

ECO COSMOPOLITANISM AND REFUSE SURFING: LOCATING THE LAGOS EXPERIENCE THROUGH SOME SELECTED POEMS

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Abstract

Refuse or waste management has become a major social problem besetting many urban and cosmopolitan cities especially in developing countries. Environmental pollution arising from poor refuse production, disposal and management in Lagos as in many urban centres of the world has become a veritable source of ecological deterioration threatening human and urban lives. The open dumping and refuse incineration approach has turned Lagos into a behemoth site of refuse thus making waste littering a permanent landmark feature of the state as wastes are spotted virtually everywhere in the cosmopolitan. Poor refuse disposal endangers biotic and abiotic relations thus engendering and festering germs and diseases communicable in all forms of human contacts i.e. in homes, buses, planes, markets, and offices among others. The Lagos environment seems so largely polluted that bacteria and viruses can be easily contracted. Yet this problem is a global one as the Planet Earth has become an interwoven complex set of eco systems where refuse production and management has spiraling effects on the world global belonging. For instance polluted air can move across territories in the same vein people transmit germs and diseases across the globe. Eco-cosmopolitanism envisions that human and nonhuman kinds are part of the planetary 'imagined communities' yet giving vent to 'glocalisation' and allegiance to national communities. While some Lagosians seem to have become attached and tied to the 'naturalness' of Lagos putrefaction, can we say the same of the many visitors who come into Lagos daily? Lagos as a cosmopolitan shares its impurities with other world citizens and cities. This paper therefore argues that the solution to the refuse management should be a shared one among the planetary communities of the world.

Keywords: refuse, environmental pollution, germs, Lagos, biotic, abiotic, eco - cosmopolitanism

INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation though a product of development has become a major challenge in contemporary times. It is characterized by a movement from rural settlements to urban creations. Urbanisation is circumscribed by increased population and high industrialization and it is a major factor in the extent and density of an urban site. It must be noted that the world is largely being urbanized in recent times especially in Africa and Asia that are largely characterized by low and middle income societies. Poston and Bouvier (2010, 307) define urbanization as 'the increasing share of population living in urban areas'. A major attraction in urbanization is economic growth which industrialization seems to fuel. People migrate to the urban areas in search of jobs and economic empowerments. Yet, ironically, urbanization in itself breeds poverty, crime, pollution and class segmentation. For instance on one hand, the huge population density and high cost of living in cities force the poor to live in peripheral areas of the cities. They therefore create slums where they are enmeshed and

enveloped in inadequate public infrastructures, grim impurities and putridity among others. On the other hand, the rich creates for themselves, an organised environment conducive for human habitation and ensuring security and necessary infrastructures.

The ghettos where the poor are forced to live subject them to huge vulnerability and hazards which according to World Migration Report 2015 may be both environmental and socioeconomic. The truth however is that the poor environmentalism that pervades these blighted areas has a way of affecting the whole city and all its inhabitants. The rich source their domestic workers from these low, decadent and dirty areas, these people therefore could easily serve as conduit pipes for the transmission of germs, viruses and such other impurities that they may have contacted from their dirty environment into the exotic cars of the rich, their seemingly safe homes, children, kitchen and so on. Also, the market can serve as a distribution point for these germs and viruses since most of the sellers in the market originate from these slums and dirty environments. Better still, industrial waste pollution may not be able to distinguish between the rich, the poor or visitors. Similarly the stench from unattended refuse heap which often perfume the whole air over the city for all inhabitants to inhale could cause majors harms to the health of the people and the environment. The point here is that the issue of environment is for all to attend to lest it may consume all. Urbanization comes with a myriad of challenges and solving some of these has becoming herculean to modern city managers. Some of these challenges include over population, environmental pollution, overburdened resources, inadequate housing, crime and social alienation among others.

Lagos has a land area of 1, 171 km² and is on an elevation of 41m. It is the largest and most populous city in Nigeria. The population of Lagos is between 17 and 21 million. According to Abiodun 'Lagos as, the premier metropolis in Nigeria has experienced a much faster growth rate than any other urban centre in Nigeria (341) Lagos was the capital city of Nigeria for many years and this helped to facilitate greater and modern infrastructural facilities in the city. The city obviously a cosmopolitan is a melting port of different ethnic groups, tribes and nationals. Lagos is surrounded by water and her flourishing port attracts her to many industries and businesses and indeed Lagos is a major commercial hub of the West African Sub region and indeed the world. Many nationalities troop in and out of Lagos on a daily basis for varied business transaction. Lagos is also a wonderful entertainment spot where talents in the entertainment industry from around the world come to showcase their art.

