

# Poetics as Vocabulary of Resistance: A Linguistic Analysis of Ebinyo Ogbowei's Poetry

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**Abstract** In the past decade, the third generation Niger Delta poet, Ebinyo Ogbowei has jettisoned the poetics of passivity associated with J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, Gabriel Imomotimi Okara and side tracked Tanure Ojaide's eco-critical poetry subscription, to embrace a fierce and militant poetics of nationalism in his poetry. Arguably, Ogbowei deploys resistance trope in his poetry, to address the social contradictions besetting the Niger Delta communities. This paper problematizes the dilemma of Niger Delta nationalities, although subdued, but are determined in their struggle to have a fulfilled life in an ecologically degraded environment. The paper is focused on the analysis of poetics of resistance in Ebinyo Ogbowei's six poetry collections: *the heedless ballot box* (2006), *the town crier's song* (2009), *the song of a dying river* (2009), *marsh boy and other poems* (2013), *let the honey run* (2013) and *matilda* (2018). Voicing the worsening plight of the Niger Delta, Ogbowei's poetry not only engages the region's enduring poverty, ecological degradation and despair but also explores a generational resistance against its persistent subjugation. In this paper, attention is paid specifically to the linguistic analysis of representative poems from the six collections purposively selected for the delineation of poetics of anger, belligerence and resistance in Ogbowei's poetry. In fulfilling its aim, the analysis is achieved with recourse to the dictates of Critical Discourse Analysis which postulates that language in use is not neutral, but is rather used in the performance of power, ideology, identity and hegemony.

**Key words** poetics as vocabulary of resistance; Niger Delta; ecological degradation; Critical Discourse Analysis; Ebinyo Ogbowei's poetry.

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### Introduction

If the Niger Delta's enduring crisis has in recent years benefited from the poetry of anger and disillusionment deriving from a generational reaction to the obvious economic strangulation, its political marginalization, social emasculation and ecological despoliation of the various communities in the region have been stridently contextualized in the poetry of Ebinyo Ogbowei. The Niger Delta's ecological degradation ostensibly results from the poorly regulated activities of the multinational oil firms, who have been operating with reckless abandon in the past decades. Since 1960, the farm lands, fishing ponds and flowing rivers have borne the inscription of environmental pollution orchestrated by Shell and other oil multinational in the region. The effect of degradation on the Niger Delta's communities has been threatening in scope, frightening in assessment and destructive in its action. In view of the continual despoliation of the Niger Delta's flora and fauna, the region remains a significant subject matter in contemporary Nigerian literature.

Curiously, if the dialectic determination to amplify the narrative of misery besetting the Niger Delta is of utmost concern to the writers from the region, then how does one come to terms with the revelation that the first generation of the Niger Delta poets like John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo and Gabriel Imomotimi Okara reacted passively to the degradation of the region in their poetry? Perhaps their hesitant reaction is borne out of a measure of their respective attitudes toward

the euphoria of celebrating a promising, newly independent Nigeria nationhood bristling with a boisterous optimism in the 1960s to the detriment of launching a vitriolic campaign for the restoration of Delta's ecosystem. The poetry of the duo professed a disparate leaning as they are effusive in their praise and celebration of the rustic charms of a Niger Delta's milieu as exemplified in *A Reed in the Tide* (1965) and *The Fisherman's Invocation* (1978). Of course, at this stage, the degradation of the region as we have it now had not become a national embarrassment. Nevertheless, given the fact that postcolonial Nigeria has convincingly been a very disparate nation with enormous regional differences, Clark-Bekederemo and Okara must have deliberately shied away from capturing in their poetry, the humiliating and festering poverty that the Niger Delta has been contending with since Nigeria attained independence.

Yet within the limits of his concern, Tanure Ojaide, a prodigious second generation Niger Delta poet, betrays a reactionary sensibility in his poetry: *Labyrinths of the Delta* (1986), *the endless song* (1989) and *The Tales of the Harmattan* (2007) to draw awareness to the ecological degradation of the Delta region. However, in the last ten years, the passivity of the first generation Niger Delta poets and reactionary poetics of the second generation poets have been replaced by a new poetic consciousness which emanated from a combative reaction to the relentless, successive military subjugation and economic emasculation of the region. Suffice it to say that years of neglect, reckless appropriation of the wealth of the Niger Delta by the Nigerian government in correspondence with the insensitivity of the oil multinationals have fuelled a wave of radical ecological poetics from the third generation Niger Delta poets like Ibiwari Ikiriko, Joe Ushie and Ogaga Ifowodo. Drawing on the seemingly, eco-critical reactionary poetry of Ojaide, the third generation Niger Delta's poetry is entrenched in anger and defiance to address the gamut of grievances of the Niger Delta communities: theft of the region's wealth by the Nigerian government, the destruction of the ecosystem by the operating oil multinationals, pauperization of the population due to the polluted water and farm lands and deficit in social amenities in the region. Reflecting on the embarrassing Delta's degradation, Niyi Akingbe argues that "in the context of the degradation of the Niger Delta, the language of neglect continues to revolve around the images of oil exploitation and, by extension, economic dispossession" (Akingbe 17).

Ogbowei is a third generation Nigerian poet and one of the most prodigious poets from the Niger Delta region. His six poetry collections: *the heedless ballot box* (2006), *the town crier's song* (2009), *song of a dying river* (2009), *let the honey run* (2013), *marsh boy & other poems* (2013) and *matilda* (2008) are crowded with the

tremolo of poetics which oscillate between pugilism and belligerence. Discernible in Ogbowei's poetry is a reflection of the contradictions and struggles within the Niger Delta communities. A terrific inscription of despoliation exegesis in the poetics of Ogbowei frames the anguish of untold hardship in the Delta communities—an anguish which reinforces the theme of neglect which necessitated a counter-reaction that developed into violence. Death and violence coalesce admirably to heighten the tension in Ogbowei's poetry as a way of arousing our understanding of the current socio-political rhythms in the Niger Delta. Correspondingly, the Niger Delta's sustained dilemma has been relentlessly referenced in the eco-critical poetics of Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* (2000), Ogaga Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp* (2005), Ebi Yeibo's *The Forbidden Tongue* (2007) and Joe Ushie's *A Reign of Locusts* (2004).

