of Western modes of recovery, which leaves out culture-bound modes of recuperation. For the African man, art is an integral aspect of his existence because of the diverse kinds of roles it plays. For instance, in this poem, the poet persona draws attention to the potency of music in providing remedial comfort and relief for the people from their traumatising reality. However, the temporary potency of music to soothe pain is alluded to because almost immediately the poet persona wonders: "O! Who now will resolve/Issues in their favour" and "Who will talk

and watch/And pray and act for them?" (*Oily Tears,* 54), with the betrayal of their local leaders. These are only helpless consternations, which attest to the loss of their local representatives (leaders) who, for their avarice, lick the boots of the despoilers and sacrifice the future of their people. Therefore, the people are caught between protesting against oppression and retreating from the battlefront, because while "[a] crusade is in conclave", the "concierge" is "in retreat" (*Oily Tears,* 54). In other words, the leaders who double as their spokespersons leave the people at the mercy of the despoilers, abandoning them to their fate. Reiterating these opposing feelings experienced by Niger Deltans, Schonfelder (2021: 320) affirms that "[t]rauma also tends to lead to ambivalent feelings of too much and too little memory, represented by flashbacks and amnesia, and to produce contrary responses of numbing versus aggression, withdrawal versus protest". Sadly, the physical presence of loss of land and the absence of forthright leaders lead to excruciating pains where "[i]nnumerable eyes are/Turned into rivers" (*Oily Tears,* 55). The deployment of hyperbole in the above excerpt draws attention to the unbearably distressing condition that moves them to uncontrollable tears, which can be emotionally and mentally exhausting.

In another poem, "A government ago" (*Oily Tears,* 60), the traumatised state of the Niger Delta people is dramatised. The poet persona relates how, in the wake of oil extraction, the people attempted to resist and defy the hegemonic authority bent on despoiling their communities. They already had these tranquilising illusions as well as sedating projections to disrupt the plans and deny the despoilers access to their lands:

> On its way coming
> We swaggered a boast: NO
> Not here that Is not
> Uganda, nor Zaire, nor Liberia (*Oily Tears*, 60)

However, no sooner had they made their master plan than it came crashing before their eyes, simply because they could not contend against the pillagers whose machineries and agencies were more powerful than theirs. The pillagers had them "beaten" and they "[s]campered into holes" with "words shy" (*Oily Tears*, 60). As a result, their fortified resistance in the face of advancing forces was squelched. They were not only suppressed but also intimidated, so much so that they became diffident, while the plunderers gained ground. Perhaps, this is what has got the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region into their present

condition. Although it appears like they have emerged into "...token freedom" today, they "…mouth words, words, words" while comparing themselves to the "[s]urvivors of the holocaust" (*Oily Tears*, 60). Yes! The people have gained some form of freedom from the despoilers; though, the seeming freedom from the despoilers is almost an illusion as it cannot oil the wheels of their resistance and effectuate the required change. However, the poet persona ponders if they can, in grand style like the "jealous children of Jacob/Resolve will into wheels/And affirm – "Never again"?" (*Oily Tears*, 60); then, their total liberation will become a reality.

The subtle undertone of resistance is underscored here with the historical allusion to the holocaust and the Jews, which recalls Craps' (2013) critique against classical trauma theory that largely discounts the relationship between the metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas. Similarly, Visser (2015) emphasises that "the histories of trauma of the Holocaust, slavery, and colonialism, re-enacted through narrative, must not be considered as contesting for primacy, but rather as non-contesting and co-existing, from a recognition that collectively held traumatic memories resonate profoundly" (4). Establishing this cross-cultural affinity between the Western and Non-western minority trauma will foster action and promote solidarity towards stomping environmental degradation, without any prejudice to its being less traumatic. Unfortunately, this is yet to happen. Little wonder, international bodies for peace and unity treat the situation in the Niger Delta region as negligible, which does not boost the confidence of those contending against the plundering agencies. Therefore, until the world begins to see the affiliation between the metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas, without relegating the sufferings of the people to the background, the Niger Delta region might not attain her true sense of freedom. Until then, the poet persona in the titled poem of the collection "Oily Tears" (*Oily Tears*, 62) hopes:

> These oily tears
> Dripping down the tears on your depressed face
> Will one day be staunched (*Oily Tears*, 62)