Associated with the astounding growth of Lagos in recent times are some challenges that the cosmopolitan city has come to face like many cities in the world such as pollution, overcrowding and traffic jam. Obono writes that 'the inherent contradictions of Lagos are the products of the tremendous social and cultural contestations underlying its existence and status as mega slum and mage city in that order' (32). Lagos indeed is a city of oxymoron combining sophistication and decadence. Yet it is a city of limitless opportunities. For the different categories of residents of the city, the seeming unstructuredness of Lagos is part of the beauty of the Lagos experience which is incomparable to that of any city in the world.

Though a few works has been done on the social contradictions of Lagos, this work focuses on the ecological problems especially the environmental pollution that the mega city has come to represent and the attendant challenges that the problem creates. Though the city is known as the state of aquatic splendor, it is also notorious for her squalour. The environmental pollution of Lagos stems from many sources viz a viz increasing industrialization, sea rise, flooding, overpopulation, inadequacies of government to manage the heaps of putrefying wastes both industrial and domestic that dot every inch of the entire Lagos landscape. Also disturbing is the fetid drainages that seem coiffured into the architect of the city and upon which varied human transactions including food items are sold and eaten. It is not surprising therefore that this reality has gained representation in fictional and non-fictional works on Lagos. Andreas Thorpe quoted in Akingbe and Akwen says 'the metaphysics of city as text, or comingling of the textual and the real, is both ubiquitous and particularly associated with modern urban subject' (2019, 2).

Many humans come in contact with Lagos dirt on a daily basis. These include the locals and different nationals some of who live or visit the city for varied reasons. Indeed many people live, visit and trade in Lagos.

ECO-COSMOPOLITANISM

Eco cosmopolitanism is an attempt to view ecocriticism from the lens of globalisation. Globalisation scholars are found in many disciplines and are wont to domesticate the concept of globalisation in all areas of scholarship. Ursula Heise in Connell and Marsh Ed says eco-cosmopolitanism 'is an attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds' (167). Ursula argues that 'while cultural mechanisms of which allegiance to national communities is

generated, legitimated and maintained have been studied in depth, ecocriticism has only begun to explore the cultural means by which ties to the natural world are produced and perpetuated, and how the perception of such ties fosters or impedes regional, national and transnational forms of identification'(167). She argues that such attachment to place is neither natural nor spontaneous yet 'allegiances to larger entities – modern society, the nation-state – have to be created by complex and artificial means'(167). She further maintains that analyses of nation- based forms of identity have shown that 'individuals in certain cultural contexts readily identify themselves as belonging to a very large scale an abstract entities of which they have only partial personal experience, a kind of commitment that place-oriented environmentalist tend to consider highly artificial and arbitrary'(167). She suggests that attachment to a place is not natural but merely a function of cultural commitments and habits. She argued that calling nation abstract would be a wrong notion, since culture is the same yardstick to measure national belonging.

The object of eco-cosmopolitan therefore, according to her. 'would be to go beyond the aforementioned 'ethic of proximity' so as to investigate by what means individuals or groups in specific cultural contexts have succeeded in envisioning themselves in similarly concrete fashion as part of the global biosphere, or by what means they might be enabled to do so... such a perspective needs to be attentive to the political frameworks in which communities begin to see themselves as part of a planetary community...'(167). The objective that eco-cosmopolitanism seeks to achieve obviously is derived from the concept of globalisation.

Eco-cosmopolitanism fashions out an approach that values the abstract and the highly mediated kinds of knowledge and experience that supports biospheric connectedness. McKenzie Wark examines the enormous role that computer modelling and simulations would play in the scientific display of global ecological processes. He argues that ' it is only by becoming more abstract, more estranged from nature that I can make the cultural leap to thinking its fragile totality'(117). He believes that through computer mediation an ecological problem in any part of the globe can be linked to how it would affect other parts of the world. Ursula quoted in Connell and Marsh maintains that 'the task of ecocriticism with a cosmopolitan perspective is to develop an understanding and critique of these mechanisms as they play themselves out in different contexts so as to create a variety of ecological imaginations of the global'(168). An eco-cosmopolitan analysis would therefore look at the work of literature from the cosmopolitan or global view of the connectedness of the whole world as a planetary community where what affects one affects all. It is an attempt to foster global ecological belonging on individuals and groups that make up the world. This, according to Ursula quoted in Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh, would ensure that

existing ideas and ideologies of collectivity and totality, some with very long cultural traditions, are deployed in the attempt to envision global ecological belonging. An awareness of such forms and their cultural background and implications is part and parcel of an environmentally oriented cosmopolitanism that not only seeks to explore how global systems shape local forms of inhabitation but also is aware of how this exploration itself is framed by culturally specific assumptions.(168)