As with any group threatened with annihilation, the Niger Delta communities have constantly resisted exploitation/ domination during colonialism and in the post-colonial Nigeria. Isaac Adaka Boro's referenced "The Twelve-Day Revolution" in 1966 provides a striking example. However, during the 1990s, due to the militarization of the zone, the crisis escalated and received international media coverage. Over the years, government's neglect of the Delta communities in terms of non-provision of basic amenities, the destruction of farmlands and fishing waters have significantly fuelled agitations that have developed into an enduring resistance—youth militancy. This typifies a historical intervention that has redefined agitation in the region, which the government and oil multi nationals have not succeeded in curbing. Suffice to state that, in the domain of the arts, literature apparently undertakes the task of documenting prevalent social realities within the environment in which it is produced. The paper is focused on articulating a linguistic analysis of the intersection of poverty, deprivation and ecological degradation that have given rise to forms of militant resistance as depicted in Ogbowei's six poetry collections.

### **Rallying Voices and Resolute Revolts**

As the world continues to witness accretions of repression, injustice and blatant subjugation of the oppressed minorities, technological advancements and the appropriation of social media have provided viable pathways to the creation and sustenance of protestations for social change. Through hash tags and online trends like #ArabSpring, #BringBackOurGirls, #BlackLivesMatter, attention is drawn to prevailing social situations while physical moves are made to correct identified wrongs. However, while online or social media-based protestations are regular

occurrences and have been adjudged as influential, the levels and forms of political protest have only continued to expand (Norris 20). Social scientists and sociologists have been concerned with the social demographics of protests, the attitudes and motivations for protests and how protestations are mobilized. However, for most literary writers, resistance and protest are hinged on the weight of conscience where the pen is mightier than the sword. Consequently incidents of cultural imperialism, political subjugation, economic and social oppression are regular themes explored in literary writings.

The role of the literary writer extends beyond reducing thoughts to writing. Writers are the conscience of the society as they draw attention to existing social ills. This preoccupation is targeted toward eventually occasioning social change. Within the African continent, politically-conscious writers have undertaken this onerous task, oftentimes to their personal detriment. Some popular names that come to mind are Wole Soyinka, Jack Mapanje, Kole Omotoso, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Chinua Achebe. With specific attention to the genre of poetry, Okara argues that the "poet must exist to exercise the powers of the Word to realise his visions and an existing society on which he focuses his visions" (78). Achebe (1985) also asserts that literary writing's are often concerned with the contemporary issues. However while physical resistance and protests may involve violence and the breakdown of law and order, resistance and protest through literature functions as an arbiter of justice through non-violent means. Tanure Ojaide (42) also declares that:

Literature has to draw attention to [the] increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots. Literature has become a weapon against the denial of basic human rights... It is understandable why the African (Nigerian) artist is utilitarian.

The poets, as the case is in the present study, employ their artistic talents and consciousness to create awareness either to avert conflict or reconcile people enmeshed in conflicts (Ofure 6). The present enquiry extends Ofure's (8) typification as "town criers" of poets "who harness the relationship between art, ideology and social consciousness to articulate the prevalent conflicts in postcolonial Nigeria." However this enquiry is limited to the exploration of the linguistic representation of activism and resistance in the selected eco-critical poems.

### **Ecocriticism, Ecological Oppression and the Propagation of Poetic Expressivity**

Ecocriticism substantiates the intersection between literature and the environment. Ezenwa Ohaeto (1994) remarks that ecocriticism explores the interaction between literature and nature. Since literature exists as a mirror of the human society and serves as a form of documentation of the prevailing happenings, eco-critical literary

writings have grown to draw attention to the aftermath of human activities on the environment. Buell, Heise and Thornber (418) opine that ecocriticism is central in view of the necessity “that environmental phenomena must be comprehended, and that today’s burgeoning array of environmental concerns must be addressed qualitatively as well as quantitatively.” The expression of ecocriticism through literary writings spans the three genres of literature, although the present enquiry focuses on poetry. As a tool for creative expression, poetry has been harnessed for the documentation of historical realities and for stimulating socio-cultural consciousness. In addition, it is employed for mediation or reconciliation during dissonance. In the present scenario, it is used to engineer affection on the experiences of persons inhabiting environmentally-degraded locations and unravel the capitalist inclinations that result into the birthing of such experiences. This suggests the concept of ecological oppression where business concerns take more significance than the lives of the occupants of these terrains. Commenting on ecological oppression, Bunker (25) states that:

When natural resources are extracted from one regional ecosystem to be transformed and consumed in another, the source-exporting region loses value that occur in its physical environment. These losses eventually decelerate the extractive region’s economy while the resource-consuming communities gain values and their economies accelerate.

The oppressive regime permeates the daily lives of the victims leading most often to loss of livelihood, ruining of the environment, and incidences of health challenges. Naturally, victims of such exploitations do not take things lying low. There are often protests, physical attacks, media advocacy and, in the case of the Nigeria’s Niger Delta, militancy and armed engagement of government forces coalesced into series of kidnapping for ransom. The agitation has however not been limited to militaristic responses. In fact, such experiences have spurred and engendered the spurning of creative writings borne out of the choleric energies. These literary compositions not only document the peculiar experiences of victimhood, they also markedly explore the activities of perpetrators through first-hand recounts of happenings. These expressive litanies are discussed and contextualized with specific attention paid to the linguistic framing of resistance and protestations and the ideological implications of the identified linguistic realisations in Ogbowei’s six poetry collections.

### **The Niger Delta as a Tale of Hardship**

The Niger Delta region traditionally extends from the tributaries of the River Niger to its depository in the Atlantic Ocean at Oghoye, in the Ilaje country of the South-Western Nigeria. Within the context of littoral sphere, the Delta region is a geographical area that has often been neglected in terms of infrastructural development by successive Nigerian governments. “It is a homeland to relatively small, migratory ethnic groupings like the Ijaw, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ilaje, Ogoni and Isoko, who have competed with one another from the pre-colonial period for dominance in trade and have often asserted supremacy through warfare” (Akingbe and Akwen 2-3). Recently however, the appellation is used to include all the areas where there are confirmed petroleum products extractable in commercial quantities. The area spans Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwalbom, Cross River, Ondo, Abia and Imo States. These states are members of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), an agency of the Nigerian government established to manage the affairs and peculiar developmental challenges of the region.

