

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE,
INSECURITY AND WORLD PEACE: A CRITICAL
EXAMINATION OF SELECTED AFRICAN
LITERARY TEXTS

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Abstract

The interest in African literary texts has increased significantly in recent times. However, crucial issues such as climate change, environment, insecurity, and world peace have not received adequate attention, despite their relevance. This study explores these topics in African literary texts of various genres by employing ecocriticism as a theoretical framework and using content analysis as the primary methodology. The corpus of this study focuses on the works of Ramonu Sanusi (novel *Un Nègre a violé une Blonde à Dallas*), Niyi Osundare (poem “They Too Are the Earth”), David Rubadiri (poem “African Thundersorm”), and Ahmed Yerima (play *Ipomu*), all of whom have been selected for sharing the primary objective of this work - to shed light on the environmental realities of modern society by describing the rates of environmental and climate change and their adverse effects on humanity. Moreover, the authors emphasize the need for world peace to ensure global sustainable development. By critically analyzing the African literary texts, this research seeks to contribute to the academic understanding of these significant global issues and the critical role that literature can play in addressing them.

Keywords: African literature, climate change, Environment, Insecurity, World Peace

MEDIO AMBIENTE, CAMBIO CLIMÁTICO, INSEGURIDAD Y PAZ MUNDIAL: UN EXAMEN CRÍTICO DE TEXTOS LITERARIOS AFRICANOS SELECCIONADOS

Resumen

El interés por la literatura africana ha crecido en la comunidad académica en años recientes. Sin embargo, temas cruciales como el cambio climático, el medio ambiente, la inseguridad y la paz mundial han recibido una atención insuficiente por parte de los estudiosos, a pesar de su enorme relevancia. Por lo tanto, el presente estudio se centra en el análisis de estos temas en textos literarios africanos, pertenecientes a diversos géneros, utilizando la ecocrítica como marco teórico y aplicando como metodología el análisis del contenido. El corpus de estudio se centra en obras de Ramonu Sanusi (novela *Un Nègre a violé une Blonde à Dallas*), Niyi Osundare (poema “They Too Are the Earth”), David Rubadiri (poema “African Thundersorm”) y Ahmed Yerima (drama *Ipomu*), autores seleccionados precisamente por compartir la principal inquietud de este trabajo: mostrar las realidades ambientales de la sociedad moderna. Dichos autores describen los índices del cambio ambiental y climático y sus efectos adversos en la humanidad, así como la necesidad de la paz mundial para asegurar el desarrollo sostenible global.

Palabras clave: Textos literarios africanos, cambio climático, medio ambiente, inseguridad, paz mundial

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Introduction

Interestingly, African writers have started to shake off the nostalgia induced by the Negritude ideology, which blamed the woes of the Black race mainly on the high-handedness of their colonial lords. A new generation of more committed African creative writers has made social realities of the modern society the main focus in their artistic creations. Environmental degradation, climate change and insecurity can slow down development. Food security and the well-being of humanhood also depend on a safe environment and on climate. Certain factors such as anthropogenic activities and increased greenhouse gases are responsible for high temperature, flooding, biodiversity loss, shortage of water, loss of soil nutrients and even diseases around the world. Gemeda and Sima (2015: 256) remark:

It is predicted that the temperature in the African continent will rise by 2 to 6^o C over the next 100 years. In terms of economy, the sub-Saharan Africa will lose a total of US\$26 million by 2060 due to climate change.

In recent times, global temperature and precipitation have increased because of the greenhouse effect and the destruction of the ozone layer. In Africa, burning of fossil fuels such as petroleum, coal, natural gases and bush, has caused deforestation. Besides, human beings have seriously altered the vegetation types one can find anywhere in the world. In Africa, for instance, the environment is negatively influenced by the activities of

man. Trees are cut down without replacement, and bushes are burnt recklessly. Hence, the nitrogen cycle is adversely affected, and life becomes difficult for both plants and animals, including man, the “superior animal”. The exchange of oxygen for carbon dioxide between man and nature has turned out to be inadequate because of the nonchalant attitude of man.

High level of dependence on agriculture, extraction of solid minerals, poor technology and inadequate financial potential as well as institutional incapacity among other things make countries in Africa to be the most negatively affected by environmental challenges and climate change. The continent is characterized by acute land degradation and wide range of desertification (Nordhaus 2006, Hummel 2015, Rose 2015).

