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Between the Supernatural and Nature: Ecocritical Interpretation of Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between humanity and the natural environment using Femi Osofisan's play No More the Wasted Breed (1982). A general reading of the text implicates supernatural elements as conspirators in human misery. In most African interpretations of human experience, nature's wrath and rage are always associated with supernatural interventions. Many scholars and critics have interpreted the play as the fury of supernatural elements against humanity. Such interpretations advocate for humanity's radical awakening to chart a new course of existence independent of supernatural powers. While these perspectives are valid, they overlook the immediate relationship between people and their natural environment, which contributes to the inexorable synergy driving global economic advancement. Through the theoretical framework of ecocriticism, this article argues that the text interrogates the inevitable conflict between humanity and the natural environment, demonstrating how people inadvertently despoil it for economic gain. The study adopts a qualitative research methodology through detailed textual analysis, which reveals the inevitable intersection between humanity and the environment. It attempts to rescue human desolation in the text from supernatural nemesis. While humanity unconsciously neglects nature and exploits it for survival, nature inevitably threatens human existence. It concludes by identifying environmental concerns in the text and explaining how nature can react negatively when humanity continuously neglects it.

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Introduction

This study interprets Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* from an ecocritical perspective. Ecocriticism examines the relationship between people and their natural environment and how that relationship is portrayed in literature. According to Al Fawareh *et al* (2023), "it deals with the presentation and analysis of environmental concerns, environmental-related cultural issues, and attitudes toward nature. Studying

how people behave and respond in their cultures toward the environment and ecological issues is one of ecocriticism's key goals" (p. 783). The study provides an alternative perspective for interpreting the play, which has hitherto been assessed from Marxist, class, and spiritual perspectives. Studying a text from an environmental viewpoint also reveals cultural, historical, and anthropological realities of a people. Schneider-Mayerson *et al* (2020), remark that "most of us believe that studying environmentally engaged texts is a valuable and even important enterprise not only because this work is interesting and gratifying, but because these texts matter—socially, culturally, politically" (p. 1). One of the eclectic features of *No More the Wasted Breed* is its polysemic identity, which allows writers and critics to interpret it from multiple, diverse perspectives. Over the years, while Marxism and the role of the supernatural have dominated the play's interpretive engagements, ecocritical orientations have been muted. When they are highlighted, they fail to establish the dialectics of humanity and the natural environment as an inseparable whole.

Beyond the dominant interpretation of the text from a Marxist and supernatural perspective lies a profound relationship between nature and humanity. That relationship is captured by Raji (2007), who asserts that "the waters of the river have crashed over the banks and have invaded the farmlands and houses. Strange times, so the people say, especially with a food supply that is in acute shortage, with crops that have all rotted away and with a strange epidemic that is feeding on the flesh of small children" (p. 4). Raji sets the ball rolling by painting a grim picture of the situation in the play where humanity is at the receiving end of nature's implacable fury. The people and the river, two inseparable friends, have thus become enemies. Given that humans are more conscious than nonhuman elements of nature, they are predisposed to a superior awareness that empowers them to dominate the natural environment, creating a lopsided relationship within the ecosystem.

Osofisan is not an acclaimed environmental writer. He is noted for his Marxist proclivities, and critics have interpreted his works along that ideological prism. Olaniyan (2020), agrees that "in *No More the Wasted Breed*, Osofisan identifies with the poor and the oppressed in the society and wonders why they are usually called upon to sacrifice their lives at the expense of the rich" (p. 38). Olaniyan's submission encapsulates a myriad of other interpretations of the text from a Marxist class alignment. The class and social interpretations of Osofisan's plays could be attributed to the struggles in his native Nigeria, a country caught in the throes of political instability, corruption, and a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Thus, ecocriticism is not a popular framework for interpreting the text like other critical literary armaments such as Marxism, Deconstruction, and Psychoanalysis. Ejiogu & Ekpenisi (2014), infer that "Eco-literature is virtually a new area of scholarship in Nigeria's literary landscape. The obvious reason for this cannot be far-fetched. Nigerians are still grappling with primordial problems of existence such as food, shelter and clothing" (p. 100). However, the rising incidence of environmental crises in the country has necessitated a revisiting of environmental concerns and their representation in Nigerian literature. Beyond the text's Marxist thematic thrust, an ecocritical interpretation seeks to unravel how the Egure community in the text is influenced by environmental factors and how these factors affect its existential continuities.

