Eco-Ruins and the Neoliberal Exploitation of Nature: Rethinking Sustainability in Tanure Ojaide's *Great Boys: An African Childhood*

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Abstract

The contemporary challenges in the Niger Delta are provoked by the environmental harm due to the activities of multinational oil companies. Previous studies on literary texts on the Niger Delta situation have focused mainly on the politics of petroleum, economics, and the violence accompanying and arising from it. Not enough attention has been paid to the tragic experiences of the individuals and group of people arising from environmental pollution and as well as the degradation of the environment, even though these experiences have been demonstrably represented in many cultural expressions. This study therefore seeks to address the tragic conditions that have affected the peoples' fortunes, hopes, and aspirations as articulated in Ojaide's *Great Boys: An African Childhood*. The study is based on ecocriticism which enable the study depicts the exploitation of the ecological rights of the people, which sustains the oppression and domination of the people, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of the people and their lands as well as their means of livelihood. The study exposed the various forms of predicaments that have devastated the people. Thus, the environmental damage has adversely affected the people negatively and has resulted in the down-turn of their life sustenance and means of livelihood. Therefore, it recommends that these life-threatening ecological issues be curbed, and it will be only possible by an inward/indigenous approach that will tend to guaranty environmental conservation and protection.

Keywords: Neoliberalization, Nature, Eco-Ruins, Ecological Sustainability Africa.

Introduction

Prior to the advent of commercial oil production in the Niger Delta about sixty years ago the region was essentially a pristine environment which supported substantial subsistence resources for the mostly sedentary populations. These included among other things, medicinal herbs and barks, fish and shrimp, crabs and clams, wood for energy and shelter, as well as a stable soil for farming and habitat for exotic wildlife. Today, the narrative of this same region has been reverted to tales of desecrations. Oil prospecting activities are now associated with the destruction of vegetation, farmlands and human settlements to allow for neoliberalization of nature. However, there are severe environmental hazards associated with this activity. Some include destruction of aquatic life, both marine and freshwater around the prospecting sites, noise pollution and vibration from seismographic among others. When the impact occurs, as has become routine in the Niger Delta, there is usually no attempt to rectify the damages done to the environment, health and social well-being of the people and ecosystem. Further, the uncaring and unsustainable pile exploration and exploitation methods adopted by oil companies in the region have resulted in a pandemic loss of biodiversity, ecological destabilization and substantial reduction in aquatic lives. In particular, the agricultural lands have been rendered unproductive while the fishing industry has been destroyed.

Hence, the paper, using literary text illustrates that, literature is not just an art of writing, which only entertains. It is equally, a means of expressing ideas, views, opinions, experiences, feelings, body of knowledge, cultural values as well as teaching moral lessons and providing psychological and physical therapeutic. It is as well as becomes a medium of apprehending contemporary or conventional realities through the exposition of the socio-cultural, ecological and political experiences of a given society; since it is a product of a particular human society. It is far from being ambiguous that literature buys into the expressive function of a given language. And, the understanding of culture and the society, which are potential ingredients on which literature is premised, paves way for an effective development. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the impact of neoliberalization of nature while also projecting and advocating for nativist norms for ecological sustainability using Ojaide's *Great Boys: An African Childhood*.

Neoliberalization of Nature: A Retrospection of Eco-Ruins in Ojaide's *Great Boys: An African Childhood*

One of the several ecological reflections in Ojaide's autobiography is his recollection of the commencement of oil exploration and extraction activities and their consequential destructive impacts on the bionetwork of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. An ecological destruction that is relative to ecological genocide in the Niger Delta. Chinyere Nwahunanya notes that the Niger Delta represents for the imagination, "the symbol of the ironic contradictions of the consequences of capitalist exploitation by multinational economic interests teaming with the local comprador bourgeois class" (xiii). Thus, focusing on his matrilineal community of Ibada, Ojaide therefore, unfolds the sorrowful tales not just of a particular community, but that of a region with diverse socio-cultural identity but similar geographical configurations including similar tales of ecological woes. For Ojaide, the seismic activities, oil exploration and extraction are the first ever mans' attempt within the region that demonstrate a forceful and strange process of extraction of natural resources from the environment without any form of religious (rituals, sacrifices, festivals and offerings) and agricultural (cultivation, husbandry and agronomy) pre-activities. The local people had a history of actually given to nature through several religious and agricultural practices before any form of contact with nature at the level of cultivation, while Mother Nature on her part has one way or the other reciprocates through bountiful harvest. However, the coming of the seismic and extraction industry alters the chains of ecological activities with catastrophic consequences on the environment. Thus, Ojaide takes cognizant of this development in the extract below:

> Sometime after the rain in 1958, about late October, Shell-BP came. A lot of people, mainly from cities, came to our area. They came wearing helmets, in pickups and jeeps. They wore boots and marched, so to say, into the bushes around us […] They tore through the forest creeks, cutting paths that one could

> only go through in single file. They say they were looking for oil, not palm oil but for petrol oil. (Ojaide 121).

Ojaide specifically mention the year '1958', which is also within the same period oil, was exported in commercial quantity in Nigeria. It therefore implies that Ojaide childhood ecological recollections and postulations are in line with verifiable historical records. Significantly, given Ojaide's claims in *Great Boys,* the extraction activities of capitalists /ecological imperialists alter the once serene and bucolic ecological space of the rural communities of the delta region as he elucidates in Ibada community. This ecological invasion results to myriad ecological crisis that initiates the alteration of the landscape, ecosystem and among other forms of degradations of the Delta's biodiversity.

Meanwhile, the most significant ecological challenge in Ibada that Ojaide recalls that calls for greater concern is the colossal damage cause by the oil extraction and gas flaring on the local biosphere of Ibada. Therefore, one of the first impacts of ecological exploration recollected by Ojaide in his autobiography is the destruction of agricultural land and produces "The helmeted men in boots cut narrow paths through the bush, through other people's land. They were like elephants or buffalo trampling yams and cassava underfoot" (Ojaide 112). These metaphor and imagery of elephant and buffalo are terrifying when examined within the context of the experiences of the local communities. These invaders, Ojaide opines are brutal men who have no value for the eco-occupation of the local people. Their sole concern is not for the wellbeing of the local population rather for their successful extraction and exploration. Thus, while they show no remorse for the destructions of the economic base of the local people, they celebrate a successful exploration. The narrator says, "Then came the day […] And as crowds gathered in the make-shift market, a loud explosion shook the earth […] The quake brought jubilation from the workers […] The explosion determined where there was underground oil. A well would be made there to draw oil" (Ojaide 125). The exploration activities lead to the loss of individual, family and communal lands to the ecological invaders (Oil Company).

For Ojaide, this is a major dilemma for the community, while the initially ecological concern for exploration is minimal, the drilling and exportation activities posse serious, grave and diverse ecological consequences. Thus, gas flaring is becoming a nuisance to the local ecological population in Ibada (humans and non-human population) "[…] one day, we awoke to an intense heat and a monstrous cloud of fire in the sky. Nobody knew what type of fire rose so high as to threaten god […] I woke from sleep in a panic and in the dazed frenzy of the strange brightness in a supposedly dark nigh shouted for help. Ibada village was in an uproar […]" (Ojaide 126) "[…] the harmattan month lost their cool to the flaring gas, which had brought eternal heat. Once in a while dead ant littered empty spaces […]" (Ojaide 128).

Thus, it is obvious that some aspects of their extraction and exportation processes specifically gas flaring leads to adverse effects on the environment. Okorowo Cyril Agochi

opines that the practice of gas flaring leads to significant increases of carbon emissions in to the atmosphere and its combustion release high amounts of soot and carbon monoxide. Much of the immediate environments where flaring take place do experience significant climatic change that affects a negative rainfall pattern causing extreme floods and droughts, graduating heat, and humid conditions (2345) as Ojaide elucidates in Ibada. The geography of the Niger Delta catalyses this situation, as much of the lands are not only low lands, but below the sea level. Therefore, when rivers overflow because of ecological changes, it causes water to flood the lands making it unusable for agriculture. The environmental damage resulting from gas flaring directly affects human and aquatic life. It includes pollution of water and contamination of the soil. In addition to human angle, damages to the environment effect vegetation, livestock and agriculture in general (Sunday A. Effiong and Ubi Evang Etowa 211-228) and capable of affecting crop yield through impacting nutrients availability in the soil.