The word eco-criticism is a fusion of ecology and criticism. Hornby (2000) sees “ecology” as “the relation of plants and living creatures to each other and to their environment, the (scientific) study of this.” The same authority defines “criticism” as “the work or activity of making fair, careful judgments about the good and bad qualities of something/somebody, especially books, music, etc.”

“Eco-criticism” is the study of representations of nature in literary works or any art for that matter, and of the relationship between literature and its milieu (Ogundokun 2014: 39). In other words, adopting ecological philosophy and concepts to the study as well as the understanding and explanation of literature could be viewed as eco-criticism. The term “géocritique” is used by French-speaking scholars to mean eco-criticism. As an academic field, eco-criticism started in the 1990s, but its roots date back to the late 1970s, when the term was coined by William Rueckert in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (Rueckert 1978). In 1996, Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the main theorists in the field, considers eco-criticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty 1996: xviii; see also Cronon 1996, Garrard 2008 and Ogundokun 2013b).

This study, it is evident, cannot be conducted without a thorough understanding of the ecological crises of modern time and must underscore personal and political actions, which undoubtedly make it a kind of activism. Using this theoretical framework, some critics articulate the interdisciplinary nature of the inquiry, which is informed by ecological variables such as science, politics, ethics, women’s studies, cultural studies and history, as well as sociology and criminology.

William Rueckert (1978) proposed that Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural

artefacts of language and literature. However, citing Huggan and Helen Tiffin, Ben Bunting (2015: 1) observes:

Today, ecocritics not only study the ways in which literature and the environment interact and have interacted, they have also cultivated an interdisciplinary interest, extending the scope of their work into the fields of environmental philosophy and bioethics as well as the environmental sciences, especially ecology.

Ramonu Sanusi's *Un Nègre a violé une Blonde à Dallas*

For the purpose of redirecting human thinking and attention with regard to environmental challenges, many creative writers in Africa have in recent times used their literary texts as a veritable platform. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the debate on how to fight the adverse effects of environmental degradation, climate change and insecurity. Ramonu Sanusi, in his novel *Un Nègre a violé une Blonde à Dallas (A negro raped a blonde in Dallas)* (2016) raises the issue of climate change, which, according to the author, is now a universal plague. Sanusi writes thus:

J'ai vu beaucoup de Présidents et des Premiers Ministres du monde entier là-bas. L'homme blanc a dit à la télévision que c'est une conférence sur les changements climatiques. Il y a cent quatre-vingt-dix pays du monde entier au total qui sont représentés là-bas. C'est pour parler! C'est pour discuter! C'est pour trouver une solution commune contre les dangers des changements climatiques. (Sanusi 2016a: 96)

The novelist gives reasons for the meeting of the world leaders. He points out that if the environmental degradation and climate change are not addressed there will be flooding, erosion and oil spillage among other things. For instance, the oil spillage will contaminate water body and eventually cause the death of water animals and even human beings. The lands will become barren. The author also warns that it is important to note that the smoke pollution released from industrial activities everywhere in the world is responsible for climate change which destroy the nature. The writer adds:

Les Changements Climatiques sont dangereux. Tellement dangereux même. Il faut lutter contre ça. C'est comme un cancer. Si l'on n'agit pas maintenant. Si l'on croise les bras. Si on regarde tout ça là comme un mouton sans prévenir ce danger, on n'aura pas de nourritures à manger dans

l'avenir. On n'aura pas d'eau à boire dans l'avenir ! Et tout ça là c'est grave ! (Sanusi 2016a: 96)

Before, the novelist holds the opinion that it was only armed robbers, drug barons, warlords all around the world and, especially, in black Africa who threatened nature, but it is now clear to him that climatic change is so dangerous that all hands must be on deck. Hence, it is time we stopped declining the clarion call to our responsibilities. If we folded our arms, if we just kept gazing at it like sheep, without preventing the danger, we would not have foods to eat and there would be no water to drink in the future.

Moi, je croyais auparavant que c'était les cambrioleurs, les barons de drogue, les Seigneurs de guerre partout dans le monde et surtout en Afrique noire qui embêtaient la nature, mais aujourd'hui l'homme blanc m'a enseigné une autre leçon.