The plausibility of the global world along a planetary paradigm is however suspect based on a number of questions begging to be answered. Would the resources derived from the global capitalism that globalisation promotes be shared on that bases? Why would some so called industrialised countries plunder the resources of other nations only for their own benefits and to the environmental catastrophes of other nations? The despoliation of the Niger Delta is a classic example of this mode of thinking. Has the capitalist world that seems to be grossing home wealth from the oil exploration of the region been part of the solution to the problems there? Is the view of eco-cosmopolitanism not an attempt to rationalize the unending plundering of the resources of the world especially the developing and the less developed countries?

Eco-cosmopolitanism fails to recognise the sanctity of place attachment to humans. It allows for the arbitrary and artificial pursuance of wealth to dislocate the 'naturalness' of place to humans. Place, aside being a cultural barometer of behaviour, serves as a patent platform of driving worldview and outlook. It is thus too fundamental to human psychology to be artificially credence as eco-cosmopolitanism is wont to trivialise.

It is instructive to note that modern cities celebrate artificiality and to that extent are anti people and anti-nature. Only the rich enjoy the city space while the poor are made to serve them perpetually in hope that they too would be compensated somewhere in the future. The glitz and glammour of the cities sometimes are a façade and truly the city is soaked in immorality, obscenities, crimes, innumerable antisocial behaviors and malaise Tade Ipadeola in 'Redivivus' argues for a better society for humans and nature. He portrays the artificiality of the city space and projects its anti-people posturing. These he does by asking a series of questions which obviously are rhetorical. These rhetorical questions task the intellectual acumen of the

reader especially over the issues that these posers raise. The poet writes:

Who would raise the palm-lined cities
Erase the formless squalid sprawls?
Who would plant the people's palaces
At appointed spaces and times?
Yes who would house the nobles
In plain stoneworks and clay?
Who would free the kings to walk
Their streets with humble men? (1-8)

The poet writes about the artificiality of what cities have become. In the poem, the poet mocks human attitude to nature. This he does by asking questions which obviously are out to deride how humans have decided to treat nature. He laments a situation whereby nobody seems ready to stand for nature. He asks about who would 'raise palm-lined cities, about who would address the issue of slums in the cities. He even derides the rulers of not being able to stay in stoneworks and clay making reference to what Africans have become in not being able to develop things of their own but would rather use foreign materials. This practice has been doing irreparable harm to the economies of many African countries and until this is reversed many African countries may find it difficult to do well economically. But the truth is that answers to these questions if sincerely they were to be answered would hallmark a better society for the Nigeria and indeed the African environment. Currently, the Nigerian environment especially the cities are ridden with ghettos, squalor, putrid shanties and slums. Coping with city challenges has posed a major difficulty to many Nigerian governments. Indeed the failure to effectively handle city environment has a negative effect on the quality of the environment and life in the cities. Most Nigerian cities are bifurcated along two milieus namely the area for the rich and the area for the downtrodden. While the area occupied by the rich may be cleaner, the area occupied by the poor is often dirty, disordered and usually a haven for criminals.

Ipadeola further shows his passion for a nature friendly society when he asks to be directed to the individual who responds to the earth better. He says:

Point me to the house of the man
That makes earth yield to reason
And the skies to yield romance
Point me to the house of the man I seek
That fills the trees with seranades – (9-13)

Ipadeola uses poetry here to seek a change in people's attitude towards nature. He longs for a people who would begin to accommodate nature and treat the earth right in their daily activities, people who would respect the trees by planting more of them and tending them right. Employing a participatory approach, the poet invites the reader into the discussion. This is to inculcate the right attitude to nature in them. Treating nature right, according to Ipadeola is having 'the skies to yield romance' (11). This is when the world would be in harmony with nature. The poet further envisions what the cities should look like:

Our cities of dream will have their poets
Our cities of dream will throb,
Our cities of dream will civilize
They'll not corrupt our youth... (14-17)

In truth, the cities have become environmental eye sores and major corrupt centres for the youths. Many youths in the cities have the tendency of flowing with corrupt practices and patterns of the cities. Some of the ills and decadence that youths may fall into in the cities include armed robbery, prostitution, thuggery, cultism, drug and alcohol addiction. All these combined often make the city environment a dangerous one and youths can easily be influenced into these social malaise. When cities turn out well, youths also will be more responsible and would cultivate good manners. The city therefore goes beyond the physical dirt, it is also a kind of death at the subliminal level corrupting the youths in varied ways.