Hence, for Ojaide oil exploitation has left the indigenous farm households of the Niger Delta community with less fertile farmlands. As well as clean water from rivers and streams and weaken the family and communal bonds causing social tension among various groups and institution in the region, "The effect of gas flaring is multifaceted causing undesirable ecosystem disequilibrium" (qtd. in Agochi 2355). Gas flaring raises the temperatures and render large area of land inhabitable and uncultivable by farm households. S. I. Ovuakporaye et al. (525-528) emphasized that, due to increased temperature, climate variability proliferation of pests and widespread disease these have seriously affected agricultural activities causing serious negative effect (impacts) of wellbeing of farm household in the Niger Delta.

In addition, as the drilling and transportation processes pick momentum the people of Ibada like other Niger Delta communities are faced with more devastating ecological scenarios and metamorphosis. Terrestrial, aquatic, air and noise pollutions followed. Ojaide remarks, "Fishermen and women soon discovered that they couldn't catch as many fish as they used to […] within months a pipe broke and the stream were covered with tick seams. The fish floated belly-up, and no one would eat dead fish" (Ojaide 126-127). "The forest was no longer a quiet place. Sound of heavy trucks carrying huge machines, some tall in a comical fashion broke the quiet of the area. The boisterous noise of works, elated by their oyibo works that earned them a fortune, shattered the legendary silence of the rustic landscape" (Ojaide 126). Thus, ecological pollutions lead to dislocation and displacement for both human and non-human populations and communities. Accounts of dislocation and in some case reduction in wild life, mass death of animal and plant species and increased deforestations persists in Ibada and its surrounding communities. Ojaide captures these developments in the extract below:

> Hunters discovered that bush animals were becoming rarer to sight. The grass cutter and antelopes appeared to have relocated to quieter and darker

> places. Farmers saw their cassava and yams leaves wilt and burn out. Of course, the underground tubers were shriveled and couldn't be eaten […] In a frenzy, trees were felled. No tree, except rubber was planted. Everywhere was becoming bare, and water was being driven away for more land […] *jigger* and *Kubrasi* flea, epidemic broke out. (Ojaide 127-128).

In addition, the debasement of the abode of the peoples' cosmic essence through pollutions because of pipeline eruption, the aquatic-scape that is the habitant of the peoples' deity is encroached upon. This implies that the peoples' spiritual essence is also a victim of the ecological changes experience in the ecological spaces in the narrative. According to Okuyade, "it is no longer news how these spillages in combination with other toxic wastes and effluents dumped into the waters at virtual every stage of oil exploration and exploitation destroy [the] biodiversity and other effects of oil exploration in the Niger Delta" ("The Vanishing Eden" 54). Thus, given the fact that within the African ecological thinking the cosmic essence is recognized as part of human's ecological space, therefore, if one of their recognizable habitants is under treat, it implies that such cosmic ecological entities like "Olokun" would also be under great risk of separation from the mortal connection or face possible extinction. The quotation "even gods and goddesses, we realized, needed privacy" (Ojaide 165) is a typical fact of Ojaide's consciousness of the threatened state of their cosmic aquatic essence. As Okuyade points out in this regard:

> The gods and goddesses are equally threatened as the environment of their worshipers is gradually subjected to erosion by the advancement of industrial capitalism. For a people who have maintained a collective memory about society and the mythic, the dislocation of the gods and goddesses from their worshipers is cataclysmic and a cultural convulsion which threaten the stability of an erstwhile rural habitation. This is a manifestation of the agonizing break with the past. ("The Vanishing Eden" 56).

The local people are as a result of this dislocation denied the annual sacred and spiritual rituals. If they can no longer assess their deities that reside within the aquatic space, then their entire spiritual essence is in disarray.