Osofisan wrote the play as a response to Wole Soyinka's play *The Strong Breed,* where Soyinka subtly prescribes human sacrifice as a form of propitiation to lubricate the gulf between the living and the dead, man and his ancestors. While responding to Soyinka, Osofisan denounces human sacrifice as a way of redeeming humanity and appeasing callous, uncaring supernatural essences. Awoyemi *et al* (2014), observe that "ritual sacrifice of human beings is a paradigm of the old order and is denounced in Osofisan's plays" (p. 86). Therefore, ritual and human sacrifice also occupy a pride of place in the interpretive kernel of the text and have motivated the public to question the gods' insistence on

human sacrifice. These analyses have, over the years, sustained various analytical interests, galvanising multiple interpretive patterns, which open new vistas for further critical scrutiny of the text. Ecological concerns in the text establish the friction in the relationship between humans and their immediate environment. These ecological flourishes in the text provide the spine of this study.

The attention of the creative, literary world was drawn to environmental issues in 1978 when William Rueckert coined the term 'ecocriticism' to examine the relationship between humans and their environment and how that relationship is portrayed in literature. The ecocritical inquiry has, over the years, revealed that although the relationship between humans and their environment is mutual, literary depictions of that relationship often portray humans as a destructive force against nature in the pursuit of advancement and development. According to Rueckert (1978), "the conceptual and practical problem is to find the grounds upon which the two communities - the human, the natural - can coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere" (p. 77). *No More the Wasted Breed* has elicited diverse reactions from critics regarding the conspiracy of supernatural elements and capitalist multinational companies to degrade the environment that provides economic prospects for people living in riverine areas. To underscore the preceding assertion, Richards (1996), implicates Elusu, the goddess of the inland waters in the text by remarking that "she has abrogated her responsibilities by ignoring violations committed by powerful slave traders in the past and oil drilling magnates in the present, while inflicting death and destruction on ignorant fishermen and farmers" (p. 16). Richards agrees with the primal existence of supernatural essences and their ability to influence human destiny by inhabiting natural objects and the environment. These supernatural essences further assert hegemonic control over humanity by seeking sacrifices and propitiations as conditions for continual blessings.

Environmental crisis is a present reality worldwide, and literature has not shied away from illustrating how these crises endanger the continued existence of both human and natural communities. Kortenkamp and Moore (2001), aver that "environmental crises, such as species extinction, global warming, air and water pollution, and wildland destruction, are some of the most important problems currently facing our society. How we deal with these problems largely depends on how we perceive our relationship with the land" (p. 261). Through literary interpretations, nature and the environment are revealed to speak in accordance with the writer's eco-convictions, which may subscribe to anthropocentric or ecocentric views. The literary interpretations of ecocriticism mean that the text can be explained and understood through an ecocritical prism. Although these ecocritical literary interpretations do not directly mention *No More the Wasted Breed*, this article fills that gap by establishing a parallel between the literary ideas of ecocriticism and the text. Some of the ecocritical literary interpretations portray, in more practical terms, how humanity's neglect of nature can adversely affect humanity. Hutchings (2007), reminds us that,

> "*One of ecocriticism's basic premises is that literature both reflects and helps shape human responses to the natural environment. By studying the representation of the physical world in literary texts and the social contexts of their production, ecocriticism attempts to account for attitudes and practices that have contributed to modern-day ecological problems*" (p. 172).

Given these revelations enabled by ecocritical inquiries, we can profitably contend that people's existence and well-being are intricately dependent on the well-being of their natural environment. As mostly fishermen and farmers, the economic well-being and survival of the Egure community depended on the safety of the Egure River. But unfortunately, the community was only interested in exploiting the resources of nature without also making efforts to protect nature.