The poem hints at the state of depression that characterises the lives of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region, as they anticipate a utopian society, free from domination and excruciating pains. Despite their present predicament, they still nurse a kind of hope described as "persevering hope". Sandra Yu Rueger et. al. (2022) define persevering hope

"as the dispositional motivation to endure when a desired outcome seems unattainable, unlikely or even impossible" (7). This fits the description of the Niger Delta denizens' hope, where the day of eventual triumph over the distressing conditions that accompany environmental degradation and the machinery deployed seems far-fetched, that is if it will ever come to be. Yet, the people of the Niger Delta region keep nurturing hopes. Perhaps, temporary respite is provided through the choice to hope amidst hopelessness on the one hand, while, hope, as a coping mechanism, prevents them from lapsing into despair on the other hand. Substantiating hope as a coping mechanism, Richard Lazarus (1999) states that "[w]e hope because without hope we must despair. As such, the capacity to hope is a vital coping resource…And we look for reasons to justify and sustain our hope, even against the odds" (674). To conclude, in *Oily Tears of the Delta,* although the poet persona mourns this forfeiture, displacement and dispossession of their possessions, he still believes in the power of resistance to actualise the prestigious liberation of his people someday.

4.7 Summary of findings

The manifestations of traumatogenic inscriptions and trauma are represented through several traumatic motifs. Psychic torture is demonstrated in Ojaide's poem "If those called militants" (*Songs*, 112). The poem reads: "[i]f the laboring poor/had the power to overturn their suffering/they would make servants of their lords". Sadly, this is only imaginary. Thus, the poet persona laments the Niger Deltans' impotence in the face of anguish and he is psychologically tortured by that reality. Also, Ikiriko's "For Ken" (*Oily Tears*, 38) emphasises this psychic injury, as the poet persona states that "[t]he injury is written/Deep in my soul/Leaving a manuscript". Emotional distress at disconcerting memories engendered by environmental damage is also inscribed in poems such as Ojaide's "Come and spend a day with me" (*Songs*, 128) where the poet persona says "[c]ome and spend a day with me…/come and experience the life we live/and see for yourself the rigors we bear", and in Bassey's "Ezulwini" (*I Will Not Dance*, 42), he dreams of "the Vallley of Heaven…/Wafts of aromas from inaccessible pots".

Imprinted pain and sadness is also implied in all the poems of this study. For example, in Ikiriko's "Dinma: better dead than blind" (*Oily Tears*, 53), the poet persona laments thus: [l]one Oasis, so/The desert storm/Was not tentative, afterall…/This episode confounds me".

The poem foregrounds the magnitude of pain. Also, Bassey's "Bottled tears" (*I Will Not Dance*, 53-55), the poet persona confesses that "[y]esterday I could cry and shed watery tears/I could labour and freely shoot watery sweat/But today/Not so, not so/Riverbeds turned dustbowls". The poem records the tons of pain the Niger Delta people experience owing to the despoilers' obsession with acquisitiveness. Grief and rage for the loss of their near-pristine environment, loss of means of livelihood, and possibly loss of lives are inscribed in all the collections of poems.

The Niger Delta people also suffer from delusion as demonstrated in Ojaide's "Only in his memory" (*Songs*, 120) where "only in his memory/does" the homeland warrior "recover and walk a stranger to himself". In Otto's "Mirage" (*Letters*, 70), the poet persona says "[l]isten now, you mirage-hearted/I sparkle as/Stars and gems could do/Even yet, with your/Armies of Vicissitudes, in vain you strive". However, in reality, the environment is stuck in the murky process of environmental degradation. Also, in Ogbowei's "marsh boy V" (*marsh boy*, 24), the poet persona envisages the "elusive army of the debased/take the burning brand to the pernicious precinct/a wailing bullet burying a complicit consul", whereas in reality, it is his land that suffers from unending devastation and the people from constant oppression. The poems suggest the poet persona's, and by extension, their people's, unbalanced state, due to the disquieting effect of reminiscences and wishful desires.

Also, illusion, entwined in delusion which has no objective reality and serve as temporary comfort, is portrayed in Obi's "Oloibiri" (*Tears*, 13-14). The poet persona hears "… the celebration/the joyful uproar that comes with controlling the blessings/of my God-given inheritance"; and in Otto's "Hope lulls the earth" (*Letters*, 38), he sees "… everything beautiful–/After a long chemical holocaust/Caked our earth and ruined lives". In Ogbowei's "the horrors of history" (*marsh boy*, 44), the poet persona talks of "dead souls singing to sorrowful swamps/rally the restive region/bring the fragrance of freedom/to internees of concentration camps". However, Ogbowei's "amnesty" (*marsh boy*, 63-66) confirms the falsity in the above poem because in reality, the people of the Niger Delta region have been "sacrificed on the altar of profit/…forced to father an illusion".

