HISTORY ANDTHE ENVIRONMENT IN THE PLAYS OF J. P. CLARK-BEKEDEREMO

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Anghioha, Matthias Unimke with Registration Number: ELS/PhD/2017/ 001, hereby declare that this thesis entitled: "History and the Environment in the Plays of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo" is original, and has been written by me. It is a record of my research work and has not been presented before in any previous publication.

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We certifythat this thesis titled: "History and the Environment in the Plays of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo" by Angioha, Matthias Unimke (ELS/Ph.D/2017/001), carried out under our supervision, has been found to have met the regulations of the University of Calabar, we therefore, recommend the work for the award of the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) Degree in English and Literary Studies.

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ABSTRACT

In Nigerian drama J. P. Clark-Bekederemo is one of the most consistent playwrights in staging the connection between history and the environment. This thesis entitled "History and Environment in the Plays of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo" interrogates five of J. P. Clark's plays namely, *The Raft, Song of a Goat, The Boat, The Return, Full Circle, All for Oil* and *The Wives' Revolt* to show that in his dramaturgy, history and the environment are inexorably connected and form one dramatic narrative. Placing the selected plays in synchronic and diachronic perspectives, the study makes the point that J.P. Clark-Bekederemo uses his plays to engage the falsehood and contradictions that surround the initial encounter between his people, the environment and western adventurers from the 16th century through the 19th century, when colonialism was installed and the predatory experience of the post-independence era in the 20th century. Intricately connected to the painful narrative of western incursion into the Niger Delta, the study reveals that Clark-Bekederemo uses his plays to further demonstrate that the non-human environment is both catalyst and victim like humans in the narrative of the Niger Delta experience. The study is dominantly given analytic depth by the application of the theories of Postcolonial Ecocriticism and New Historicism. The two theories facilitate a rigorous understanding and critical interpretation of drama as an aesthetic representation of history, the inexorable, but often ignored, place of ecology in the reconstruction of memory as fundamental part of human culture and experiences. The materials for this study are sourced from the library, internet as well as academic journals devoted to Nigerian Drama. The thesis concludes that the most formidable exploration and understanding of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's plays under study has to implicate the dual heritage of history and the environment. The study recommends that, more scholarship should be done on the place of the ecology in the reconstruction of the people's memory, experience and heritage.

Word count: 317

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The task of representing the human experience for either didactic, instructional or entertaining reasons in drama generally demands situating that experience within a certain social and physical environment at a point in history. This demand is not exclusively made on the dramatic genres of literature, but also on the other genre of literature namely, prose and poetry. Examining the representation of the environment and history and their various implications in the work of art becomes a key concern for such a committed writer as John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, who is deeply concerned with the conditions of his ethnic nationality and the odd nation state in which he finds himself as a consequence of western colonialism. Yet, not all Nigerian dramatists pay equal attention, understandably, to the state of the environment as a consequence of shared political failure; nor are they all involved in the same tempo in the appropriation of history to engage certain falsehood and contradiction in the representation of colonial encounters with the people of Nigeria. However, each dramatic text addresses the issues of its time, reflecting the anxieties and challenges of such a period.

Nigerian drama is the reflection of the social concerns and draws the people's attention to them, while at the same time prompts a particular course of action that fulfills the ideology or vision of the writer. This posture is as much a calling of artists (in Africa) to serve their community as is a recognition of drama as "...a powerful political weapon" (Eslin 95). The history of Nigeria and its grappling with development has necessitated the commitment of the writer. Thus, drama as a social and collective art has been used to give expression to teething national issues in Nigeria, including leadership dilemma, erosion of cultural values, social malfeasance and general indiscipline, impunity and delinquency. Michael Etherton acknowledges these issues as conditioning the temperament of post-independence theatre in Africa (22). Thus, from Ogunde's theatre of the 1940s with concern on cultural nationalism to the plays of the 1960s and beyond, Nigerian drama or theatre has been a reflection of the mood prevalent at the time and a response to the political, social dimensions.

In a sense, therefore, drama becomes a metaphor for the larger environment, which also informs it. Thus, drama has a self-reflecting ability; in other words, the dramatic text becomes, from this prism, a mirror of its time; but that mirror highlights a particular aspect or aspects of that time for the audience and indeed the people to look at and reflect on. That larger metaphor which drama represents is the canvas, by some kind of equivalence, on and from which the writer expresses his vision for the

society. Therefore, there is a dialectical relationship between the work of art, on the one hand, and the society, on the other.

This relationship between a work of art and the society and the role played by drama in drawing from the raw material which everyday life provides makes de Craft to reason that: Drama certainly, derives from everyday life... Drama is condensation from everyday life, whose many aspects - visible and invisible, tangible and intangible - it attempts to manifest, embody, or affirm. It is in this sense that drama is an art form. But what makes drama unique as an art form is that not only is it capable of drawing on all life for it raw material, but also it does and must utilize the pulsating raw material of actual human bodies...(3). In this sense the playwright under study has utilized the humans and the non-human agents of history in a physical environment for his dramatic enactment.

The concern about the non-human environment has also preoccupied Nigerian dramatists, who seek to examine and bring to the fore the ecological implications of social processes, decisions and activities. In such eco-conscious literary works, representations of the physical environment – the flora and fauna – is made to underscore how man has despoiled the ecology and compromised his future. This strand of thought – endowing agency to nature – finds resonance in the traditional elements in modern African drama, elements which demonstrate the closeness of humans to nature and the reluctance by Africans "...to disengage from 'primitive'

ideas of inter-dependence between humans and non-humans (Egya 209). The connection is what Cajetan Iheka refers to variously as ecosystemic thinking, aesthetic proximity and entanglement-terms that underscore an alternative perspective to "environmentalism of the poor" (Nixon 2011). These terms connote the shared agency between humans and nature (218), which implies that much as it is important that human life is not imperiled, the non-human is equally not elided (Iheka 218).

The ecological violence in the Niger Delta, the oil bearing area of Nigeria, has made topical the focus of environment as subject in the literary expressions from and about the area. Oil discovery in the Niger Delta in the 1950s, then colonial Nigeria, and the exploitation since then has meant a ruthless and sustained despoliation on the environment with huge consequences for human and non-human life. With the ecosystem largely destroyed, the streams and rivers polluted and the forest made a wasteland, the Niger Delta environment is an apocalypse that speaks to the terrible alchemy of mindless global capitalism colluding with systemic marginalization and leadership failure. The result of this is a near-abandoned environment, which has formed a kind of canvas for writers. Nwahunanya acknowledges the topicality of the Niger Delta in literary articulation when he argues:

> At some point in Nigeria's literary history, the Nigerian civil war was the subject matter of popular choice, but it

> has been overtaken by the Niger Delta. One reason would be that although the civil war and the Niger Delta experience have historical antecedents which are rooted in our colonial experience, the Niger Delta experience has lasted longer and the impact has been more devastating in a permanent way (xiii).

This permanent devastation is in the extent to which the environment has been decimated and the concomitant destruction of aquatic life, forest resources and the harsh implication for the humanity of the people.

The response of writers to the Niger Delta problem has varied, from thesoft tone of quiet attention as seen in the earlier generation of writers like Gabiel Okara, Elechi Amadi and J.P. Clark-Bekederemo to a harsh and confrontational posture as the environmental condition degenerates with a toll on human life. Writers that have focused on the Niger Delta challenge are Isidore Okpewho, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Tanure Ojaide, Ben Okri, Tess Onwueme, Onookome Okome, Ogaga Ifowodo, Nnimmo Bassey, Joe Ushie, Obari Gomba, Hope Eghagha, Ibiwari Ikiriko, Jowhor Ile, etc.

In many ways, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's plays represent the most unequivocal and creative example of this intricate relationship between Niger Delta history and the environment in Nigerian drama. In his career, Clark started up by specifying the importance of his aboriginal

environment to his own making as a person. We can observe this especially in his poetry, where he creates personae who speak of this homeland, his people's collective experience and the fate of their physical environment which gives them identity. But it is in his plays where the interconnectedness of his people's history and the fate of the non-human environment are given vitality through performance.

It was through the waters of the Niger Delta that early European adventurers made incursion into what is now known as Nigeria and found access even to central Africa as Kenneth Dike has indicated in his *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta.* When in the mid-19th century the trade on humans, as slaves, became illegal, unprofitable and risky the Europeans reverted to another form of trade called "legitimate commerce" (Tamuno ix), which was characterized by usury and objectification of the people. To effectively establish and operate the so called legitimate trade, which was basically commerce on palm produce, a resource most dominantly found in the Niger Delta, the British imperialists had to annex the water ways and define their own boundaries from other colonial super power namely, the French, Portuguese, Germans and the Spaniards. Hence, parts of what was called "Protectorates" were both the objectification of people as well as seas, land and vegetation (Tamuno 19).

As Rowell, Marriott & Stockman (2005) would show, palm oil was a very valuable resource in the 18th and 19th century given its use as lubricant for industrial machines, and the production of glycerin, soap and margarine (50). Thus, it is for this reason that it became the highest economic base for colonial Britain. The British Empire, through the Royal Niger Company, would go to all length in protecting their trading out-posts by keeping it safe from other European interests and prevent any form of internal antagonists that will compromise their acquisition and profit. In this regard many African princes were either hoodwinked of their possessions, exiled or imprisoned. This was the fate of Nana of Itshekiri, Jaja of Opobo and Ovoranmwen of Benin (Okonta and Douglas 2001; Rowell 2005; Tekena 2011). Colonial administration was properly sustained by the continuous subjugation of the people of the Niger Delta as it was for other people in Nigeria. But it has been argued that the burden of maintaining the entire colony of Nigeria was carried in major part by the Niger Delta whose natural produce and water ways sustained the colonial economy (Clark "To be Izon Today in Nigeria" 9).

With the discovery of crude oil in the late 1950s and the dawn of self-rule, the Niger Delta entered another phase of servitude, objectification and marginalization. Independence for the Niger Delta people only meant more denial of their rights and wanton plundering of their land. This came in the

wake of aggressive exploration and exploitation of crude oil t0 the detriment of the life of the people and their entire ecosystem.

While one would not want to make this an account on the history of oil exploration in the region, it would be instructive for us to note that historians have observed that even with the discovery of crude oil the old pattern of trade and usury in trans-Atlantic slave trade and, then palm oil in the colonial era is repeated in the late 20th century. Just like in the trade on humans in the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries and palm oil in the late 18th and 19th centuries when gin, fabric and guns, soap and magerine were brought to the Niger Delta in exchange for more slaves and palm oil, now crude oil is extracted and taken to Europe and America and then imported as gas and other petroleum products to Nigeria. This is what Rowell et al have called "the new Atlantic" (45), where the "comprador" or neo-colonial Nigerian state (Turner, 199) mortgage the interest of the Niger Delta and the entire country for pecuniary gains. It is this tortured past within an exploited environment and its impact on the life of his people that have preoccupied the corpus of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's plays that we shall interrogate here.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The eco-critical attention often given to literary texts that are conscious of the physical environment is mostly centered on how human life is affected by ecological despoliation. Such analyses are

anthropocentric, that is, human based, without having to recognize the non-human elements of the environment – the rivers and aquatic life, the forest, plants and animals, mountains and groves, often referred to as the deep ecology. This partial attention from the foregoing perspective is a problem that has denied readers a full understanding of the dimensions and complexity in the relationship between the environment and humans in the plays of Clark-Bekederemo. This is in spite of the fact that his plays display the subtle fusion of human and non-human life.

Secondly, there is a necessity to deepen insights on Clark-Bekederemo's handling of history both synchronically and diachronically with the question of the environment in his dramaturgy. All of these imply an eclectic theoretical approach, drawing insights mainly from post-colonial Eco-criticism and New Historicism in the analysis to account for the plays' engagement of the falsehood and contradictions that surround the initial encounter between the Niger Delta people, the environment and Western adventurers from the 18th century through the 19th Century to the post-independence era in the 20th and 21st centuries. This study provides a deeper perspective into Clark-Bekederemo's plays by applying a broad spectrum approach to the interrogation of his historically and ecologically rich plays.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of this study is to interrogate the interface or connection between history and the environment in the plays of J. P. Clark – Bekederemo. To achieve this aim, the specific objectives are;

i. To analyze how the playwright J. P. Clark-Bekedermo establishes a link between historical deprivation of his Niger Delta characters and the exploitation of the physical environment.

ii. To show that in the creativity of the playwright, there is a link between how non-human elements of the environment i.e. (geographical space, vegetation, water bodies) is connected to how humans are also made objects in the imagination of the colonial and neocolonial Government.

iii. To demonstrate how the playwright uses literary style to capture this objectification of humans and non-human in his plays.

1.4 Significance of the Study

In its application of postcolonial ecocriticism from the perspective of the relationship between human and non-human elements of the environment to the study, the research offers a new critical insight to the understanding and appreciation of the plays of Clark-Bekederemo. The significance of the study also lies in the connection that is made between ecocriticism and New Historicism, theories that have hitherto not been

connected and brought to the critical task of Clark-Bekederemo's plays. In showing the possibilities of an eco-critical study of drama in the troubled environment of the Niger Delta, this study updates the scholarship on a committed writer like J. P. Clark-Bekederemo. This study will be of immense benefit to scholars of African drama, the environment and history as it provides deeper insights through the nexus of the environment and the people's historically and experience.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study concentrates on five plays by J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, namely: *The Raft* (1964), *Ozidi* (1966), *The Boat* (1985), *Song of a Goat* (1987), *The Wives' Revolt* (1991) and *All for Oil* (2000). The selection of these plays has been made to reflect a sense of history and environment which, as the playwright shows, are inseparable elements in the understanding of the region and fundamental facilitators of his dramaturgy. The study is thus planned to demonstrate a dynamic appreciation of Clark-Bekederemo's plays from eco-critical and new historicist perspectives. In grappling with this, the dramatic strategies and conventions brought to the task of representation are also examined in these five plays along with the playwright's artistic vision.

1.6 A Historical Overview of Nigerian Drama

Like most drama, Nigerian drama has its roots in traditional festivals, ritual performance and religious ceremonies of the people. The compositeness of these performances entailing an admixture of different aspects of life has given it a hue that makes it characteristically African. Modern African drama is therefore a fusion of both traditional elements and Western structural frameworks to comment to society by holding a mirror to man in the society. This has been an abiding role of theatre and drama from its origin. The history of drama and its development in Nigeria cannot be successfully accounted for without a discussion of the South Western part of the county in the 19th century and early 20th century. from the "Alarinjo" traditional travelling theatre first domiciled in the king's court for entertainment and later democratized according to the political development in the Oyo-Yoruba empire, emerged a tradition in theatre that backgrounds the great masque-dramaturges of the contemporary times. Adedeji remarks that the rise and fall of the Oyo-Yoruba Empire had implications for the development of the "Alarinjo" theatre; and that slave trade, Fulani invasion and internecine wars disrupted court life thus proliferating performing troupes, bringing about professionalism (Adedeji 32). This travelling theatre consigned to antiquity, as it has become, had a tremendous influence on a leading professional dramatist – Hubert Ogunde – whose contribution to the

development of the theatre in Nigeria is very remarkable, an actor, director, manager and organizer.

Ogunde's theatre showed a strong connection with the audience, reflecting the mood of "...the people, especially the west of Nigeria (the Yoruba heartlands) from 1946 to the beginning of the Nigerian civil war in 1966" (Ogunde 44). Yet, the theatre went beyond the West into the Northern part of the country, particularly the city and more specifically after the assassination of General Murtala Mohammed, after whom one of the plays by Ogunde was named – Murtala. Ogunde drama offered with and satire around many stories, some of which were on social evils, colonization and Yoruba sensibilities. Ogunde's profound influence has earned him the sobriquet "the father of Nigerian theatre" (Etherton 48). Other key personalities in the evolution of Nigerian theatre are Kola Ogunmola, whose inspiration by Ogunde is recognizable; Duro Ladipo, whose dramatic structuring imaginativeness in the orchestration of the Yoruba myth is adeft; and Moses Olaiya Adejumo, also known as Baba Sala, whose bold and comical representation have added to the advanced the Yoruba travelling theatre in particular and Nigerian drama in general.

From the open air itinerant theatre came the scripting of Nigerian Drama that saw the introduction of scripted performers where theatre left the street corners and gained residence in the university which was rapidly becoming the ground of intellectualism. Drama transformed as it became

not only a showcase of art for art's sake but a tool for more radical and social commentary, not overlooking the epoch independence era that announced a shift in style and theme. Progressively, several scholarly dramatic groups and societies were formed in the 1960s and 1970s, many domiciled in the University of Ibadan and other splinter groups scattered in several secondary schools in Ibadan and Lagos. Amongst these were the University College Ibadan Dramatic Society (UCIDS), The Main Club and the Ibadan Opera Society (Ola-Koji & Kola, 2014: 3). Following the institutionalization of Drama and Theatre performances in the higher institutions, one could identify novel techniques and practices such as the introduction of new methods in scripting, designing and staging; rapid development of artistes and script writers into international acts and playwrights; and the development of off-stage dramatic presentation. The thematic concerns of these University tropes ranged from socio-political where there were reenactment of independence stories; ethno-mythical, where man's relationship with the supernatural was the focus; and naturalism, where "the plots and the characters" seem to take on life off their own and the action assumes the inevitable, arbitrary and willful aspect of nature itself (Jeyi 56).

It is from this backdrop that the Nigerian Drama and Theatre branched into two forms: Film Production and Scripted plays. Film production, as documented by (Ola-Koyi & Kola 3), grew from the

activities and expansion of University Theatre Company (UTC) which later transformed into UniIbadan Performing Company. Upon securing recording contract with The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Ibadan, some plays came on screen such as Theatre on the Screen. They produced also for Television service of Oyo State; for Ogun state Television, where they did Tellydrama; for Benin Television and NTA Ilorin where they produced weekly Dramas. Television Dramas ushered in the thriving Nigerian movie industry- Nollywood which began the home-video production, progressing into Soap Opera and the present contemporary Digital movie production, with *Living in Bondage* launching the home-video market (Olayiwola 189).

While television drama grew, scripted drama also gained waves. The script writers had evolved from the travelling theatre bringing in western inspired motifs. Mask Theatre founded by Wole Soyinka 1960s and the latter Orisun Theatre already modified the culturally- inspired travelling theatre of Ogunde, Ogunmola and Ladipo by first bridging the language barrier customary to the itinerant theatre since they enacted their performance in Yoruba language. The new playwrights cum script writers who pioneered literary drama made profound statements with their scripts and their performances had political undertones and dispositions. Notably, Wole Soyinka's *A Dance in the Forest*, James Ene Henshaw's *This is Our Chance* and J.P. Clark's *The Raft* were enacted to reflect the post-independence disillusionment and the Political directionlessness of the

emerging country. Though these plays were written for the stage, they found their way into the hands of readers as literary publications. From these, independentce popular dramas came the civil war dramas which strongly lamented the atrocities of the stakeholders in the war and how the common man who is a mere pun felt the effect of the war. Playwrights like Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Tunde Fatunde, Kole Omotosho, Fela Davis, Counish Ekiye, Soyi Simpson and a host of others whose temperament and vision hindered by the wounds and trauma of the civil war turned out to be the next generation playwrights referred to as radical writers (Nwabueze 200). These radical playwrights had Marxist tendencies, orientations and ideology as their inspiration where their concern was defending, supporting and championing the cause of the oppressed and lowly by the feudal elite class. They wrote plays that protested against the political elites and their corrupt tendencies.

Though this Marxists socialist voice was retained and sustained, the 1990-2010 period of literacy growth in Nigeria saw the emergence of more radicalist playwrights which Olu Obafemi (2017) refers to as the 20th Century Neo-reformist Theatre. The Neo-reformists, besides being protest playwrights had a lot of other contentions to grapple with, ranging from Ecocriticism and the Niger delta, to queer consciousness, gender inspired themes, political activism, naturalism and romanticism. Neo-reformist playwrights like Sam Ukala, Emeka Nwabueze, Tess Onwueme, Bakare

Ojo Rasaki, and Esiaba Irobi also attempted to restore Nigerian Drama into its earlier culturally-inspired aesthetics where there was a serious attempt to "replace the Brechtian epic aesthetics and core Marxist with traditional African performance techniques and ideologies" (Ugwu 109). Clinging onto the influences of the popular theatre and plays of Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark and Ola Rotimi, they sought to return the anesthetic content of Nigerian Drama to Folklorist theatre (especially Ukala), mythological ritualism and cultural renditions of didactic themes. This new tradition saw a fusion between what Jeyifo describes as "modernist textual dramaturgy modes with our indigenous theatrical penchant for ritual, ceremony, festivity, dance, song, and mime" (84), in his characterization of the post-independence and popular theatre.

The growth of Nigerian Drama has followed social, political and cultural transformation just like other genres of literature. As it has been revealed in the review, the changes have followed from progressive modification in time and space. This political era has launched novel thematic preoccupation; the cultural space prompted traditional peculiar styles and the social milieu birthing newer artistic concerns.