Obviously, there is ecological alteration in Ibada environment. An once rustic, idyllic, serene, and pastoral environment has been debased. The altered ecological space of Ibada is Ojaide's painful recollections of the genesis of ecological debasement in the Niger Delta region. This is occasion by human's greed and insatiable quest for material acquisition. The debasement of Ibada's ecological space is a representation of the entire Niger Delta region. Okuyade succinctly summarized it, "With the inauguration of oil exploration, the plight of the inhabitants of the Niger Deltascape became unbearable. Rather than become the harbinger of the good things of life, oil became the very bane of the people. The people now had no choice but to endure the heat and the anger of "god's fire that lit their nights

into eternal dawn […]" (53) and with the soils damaged, the waters polluted, the air invaded by permanent gas flares, and the debasement of the fauna and flora, the people become extremely vulnerable.

Thus, in a regretful and pessimistic tone the narrator nostalgias, "My people had been sitting on a wealth of oil from the beginning without knowing it was there. They had been happy with their streams, farms and forests" (Ojaide 127), the underline implication for Ojaide is that, it would have been more ecological prosperous if they have remained ignorant of the existence of nature's blessings in form of hydrocarbon. Their exposure to such a gift of Mother Nature account for more ecological woes and atrocities than the annual natural ecological phenomena, they usually experience, though, the natural ecological phenomena constitute their own ecological challenges but not as the same magnitude of man's engendered ecological creations. For the natural ecological experiences, a year interval is enough for recovery, but the present gives no such grace. The ecological disaster is fatal and knows no space or time. It is eco-suicidal.

Hence, one presumes that Ojaide explores ecological sensibility in his life narrative *Great Boys*, through his recollections of childhood ecological memories. There is a juxtaposition of the then prevailing pastoral ecological awareness against the backdrop of an emerging ecological crisis in his nativist's ecology. For Ojaide, these new forms of ecological activities have given birth to several ecological breaches with devastating implication for the biosphere and biodiversity of the populations and communities (humans and non-humans) in the Niger Delta region, who depend on a healthy ecosystem for their spiritual, socio-cultural and economic survival. Ojaide's *Great Boys* therefore, becomes an historical but personal rendering of the genesis of ecological debasement of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This had led to several ecological reoccurring genocides. Thus, it offered a truthful recollection and representation of the ecological reality of a people, who are victims of their own ecological diversities and potentials.

Rethinking Ecological Sustainability in Ojaide's *Great Boys: An African Childhood*

On the other hand, these crises are responsible for the nativist's ecological intervention in the narrative. Therefore, *Great Boys: An African Childhood* as an autobiographical narrative explores Ojaide's reflections of the interconnection of agricultural practices and rural life. Ojaide vision is to demonstrate indigenous ecological practices that are instrumental in the protection and sustenance of local biodiversity. Hence, there is a fusion of several ecological spaces and these spaces become the major sites of ecological activities and a site for eco-bilateral agencies and the nitty-gritties of the narrative. These ecological spaces are the aquatic and terrestrial biosphere (soil, bushes and forests). Ojaide explores the aquatic as a major ecological construction in his eco-biography. There is deliberate fusion of the ecological activities of the people within the aquatic bio-network. In this sense, "By representing aquatic ecology and the lives of other creatures […] [Ojaide's autobiography] explore[s] the essential place of water in relation to human

culture" (Chaiyon Tongsukkaeng 226). This ecological space offers the people of Ibada and Enemarho an economic survival and cultural/spiritual solidarity with nature. Thus, for Ojaide, the aquatic becomes not just an economic surviving agency, but also a platform for spiritual connection with non-human agencies, projecting the aquatic as a major player of humans' survival and an indispensable ecological site, in addition reflecting the rivers scape of the narrative.

