

THE PLACE OF WATER IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: READINGS FROM GREG MABAJIORGU'S WRITINGS.

Agatha Njideka Nwanya.

Department of Theatre and Cultural Studies,
Nasarawa State University,
PMB 1022 Keffi, Nasarawa State,
Nigeria.

ABSTRACT: *Argument on the eroding environmental degradation by modern industrial society has been rife in most critical works of the modern period. Man's quest for civilization and its accompanied industrialization are often seen as reasons for destruction of natural environment. Despite the facts that water covers about seventy percent of the earth surface, availability and accessibility of water has remained a great challenge to human development. Acute water shortage for human consumption is a course for worry in the face of alarming industrial pollution. Little wonders that ecocritics and ecodramatics are upset by degenerating human environment. Greg Mbajiorgu is one of them. He has written extensively on water as important abiotic resource. In his collection of poems title Water testament (2008) and a dramatic text, Wota na Wota (2006), he explored various themes on the usefulness of water to man. He asserts that search for drinkable water in most local communities can create anarchy as a result of its scarcity. This research explores these themes and attributes of water as illustrated in the poems and the drama. The basic assumption of this research is that water is a necessity for sustenance of life and a component of natural resources. Consequently, great effort must be geared towards its preservation.*

KEYWORDS: Water, Sustainable Development, Greg Mabajiorgu's Writings

INTRODUCTION

Natural resources are materials and components that can be found within natural environment made up of biosphere and Lithosphere. Fresh water (an abiotic resource) is one of the most scarce natural resources. Despite the fact that water covers about seventy percent (70%) of the earth surface, availability and accessibility of water has remained a great course for worry all over the world. An account of creation in the Holy Scripture submits that the whole earth was covered with water until God gave his command that separated the water from the dry land.(Gen.1:1-2) Little wonders that the availability of this natural resource does not guarantee its accessibility and purity. Statistics reveals an uneven distribution of natural water. While some colonies, states, communities and villages are covered by seas, rivers, lakes, streams, springs waterfalls, some are desert lands. This scenario is true of Nigerian nation. While most Eastern and Southern States

are covered with water, North East Nigeria is more or less a desert area. Uneven distribution of water by nature generates the first problem of mankind. The second problem is the problem of purity of water itself. Only a small quantity of water is good for human consumption. Indeed, fresh water is one of the scarcest natural resources. One can only imagine a life without water. Civilization, industrialization and other activities of man often increase environmental pollution. Major environmental pollution such as gas flaring and industrial waste contaminate water thereby increasing its acidity and toxicity. Many writers including Eco critics, Eco dramatists have been upset by these unhealthy attitudes towards human environment. Greg Mbajiorgu, a Theatre director, critics and poet has written extensively on Water and other water related issues in his collection of poetry title *Water Testaments: An Anthology of Poems on Water and other Water-related issues* and his dramatic text, *Wota na Wota* illustrating importance of water and major hindrances in conservation of water. He painstakingly stresses cardinal point of water in aquatics and terrestrial habitats.

WATER AND SUSTAINABILITY OF LIFE

It is believed that Water is the main constituent of human body consisting between 70%-50%. Even various organs and parts of human body contain certain percentage of water. Brain for instance has 75%, blood 83%, heart 79%, Bones 22%, Liver 86%, Muscles 75% and Kidney, 83%. (See www.drinkingwaterforhealth.com/importance-of-drinking-water.html) The above facts are clear indications of usefulness of water to human being, hence the clamour for availability of pure water for consumption. There are so many health benefits to drinking water. Scientifically, it has been proved that water aid digestion and drinking pure water relieves stress and tension in the brain. It reduces anxiety and sharpens our mental functions. Above all, water sustains the body many vital chemical reactions and maintains correct body functions. Water also carries waste materials away from the body cells and regulates body temperature. ([www.europeanhydrationinstitute.org/hydration.htm/?Gclid=CFQf3god\(MHAA\)](http://www.europeanhydrationinstitute.org/hydration.htm/?Gclid=CFQf3god(MHAA))).