1.7 Background of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo

John Pepper Clark, or as he later renamed himself, J. P Clark-Bekeredemo, was born April 6, 1935 of Urhobo and Ijo parentage. He was a

poet, playwright, essayist, columnist and journalist who is well celebrated in Africa and beyond. Clark-Bekeredemo received his early education at Nature Administrative School and the prestigious Government College in Ughelli, and his Bachelor's Degree in English at the University of Ibadan, where he edited various magazines like *The Beacon* (1956) and *The Horn* (1957). He began his career as a writer and a journalist by first working as an Information Officer in the Ministry of Information in the old Western Region. Then he worked as editorial writer for *The Daily Express* in Lagos between 1960-1963, upon earning a year's study at Princeton University on a foundation grant he published, his *America, Their America* (1964) in which he attacked the American middle-class values, from capitalism to Black American Life-styles. After a year's research at Ibadan Institute of African studies, he became a lecturer in English at The University of Lagos and coeditor of the literary journal *Black Orpheus*. In 1982, he founded, with his wife, Ebun Odutola (a professor and former director of the Centre for Social Studies at the University of Lagos), the Pec Repertory Theatre in Lagos. Since his retirement, Clark-Bekeredemo has held visiting Professorial appointments at several institutions, including Yale and Wesleyan University in the United States of America.

Clark-Bekeredemo's works of poetry are *Poems* (1961), a set of forty lyrics on several themes; *A Reed in the Tide* (1965), which talks about his deep rooted African background and his exploits in America and other

places; *Casualties: Poems 1966-1968* (1970), written to recount the violence of the civil war; *A Decade of Tongues* (1981); *State of the Union* (1981); *Mandela and other Poems* (1988); *A Lot from paradise* (1999); and *Of Sleep and Old Age* (2004), which comprises poems about aging, death, dying and the question of religion. J. P. Clark's poetic themes include violence and protests in *Casualties*, institutional corruption in *State of the Union*, nationalism and the beauty of nature in *A Reed in the Tide* while *Mandela and other Poems* comments on man's inhumanity to man. Also to his name is his autobiography, describing his childhood in Niger Delta titled *Once Again a Child* (2004).

As a reputable dramatist, Clark-Bekeredemo has to his credit titles like *Song of a Goat* (1961); *The Masquerade* (1964); *The Raft* (1964) which depicts the state of the newly independent nation of Nigeria; *Ozidi* (1966), an epic drama rooted in Ijaw culture; *The Boat* (1981), a prose drama that documents Ngbilebiri history; *All for Oil* (2000), which tells the story of the deprived inhabitants of the Niger Delta region, and *The Wives Revolt* (1991), a comedy that represents wives against husbands in an argument over a compensation fee paid by an oil company. His other works include his translation of *Ozidi Saga* (1977), an oral literary epic of the Ijaw people; his critical study of *The Example of Shakespeare* (1970), which discloses his anesthetic views about poetry and drama; his journalistic essays in *The Daily Express*, *Daily Times* and other newspapers. In 1991, he received the

Nigerian National Merit Award for literary Excellence, received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Benin and saw the Howard University Publication of the *Ozidi Saga* and *Collected Plays and Poems 1958- 1988.*

1.8 Synopses of the Plays

1.8.1 *All for Oil*

Set in the colonial era and capturing the palm oil trading activities between the British-run Niger Company and the locals of the Niger-Delta, *All for Oil* focuses on two key players: Chief Bekederemo, a wealthy oil merchant and Chief Dore Numa, a puppet of British colonial administration. Both major characters battle for supremacy, with Bekederemo standing for truth and justice while Chief Dore represents the evil and exploitative force against the people. It is revealed that Chief Dore has a long history of betraying and sabotaging his own people, having assisted the colonial powers in ousting famous kings as King Nana Olomu of Ebrohimi and Oba Ovoranwen of Benin.

In the play, there is a gross exploitation of the oil traders as the prices are dictated by the buyers to the detriment of the locals who toil under harsh conditions to produce the commodity. The lands of the colonies are also seized by the British administration through the whims of Chief Dore, to the

anguish of the people. Their young girls are also raped and abused and violated, their youths subjected to forced labour, amid other atrocities perpetrated by the colonial masters. This sparks the need to have a voice of reason, which is represented by the character of Bekederemo. There is also a reflection of the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by Sir Frederick Lugard, the then Governor-General. The likes of Clark-Bekederemo do not welcome the idea as he considers it a problem, resulting from an abject and insensitive miscalculation. To him, it is an imposition on the people "at gun point" (461).

In order to improve the welfare of his people, and to redress some of the excesses of Chief Dore, Clark-Bekederemo takes his grievances to the Governor-General. Upon arriving His Excellency's office with his lawyer, he realizes that the Governor-General is on vacation in Britain, and is represented by his deputy, Col. Moorhouse, a friend and ally of Chief Dore. Nevertheless, Clark-Bekederemo goes on to present his case. He is told that he had declined a number of invitations by the Governor-General in the near past. Bewildered by this, Clark-Bekederemo makes it clear that there had been no invitation and points out that Chief Dore had masterminded the entire thing. After granting him audience, Col. Moorhouse promises to give Clark-Bekederemo "British justice", but knowing full well the insincerity

and deception of the administration, Clark-Bekederemo understands that justice is far-fetched.

The play ends with Clark-Bekederemo being frustrated on his sick bed, with his wife Mitovwodo by his side to give him care and words of encouragement. He expresses fear for the well-being of his people in the face of tyranny from the British administration and their local stooges like Chief Dore. Through revelations from his wife it is brought to the audience that Bekederemo life's story is one of a survivor, having survived a double-barrel gunshot from his half-brother. Saboloa, and an ark loaded with small pox from Chief Dore. Mitovwdo makes the last comment of the play, referring to the newly amalgamated Nigeria as a "night market" (526). Hence, the future is uncertain, if not bleak, for the colony, especially the Niger-Delta region which is the immediate setting.

1.8.2 *The Raft*

Four lumbermen—Kengide, Ibobo, Ogrope and Olotu—are exposed to the turbulence of the Niger River on their troubled voyage to convey timber logs on a raft from Lagos to the port at Burutu. Ogrope makes a disturbing realization that the moorings with which their raft was fastened have all gone loose, leaving them in a condition of uncontrollable drifting out of course. Neither of the four men can attempt a reasonable explanation of how all the knottings suddenly broke off at once. But they are sure that

they are at the mercy of the tides and currents. Rather than put heads together to seek a lasting solution to their predicament, the four young men are consumed in heated arguments and quarrels, with some directed at their cultural and religious practices. This plunges them into further crisis. Kengide is especially pained by the fact that they are being exploited by the wealthy owner of the logs who is safe and sound offshore, while they are at the mercy of fate on the high sea. He continues to curse and lament, irritating and infuriating other characters all along.

Gradually, their raft drifts towards the fierce whirlpool of Osikoboro, known to them as the confluence of all creeks. This unforgiving whirlpool, as the four characters are well aware of, has devastated several seamen, which further heightens their apprehension. Even in this grave condition, the four men do not stop their arguments and quarrels. Suddenly, a loud creaking sounds is heard and the raft breaks into two, with Olotu on one side and the three others on the other. The currents drift Olotu in another direction from them, and when the three men beckon on him to jump and swim back to their end of the divide, he rather yells for help, saying he cannot let go of the logs. His screams die out gradually until he vanishes from their sight.

In the midst of the whole turmoil, the remaining three men sight an approaching ship but are unsure of what direction it is heading. But

determined to escape the doom that he foresees, Ogrope plunges overboard and swims expertly in the direction of the oncoming ship. He makes it successfully to the ship but just when he struggles to get on board, the passengers beat his hands off with iron bars. Ogrope plummets back into the deep and gets chopped into pieces by the ship's stern-wheeler. This happens with Kengide and Ibobo watching from afar off in shock and only shouting at the scoundrels in the ship. It dawns on them in a sudden rush that they are to share a similar fate as Olotu and Ogrope.

The remaining two have their woes compounded by the fact that they do not know their direction. All of a sudden, they sight lights from a far distance—an indication that the safety of port is near. Their relief is cut short just as soon as it comes, as a fog descends upon them, blurring their vision and further dampening their spirits. At this point, the inevitability of death scares them and Kengide forces Ibobo to hold hands with him as consolation in the face of irreversible tragedy. They give in to fate as lights fade.

1.8.3 *The Boat*

Two brothers, Bradide and Biowa are faced with irreconcilable conflict due to the management of a boat which they co-own. The play opens with Biowa's long-awaited return from a business trip to Lagos as he is given a ceremonious welcome by the people of Bikoroa. He is

extravagantly dressed, a clear indication that he is a man of good fortunes and a traveler to distant climes. He brings with him numerous tales of the lavish life in Lagos and tells these over the welcome dinner in his honour. Biowa's elder brother, Bradide is not as excited as the other revelers who are willing to eat and drink to stupor.

Bradide and Biowa engage in persistent quarrels about taking turns on the use of the boat, and on each occasion, their mother, Umuto Diakowho, takes sides with Biowa, showing her lack of affection towards the older one, Bradide. The neighours condemn her for this role, but Umuto does not stop fueling discord between her two sons. It is revealed by Burubo, a cripple, that Bradide is a product of rape, hence Umuto's disaffection towards him. the disagreement between the two men comes to a head when Bradide insists on going on a business trip with the boat when Biowa feels that his turn is not used up yet. Bradide does not budge, and Biowa is forced to ask that they end the co-ownership by literally splitting the much-valued boat into two with an axe. The idea is ridiculous to Bradide who offers to settle Biowa in cash, only to have his offer fiercely turned down. Their mother, as always, takes sides with Biowa and rains scorn on Bradide. The two men continue to engage in a heated verbal exchange which infuriates Biowa beyond control. He rushes to get his gun

and returns to the beach where he fatally shoots Bradide just when he is about to board the boat.

Considering Biowa's murder of his brother as "an act forbidden by both the living and the dead" (318), the community assembles at the town-court to deliberate on the act in order to pass judgment accordingly. Biowa takes responsibility of the offence without showing any form of remorse. After consideration of accounts from eye-witnesses, coupled with Biowa's reaction to the charges, the council adjudges that he is guilty. Before final judgment or pronouncement is made, Biowa is given an opportunity to make a special request to which he asks to see his mother. She is brought to the hall and in pretence that he wishes to whisper something to her, Biowa bites off his mother's ear as a lesson to her for not cautioning him against hating his brother. Biowa's sister, Emonemua is brought forward to suggest the penalty to be given, as suggested by Young Man of Wisdom. Surprisingly, Emonemua passes a verdict of death to her brother and the council upholds this pronouncement. Biowa is led out of the courtroom and is consequently executed. The story continues in *The Return Home* and *Full Circle*, both of which respectively complete the trilogy of "The Bikoroa Plays". In the second play in the series, a ritual is carried out to cleanse the land of the abomination twenty years after.

1.8.4 *The Wives' Revolt*

In this three-character play, the people of Ehuwaren have just received a bail-out sum of money as compensation from an oil firm carrying out crude oil drilling activities in their land. The money is shared into three equal parts: one for the elders, the other for the men in all their age groups, while the third is for the women. Ironically, the elders are all men, which means that the men have two portions of the three shares. The women are enraged by this greedy act from the men, having been subjected to suppression, marginalization and injustice several times in the past. Hence, they vehemently reject the offer, insisting resolutely that the money be shared equally (into two parts) between men and women.

Koko, the protagonist and wife of one of the community leaders, Okoro, argues out this issue with her husband in their home. She puts it to him that the men's intentions towards sharing the money are unfair and unjustifiable. Hence, she speaks the minds of the women that; they will never succumb to being deprived of a fair share. Okoro on his part speaks out for the menfolk, maintaining that by sharing the money into three, fairness has been served. As a way of keeping the women under control and imposing the men's decision on them, a ban is placed on goats, which are animals reared by women in the community: this is done with the label that the women have begun to diabolically maneuver goats to terrorize men and

the community at large. To this banishment of goats, Koko tells her husband: "The law you have passed is bad, unfair and discriminatory, being directed against women because of our stand. We will not accept it" (409).

In protest against the unjust policies directed at them, the women of Erhuwaren leave en masse in the dead of the night to the distant community of Eyara, which is not in good standing with Erhuware. Also, their host community is battling with an epidemic which infects the women who have come to seek refuge. This self-exile by the women leaves the men of Erhuwaren in total disarray and confusion: the men are left to take over the civic and domestic responsibilities and duties of home keeping, cooking, baby-sitting and so on. They are unable to cope with the sudden turn of events and decide to send a message to their wives to return home. With the conviction that the laws regarding the money sharing and the goat ban will be repealed, the women agree to return to their community.

The men of Erwuharen are shocked that their wives have returned infected with the strange disease, each of them thinking the women had been sexually violated in Eyara. The truth about the plague is later revealed; they had been infected through contaminated water. The men learn their lesson at last, and through Okoro's declaration, it is clear that the obnoxious policies are reversed: "We have accepted to return all their goats into town. We have accepted to give them the fattest cow that money can buy..."

(445). Thus, through a civil protest, the women have made known their grievances and have won a remarkable victory against an exploitative system in the aftermath.

1.8.5 *Song of a Goat*

In this play, Ebiere consults the family doctor, Masseur (who also doubles as the confessor and oracle), to decipher why she is unable to conceive again after her first child. From his examination, Masseur finds nothing amiss about Ebiere's reproductive health. Just when Ebiere leaves, her husband, Zifa, arrives at the diviner's place. Zifa is told that he is the one at fault, which he is already aware of but would not accept due to pride. His attitude is partly due to the fact that they live in a society where human fertility is celebrated as a mark of honour and respect for the individual, male or female. Masseur reveals to Zifa that his problem is a problem from the gods as punishment for burying his father who had died of leprosy earlier than permitted by tradition. Masseur suggests to Zifa, as he had earlier done to his wife, that as permitted by their customs in such situations, he must consider a man within his family cycle to make his wife pregnant again. He even suggests Zifa's younger brother, Tonye, as a welcome remedy. The idea of letting his younger brother perform his conjugal duties puts him off completely-he considers it to be a deliberate

affront on his masculinity and declares that he would rather die than let the unthinkable deed happen.

With time, Ebiere's frustration at Zifa's inability to sexually gratify her continues to rise, to the extent that she easily goes paranoid and hits her son, Dode, on the head a number of times. On an occasion, Tonye notices her unwarranted aggression on the child and confronts Ebiere with provocative words. In response, Ebiere is forced to reveal her husband's plight to Tonye who advises her to be content with the one child she already has. Ebiere goes on to seduce Tonye who succumbs and has an intercourse with her before the watchful eyes of Dode. The little child calls the attention of Zifa's aunt, Orukorere, but she refuses to intervene, having earlier given a warning that was not heeded that there was a serpent in the house. Ebiere and Tony become sexually and emotionally connected to the extent that they secretly discuss marriage plans.

Out of suspicion that his wife is having an affair with Tonye, Zifa takes the matter to Orukorere who confirms his worst fears. Their furtive affair, which is finally in the open, is considered by Zifa to be further desecration of their home because it does not follow the proper ritual or approval from Zifa. Zifa decides to carry out a sacrifice of a goat to purge the family of the taboo but Orukorere stands against the hasty idea, foreseeing a tragic repercussion in the end. Zifa ignores her warnings and

proceeds to kill a goat, chop off its head and asks Tonye to force the goat's head into a small pot. The pot eventually breaks, causing Ebiere to faint. In a sudden fit of ire for Tonye's violation of his wife, Zifa chases him, ready to inflict fatal harm. Tonye runs into the house where he commits suicide behind closed doors. Zifa is unable to bear the weight of the whole disaster. He walks straight into the sea where he drowns himself. The tragedy reaches its crest with Ebiere's death while in premature labour.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP

This chapter examines the scholarship on J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's plays. In doing this, the emphasis is on the engagement of critics on the development of his dramaturgy and through this we hope to foreground our contribution to the scholarship of Clark-Bekederemo's plays.

2.1 Review of Scholarship on Clark-Bekederemo's Plays

Deriving from the above we begin by stating that Clark-Bekederemo can be classified into the first generation of playwrights in Africa whose works have been widely read and given scholarly attention. The appraisals of Clark-Bekederemo's work have tended to emanate from two approaches that are not necessarily opposed to each other but are different in emphasis. One of these is that Clark-Bekederemo is a neo-classical dramatist. The other holds that Clark-Bekederemo develops progressively from a Graeco-African to a Neo-African dramatist. Nonetheless, both of these critical perspectives thrive on the theory of evolutionism in drama to which Clark-Bekederemo himself has given credence.

Accentuating Clark's love for ancestral, myth and traditional drama, Ashaolu Albert belongs to the group that believes Clark-Bekederemo progresses from a Graeco-African to Neo-Africanism. He asserts that Clark attempts and somewhat successfully "transforms local myths, folktales and

native dance dramas into modern stage productions" (178). Affirming Clark's similitude in Style with the Greek and Classical plays, Ashaolu opines that Clark himself posits that just like the root of European drama go back to the Egyptian Osiris and the Greek Dionysius, so is the origin of Nigerian drama likely "to be traced to the early religious and magical ceremonies and festivals of the people of this country [Nigeria] (177)". Exploring the style of J. P. Clark's first three tragedies, Ashaolu submits that they contain recognizable elements and characteristics of Greek and Elizabethan tragedy. Besides borrowing the tropes of Greek theatre – chorus, gods, messenger, prophesies of doom, fearful crimes and curses – Clark also maintains the supernatural inescapable turn of events that the Greek tragic hero unfailingly suffers from, especially in *Song of a Goat* and *The Masquerade*. He reveals that in *Song of a Goat,* Zifa the protagonist suffers and is tortured for an event he could not revert by a malevolent god who would have intervened but does not. Like the classical tragic hero, Zifa commits suicide to fulfill an earlier mentioned premonition to prove that the words of the gods are sacred. The result of the tragedy in *Song of a Goat* is a tragic flaw in which the protagonist is a victim of the "inexplicable and uncontrollable forces militating against the individual" (Ashaolu, 182). Conflict, is another element Clark experiments with, which is a characteristic feature of Shakespearean drama. He relates Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* to Clark's *The Masquerade* where the conflict is a clash

of choice in the ideology of parents and their wards over their marital partners. On the one hand is Titi and Dibiri her father (in *The Masquerade)* and on the other hand is Polixenes and his son Florizel (in *The Winter's Tale).* For *The Raft*, the concern that the raft represents the situation of the newly independent nation of Nigeria and other newly independent African nation, weakening and disintegrating under internal squabbles and problems while the characters are true reflection of her citizenry. Comparatively, Ashaolu submits that Clark's plays examined question the validity of any judgment made from any fixed moral standpoint upon a man for transgressions committed unintentionally" or not (188).

Following from a similar literary concern is Edde Iji's who believes that the works of Clark have been tremendously influenced by the patterns of Greek classical drama building from the Aeschylus model of turgid or rigid format (Iji, 4). Comparing the aesthetic archetypes of the dramas of J. P. Clark, Amiri Imamu Baraka and Ola Rotimi, Iji contends that besides their basic thematic preoccupation centering around human and social development, these playwrights indulge in creating myths, rituals and cultural nuances. Critiquing the aesthetic contents and predilections of Clark's *The Raft*, he characterizes the play as being "very symptomatic of a tortuous journey through life, wherein the characters individually have alternative foretaste of heaven and hell here on earth" (Iji, 9). The narrative, he continues, is of the African being in a constant war against the foreseen

pessimistic disadvantages occasioned by the victimhood of colonialism and imperialism. He summarizes that Clark's characters in *Ozidi*, *Song of a Goat* and *The Masquerade* reflect the futile heroism of some brave citizens as others with nefarious thoughts continue to pull them down and the nation suffers the repercussions.

Adrian Roscoe also joins voices with critics that tag Clark as imitating classical drama, though he deviates from a total characterizing of this drama. To Roscoe, whilst the play, *Song of a Goat* shares the structural minimalism of Greek tragedies, it lacks the corresponding charge of terror, the customary movement in action, the total inexorability of fate that the Greek theatre invokes on the tragic hero. On linguistic appreciation, he claims that Clark is monotonous and unvaried, not finding or locating appropriate rhythmic versification of his dialogues as of Greek theatre. Contrary to his backlash on the artistic rendering of *The Masquerade* and *Song of a Goat*, Roscoe believes that *The Raft* shows some improvement in its dramatic quality and theatrical strength. He observed a digression from the Graeco-African orientation of the earlier plays to a profound celebration of his [Clark's] indigenous culture; which represents a deliberate and wholesale return to his roots (Roscoe, 70). The concern in Roscoe's proposition is that there is a fundamental difference between African and Western theatre aesthetics and that one will become more evident as

African writer when he retracts indigenous norms which should be the backdrop of the literature of a people.

On the cultural cum social experience of Clark's play, Uwandu Daniel is of the opinion that to an African audience, the plays are quite plausible especially when one considers the contexts of the social realities of the characters. For instance, in the social setting of *Song of a Goat*, Zifa and Tonye are men full of self-pride and are conscious of the social implications of kindred and personal honour. Tonye, on his part, is equally aware of the social implications and stigma attached to the incestuous act with his brother's wife. Faced with this fact, it becomes difficult for him to confront his elder brother. In this light, he has to take a decision – one which affects his future as well as that of his community. His decision may sound implausible to non-African readers and spectators who will argue that there were other alternatives to choose from. But we know that in the context of Ijaw tradition from which Clark drew his story, there is only one choice open to him in the face of such an over-whelming shame: Suicide. This issue is consistent in *The Masquerade*, where Clark develops the character of Diribi, the protagonist in the same fashion as Zifa and Tonye. Clark presents Diribi as a highly impulsive and choleric man who has great pride in solid personal achievement as well as in the purity of his family line. With this Uwandu affirms that contrary to the notion that Clark simply transposes classical plots into African settings, there is profound social

evidence that Clark's plays reflect the true cultural experiences of his people.