In a way, the totality of humanity's natural environment constitutes a significant aspect of its culture, which defines its way of life. Therefore, humanity's ruination of the natural environment for economic and sundry aspects of advancement negatively affects it in the long

run. If nature provides a source of existence and advancement for humanity, then that source deserves equitable attention from it. That is the immediate project of ecocriticism. Buell *et al* (2011) argue that,

> "*Ecocriticism begins from the conviction that the arts of imagination and the study thereof—by virtue of their grasp of the power of word, story, and image to reinforce, enliven, and direct environmental concern—can contribute significantly to the understanding of environmental problems: the multiple forms of eco-degradation that afflict planet Earth today*" (p. 418)

In *No More the Wasted Breed*, the Egure Community sees the river as an animist materialistic object, which provides them a source of spiritual revival. Animism is the belief that nonhuman, natural objects possess life, soul, vitality, and consciousness and operate at the same level as human beings. Adherents of animism turn trees, rivers, mountains, stones, roads, and various environmental objects into spiritual items of worship. In these cases, people locate their spiritual essence in such entities. Expectedly, these objects are desecrated in the process of ritual and sacrificial propitiation by way of libation, where liquid and food items are poured on them. Thus, nature and man's immediate environment are abused and violated. Newman (2002), remarks that "at a time when it is becoming clear that environmental destruction is a feature of modern societies as pervasive and persistent as sexual oppression, ecocriticism has begun a crucial expansion of the vibrant tradition of radicalising scholarship" (p. 3). In many parts of the world, especially in developing countries, people engage in wanton destruction of the environment in pursuit of an expansionist agenda, which could be cultural, political, or economic. Thus, the natural environment accepts all of humanity's destructive excesses, and this is part of ecocriticism's project – to identify these wanton anomalies as they are represented in literature. However, nature unconsciously reacts to this constant human plundering in various ways. Nature's reaction when neglected can have far-reaching consequences for people's general well-being and continued existence.

Given people's exploitative attitude towards their environment in the pursuit of economic benefits, some critics, through the lens of ecocriticism, focus their searchlight on the effects of the persistent war against nature by humanity. Fenn (2015) infers that "ecocriticism not only emphasises the "harmony" of humanity and nature but also talks about the destruction caused to nature by the changes which take place in the modern world, for most of which man is directly responsible" (p. 118). The pursuit of modernity constitutes a threat to the existence of nature. Medical investigations and research turn to plants, leaves, foliage, and roots of plants as extracts to advance cures for diverse human ailments. Therefore, it appears that nature exists for people's fulfilment, which upholds the anthropocentric inclinations of humanity. Given these realities, ecocentric narratives are subdued because humanity is elevated above nature. Mishra (2016) sums up the historical disregard of nature and its challenges in literature by observing that "for a long time, nature was not given due consideration by literary critics, so ecologically oriented literature pleads for a better understanding of nature in its wider significance" (p. 168). When critics preach for a better understanding of nature, they are invariably encouraging humanity to pay more attention to nature and recognise it as part of its existence that requires nourishment, as does any other aspect of human existence.

Ecological factors and conditions affect human culture in different ways, so that the understanding of these factors is a way of appreciating human conditions. Heise (2013), makes the point that "the ecocritical perspective has always distinguished itself by its interest in how nonhumans interact with human cultures: how ecological conditions shape cultural expressions and, conversely, how culture shapes the perception and uses of the natural environment" (p. 638). Oppermann (2006), observes that "in fact, in order to surpass its ambivalent methodological orientations, and to effect change in today's literary and academic community, ecocriticism needs to be more fully engaged in a dynamic interaction with literary theory, not in a derivative sense but to develop its unique

theoretical footing" (p. 108). Oppermann argues that ecocriticism deserves to develop and become a canonized critical and literary theory on its own, given the innovative platforms it provides in literature for the critical appreciation of the natural environment and its relationship with humanity.