Freshwater biome surrounds Ojaide's Ibada community in Niger Delta; these aquatic features of the area give the narrative some of its ecological paraphernalia and outlook. For example, the narrator says, "If you live in the Niger Delta [region] you got used to water as people everywhere got used to food staple. You live on the omnipresent and omnipotent water. Water filled the named and un-named creeks, streams, rivers, pounds, swamps, and marches" (Ojaide 73). For Ojaide the aquatic scape forms a geographical/ecological attractive site given the crisscrossing of several aquatic bodies, the vegetation and the aquatic fluviatile. Moware observes that:

> Water was a refuge for us. Our village was by the river as were other villages I knew. I could not image a settlement without a stream, river or creek around it. Water was our natural friend […] Once in a while a natural death condemned our friend as a newly realized foe. Children sometimes drowned in rivers. Sometimes even experienced adult got lost in the network of streams and rivers that created the delta. But still you couldn't live without water. Water was our temperamental friend. (Ojaide 75).

Thus, as the passage sinuates, the aquatic is an indispensable element to the existence of the local population and it is interwoven with the way they perceive their cosmic essence. The possibility of a regular devastating encounter with the aquatic wilderness constitutes no restriction to the exploration of the natural element. For Ojaide, this ecological awareness of the local population re-enforces a solemn projection of a people, who despite their lack of sophisticated methodology understand the potentials of the aquatic scape.

Fishing in the aquatic is one of several ecological meeting points between humans and Mother Nature in *Great Boys.* Through fishing, there is an exploration of the multiple properties of water, which gives the community a sense of unity with external nature. Mother Nature through the aquatic space offers humankind several edible delicacies. Fishing allows the community to make 'primitive' contact with other non-human communities. Most types of hunting, including fishing are characterised by, certain expectations, practices and even rituals. Fishing is a form of direct, non-verbal, contact with the wild that seems unmediated by social formulas. Mother Nature offers humankind several edible delicacies for its nutrition, physiological satisfaction and survival. For Ojaide fishing is an essential ecological occupation of the communities in the text. It is one of the several ways the locals are in contact with Mother Nature and falls within the georgic tradition of work in other to sustain nature. According to Ojaide, "The fishing

season began after the rivers were full and flowing. Somehow, all years-round was one fishing season [....] It was either hooking or netting of some sort. When there was plenty of water it was good sorts of fishing, when the waters were down, we emptied the ponds for the fish in them" (Ojaide 75). Also:

> At Ibada soup are prepared with fish […] Men and women fished their different ways […] They [mothers] took their *ayaro* nets to the pond and pools of marches. They knew where there were plenty crayfish from the yellowish green leaves that covered the water. They always caught just enough crayfish and a few *eghoro,* which they used for one thick soup…. Every day need was provided by the creeks and streams. Nobody fretted over food. There was always fish […] for food whenever you wanted to cook or eat […] Sometimes mother and her fishing partners went to the *Omwen* River during the few months it ways drying up. There they caught big fish in the family ponds. It was a whole day's work from early morning to very late evenings when they had to use lamps. The catch was dried for a good month's lavish meal. (Ojaide 70-71).

Thus, the place of the aquatic for Ojaide and his people cannot be over emphasized. It is obvious that the aquatic bio-network is a major source of human daily food nutrients. They also through rains, which form puddles, serve as recreation sites for children in the village. During the rainy seasons, heavy rains create artificial tributaries and these sites become rally point for the local children. Moware says, "Large puddles were playgrounds, where we used hands and leg to splash the greyish dark, soil-tainted water at each other amidst boisterous banter, shouting, and laughter […] we looked forward to the heavy rains with hope that they would fill the seasonal rivers. Different pools will swell up until they join each other" (Ojaide 73-75). These experiences demonstrate how the local people express their relationship with natural elements.

The aquatic relationship between Mother Nature and the local community in Ojaide's *Great Boys* further underscores a spiritual connection. The aquatic assumes a site for the rendition of ritual and sacrifice, a habitat for aquatic deities/several spiritual entities and a site for cultural inspiration where certain cultural artefacts and performances have their roots. This connection is captured in the narrative through the activities of the water deity *'Olokun*" and her several shades of worshipers. For example, the narrator says:

> *Olokun* lives in water and many have shrines dedicated to her. There were many sects of Olokun worshipers, and once a year they went to the big river at Okpara waterside to receive her offerings. I used to see several of the white-robed sectarians singing and dance, some of them possessed as they made the long trek to the big river. They carried yams, pieces of loth, fowls and even ram to deliver to the river goddess. She would help them cope with adversities

> till the next offering a year away when they would try to make a record sacrifice. (Ojaide 76).