Olanipekun, Haruna & James appraise Clark as a poet and consider his political commentary amidst the social challenges occasioned by the Nigerian Civil War and the resultant nepotism and abuse of political will by the government. The artistry of Clark is examined in their investigation into inter-relationship between history, politics and poetry, and how the poet exploits both resources to his creative advantage. Analyzing J. P. Clark's *A Decade of Tongue,* the trio observes how dependent literature is on realism as the events of the Civil War are recast in the poetry of Clark. The poet while responding to an ever turbulent historical Nigerian civil war, "...annunciates the perversion of human values, harvest of death, blind rage and holocaust" which were birthed on the altar of ethnicity and racial animosity (29). Akin to Clark, the political undertone of *A Decade of Tongue* is pitched against the poet's desire for political stability, economic development and social tranquility as is depicted in his plays.

Sustaining the concern that Clark's works are ripe with political commentaries on the situation of the Nigerian State after independence, Olaniyan Modupe examines symbolism as an artistic tool in Clark's *The Raft*. Olaniyan maintains that *The Raft* reflects the total image of the newly independent Nigerian nation, where the four lumbermen symbolize the four regions in Nigeria at the early republican era, with premiers who have lost

control of these regions and the nation has gone adrift. Olaniyan is quoted extensively here, where she submits that:

> The play [*The* Raft] can be described as a prophetic one because the playwright envisions doom and what he predicted actually came to pass in Nigeria after independence. Nigeria's unity was not conclusive then. There was the tendency that a part of the country wanted to secede. The playwright presents ***The Raft*** to represent the problems of Nigeria in the symbolic regional characters of Ogro, Ibobo, Kengide and Olotu. They are impotent, incompetent and visionless. They symbolize the Nigerian nation whose problems are being compounded by the greedy and selfish rulers (495).

Otete-Akpofure's critique of Clark comes from the perspective of a political activist championing the course of economic resource control for his Niger Delta people in his *The Wives' Revolt* and *All for Oil*. The place of Clark as a patriot is interplayed with Esiaba Irobi and Tunde Fatunde who are also playwrights reflecting the concerns of the Niger Delta. There is the arrogation of power, between the depraved political class who in selfish interest, pitch their tent with the exploitative oil corporations and the corrupt government to rip the people off their resources. Otete-Akpofure asserts that there is on the one hand, those who faithfully champion the

cause of their people like Chief Bekederemo in *All for Oil* ; and on the other hand the "gang of greedy tycoons... each waving some tribal or sectional banner to confuse and divide the Niger Delta people" such as Chief Dore Numa. He submits that Clark presents a recommendation in *The Wives' Revolt* where economic empowerment could serve as a good matrix for conflict resolution.

Odi Christine's criticism of *The Wives Revolt* centers around the negative female stereotyping in Nigerian plays where Clark has been portrayed as a socially conscious writer who takes into bare the conditions of the cultural setting he writes to expose. Situating his *The Wives Revolt* in the Niger Delta region which is known for its strong patriarchal ideology, Clark attempts to point at the dangers women face in male dominated societies and how they are viewed with antipathy, repugnance and aversion in certain instances. Such cultures as negatively criticized by Odi put the woman in the disadvantageous position where she is treated as a mere appendage. Odi says:

> In this region, as in most other parts of the country, women exist under the shadows of the men. The woman is not included in political decision making processes at the communal level. At the domestic level, she is constrained by such negative cultural practices as; early and forced marriages; teenage pregnancies; obnoxious widowhood rites, female

> genital mutilations, male child preference, high degree of illiteracy amongst other practices (9).

In cases where she revolts against these demeaning cultural practices, just like they did in *The Wives Revolt*, where the women totally abandoned their domestic and public responsibilities and staged a walk-out on their families and the community at large; she is termed a witch and given dire punishment.

From an eco-critical perspective, Emmanuel Ugoji examines Clark's Plays *All for Oil* and *The Wives Revolt* where he acknowledges the role of the Nigerian writers in the examination and exposure of the several degrading activities and situation of the Niger Delta Region. Uzoji, captures Asagba's summation that spells that "Clark - Bekederemo"s *The Wives Revolt* and *All for Oil* reinforce and pursue social and political themes bordering on the fate of humans plagued by predators from within and without" (140). To Uzorji,

> The play *All for Oil* sets out to correct certain historical anomalies, perceptions and positions concerning socio-political happenings and developments in the Niger Delta. The discourse of this playwright as reflected in the two plays dwells more on economic exploitation and dehumanization of the people of the region who should naturally live better from

> the natural resource – oil, even if the environmental circumstance remains the same" (140).

Ironically, man's abuse of the environment (and in this case the Niger Delta) has become a boomerang where the brunt of the degraded and degenerated environment has been borne by man. While the exploitation is unchecked, man's civility is debased, as health, lifestyle and economic viability are eroded on a retrogressive level.

2.2 Review of Scholarship on History and the Environment in Nigerian Drama

The consciousness the writer brings to bare in his work is wrapped in a foil of place and time, which are the fluid that make literature appealing to an audience. It is for this reason that Ngugi Wa Thiong'o states:

> The arts are a form of knowledge about reality acquired through a pile of images. But these images are not neutral. The images given to us by art try to make us not only see and understand the world of man and nature, apprehend it, but to see and understand it in a certain way or from the angle of the vision of the artist (Ngugi Wa Thiong'o cited in Aderemi Bamikunle 240).

It is upon the above that Bamikunle situates his appreciation of the drama of James Ene Henshaw, which the former believes was cast in the period of colonial and early independence. Bamikunle testifies that "when

Henshaw wrote *This is our Chance* for staging at Christmas in 1945, Nigeria's Independence was fifteen years away (240)". With this, Bamikunle believes that as a pioneer work of drama, Henshaw's play addresses the problem of that dearth in African literature at the colonial period. Their role was to "deliberately set out to re-interpret Africa to the colonialists and to African victims of colonial alienation" (240), and James Ene Henshaw's relevance as an artist "is best appreciated in his effort at pioneering the analysis and understandings of the contradictions of colonialism and finding solutions to these in his artistic praxis" (241).

The historical period of the early colonial time and the activism against colonial imperialism is recast even in the contemporary literature as history is the resources within which literature is situated. Benjamin Ejiofor's critique of Minimah's and Bellgam's *King Jaja* points to the inexplicability of time in the reliving of literary experience. Believed to have lived during the period of early European contacts, King Jaja of Opobo is praised for his bravery. Published in 1996 and 1997 respectively, Minimah's and Bellgam's *King Jaja* is used to reflect the paradigm of Nigeria as a political expression. Ejiofor believes that the plays bring to bear two stringent times in Nigerian history; the first being the Niger Delta region and their situation in the colonial times and the second the Biafran secession and the civil war period symbolized by the Opubo house break way in the play. Ejiofor argues that the essence of revisiting history is for

the purpose of reconstruction, which should be premised on learn from past mistakes.

Asserting the place of environment in the literature of the Niger Delta and indeed Nigerian literature, Mabel Evwierhoma and Rose Yacim emphasize the role of the mytho-spiritual environment in the creation of a perfect Niger Delta play. Analyzing selected plays in the Niger Delta, Evwierhoma and Yacim review the plays of Julie Okoh – *The Fullness of Time*, *Edewede, Closed Doors and Our Wife Forever* – where they relate the significance of some mystical characters of the sea and rivers to the physical setting of the Niger Delta. They posit that:

> In some of her [Okoh's] plays, she has 'Sea Spirits' as part of her cast for the play. It is very common among the riverine dwellers to believe in water or sea spirits, pay allegiance to them and as well invoke their blessings and intervention in some of their communal and individual problems. This is indicative of her Niger Delta origin (283).

One can, therefore, affirm to the role the immediate environment and background brings to the artistry of the playwright. The environment is portrayed in concrete terms, removed from the physical abstraction of anthropological researches which Diala-Ogamba Blessing concerns herself with, in her criticism of Tess Onwueme's plays of the Niger Delta. There is figurative 'Rape of the Land' which to her describes the negative effect of

uncontrolled exploration of oil, as "the land is ravaged and the citizens are tortured" (307). The decry of the environmental pollution due to gas flaring, vandalism of pipe-lines and spilling of oil is the theme of Onwueme's *Then She Said It*, *No Vacancy*, and *What Mama Said*. Diala-Ogamba gives a snippet of the evil of uncontrolled exploration and degradation when she writes:

> The community cannot breathe clean air or even drink clean water. The fishes die in the ocean because of oil spillage. The plants and trees are soaked in oil and so they cannot use firewood to cook their meals. The people are relocated to camps... The people are tortured psychologically and physically by being removed from the lands and homes where they are used to without any sign of hope but empty promises (307).

The act of raping, according to Diala-Ogamba, is done on the one hand by the government who through massive corruption deprive their people the benefit of the resources; and the oil corporations who cut crooked deals with the populace through their representatives and steal the collective commonwealth of the people, without compensating them on the other hand. These oil corporations create artificial scarcities and horde petroleum products in order to rip the populace of their monies. In many instances, they sell substandard products. This denigrated physical environment, its

flora and fauna, is what writers/playwrights of the Niger Delta literature have sought to speak for. Considering her as an entity with life and form, playwrights go as far as artistically giving her a characteristic description and some instances making her a character. Situating her play in Hungeria and Sufferland, which are fictional recreations of the Niger Delta communities ravaged by oil pollution, Chinwendu Nwizu goes ahead to examine Tess Onwueme's *Then She Said it* and *What Mama said* respectively; describing these settings to fit into the real Niger Delta. The oil company in the plays is Shell BP, a direct replica of the Shell British Corporation that is exploring oil in the region. Nwizu tells us that "the lands sand rivers are totally engulfed and polluted by the oil being drilled by the oil company" which on the long run "has rendered the land arid and non-productive" (317). Her recommendation as proposed by Tess Onwueme is total resource control. Nwizu believes that the Niger Delta region should be accorded at least fifty percent (50%) revenue allocation from the paltry thirteen percent (13%) she enjoys; and that oil companies and the government should pay the communities adequate compensation and royalties for the previous environmental degradation and economic deprivation.

According the environment feminine symbolism, Elizabeth Nyager refers to the Niger Delta as a bleeding motherland which is seriously wounded and ripped of the pride of fruitfulness. Analyzing yet again Tess

Onwueme's *What Mama Said*, Nyager believes that environment stability is a mirage in the social realities of the indigenes of the Niger Delta region as exploration and exploitation is the recurrent theme in the study. Decrying the rife degeneration and retrogression interpolated in the result of negative exploitation, Nyager believes that the underdevelopment of the region "is not supposed to be seen as a residual and a passive condition but [as] a phenomenon resulting from a particular historical process" (324). The action and inaction of social actors and agents overtime in an extended period has resulted in this malfeasance. Characters within the play are given names that are representative of the consciousness they are to carry. Nyager opines that the opening scene of the play reveals this assertion as the colonizer's attempt to assault the innocent and displace them from their land. The land is said to be the woman who has been a victim of history, international politics and trade. Nyager uses the women in the text to symbolize the land which is where the symbol of rape and violation is played out. Her position of this is:

> No wonder when Hadeja is violated, she lays the blame on the trio of white man, government official and the chief – Pipeline. In the same way, the land is being raped by the conniving of the three representative individuals who are Oceana (the white man) Yobe (the government official) and Pipe-line (the local chief) (326).

This is truly picaresque of the goings-on in the Niger Delta as the grand corruption witnessed in oil exploitation is in the actions of these three agents – the oil company, the government (both federal and state) and the local chiefs. The indigenes are the ones that are exploited on two fronts: the first being that they suffer the neglect and underdevelopment that the resultant corruption initiates; and then they suffer the effects of environmental degradation as their source of livelihood is taken away. This position is shared by Jonas Akung when he argues that: "The marginalization of the Niger-Delta region has been brutal, total and complete...that the various agitations have been going on both economic and political front all aimed as achieving the well-being of the region"(204).

Based on the reviews done herein, it has been discovered to the best of our knowledge that there has not been any critical study on the relationship between environment and history in Nigerian drama, more so in the drama of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo. Most critiques on environment have been highly anthropological, where man is made the centre of attraction while the environment is treated as a mere ecological space. This research, therefore, attempts to fill that gap as it helps birth a critical material that interrogates the interplay between history as it relates to the social consciousness of a people, and environment as it pertains to the degradation of the flora and fauna of the Niger Delta region. Furthermore,

this research also attempts forging a meeting point for the two theoretical perspectives at the crossroad of the criticism of Nigerian Drama, viz; Postcolonial Ecocriticism and New Historicism. This is novel, especially in the genre of Nigerian Drama.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach as it seeks to provide insights on how the playwright, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, creatively reflects history and the environment-in his dramaturgy. The data for analysis are drawn from six of the playwright's plays: *The Raft*, *The Boat, The Return, Full Circle, Song of a Goat, The Wives' Revolt* and *All for Oil.* Secondary bibliographical materials from the library are instrumental to the study. Emphasis here is however on critical resources, reviews, literary commentaries and inputs that have guided the research and facilitated an exploration of the area of discourse. To lead to valid findings and conclusion, a theoretical framework will provide a base upon which to sustain the arguments and critical comments. Captured in this framework are two literary theories Ecocriticism and New Historicism-which tenets and basic assumptions have been applied to substantiate the study.

3.2 Theoretical framework

The relevance of theories to research cannot be over-emphasized, as they furnish the researcher with the much-needed guide to validate the findings made from the process. Hence, the theoretical framework of this research is constituted by an amalgam of two theories: Stephen Greenblat's

New Historicism and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's Postcolonial Ecocriticism. Both theoretical models will be equally applied in the interrogation of the subjects of history and environment as reflected in the selected plays. As a way of having a more comprehensive survey of both theories and establishing a clearer understanding of their fundamental assumptions and ideological leanings, this section examines them one after the other. It is also of utmost importance to state here that the study draws from aspects or strands of other theories such as feminism, Marxism and intertextuality which are implicit in the major theories that have been selected for this research.

3.2.1 New historicism

With what was perceived by literary scholars and critics to be a shortcoming in Old Historicism's argument that every work of literary art is a reflection of history and must be judged or interpreted only subject to the history it reflects, there was the need, or better said, urgency, to modify the basic tenets or provide an alternative model to literary criticism in this regard. This set the ground for the emergence of New Historicism. The term "new" obviously suggests that the theory looks at the concept or import of history in literary explication from an up-to-date or modernized perspective.

Historicism considers history to be the central or sole element in literary analysis and the core determinant of meaning in a literary text. To

this school of thought, meaning in a work of art is residual in the time element that the said text portrays. New Historicism emerged in the 1970s and 1980s to challenge this view of Historicism that history is the sole element in literary interpretation. By so doing, New Historicists argue that history itself cannot be depended upon or wholly considered to be true; as it is subject to all manner of variations from one teller to the other. Robert Markley, for instance, notes that history is "impure" and any attempt to define it or guarantee its accuracy is "maddeningly complex" (879). This notion of history is arrived at, after this argument that:

> ...the more we deal with history as a series of specific texts and artifacts, the more likely we are to perceive it not as an abstract entity or truthful account of what "really" happened but as a series of arguments and debates, of differing viewpoints about the significance of various events, individuals, policies, and crises. History, in this respect, can never simply be taken for granted or presumed to be a set of objective observations about [past events]... we can only read and interpret the accounts that are themselves interpretations of what "really" happened (877-878).

This view summarizes the fact that historical accounts cannot be solely depended upon as facts. Even in live events, the tendency of witnessing from

divergent perspectives (as space and location permit) and having varying perceptions about the ongoing action is always not far-fetched. Simply, the New Historicists are of the notion that why must history, a subjective element, be the exclusive criterion for literary analysis? This will only lead to, or end in a subjective evaluation of the text. It is this view that history cannot be relied upon that Charles Bressler explains where he states

> New Historicism declares that all history is subjective, written by people whose personal biases affect their interpretation of the past. History, asserts New Historicism, can never provide us with the "truth" or give us a totally accurate picture of past events.... Disavowing the old historicism's autonomous view of history, New Historicism declares that history is one of many discourses or ways of seeing and thinking about the world.... New Historicism challenges the supposed objectivity of history, redefines the meaning of a text, and asserts that all critics must acknowledge and openly declare their own biases when interpreting a work. (128-129).

The basic assumption of New Historicism is that the literary work is a manifestation of an assemblage of numerous elements which all hold great significance in making up the meaning of the text. These elements which

include history, politics, current happenings, authorial background, religion, cultures and belief systems, and so on, all share equal importance in the task of evaluating textual meaning. New Historicism does not completely erase the importance of history, it in fact gives it a "prominent place in the interpretative process" (133) as Bressler puts it. But it only comes out to emphasize that just as history is of value, so also are other elements (that play in the given text) of equal value.

While the Old Historicists view history as the background for literature, New Historicists consider it (history) in a broader scope and perspective than their predecessors. To the New Historicists school of thought, history is considered in the light of a social science like anthropology and sociology. They warn that it is dangerous to recount the past as it was; rather, the past should be considered in the perspective of how time and space have conditioned the individual or group in narrating or presenting it. In other words, history is viewed differently; albeit this does not stand to mean that it loses its importance or that it is discarded as a vital element for consideration in literary criticism. The contention of Robert Con Davis and Ronald Shleifer clarifies this:

> The current view of history as a "discourse" indeed reverses the hierarchy of history over literature. Now history, like literature, is seen as a product of language, and both represent themselves as formed in a sequence of

> gaps, as a narrative discourse. If in this way fundamentally a breached narrative, history in its constitution is virtually indistinguishable from literature. This is not to say that history is "made up"-"fictitious" or "mythical" in the derogatory sense.... On the contrary, the reality of history in this new view is as "real" as it ever was. The new awareness, rather, is that history, like a fictional narrative, exists in a dialogue with something "foreign" or "other" to it that can never be contained or controlled by the historian (373-74).

History, hence, is not treated as an exclusively true and indispensible account. In its narration, the imaginative ability of the teller or historian or his personal biases are capable of distorting the account.

The proponent of this theory, Stephen Greenblatt, believes that the numerous discourses that interweave within and outside the text have "complex interactions" as Mayer Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham describe it. And they must be carefully studied in a critic's quest to expound the text, understand it and unravel its true meaning. Greenblatt disagrees with the view of the autonomy of history in textual explication. In his essay, "Shakespeare and the Exorcisists", he refutes the concept of "autonomous signification", going further to table his point of argument that:

> I believe that the most important effect contemporary theory upon the practice of literary criticism, and certainly upon my practice, is to subvert the tendency to think of aesthetic representation as ultimately autonomous, separable from its cultural context and hence divorced from the social, ideological and material matrix in which all art is produced and consumed.... For the undecidability that deconstruction repeatedly discovers in literary signification also calls into question the boundaries between the literary and the nonliterary (429).

Clearly, Greenblatt's stance is a repudiation of the omnipotence of history in literary discourse.

On the notion that a complex assemblage of elements makes up the content and meaning of a text, Rajani Sharma contends that a text finds proper interpretation in a review of the multiple conditions that evidently exert their influence on the writer. He identifies the concepts of time, place and circumstances (authorial background and experiences, socio-economic and political situations, and so on) to be primary influences and meaning-bearing elements (2). This underscores that the reader ought to situate the text within this framework of variables in order to have a full understanding of the writer's message. This helps to illustrate that New Historicism is a

meeting point for other post-structuralist theories such as Marxism, Reader Response, Feminism, etc. This theory combines perspectives from other theories because the proponents believe that an attempt to locate meaning solely in features of language and textual evidences is only one side of the coin. Meaning is rather residual in examining the interrelationship between the multiple elements that feature in the text.

Another proponent of this theory, Michael Foucault, also helps to clarify the reaction of New Historicism to other theories such as New Criticism, which argues that the text is an end to itself and contains every detail, information and clue related to interpretation of meaning. As a way of making their stance clear, New Historicists bring forth the idea that circumstances outside the immediate environment of the text are as much important as what is contained in the text. In other words, authors' backgrounds, world views of a people, current trends and political atmospheres external to the text can be paralleled with the events in the text while interpreting it. Foucault also brings about a term referred to as 'episteme' which he uses to refer to how a complexity of elements shape our notion of the world-an approach applicable to criticism, which means carefully studying the intricate interlocking of items that can hint at literary meaning. Foucault, as Bresssler observes, borrows a lot from archeology and "Just as an archeologist must slowly and meticulously dig through various layers of earth to uncover the systemic treasures of the past,"(30) so must the

literary critic dig into the variety of elements featuring in the text to uncover meaning.

New Historicism is also largely influenced by a reaction to the text-only approach of New Critics, such as Rene Wellek, W. K. Wimsatt, R. P. Blackmur, I. A. Richards, Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, and Cleanth Brooks who argue that the critic must focus squarely on the text and analyze only based on the evidence within the confines of the text. Charles Bressler shows this standpoint of the New Critics where he posits

> In declaring the objective existence of the poem, the New Critics assert that only the poem itself can be objectively evaluated, not the feelings, attitudes, values, and beliefs of either the author or the reader. Because they concern themselves primarily with an examination of the work itself and not its historical contexts or biographical elements, the New Critics belong to a broad classification of literary criticism called formalism (31-32).