Despite the intervention of the NDDC over the years, what is not in doubt is that the region constitutes a gaping irony of wealth and poverty. An oil-rich region, a significant contributor, up to about 90% to the Nigerian GDP, the Niger Delta is enmeshed in environmental degradation as well as systemic neglect and marginalization. While the dominant and primary occupation of the peoples of this region used to be fishing and farming, oil spillages and hazardous gas flares have concertedly ruined the once lush region. Hence, socially- and politically-conscious writers have consistently dwelt on the plight of the region for national and global attention. The writers include Gabriel Okara, Ken Saro-Wiwa, J.P. Clark, Tanure Ojaide, Ibiwari Ikiriko as well as Ebinyō Ogbowei whose creative intervention constitutes the data for the present study.

The Niger Delta region has had a chequered history with antithetical frustrations from the two existing divides: the government and the multinational oil companies who reap the benefits of oil exploration, exploitation and marketing; and the residents who suffer the effects of the environmental degradation in their homelands caused by oil spillages and incessant gas-flaring worsened by the lack of commensurate government presence in terms of social services. Paradoxically, “the Delta region is the richest and most naturally endowed, but seems abysmally, a lesser developed part of the Nigeria nation-state. Nevertheless, some of the northern states are far worse on many basic indicators of development. That was the case before Boko Haram insurgence, and it is most definitely the case after it” (Akingbe,

“Writing against Tyranny” 13).

Despite prolonged clamouring for resource control, a sizable amount of the oil blocks are owned by private individuals from outside the region while exploration is done by foreign oil companies. Uzoechi Nwagbara (77) refers to this as ‘a serious form of polarisation, which finds timbre in the periphery and centre paradigm or town/country thesis, where the core depends on the periphery for the supply of its economic means and materials’. David Dafinone explains that:

The Niger Delta people vehemently oppose being colonized by few Nigerians who have captured the instrument of power for their interests. As long as the government continues to alienate the people from their land and usurp their right without due process, the government cannot be seen to be democratic as it does not take into consideration the principles of corporate governances, which involves freedom of choice, rule of law, transparency, accountability, probity, equity and justice. Our stand on this issue is not in the context of breaking from the Nigerian federation or excluding other non-oil producing areas from benefiting from the proceeds from oil export and production... (4)

Contemporary Nigerian literature has highlighted the conflagrating tensions in the Niger Delta. Similarly, poetics of the third generation Niger Delta poetry revolves around the experiences and challenges of Delta communities and inhabitants which have been poignantly articulated in the poetry of Ogbowei. These poetry collections encapsulate the issues that surround the erosion of their homelands, their identities, languages, and environment and culture. They are also wielded as cudgels to batter the government. Enajite Ojaruega says:

The debacle caused by oil exploration and exploitation activities in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region has attracted much attention within and outside the annals of literature to such an extent that; even now it is possible to refer to the fast growing corpus of literary writings on these issues as “Niger Delta Literature.” Many writers have written and published works in all genres of literature describing in literary terms the on-going despoliation and degradation of the physical environment of this region. The extraction of crude oil from the land and water spaces as well as gas flaring activities have led to the pollution of the region’s land, water, and air. (495)

Consequently, creative writings from the region have, beyond documenting the

peculiar experiences of its inhabitants, been confrontational and oppositional in orientation. Poetic outcrops from this region have also been perceived as products of “conflict, political schisms and experiences that enables self-expression, self-fulfilment and maximum self-realisation” (Aito 11). In all, the Niger Delta poetry revolves around the discourse of experiences and conflicts as they affect individuals, communities and the region as well as how these influence the relationship with the Nigerian political entity.

### **Methodological Details**

Ogbowei’s six poetry collections were purposively selected because of their ostensible Niger Delta’s reclamation campaign. With the hindsight of rhetoric of motives, Ogbowei’s poetry provides a veritable linguistic-literary site where Niger Delta’s nationalism dovetails with a regional determination for a resource control. This concern is imbued with a linguistic exploration of protestation and resistance that reinforce a polemic of “we” versus “they” in the selected poems culled from the six collections. The poetry collections bear the imprint of Ogbowei’s fidelity and dedication to the Niger Delta’s nationalism and political activism tailored toward total emancipation of the region. Excerpts from these poems are employed as supplements in the subsequent discussions of how protestation and resistance are enacted and (re)negotiated in Niger Delta poetry. The analysis is guided by tenets from Critical Discourse Analysis. To Fairclough and Wodak,

CDA sees discourse — language use in speech and writing — as a form of ‘social practice’. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it: The discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned — it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects — that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people. (258)

According to Wodak (2009), CDA “is not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach”. Instead, CDA focuses on larger units than isolated words and sentences and, hence, new basic units of analysis: texts, discourses, conversations, speech acts, or communicative events. The implication hence is that CDA contextualises the use of language and attributes situational functions (social, cultural, situative and cognitive) to language use. CDA’s predilection for social phenomenon therefore suits the attendant enquiry which the paper explores.

### **Exploring Activism, Protestation and Resistance in Ogbowei’s Selected Poems: A Discussion**

In subsequent sub-headings, the linguistic framing of the themes of activism and resistance in the selected poems are discussed. The implications of these findings are further elaborated.

#### **Stylistic Deviations and Foregrounding**

The tone of resistance and protestation is set from the cover page through the preliminary pages where writing conventions are serially flouted. The most obvious realisations, which also run across all the poems, come from normally capitalised words (proper nouns, the first letter of sentences and titles), which are reproduced in deviant fashion. The conventions of initial capitalisations, capitalisation of proper nouns and full stops are ignored. These realisations constitute grammatical and graphological foregrounding which lead to stylistic prominence. Some instances include:

i sing of creeks...  
 i sing of ponds...  
 i sing of rivers...  
 i sing of swamps...  
 i cast aside paddle and net...  
 i am the marsh boy...            (*marsh boy* 21)

In the above, I, the first person personal pronoun is written in small letters. While it visibly breaks the convention of writing, its miniaturization stylistically validates the second-class citizenship of Niger Delta residents within the post colonial Nigeria.