More so, the magnitude of destruction of the Niger Delta region makes the people susceptible to depression. For example, in Ojaide's "The zestful river lost its fine fingers" (*Songs*, 122), the poet persona says that "[y]ou wouldn't know this was the primeval haven/this home whose residents drop from agonies", which implies a descent into a state of hopelessness, then depression when the threshold for pain gives way. In Obi's "Tomorrow's debris" (*Tears*, 12), the poet persona states that "the old and desolate hold tight/to the shovel of hope/and dig into the depths of their minds" suggesting the onset of depression. Also, in Ikiriko's "Oily Tears" (*Oily Tears*, 62), the poem records the "… oily tears/Dripping down the tears on your depressed face", hinting at the state of depression that characterise the Niger Delta denizens' lives because of their ironical living and the present condition of their land, which is a commemorative plaque to their former magnificent haven.

A constant state of anxiety and climate of fear caused by fear of painful revelations of the past, present and imminent danger, in addition to future environmental apocalypse is also represented in the poems. For example, in Ikiriko's "Under pressure" (*Oily Tears*, 51), the poem reads: "DANGER!.../Trespassers will be compressed…/O what a full tide of pressure/Brim they over our land and persons". Also, in Ogbowei's "on the margin of consciousness III" (*marsh boy*, 53), the poet persona echoes that "this road paved with good intentions/carries us to the city of continual convulsions" denoting a mental state of anxiety. Similarly, in Otto's "The Conflagration" (*Letters*, 21), the poet persona sees "in the rude ominous light, silhouettes/Of crimson-eyed firebugs hurdle to obliterate/The lush and luxuriant landscapes" implying anticipatory anxiety. Lastly, in Obi's "Resolve" (*Tears*, 46), the poet persona's pretraummatic state, which is due to severe anxiety is hinted at: "I am sitting on the edge of anxiety/I am gazing into the mist of tomorrow/Blurred and shapeless".

However, the insignias of trauma are also projected through self-estrangement and loneliness in Ojaide's "Only in his memory" (*Songs*, 120), where "only in memory brought alive in dreams/does" the homeland warrior "recover and walk a stranger to himself", suggesting his unbalanced state owing to his state of helplessness in protecting the rights of his people. There are also feelings of insomnia in Obi's "A taste of tomorrow" (*Tears*, 45), as the poet persona "… toss[es] and turn[s] on [her] tired bed/sleep miles and miles away from [her]"; and despair in Otto's "Sterility" (*Letters*, 43) where the poet persona laments

thus: "[y]ou of fair feminine grace that shines against/The ageless darkness of womanhood…/Why keep frozen with burning despair?" due to terrifying memories and uncertainty of the future. Agitation owing to mindless exploitation and frustration on account of unfulfilled promises is also inscribed in Ikiriko's "Rivers at 25" (*Oily Tears*, 48-50), as "Frustrations…/Further frustrations, promises/Denials and betrayals" lead to anger.

The people of the Niger Delta region become vulnerable to mental confusion as a result of the present state of their environment. For example, in Ogbowei's "marsh boy V" (*marsh boy*, 24), the poet persona sees "the elusive army of the debased/take the burning brand to the pernicious precinct". The elusiveness of the army denotes their mental confused state. Also, in Ikiriko's "Dinma: better dead than blind" (*Oily Tears*, 53-55), the poet persona confesses that "[t]his episode confounds me/Frankly speaking, it intrigues me", confirming the presence of psychic conflict. Also, hallucination is demonstrated in Ikiriko's "Evening already" (*Oily Tears*, 11). The poet persona hallucinates as he says that he "had listened to the voices within [him]/To the voices around [him]/That [he is] a time-bomb", only to discover that he (the poet persona) as well as the people of the Niger Delta possesses no extraordinary ability to defeat the despoilers.