It is this sort of textual autonomy that New Historicists disagree with. As with other poststructuralist theories like deconstruction, reader-response, feminism and Marxism, New Historicism acknowledges the importance of the text, but declares that the text is a product of a human mind, borne out of social conditions and experiences, reflects historical content, and exhibits an interplay of these elements.

It must be noted, nevertheless, that New Historicism has some limitations. First and foremost, as Bressler observes, it has been labeled "the bastard child of history" (30) for its revolt against history which is essential to a people and the creation of literature. Secondly, its limitation lies in the fact that it permits too many elements which are alien to a text to be introduced into textual analysis. This could lead to biased criticism, as emotions and personal beliefs are likely to influence the critic. Also, this theory has been considered to be hostile to American values, as Bressler has also evaluated.

New historicism is considered a suitable theory for this research as its basic assumptions will be a guidepost towards exploring the representation of Nigerian (and extensively, African) history in the plays of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo. Also, by basing the analysis on the tenets of this theoretical model, this research explores other elements in the texts such as social conditions, political dynamics, economic circumstances, religious complexities, authorial background, contemporary happenings, and so on, interrogating how the representation of these elements underscores the playwright's ideology and vision for a nation (continent) that is rocked by a discomfiting fate. The theory will provide the base for a better understanding of colonial and postcolonial history in an attempt to survey the influence of religion, authorial background, politics, culture and socio-economic complexities on the playwright's ideology and vision.

3.2.2 Postcolonial Ecocriticism

The term Postcolonial Ecocriticism, as the name implies, combines perspectives from the two theories of postcolonialism and ecocriticism to fashion out a new model for literary criticism and textual explication. This model was first introduced by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in their book, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* with the aim of highlighting the interrelatedness between postcolonial nations and the natural environment (plants and animals). By this, the scholars are out to cast a spotlight on the similar fate of exploitation, abuse and degradation suffered by the post colonies and the non-human environment in order to establish a valid explanation and understanding of both human and non-human exploitation through the ages. In order to better understand this theoretical approach, this section undertakes a concise survey of the two theories that have come to inspire this novel school of thought. We shall begin with the first theoretical viewpoint, which is post-colonialism.

Post-colonialism or the postcolonial theory concerns itself with the reading and interpretation of literature with designated interest on how the history, culture and modes of discourse of the former colonies of European imperialist nations have shaped their mode of thought. Its focus is on the continents of Asia, Africa, South America and the Caribbean region, which have been labeled third world countries. But, it is not exclusively these

regions, as a number of scholars also extend the scope of their consideration to nations such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, even though they achieved their independence much earlier than the so-called third world nations (Bressler 245). The approach interrogates the experience of colonialism on these nations and the experience between the colonizer and the colonized.

The theory is widely argued to have been pioneered by the views expressed by the Palestinian-American scholar, Edward Said, in his *Orientalism* (1978), a text in which, as Mayer Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham observe, Said applied Michel Foucault's historicist critique of discourse in his (Said's) analytical exploration of the concept of "cultural imperialism" (245). Said clearly presented his criticism of the manner in which the West has suppressed and exploited the East (colonies), not just culturally, but also politically. In other words, there is a concern about how colonization suppresses the cultural aspects of the colonized people who are usually seen suffering from an imposition of an alien culture. Said's debate on the issue of imperialism accorded the area of postcolonial studies a wide global prominence and interests. Another major influence of this theory comes from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) where the author deeply examines the concept of Black and African identity (crisis) and how this has come to be shaped by slavery, colonization and racism-all of which have underlined the exploitation and oppression of the black man.

In line with this, Chris Baldick summarizes the interest of the postcolonial theory in his striking observation, thus:

> Postcolonial theory considers vexed cultural-political questions of national and ethnic identity, 'otherness', race, imperialism, and language, during and after the colonial periods. It draws upon post-structuralist theories such as those of deconstruction in order to unravel the complex relation between the imperial 'centre' and colonial 'periphery', often in ways that have been criticized for being excessively abstruse (200).

Hence, from Baldick's view, the theory puts the parallel of colonizer and colonized side by side to determine mainly the effect of their relationship on the colonized. This stance has also been projected by other proponents of the theory such as Homi Bhabba, Ziauddin Saddar, Gayatri C. Spivak and Albert Memmi.

Also, the postcolonial theory considers the way in which writers of post-colonies respond to the literary and critical discourses about the colonial experience as written from the point of view of the colonizer. They respond by presenting their own account of what is perceived to be the truth, mostly as a rejection of what has been said about them and their past. John Lye's view more succinctly presents this. He clearly contends:

> Postcolonial theory focuses particularly on the way in which literature by the colonizing culture distorts the experience and realities, and inscribes the inferiority of the colonized which attempts to articulate their identity and reclaim their past's inevitable otherness (3).

Therefore, the postcolonial writer surveys the colonial encounter while attempting to crush the stereotypical submissions of the colonizer against the cultural realities of the colonized. In the case of the African continent, for instance, the negative portrayal of the African culture as barbaric, uncivilized and wild in works such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Carry's *Mister Johnson*, prompted a writing-back from Chinua Achebe in his *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, respectively. In the former text, for illustration, while arguing out the social and cultural organization of the continent before the coming of the imperial West, Achebe blames the white man for putting a knife on the cord that held the people together, hence their falling apart, which occasioned his adopting the title of the novel from the befitting lines in W.B Yeats' poem "The Second Coming".

The postcolonial theory has been examined by literary scholars to be too diverse in its focus as it has not underlined its major concern. Bressler observes this, and explains that the theoretical praxis lacks a single

approach, concerns or practice because too many cultures have been conquered, therefore bringing about divergent responses from various cultural backgrounds (202). It is this situation that moves Ato Quayson to contend that the subject of post-colonialism is extremely elusive to classify ("Post-colonialism and Postmodernism" 646). This notwithstanding, Mayer and Harpham identify three unifying concerns of postcolonial theorists: firstly, they reject the "master-narrative" of the West by bringing forth a counter-narrative where the hitherto defaced culture is brought back into its positive shape; secondly, a rejection of the subaltern identity given to the colonized and which informed their domination by the West; and, lastly, the destabilizing of Eurocentric norms of literary and artistic values in order to expand the literary can for the inclusion of colonial and postcolonial writers (245-246). These have been the primary concerns of postcolonial theorists, writers and critics alike.

It is important to note here that though African literature has contributed greatly to the discourse of post-colonialism in terms of creative writing, very little has come from the continent in terms of theorizing the concept. Pius Adesanmi notes this limited theoretical impact in his opinion that:

> Is Africa contributing efficiently and sufficiently to the growing and monstrously disparate body of knowledge we all

> now refer as postcolonial theory? Judging from current reflections and discussions amongst specialists, it would seem that the initial anxieties about the relevance and applicability of postcolonial theory to African literatures (and postcoloniality to the African condition) are now compounded by even more troubling anxieties about the quality of Africa's contribution to the field (35-36).

Ginna Wilkerson observes that as a literary approach, the postcolonial theorist approaches a text "through a specific critical lens, or a specific way of reading a text" which asks the reader to analyze and explain the effects of colonization and imperialism on a particular group of people or a nation (1). Wilkerson observes that this is made possible by the fact that:

> In many works of literature, specifically those coming out from Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent, we meet characters who are struggling with their identities in the wake of colonization, or the establishment of colonies in another nation.... [The characters] ... must deal with the economic, political, and emotional effects that the [Europeans] brought and left behind. This is true for literature that comes out of any colonized nation. In many cases, the literature stemming from these events is both emotional and political (1).

The above view helps to make clear the application of the theory in the reading and interpretation of literary texts from the postcolonial viewpoint. Postcolonial theorists argue that in analyzing literature in this regard, the critic must pay due attention to how language is used and how the language is suggestive of a debate between two opposing cultures of the colonizer and colonized. The critic must watch out for how the writer (the colonized) responds to Western hegemony and how it damaged the ideologies of the once suppressed and conquered (Bressler 204). The postcolonial theory is also influenced by other post-structuralist theories such as feminism, ecocriticism and Marxism.

The term "ecocriticism", was first introduced into literary scholarship in the later part of the 1970s by William Rueckert from a combination of "eco" (from ecology) and "criticism". This was captured in his essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". In his paper, Ruecket avowed that the concept of ecocriticism was coined in an attempt to "discover something about the ecology of literature", or experiment with a concept aimed at developing an "ecological poetics by applying ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature" (107). Rueckert is believed to have been inspired by Joseph W. Meeker who in 1972 (six years before Rueckert's epoch-making essay) introduced the term "literary ecology" to refer to "the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works. It is simultaneously an attempt

to discover what roles have been played by literature in the ecology of the human species" (2). Captured in his "The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology", Meeker's view has continued to inspire subsequent generations of ecocritical scholars and critics.

Before Rueckert's emergence into the scene, however, there had been a group of writers in the 1960s whose views align with ecocritical considerations. They raised alarming concerns over a spiraling population growth globally, pollution (land, air and water), deforestation, nuclear threats and so on. In this category, we have Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and Charles Reich's *The Greening of America* (1971). These publications decried the degradation of the natural environment, stressing on the need to have a cultural re-orientation of man as a way of avoiding premonitions of doom. Nonetheless, these writers were not united in their ideologies, leading Glotfelty to adjudge that "Each critic was inventing an environmental approach to literature in isolation. Each was a single voice howling in the wilderness" (xvii). Their failure to speak in one voice also sparks Fromm's observation that they had a "slow gestation" (81).

The term "ecocriticism" has been adopted over the years to generally designate a literary inquiry into the physical or natural environment. In other words, its primary interest is in the portrayal of the physical environment in works of literature. Ecocriticism investigates the place of human and non-human aspects of life and how they interrelate and influence each other

within the natural space. It is also referred to as environmental criticism, owing to its intense advocacy for a safe and tranquil natural environment for the good of all—human and non-human constituents of nature.

Ecocriticism, as an approach to literary criticism and textual interpretation, interrogates the abuse of non-human nature by the excesses of man. In line with this, Mayer Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham observe that ecocriticism is concerned with "critical writings which explore the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities" (71). Therefore, it becomes clear the model of ecocriticism or environmental criticism canvasses for an eco-friendly relationship between living things and non-living things alike. Cheryll Glotfelty, a foremost ecocritical scholar and environmental critic, in *Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, defines the concept and scope of ecocriticism where he succinctly remarks that it is:

> ...the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminism examines language from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies (xviii).

"Earth-centered", from Glotfelty's view above considers how earth-related aspects of nature-the flora and fauna, the atmosphere, humans, climate peculiarities, and many more are represented in literature. It can thus be deduced that the natural landscape and its exploration and exploitation by man bear the spotlight. Glotfelty proceeds to clarify that "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature" (xix). From the view expressed here, it is apparent that human culture affects the environment. Most human necessities are dependent on non-human nature to be realized; what is eaten, worn, used for shelter, and so on are gotten from what humans assume to be the boundless or inexhaustible resources of nature.

Ecocriticism and its studies have been promoted at meetings of the Western Literature Association, a body whose field of interest is the literature of the American West. (Barry 161) From the point of view of academics, ecocriticism is dominated by the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), a professional association that started in America but now has significant branches in the UK and Japan. It organizes regular conferences and publishes a journal that includes literary analysis, creative writings and articles on environmental education and activism. Many early works of ecocriticism were characterized by an

exclusive interest in Romantic poetry, wilderness narrative and nature writing, but in the last few years ASLE has turned towards a more general cultural ecocriticism, with studies of popular scientific writing, film, TV, art, architecture and other cultural artifacts such as theme parks, zoos and shopping malls (4).

A number of scholars have attempted to trace the origin of the reflection of nature in literature. Abrams and Hapharm for instance refer us back to the origin of man, as captured in the Biblical account of creation. They contend that "Representations of the natural environment are as old as recorded literature and were prominent in the account of the Garden of Eden in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the pastoral form inaugurated by the Greek Theocritus in the third century BC and later initiated by the Roman poet, Virgil..." (72). This "Garden of Eden" description of the ideal human environment where man, green nature and animals co-exist without harm becomes the model environment which ecocritics advocate for. Glen Love also makes an effort to spot the history of environmentally-concerned writings where in rractice *Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology and the Environment* he, in a perspective that corroborates that of Abrams and Harpham, states:

> The study of literature's relationship to the physical world has been with us, in the domain of the pastoral

> tradition, since ancient times. And academic attention to canonical works such as Thoreau, … and the fiction, poetry and essays of British and American Romantics had always had a place in the literary spectrum (1).

Another great influence on ecocritical scholars is the Romantic tradition that particularly idolized nature, according it a fascinating extent of reverence. With the likes of Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge, Dryden, Shelly, and so on evincing an obvious obsession for nature and its unalloyed beauty, ecocritics continue to refer to the works of these poets. Greg Garrard, for instance, posits that a good number of early ecocritics referred back to the "wilderness narrative and "nature writing" of the Romantic age (4). However, ecocritics such as Love have argued that ecocritical concern differs from the Romantic adulation of nature and somewhat spiritual attachment to it. Love particularly shows that to the Romantic conception, nature is a world to which sophisticated city dwellers "withdraw in search of simplicity lessons that only nature can teach" (66). This notion of nature puts man in a position of unchecked exploitation against non-human nature.

Ecocritical concerns have been divided into two major stages by Buell. In *The Future of Environmental Criticism,* Buell presents these stages as 'first-wave' and 'second-wave' respectively. He adumbrates that the first-wave is synonymous with the practice and perception of early ecocritics which concentrated more on culture's effect on nature and an agitation to

save nature from its despoilers and reverse its destruction through political action (69). Coupe affirms this where he observes that the early ecocritics set out to struggle for the preservation of the abiotic community (4). The second-wave expands its concept and scope to incorporate the artificial or man-made environments such as cities, urban centres, etc which are also exploited by man. Buell refers to this stage of ecocriticism as contemporary ecocriticism. He espouses that its major concentration is in locating vestiges of nature within cities and exposing crimes of eco-injustice against society's marginalized groups (70). Unlike the first wave which focused primarily on non-human nature, contemporary ecocriticism considers man to be part and parcel of nature and the environment. Hence, the natural environment and its man-made counterpart share a deep-rooted connection, such that urban and degraded landscapes are taken as seriously as natural landscapes (Bennett, 41). This idea presupposes that both environments are important. Buell elucidates this,

> Environmental criticism in literary studies is increasingly moving-albeit irregularly-in the direction of extending the concept of environment beyond the arena of the 'natural' alone and in the process is becoming increasingly sophisticated in its address to how, in both

> literature and in history, natural and social environments impinge on each other (127).

This illustrates that apart from just nature, the artificial environment is also interrogated as it is also affected by nature and man, and vice versa.

Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture. 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. Ecocriticism expands the notion of "the world" to include the entire ecosphere. The ecocritical movement's primary publications, the American ISLE (International Studies in Literature and Environment) and its younger British counterpart, Green Letters, are remarkable among scholarly association journals for their mixture of scholarly, pedagogical, creative, and environmentalist contributions. (Buel 6). ISLE is established in 1993 by Patrick Murphy to "provide a forum for critical studies of the literary and performing arts proceeding from or addressing environmental considerations. These would include ecological theory, environmentalism, conceptions of nature and their depictions, the human/nature dichotomy and related concerns." (Glotfelty and Fromm XVII).

Ecology, meanwhile, is concerned with an integrated, notionally holistic view of human–natural systems, even though at any point or space these systems–whether nominally organic or mechanical–are seen to be open

and evolving. Meanwhile a broadly ecological concern with human/nature and people/place relations is a deep-rooted and perennial feature of the subject, implicit in some of its Classical origins and explicit in much of its Romantic legacy. Ecological concern has some terms and topics they usually focus on some questions about family and community based on, identification between characters and places or a mood and a place, life and death, and about human and environment representation and relation such as whether people are a part of or apart from nature.

Lawrence Buell in the last chapter of his book believed that "environmental criticism at the turn of the twenty-first century will also come to be looked back upon as a moment that did produce a cluster of challenging intellectual work, a constellation rather than a single titanic book or figure, that established environmentality as a permanent concern for literary and other humanists, and through that even more than through acts of pedagogical or activist outreach helped instill and reinforce public concern about the fate of the earth, about humankind's responsibility to act on that awareness, about the shame of environmental injustice, and about the importance of vision and imagination in changing minds, lives, and policy as well as composing words, poems, and books. (Buel 133)

Combining traditional literary methodologies with ecological perspectives, ecocriticism is most appropriately applied to a work in which

the landscape itself is a dominant character, when a significant interaction occurs between author and place, character(s) and place. Landscape by definition includes the non-human elements of place—rocks, soil, trees, plants, rivers, animals, air-as well as human perceptions and modifications. (Scheese) By examining the language and metaphors used to describe nature, ecocriticism investigates the terms by which we relate to nature. Adopting Barry Commoner's first law of ecosystem ecology that "everything is connected to everything else," ecocritics such Glotfelty, presuppose that human culture, specifically its literature, is connected to the physical world, affecting nature as nature affects culture.

Though significantly influenced by the spiritual, philosophical, and aesthetic appreciation of nature that comes from pre-ecology Romanticism, ecocriticism is also informed by ecology and the contemporary environmental crisis. Transforming all of those influences to the study of literature, one of ecocriticism's main goals is to identify and analyze "our own attitudes toward nature and to engender a sense of accountability for the havoc the culture's left hand wreaks on its right hand through shortsighted technological practices" (Harold Fromm 109). As such, ecocriticism is more accurately described as a form of literary environmentalism. While not yet fully engaging the science of ecology, this literary environmentalism applies philosophy and theory to nature centered literature.

As Stephanie Sarver has noted, ecocriticism does not constitute a new critical field, but has relied heavily on Marxist, poststructuralist, psychoanalytic, and historicist theories. Its greatest challenge-to fully engage the biological sciences-has yet to be met. English studies has long integrated "soft" disciplines of history, philosophy, and anthropology in order to examine literature but has found it more challenging to engage the "hard" disciplines, "partly because of the difficulties involved in acquiring adequate grounding in the sciences to follow multidisciplinary arguments" (McDowell 372). Sarver fears that until such literary engagement with the biological sciences occurs, ecocriticism risks becoming just another jargon-filled critical literary field-another "-ism" in literary studies.

At the same time, Sarver and many ecocritical scholars recognize the need for literary criticism to address the pressing environmental issues of today. One way to do so is to refocus our study of literature on texts in which nature plays a dominant role: "our profession must soon direct its attention to that literature which recognizes and dramatizes the integration of human with natural cycles of life" (Love 235). Many ecocritics view urgent literary criticism as overly specialized, inaccessible even to some within the discipline, and generally irrelevant to the larger issues confronting the modern world; for those scholars, ecological literary criticism is an attempt to escape "from the esoteric abstractness that afflicts current theorizing

about literature, seiz[ing] opportunities offered by recent biological research to make humanistic studies more socially responsible" (Kroeber 1). As William Rueckert explains, in literary study there "must be a shift in our locus of motivation from newness, or theoretical elegance, or even coherence, to a principle of relevance" (107). Others have also identified the need for literary criticism to "recognize... our discipline's limited humanistic vision, our narrowly anthropocentric view of what's consequential in life" (Love 229). As a result of that recognition, in the early 1970s Rueckert began to experiment "with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for a human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in of anything g that I have studied in recent years" (107). The shift in literary study, as these critics perceive it, is from ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness (Love 230).

It is from these two critical perspectives that Huggan and Tiffin introduced the concept of Postcolonial Ecocriticism to establish a line of comparison between the domination and occupation of colonies by imperial powers with the destructive domination and coarse exploitation of the flora and fauna. They explore this theory in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. They illustrate this interrelatedness between nature and former colonies in their observation that:

> Postcolonial studies has come to understand environmental issues not only as central to the projects of European conquest and global domination, but also as inherent in the ideologies of imperialism and racism on which those projects historically-and persistently-depend. Not only were other people often regarded as part of nature-and thus treated instrumentally as animals-but also they were forced or coopted over time into western views of the environment, thereby rendering cultural and environmental restitution difficult if not impossible to achieve (6).

This view considers former colonies to have suffered (and still suffer) a similar fate with the crassly exploited natural environment. They proceed to observe that Postcolonial Ecocriticim is necessitated by the need to examine the interface between nature and culture, animal and human and how the binaries relate in the aspect of exploitation (Huggan and Tiffin6).

In the view of Idom Inyabri, the European imperialists approached their colonies with a similar mentality that man approaches the flora and fauna. He uses words such as "primitive", "savage", "unused", "virgin" and "untamed"-all of which are a common characteristic that provided the moral impetus for the exploitation of these two entities (117). In other words,

former colonies were seen as untamed, primitive and so on, just as the non-human environment, consequently resulting in their exploitative domination. He goes further to say that both land (non-human nature) and the colonized people have suffered a common fate of stereotype and objectification (118).

Three major influences to this novel theoretical perspective have been identified. First and foremost is the Australian ecofeminist, Val Plumwood, who argued that the masculinist reasoning of human towards non-human nature can be likened to the ideology that triggered the domination of territories by European powers. Secondly is the observation of some environmental and biospecific scholars who employed the term, 'biocolonialism' to refer to man's perceived supremacy over non-human nature. The third influence is Deane Curtin's concept of environmental racism as 'the connection, in theory and practice, of race and the environment so that the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the oppression of the other' (Qtd. in Huggan and Tiffin 4).