Methodology

This article utilizes the theoretical paradigm of Ecocriticism to provide fresh insights for the understanding of Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*. Adopting a qualitative approach, the study focuses on a detailed interpretation of the text to reveal the inexorable relationship between humanity and the natural environment. Although Osofisan's texts have always been interpreted and understood from a class-based, Marxist perspective, the analysis of the text demonstrates that Osofisan can be regarded as an environmental writer who exposes the tensions between the Egure community in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria and their immediate environment. A detailed analysis of the text shows why the riverbank collapsed over the farmlands and destroyed the people's economic resources. It also reveals the people's response to the tragedy that befalls them. In addition to the text as primary data, the article also uses secondary data, such as other critical materials on the text, which reveal the relationship between humanity and the natural environment. Overall, the research will be library-based. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to analyse the many sub-categories of ecocriticism, it is important to have a broader overview of the theory as it relates to literary interpretation. This is why the research further explains ecocriticism by focusing on the anthropocentric and ecocentric aspects of the theory.

While anthropocentrism is concerned with human-centred interest in environmental issues, ecocentrism is concerned with nature-centred interest in environmental issues. Both aspects of ecocriticism will sustain the spine of this study, revealing how humanity and nature are infinitely intertwined. The article demonstrates that nature and the entire natural environment are important components of the Earth within a matrix of continual cohabitation. When both natural and human communities exist harmoniously, it creates a symbiosis that progressively renews the Earth and upholds the coherence of the cosmic regime. In the ecological circle, humanity is the dominant, controlling species, determining the well-being of the flora and fauna in various ways. The substratum of these realities is captured in geography, environmental sciences, and earth-related studies.

The emergence of ecocriticism birthed a new class of literary critics who joined ecologists to act as nature's advocate in revealing how man has constituted a threat to nature. Ecocritics, like ecologists, advocate for ecological justice where humans and nature can coexist harmoniously, each serving the other's purpose. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996), advance the frontiers of ecocritical engagement by highlighting the intersections between nature and culture as captured in literature. According to them, "ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman" (p. xix). Ecocriticism utilises literature's instrumentality to draw global attention to the challenges in the relationship between people and nature and to the consequences humanity will face if people continue to deplete nature through inadvertent actions. Khan (2019) expands the scope of ecocriticism by remarking that "ecocriticism is a demonstration of how the sense of biology, biopolitics, environmentalism, pastoralism, living spaces, and ergonomic designs informs the works of literature" (p. 25).

The ecocritical reading of *No More the Wasted Breed* exposes the inadequacies of the Egure community in their relationship with the river, which constitutes an important component in their economic survival. While the Egure community blame supernatural elements for their economic and environmental woes, they fail to care for their environment. Furthermore, an ecocritical

analysis of the text draws the public's attention to the incessant occurrence of flooding in the riverine area and the urgent need for communities and governments to curb such environmental excesses. With the consequences of the Egure community's neglect of the river, awareness is created about the potential impact of the environmental crisis on humanity, which could range from the destruction of economic sources of survival, displacement, and health hazards, leading to the death of members of the community. In this way, ecocriticism initiates a more practical, demonstrable approach to environmental issues because everyone can feel the presence and influence of the immediate environment. Asika (2014), remarks that "an appraisal of man's activities as it affects nature; an awareness of this fact; a scrutiny of how this injustice to nature affects man in return constitute the idea of eco-criticism in literary discourse" (p. 21). By relying on such sacrifices to uphold the existence of these supernatural elements, humanity inadvertently ignores the existential threat posed by disregarding the natural environment.

Ecocriticism covers different literary genres where humanity is confronted with environmental challenges. Nuri (2020) opines that "though ecocriticism focuses on nature, all writings on nature are not ecocritical. There must be the presence of a strong bond between the humans and the non-humans for a writing to be considered as ecocritical" (p. 4). For a text to convey ecocritical possibilities, it must reflect a mutual relationship between humans, nature, and their immediate environment and how they influence each other. Humanity and the natural environment must have a fundamental synergy within a spatial continuum. When a writer describes nature and its corollary beauty in drama, prose, or poetry without establishing a relationship between them and humanity, such representations may not be adequate for an ecocritical interpretation. Therefore, ecocriticism is based on the premise that humanity and the natural environment must be interdependent and mutually related. It emphasises the interdependence of organic and non-organic universes foregrounded or captured in any genre of literature. It advocates reviving and revalidating all constituent elements of the ecosystem chain as portrayed in literature. It does not elevate people over their environment, nor does it elevate the natural environment over people. Rather, it argues for judicial balancing, an inauguration of a universal equilibrium where people and their natural environment will prosper. However, since humanity as a conscious phenomenon depends on nature for survival and inadvertently engages in its despoliation, ecocriticism seems to always campaign for the protection of nature from humanity's invading, exploitative tendencies.