Psychic numbing is also foregrounded in Ikiriko's "Dinma: better dead than blind" (*Oily Tears*, 53-55), where the poet persona confesses that he is "… numbed and sieged./Like eye-balls by glaucoma blinding them" because of the succession of tragic ecological occurrences. Amnesia, as a result of continual shock or reluctance to articulate grief, is also expressed in Bassey's "They charged through the mounted troops" (*I Will Not Dance,* 12). The poet persona encourages the Niger Delta people to "[b]reak the teeth of the blood-sucking vermin to shake off/collective amnesia". Violence is also depicted in Ogbowei's "marsh boy V" (*marsh boy*, 23-24), as the poet persona announces that "I am the marsh boy/quick and handy with a gun" chasing "beneficient tyrants/…who see in our desolation their prosperity". Lastly, suicide and suicidal thoughts birthed from profound depression is portrayed in Bassey's "Walking blind" (*I Will Not Dance*, 37-38), where the people are "[c]limbing the trails of tales.../Folks rising on survival trails/Seas rising on suicide runs" on account of the inability to fend for their families.

Stylistically, enjambment and apostrophe are predominantly used in almost all the poetry collections to emphasise the mental distress experienced by the poet-personas and, by extension, the Niger Delta populace. For instance, "If those called militants" (*Songs,* 112) exemplifies enjambment. Apostrophe is demonstrated in "Come and spend a day with me" (*Songs*, 128), "A taste of tomorrow" (*Tears*, 45), "Sterility" (*Letters*, 43), "marsh boy I" (*marsh boy,* 21), and "Old rio is dead" (*I Will Not Dance*, 25-26). The collections are also suffused with repetition to draw attention to grief in poems such as "If they had their gods here" (*Songs*, 113) and "the fumbling king" (*marsh boy*, 51); intertextuality to depict the people's contrasting conditions and misery in "Can i still call from the River Nun?" (*Songs,* 114-115) and "Okara's nun" (*Oily Tears,* 25-26); and rhetorical questions to emphasise pain in "Can i still call from the River Nun?" (*Songs,* 114-115), "Tears in a basket" (*Tears,* 19), "Sterility" (*Letters*, 43), "Watchman, what of the night?" (*I Will Not Dance,* 13-14), and "Rivers at 25" (*Oily Tears,* 48-50). Metaphorical language and imagery are used to inscribe agonising experiences and pains in "I had left home with reluctance" (*Songs,* 129), "Tomorrow's debris" (*Tears*, 12), "Sterility" (*Letters*, 43), "amnesty" (*marsh boy,* 63-66), "Bottled tears (*Or Water Poem*)" (*I Will Not Dance,* 53-55), and "Dinma: better dead than blind" (*Oily Tears,* 53-55); while irony in "Oloibiri" (*Tears*, 13) and "Ezulwini" (*I Will Not Dance*, 42-43), and oxymoron in "If those called militants" (*Songs*, 112), "Oloibiri" (*Tears,* 13), "The embattled coast" (*Letters*, 24), "the horrors of history" (*marsh boy*, 44-45), "They charged through the mounted troops" (*I Will Not Dance,* 12), and "Baseless compass" (*Oily Tears,* 21) are used to stress the contradictions that result in trauma. These tropes mimic the effects of trauma and bear out its inscriptions.

Besides, in many of the selected poems from the poetry collections, anecdotal aesthetics and narrative quality (not narrative poetry) are deployed, as opposed to the modernist aesthetics of fragmentation and aporia, and the potential of resistance to bring about a change, not an empathy-driven attitude which is a form of passive witnessing, is extensively explored. Particularly, storytelling represented through anecdotal aesthetics is engaged as a tool of literary activism, because storytelling produces that sensational experience as it spurs them to action. Supporting this view, Rodi-Risberg (2018) states that through storytelling, reading turns out to be a dialogic activity because readers can visualise their roles in the accounts. Hence, these stories involve the reader in a way that he/she can respond

appropriately as a witness. In other words, storytelling becomes a medium for relating traumatic experiences, as well as a testimony with the potential of engendering activist response from the reader because of their vicarious experience, as it challenges the reader not to strengthen forces, structures and organisations that encourage ecological degradation in this study. Lastly, the significance of culture-bound arts (music), in contrast to Western modes of recovery, in alleviating pain is underscored in some of the poems.