The deviation portrays the sub-humanity of the victims who live a life of penury despite the wealth on which their homelands are situated. Some other excerpts are:

many mays have passed (58)  
 folake, folarin (34); mammanvatsa, bukharin (35)  
 ratkopladic, sarkin bello (62)

where ‘mays’ refers to the month of May in plural form whereas the other realisations are deviant forms since they are proper nouns, names, which under normal circumstances should be written with initial capitals. Similarly, in *song of a dying river*, the misery of the Delta is further pursued in a poem titled “vultures”:

a dead gull  
 a dead turtle  
 fish washed up shore  
 a motorboat strike  
 a maimed manatee  
 a raucous vulture restaurant (*song of a dying river*, 41)

A further realisation of deviation within punctuation is the obvious and intentional elision of intra-sentential markers like comma, full-stop, colon and semicolon. The only constantly properly applied punctuation is the apostrophe to indicate possession or ownership. While, normally, these punctuation conventions are used to assist readers in understanding a text, the poet’s wilful deviation complicates reading and comprehension, subtly replicating the difficulty of daily existence in the Niger Delta. By making the reader tread the confusing paths of interpreting the writings, the poet also subjects the reader to share in the excruciating hardship and toil. An instance is provided from “*marsh boy*”:

the horse will throw off the rider  
 mudbugs would be honoured held high  
 mud hens would roost in palaces  
 we’d be decked in royal robes  
 but you dress us in shrouds  
 we desire liberty equality not bread  
 but death is a liberator  
 the grave a leveller

you feed us the poisoned fruits of freedom (*sarsh boy* 22)

Correspondingly, this elan of hardship is reiterated in “curving winds of hate” where in *song of a dying river*, we identify several instances of non-punctuation through which the poet activates shared feelings between the readers and the Niger Delta residents:

the city by the sea is burning  
 a triangulating greed  
 patriotic awesomely tribal  
 carries off the prize  
 puts to death the battered bride (*song of a dying river*, 27)

The poet’s intentional flouting of the conventions of written English language in his poetry portrays the collections as anti-normative or counter-discoursal. The experiences of oppression and the ruining of homelands, particularly in a nation in which the Niger Deltans feel alienated, are clearly not normal. Consequently, the poet uses *abnormal* language to portray the sustained social disequilibrium suffered by the Niger Delta’s residents. Sadly enough, people on whose lands ‘black gold’ is extracted are enmeshed in defiant poverty. The linguistic resistance and protest here thus suggest that the poet is ready and willing for a new reality, one where they can “pluck out the green white green, the plunderer’s flag of pride” (62). The protestation therefore goes beyond the distaste for prevalent poverty, environmental exploitation and control over resources; it embraces the yearning for self-rule and the preservation of group identity. The aspiration to ‘pluck out’ the green white green, a Nigeria’s flag from the Delta communities, signifies a morbid disenchantment with the Nigerian nationhood. It equally implies that the relation between Nigeria and Niger Delta has become tenuous: as spatial divides, and the assertion of binary opposition of “we” and “they” subsists. The rancorous campaign for the severance of Niger Delta from Nigeria, illustrates that little or non-benefits have been derived from the Nigeria nation-state by the region since the attainment of independence in 1960.

Poetry is a form of song and its mellifluousness lies in the engagement of sounds for lyrical creativity. Foremost trope devices employed in the achievement of this are assonance and alliteration. Within the poems lie several of these realisations, with some examples given below:

...**p**rison of **p**overty  
 ...**r**ight to **r**ise  
 ...**s**ighing **s**wamps  
 ...**c**reeks with **c**rushed dreams  
 ...**h**umble **h**ungry **h**unter (*marsh boy 1*)

...**c**arpet...**c**auterize clean the **c**ancer  
 ...**b**omb the **b**ellicose **b**ogs  
 ...**s**tone and **t**hron**e**  
 ...**p**leading **r**eprieve (*marsh boy 2*)

Assonance and alliteration trope devices are also realised in the poetics of ‘depression’:

...by **s**uffering and **s**orrow  
**A**smile **s**tretches the **c**reases  
**A**nd **l**aughter  
**l**ightening out of the dark **r**eaches  
 of a **w**racked soul (*the heedless ballot box 30*)

rally **r**ascals and **r**enegades  
 summon **s**ycophants and **s**quanderers (*song of a dying river 61*)

Beyond enhancing the lyrical nature of poetic renditions, sounds play symbolic roles when they are used in creative writings, some sounds for instances are exploited to convey meanings like force and softness. Plosives, sounds which are produced with the explosion of air through the oral cavity, are indicative of force. Therefore the conscious repetition of such sounds — in these cases, /p/ and /k/ in **p**rison**s** of **p**overty; **c**arpet **b**omb...**c**auterize **c**lean the **c**ancer — is indicative of force, affirmation, conviction, etc.

Parallelism is a linguistic tool in which similar linguistic structures are repeated. The repetition of such structures has stylistic and ideological implications: they are emphatic since they reiterate viewpoints and perspectives. Instances of these realisations are rife in “a riddle”:

long stabs search for liver  
 long knives bloody a river  
 black clouds rain clouds

a quiz thunder louds (*the town crier's song* 36)

Parallelism is further realised:

i sing of creeks...

i sing of ponds...

i sing of rivers...

i sing of swamps... (*marsh boy* 21)

this ideology of terror...

this love of the betrayer

this loyalty to the slayer

that bullies us

into taking the name of our abuser...

into learning the lingo of the looter

this perpetual paranoia (*marsh boy* 27)

The realisations provide the poetry its musicality while also emphatically drawing attention, through the repetition of structures, to the thematic of chaos. In addition, “the felon is on the run” (49) is suffused with and totally reliant on the use of parallelism in realising its thematic focus. Instances are:

the conflict is on the run

the jailer too is on the run...

the felon is on the run

the enforcer too is on the run...

the shoplifter is on the run

the shopkeeper too is on the run...

hawker and retailer are on the run

wholesaler and bulk buyer too are on the run.. (*marsh boy* 49)

“the doorway to hell” in *song of a dying river* also reverberates with a striking parallelism:

i see them all

saracens and crusaders

visigoths and vandals

makers of history...(95)

Paradigmatic relations in terms of the substitution of lexical items within the same word category are however employed to sustain and reiterate the spheres of discourse. Therefore we have situations where any of the nouns — conflict, jailer, felon, enforcer, etc. — can replace any of the other options. These portray the circuitous resource bleeding of the Niger Delta by the successive Nigerian governments, multinational agencies and internal saboteurs within the region.

Further identifiable are realisations of rhetorical questions which are heavily laden with expressions that heighten concerns about the Niger Delta's plight. An instance is below:

is it fear  
 or a pontifical perfidy  
 that shuts your ears  
 to the apostrophising pain  
 of the wounded and dying? (*matilda* 30)

Here the poet questions the *raison d'être* of the continual subjugation of these underprivileged people. He also employs the use of "apostrophising" in a novel manner that attests to the gross indifference which follows the pains and long-suffering that have become second nature in the Delta region. Since apostrophes are used to show possession or ownership, the marked presence of 'pain of the wounded and dying' is asserted. Unfortunately however, their plight is ignored. The poet queries the inaction of the power elite, who could have rescued the situation by demanding to know whether their silence is due to "fear or a pontifical perfidy" — fear of being undermined or displaced from been in control of the prevailing exploitation.