La pollution est un grand danger car ça cause aussi le cancer ! Ça cause l'asthme ! Ça cause beaucoup de maladies nuisibles. Voilà pourquoi les enfants meurent prématurés. Voilà pourquoi les femmes enceintes perdent leurs grossesses. Et voilà pourquoi il ne pleut pas. Voilà pourquoi les terres de l'Afrique noire deviennent le désert. C'est pourquoi les terres meurent. Voilà pourquoi les herbes et les arbres meurent. (Sanusi 2016a: 96-97)

From the excerpt, it can be understood that the adverse effect of climate change is more dangerous than calamities coming from the activities of armed bandits, drug dealers, terrorists and wicked warlords. It is as dangerous as cancer. Apart from pollution, that causes asthma and other deadly diseases, there is the erosion, which accounts for the washing away of the essential soil nutrients and the eventual poor farm yields. Simply put, climate change will affect food production and food security. Flooding and drought are caused by climate change and they have negative influence on agriculture. Decline in food production and supply is capable of bringing food insecurity as well as malnutrition. In other words, flooding and drought will bring about scarcity of food and this will force prices to go up. The increase in prices of basic necessities of life will make things difficult, especially for the low income earners. The level of poverty will undoubtedly increase. The fall out of this ugly trend is an economic slowdown. In a economic recession, there is no possibility of sustainable national development because per capita income as well as the national foreign reserves are below expectations. Desertification will lead to

displacement of people and dangerous migration, which can bring about land grabbing syndrome.

It is also evident that environmental degradation, climate change and insecurity in Africa will force people to flee their territories for fear of dying. And when people are displaced from their countries, it will aggravate humanitarian crisis such as interborder movement and refugee palaver.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in 2011, Africa is the most susceptible continent to climate change related health issues because of the existing poverty and weak institutions to cope with health problems caused by climate change, unfair treatment of the environment and food insecurity.

Examining the possibility of human survival and of other living things, the presence or absence of vector and water borne pathogens is often determined by the amount of rainfall recorded at a particular time. Gemedá and Sima (2015: 259) remark:

Climate change can affect the well-being of human beings either directly or indirectly. For instance, changing in the quality of air, water and food can disturb human health indirectly. Climate change will likely discomfort the environmental and social conditions which might lead to social and economic disruptions.

On the issue of insecurity, through his major character, Ajanaku, Sanusi makes references to some terrorist groups around the world and the atrocities they cause from time to time. He mentions dreaded terrorists such as Boko Haram, ISIS and Al Shabab. The novelist's account shows that contemporary African creative writers are conscious of the level of insecurity not only in the immediate environment but also across the globe:

Deux jours après, c'est-à-dire le 15 novembre 2015, les Boko Haram du Nigeria: des Kamikaze sanguinaires ont coupé court la vie d'une centaine de gens. (Sanusi 2016a: 91)

Two days after a terrorist group bombed Charlie Hebdo in France, 15 November 2015, precisely, Boko Haram, a dreaded terrorist group in Nigeria massacred about a hundred innocent souls. However, the protagonist/writer is eager to disassociate himself from any form of terrorism. The narrator, in a first-person narrative technique, says that he is not a member of Boko Haram, ISIS or Al Shabab. He further explains:

Moi, je suis contre ce qui s'est passé a Paris hier le 13 novembre 2015. Je ne suis pas d'accord avec ces meurtriers qui ont tué CENT-TRENTE innocents, selon les dernières. (Sanusi 2016a: 89)

It is obvious that the main character, Ajanaku, and/or the writer (Sanusi) is against the heartless operations of the terrorists anywhere in the world. Therefore, there is a need to find a workable solution to the problem. This has to involve all nations of the world. There cannot be any meaningful development where there is no peaceful co-existence.

Underscoring his commitment to matters affecting the ecosystem, insecurity and world peace, Sanusi in another novel, *Le bistouri des larmes* (2005), frowns at Africans that instead of destroying the ecosystem and encouraging barbaric practices in the name of culture, they need to find ways of solving their socioeconomic and political problems that impoverish the African States as well as providing solutions to the environmental degradation, climate change and insecurity; especially in the crude oil producing areas. Sanusi believes that the economic meltdown is caused by dictatorship, incompetent administration, faulty policies, corruption and ignorance of the followership. Most countries in Africa are in serious debts: even with purported cuts in government expenditure such as the removal of subsidies on basic daily commodities and upward increase in taxes, Nigerian economy is still in a mess (see Ogundokun, 2013a and 2014).