All the poets share similar traumatic experiences and express their resentment against the pain inflicted on the populace owing to the destruction of the environment and the devastating consequences; however, their responses and methods of representation differ. For instance, while Ojaide's *Songs of Myself,* Obi's *Tears in a Basket*, and Otto's *Letters from the Earth* react to the traumatising conditions, engendered by wrecked damage on the land without impunity, deploying the lachrymal and lamentatory mode; Ogbowei's *marsh boy,* Bassey's *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat*, and Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* respond to the overwhelming experiences with resistance and remonstration undertone. In other words, resistance to the traumatising situation is a common feature in Ogbowei's *marsh boy,* Bassey's *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat,* and implied in Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta;* while lyrical lamentation dominates Ojaide's *Songs of Myself,* Obi's *Tears in a Basket*, and Otto's *Letters from the Earth*, as responses to trauma. Therefore, there is the diversity of poetic representations and traumatic responses are multifaceted as expected. Though their writings are different, their environmental stance is not, as all the oeuvres clamour against the forces behind environmental despoliation and the medium of exploitation.

Though the study evaluated poems from six different poetry collections, in terms of thematic concern, the analysed poems, on the whole, are predominantly occupied with the palpable constellations of traumatic experiences generated from the traumatic landscapes. The poetic texts establish the intricate relationship between environmental devastation and the traumatogenic effects through their retrospective narratives. The study validates the fact that the discovery of oil resulted in deterioration in all forms as well as dramatic consequences for the Niger Delta region, and the poetic form reflects the traumatic content as the landscape becomes a metaphor for pain. Thus, Niger Delta eco-conscious poetry inscribes

trauma as a stealthily ongoing disaster in the region. The trauma, which has become the quotidian reality of Niger Delta people, is catalysed by environmental degradation, and the surge of intense pain experienced by the inhabitants in the Niger Delta communities is captured through the poetry texts of the poets under study, with the poetic devices deployed in representing the unrepresentable. Poetry becomes a suitable medium for relating traumatic experiences in literary form.

The findings corroborate the recurring tradition of poetry of resistance against environmental degradation in Ohwavworhua and Orhero's (2019) study of Bassey's *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat*, Bie's (2017) and Nutsukpo's (2018) submission of Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*, Anyokwu's (2019) and Adebiyi-Adelabu's (2020) description of Ogbowei's *marsh boy and other poems*. However, this study further foregrounds the capability of resistance (not empathic attitude) as a rejoinder to traumatising conditions, to effectuate change, which opposes the modernist aesthetics of fragmentation and aporia by classical trauma theorists. Furthermore, while this study refers to the ecological difficulties and appalling exploitation that has defined the Niger Delta region since the discovery of oil, which is underscored in Ohwavworhua and Orhero's (2019) appraisal of *Letters from the Earth*, Onyema's (2011) position on Obi's *Tears in a Basket*, and Usanga's (2018) analysis of *Songs of Myself*, it states further that these ecological difficulties and abuse of the environment translate into trauma for the inhabitants of the region. To conclude, this study agrees with existing studies that have expressed concerns for the devastated environment in the poetry volumes utilised for this research. This study builds on existing research by juxtaposing six collections, which have previously not been juxtaposed, to examine the subject of trauma as a derivative of environmental degradation.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

> Literature becomes the forgotten unforgettable place of trauma that it so urgently needs. (Rodi-Risberg, 2010: 2)

5.1 Summary

Environmental degradation has severe impacts on man, physically, economically, culturally and even psychologically, because of the symbiotic relationship between man and his environment. Particularly, the continual destruction of the Niger Delta environment leaves in its wake traumatogenic and traumatic experiences for the affected. It is these experiences that gave rise to literary works of writers-activists like Tanure Ojaide, Sophia Obi, Albert Otto, G'Ebinyo Ogbowei, Nnimmo Bassey, Ibiwari Ikiriko among others, all of whom hail from this region. Therefore, this study relates the distressing experiences of the Niger Delta denizens owing to environmental degradation expressed through literature (poetry). This study, which is divided into five chapters, began with a general introduction. The introduction provided the background to the study by establishing utilitarianism as an essential property of literary writings, specifically African literature, where literature is almost always in the service of humanity by its expressiveness of socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural realities. One of these realities which literature expresses is the trauma that attends environmental degradation.