There is also an over-reliance on nominal groups and adjectives. Nouns refer to people and things while adjectives work alongside nouns to provide more information. The penchant of the poet for nouns and adjectives are not far-fetched. These word classes help in achieving a vivid representation of the thoughts of the poet and reinforce the images of happenings in the Niger Delta.

seeing these smoking shores  
 the sacked villages their smouldering huts  
 the gullied faces of stripped peasants

their drooping shoulders their despair-dimmed eyes (“a dream delayed”  
*matilda* 60)

“smoking shores, sacked villages, smouldering huts, gullied faces, stripped peasants, drooping shoulders, despair-dimmed eyes” are all dim reflections of the Niger Delta experience. The Nigerian government’s unleashed carnage in the Delta is unforgiving and has continually ruined the inhabitants. The reference to fire — through smoking, smouldering — indicates the deplorable state which the contentious oil exploration has plunged the region. The inhabitants are also not spared as they have ‘gullied faces, drooping shoulders, despair-dimmed eyes’ and have become “stripped peasants”.

### Graphological Deviation

Graphology is concerned with studying how what is said is represented graphically. Through this, a language scholar may gain insights into covert meanings, information as well as the personality or psychological state of the writer. Graphological deviation however occurs when established norms of writing (graphemes) are intentionally flouted to create additional meanings in a text. Several instances are identifiable in the *marsh boy*.

What are cruisers and **suvs** to the swamp dweller (28)

The word “suvs” is put in bold to reinforce the contrast in fortunes in terms of material acquisitions for the Niger Delta residents and the exploiting government officials. It could also be interpreted as the poet drawing attention to the alphabetism which otherwise should have full stops between each letter.

Within the *larcenous party*, there are also instances of graphological deviations. The word ‘hole’ is written in such a symbolic manner where the written fonts thin out, one word per line, as if a hole is being dug. The adjective ‘black’ is also graphologically realised:

**black**

**h**

**o**

**l**

**e** (*marsh boy* 59)

Similarly, graphology is harnessed in “the heron hunt”:

pitiless ghosts out of the past  
 pursue the heron  
 down  
 looping creeks  
 to her hair-raising loft  
 lost in this wilderness of want (*the heedless ballot box* 72)

Beyond the written letters, the imagery reinforces the context/situation which the poet documents. Black suggests the bleakness and acute irredemption of the plight of the masses who have been thrown into “contemplative poverty” by the licentious and profligate rulers. The graphological recreation in ‘*the heron hunt*’ represents the jagged pursuit along looping creeks. The semblance of a spiralling effect is also enacted through graphology viz:

S  
 p  
 i  
 r  
 a  
 l                    (*marsh boy* 60)

In the “shifting fault lines” (62), the word “war” is handwritten and not typewritten. This provides graphological prominence especially as it makes the word markedly different from the other words around it. There are two assumptions about the motivation for this realisation. First, is the context of the use which resonates with the action of “carving” as in “the bludgeoned body of baby charles/dumped on the doorsteps of our distraught home/the word war with a fork/carved on his bloated belly.” The second interpretation lies in the fact that human actions — self-inflicted, handwritten — are usually the causes of crises, conflicts and eventually war.

The poet also appropriates the use of italicisation as a graphological tool. This is exemplified in “Christmas”:

*Mummy mummy*  
*you'll buy us new shoes of fine leather*  
*a pair for me*  
*a pair for heather* (*Let the Honey Run* 3)

Italicisation is also employed in “stormin”

*how bad for Baghdad*

*how sad for saddam (the town crier's song 87)*

In “the fumbling king” (51), italicisation is used in the penultimate stanza to delineate the eventuality of the arrogant ruler. While the death is occasioned by betrayal through “oily words of sharks with shiny teeth/sharper than brutus’ dagger,” italics foreground the remark that the stab “*cut through his cunning heart/feels the feral pain of pleading death.*”

The refrain in “a deranged gun” (38) is also repetitively rendered in italics:

*ransom riches have reached rumuekpe*

*banditry brings beautiful girls and luxury cars (marsh boy)*

These realisations foreground the expressions and also establish a homological effect, which Short (2000) refers to as a “graphology-symbolic” effect. This occurs where a word or a piece of text actually looks like the concept that it represents.

### **Allusions and the “Historization” of Resistance**

Allusion refers to a passing reference or indirect mention. It may also be defined as an expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly. Such instances are rife in Ogbowei’s poetry. Locations, persons and events within and outside Nigeria are constantly referred to. These function as indexes of fields of experience. Whether direct or inferred, allusions assist in broadening the readers’ understanding. Not only are the references reflective of the shared experiences, they are also evocative of the inhumane disparities in the performance of power. The allusions in the anthology are varied and stride different spheres of human activities. However the most realised domain of allusion is from the socio-politics. Instances of such socio-political references in Ogbowei’s poetry abound. This can be located for instance in “for kenule saro-wiwa”:

sun-glasses award the degree of the white feather

deliver it with nine decapitated red cocks

bleeding thrashing scratching from the rolls

not the name *saro-wiwa*

not the name *mosop*

but *khanagokana tai eleme*

and nine necklaced cocks

are nine burning hellhounds hanging (*let the honey run* 47)

Some other realisations from *marsh boy* are:

**son my** and **srebrenica** (21) (refers to ethnic cleansing massacre, a localized genocide. A town in the east of Bosnia, which was the site of an ethnic cleansing massacre in July 1995.)

mean months of '66 (21) (refers to the events that surround Isaac Boro's referenced 'The Twelve-Day Revolution' and the first Nigerian military coup)

**romanovs** who see in our desolation their prosperity

**somozas** who see in our destruction their security (23)

**tuolsleng** (28) (a notorious prison in Cambodia)

**choeungek** (28) (a traumatic reference to a killing field in Cambodia)

**dawsuu** (35) (a Burmese non-violent politician)

**insein prison** (35) (a Burmese top security prison)

**bush, blair, barak** (37) (names of former American presidents)

As well as the following from: "stalking death":

a river of corpses

running through the bosphorus

seeks a northerly course (*matilda* 66)