Anthropocentrism and Ecocentrism

While examining the relationship between humanity and the natural environment in literature, ecocriticism utilizes a human-centred approach, anthropocentrism, or a nonhuman, natural environment approach, ecocentrism. Depending on individual critics and the motive of interpretation, ecocriticism can be explained as an anthropocentric or ecocentric theory. Anthropocentrism emphasises the supremacy of humanity over other elements of creation, including supernatural essences. In pursuit of anthropocentric convictions, humanity, therefore, sees everything in the environment as serving its survival and beneficial purposes. Therefore, it is motivated to conquer, dominate, and destroy nature to advance personal objectives. The anthropocentric complexion of the play establishes the people of the Egure community as the most important factor, given that their suffering for failing to offer sacrifice to Elusu goddess of the inland waters for twenty-five years results in the dying of all aquatic ingredients, and the overflowing of the Egure River, which washes away the farmlands. Whether it is the natural reaction of the river or the influence of some supernatural powers that caused the river to overflow, the people of the community are only interested in how the overflowing of the water contributed to their economic and survival woes. The most important thing to them is their inability to fish or fetch water from the river, as the anger of the river decimates their farmlands. Therefore, humanity as an element of nature is the most significant, essential, and focal point in the

creation chain. All other factors are immaterial or less important.

The Anthropocentric attitude of the Egure community leads the people to ignore nature by failing to adopt an effective irrigation procedure to check the excesses of the river. Thus, while the people and many critics interpret the overflowing river as anger from the gods, an ecocritical response will interpret the situation as a deliberate neglect of nature, which ultimately creates a crisis in the relationship. Over time, people see nature as serving their numerous purposes without an effort to establish a structure that would also care for nature so that the relationship between the two is mutually beneficial. Besides the death of aquatic elements as a consequence of the overflowing river, the farmlands are also invaded by the deluge, which washes the crops away, thereby causing hunger in the land. So, as fishermen cry, farmers also sorrow in equal measure. The plague, which causes death among children, can be interpreted as an outbreak of water-borne diseases, vector-borne diseases, and acute malaria resulting from excessive mosquito bites. In a way, the river's overflowing can be construed as flooding, a menace that challenges most urban and semi-urban settlements with poor drainage systems. The plague in the land is a result of over-flooding, which is a derivative of poor hygiene as a result of stagnant water from the river. Ultimately, these developments affect the Egure community in terms of their economy, health, and general well-being. It can therefore be said that although nature is unconscious, it has taken its pound of flesh from the people for the neglect and exploitation of its resources.

On the other hand, ecocriticism can be interpreted from the standpoint of ecocentrism, which is nature and environment-centred, upholding the belief that nature is supreme in the universe of creation. Thompson and Barton (1994), distinguish anthropocentrism and ecocentrism by remarking that "ecocentric individuals value nature for its own sake and, therefore, judge that it deserves protection because of its intrinsic value. In contrast, anthropocentrists feel that the environment should be protected because of its value in maintaining or enhancing the quality of life for humans" (p. 149). The ecocentric perspective of the play relies on the river, which the people depend on for their economic well-being because they are fishermen and farmers by occupation. Lucia (2017) explains ecocentrism more concisely. According to her, "Ecocentrism here simultaneously indicates: (a) an ethical position where nature is recognised as having intrinsic value; and (b) an epistemological position reflecting ecology's relational and holistic understanding of 'nature' and its ecosystems, of which humans are but a part" (p. 186). Ecocentrism calls for attention towards nature as a vital component of human existence. However, in the text, failure to take care of the river leads to overflow, causing damage to the community. The priest of Olokun, god of the inland waters, had informed the people that the river goddess Elusu was angry for the people's failure to offer sacrifices and demanded human sacrifices to appease the gods. Beyond the human explanation for the anger of the river, it offers the opportunity to critically scrutinise circumstances that could warrant the river to overflow, leading to the death of aquatic creatures. From an ecocritical perspective, environmental changes, including the intensity of global temperature, could lead to the drying up of a river. Heavy rainfall where there is poor drainage could also lead the river to overflow.