However, the world leaders are advised not to make the conference on climate change in France, tagged Paris 2015, a matter of just drinking coffee morning, afternoon and night. The deadly impact of climate change on agricultural produce such as reduction in rainfall, soil infertility, and drop in food production (crops, animal husbandry and poultry) that needs urgent attention. The author notes the impact of climate change on human health. According to him, pollution lays in the root of life-threatening diseases like cancer and asthma. He equally points out that children die prematurely and women suffer miscarriages due to environmental issues. For fear of uncertainty, desertification is forcing many inhabitants to abandon their homes. As people flee their areas and migrate to other areas, there is an increased pressure on natural resources of the destination areas. This alone can foster further internal crisis or interethnic conflicts, like the issue of Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers in Nigeria at present. The impact of

climatic change on agriculture and human health will eventually paralyse meaningful socio-economic and political development.

Niyi Osundare's "They Too Are the Earth"

In addition, contributing to the fight against climate change through literary composition, one cannot ignore the genuine clarion call of Niyi Osundare in his poem entitled "They Too Are the Earth" (Osundare 1986: 45). A close reading of the poem will provide some basis for this study:

THEY TOO ARE THE EARTH

They too are the earth
The swamsongs of beggars sprawled out
The brimming gutters
They are the earth
Under snakeskin shoes and Mercedes tyres 5

They too are the earth
The sweat and grime of
Millions hewing wood and hurling water
They are the earth
Muddy every pore like naked moles 10

They too are the earth
The distant groans of thousands buried alive
In hard unfathomable mines
They are the earth
Of gold dreams and blood banks 15

They too are the earth
The dying distant deaths
In narrow abandoned hamlets
They are the earth
Women battling centuries 20
Maleficent slavery

Are they of this earth
Who fritter the forest and harry the hills
Are they of this earth
Who live that earth may die 25
Are they?

From her deep unsearchable mines
 Hitch up a ladder to the dodging sky
 Let's put a sun in every night
 Our earth is an opened grain house 20
 A bustling barn in some far, uncharted jungle
 A distant gem in a rough unhappy dust

This earth is
 Ours to work not to waste
 Ours to man not to main 25
 This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder
 (Osundare 1986: 48)

In this poem Osundare preaches for orderliness and carefulness on how human beings treat nature and the resources there-in. He holds the view that earth, which represents nature, needs to be handled with care and respect. The earth provides man's food, water, shelter, wears and other useful things.

The first part of the poem reflects on the theme of agriculture. We "plough and plant" (l. 1). With the hoe, the land is tilled, and crops are planted for man to get his food. The second stanza (4-7) shows the time of harvest. Farm implements like "mattocks" (4), "machetes" (4), "calabash trays" (5) and "Rocking baskets" (5) indicate that it is a season to enjoy the fruits of one's labour. "Heavy heaps" (7) and "earth roots" (6) demonstrate that the resources from mother earth are inexhaustible.

In the third stanza (8-13), the poet advocates for obedience in following the natural course of events: The fourth (14-22) and the fifth (23-26) stanzas continue the poet's line of thought that earth is capable of providing man with all he needs for a happy living. The expression "let's put a sun in every night" (19) suggests that the poet is calling for technological advancement, which will translate to progress and sustainable development. The poet believes that there are still resources yet untapped from the earth: "Our earth is an unopened grain house".

In the last stanza (23-26), the poet re-echoes that earth remains the most veritable and inexhaustible asset for mankind. Hence, man must not destroy it. Man only needs to "plough" the earth, but "not to plunder" it (26). In a mildly sharp tone but hopeful mood, Osundare calls for caution in the way and manner we carry out certain activities on earth, with advice that earth must be respected and preserved if our future is to be guaranteed.

Babies clinging on their backs	20
Dart about	
In and out	
Madly;	
The wind whistles by	
Whilst trees bend to let it pass.	25
Clothes wave like tattered flags	
Flying off	
To expose dangling breasts	
As jagged blinding flashes	
Rumble, tremble and crack	30
Amidst the smell of fired smoke	
And the pelting march of the storm.	
(Rubadiri 2004: 21-22)	

David Rubadiri, an African poet from Malawi, reflects on climatic condition in his poem titled “African Thunderstorm”. A careful reading of this poem provides a picturesque detail of what an unusual climate situation can cause both plants and animals, including humanhood.