The passage above underscores the significance of the aquatic space. Thus, beyond its aquatic provisions of fishes, crabs, *Ogbene*, cry fish and turtle, it serves as a meeting point between nature as divine with vested agency and humans seeking divine offering. The local population performs songs and dramatic enactment at the aquatic bodies.

Significantly, the people perform annual rituals and sacrifice in the aquatic. It also provides sacred platforms where the locals secure the blessing, protection and provision from the aquatic deity. Ojaide's exploration of the aquatic within these dimensions reveals the indispensability of the aquatic as an agency. This is similar to what several African writers have also capture in their texts, fusing terrestrial (forest, mountains, rocks and valleys) and aquatic spaces with spiritual agency.

Cultural artefacts in the riverine communities are also artistic reproduction of aquatic species. Most especial masquerade paraphernalia, dance choreographies and acrobatic displays. As the narrator describes, "This was the time for masquerade dances. Okurekpo has a big one, so has Okpara including Kokori. Their masks are varied. I like those from the waters: crocodiles, kingfisher, [and] water spirits" (Ojaide 108). Therefore, the aquatic biosphere as one of the custodians of the peoples' spiritual and cultural systems becomes one of the avenues of the nativist's connection between nature and human culture. The people understand nature as a friend, revered as mother, obeyed as father and nurtured as a beloved child. Nature is sacred because man depends entirely on it and because of this; there is a sanctification of everything.

Furthermore, farming, hunting and gathering like fishing constitute a major thematic and structural ecological device in Ojaide's *Great Boys.* As ecological occupations in the text, their significance demonstrates the existing agrarian relationship between nature and culture. Ojaide sees the farm as an ecological site in which a farmer has to understand, adapt, and exploit nature (both the earth and plants) in a sustainable way. Ojaide demonstrates the bilateral ecological relationship in which one considers Mother Nature as the centre of man's activities. Mother Nature bears the bigger burden, as the creator, regenerator, provider and sustainer of the two. Thus, by infusing farming as ecological devices in the text, Ojaide succeeds in situating his life narrative within a nativist tradition. Therefore, it espouses Ojaide's environmentalism. Farming in the narrative reinforces and includes clearing, cultivation, harvesting, gathering and handwork on the part of humans (culture), whereas Mother Nature reciprocally becomes the centre of human's agrarian activities; as the provider, sustainer and the source of man's physiological survival. In addition, farming bestows social status, societal recognition and gives the individual voice within its family circle and the community as the study will demonstrates. Through his life narrative, Ojaide reflects and explores these ecological collaborations and ecological inspired privileges:

> Whether you were a fisherman, a cloth merchant, a fowl seller, or a priest, every adult male made a farm for his family. Single women, often widows and divorcees, also made their farms. Usually, each invited relatives and friends to his farm and he would, in the *ifo* practice, respond to others' calls. Relatives of single women knew it was their responsibility to help them clear the farms. Before clearing time, they would know from their women where they were going to farm the coming season […] (Ojaide 89).

Thus, as the passage shows, Ojaide argues that irrespective of one's vocation, farming remains a primary occupation for everyone in the community. Farming ensures food security. He demonstrates the potentials of nature as a provider of humans needs, "I accompanied Grandpa Odjeba and uncle Otata to pluck fruits or hack down plantains […] The plantain and fruits were only for family consumption, as grandfather meant it to be. His reason was to have enough for himself and the house hold, and if everyone did that, there would be neither hunger nor theft […]" (Ojaide 26-27). The extract indicates the ecological sensibility that engaging with farming activities promotes. There is Mother Nature's provision of fruits to Moware and his family members. The passage also demonstrates Man's cultivation of the earth in the farm through the image of "hacking down plantains". In addition, in a similar encounter with farming related activities Moware explains how him and other children embark on the forest in search of fruits, "We always set out in groups of four to seven during the fruiting season to pick fruits that fell overnight. There was a certain sense of accomplishment in picking these fruits that were sometimes hidden by leaves" (Ojaide 27).