The research begins by tracing the history of the study of the representation of nature in literature. Although humans have always had a proclivity for nature, and although the study of nature in literature began right from the classical period, it reached its height in the 18th century with the emergence of nature poets, and the designation, "nature poetry" came to being. The study describes nature poetry as that poetry where the natural world is the seedbed of inspiration as well as the subject of discourse. However, the continual parasitic relationship between humans and nature engendered ecopoetry. Ecopoetry, a progeny of nature poetry, addresses the imbalance that causes the gradual degradation of the

environment by the activities of humans. It has as its aim – to institute change. Then, the upsurge of ecopoetry in the world, which was a result of the increasing global concern for the environment, was underscored. Also, the upsurge of ecopoetry in Nigeria/Niger Delta, which was due to the mindless destruction of human's fellow inhabitants (flora and fauna) and commodification of the ecosystem by successive governments, was emphasised. The destruction of the environment equalled monumental losses for those affected communities in the Niger Delta area, which culminate in trauma. Despite the volume of scholarly works on the causal effects of environmental degradation, adequate attention was not given to traumatogenic inscriptions and trauma in Niger Delta poetry, which is the gap that the study filled.

Therefore, the study examined traumatogenic inscriptions and trauma owing to ecological degradation metaphorised in selected six (6) collections of Niger Delta poetry. It was achieved by investigating the traumatogenic developments that lead to trauma, identifying the various manifestations of trauma, analysing the literary devices deployed to foreground trauma, and comparing representations of trauma by the different poets. The scope of the study is delimited to Tanure Ojaide's *Songs of Myself*; Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket*; Albert Otto's *Letter from the Earth*; G'Ebinyo Ogbowei's *marsh Boy and other Poems*; Nnimmo Bassey's *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat*; and Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta.* The study drew attention to the potential application of trauma theory to environmental-related quandaries, using a subset of postcolonial trauma theory pioneered by Stef Craps. It also foregrounds the potency of the poetry genre in engaging trauma studies, as against the novel in which trauma narratives have been repeatedly expressed. The definition of terms such as inscriptions, Niger Delta poetry, trauma and traumatogenic was attempted with a conclusion on the organisation of the study.

The study was guided by related concepts, empirical reviews of literature and a relevant theory. Concepts that are related to the study such as trauma, traumatogenic/traumagenic, trauma and literature, and trauma and poetry, were reviewed. Trauma is described as an injury to the body as well as the psyche while traumatogenic is defined as something that possesses the capability to lead to trauma. The study establishes literature's appropriateness in articulating trauma because it can present an experience, which has not been fully

comprehended. Also, traumatic experiences are frequently expressed through defying language, which is often literary, and this is distinctive of poetry. Empirical reviews of the Niger Delta region revealed that the region has been contending with severe exploitation since the discovery of oil, leaving in its wake traumatising conditions for the host communities. This led to the nascency of Niger Delta eco-conscious literature (poetry). Despite the volume of scholarly works on ecological concerns as demonstrated in the reviews, the representation of trauma as a consequence of environmental devastation has received scant attention. This was the focus of this study. On the other hand, the theory that supported this study is trauma theory. Because of the relevance of the assumptions of Stef Craps' trauma theory, a strand of postcolonial trauma theory, it was adopted for the study. Amongst others, one of the important assumptions that is significant to this research is the review of the definition of trauma from a single unexpected disastrous event to include quotidian kinds of brutality.

For an effective research process and valid findings, the study deployed a methodology. The study is situated within the emergent Niger Delta literature, from which Niger Delta poetry is a fragment. The research population are the six (6) poetry collections where uneven numbers of poems with trauma presence are drawn. These poetry texts were purposively selected based on the year of publication, similarity in linguistic representations and most of all, the discourse of trauma as a sequel to environmental degradation. The interpretive design was adopted and poems were collected based on thematic relevance, aesthetic appreciation and comparative applicability. The close reading technique, where thematic and stylistic readings were emphasised, was employed in analysing the data (poems). Also, some of the perspectives of Stef Craps' trauma theory were applied to the analysis.

The analysis confirmed the presence of trauma, which is registered through various triggers such as sadness, sensations of intense visceral pain, feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, a constant state of anxiety, rage, agitation, fear, frustration and despair, environmentally-induced distress, nightmare, grief, agony as well as sorrow; and manifestations namely psychological torture, mental anguish, guilt, profound depression, delusion, estrangement, violence, numbing, suicide and suicide ideation, both individually and collectively. These insignias of trauma are underscored through literary devices such as

interior monologue, enjambment, apostrophe, alliteration, personification, intertextuality, metaphor, repetition, anaphora and others. While the traumatising experiences are presented through lyrical lamentatory mode in *Songs of Myself*, Sophia Obi's *Tears in a Basket*, and Albert Otto's *Letter from the Earth,* G'Ebinyo Ogbowei's *marsh Boy and other Poems,* Nnimmo Bassey's *I Will Not Dance To Your Beat,* and Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* are saturated with resistance and resilience. The study concludes by emphasising the traumatogenic and traumatic potentials of environmental degradation. As suggestions for further studies, the study of poetry as a recuperative medium from trauma was proposed.