In fact, Rubadiri’s poem is a demonstration of the havoc which climate change can wreak on man. The poet depicts an atmosphere of commotion and confusion to recreate and explain an African experience of a thunderstorm. The poem depicts a total panic, discomfort and uncertainty caused by the climatic condition called thunderstorm. In the words of the poet, the thunderstorm is “Turning sharply / Here and there” (3-4) and this situation is compared to the plague of locusts, which is equally destructive. As a means of warning, the poet designs a clear imagery of nature and explains how human beings can be affected by a given climatic situation. The lines “In the village / Screams of delighted children / Toss and turn / In the din of whirling wind” (15-18) and also “Women, / Babies clinging on their backs” (19-20) picture the unpleasant situation human beings found themselves. The thunderstorm destroys trees and clothes as the poet captures it (24-28).

Whether directly or indirectly, man’s carefree attitude towards his environment could have been responsible for the destructive thunderstorm, which ravaged the African community as presented in the poem.

Ahmed Yerima's *Ipomu*

Although the main concern of Ahmed Yerima in his play *Ipomu* (2011) is socio-political awareness in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria, the playwright extends his discussion to the ecosystem of the said region. He identifies environmental degradation, illiteracy, poverty, hostility such as blocking of oil wells, pipeline vandalism, arms running and proliferation, as well as kidnapping, as the major social challenges in the Niger Delta. *Ipomu*, Yerima's hero in the play, explains:

We walked in the oily stained river; the oil river mixed with shreds, carcasses of dead fish . . . and burnt crayfish half fried with the river oil and the basking heat from the sun. Oh! the sickening smell (Yerima 2011: 121).

From the foregoing excerpt, the unhealthy environmental condition in the Niger Delta is vividly captured. For instance, "the oily stained river" illustrates that the fish farming activity, which is the major occupation of the Ijaws and other ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta, is no longer feasible. This has added to the problem of unemployment and shortage of essential food. There is, therefore, malnutrition and traces of kwashiorkor. The phrase, "basking heat from the sun" shows a proof of the destruction of the ozone layer, while the expression "the sickening smell" indicates pollution, which eventually brings about dreaded ailments like cancer, asthma, and other air or diseases.

Yerima attempts to warn all the concerned authorities to urgently do what is required to control the negative effects of oil exploration in the Niger Delta areas. The issues of oil spillages and gas flaring should be tackled squarely by the government and the multinational oil companies to ensure continue existence of people and other living things in that part of the world.

Recommendations and Conclusions

In their artistic compositions, the four purposively selected literary writers have proved it beyond doubt that climate change can lead to people's displacement, suffering and death. The essence of a good research in the field of cultural studies is to provide workable solution(s) to human problems to bring global advancement. This study, therefore, recommends the following solutions to curb the menace of climatic change in the world.

There is a need for adequate information sharing and dissemination on issues relating to environmental and climate changes and how to adaptn /

acclimatize to the changes. Awareness on ecological education must be created. The media, both online and on print, as agents of socialization and mobilization should carry out their social responsibilities in this regard. Governments at various levels, private sectors/companies as well as non-governmental organizations should take matters that concern the ecosystem very seriously by sponsoring programmes, seminars, workshops and events that will provide information on environmental education and measures to reduce the adverse effects of environmental challenges, climate change and insecurity that are associated with them.

Construction of dams, development of river basin and irrigation farming should be encouraged to downsize the effects of drought. Farmers and herdsman conflicts should be resolved with all seriousness and faithfully too. Mining activities should be done in line with the best practices around the world. Illegal mining and vandalism must be checked.

The culture of tree planting and forest reservation should be advocated for at all levels of government. Climate smart initiatives should be encouraged in agricultural practices. It is high time countries in the world embraced the idea of comparative advantage as regards agricultural produce and natural resources to prevent overstressing the available resources and unhealthy competition.

Research activities in the areas of climate change, strategies to reduce pressure on available natural resources and ways of managing environmental risks and disasters must be of interest to scholars of higher institutions.

The study has established that it is not only the activities of armed bandits, drug traffickers, warlords and terrorists that are dangerous. Illegal mining and climate change are potential threats to human existence on earth. Applying an eco-critic perspective, this paper has identified major adverse effects of climatic change on agricultural produce, human health and socio-economic development of a given nation. The writers of the examined texts demonstrate that literary works are also capable of debating ecological issues, with a view to suggesting constructive solutions to challenges which are associated with climatic plague. They believe that human activities on earth must be guided, and the earth must be treated with care to ensure human sustainability and development within his ecosystem. The study holds that all hope is not lost in coping with ecological challenges if the whole world can exercise utmost mutual co-operation.

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