While Tade Ipadeola looks at the city generally, Odia Ofeimun describes Lagos as 'big, boisterous, chaotic, with busy-body propensities in full play, Lagos has always been our all-comers city' (2010, xxii). He further in 'Lagoon', one of the poems in *Lagos of the Poets* relates his Lagos experience and his opinion about the city. He writes

I let the lagoon speak for my memory
though offended by water hyacinth
waste and nightsoil...

The portrayal of Lagos here reveals immediately the dirty nature of the city and how the lagoon her naturally endowed beauty becomes a conveyor of disposing waste. This confirms that Lagos on land and on water is dirty. How does one explain heaping waste and defecations in the lagoon yet the lagoon also serve as means of transportation? Aside from the stench that continuously ooze from the lagoon which obviously serves as environmental hazard to the neighbourhood, it is a major pollutant to marine life. Also in a city where potable water is hard to come by, the lagoon also serves as a source of water for domestic use. The health hazard that goes with this can only be imagined. The poem also document one of the environmental challenges confronting Lagos. The poet writes

My lagoon speaks!
gateway and storehouse, never dry,
in regatta floats hauling epic seasons
in floods that take over
the lordly garbage of our alleys
after the rains
have registered their pity.

Lagos is a city with huge refuse management problems. The ever increasing population of Lagos and the poor environmental disposition of some residents have made refuse management a hazardous one. Refuse litters everywhere in heaps and mounds across the city and have almost become a permanent feature of the city. Also many residents turn their refuse into water channels, and drainages for disposal by rain. This often leads to blockage or hindrances in the water channels thus preventing the easy flow of water. A major consequence of this is flood which often causes the destruction of lives and property. It also creates a lot of inconvenience for the dwellers of the city who spend hours trying to maneuver the flood to get to work. In this wise a number of productive hours are wasted in traffic sometimes caused by flood leading to low productivity. Dennis Osadebey agrees that Lagos is a city of slum. Osadebey in his *Lagos* describes the city as / O town of slums and seat of deafening noise/. This representation of Lagos reminds one of the filthiness and the ceaseless environmental pollution that the city is encased. The noise pollution is easily noticeable from commuters who indulge in shouting the direction to which their buses are headed. A popular one is the deafening and nauseating shouts of 'Oshodi O! Oshodi O!! Oshodi O !!!' by bus conductors who according to Austyn Njoku in ' Our Island use 'sharp thrilled tone's. Oshodi is a popular area, an interchange and an intersection from where other parts of the city are easily accessed. Coupled with this kind of noise is the thunderous and ear-piercing noise caused by music and video disc sellers as a way to advertise their market. Most bus stops in Lagos are heralded and characterized by this kind of noise. Akingbe and Akwen (2019) assert that 'the noise pollution reinforces a negative distraction that marks Lagos as a city trapped in the throes of confusion'. Also, Austyn Njoku writing about the chaos of the city in his *Lagos Island* says that "/ They hoot they shout.../ How I hate this jazz (LOP 2010, 69)

In a similar vein Rashidah Ismaili in 'Lagos' further strengthen the fact that the city is ridden in squalour. The poet personifies Lagos and addresses her as human. She writes:

Lagos you are dirty
Your sand is soiled
Your fruits pithy.

This portrayal is a further testimony to the general perception of Lagos as a dirty city and a reflection of how these have become the thematic concerns of some literary works about Lagos. The portrayal of Lagos as a soiled sand may be the blacky, smelly and murky water in which most Lagos land is saturated especially in

Lagos Island otherwise called Eko. The other part of the city is Lagos mainland. These two are the geographical classification of Lagos. It is instructive to note that most Lagos land is littoral.

CONCLUSION

Eco-cosmopolitanism relates the nexus between culture and ecological frameworks in such a manner as to envision individuals and groups as belonging to same planetary community. This completely aided by globalisation and techno-science indeed makes the world really a planetary community of ecological processes. And since the essence of eco-cosmopolitanism is to show the interconnectedness of the global ecological processes, it thus becomes wondrous that while certain societies plough the gains and dividends of such interconnectedness, they live the host communities with their challenges. The object of a global, ecological planetary community should afford the host communities the helping hand to resolve ecological issues battling them especially since such issues could have a way of making the rounds in the global village. The point being made here is that the rest of the world can assist Lagos overcome the putrescent and such other ecological challenges that the city may be facing. In the event of vacillation or the downgrading of such problem as a local affair, such ecological problems may escalate into a global affectation where other world citizens may become victims. It is therefore important for the rest of the world to intervene in the waste management of Lagos before it degenerates into a global crisis.

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