The story of Ishaka and his wife Matije also demonstrates humans' cultivation of nature through hard work in the farm, which is a nativist's paraphernalia. Matije's handicap is not even a hindrance to her farming prowess, "Having one hand had not been a real disability for Matije anyway […] With her left hand she weeded her farm. With the same left she grated her cassava […]" (Ojaide 88). Sex and marriage status are also not a barrier to farming activities. There is also the element of eco-communalism. This portrays the idea of collaboration as individuals' form groups to work in each other's farms in different days. Even one of the systems of marriage (polygamy) in the community is inform from their agrarian activities. The more wives one possesses the more working hand one gets, "Onosigho already had three wives and the number was to increase every few years" (Ojaide 63). "Onosigho and Otata made farms for their wives in one place, so they worked together" (Ojaide 89). Thus, Onosighi's several wives give him an edge over other subsistence farmers in Ibada.

Farming prowess plays a very significant role in ascribing socio-status, societal hierarchy/ recognition and gives voice to the individual in the community in terms of leadership responsibility. In these pastoral communities, high esteem, respect, honour, and appointment of mouthpiece of the respective families and the community in cases of

dispute resolutions are based one's agrarian abilities or success. Chinua Achebe also deals with this aspect of Ecocritical thinking in *Things Fall Apart* with the protagonist Okonkwo. For example, the narrator says by the time Okonkwo was twenty-one years old and as a man he had achieved personal wealth symbolized by his two-barn full of yams, his three wives and most importantly, he had taken two titles which can be acquire when wealth has been achieved and his quality proven. An epitome of the values of his community, he is lionized by the Igbo people and he is even considered as one of the greatest men in Umoufia. Okonkwo is indeed a self-made man. In fact, Oknokwo achieves an eco-heroic status in Umoufia.

Thus, it is in line with similar eco-inspired thinking that the protagonist presents his father. Mowares father's large farming activities, most especially his cash crops plantations stand him out in the entire Enemarho village. His farming prowess, which includes oil palm, cocoa plantation, coffee plantation and rubber plantation for cash crops, others include yam and cassava farms and several other farms ends him respect in the village. While the cash crops produce extensive capitals, the subsistence crops take care of family consumptions. In all, both farming, systems serve as the basis of his socio-status, recognition and voice in Enemarho and the surrounding villages. Thus, Moware declares, "When would I visit Enemarho to […] pick from the famous cherry tree and see father's coffee or cotton and rubber plantations? I had not seen any coffee or cotton plant, and my father I was told was one of few Urhobo farmers of these crops" (Ojaide 47). He further observes:

> In the next few days, my father wanted me to make up for the four years I had missed Enemarho. He wanted me appraised of all he had. He took me to the cocoa and coffee plantations behind the compound. The coolness attracted me. Cocoa plants could cohabit with plantation, bananas, coffee, and kola nuts. The coffee seeds were like *urhurhu* grapes and tasted very fresh. The same for the ripe cocoa pods that were torn open so that I could enjoy the fiber. The fresh covering the seeds was my favorite. I was to gather enough coffee seeds and cocoa pods to enjoy between meals daily […] Later, he took me to his palm oil press by the marshland. It was a distant place, but it had to near abundant water whatever the season, rainy or dry […] A very meticulous man, he produced first class palm oil. There was no dirt in his oil, and it was produced not for quantity but for superior quality […] His palm oil and rubber sheets were highly contested […] My father was the family otota, the spokesperson. Though small, he had a compelling voice. Shout transfixed people. He was very resourceful. (Ojaide 53-55).