These references are infused with senses and imageries of destructions and hegemonic imbalances. They testify to the cyclical nature of history and referenced the contemporary challenges of the Niger Delta people in the context of previous occurrences elsewhere. Through this, we know that, in addition to the systemic exploitation of natural resources, oppression and state repression are the lot of avengers who seek a halt to the exploitative realities. Ogbowei therefore situates the Niger Delta resistance within the global theatres of violence where the voices of dissent and resistance are met with decisive state repression. By navigating the Niger Delta's political turbulence, Ogbowei appropriates the striking contiguous memories of terror and oppression: from Spain, Portugal, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Guatemala, Cambodia, Philippines, Ukraine, Senegal, China, Kenya, Turkey and Russia. Most of these countries have witnessed dictatorial regimes and have adjudicated on cases of human rights abuse. Consequently, the names of perpetrators of crimes against humanity as well as their victims are also recounted. The names of

these dictators are derisively mentioned — Somoza, Mugabe, Mubarak, Museveni who represent the oppressors; and correspondingly, Ken Saro-Wiwa and Mamman Vatsa represent the victims. The poet therefore contextualizes the present Niger Delta's turmoil within the proclivity of both the classical and contemporary realities.

In addition to the allusions to socio-political history, there are references to popular culture:

this game of thrones (*marsh boy* 27)  
 shifting patterns on corleone's chessboard (*marsh boy* 27)  
 dancing dacoits to the dragon throne (*song of a dying river* 34)

Popular culture refers to the mundane prevailing culture within a society and encompasses realisations from art, cooking, clothing, entertainment, films, mass media, music and sports. The “game of thrones” refers to a television series which enjoyed wide viewership. However, the poet uses the allusion to represent the power play that goes on when politicians' exercise their strategies in gaining a stronghold. The allusion is sustained through another popular culture referenced in the text and movie ‘The Godfather’ where Corleone is a mafia don. The reference to “chessboard” affirms the place of stratagems in political battlegrounds. However the situation does not favour the masses, who are continually trampled upon in “the cut-throat politics.” In fact, the poet affirms that the politician “bullies us into taking the name of our abuser that bullies us into learning the lingo of the looter.” This excerpt asserts the forced nationhood foisted on Niger Deltans by the Nigeria nation- state.

### **The Politics of Language in Indexing Resistance**

Language is never neutral when in action. Instead it is made malleable to perform multifaricity of roles and functions. In the texts, the English language is the dominant language. However, this is interspersed with the creolised Nigerian Pidgin and the Ijaw language spoken by the majority of Niger Delta communities in Bayelsa and Rivers states.

Creolised Nigerian pidgin is strikingly appropriated in “na here de deal dey don”:

oga notin dey shele  
 notin dey happen  
 na here de deal dey don  
 an na here de don dey deal (*song of a dying river* 58)

(Boss, nothing is happening  
 It is here that the deal gets done  
 And it is here that they have been doing the deal)

Significantly, the dialectic of Ijaw language is ostensibly explored in *welcome to our smouldering swamps*:

Asawana  
 Wana (an Ijaw battle cry) (*marsh boy* 29)

The war cry is emblematic of the call to arms in the spirit of protest and resistance against entrenched systemic subjugation to which the Niger Delta people have been consigned. Through the use of the Ijaw language; the poet asserts his Ijaw nationalism, courts a group patronage, and seeks to establish a lingua-cultural affinity. He also establishes the “we versus them” dichotomy, an alternation that suffuses in the text.

In “avoid them” (43), there are realisations of Nigerian Pidgin, a contact language which is fast becoming creolised in the Niger Delta region. The identified excerpts are of proverbs from the Niger Delta Creole.

not every han carry cutlass kin kill  
 yet you get for watch cutlass and han (*marsh boy* 43)  
 (although it isn't every hand that wields a cutlass that can kill  
 Still you've got to watch both cutlass and hand)

orange yellow fine for eye  
 how you know 'e sweet (*marsh boy* 43)  
 (how can you tell the sweetness of and orange  
 From its seemingly attractive colour)

learn for be sentinel na you hos  
 cos plenty tem nadere de rascals kin gada (*marsh boy* 43)  
 (learn to be a sentinel/watchman in/over your own house  
 because many a time the rascals gather there)

There is also a rendition of a French proverb:

Lameilleurefacond'atteindrevotre  
 ton but c'est par la force le fusil  
 (the best way to achieve your goal is by the gun)

It is noteworthy that the non-English sentential expressions are proverbs. Proverbs are aspects of oral literature and provide a window into the ethos and norms within a culture. Nigerian Pidgin/Creole is regarded as a neutral language which cuts across cultural and social divides. Consequently, its use is intended to serve as a vehicle of propaganda, to communicate and accentuate the Niger Delta's dilemma beyond the region. This is with the consequent intention of ensuring public sensitization on the agitating issues.

### **Hedging Lexis and Vocabulary Range**

Cohesion is a textual resource employed to link different sentences within any text. Through the establishment of cohesive relationship, the linguistic choices in different parts of a text correspond with one another to form a network of sequential relation. According to Leech and Short (244), cross-reference and linkage are the two major kinds of cohesion. Cross-reference is concerned with how language is used to indicate referentiality within different parts of a text, that is, how connectivity is established in the text. This is realised through the use of definite reference (personal pronouns, deictics, and definite articles), substitution, ellipses, and repetition. Linkage, on the other hand, involves the use of overt connectors such as coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, and linking adverbials.

Pronouns are used to replace nouns and are imbued with ideological framing characteristics since they can signify inclusiveness or otherwise. This implies that pronouns can be harnessed by politically-conscious writers for the statement of group affinity and otherness where affiliations and dissociations are established. The resultant identities assist in the perspectivisation of the "factional" creations enacted by the poet. In *marsh boy*, Ogbowei employs the pronouns "I, we, our, us" as counterforces to "they, them, their" where their inclusion in the plight of Niger Deltans is established. The oppressors are in this case the Nigerian government, complicit Niger Deltans and the oil multinationals who do business but fail to ensure abandonment liability which requires that they restore their areas of operation back to how nature intended. Apart from being very harsh in the criticism of the activities of the "pillagers", exploiters and oppressors, the poet's tone is also scathing in denouncing the complicity of opportunists who betray the struggle in recompense for government's lucre.