All through the ages singers, poets, writers, etc have eulogized water as agent of life. Fela Anikilapo Kute in one of his albums sings “water no get enemy”. Indeed, water is the greatest friend of all. In traditional Igbo society for instance, water is a supplement for food. Its presence indicates plentitude, fullness and contentment. Sources of water in traditional society are streams, lakes, springs, waterfalls. These sources in many communities are sacrosanct. The women in particular take special care of community sources of water. Some days are set aside in which all married women embark on water sanitation exercise. These exercises include cleaning and cutting grasses along the bush paths to the streams as well as cleaning the water of all rubbish and debris.

Streams, springs, falls, lakes are also believed to possess healing power in many culture. As a child, my parents told me how a lake in my community called “Mgborogwu Nwadibe” i.e. “root that heals” transpose into what for want of appropriate words I will call “Aqua-Rapha” meaning

“healing water”. Pregnant mothers drank it, and were healed of miscarriages. Barren women drank it and became pregnant mothers. People suffering from all kinds of diseases, such as measles, yam; malaria etc drank Mgborogwu lake and got healed. Perhaps, it is an Igbo folk story that vividly illustrates and substantiates the authenticity of Igbo philosophy on potency of water as a healing substance. Water indeed possesses therapeutic power. The popular folklore was often told on how a wicked co-wife directed her rival’s child to “cook” her sibling. The mother of the cooked child returned from the market and discovered that her son is cooked. She took the child to a stream called “Mmiri-Oma” for immediate intervention. The folklore song goes like this

Mmiri-oma lee nwa m	Refrain:Zemirize!
Mmiri-oma lee nwa m	Refrain: Zemirize!
Ozi m ziri nwunye dim zie nwa m	Zemirize!
Ya ghuo ukpa,	zemirize!
O ghuo nwa,	zemirize!
Eji m ogu,	zemirize!
Eji m ofo,	zemirize!
Le nwa m	zemirize!

Translation

Mmiri-oma see my child	Refrain -	Zemirize!
Mmiri-oma see my child		Zemirize!
I asked my co-wife to deliver a message to my daughter –		Zemirize!
That she should boil walnut		zemirize!
But she boiled my son		zemirize!
My hands are clean		zemirize!
And I want justice		zemirize!

The story had it that as she moved from “Mmiri-oma” to “Mmiri-nta”, her child was fully restored and remolded back to a living entity. Water indeed possesses therapeutic power. This story agrees with various scriptural accounts establishing this therapeutic nature of water. In the Holy Bible, we are exposed to many miraculous healings associated with water. At the pool of Besidia, the sick waited for ages to get healing from the pool. There, Jesus healed a paralytic who spent thirty-six years waiting (John 5:1-9). Second Kings (5:1-27) also recorded the story of a military officer, Naaman the leper who got healed after dipping his body seven times in River Jordan at the instruction of Elijah the prophet. Ola Rotimi, in his play *Hopes of the Living Dead* philosophically alludes to this event when he says

CC Now Naaman, Captain of the host of the king of Syria was a
a great man with his master and honourable (p.11)

Interestingly, Jesus Christ the Messiah at the wedding at Cana in Gallilee performed the miracle of turning water into wine. This feat was performed not only to restore “plentitude” at the

moment of “scarcity”, but also to “heal the psychological trauma of the host” and to “purge the heart” of the guests and other beneficiaries (John 2:1-12) In our days, water continues to heal people of different diseases. There are countless claims of healing miracles, received by pilgrims who visited River Jordan in Israel, where Jesus was baptized. Here in Nigeria, Awhum, a small community at the suburb of Enugu in Enugu State has become a pilgrimage centre on an account of countless miracles associated with Awhum waterfall. The waterfall is an enclosure within Benedictine Monastery run by the Monks of St. Benedict. Recently, healing efficacy of water is made manifest in a small village in Enugu State. The healing spring surges out from a cave where Hausa cattle rearers used to rest after grazing their cattle. Many pilgrimages claimed they got healed of different ailments while bathing in the pool. Water is life.

Plants, grow because it rains. They also grow because they receive adequate water supply through irrigation in the field. Most animal protein such as fish, crayfish, and periwinkles are derived from the seas and rivers. Besides, many raw materials are deposited along the sea shore. Gold and diamond are good examples. Sandy soil are in high deposit in rivers and seas, woods used in building and other construction works are preserved in the water. Similarly, rivers, seas, lakes, and waterfalls are tourist attraction and centres for relaxation and amusement in many cultures of the world.