Results and Discussion

Set in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria with its documented environmental crisis, *No More the Wasted Breed* reveals how the anger of the sea can inflict poverty and penury on the people who depend on the waters for their livelihood. Adebiyi-Adelabu and Ayomide (2023), posit that "the environmental issues in the Niger Delta have subjected the people to abject poverty and untold hardship with other negative activities that are harmful to their existence and survival" (p. 45). This means that the economic survival of the Niger Delta area depends on the security and safety of the entire ecosystem. Amid the raging calamity upon the Egure community, Biokun's friend and a member of the Egure community Saluga, alludes to the complicity of the multinational oil companies in the despoliation of the river,

which may have contributed to its degradation and inevitable overflowing. Thus, besides human neglect, the activities of multinational oil companies in the area also contribute to degrading the environment through pollution and adulteration.

1. Humanity Versus the Supernatural

At the beginning of the play, two supernatural elements, Olokun, god of the inland waters, and his wife Elusu, emerge in human form to assess the extent of the damage which Elusu had inflicted on the people for their refusal to offer sacrifices to her in twenty-five years. Osofisan (1982), writes:

> *"OLOKUN: Look at your work. Just look at your work, Elusu.*
> *ELUSU: Yes. Am I not beautiful?*
> *OLOKUN: Beautiful! Look at the wreckage you've made of the town. For how many months now you have surrounded them, suffocated them, till their land has ceased to breathe. You have spread your water everywhere, like a terrible carpet, so that wherever they put their feet, even within their doors, they swim in you.*
> *ELUSU: And more! You should see their farmlands, which I have turned to swamp. Roots of their precious crops, I held so tight in my embrace, till they rotted away. I am a terrible goddess of vengeance*." (Osofisan, 1982, p. 88)

The people of the Egure community recognise the existence of supernatural elements expressed through gods and goddesses. As a cultural and spiritual practice that underscores their animist inclinations, they always offer sacrifices as propitiations to lubricate the continuum between humanity and the gods. However, for twenty-five years, the Egure community failed to offer sacrifices to Elusu goddess of the inland waters, and in retaliation, the goddess caused the river to overflow, leading to the death of all water creatures, which hitherto provided economic support for the people. In addition to the overflowing of the river, there is a deadly plague in the land which claimed the lives of young ones. Biokun, a member of the community, responds to the tragedy in the land by consulting Togun, the revered Olokun priest. However, Togun identifies a mole on Biokun's chest, which reveals that he is from the lineage of carriers, therefore, the gods chose him as a carrier, one who has been selected to die vicariously to save the community. Togun further reveals that Osoosi, Biokun's father, was a carrier and that during a ritual process by Osoosi, a woman intervened and stopped the process, thereby contaminating the cult tradition. The woman was eventually stoned to death, and Osoosi wandered into the unknown. Saluga, Biokun's friend, queries why the gods should desire human sacrifice from the underclass and not from the wealthy class:

> *"SALUGA: Tell me, why is it always us who give our lives? Why is it always the poor who are called to sacrifice? Why is it always the wretched, never a wealthy man, never the son of a king, who is suddenly discovered to bear the mark of destiny at difficult moments, and pushed on to fulfil himself in suicidal tasks? Why?"*(Osofisan, 1982, p.105)

The protest from Saluga, Biokun's friend, provokes Elusu as she and her husband Olokun appear to confront Biokun. Saluga states his case vehemently and insists that the gods have been unfair to humans. Irked by this apparent impudence, Elusu strikes Saluga dead. Olokun asserts his supremacy and authority over his wife by banishing her into the river and divesting her of every supernatural power. He takes this action because he is sympathetic to humans, given their misery and suffering. Olokun returns to the sea after banishing his wife to another generation and encourages humanity to build a new pragmatic order devoid of supernatural interventions. Through Olokun's action, he encourages humanity to disregard supernatural essences and build a new pragmatic order where they are empowered to take their destinies in their hands.