Though this theory is still developing, the basic assumptions of the proponents can be summed up, thus: first and foremost, Postcolonial Ecocritics argue that colonized territories and the environment share a similar history and experience of abuse and manipulation. Secondly, they put forward the view that due to this common fate of victimization, post-colonialism can benefit from studies of ecocriticism and that both areas can

offer mutual correctives to each other (Huggan and Tiffin 3). Thirdly, they argue that the language of the postcolonial and eco-critical writers should be approached with a comprehension of the fact that they make conscious choices that enhance their expression of the plight of the former colonies as well as the abused non-human sphere of life. Therefore, in approaching a text from a Postcolonial Ecocritical viewpoint, there is need to watch carefully for deliberate linguistic choices made by the author.

Having explored the historical background of the theory and its gradual advancement through the decade, it becomes necessary to state that the theory Postcolonial Ecocriticism is an appropriate theoretical model for this study as it enables this research to survey the portrayal of the natural environment (human and non-human) in Clark-Bekederemo's plays. It will also provide a base for the examination of the place of African colonial experience as captured in Clark-Bekederemo's representation of history. In this regard, the theoretical model enables the study to vividly explore the dehumanization and exploitation of the continent by the European supremacist forces. It will be highly instrumental to the study, also, due to the overwhelming presence of human and non-human nature throughout the selected plays. On an extended level of consideration, the theory is expedient because of the important influence that non-human nature has on the thoughts and actions of the playwright's human characters. By application of

the tenets of the theory, this research will interrogate the recent history of the Niger Delta society that has recorded unfortunate narratives of environmental devastation resulting from activities of oil exploration. This region of Nigeria, from which the playwright in view hails and which constitutes the overriding setting of his plays, has been crudely exploited on a human and non-human scale. Their recent history is embroiled in misery occasioned by oil spillage, gas flaring, farmland and water pollution, explosions and so on. All of these will be examined under the lens and application of the Postcolonial Ecocritical theory to understand the playwright's literary advocacy for a redeemed Niger Deltan region and by extension, the African continent.

It is important to sum this chapter up with the comment that the two theories that have been singled out for the study (New Historicism and Postcolonial Ecocriticism) can be effectively combined in the analysis. While new historicism enables the study to examine the place of history in the playwright's works and a number of other textual elements that constitute the thematic framework of his creative texts, the theory of Postcolonial Ecocriticism will help in casting an intellectual light on the effect of the African environment on the playwright's creativity. Hence, the two theories are evidently complementary and relevant to the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

HISTORY AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE SELECTED PLAYS

4.1 Historical Representations in the Selected Plays

The plays of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo generally evince the strong presence of history and the desire to give a historical orientation to his audience. Conscious of the essence of understanding one's past and the ray of light it holds to the future, Clark-Bekederemo infuses important fragments of history into his dramatic plots. Hence, in understanding his dramaturgy, there is the compelling need to first understand the historical contexts and backgrounds that inform and inspire his creativity. As the theoretical model of New Historicism espouses, history-like an array of other significant elements-has an important place in the endeavour of textual interpretation. Thus, this section explores the representation of aspects of Nigerian and African history in the plays of Clark-Bekederemo and how this historical manifestation underlines the artist's commitment to his African audience whose past he conjures.

In the play *All for Oil*, it is evident that the plot is drawn from events of the past, bordering on the continent's contact with European colonial masters and the aftermath of this contact which impacted seriously on the social, political, religious and cultural lives of the people. Particularly, focus

in this play is on palm oil trade between the European merchants and African indigenes. As captured in the history of the entire region of the Niger Delta, trade of commodities such as cocoa, palm oil, rubber, and so on underlined the continent's first contact with Europe. Clark-Bekederemo attempts to show the exploitation of the colonies by European powers and also by their fellow African brothers who were stooges to the imperialists. As a prelude to the play, the playwright presents the historical background upon which the plot is rooted:

> In the European scramble for Africa towards the end of the 19th century, Britain declared itself the Oil Rivers Protectorate to gain monopoly of the palm oil trade in what is now part of the land it put together as a country. Later, it formed the first Federation of Nigeria with the former Royal Niger Company as its principal commercial operator, and the indigenous people of the area, the Niger Delta, the suppliers of the raw materials that Britain needed for its factories (452).

This account above sets the play in motion and determines the twists, uncertainties and intricacies of the play. In a more direct manner, Clark-Bekederemo further adds in the prelude:

> Drawing from official colonial documents and oral tradition, *All for Oil* presents a powerful panorama of the players in the original drama of the creation of Nigeria. Sir (later Lord) Frederick Lugard and Colonel M. C. Moorhouse, aided by Chief Dore Numa, a local agent for the British in their war of aggression against Nana Olomu the Itsekiri (1894) and Oba Ovonramwen of Benin (1897), represent the colonial administration; the Niger Company dominates the trade and its largest trader and middleman in the Western Niger Delta, Chief Bekederemo (Ambekederemo), his friend, Chief Egbe, and his lawyer, Egerton Shyngle, leader of the Nigerian Bar... give voice to the interests and yearnings of the local people as it has never been reported before in the presentation of Nigeria's history (452-453).

It is apprehensible that the playwright sets out very consciously to re-enact historical events through the crafting of the play. And, as the closing statement of the excerpt above exhibits, he attempts to recreate that history as drama with shades of truth that have been left untold for long.

All for Oil opens with the reaction of the Nigerian people in the wake of the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates into one nation. The protagonist, Bekederemo, raises a number of fundamental

questions that have continued to trouble the Nigerian nation for more than a century, questions which point at the oddity of the Nigerian federation ab initio and the arbitrary manner in which the Nigerian state was created. In a dialogue with his friend, Egbe, Bekederemo questions:

> Come, come, Egbe.... Do you see how the white man has piled our plate full with problems? He has summoned a whole crowd of people, big and small, each speaking a different tongue, into a single hall, which he calls Nigeria. How are we going to hear each other speak? And above all the din, he hands us a song to sing at gun-point. We are in trouble, my brother (461).

The playwright, through the voice of Bekederemo, questions the insensitivity of the British administration in merging people from different backgrounds, and with different languages, into one nation. He traces the challenges of ethnic strife and disunity experienced in the nation today to its historical roots.

More so, a historical allusion is made to the highly celebrated and legendary Oba of Benin, Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, whose unflinching resistance of British imperialist forces led to his capture and subsequent exile and imprisonment in an underground cell in the Old Calabar from

which, history records that he never returned. This is alluded to in the heated argument between Dore and Bekederemo:

> DORE: Bekederemo, don't dare me further... Nana tried it, and you saw what happened to him .... And as for the mighty Oba of Benin, need I remind you he never returned home from his Calabar captivity? There he still lies today, in a plot, built over by a common Urhobo man.
>
> BEKEDEREMO: Don't you threaten me! There you are, you have an elephant stung over your shoulder, and you are still digging the earth for crickets with your toe (468).

In this exchange, the playwright has not just alluded to a historical figure whose role and place is central in the resistance of imperialism in Niger Delta and what has become Nigeria today, he has also captured the treacherous role of some indigenes in the hegemony of the people by colonialism. These treacherous elements are represented by Chief Dore, who does the bidding of the colonial masters and derive pecuniary gains from the betrayal of their own people. By this allusion, the playwright reminds his audience that the monarch who ended tragically and his heroic deeds against an oppressive colonial system are not forgotten.

The thoughtless exploitation of the African people by the colonial system is not left unattended in Clark-Bekederemo's interrogation of history. He creatively shows how the British administration forcefully deprived the people of their lands which they relied heavily on for survival. The same was the case in other nations of Africa, of which Keny a, Tanzania and South Africa stand as striking examples. This exploitation is espoused thus:

> BEKEDEREMO:....And it's not only oil they talk of these days for which, mind you, they fix all the prices, but plain possession and transfer of our land. Remember how Commissioner Crawford displaced the Ogbe people from this homeland to build a trading post now called Warri. Oh, my brother, there is a strange disease now spreading among us.... The terrible thing is that it is our own man Dore helping them to spread it, first from Benin River and now to Warri River and all around....
>
> EGBE: It's not just Ijaw and Urhobo lands here that he is signing away without the people's knowledge and consent. He has done it at Okere, at Sapele, and now he is signing away more for a new place called Alder's Town.... In return, the white man carves for the man a portion of the land that can hardly take the quarters for his cook and steward (464).

This sort of land-grabbing re-echoes the situation in Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and Ibrahim Hussein's *Kinjeketile*—two amongst the several other epic drama texts that have recreated the ill-fated environmental history of Africa during the colonial era. Yet in this conversation of regret between Bekederemo and Egbe the treacherous role of Chief Dore is brought to the fore as Egbe highlights the selfish rewards of land that goes to Chief Dore in his evil alliance with the white man. By diminishing the likes of Chief Dore, through the agency of Egbe and Bekederemo, the playwright is not only bringing nemesis to the traitors of Africans during the colonial era, he is aesthetically also showing how traitors of the Niger Delta, and Africans by extension go contrary to the fundamental belief system of collective survival and protection of land for the common good. Moreso, the playwright is creatively drawing our attention to the root of the selfishness that is also displayed by those who Frantz Fanon refer to as "the internal bourgeoisie" (120) who are conniving with multinational entrepreneurs in our time to fuel crisis and divisiveness in many parts of African land for their own selfish gains. The economic exploitation of the people is further emphasized in the conversation between Fuludu and Bekederemo, as illustrated below:

> FULUDU: And down here the white man dictates the price of oil and…

> BEKEDEREMO: Yes, a curious market they have established for themselves, a buyer dictating the price of his goods (474).

It is clear from the above that the white man takes advantage of the people in their land, using the arbitrary colonial laws. In a more detailed manner, the exploitative atrocity meted out on the indigenes is captured in Nemugha's lament:

> ...all have come with their accounts of the damages done to them by the wild elephant the white man has let loose on us. Accounts of palm oil produce extorted with little or no pay, demands for the best timber for rafters for his house, forced labour to build roads, illegal arrests of men so he can take over their wives, seizure of young girls to breach their virginity for public display, capture of other people's livestock to sacrifice to his gods... dispossession of people of their God-given land-oh, what a flash flood now sweeps over our land! Who is left that does not suffer in this province? (489).

Nemugha's wailing here presents lucidly a summary of the malevolence of the colonial system towards the continent. It presents unambiguously the physical, economic, political and sexual exploitation of Africa. The events in

the play therefore stand as a metaphor for the entire continent. By delving into the continent's past, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo becomes the literary historian who employs his skills as a master playwright to equip his Nigerian and African readers with vital information and fundamental details about their past. Chinua Achebe contends that this role of historian should be one of the average African writer's fundamental commitments. This is clear in his observation that the duty of the African literary artist (poet, playwright, novelist) is to help his African audience regain the dignity they have lost in the past, and that in doing this, the writer must arm himself with proper sense of history (8). To this commitment, Simon Gikandi observes:

> Colonialism, especially its radical transformation of African societies, remains one of the central problems with which writers and intellectuals in Africa have to deal; the tradition of African writing that has produced Nobel Prize laureates was built and consolidated when African writers began to take stock of the colonial situation and its impact on the African psyche (54-55).

Hence, historical (re-) orientation becomes a point of duty of the literary artist whose concern for his immediate society is not taken for granted. By so doing, the society is reminded of what they have been through in the past, as a guidepost to making more cautious decisions about their present and

future times. By relating the plight of the voiceless and exploited people to his audience, Clark-Bekederemo, in the view of Anthony Eyang and Augustine Edung, "stands with the marginalized and exploited... and deplores injustice and other forms of social malaise", which to them is a responsibility of the writer in whatever society he finds himself (106).

As a matter of great importance, it is noted that J. P. Clark-Bekederemo also employs *All for Oil* to trace the origin of the misfortune and socio-political chaos that has bedeviled the Niger Delta region as a result of oil exploration in recent times. The word "oil" as used in the title becomes highly loaded and suggestive in its meaning – on one hand it refers to palm oil and the dubious trans-Atlantic trade midwived by European merchants in the 19th century and, on the other hand, it creatively foreshadows the equally mischievous and murderous multinational enterprise around crude oil which Britain and other western countries inaugurated as from the mid-20th century. Insight on this is provided by the playwright in the introductory note to the play: "All for Oil is a play for our present crisis after crisis, a play for all who really care that this volatile resource is responsibly managed for peace and prosperity to prevail in our land" (453). This comes after having earlier stated that "Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, oil again, this time, petroleum, has been for years the major commodity making up Nigeria's economy...." (452).

Apparently, the need to resolve the smoldering Niger Delta oil crisis of today has informed Clark-Bekedermo's venture into historical records in a painstaking search to uncover hidden truths. He has pointed out that the same insensitivity to man and environment, greed, betrayal, strife, agony, exploitation and neglect that make up the current history of the region have persisted for decades. The situation today, as Oyeh Otu observes, parades a politics of betrayal of trust and absolute treachery-manifest in the atrocious activities of the local leaders who take sides with the Nigerian government and the multinational oil firms to further impoverish and marginalize their own people (178). That this betrayal and treachery did not begin today is not far-fetched: it has beleaguered the region right from the colonial days. The character of Chief Dore (with the brutality and terror he subjects his people) is representative of these traitors who are only interested in swelling or bulging their purses, to the detriment of their own people.

In interrogating colonial history, Clark-Bekederemo also highlights the reaction of the people to the then newly-introduced religion of Christianity and its complementary Western form of education. Therefore, in understanding the relevance of the historical records chronicled in the play, *All for Oil*, therefore foregrounds the need to grapple with the role of religion and education in facilitating the success of the colonial structure. Religion and education, as a result, are two of the several elements that are

fundamental to understanding Clark-Bekederemo's play; and drawing from the basic arguments of New Historicism they are examined here to clarify the analysis. The history of European colonization of Africa would be incomplete without due attention to the role played by these elements and this is what the playwright illustrates. This is because missionary activities aided in extending the frontiers of European influence and to solidify their total domination of the colonies. The dialogue between Bekederemo and Fuludu captures the role of education:

> FULUDU: We've finished, father. I fear that the boy won't be able to use his buttocks for some days.
>
> BEKEDEREMO: Let's hope he learns the lesson he ran away from at school.
>
> FULUDU: There it is sons of slaves the white man has brought back with him who do the drubbing.
>
> BEKEDEREMO: And with a vengeance that we all understand. When Sir Ralph Moor first asked us chiefs of the Niger Delta to send our sons to the new schools they were setting up, from Ogungumanga to Sapele, as part and instrument of their administration, you will all recall I had my doubts. Nor did the Yoruba man Ajayi

> Crowther who came as priest of their God convince many of us. I made my money as did my father... without the help of the white man and his education (473-474).

It is seen from the above dialogue how education was considered in a negative light by the colonized people. Bekederemo, here, refers us to the tragic protagonist, Ezeulu, in Achebe's *Arrow of God*. Both characters consider education to be the white man's scheme to ulterior intentions and would only send their children to help them monitor the suspicious activities of the British administration. This is not to mean that the Western form of education is condemned, but it is shown to have enhanced the social, cultural and political colonization of the African continent, the effects of which are still visibly in the psychology of the post-colonies. There is also a reference to the returning slaves who were beneficiaries of the Emancipation Proclamation. Just as contained in historical documents, Clark-Bekederemo shows the vital role played by these freedmen and women in facilitating the spread of Western education. Upon their return they joined the European missionaries and the colonial government, playing the all-important role of interpreters.

J. P. Clark-Bekederemo also casts his literary spotlight on the clash between Christianity and African traditional religion. With the arrival of the Christian missionaries, the religious beliefs and practices of pre-colonial

Africa faced an enormous threat of extinction. The colonies became more or less a battleground for two disparate forms of religious beliefs and ideologies, both combating for supremacy over the other. The playwright shows this clash in *All for Oil*. There is a tense religious debate as captured in the dialogue as follows:

> BABIGHA: It is the old dispute over the pantheon of gods at our town gate, set up by my son, Fetaroro. They are arbiter gods, especially the central one, Okpokaye, famous for settling disputes in Kiagbodo and districts all around. But Bekederemo claims Madam, that's her name is a killer, the whole families, wards entire districts have been wiped out by her. Now, yesterday he called Mr. Grant, the District Officer, from Forcados, and under his cover, he burnt down our shrine.
>
> DORE: Mr Bucknor, the white man gave us freedom to worship in our old ways, didn't he?
>
> BUCKNOR: Yes, Chief, he did; there is absolute freedom of worship, excepting of course the practice of any religion that calls for human sacrifice and cannibalism in the name of some fetish god (485).

The above reveals the agony of a people whose religion is grossly violated; the torching of their shrine of worship (which bears their altar of religious devotion and channel to the divine) symbolizes the devaluation and spiritual terror suffered by the colonies. Dore goes on to show the extent of this where he wails:

> My father-in-law is humiliated before his family, the protective goddess of his people burnt down to ashes at the behest of Bekederemo in a most cleverly contrived operation, carried out in broad daylight.... We have burnt down settlements far less than this in the time of Moor and Moorhouse (486).

The religious affront suffered by the African people is shown by the playwright to have left them spiritually detached and physically defenseless as the gods and goddesses were strongly believed to be guardians of the cosmos and custodians of activities in the physical world. Therefore, this defiance to their spiritual connection-a sacrilege of boundless proportions-cuts them off and distances them from their divine protectors. This, as the playwright illustrates, is an unfortunate fate suffered by African colonies.

The play, *All for Oil,* in bearing a great weight of historical significance, also focuses on the British system of indirect rule. Clark-Bekederemo shows the imperfections of this approach to colonial

administration. The district chiefs are portrayed to be tyrants who greedily exploited their own people and imposed on them harsh policies that even the British administrators were ignorant of. On the visit to Sir Frederick Lord Lugard (who to the dismay of the delegation is overseas and is represented by Col. Moorhouse), Shyngle, the colonial secretary tells Col. Moorhouse, Lugard's representative ".... Your Excellency. Every charge and complaint is fully documented here. The man is a tyrant, and, if I may venture to add, a poor choice to promote your policy of indirect rule" (*All for Oil* 506). When Col. Moorhuse, patronizingly, assures them that their complaint would be responded to "with sympathy", Bekederemo openly faults the system as being slow in responding to distress. This is captured in the exchange below:

> BEKEDEREMO: When? When will you look at them? This is not the first time these matters have been raised. You are always calling one meeting or another, setting up committee after another, never taking any decision, while your agent runs all over the place like a buffalo.
>
> COL. MOORHOUSE: Not this time, I solemnly assure you on behalf of His Majesty's Government. A visitation of high officials will come immediately to Warri to examine the matter on the spot. Will you be prepared to appear in person to present your case?

> BEKEDEREMO: Have I come all this way to ask for justice and you ask whether I shall be at home to face Dore and Douglas with my charges? (*All for Oil* 508).

Bekederemo's outburst here is representative of the frustration of the colonies towards the policy of indirect rule and it's inefficiency taking care of inter-personal and inter-communal crisis; crisis, which sometimes are beyond the comprehension of the colonial administration.

J. P. Clark-Bekederemo wraps up the historical content of the play by puzzling the reader with the big survival question of if Nigeria would stand, in the event of the amalgamation. Through the voice of Bekederemo, it is put forward: "Now, do you really believe this your market of unnumbered sheds that you call Nigeria will actually hold and for how long?" (507). This question is very significant as a number of events in the nation's fraught history have constantly referred us back to 1914, with the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) being the most prominent as it threatened to tear the nation apart. Even today, more than a century after Amalgamation, recent occurrences continue to threaten the survival of the nation, Nigeria.

Another play in which J. P. Clark-Bekederemo deeply interrogates history is *The Raft*. Written and first staged in 1964, The Raft symbolically surveys a period in Nigerian history that is fundamental to understanding the present condition of the nation. The period in focus, shortly after the nation's

independence (with burning hopes and desire for a new nation, new opportunities for the post-colony and total liberty to aspire), is one that is shown to be very complicated and mired in uncertainty and confusion. In the wake of the much-expected independence, attained through the unrelenting struggles of nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Tafawa Balewa, Alvan Ikoku, among many others, the emergent rulers derail from the sane part of leadership.

As one of the pioneering works in modern African drama, Clark-Bekederemo's *The Raft* has been considered by a number of critics to be historically relevant. Tony Eyang and James Okpiliya, for instance, consider the play in the light of projecting "...a nation adrift on the sea of history..." (1). This contention is highly insightful in examining the play and its reflection of the nation's past. The playwright here chooses to metaphorically represent a time in Nigeria's history when the leaders have avariciously mismanaged and grossly embezzled the peoples' commonwealth, thereby leaving the common man to wallow in wretch and privation. The raft on which the entire events take place symbolizes the Nigerian nation; the four ill-fated conveyers of lumber represent the exploited citizenry while their drift epitomizes the loss of direction, sociopolitical malfeasance and catastrophe that has befallen the nation - a resultant effect of failed leadership. This monumental failure on the part of

the leaders continues to reverberate in the present-day crises-ridden continent of Africa. Drawing from this, it is not far-fetched to sum up that *The Raft* portrays what has been topical in the historical narrative of the Nigerian nation and the continent since the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The unfortunate fate of the four characters-Kengide, Ogrope, Olotu and Ibobo-alludes to the doom that befalls the masses in the post-colonial era. These four men, in the prime of their lives, are conveying heavy logs against dangerous storms of the Niger River for capitalist owners who live lavishly without caring to know what their labourers have to go through on every voyage. Kengide's explosion reveals this:

> Had I not allowed that man's sweet tongue to lick me round with all his talk about money there is to make in this log business, I should be safe at home today happily collapsed over my calabash of palm wine. But I let that weakling of a wash-back from Lagos fool me into joining his lumber gang, and here we are tied to a raft of logs whose sole owner is miles away rolling on laps of his innumerable wives (122).