With regards to employing words as weapons for activism and resistance, the phases of transition witnessed among residents of the Niger Delta is identifiable thus:

watch the plundered province provoked to revolt  
cut herself loose from this house of hate  
this house full of strife...(song of a dying river 69)

Again, memory is subverted to recall the despoliation of the Niger Delta in “the floor plan of a dream”:

the silhouette of a simulated passion  
is thrown upon the screen where fond memories  
dance to a thousand instruments  
playing half-forgotten tunes (*let the honey run*, 25)

This dialectic of transition is further pursued in the marsh boy:

i am a **marsh boy** quick and handy with a gun  
i am the **marsh tiger** stalking beneficent tyrants (*marsh boy* 23)

This transmutation of the marsh boy and his consequent heroism as a freedom fighter and revolutionary is occasioned by the troubled experiences in the exploited yet degraded region. The marsh boy is in real pursuit of equity and the chance to live a fulfilled life. The quest for “liberty equality” however does not come on a platter of gold; especially as there have been “compatriots made to pay for crimes for which others are decorated.” The metamorphosis of the “marsh boy” to a “marsh tiger” follows his transition from a “humble hungry hunter pushed out of the dining hall by the buccaneering brothers.” This speeds his response as the conscience of the society as he becomes the “spear driven into the soul of the stalker... the bomb exploding the peace of the pillage...quick and handy with a gun.”

I am the **evil child** who cries too much/you say  
I am the **evil spirit** driving the delta round in loops/you say (*marsh boy* 22)

The transfiguration of the Niger Delta protester/rebel is also attested to from the above excerpt where he/she metamorphoses from being a child to being a spirit.

Obviously, the expectation of the government is for the status-quo of exploitation to be maintained, at which point the protester is still accorded the designation of a child. However, once the protests become disruptive, inhibiting the status-quo, the protesters become “evil spirits” which must be exorcised.

Lexical items are also employed to establish contrasts in the prevailing realities as it pertains to the experiences of the victims and the aggressors. A veritable instance comes from “welcome to our smouldering swamps,”

What are schools and clinics to the vanishing ones  
 What are water pumps and power mowers  
 What are cruisers and SUVs to the swamp dweller  
 This toothache running needles  
 Through the roof of your head  
 This bomb ticking in your grasping mind  
 This running sore draining your sick soul (*marsh boy* 28)

These lines document the lacklustre state of affairs where even good things are meaningless for the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region. Schools and clinics which ordinarily should be commonplace social amenities are unavailable yet the marsh boy has limitless access to arms.

The contrast is further sustained:

romanovs who see in our **desolation** their **prosperity**  
 somozas who see in our **destruction** their **security** (23)

where the “desolation” and “destruction” which the Niger-Delta inhabitants and their homeland undergo are juxtaposed with the ‘prosperity’ and ‘security’ which the looters and exploiters enjoy. The anger which the poet feels can therefore be better understood since the wealth in which the exploiters gloat have not been used to service the needs and yearnings of the Niger Delta region.

The poet further invoices the prevalent situation in the Niger Delta through the effusive use of adjectives which reinforce the imageries and portrayals of the realities in the Delta. He identifies the Niger Delta as “contentious constituent” (42), “traumatized territories” (25), “eventful graveyards” (24), “smouldering swamps,” “swamps of death” (28) and, with a tone of anguish and finality, declares that the region is a reflection of “a failed federation”:

odi's the sector  
 that killed our faith  
 in a failed federation  
 where contentious constituents  
 disdainful of minorities  
 mired in the maligned marshland  
 hurry south spreading  
 the language of hell (*the heedless ballot box* 42)

The predilection for a jeremiad persists in *matilda* where through the imagery of rainfall, judgment day is announced to evil doers while the suffering lot of the Niger Deltans might eventually have respite in “by the brass river bury me”:

thunder drums heralding the retreating rains  
 heaven's fury searing the weeping sky  
 lancing the heaving sea  
 all wails shall drown  
 drown all self-flattering tears (*matilda* 38)

Through expressions like “thunder drums, heaven's fury, wails shall drown... all self-flattering tears”, one can identify an intertextual appeal to the biblical Armageddon. It can be surmised therefore that not only are people in the Delta communities angry and desperately in need of intercession, but heaven's fury also sets to be unleashed.

He further tolls the death knell when he submits that:  
 the delta is a death parlour  
 a place of grief  
 where we're gathered to hear  
 the ghouls decide how you deserve to die (*marsh boy* 24)

The poet through the use of these evocative expressions can be assumed to, after assessing the present realities, have foreclosed the possibility of a change in the fortunes of the Niger Delta through a peaceful dialogue. History is also harnessed as an ideological construct. Through historiography, the cyclical nature of documentation is brought to the fore particularly where events in other parts of the world are weaved, because of the mirrored realities, into illustrating the

present Niger Delta's experience. As earlier identified, the use of socio-political and historical allusions in the poems, foreground the contemporary problematic of the Niger Delta within the context of certain historical realities. They are also indicative of the referencing of the political history, like the invasion and destruction of Odi village during the regime of President Olusegun Obasanjo.

### **The Ideological Implications of the Linguistic Realisations**

Ogbowei's *marsh boy* poems have been identified as suffused with vivid cataloguing of the lurid realities of life in the Niger Delta. The linguistic tools employed are further reliant on specific ideological constructs. The first and obvious ideology is that of Otherness wherein the author situates the sufferings and poverty of his people against the backdrop of surpluses and vanity by the exploiters. This viewpoint is accented across the poetry collection. A significant pointer is from "this perpetual paranoia" (27):

this ideology of terror...  
 this love of the betrayer  
 this loyalty to the slayer  
 that bullies us  
 into taking the name of our abuser...  
 into learning the lingo of the looter (*marsh boy* 27)

and 'how many mays more' (58):  
 communities can't coalesce into a nation  
 tribes can't be welded into a state (*marsh boy* 58)

The excerpts indicate through the use of pronouns and nominal items the contrasts in the situations. Expressions such as "betrayer," "slayer," "abuser," "looter" are provided oppositional signification. They also testify to the forced/continued nationhood foisted on the Niger Deltans who would rather elect to have their own sovereign state. "Our" and "us" however identify the Niger Deltans as the oppressed minority. In addition, and as identified earlier, lexis has been manipulated as a linguistic implement in exemplifying the performance of Otherness. The excerpt from "how many more days" also queries the rationale behind the cynical Nigerian citizenship which the Niger Delta nationalities have been forced to acquire. The Nigeria nation-state is often viewed as colonial relic and outcrop where apparently, the ethnic majorities are obviously enjoying a privileged position over

the minorities. A situation, which has often pitched the Niger Delta nationalities against the ethnic majorities of Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo who have successively produced the political elite that has governed the postcolonial Nigeria since independence with the exception of President Goodluck Jonathan, so far the only past Nigerian president of the Niger Delta's extraction, whose emergence as president is the result of a fortuitous combination of concessions.