In the text, the interplay between human hardship and the anger of the natural environment represented by the river demonstrates a relationship between two mutually dependent entities, even if people are of a more superior, enlightened consciousness. Adeoye (2014), asserts that "among several other useful advantages, ecocriticism allows researchers to describe the link between nature, man, science and arts through literary

works (poems, novels, drama and others)" (p. 83). Although the playwright presents Olokun, god of the inland waters, and Elusu his wife and goddess of the inland waters, as extra-terrestrial and supernatural beings who have come to inspect the extent of the damage caused by Elusu as punishment against the people for disrespecting her, ecocriticism looks beyond the spiritual dimension of the play to locate a relationship between people and their environment.

The harmony and equitability of the relationship between the community and Egure River are distorted due to the people's continual appropriation of the resources of the river without a corresponding investment by way of attentive nurturing. Oluseye *et al* (2020), re-emphasize humanity's duty to its environment, constructed upon a reciprocal ordering. According to them, "nature is the environment in which humans are enfolded; humans must therefore interact with the generative forces of nature, out of curiosity, out of existence, and generally as a way of relating to their environment" (p. 2). Most times, people's failure to fulfil their side of the natural contract of protecting the environment causes natural and environmental crises. Most riverine communities experience overflowing banks periodically, given that they are surrounded by water. As a consequence of their location around the riverine area, the Egure community shares an inexorable affinity with nature, which can be positive and negative.

2. Human Failure towards The Environment

The failure of the people to take care of the river and its surroundings can be blamed on their anthropocentric posturing, which motivates them to consider themselves as the most important element in the ecological chain. Instead of taking care of the river, the people indulge in the mindless exploitation of its resources for economic gain, which echoes a capitalistic attitude. Nwagbara (2013), pinpoints humanity's commodification of nature, depending on it for gain while neglecting it by remarking that "the shift from the preservation of nature to capitalism in the wake of frontier global capitalism is fundamentally ensconced in different modes of humanity's relation to the earth" (p. 199). Flowing rivers, by their nature, deserve attention, clearing of the bushes around them, creating pathways for erosion waters to navigate to waste routes, and ensuring adequate maintenance of the river environment.

The encounter between Togun, the Olokun priest and Biokun, a member of the Egure community, broadens the frontiers of our understanding of the relationship between the people of the Egure community and the Egure River. Biokun has come to offer sacrifices to the god and goddess of the sea to save his son Erindo from dying. Erindo is a victim of the deadly bubonic plague in the community, claiming the lives of young children. With the appearance of Togun, we can put a face to the responsibility of taking care of the Egure River and ensuring the proper cleaning of its environment. However, Togun, we are informed, is the priest of the god and goddess of the river. Although there are narratives that support the existence of gods and goddesses as controlling the waterways and river banks, in the text, it is empirically impossible to establish a connection between the overflowing banks of the river and the controlling hands of the gods. Togun, as the caretaker of the river, failed in his responsibilities to protect the river and ensure its adequate well-being. In modern times, societies recognize the importance of taking care of rivers and their natural environment therefore, persons such as caretakers are appointed to ensure that the river is protected from abuse and violation. They also mobilize community or government efforts to construct channels for diverting rainwater or any other unwanted deposits into the river. It is possible that Togun acts in that capacity in the text. The exchange between Togun, Biokun and Saluga reveals Togun as the caretaker of the land,

"TOGUN: So you see –
BIOKUN: The goddess is angry?
TOGUN: That is their message (pointing to the OLD COUPLE)
SALUGA: But no one has ever told us. Did you know?
TOGUN: I had forgotten.