In many Nigerian cultures, water serves as kola for visitors. Danfulani provides evidence that water is the best gift offered to visitors by Mupum people of Plateau State. Names like Na'am Dafaw or Nafwan are common names of people: named after water (See Umar .H. D. Danfulani 2008:37).

For the Jewish people, water is a symbolic ritual of “purification” and “cleansing”. This is strictly in bedded in the custom of washing of the “feet and hands” whenever they are back from work. This culture is imported into Christendom especially in the Roman Catholic rites of baptism and in some aspects of Eucharistic celebration. Likewise, Muslims all over the world expressed this symbolic relation of cleansing and purification of the body and soul using water. Interestingly, most poets address water in religious terms conjuring images of purification, sanctification, power, and doom. Ecodramatics like Greg Mbajiorgu calls our attention to symbolic significant of water as in the salvavic mission of man. Ngozi Obasi's poem titled “Massa and Meriba” draws a vivid picture of Israelites plight in the desert and a miracle of water performed there with Moses' staff. The incidence that induced the miracle of water in the desert re-emphasised, the need for water and the urgent need for its sustainability.

GREG MABAJIORGU'S WATER TESTAMENTS

Water Testaments is a collection of poems on water and water-related issues. The collection is a compendium of poets and their poetic rendition of eulogies, dirges, lamentation and exhortation on water as a substance that holds the key to nature and all natural problems. Different poets

such as Dike Okoro, Leonard Emuren, Amadihe Ezeugo are nature poets discussing extensively attributes of water and the natural environment. For instance, Amadihe M. Ezeugu's poem, "Water Earth's Cradle" traces the origin of water from the period of creature, when God saw that the earth was void and filled with water. Then God gave the command, "Let the water separate from the land" and it was done. The poet captures this wonderful phenomenon thus:

Water is Almighty God base for creation
The cradle of the universe, the life of all lives (p.90)

The poet further illustrates that water assumes different forms: for instance, scientists demonstrates through experiments that water can change forms. At the boiling point of hundred degree centigrade water can change to vapour and can also change from hot to cold. In the second part of his poems, Ezeugo rolls out the uses of water to man. Water empowers the blood and flushes the system.(Stanza 5:7) This assertion compliments earlier study on the usefulness of water in the body. This assumption also tallies with Godswill Chukwuemeka's submission on his poem "The Messiah" (p. 92). The poet did not only acclaim water as the expected Messiah, the saviour and the redeemer of mankind, he significantly illustrates this:

Blood flows in the veins of the living flesh
But water flows in the arteries of living blood, giving it life to give life

He submits that water empowers the blood and flushes the system. The poet further illustration of the usefulness of water, symbolically compliments the Messianic role.

Water invigorates the oasis,
Empower caravans
A friend of fishermen
In you aquatics and amphibians rejoice

More importantly, water possesses human attributes. Nature poets, crave for union and communion between man and nature. Ideologically, the interaction between man and nature should be total and complete. In the case of water, the poet employs metaphoric images.

Among the nations, you are not just water
You are gods, goddesses and spirits
We remember Adada, Anambra, Imo, Osun,
Inachallo, Nkissi, Ulasi, Benue, Niger, Gongola,
Kaduna, Volta, Zambezi

Lake, river is widely believed to be a home of mermaids often called "mami water" in Igbo ontology. Okaraocha (30) informs us that mermaids live in water and has power of calling people from the land as she wishes. He further claims that mermaid has a building under water,

with corrugated iron sheet roofing. The logic of this statement is to illustrate the fact that water (seas, oceans, rivers, lakes, etc) serves as an abode or habitation of a spiritual being other than man. Mermaid exercises supernatural powers that control water and all other forces of water. This reasoning justifies Femi Osofisan's earlier approach in his drama *No more the Wasted Breed* water spirits believe water is sacrosanct. Consequently, pollution of water amounts to defilement and is a punishable offence. Such is the ordeal of the people in Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*. In total defiance of Elusu the wife of Olokun, the god of water, the people fish in the creeks, pollute the water and thereby angered the sea gods. In return, the god punished them severely for their stubbornness (98) Poets also paint pictures portraying economic values of water. For instance water is a source of supply of animal protein such as fish, crayfish, periwinkles, toad, frogs, crocodiles etc. Again, rivers, seas, lakes, streams have high deposit of sharp sand (sandy soil) used in building construction. Geologists have also discovered deposition of heavy minerals like gold, diamond, crude oil, gypsum, precious stones, iron-ore along river banks.