Kengide's frustration here is understandable as he is one of the several who toil day and night with little or nothing to show for their labour. This immeasurable frustration expressed by the playwright is what has continued

to deepen over the decades, culminating in the disastrous threat to security that has overwhelmed the continent.

As a matter of importance, it is notable that Clark-Bekerderemo's *The Raft* passes a subtle commentary on the events that led up to the intervention of the military in the governance of Nigeria and its aftermath, the Nigerian-Biafran War. The political class is shown to have ruined the collective dream of an ideal nation as well as the efforts of patriotic citizens towards building the nation. Kengide brings this situation to light where he furiously laments, thus:

> The politicians and papers who had promised Jericho itself, by their own divisions, caused a breach in the wall we workers had at their incitement staked to build.... Not only that, they went on to raise taxes and prices on everything money could buy in the shop—from buckets to umbrellas—they raised them all, while lowering those on our crops (132-133).

Kengide, though ill-tempered and boisterously querulous, represents the voice of reason, truth and sanity. Through him, the excesses of the ruling class are questioned. "Wall" in the excerpt above refers to the Nigerian nation, and the African continent by extension, both of which have proven abortive in their developmental process. In view of the position established

here, the play mirrors the happenings between 1960 and 1970 (a post-independence decade marked by ugly incidents: coup and counter coups, pogroms, political sabotage, all climaxing in the Civil War), the contention on the renowned literary website, bookrags.com, comes to further illuminate the view. It is projected in a succinct manner that:

> In this time and period [within which the plot is situated], Nigeria was undergoing significant transformations, politically, socially, and otherwise.... Independence was expected to bring stability to Nigeria, but instead, the country suffered much strife for many years. In the early years of independence there were tensions between the four self-governing regions (west, east, north and mid-west). Many critics believe that the four characters of The Raft represent these regions. When Nigeria became a republic in 1963, the regions were replaced by twelve states. Though this was expected to ease regional problems, it did not (1).

The observation here emphasizes the historical relevance of Clark-Bekederemo's *The Raft*. Though much of the character analysis and general commentary on the playwright's strategy of characterization will feature in the succeeding chapter of this study, it is pertinent to observe here that on a

level of analysis, *The Raft*'s four characters represent the major tribal divisions—Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and the minority groups. And apparently, as occasioned by this division and as has been the fate of the nation, there is a persistent crisis of hate, distrust, failed reconciliation after the war disaster, disharmony and bloodshed. This is reflected in the four characters who are consistently consumed by heated quarrels, and unsavory exchanges even in the face of doom. In "Movement Three", this disagreeing and argumentative spirit which characterizes most of the play is presented, thus:

> IBOBO: Do you ever sing and laugh in your own part of the country?
>
> OGRO: No, each day some poor fellow is either going out with a hiss or making his brief entrance with a howl, the women wail going to bed and wake up wailing, for their seeds are eaten up by the black beetle.
>
> IBOBO: Forgive me, Ogro, in my place, too, plants wilt and die, wilt and die, but all the same, we have our happy seasons.
>
> KENGIDE: That is because, like the very creeks you live on, your ways meander like the pythons you worship.

> Thus, you drink where you defecate, and will have others believe it's living water.
>
> IBOBO: And your people have pure wells and sweet springs! (*The Raft* 134-135).

It is clearly established that the characters are divided by ethnic or tribal differences. Kengide's reference to "... the pythons you worship", shows that there is a religious sentiment which, like many other factors, has defined many events in the nation's fraught history. There have been massacres of unimaginable degrees in places like Kaduna, Jos, Bauchi and Kano in the recent past that have been sparked by religious tensions to the detriment of the delicate peace and harmony that have been sought by patriotic citizens.

The disastrous and apocalyptic closure of *The Raft* refers us back to the Civil War crisis that ravaged the nation for three years, claiming the lives of eminent sons and daughters of the Nigerian and Biafran sides in their prime, not to mention the deep-seated humanitarian and economic ruins that followed. Though *The Raft* was written before the outbreak of the war, it prophetically foretold of the doom that lurked. This doom still looms in the nation today with such examples as the brutal killings by the herdsmen of Fulani extraction, Boko Haram terrorism, kidnappings and the vicious murder of innocent citizens by armed bandits in the North East, and so on.

A major detail in Nigerian colonial history is also recreated in *The Wives' Revolt*. In showing the resistance to and resilience against an oppressive patriarchal system, the playwright refers us back to the unfair taxation of market women and which culminated in the vicious massacre of unclad, protesting women, an event that has gone down the history books as the Aba Women's Riot of 1929. This event is directly alluded to in the verbal interchange between Okoro and his wife, Koko:

> OKORO: Go, go up there and spit your fire at the Governor and President and see whether you won't be snuffed out as so many sputtering candles.
>
> KOKO: Shame on you! It's you men who should take up fight for our common rights.
>
> OKORO: Shame on you too! Why can't you women act on your own? It is less likely that they will shoot at you if you did, whereas they will only be too glad to test their weapons on us.
>
> KOKO: Who told you so? The British shot women at Aba, and everybody knows they rise from seats for their women to sit, while you order us to carry yours behind you....

> OKORO: Those Aba women adopted the wrong tactics. They should have stripped like the women at Abeokuta in similar protest. They would have disarmed the government (413).

By referring to this disturbing historical detail, Clark-Bekederemo refers his Nigerian audience to where they have been in the past; he reminds them of one of the most resounding atrocities and negative legacies of the British colonial regime. He also informs and enlightens the womenfolk so as to take precedence from the unshakable resolve expressed by the protesting women of 1929 in the face of unjust policies and oppressive laws against them. This is what Koko and the other women in *The Wives' Revolt* exemplify—they unite in questioning an oppressive patriarchal system, and their uprising yields in the end.

In all, it suffices to submit that J. P. Cark-Bekederemo is a rounded historical dramatist as he consciously fashions aspects of his plays to represent pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial accounts of history in a way that stresses the social, political, economic, cultural and religious conditions as have been peculiar to the Niger Delta people through the ages. Through his portrayal of pre-colonial history, the playwright succeeds in illustrating, as Achebe rightly expresses, that despite the imperfections of the pre-colonial African society, the narrative of the continent before the coming

of the white man was not one long night of savagery which the Europeans delivered to the people, ostensibly acting on God's command ("The Novelist as Teacher" 105). His engagement of colonial history emphasizes the human and material exploitation of the African continent by the colonial masters and the damage done to the numerous aspects of the continent's cultural and religious beliefs and practices which effects are still very much patent in the present times. On the other hand, the playwright's narrative of post-colonial history is an attempt to highlight the abject betrayal of the African masses by the political elite and the social and economic catastrophe that this has wrecked on the continent through the decades.

By giving the historical a prominent representation in his dramaturgy, Clark-Bekederemo emphasizes without restraint the importance of having a deeply-rooted orientation and awareness about one's past as the past holds a lot of answers to the questions of the present. As Achebe observes, a people need to be aware of where the rain started beating them, in order to know where their body became dry. Clark-Bekederemo, consequent upon Achebe's stance, shows his Nigerian audience where the rain of colonialism started to beat them. This section therefore concludes with the statement that history greatly inspires the literary art as exemplified by Clark-Bekederemo in the selected plays analyzed here. It provides the literary artist with plot

structures and accounts, thematic preoccupations and a channel through which the origin and past experiences of a people are interrogated.

4.2 Environmental Representations in the Selected Plays

The Niger Delta environment has a strong influence on the writings of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo. It can be said that a writer's imagination is logically steeped in his immediate milieu. True as this may be, in the case of Clark-Bekederemo the thought that his people and entire bioregion have suffered a history of marginalization makes it more compelling to foreground that environment in his writings. This focus on his bio-region, physical qualities, cultural dignity, political concerns and vicissitude can be seen graphically engaged in his plays. In exploring the representation of the environment in Clark-Bekederemo's plays, we are guided by the underlying tenets of Postcolonial Ecocriticism to analyze how the playwright-reflects the inter-relationship between human and non-human as aspects of nature that determine existence in his cultural space. Moreso, our interest here is also to show that for Clark-Bekederemo non-human environment is an important element in recreating and understanding the tortured history of imperialism and what Ken Saro-Wiwa has called domestic colonialism; a situation in which minorities like the Niger Delta are subjugated and deprived of their rights and privileges by a corrupt elite class, who are riding on the wings of dominant ethnic nationalities in Nigeria's odd federation. This reading is in

tandem with the convictions of postcolonial eco-critics that nonhumans are implicated in the colonizing process of Africans, Asians and the Pacific and can be perceived in their post-independent legacies (Huggan and Tiffin 11). These post-independence legacies for us consist of the odd ways in which the "national elites" connive with multi-nationals to defraud the people of their common wealth.

Thus, in the spirit of the "second Wave" of the study of literature and the environment, we proceed by reading the social implication of the despoliation of the environment and the relationship between the representation of nature and power (Caminero-Santangelo and Myers 7) in Clark-Bekederemo's plays that have hitherto been seen as purely materialist or plainly socio-political. So, for us, what has been long considered as purely socio-political has embedded in it non-human environmental concerns. In his plays Clark-Bekederemo exploits the dramatic process to make creative and ideological statements on place consciousness and the otherness of the proletariat and non-human / natural resources in the Niger Delta. It is this sense of eco-consciousness that preoccupies us in the section below.

different from the term Space which has, sometimes, been used interchangeably with it. To this extent Space becomes an un-humanized zone, lacking human presence. Lawrence Buell deepens our understanding of Place again when he states that "the meaning of places may be rooted in the physical setting and object and activities … but they are not a property of them – rather they are a property of human intensions and experiences…" (*The Environmental Imagination*... 253). In this regard, human experiences implicated in a space are the elements that convert it to a place.

To adequately capture what we mean by place consciousness in this study, we need to connect Peter Berge's delineation of the term "Bioregion" with the concept of Place. This is because both concepts are related and characterize each other. Thus for Berg, a bioregion goes beyond physicality, "it is a geographic terrain and a terrain of consciousness" (www.planedrum.org). Stretching our grasp of the concept Berg further states that we do not only rely on natural sciences to understand what bioregion means but "... must draw information from anthropological studies, historical accounts, social developments, customs, traditions and arts ... " (www.planedrum.org.). Hence in capturing the representation of a bioregion or place we need to identify the custom and moors of a place, its social, enthnographic, historical and mythical elements that give that place its characters.

Drawing from this subtle understanding of place and bioregion, we can say that place consciousness is the awareness and creative vision of ones homeland and terrain of belonging. It is the consciousness of a place that helps one to have affinity or any other sentiment to that place and determines the relationship between a person and his environment – human and non-human. According to James Tarter, "it is an exigency that demands environmental justice" (92), which implies that it is through place consciousness that people stand to defend a bioregion or make presentations that will show its integrity. For us it is from a peculiar state of place consciousness that Clark-Bekederemo proceeds in his career to represent his bioregion. He does this against the background of colonial and post-independence injustice, inferiorization and marginalization.

In *The Raft*, which is seen as a socio-political parable of post-independence Nigeria, displays dense issues that can today be read from eco-critical perspective. Although the four lumbermen on the raft which has gone adrift in the Niger river are seen as characters who represent the Nigerian troubled nation-state that is politically adrift, their interaction on the ill-fated raft portrays the playwright's commitment to foreground the exploitation and objectification of his Niger Delta environment and his people's deplorable condition in a dispossessed country. This commitment is immediately displayed at the beginning of the play when the director

describes the opening scene of the play as "Night on a creek in the Niger Delta" (*The Raft* 93). This place-conscious, for us is a deliberate attempt to draw attention to a dispossessed region, even as early as the 1960s, a situation which is continually expressed as the play progresses.

Obviously irritated by Olotu's contempt for his astute identification of their mutual entrapment at the disastrous Osikoboro whirlpool, Kengide took exception at the latter's expression of derision for his own people's belief system around the whirlpool of the Niger river and by extension the whole of the Niger Delta. Thus he chides his colleague

> Now I see why we the Delta
> Never will make good. You believe all
> The tales tampering with the stars
> That are told you abroad, but never anyone
> At home about your own rivers. (*The Raft* 103).

Loaded in Kingide's angry reaction above is an expression of regret over a people's self-hate and derision of what should really be theirs. In Kingide's exchange is an eco-conscious position which demands that a people must first appreciate their home and sustain the knowledge that emanates from the myths, moors and ethos that actually give character to their environment. Indeed, through the instrumentality of Kingide, Clark-

Bekederemo is creatively positing a vital sense of place consciousness which can best be seen from the perspective of Peter Berg, when he states: "... must draw information from anthropological studies, historical accounts, social developments, customs, traditions and arts..." (www.planedrum.org.).

This active impulse of place consciousness and belonging is persistent in the play as the nostalgic lumbermen muse over their lost pastoral bliss in their riverine homeland. Ogro especially, reminisces over his homeland's richness in fish and his boyhood escapade in fishing activities. It is in the same manner that he boasts of having knowledge of "... every single craft / Sailing between Burutu, Warri / And Lokoja as well as Makurdi / Or Yola (*The Raft* 118). The consciousness of the steamboats and ships, which became a powerful vessel for the conveyance of natural resources like palm produce and timber pervades Clark-Bekederemo's settings in his plays. Through his characters' references to that technology in the late 18th, 19th and through the 20th centuries, the playwright captures the ubiquity of that vessel in his homeland and its oppressive and exploitative presence as a colonial figure. Apart from *The Raft*,where Ogro tells us of his knowledge of British and French super cargo vessels, in *The Return Home*, the second text in Clark-Bekederemo's trilogy, the ubiquitous sound of the Niger Company boat offers Apele apt simile with which to show what nuisance Omonibo, his peer, has become (*The Return Home* 366). In *All for Oil* the motif of the

steam boats and the cargo ships loom over what Maika in *The Return Home* would refer to as "a hostile surrounding" (*The Return Home* 353). It is within the anxiety of that "hostile surrounding" that the Ijaw grand patriarch, Bekederemo, would prefer to use his own boat, "Okolada", for fear of the "German U-boats" (*All for Oil* 509). When (Egerton) Shyngle tells Col (M.C.) Moorhouse, the deputy of Lord Frederick Lugard, that "your Excellency knows better than us the danger of torpedoes fired by German U-boats now approaching these waters" (*All for Oil* 509), he was speaking volumes of what has been discussed as the militarization of the Niger Delta (Rowell, Marriott & Stockman: 2005; Tamuno: 2011). The history of the Niger Delta shows that right from the trade on humans, the colonial inquisitions, the so called years of legitimate trade down to discovery of crude oil, its multi-billion dollars multi-national trade, the Niger delta bio-region has been bedeviled by wars, insurrections, militancy and all manner of riots which have in turn proliferated weapons in the environment. Therefore, in *All for Oil*, Clark-Bekederemo is only dramatically impressing on his reader / audience the trauma which the region has gone through for centuries. As in *All for Oil*, the treachery and violence which saw the exile of some Niger Delta Princes, namely Ovoranmwen of Benin, Nana of Itsekiri, Jaja of Opobo pervade the traumatized memories of the actors in the trilogy especially in *The Boat*, where the patriarch, Ambakederemo, cautioned an Ijaw leader, Onduku: "Take care, Take care. In Benin they

flattened a whole city because of the loss of one man. They called it pacification as indeed they sacked Nana" (*The Boat* 311).

In the trilogy, *The Bikoroa Plays*, Clark-Bekederemo displays his deep sense of place consciousness by dramatizing one of his people means of attaining social and cosmic cleansing, rejuvenation and balance. In the first play of the trilogy the land is desecrated by Biowa's murder of his brother, Bradide over misunderstanding of how to use their mutual inheritance, the boat, "an instrument of service, and a symbol of position among a people" (*The Return* 354), bequeathed them by their deceased father. Consequently there is a death penalty that Biowa is faces to atone for the murder of his own brother. The overall implication of the situation is that the spirits of the two brothers restlessly roam the earth as they have no dignified resting place among their ancestors and entire people are jinxed by the curse of the abominable act.

In the second part of the trilogy, *The Return Home*, the burden of healing the land and restoring the cosmological order falls on Fregene and Egberibo, sons of Bradide and Biowa, respectively. By the tragic and unfortunate deaths of their late fathers, the entire Bikoroa society suffers. Since the deceased have no place in the ancestral circle, there is a seismic disruption of a very significant cosmological order that threatens the connection between the living and their ancestors who are believed to bring

good fortunes to man. The cleansing rites are carried out with items such as two rams, cam, pomade, effigies made from wood, a ladder made from bamboo and water. With these items, Fregene and Egberibo (used by the community to symbolize their late fathers) go through ritual rights of cleansing, reconciliation, redemption and rebirth. They are each given a thorough bath in the blood of the slaughtered rams, washed clean with water and have their bodies judiciously rubbed with cam and pomade. Their ritual cleansing and consequent restoration is not only personal but a community affair as the entire race of ijaw and Itsjekiri people are wrapped in euphoria when the rite of cleansing is completed. Indeed in the denouement of the play it is the entire people who feel relieved of the burden of the curse of the generational curse. The rapturous feasting that takes place signifies this all round salvation (*The Return* 370-371).

However, as a cycle of fate, in *Full Circle*, the last part of the trilogy, there is a near recurrence of the abomination that jinxed the whole Ijaw and Itsekiri race three generations before. Here it is the case of an impoverished son, Kari, who feels bewitched by his mother attacking the latter but dying in the course of his elder brother, Ojoboro, separating the fight. Although the death is an accident, the community again feels cursed as it spells doom for their spirituality. Confirming the accidental nature of the unfortunate

incidence and its spiritual implication, Neighbours also show that addressing the issue and salvaging the race is a collective task:

NEIGHBOURS: Yes, we saw it all. But it happened again ... in Bikoro.... Can it be a curse? How far does it go? Oh what shall we do? What shall we do? ... How do we handle a case like this. This is a matter that must not be reported abroad. (*Full Circle* 389-90)

From the Neighbours' regret we can perceive a unique ethos that the playwright projects in context of representing a place conscious against a colonial world view that threatens his cultural identity. That world view is a collective one which is sign post the collective pronoun, "we", as seen in the speech of the neighbours. Here they express a collective responsibility as well as a collective task of salvation. To show that his play is a cultural, ideological face-off with colonialist stereotypes of his people, Clark-Bekederemo presents a situation where from among the community, somebody raises an objection to the communal resolution of the tragic situation instead of taking it to the new colonial system of Government juridical trial of the situation. Puncturing this colonialist logic an Elder, Apele, replied:

APELE: We know it is a world of government, and one controlled from abroad. But when did we start reporting death and birth to the government? (*Full Circle* 392)

In the speech of Apele is a consolidation of an indigenous perception of kinship, nationality and a rejection of an impersonal foreign government and system of conflict resolution. The abroad-ness of Government and its new regime of control is quite in human and does augur well for love and unity. Thus the playwright is insisting on a system that will continue to bond the people and make the have a sense of en-placement. In Full circle, therefore, we have a dramatization of an indigenous, perhaps, bioregional method of engaging fate and existence which is stands in the face of extinction by a hostile foreign power. The communal ritual and drama of reconciliation as staged here is a clear installation of place consciousness, which is in conformity of the spirit of ecology where everything is connected to everything else as Larry Commoner will have it

4.2.2 Wilderness, Otherness and Objects

Social and environmental exploitation underlines the major concern of the playwright, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo. Through the vehicle of the play, we are presented with the extent to which less privileged people, in the same manner and pedigree as non-human nature are grossly abused and like non-humans around him, they are objectified. The less privileged man (being on the receiving end of this exploitation) is portrayed to be vulnerable to the exploitative schemes of the privileged and powerful, so much so that his life like that of the palm oil, timber or crude oil, which they deal on is objectified

and made dispensable by a big entrepreneur, basking in wealth and insulated from the vagaries of life in the tortuous and poverty ridden terrain of the Delta. To better understand the colonial and post-independence exploitation of Africa as is recreated in Clark-Bekederemo's plays we will draw insights from the ecocritical trope of wilderness.

The trope of wilderness therefore, designates one of the fundamental frame of mind through which humans reconstruct some aspect of nature. Greg Garrard in his *Ecocriticism* traces the etymology of the word "wilderness" to the anglo-Saxon "wilddeoren" "where 'deoren' existed beyond the boundaries of cultivation" (60). He goes further to elaborate that "Wilderness is, in the history of our species, a recent notion. To designate a place apart from, and opposed to, human culture..." (60). It should be noted that Garrad's explication of wilderness truly captures western colonial logic of places they were to occupy. In this regard the African landscape and its people were considered as wilderness; hence the need to conquer and 'civilize' the continent through colonization. The colonial powers decided to exploit this perceived wilderness without considering the human population of the region. This draws attention to Edward Said's concept of orientalism which critically examines the exploitative domination of weaker territories by European imperialists. The environment in Clark-Bekederemo's *The Boat*, *The Return Home*, *Full Circle*, *The Revolt* and *All for Oil* is

approached as an orient by European supremacists without due regards to the people's cultural ethics, political organization and religious beliefs. The landscape and its people are violated to the peril of the colonized. Through land seizure, forced labour, illegal arrests and detentions, sexual abuse and the mindless and ignorant boundary formation and reorganization of indigenous people and landscapes in the Niger Delta like many other parts of the continent, the playwright hints at the crude exploitation and abuse of the African geography. On the environmental (human and non-human) exploitation of the colonies, Idom Inyabri observes succinctly that:

> In the thought process of western colonialism, there was no difference between the people and the non-humans they subjugated and exploited. Thus, categories such as 'primitive', 'savage', 'untamed', 'virgin' and above all 'unused' which necessitated the objectification of the land were also applied to colonize the subjects, providing the moral impetus for colonial enterprise to exploit (non-European) humans as it would manipulate flora and fauna to profit the [imperial] metropolis (117).