Oppression is also depicted as an ideology and wielded as a tool of subjugation. The oppression as used by the aggressor (the government and its capitalist counterparts-the oil multinationals) is framed in several forms – from its use as a repressive implement to being employed as a device through which the opposition is forced to join the exploiters' camp. The poet reiterates that, oftentimes during and after protestations and resistance, charlatans come forward to reap the fruits of group struggles. Consequently, the cycle of lack, deprivation and resistance are poignantly contextualized:

frustration ploughs my back  
cuts gullies down each side of my face  
theharmattan of poverty has cracked my soul...(let the honey run 67)

starving criminals scavenging for supplies  
dance around the dead and dying  
rush into promising stores and warehouses  
haul home stereo systems sacks of sugar and flour (*marsh boy* 24)

now locked doors are blown open  
see palm-greasing patriots  
flirting through breached bunkers  
to the hall where history is made  
now locked doors are blown open... (*marsh boy* 25)

...you dress us in shrouds  
we desire liberty equality not bread  
but death is a liberator  
the grave a leveller  
you feed us the poisoned fruits of freedom (*marsh boy* 22)

the creeks burning at shoulders

beat a hasty retreat  
 the rivers on fire foam at mouth...(*the town crier's song* 77)  
 a clash of cymbals  
 lightning  
 out of the barrel  
 of a sniper rifle  
 a whirlwind  
 of pain...(*the heedless ballot box* 72)

now guns are smoking  
 now resilient rockets and mortars  
 and dedicated ieds  
 blast rip apart  
 dreams beginning to bloom... (*song of a dying river* 63)

These realisations poignantly accentuate the emasculation and dehumanization routines that the inhabitants of the region are continually subjected. Significantly, these poems ostensibly capture the level of subjugation of the Niger Delta with a corresponding courageous defiance mustered by the rampaging militant youths to counter the excesses of brutality dispensed by the government troops deployed to the region. Thus, poetics of resistance embedded in the Ogbowei's poetry registers a ringing proclamation that, the Niger Delta's reclamation has moved from the conciliatory passivity to a new phase of armed struggle, which has helped to highlight the tension between a determined struggle for the recuperation of the Delta from the predatory Nigerian government and a resignation to debilitating complacency. Indeed, for the contemporary Niger Deltans, death seems a better alternative — "a liberator" from "scheming cowards and cunning criminals," and from "the poisoned fruits of freedom."

### **Conclusion**

The paper, through a linguistic analysis of Ogbowei's six poetry collections, has affirmed that resistance and the deployment of poetics of protestation has been the leitmotif that runs in the thematics of *heedless ballot box*, *the town crier's song*, *song of a dying river*, *let the honey run*, *marsh boy* and *matilda*. The paper has relentlessly stressed that, the first generation Niger Delta poets like J.P. Clark-Bekederemo and Gabriel Imomotimi Okara only deployed themes and styles that celebrated the Niger Delta's rustic charms in their poetry. This tradition morphed

into a criticism of ecological degradation of the Delta region, aptly referenced in the poetry of second generation Niger Delta's poet, Tanure Ojaide and in the poetry of the third generation poets like Ibiwari Ikiriko, Ogaga Ifowodo, Ebi Yeibo and Joe Ushie. However, Ebinyo Ogbowei a third generation Niger Delta's poet has extended the discourse of poverty, misery and ecological degradation of the Niger Delta in the militant vocabulary and combative poetics of the selected poems.

The paper has also acknowledged that due to its poetics of anger, disillusionment and resistance, the poetry of Ogbowei continually seeks to redefine the Niger Delta's struggle against a perceived deprivation within the context of a recognised combative rhythm. Given the all-too-familiar pauperization and subjugation of the region in the past decades, Ogbowei is convinced that these atrocities should be interrogated and challenged in militant poetics. The Niger Delta's exploitation and wreckage is traceable to the history of pervasive military incursions and almost legendary dictatorial "democracies" in the post colonial Nigeria which has led to disaffection, poverty and disruption of the Delta's harmony. It is within this background that Ogbowei thus draws attention to the ecocidal and homicidal activities of the Nigeria rulers who are only preoccupied with the continual theft of the region's wealth, without a corresponding improvement on the economic well-being of the people and environment. The poems from Ogbowei's six poetry collections have not only discussed but also identified the complicity of the Nigerian government in entrenching inequality and exploitation — an economic emasculation gambit which has led to the degradation of the Niger Delta and triggered armed insurrection in the recent time. The poems in these collections further detail the regrettable influence of internal conspirators from the Delta communities who collaborate with the Nigerian government and the oil multinationals to compromise the collective interest of the region.

The evocative attention to the condition of the Niger Delta, its people and environment as grounded in the poetry collections, reverberates what Udentia refers to as "alternative pedagogy." This is further pursued by Maduka who affirms that "there is a direct relationship between literature and social institutions. The principal function of literature is to criticise these institutions and eventually bring about desirable changes in the society" (11). The paper has remarkably benefitted from Emmanuel Obiechina's submission that "all African writing is at once a literary piece, a social protest and a medium of political re-assertion" (8). Similarly, going by the militant tone of articulation in the collections, the paper has equally reiterated the concern of Frank Mowah that modern African poetry is "a product of conflict, political schisms and experiences" (99). These submissions have

proven that poetry as creative endeavour is a product of endemic socio-political, religious and economic experiences of a particular society. Hence, Ogbowei's poetry therefore has exhibited its thematic commitment to the inauguration of a new Niger Delta where equity, fairness and justice will prevail. This he has ostensibly negotiated through the appropriation of the poetics of nationalism, protestation and resistance.

In exploring the frenetic linguistic architecture of these collections, we have identified how the poet, Ogbowei, has annexed the soaring pyrotechnics of anger, resentment and audacity to contextualize the linguistic deftness that taut the lines of his poetry. Suffice to state that, the analysed poems relied poignantly on language of Niger Delta's nationalism and emotion deployed in the central thematic of recuperation. The poet's impassioned deviations from writing conventions relay the foregrounding strains of resistance and protestation exemplified in the features that are identifiable in the language of the third generation Niger Delta poetry. In conclusion, the linguistic realisations of tropes of resistance in Ogbowei's poetry are dramatically harnessed to fulfil ideological roles in relaying perceptible peculiarities of the Niger Delta's experience.

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