Despite all these, water brings doom to mankind. Poets have also lamented these destructive nature of water. At this juncture, Ngozi Obasi's "Massa and Meriba" Leonard Emuren's "Desolated Rivers" (12) and Dike Okoro's "Orashi" (108) came to mind. Ngozi Obasi's poem among other things records how rain flood claimed four children of comfort. Ezeokeke in Nanka area of Anambra State. Devastating impact of water in drums all over the world. Whether rain water; flood water or ice water, water represents a terror to mankind because it possesses a strong force that can pull down gigantic buildings and even mountain at range. Many cultures of the world have been washed away from the surface of the earth through water disaster. Tsunami, Hurricane are few examples. In the poem *Orashi* (108) and "Desolated Rivers" (125), the poets bemused water, pollution cause by industrialization. In Nigeria, for instance, activities of multi-national oil companies brought misery and doom to people whose only source of living is water. Water pollution include oil spillage through pipeline, gas flaring, sewage etc. Various researches in Niger Delta areas attest to this fact. Tsaku (2010) G G Darah (2010) Esiaba (1989), Clark (2000) made this submission that over seventy percent of water pollution and environmental pollution in Niger Delta Regions was caused as a results of oil exploration in area. Oil spillage, apart from polluting the atmosphere, destroys aquatic habitats. Millions of Niger Delta people whose sources of income depend largely on fishing are left in abject poverty and misery. Okumagba (2009). Leonard Emuren's "Desolated Rivers" captures this more vividly.

River, belaboured, sullen, rapid Line 2:1
Molested, dejected and draped
To her mate's recalcitrant soul Line 2:2

From the river that is now brown in colour, the poet draws our attention to what he described as "Silver water of Delta's Nun presently in a state of devastation". The mirages of "belaboured", and "raped" is meant to appeal to our emotion on the disgusting state of the water in the area..

These seeming doom befall Delta Rivers on account of external invasion of the area by multi-billion oil companies. As a capitalist oriented project, the companies main target is profit consequently, they exploit the people and leave them miserably poor and dejected.

Again Tanure Ojaide provides the reason for river pollution in his “The Minstrel Comes to A

River”. According to him,

The world’s criminals and transgressors

pissed and pissed barrels of arsenic

into the currents and stripped and stripped the forest

naked of its ever-green suit (24).

Indeed, Niger Delta Rivers have lost their souls. No thanks to the activities of these world criminals. It is in the light of the above misgivings, unmitigated problems and excruciating circumstances of polluted water and polluted environment that we appreciate the pain and suffering of the masses in the face of water scarcity. In this wise, scarcity of water implies non-availability and non-suitability for human consumption.

The problem of water scarcity in turn necessitate search for portable drinking water. The demand for clean water for human consumption is high especially in Nigeria. Conversely, supply of such essential commodity is low. It is on this premise that one appreciates, crisis that often associate with its provision in many areas especially in rural communities. Again such ordeal captured the interest of Greg Mbajorgu and Chike Amakor in their dramatic piece, *Wota na Wota*. Using the method of Development Communication, the dramatists, highlight difficulties associated with provision of clean drinking water in many places. The concept of Theatre for Integrated Development aimed at involving grassroots in development project form the fulcrum on which the drama revolves. Dialogue, the soul of speech communication is effectively introduced to douse tension and resolve conflict between the two warring communities. Following, Brechtian style of dramaturgy, the narrators introduces the play by provoking the audience to think deeply on the action.

As the drama begins with the search for the house of a hydrologist, Engr. Harmen who lives at 2 Bent Lane, the dramatists draws attention to the problem of unemployment in the country. Ikechukwu a young unemployed graduate has just been recommended for a job by Rev. Fr. Ignatius. The drama unfolds to reveal how Ikechukwu’s employment as Public Relations Office save a community water project. A German company, Misereor, a Roman Catholic Development Organisation initiated a water project in Ebenano Community. The community is dominated by Anglican Christian faithful. Mr. Nicholas, the former community Relations Manager is a Roman Catholic adherent. He marginalized the Anglicans in the water project planning and execution. Malicious exclusion of the majority of the indigenes from local workforce and assistant technical staff in the construction of a multi-million naira project create room for enmity and wrangling between the indigenes and faithful of the two Christian denominations. For this obvious reasons, the minority Catholics are accused of giving out a