The perspective which Inyabri notes with regard to the colonial conception of African people, especially the Niger Delta is sustained in the mind of post-independence African political elites in their neo-colonial

exploitation of their own people. This indeed constitutes what Huggan and Tiffin have described as the post-independence legacies of colonialism (11).

Drawing ideological lead from the above, we offer an eco-conscious reading of the Raft which departs from the usual soccio-political allegory has dominated the reception of the play. In fact our argument here is that the Clark-Bekederemo the objectification of his people when he wrote *The Raft.* The predicament of the Lumbermen caught up in hostile sea of the Delta is truly the predicament of a people who like their natural resources have faced waste and usury. It is important to note that timber business in like palm oil is one of the enterprises which European colonialism bequeathed to the neo-colonial Nigerian leadership. In that business, therefore, the indigenous people involved in it are as dispensable as the timbers which are hacked down in the dense forests of the Delta. Yet the big entrepreneur whose sole interest is the financial gains is basking in the safety and luxury of his home in Lagos (*The Raft* 93). Kengide considers himself and the three other lumbermen to be fools for allowing themselves to be so coarsely objectified that their lives lose meaning (*The Raft* 93). When Ogrope expresses cheering hopes that upon their safe berthing at the port, he would have the old chief's finest daughter for a wife, Kengide deliriously mocks him, telling him to put such extravagant thoughts and wild hopes behind him. This impresses on the audience and reader alike, the degree of physical and psychological abuse

and manipulation suffered by the common man. It is clearly illustrated in the dialogue as follows:

> KENGIDE: I sometimes wonder what unattended dead or god is inside the fellow.
>
> IBOBO: Think of him going about believing the old chief will give him that daughter of his to marry—ha, ha, a proper fool!
>
> OLOTU: And not a penny to his purse.
>
> KENGIDE: Perhaps his parents at home have a pot buried under their bedstead.
>
> IBOBO: No. Ogro does not even believe dowry is necessary. The mermaid shall come to him as bounty for his sweat and service before the great shrine.
>
> KENGIDE: What a fool! The old chief who would hand out the best of their daughters like that died out generations ago. Nowadays, they drain the Delta of all that's in it, and not a shrimp slips past their fat fingers (107-108).

It is revealed here that greed and unchecked materialism are responsible for the devaluation of the common man. The helpless and hapless common man here labours endlessly without proportionate remuneration for his toils. After Ogrope's tragic end, for instance, Kengide reveals that "The rogue waiting at Warri wasn't going to pay him anyway" (122). This is descriptive of the predicaments of African post-colonies: they have struggled to overcome the exploitation of European imperialists (of the 19th and 20th centuries), only to be plunged spitefully into another phase of more agonizing exploitation in the hands of their own brothers and countrymen. It is important in our context of reading to underscore the significance of Kengide's speech above. In his deep evaluation of the monarchs Kengide shows that the royal fathers are all caught in the web of money making and disregard of their people. Unlike the legendary Ijaw patriarch, Ambakederemo, who fought for the dignity of his people and culture, today's royalties are hand in glove with the neo-colonial structures to exploit and despoil the land. Again, extending the continuity of levels of exploitation and waste that the people have to live with, deriving from his own experience, the insightful Kengide states unequivocally:

So, Government or Niger Company, two faces to one counterfeit coin as usual won the field. Not only that, they went on to raise taxes and prices on

everything money could buy… while lowering those on our crops (*The Raft* 132-133)

In the regret of Kengide above the playwright creatively leads us into that wilderness mindset that has been sustained in the postcolonies of Africa, particularly in the Niger Delta. The Niger Company is literarily the British colonial government for which all business and the governance of the colony is maintained. Although upon independence the company (British colonial government) handed over to the Nigerian government, the mindset of the Nigerian government has not really changed. For as we have witnessed the timber, palm oil, and in contemporary times crude oil are exploited as if no human lives or in fact eco-system is worth conserving in the Delta. So when Kengide states that the Niger Company and Government are the same he is only striking at a deep truth that goes beyond mere political reality to indexing deep philosophy / psychological dispositions that have continued to subdue and objectify those who should actually be citizens.

There is also a clear reflection of objectification and exploitation in *All for Oil*. As a play that is relevant for reading from the perspective of Postcolonial Ecocriticism, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo retrospectively looks to the days of colonial occupation of Africa to highlight the human and environmental damage done to the African landscape. The natives here are enormously exploited, their gods are desecrated and their land is polluted by

the domineering colonial regime. In the same manner that non-human nature is dominated and exploited, Clark-Bekederemo draws a similar parallel with the domination and exploitation of the African people. The best of the human resources of the continent were carted away in huge slave ships (amid horrifying and dehumanizing circumstances at sea that exposed them to diseases and death), their natural resources were exploited for European factories, their crafts were also carted away to European museums and exhibition centres and so on. This play reveals some of these truths. For instance, Dore says: "Everybody knows the British made away with the wealth of Benin when they took that city. And they did not spare any beautiful women they ran into in the street (483). This underscores the plight of degraded humans where the value of human life is only equal to the extent to which it can be conquered and exploited to the content of the powerful or power-wielding class. In this context, man is the domineering subject and disadvantaged fellow man is the objectified, used and abused.

From this, it can be deduced that the people in *All for Oil* are considered with prejudice as lower than the Europeans, thus informing their exploitation. There is also the case of geographical inferiorization of the African environment. For instance, upon being asked why the Governor-General is absent at the scheduled meeting, Political Secretary replies that he is "...now on home leave in the United Kingdom after a tour in these

unhealthy parts" (*All for Oil* 504). "Unhealthy parts" here refers to the Niger Delta landscape, which includes its people and their rich heritage. But in the minds of the late 19th century European the whole place is reduced to one denominator, "unhealthy parts". To a large extent this Eurocentric, colonialist perception of an African people and their environment is indicative of a supremacist and reductionist view of the African continent as inferior to the west. The continent is only seen for the human and material resources it is endowed with, and which are to be exploited without end to bolster the grandeur of British Empire. This of course is understandable in the psychology and philosophy of the Europeans in the scramble for Africa all through the 17th to the 19th centuries.

The otherness and objectification which we have noted in other plays can also be seen echoing in *The Wives' Revolt*. In this play, Clark-Bekederemo considers the issue from a feminist point of view. The playwright employs the metaphor of the woman to represent the exploited human and non-human environment. He creatively depicts a society, Erhuwaren, where the women are oppressed and relegated to the periphery; they are considered to be objects of sexual gratification for the men folk and meant to play only domestic roles within the family circle. It is this conception that convinces the men to want to cheat them out of a fair share of the compensation money, for the pollution of their environment, paid to

the community by the oil drilling company. Okoro, the town crier, makes a declaration that expresses the swindling of the women:

> The sum, after due debate in the town hall, has been shared out in three equal parts, one going to the elders of the town, the second to the men in all their age groups, and the third by no means the least, to the women, also in all their age grades. A most fair and equitable settlement you will never find in any other society; near or far (401).

From Okoro's announcement here, women are not considered to be elders, underlining the irony in his notion that they (women) have been fairly treated. These women are also victims of domestic violence, as Koko expresses that they live in a society with men who routinely "spend all day bragging about their great ancestral past and then return home too drunk to see the women they are beating"; she adds that "You don't expect the poor women would stand in one place for those drunks to give them black eyes and broken limbs" (404).

In interrogating *The Wives' Revolt* from the direction of female exploitation and suppression and in drawing interrelatedness with the exploitation of the non-human environment, the views of feminism and postcolonial ecocriticism will elaborate the discourse. Grace Okereke observes: "In both politics, the victim (the woman and the African) is

rendered voiceless (powerless), while the victimizer (the male and colonizer) is at the centre of ... [the] discourse" (69). The woman in *The Wives' Revolt* can therefore be likened to the colonized African continent that was heavily suppressed by the imperialist ideologies of European powers and that continues to carry the legacy of a deplorably exploited region. Thus, through the postcolonial lens, the women of Erhuwaren refer us back to the agony days of colonial rule while from an ecocritical perspective, we are presented with the plight of nature which is equally degraded. Inyabri's contention casts more light here. He provides insight to the deep root of the masculine / patriachal mind set from which the woman and non-human nature are seen as the same Thus he states that:

> Rooted in a mythical link between woman and land, human civilisations have continually struck a parallel between the productive capacities of land and woman.... Configured in this manner, the land becomes feminized—it is seen as a woman that must be courted, captured or protected as prove of masculinity. It is within this cosmology that we should understand western possession and exploitation of the Niger Delta [and] the hegemony of the Nigerian state over the same land... (118).

In an attempt to simply sum up the observation here, and drawing from Okereke's and Inyabri's views, Clark-Bekederemo's *The Wives' Revolt* points us to a triangle of related variables: an exploited continent on one end, the exploited woman on the second end, and an exploited non-human nature on the third space. All three have suffered a similar fate of marginalization, alienation, otherness and exploitation by more privileged entities — European colonizers, the African man. The women in *The Wives' Revolt* have had enough of being doubly colonized and silenced; they have had enough of being the objects of abuse, just as non-human resources are exploited and despoiled. Hence, they revolt against their oppressors in order to restore their scarred and defaced image.

The natural environment generously provides the playwright with rhetorical choices as illustrated here. The comparison between the woman and land as established earlier is also highlighted here. To Zifa, Ebiere (his wife) is his piece of land, with him alone wielding an exclusive right to till and cultivate it as he wishes, and is not ready to tolerate any trespassers.

CHAPTER FIVE

ASPECTS OF STYLE IN THE SELECTED PLAYS

According to Martin Esslin, "Drama is, among many other things a method of communication" (14) and it is the mode of which this communication is done that informs the critique in this section. This chapter bases its emphasis on the dramatic techniques of the playwright, as well as an appreciation of his artistic vision through the exploration of the elements of drama he has adopted. Taking a critical look at language and dialogue, characterization, plot structure, setting and metaphor we shall show how these elements of style are to account for the connection between history and the environment in Clark-Bekederemo's plays.

5.1 Plot

Plot, as an element of drama gives a detailed account of the actions in a drama. It is used to describe the arrangement of events in a work of art. Plot is quite different from a storyline as the latter 'addresses an assumed chronological sequence of events' while the former 'refers to the way the events are causally and logically related' (Leithbridge & Mildorf, 98). The interactions within the play as well as the authorial commentaries and intrusions are all parts of the plot. As an element of dramatic criticism, the style of a playwright is revealed in the manner in which the events (actions and dialogues) are outlined in the play. According to Leithbridge and

Mildorf, the Aristotelian ordering of plot satisfies that the theatrical sequence must be from the *beginning*, through the *middle* and then the *end*. It is from this that the Fretag's pyramid is built, having the exposition (the introduction), complicating action (the rising action), climax (peripety), falling action and catastrophe (denouement). This scalar aggregation is what plot carries. The opening scenes make up the exposition, which climbs to the climax and then falls to the denouement. Esslin believes that the exposition 'provides a firm framework of reference for the relationship of the characters to each other, their previous history as well as the play's principal theme' (48). This order may be chronological or lineal on the one hand, following the exact train of exposition through to the denouement; or episodic, beginning from the climax and exploring flashbacks to show the exposition and the rising action, then taking the train down to the denouement.

Clark-Bekederemo is one playwright that has displayed dexterity in adopting various plot techniques in his dramaturgy. For instance, in *The Raft*, we experience an episodic plot style where the play begins from the climax as the lumbermen, Olotu, Ogro, Ibobo and Kengide realise they are adrift. It is in this drift that other actions and dialogue are relieved. It is also from that point that the readers are given an idea of the happenings before the journey in a form of verbal flashback. We are told about several events

through the dialogues upon getting adrift. Olotu is revealed herein as Ogro quips:

OGRO: Whenever we are at the cross roads, Kengide.
Takes one road, and Olotu rushes up.
Another, but here we're at the fork still,
And not one of you can tell the forces
To get us out (98).

The same style of episodic plot is done in *All for Oil* as the tension between Chief Bekederemo and Chief Dore is expressed first, with their actions and dialogue revealing the animosity which causes the conflict between both of them. *The Wives' Revolt* also assumes with the proclamation which is done by the town crier Okoro, representing the community of Erhuwaren. The proclamation is the climax of the play where the revolt of the women is met with strict declaration that their economic and familial powers have been taken away from them. The reason for the revolt is the demand for equal settlement from the money sent by the oil company. It is from this declaration that the protest of the women which is manifest in their self-exile builds. In their defiance, the enemy town of Eyare is their choice for exile where they are inflicted with a disease.

However, Clark-Bekederemo adopts the lineal plot style for *The Boat* and *The Return Home* as the opening scenes are expositions and build-up to the murder and familial conflicts. In *The Boat,* the plot opens with the

announcement of Biowa's return from his voyage to Lagos. In his grand reception, the rivalry between him and his elder brother, Bradide is revealed. This rivalry is fuelled by Umuto, their mother who compares their achievements. The play climaxes with the Murder of Bradide by Biowa as a result of the hate built form the long sustained animosity established by the mother. Upon witnessing the murder, the falling action in the trial of Biowa for murder lands us in the denouement, which is the execution of Biowa as penance for the crime of murder. Fregene and Egberibo who are sons of the deceased brothers only get to understand the gravity of the curse that has come upon them from their fathers' conflict when they almost re-enact the same feud that led to death earlier. The climax lie in the feud and the subsequent pacification of the gods resolve the play. A critical observation of the playwright's plot strategy in the *Bikoroa Plays* shows that Clark-Bekederemo has artistically adopted the chronological sequence in order to reconstruct the memory of his Ijaw nation, and by extension the Niger Delta people in the circumstance of western encroachment. Through this plot strategy we do not only come close to the cultural practices and world view of the Ijaw, we are given a glimpse into the steady possession of the whole of the Niger Delta and the truncation of gradual and indigenous sense of society development by western intrusion.

Clark further experiments with unusual sceneric divisions of plot, where the normal acts/scenes are refurbished and new divisions are done.

As a form of style, four divisions are adopted for *The Raft* split into One: Tide-wash, Two: Wind-lash, Three: Iron and Fire and Four: Call for Land. The symbolism behind the naming of these divisions follows from the events within the divisions as One: Tide-wash reveals the conditions of the raft after the lumbermen realise they are adrift. The raft is believed to have been washed by the tides which is a natural phenomenon which is uncontrollable by the lumbermen. Two: Wind-lash reveals the events of the whirlwind which comes and splits the raft into two, with Olotu being on one part and the trio of Ogro, Ibobo and Kengide being on the other. Three: Iron and Fire reveals the mood of the three remaining occupants of the one part of the raft as the tension between them is heightened. Kengide, not being able to keep calm goes into revealing several secrets, one of which is the reason why he had joined the lumbermen which amounts to greed. Ibobo reveals to us how the government and their agencies are complicit in preventing the acts of timber logging since they also benefit from it. Kengide sustains this thought by relaying that 'the police who should apply the rope are themselves feeding fat, their belts and barracks no longer can hedge in the smallest weed' (123). Every part of the society is criticized in this division as Kengide takes on the most pious and their homosexual tendencies in their religious ranks when he quips:

KENGIDE: Now the boy from the bush full of taboos
Is talking! How do you think they keep sane

In their great barracks and boarding schools?

Why ADO's and holy fathers do it on their boys (129).

Politicians and public officers are not left out as Kengide adds that they 'have promised Jericho itself, [but] by their own divisions caused a breach in the wall we workers has at their incitement staked all to build' (132).

In *The Wives' Revolt*, there are six divisions being a description for the main events and actions therein. I: "Proclamation" as the name implies gives a clue of the decree promulgated by Erhuwaren through Okoro, the town crier, declaring the penalty against the woman for their defiance. II: "Dissent" describes the women's public disagreement with the proclamation made in the first division. In III: "Walk-out", we witness the women take a self exile to Eyara as a show of dissent. IV: "Lullaby" reveals the condition of the men in the absence of their wives. We see Okoro singing a lullaby to lure his last child to sleep. This earns IV its title as it is the last action in the division. V: "Return" describes the return and restoration of the women to their husbands as they come home with the infection they get from Eyara. The women having been accused of infidelity are vindicated following the realisation that they had contracted the infection while using the same toilet. VI: "Reclamation" presents the withdrawal of the proclamation by reintegrating the exiled women and reaffirming their place in the society.

The same pattern follows in *All for Oil* as the nine divisions are named after the acts or actions of the characters within the plot. I: "Regatta and After" describes the aftermath and confrontation between Chiefs Bekederemo and Dore where the former is accused of stealing the show with his performance and the boat race competition in honour of the Governor-general. It is from this that we are introduced to the existing feud between the two chiefs which transcends into the climax. II: "School Report" takes us into Chief Bekederemo's home as we are told that his grandson, Clark has been made to learn the ways of the British who at that period have brought into the village their education and religion. Chief Bekederemo proposes this against his son, Fuludu's judgment. III: "Court Summons" takes us to Chief Dore and his allies (Bucknor, court clerk, and messenger). Dore has to entertain the complaint of destruction of public property levelled against Chief Bekederemo's by the former's in-law Babigha. From this is hatched the plan of a protest staged by a larger crowd against Chief Bekederemo. VI: "Envoys" sees the coming of Johnson, son of Nana of Itsekiri to crave an allegiance with Bekederemo in order plead an audience with the Governor-general. Before the plan is activated, Chief Dore's scheme to arrest Bekederemo is acted out in V: "Chains", where a retinue of white men and soldiers come with chains to execute the arrest. Bekederemo charms them with his goodwill as they are thrown into a frenzy of celebration and partying. In VI: Briefing, Colonel Moorhouse,

acting under the authority of the Governor-general who has embarked on his yearly leave, is briefed about the state of affairs in the Niger Delta. This ushers us into VII: "Audience", where Bekederemo comes face-to-face with Colonel Moorhouse, bringing before him the allegations against Dore. He is assured that justice will be served but is disappointed when in VIII: "Rite of Broom", he is informed about the lacklustre attitude of the British authority in to appropriate the right punishment on Chief Dore. IX: "Sickbed" which is the last division shows Chief Bekederemo lying in a state of ill-health awaiting his death until Feteroro comes to give him a reassurance of life.

Clark-Bekederemo returns to the Acts and Scene division in *The Boat* and *The Return Home*. But this return to norm is not in the rigid terms as his scenes are given names suggestive of the goings-on in the plays. *The Boat* contains three acts with three scenes respectively. Act one contains scenes One, Two and three named Arrival, Reception and Hangover in that order. Just as he names suggest, this act is concerned with the arrival of Biowa, with a reception thrown in his honour in his resident and the hangover from the celebration. In Hangover, there is a further revelation of the feud between the brothers. Act two containing scenes named Game, Launching and Departure respectively describe events leading to the climax. In Scene I: Game, Sanfio and Biowa are engaged in a game of draught and when Biowa goes away, we are informed of the rift between the brothers and their mother's role in instigating this feud is emphasized. II: Launching describes

the repairs and launching of the boat by Bradide who claims it is his turn to use it. Act Three, with scenes named Summons, Trial and Aftermath describes the falling action and subsequent resolution of the play. Here, Biowa is tried for the murder of Bradide and then executed afterwards. In Summons, the news of the murder has travelled to the nooks and crannies of the community of Bikoroa and the neighbouring ones.

The Return Home follows from the same pattern of acts/scenes where the scenes are titled according to the events therein. The naming of the scenes one, two and three as shapes, stakes and reprise are symbolic as Shapes picture the figurines which Fregene makes. Stakes, scene two symbolically reveals the wager Egberibo and Omonibo enter into which has transcended the game they are playing into a third party involvement Egberibo knows nothing about – Fregene's debt to Omonibo. Scene 3: Reprise reveals the systematic re-launch of the conflict that has been between Biowa and Bradide, the fathers of Egberibo and Fregene respectively. Clark-Bekederemo artistically uses abstract items within the plot to name each of them as Shapes (of figurines), Stakes (of the game) and Reprise (of the dead ancestors) reveal. Act Two having four scenes namely; 1: "Ablution", 2: "Ladder", 3: "Heirlooms", 4: "Repose" is grafted like Act One. Ablution launches the purification and purgation of the brothers in the traditional acts of appeasement; Ladder launches an investigation into the causes of the feud in the family, dating back from the

early generation of Biowa and Bradide. The ladder which is symbolic as the link between a lower platform and a higher one is used here as the interface between the physical world and the spiritual world. Clark-Bekederemo uses Omonibo to deliver this reference as the diviner Omonibo retorts;

> OMONIBO:Obebe, Obebe, Obebe! You are the ladder of life, the bridge between earth and sky upon which whatever goes up and whatever goes down must walk this suspended stretch of breath called life (354).