From the passage above, it is obvious of Moware's father agricultural prowess and exploits. Through farming, he is among the richest men in the village. His cultivation of cash crops is the best in the village. The standard of his produces is also remarkable. His agricultural awareness is even undisputed through his knowledge of mixed farming,

irrigation and other agricultural practices. In mixed farming, several different crops are cultivated together without any resultant negative effect on any of the produce, while the irrigation system provides steady flow of water for his palm oil press irrespective of the climatic seasons. Thus, one other striking observation is the fact that Moware's father is engaged in both subsistence and commercial farming. While the former entails farming for consumption, the latter involves exportation of harvested cash crops in other to make profits. These two ecological farming systems appear in the narrative.

The rubber plantation is one of the cash crops that established Moware father's ecological based wealth. Although he is not the first to have planted the rubber seed, but like several others in the village, he seizes the opportunity and becomes a major cultivator and producer of rubber sheet in the village. Moware also gives an account of the story, which his Grandpa narrates of the origin of the rubber plantation and how the man that first brought the plant and planted it becomes very rich:

> My Grandpa had told me that an Okpara man called Onoharhigho had brought rubber seeds from a war between two groups of white people who had fought war far away from their homes. The man planted the seeds in his backyard then in a farmyard, […] He cleared bushes and planted rubber seeds. People came to see his "madness" to fill their curiosity […] After he became rich, others picked the seeds from his trees and joined his mad enterprise. Rubber trees soon took over palm trees in our bushes. (Ojaide 37).

For Ojaide fishing and farming constitute major ecological occupations for his nativist's ecology. They are vital ecological activities that project the bilateral relationship between nature and human culture. Culture is good as dead without the agrarian spaces, nature provides, and in these collaborations, nature is central to humans' ecological activities. Humans' socio-cultural, economic and religious wellbeing are a product of the generosity of nature. Therefore, a healthy, wealthy and fertile nature means a healthy, wealthy and fertile humanity. For Ojaide this bilateral ecological awareness is sacrosanct. In all these ecological trajectories, the central and most significant ideological postulations for Ojaide are the fact that the collaborations between nature and human agencies record no attempt of unnecessarily exploitation of nature. In addition, no account of man's engendered denigration, degradation and debasement of the pastoral ecology. Ojaide thinks this is instructive to contemporary ecological activities that lack the nativist's human-nature collaborations, nature- relatedness and other indigenous centered environmentally ethical practices. Thus, for Ojaide, the entire nativists' ecological traditions should be modus operandi for ecological operators given the healthiness of such ecological perspective.

Conclusion

Interestingly, Ojaide adequately distinguished his ecological experiences before, during and after colonization. Through indisputable historical verifiable facts, he artistically achieved great feats in an attempt to recall, recreate, compare and contrast past and present ecological experiences. Most especially as it pertains to his immediate place of birth, while also metaphorically representing the general ecological feelings of ecological challenges in Africa. From the appraisal, it is obvious that as autobiographies, Ojaide's *Great Boys* relays his personal childhood ecological experiences. Thus, from the study, it is presumed that as autobiographical narrative, Ojaide focuses on the self. It implies that the narrative is individualistic, but at the same time projects collective experiences. Therefore, beyond their individual experience, Ojaide also succeed in projecting the collective Niger Delta ecological narratives. One can conclude that Ojaide elucidates the ecological alterations dominating his ecological space.

From this presumption, there are evident of the de-centring of nature. Humanity therefore, has lost its primordial ecological sensibility and in its place replaced with antagonistic-environmental practices. The de-centering of nature for Ojaide constitute one of the major ecological setbacks for the present generation. Nevertheless, it is evident that Ojaide is not in any way against human's utilization of the environment for its survival. However, the analysis has shown that this proposition is only possible if humanity becomes conscious, rational and returned to nature friendly ecological practices. Ojaide feels humanity should be conscious to the fact that beyond economic provision that the environment guarantees' there are other support structures nature provides that may not meet the ordinary eyes. Therefore, humanity should return to ecological friendly practices for a secure and healthy ecology. This is achievable by reconsidering the present position and perception of the environment (nature). The environment (nature) must occupy the central stage in humanity's thought and not the present peripheral and marginal status accorded to it.

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