communal piece of communal land without due consultation to Igwe Okanga or the people of Ebenano. Consequently, Igwe Anachendo of Ekenato, a Catholic, becomes an arch-enemy of his neighbour, Igwe Okanga of Ebenano. With this the bloody conflict that jeopardize the execution of the project begins. The youths of the two communities are at each other's throat. Ebenano youths vandalize installation at the site, forcing the site engineer to abandon the project. The scenario is similar to the war between Umunneora and the people of Okperi in Achebe's Arrow of gods. At the height of the conflict, Harmen, the white Engineer sues for peace. In his speech, he reminds the people that

---It is consideration of your harsh ecological condition that we decided to attract this multi-million naira project to your place. 44

Greg Mbajiorgu's works no doubt prioritizes conservation of natural environment. Water is seen as the "engine house" of human ecology. His efforts are geared towards, preservation and provision of clean water for human consumption and restoration of natural environment. In this wise, both the poems in the anthology and the drama, Wota na Wota propagate this message of water preservation. Thus, as the world population increases, the demand for water also increases. Water is a necessity in every culture, environment or society.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

So far, we have seen that water is a basic necessity of life and that its provision, preservation and conservation is man's greatest challenge. Though water seems to be available everywhere, it is also a scarce commodity when we consider the fact that small quantities are available for human consumption. Water aids food digestion, blood circulation, flushes human system thereby sustains life. As part of abiotic environment, water sources need to be properly preserved in order to sustain human life. Water sites such as waterfalls provide relaxation for tourists and generate income. Despite numerous advantages derived from water, it also poses serious threat to man. Water pollution as a result of oil spillage, gas flaring and other mining activities pose great danger to man and other animals. It is in realization of these facts that ecodramatists call on man to be environmental friendly. Greg Mbajiorgu devoted his poems and drama on the usefulness of water to man, animal and plant. The basic theme revolving on his works centred on the availability and accessibility of water concluding that to celebrate water is to celebrate life.

REFERENCES

- Achebe, Chinua: Arrow of gods. Ibadan: Heinemann Press (1956)
- Chukwuemeka, Godwill. "The Messiah" in Mbajiorgu, Greg (ed) Water Testament Anthology of Poems on Water and Water Related Issues. Enugu: SNAPP Press (2008) 92
- Danfulani, Umar H. D. "Come and Drink Water" Metaphoric Classification of the Degree of Hospitality Among the Mupun in Nigeria" in Dugga, S. Victor (ed) A Window on Africa:

- Changing Cultures and Peoples. A Festschrift in honour of Prof. Eckhard Breitinger (2008) 37-62
- Ezeugu, Amadihe. "Water Earth's Cradle" in Mbajiorgu, Greg (ed) Water Testaments Anthology of Poems on Water and Water Related Issues. Enugu: SNAPP Press (2008) 90-91
- Mbajiorgu, Daniel. "Streams of Death" in Mbajiorgu, Greg (ed) Water Testaments Anthology of Poems on Water and Water Related Issues. Enugu: SNAPP Press (2008) 40-43
- Mbajiorgu, Greg and Aniako Chike. Wota na Wota A development Oriented Drama. Nkpor:SNAPP Press (2006)
- Obasi, Ngozi. "Massa and Meriba" in Mbajiorgu, Greg (ed) Water Testaments Anthology of Poems on Water and Water Related Issues. Enugu: SNAPP Press (2008) 118 – 119
- Okparaocha; John. Mbari: Art and Sacrifice. Ibadan: Daystar Press: 1976
- Okumagba, Paul. "Ethnic Militias and Criminality in Niger Delta" African Research Review: An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal: Ethiopia: Vol. 33 (April; 2009) 315-330.
- Osofisan, Femi. No More the Wasted Breed; in Morontudun and Other Plays. Ibadan: Longman 1982
- www.drinkingwater=for-health.com/importance-of-drinking-water.html
- [www.europeanhydrationinstitute.org/hydration.html?gclid=CFqZf3god\(MHM\)](http://www.europeanhydrationinstitute.org/hydration.html?gclid=CFqZf3god(MHM))