Scene 3: Heirlooms refer to the possessions of the brothers and how they are retrieved to perform the traditional rites for Fregene and Egberibo. Maika and Emonemua are the elders who help in performing this rite. Scene 4: Repose, as the name implies, sees the laying to rest of the effigy that are used to symbolize the brothers. The final ritual of burial is performed with the heirs performing their bids in pouring of liberations and making incantations. Breaking from the norm of enacting his plots in acts/scenes in three plays analysed herein and the return to the regular pattern goes to the reaffirm the fluidity of literature. We see this deviation as style a re-enactment of the dramatic licence available to playwrights.

From this division comes the classification of plot by the attributes of each genre of literature by canonical classification. Borrowing from Christopher Booker's (2004) classification of plot into seven namely: comedy, tragedy, rebirth, overcoming the monster, rags-to-riches, the quest

and Voyage and return, we can classify Clark's plays into tragedy (*The Raft* and *The Boat)*, rebirth (*The Return Home)* and overcoming the monster (*The Wives' Revolt* and *All for Oil).* Much of Booker's criticism of tragedy follows from Aristotle's appreciation in *Rhetorics.* Aristotelian tragedy stands as the underscore of dramatic conventions as it reveals certain parameters drama must meet for it to be referred to as tragedy. From the spectacle of the Chorus, to the nobility of the tragic hero, Aristotelian dramatic precepts attain standardized style of writing and critiquing drama. As a dramatist, Clark's first three tragedies have been branded as being imitative of the Classical (Greek) drama which Albert Ashaolu believes contains borrowings from both Classical and Elizabethan drama (178). Rehashing the critical position of Nkem Nwankwo and Hilary Spurling, Ashaolu reaffirms the imitative and transpositional property of Clark's tragedies. However, Jeyifo Biodun claims that African drama (tragedy) buys from the Western criticism of drama (tragedy) where three positions are accentuated to provide an appreciation of the contemporary African drama. To Jeyifo, Aristotle's notion of a tragic story not being a 'banal history', Hegel's dialectic consciousness of tragedy being a reflection of the dialectic activities of immanent consciousness and Marx-Engels' position of tragedy being a reflection of society with protagonists and antagonists representing 'concrete goals and aspiration of social groups, forces or classes' all sum up to the social significance and reflection of tragedy in the

African context, removed from the Western stereotypical canons (26). With this, we may choose to critique Clark's expose of tragedy not from the consciousness of nobility, hamartia or the social magnificence of the hero but from the social and cultural significance of the tragic characters. For example, the tragic fate that befalls the four lumbermen in *The Raft* is suggestive of the calamitous and miserable end that befalls the human race as a whole as despair and anguish push man to an early grave. 'Clark dramatizes the helplessness of Man, drifting to a ship of destiny, floundering under unknown and inexplicable forces' (Ashaolu 189). The tragedy here does not follow from the much-criticized imitative style of Clark's early plays by the likes of Dan Izebaye and Nkem Okonkwo who according to Ashaolu have spelt Clark's early drama to be 'derogatively imitative' (178). The tragedy in *The Raft* rests on man's inability to control the forces of life and man's unwillingness to unite against seemingly uncontrollable forces. Unlike the Aristotelian dictates that proposes that the tragic hero must be of noble ancestry where he is born into a royal bloodline and having all the traces of kingly or courtly etiquette; Kengide, Ibobo, Olotu and Ogro are lacking in all of these. Kengide who is likely the most knowledgeable of the four (suggestive because the playwright uses him to make most of the social commentaries) is middleclass while the others are of the lowest social cadre. Other characteristics of tragedy that are not found in *The Raft* are peripeteia and hamartia. Unlike the typical

tragic hero who sees a reversal in his life (peripeteia) and contends with a tragic flaw that in many cases is occasion by a pride (hamartia), the lumbermen do not experience these. Since they are not of the exalted social caste, they do not experience a reversal in their life outcomes. Equally, nemesis and anagnorisis are not experimented with as there are no characteristics of boomerang nor are there realisations of doom reverted from their former lives.

One attribute of tragedy which one could ascribe Clark-Bekederemo's drama is catharsis – that deep empathy that connects the reader to the actions and characters within the play. Clark has artistically soaked *The Raft* and *The Boat* with this trope that the experiences of the characters are overwhelming on the readers. Esslin, in his description of this trope reveals the experience catharsis could conjure in the minds of the reader as follows:

> The experience of sharing another human beings fate with deep compassion, of having gained a profound, lasting insight into human nature and man's predicament in this world produces an emotion akin to a religious feeling; and this feeling of having been touched by something beyond and outside our mundane everyday experience, having gained insight into the working of destiny, produces the sublime, cathartic effect of tragedy (74).

This feeling is ripe in *The Boat*, especially on two episodes. First in Act Two, Scene Three: "Departure" where there is the confrontation between Biowa and Bradide and then in the murder at the end of day. The empathy occasioned by this leads to the intense pity felt for Bradide and the equal helplessness felt for Biowa. We are not given the gruesome details of the murder of Bradide, but the declaration by the Neighbours when they call for calm restraint on Biowa drives the empathy. The second episode is the declaration by the executioners that they have carried out the convicted execution of Biowa. Maika's response to the query about the execution conveys the requisite feelings thus:

> MAIKA: We took him out of here in our boat down the stream to the wide Forcados River where black and white waters meet. There, in the circuitous current of the confluence, we lowered him, tied full-length to those slender boles of the trees he loved to be called by (327).

In *The Raft*, the cathartic feeling is felt too in several dimensions. Firstly upon the splitting of the raft, the empathy is heightened as Olotu floats off in the broken part of the raft while the other three lumbermen remain in the other part. The pitiful and helpless state of Olotu evokes a deeply hypochondriacal effect on the readers as they experience grief and despair. Just like Esslin has characterised of tragic catharsis, the emotions is akin to

a 'religious feeling' rightly exemplified in Ogro's song after the tragic split of the raft as he sing:

Ogro: (goes on singing)

Death has nothing to do
With God is what has struck;
Death has nothing to do
With God is what has struck;
It's Ozidi, the all-strong,
Who's come to strike down man (116).

The song further compounds the cathartic feeling as the helplessness of man against the supernatural is justified in the land above. The readers feel the ruthlessness described in the mythical nature of life.

In *The Boat,* the tragedy is underlined in the melancholic passage of both brothers – Bradidie and Biowa. This is also a deviation from the tragedy style of Classical tragedy where the tragic heroes are of noble birth. Both brothers in the case of Clark are fishermen, farmers and occasional business men. They are neither wealthy nor do they belong to the elite class in the society. One cannot judge Biowa's wealth from the feast thrown in his honour on his return because after the feast, he struggles to return to his voyage to make a little money for upkeep. His wealth is only comparative to that of his brother as the economic viability of the other members of the community is not mentioned, neither is he declared to be the wealthiest in

OLOTU: He can croak

For all I care, and as for Kengide

He just sits there like some foul-smelling

He-goat at the fireside mauling away

At the world between his teeth, while you Ibobo

Babble about who's a canary and who's not (102).

Even Clark's illustrations are done taking into consideration the non-living surrounding and how they relate with the animal in its habitat. The illustration below by Kengide satisfies this position.

KENGIDE: You should see crabs out of their holes

In the peat and swamp, making splendid

Salutations with hairy forearms under those

Same lamps. And the scorpions never stop

Stalking below the windows aglow with light (126).

Ecocentric language use does not just exist in *The Raft* which is the only text of the understudied texts written in pure verse form. Ecocentricism transcends into other texts. A worthy example is in *All for Oil,* where Chief Bekederemo's conversation with Nemugha in VIII: Rite of Broom where the theme is centred on the efforts of the British government to displace the people of their resources. The reference to environment and animal renders a cultural cum artistic relevance to the discourse.

NEMUGHA: The chaperons will see only the sowing of the seed in the soil. What manner of plants will spring, only time will tell. There is a strong budding that luckily i shall not be around to hear.

BEKEDEREMO: You were forever the wall gecko (513).

Chief Bekederemo refers to Nemugha as the wall gecko because the latter is never venturing out, but remains within to witness the goings-on in the community.

In Clark's use of rhetorical questions, also reside his ecological illustrations as the exchange between Bekerederemo and Fetaroro reveals. Not only is the fullness of rhetorics appreciated, as is evident in the parallelism, there is also the identification and labelling of environment in his ablution. This is rendered thus:

BEKEDEREMO: Who can grab his shadow?

FETARORO: And who can catch his echo? Song the song goes.... (526).

The metaphoric comparison of man with his environment continues in *All for Oil* as the ecology with man's existentialist concerns. Clark uses Bekederemo and Fetaroro to cast this analogy this thus:

BEKEDEREMO: Fetaroro, you know life is only a bubble made by a paddle in the river. We see ourselves large in it but it bursts in our face before we know it.

> FETARORO: And we also know the deepest track we make here on earth, and call our career, is no more than the wake a boat makes. It tears up the river with pride but the river soon swallows it up (526).

It is worthy to note that even the ecological linguistic embellishments have some ethnocentricity about it as Clark uses ecological tropes akin to the Ijaw setting. Life is compared to a river since the readily available imagery is drawn from the Niger Delta of which the Ijaw community is a part of. The mode of transportation in a riverine community would be through boats, canoes and rafts. Therefore, Fetaroro's imagery of boat tearing up the river is very relevant to the physical realities of the Ijaw setting.

Using these four descriptive language parameters, the exploration of Clark's language can be said to be Afrocentric as these parameters of sociological, ethnocentric, ecological and hybrid ties him the culture of his people. Nonetheless, there are several concerns the exposition of language has raised in this submission. On the first instance is the question; is language use reflective of the mood or the type of drama? On this note, the analysis has affirmed this question where it has been observed that tragedy as a genre has elevated language and the classical generic style of versification as have been explored in *The Raft*. As is characteristic of tragedy, the sublime diction helps to heighten the mood as characters

express these feelings in highfalutin verse form to arouse empathy and remove it from everyday style of live discourse.

On the second note is the question; is there canonical language bearing on the playwright? Clark's use of proverbs, riddles, metaphor and anecdotes which are linked to his Ijaw background has created a style which can be ascribed to him. His characters' dialogues reveal the ethnic background of his art. The consistency in this style in the plays analysed herein has given it a worthy place as a canon or literary tradition.

Finally; is the playwright speech patterning (through the characters' dialogue) impressionistic or expressionistic? The speech patterning of J. P. Clark according to the dialogue of the characters is both impressionistic and expressionistic. As an expressionistic form, the essence of communicating feelings, emotions and ideas is the focus herein. The playwright goes as far as infusing local linguistic resources to achieve this; such as proverbs, riddles and ethnographic imagery. On the impressionistic front, the dialogue is also used ot reveal certain attributes of characters as it helps to form their personality. Through speech, we are told of a character's attitude and disposition especially on the ideological level. Also from language impressionism, the artistic intention of the author is revealed.

5.5 Symbolism and metaphor

Stemming from the concerns and approach of naturalism, Martin Esslin projects the attributes of symbolism to constitute metaphors, socially inspired imagery and the idea of expressionism (63). Suggestively from this position, symbolism can be described as the use of symbols to represent social concepts, position, ideology and implications. The weight and import of symbols lie in the social significance which is peculiar while considering the multi-facetedness of society and the distinctiveness between one and another. As a repository of the society's consciousness, the playwright artistically employs symbols in his works in order to align his artistic background as well as his subject matter. Clark's use of symbolism and extended metaphors is celebrated especially in *The Raft* which critics like Edde Iji, Eldred Jones and Albert Ashaolu have seen as a parable of the failing Nigerian state just after its independence. It is Ashaolu who writes that, 'Clark's raft may, therefore, be justifiably interpreted as symbolising any independent African nation's adrift, with hydra-headed problems to solve' (191). To tag Nigeria as that independent African state referred to by Ashaolu, will not be out of place as the play published in 1964 is prophetic of what befalls the nation two years later when the Eastern region attempted to secede. With the raft being a symbol of Nigeria, the four lumbermen can be attributed to symbolise the four regions of Nigeria since she had just four regions as at 1964 when the mid-western region was carved out of the

western region. If this thought is sustained, it will be interjected that Lagos (though an independent state) is merged with the western region to represent the Yoruba tribe and the other three being Igbo, Hausa and mid-west.

The assertion that the raft directly represents Nigeria is punctured following the discovery that unlike the Nigerian state where the secession was built on the grievances between the coup and countercoup of January and July 1966 and the results of the pogroms following the eventual exodus of the warring tribes the raft in the play is broken by uncontrollable natural causes. Olotu does not purposely break off from the others unlike the breakaway Biafran state. Ashaolu writes that, 'given a political interpretation, the raft symbolises more than anything else the weakening and disintegration of the ship of the state which has been subjected to uncontrolled and uncontrollable strains for too long' (192). Considering the above, one may propose that even if there was not the forceful attempt at a break off, there may have been peaceful disintegration since the strains were weakening – strains of corruption, ethnic intolerance, religious fanaticism, nepotism and cultural hegemony. There abound examples of nation-states which have taken the lines of peaceful disintegration such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro.

The tide and whirlwind that succeed in breaking up the raft are symbolic too. The tide which is at first calm and eventually becomes

turbulent can be suggested to represent corruption, nepotism, religious intolerance and other socio-ideological issues which at first appear harmless but on the long run could tear a nation apart. The tide is not what eventually breaks the raft, but the whirlwind which could be used in the case of Nigeria to symbolise the coups of 1966. The moorings that hold the raft in place and serves as paddle is symbolic as it can be looks at the support, assurance and security that sustain the raft. Upon being lost, the raft, the raft goes adrift and those abode are thrown into a web of uncertainty.

Even the inanimate is included in Clark's artistic display of symbolism. In *The Return Home*, the effigies are used as a direct representation of the brothers, Biowa and Bradide, whose corpses are not buried in *The Boat.* Owing to the atrocity of the murder of Bradide and the eventual execution of Biowa, a familial curse is transferred to the next filial generation of the cousins Fregene and Egberibo. The irony of the symbolism lies on two level. In the first instance, the inanimate wood is buried in place of the human such that the inanimate is animated. On the second instance, Fregene, Biowa's son is the expert wood carver who carves the effigies used for the burial of his father and uncle. While his father has given him life through birth, he gives his father life in reincarnation (in the world beyond). Just like the paradox reads, 'the son is the father of the man', the son becomes the giver of life and the one who helps both parents transcend this world into the world beyond. The

heirloom (of a robe and a straw hat) of Bradide and Biowa inherited by Egberibo and Fregene represent the transformation that is inspired by the rite-of-passage performed for them. They are transformed to the images of both parents before the effigies are buried.

Also in the plays *The Boat* and *The Return Home*, there is a recurrent game played by characters. There is significance in this as some similarities point to an artistic relevance attached to it. The first similarity lies in the fact that the game is the same game of draught and the characters that play the game are Biowa in *The Boat* and his son Egberibo in *The Return Home* alongside other minor characters. The second similarity lies in the fact that the situation surrounding the game leads to the exposure of the clash and conflicts in the plays. The contention between Bradide and Biowa is revealed after the game in the first play, while that between Fregene and Egberibo is revealed in the second play immediately after the game. Therefore, the same games, the same circumstances, same kind of players surrounded by the same circumstances are not all coincidental. The ladder is another tool given an extended meaning as J. P. Clark-Bekederemo uses it to symbolize man's perception of divinity – a very strong message considering the religio-cultural dimension of the African environment. Omonibo serving as a diviner uses this ladder as his device to connect to the divine. Ironically, the ladder is manned by Tonwe, Apele, Diri and a fourth man who are those that control the movement of the ladder in affirmation or

denial of the questions posed by Omonibo. The criticism this act sparks is that man is the centre of any religious activity, and that he controls the thoughts of others who are fanatic or firm believers. The precursor of this religious rite which is the murder of Bradide is caused by premeditated hatred and anger and not a supernatural act. Therefore, it is outright outlandish to attribute the death to any spiritual factor. Hence, the total appeasement exercise in *The Return Home* can be deduced to be a psychological activity rather than a religious or spiritual activity.

There is also symbolism in the playwrights attempt to relate man with animal. Using ecological materialism, Clark attempts to spark an interaction between man and the elements in his immediate environment. In *The Wives' Revolt*, the most derogatory of social reference and association is tied to the goat. The goat becomes symbol of stupidity, evil necromancy and witchcraft. In proclamation, Okoro declares:

> OKORO: ...Our good women ... have taken to harassing the community by all sorts of unpatriotic practices, some even assuming, by power of witchcraft, the insidious forms and shapes of goats to terrorize honest, clean-living citizens of our peace-loving town (402).

To stem the assumed evil, there is the declaration that no woman shall own a goat. While the goat is a harmless creature, unrelated to the conflict of the play which is a struggle for economic rights and privileges. The African

cosmology regards it as a tool for pleasing the deities. Owing to this, there is a spiritual relevance accrued the goat regardless of its harmless nature.

The greater symbolism in Clark's play reside in the appreciation of his artistry as a playwright that better represents his socio-cultural realities and fully expresses his social commitment to be the voice of his people and a repository of his culture.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary

This research has examined the creative reflection of history and the environment in the plays of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, with the aim of exploring the playwright's concern for his people's antecedents and their environment. The study has been divided into five chapters which unite in giving a clear insight on the issue of focus.

In the first chapter of this thesis, we undertook a general survey of the concern of the research by providing as a matter of background, the major issues to be explored in the study. Here, the objectives and limitations of the study were outlined. A general background on African and Nigerian drama was also presented, with focus on the playwright's inclusion in the first generation of Nigerian dramatists, and of course, his robust contributions to the development of Nigerian drama. A brief background of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo was also presented in the first chapter, which provides more detailed insight on how his background constitutes on of the major influences on his creative oeuvre. The study also provided a synopsis of the six selected plays for analysis.

The study thencarried out a review of scholarship on the drama of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo and scholarship on the history and the environment in

the Nigerian drama. In the first section, we observed that there have been, on the one hand, the critics that are celebratory of Clark's literary output, while, on the other hand, there have been those who have seen Clark's style as derogatory and imitative of classical Greek drama. On the appreciative side of the divide are those like Albert Ashaolu, Edde Iji, Uwandu Daniel, Emmanuel Ugorji, Olaniyan Modupe, who celebrate Clark's artistry and eulogize his effort in enhancing the place of Nigerian drama. On the other hand, we have critics like Adrian Roscoe, Dan Izebaye, and Hilary Spurling who see Clark's drama as a poorly constructed imitation of Greek drama, lacking artistry.

In Chapter three of the study we have focused on establishing the method that we have adopted in selecting and interrogating our texts as well as engaging the major planks of our study, which include history and the environment. To this extent the qualitative method has helped us to also identify and deploy the major theories namely, New historicism and Postcolonial Ecocriticism, that have facilitated the analyses of the primary texts in context.

Using the theories above, topical issues of history and environment were examined in chapter four, focusing on two sub sections – "Historical Representations in the Selected Plays" and "Environmental Representations in the Selected Plays", respectively. The first part of this chapter analysed

the selected texts to show the extent to which the playwright represents the history of the Niger Delta region and the Nigerian Nation at large. Without abandoning this historical impulse as reconstructed by the playwright's memory, the second section of this chapter focused on the environmental implication of Clark-Bekederemo's plays. For us it is here, perhaps, that our study makes its deepest impact, as we have exploited the principles of ecology to re-read the corpus of Clark-Bekederemo's plays in order to uncouple eco-conscious issues that have not been engaged by precursor scholars. To this extent we have unearthed Clark-Bekederemo's ecocentric recreation of his Niger Delta bio-region under the topicality of "place consciousness" and also his skepticism with regard to the manner in which Western colonialism and neo-colonial Nigerian state have regarded and dealt with the Niger Delta region under the thematic of "Wilderness and Objectification".

It is in this chapter that we critically engaged the selected texts in the playwright's dramaturgy namely: *All for Oil, Song of a Goat, The Boat, The Return, Full Circle* and *The Wives' Revolt.*

Since the major issues of this study could also be engaged from other scholarly perspectives, we have used chapter five to interrogate the literary style of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's plays under study. This is in a bid to establish its literariness and to show to what extent the identified stylistic

devices have been exploited by the playwright to reconstruct memory and represent the environment in his plays under study. From the analysis in chapter five we have justified how the playwright creatively manipulates and employs the resources of language to create for himself a dramaturgical style peculiar to him, while also most effectively passing his message to the audience and creating the desired impressions on them. Again we have established the distinct manner in which Clark-Bekederemo employs linguistic and literary mechanisms such as symbolism, metaphors, imagery, plot structure, characterization, dialogue and setting to vividly explore the temperaments of the grossly exploited human and non-human environment.

6.2 Conclusion

This research has attempted to demonstrate that memory steep in historical antecedents and environmental issues form the major concerns of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's dramaturgy. For us, it is from these concerns that we can also locate his artistic commitment as writer. That commitment is an eco-centric vision which has been consistent in showing the world that an appreciation of the worldview, aspirations and pain of the Niger Delta people must be derived from a wholistic account of the human and non-human condition of the region in historical context. In engaging this artistic commitment, as consistently and creatively recreated in his plays we have attempted to connect Clark-Bekederemo's dramaturgy to an intellectual

strain that has radicalized our sense of history and the environment which hitherto has been dominantly perceived from anthropomorphic/ egoconscious lens. Hence, our reading and interrogation of Clark-Bekederemo's plays has equally radicalized the age old humanist tradition that has conditioned and compromised a deep appreciation of Clark-Bekederemo's canon. It is in this regard that we offer an ecological perspective as an alternative reading system to Clark-Bekederemo's plays.

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