5.2 Conclusion

Compared to previous research on these poetry collections which emphasised ecocritical reading, this study establishes the traumatic characteristics embedded in environmental devastation. The traumatic atmosphere and narrativisation that characterise the poems are explicitly rendered, as they depict the populace whose everyday lives have been structured along the lines of unremitting pains. Through the deployment of recurrent motifs and techniques, as the interrelationships of motifs and literary techniques in expressing trauma are demonstrated, the inscriptions of trauma that litter the poems are made visible. Together, the literary devices demonstrate the impact of trauma, whereas the subject of trauma is viewed through the prisms of individual and collective suffering among the Niger Delta people, as their mental and physical impasse is revealed. The repetitive history of profound suffering, as well as the haunting effect it provokes, is reflected. More so, selected poems in each of the poetry collections give a reconstructive narration of the denizens' response to trauma. The poems bear witness to the cruelty of humans, which is founded on the destruction of the environment through man-made machinery.

Therefore, this study demonstrates the capability of environmental devastation to bring about traumatogenic symptoms and trauma upon the victims, as they actively demand reparation as well as redress. Temporary moments of relief, as represented in the poem, with their environmental future remains murky at best. Hence, the people of the Niger Delta region are paralysed by fear as well as depression owing to anxiety about their future and threatened annihilation. Loneliness, as well as self-estrangement, are also noted, while their emotional and psychological well-being is affected because of the impact of trauma. In

essence, the quandary (environmental degradation) engenders traumatogenic impacts on the well-being of adults as well as the children such as environmental anxiety, besides being filled with nostalgic yearnings of their former near-virginal lands and intense feeling of loss, in addition to their illusory fantasies which provide temporary respite. As might be expected, their situation makes them susceptible to fantasy orgies. Afterwards, they relapse into depression and despair because of the anxieties that accompany loss and the distress that comes with impoverishment, besides the overwhelming presence of trauma of displacement and alienation. This alienation from the land plunges the Niger Delta people into mental distress. Also, the perceptible expression of profound troubles in dealing with feelings of guilt (survivors' guilt), grief, as well as loss, is foregrounded. All these are symptomatic of their traumatic state. To summarise, Niger Deltans deal with traumatogenic experiences and trauma triggered by environmental devastation, and this underscores the capability of the destruction of the environment to cause emotional and psychological strain. The poems analysed are splintered echoes of the traumatic experiences of the Niger Delta people, as the incidents of trauma are transferred into the infiniteness of the text.

Besides, this study echoes traumatogenic inscriptions and trauma engendered by the destruction of the environment, by exploring how the inhabitants of these affected communities in the Niger Delta region have to grapple with both the physical and psychical devastating conditions of their environment, which have sadly become commonplace occurrences. By the same token, this region as well as its people has not directly benefited from the gas proceeds. Rather, they have been defrauded, despite being the granary of wealth for the nation, as most investments are situated in other parts of the country. It is almost the least developed part. Also, this decimation, which in environmental parlance, is dubbed ecocide results in disenfranchising the people and robbing them of their legal right to their land. Finally, with a link established between ecological disaster and trauma, poets from the Niger Delta have risen to the occasion to create enlightened consciousness about the condition of the environment and its devastating repercussions on their people, while hinting at the need for reparation and emphasising a redefinition of the relationship between man and environment.

5.3 Contributions to knowledge

The study establishes that environmental degradation has psychical impacts on its victims, thereby validating the psychological ambits of environmental studies and advancing mental health studies. It is a salutary reminder of the traumatogenic effects and trauma owing to the destruction of the environment on humans. Therefore, the study foregrounds the potential of environmental devastation to engender trauma. Also, it states explicitly that trauma does not only result from a one-time sudden event but also from daily and continuous kinds of brutality that characterise the reality of the masses, which in this context is environmental devastation.

5.4 Suggestions for further studies

Further studies can be carried out on the aesthetics of poetry as a therapeutic and recuperative medium from trauma. Poetry could also be considered as a means for working through, not acting out, the traumatic experience. In addition, the intrinsic likelihood of secondary traumatisation owing to the narrative as well as testimonial functions of poet personae can be studied.

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