SALUGA: You, forgotten! You, the priest, with the land's welfare in your hands!
Or is that not what your worshippers claim?
TOGUN: I thought ... I thought it did not matter anymore." (Osofisan, 1982, p.99)

There is a bit of illogicality at this juncture because the audience does not know the real cause of the overflowing banks of the river, whether it is a failure to offer sacrifices to Elusu for twenty-five years or because Biokun's family, as a designated carrier household, failed to offer a human being for sacrifice. This obvious unresolved contradiction gives credence to a more plausible ecocritical interpretation of the overflowing banks of the Egure River. Human neglect led to the environmental crisis, and it affected the community in adverse ways. This presents a counter-discourse of the artistic objectives of the playwright, yet an ecocritical lens has revealed these ecological possibilities in the text. The encounter between Elusu and Saluga upholds the belief in the existence of supernatural forces as the controlling powers of waterways. However, Olokun intervenes, raises Saluga from the dead, and banishes his wife to another generation. Biokun goes home with Saluga as a victory for humanity over their oppressive god and goddess of the sea. Although the playwright creates his dramatic world to pursue a definite artistic objective, which is to remind humanity not to succumb to the whims and caprices of supernatural elements, the text opens genuine vistas for an ecocritical interpretation of events in the Egure community.

3. Environmental Concerns in The Text

The three critical environmental concerns raised in the text are the overflowing of the riverbanks, which causes aquatic elements to die, the crops washed away by the overflowing river, and the bubonic plague that caused the death of children in the community. These three different tragic occurrences can be explained through the critical lens of ecocriticism. First, when there are heavy rains, the rivers are overfilled, and where there is a poor irrigation network, like an overflowing cup, the river will ultimately overflow and spill into farmlands and homes. So, we can safely contend that it is the failure of the Egure community to reciprocate the rich economic resources of the river by providing proper irrigation that caused the river to overflow. Secondly, flood incidents across the world affect farmlands and agricultural schemes negatively. The consequence of the overflowing Egure River is the destruction of farmlands, which affects the farmers, leading to poor harvests. Thirdly, the bubonic plague, which claimed the lives of children, can be attributed to mosquito bites, given that the entire village was overrun by water, thus providing stagnant water as a home for mosquitoes. Given the children's low immunity, they became victims of these environmental threats.

Although humanity is at the centre of the universe and dominates its immediate environment for advancement, the relationship between people and nature must be balanced to achieve an equilibrium reflecting ecocentric and anthropocentric attitudes. By banishing his wife Elusu and identifying with human beings, Olokun encourages humanity to disregard the powers of the gods and take their fate into their hands. In the prevailing circumstance, the fate of the Egure community is to see the challenges in their land as purely environmental issues and design ways to combat them rather than blaming the gods for their woes. Across the world, when there is a flood arising from climate change or humanity's failure to properly irrigate its surroundings, it affects the farmlands, which ultimately affects the production of farm products, with severe consequences for the people. Earthquakes and other natural disasters are known to cause serious human displacement when they happen. Besides the displacements, deaths and other bodily injuries are also recorded when the earth erupts. In the 21st century, when modern cultures like mobile telephony, social media, and other information technology-driven aspects of life are on the increase, changes in climate conditions and the natural environment affect these global, modern cultures. Connections are unstable, and services are disrupted following major changes in climate or other environmental issues. These issues are captured in the literature and therefore must attract

ecocritical responses. Perhaps critics should expand the canonical branches of ecocriticism to accommodate every human issue affected by the environment and represented in literature. The foregoing could be interpreted as the ultimate message by the playwright.

Conclusion

Through the critical searchlight of ecocriticism, this paper reveals that *No More the Wasted Breed* accommodates in its artistic belly issues of environmental concerns arising from the willful neglect by members of the Egure community, which results in disastrous outcomes. The study provides fresh insight into the relationship between humanity and nature and how each party deserves equal attention, without which the entire ecological chain will be affected negatively. Events in the text reveal that humanity has always embraced tyrannical posturing towards nature by constantly exploiting it without the necessary care that the natural environment deserves. The analysis also proves that humanity's existence is intricately interwoven with the existence of nature and the natural environment therefore, the latter deserves care and protection in the same manner that humanity deserves it. Each time nature and the environment erupt in anger, it dislocates the entire ecological chain. Though these ecological issues and the enduring conflict between man and nature are highlighted in literature, they remain hidden most of the time, but through ecocritical inquiries, these issues are revealed and laid bare. While *No More the Wasted Breed* may have flourished as a text that challenges the conspiracies of the capitalist class with supernatural elements against the poor, this study reveals that the text can also be interpreted and understood from ecocritical lenses, which reveal nature as a vital component of human existence. The study also provides a template for further ecocritical engagements.

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