



Spiritual rejuvenation: Literature as solution to gas flaring in Nigeria

Chinedu Ogoke

Department of English and Communication Studies, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa, Nigeria

Abstract

There is psychological trauma that is associated with being conscious of living in a district where there are open fires known as gas flaring. In Bayelsa state, the people with the assignment to regulate or check this flaring of gas are neglectful of their duty. Inhabitants around the place may be unaware that it is a problem. The presence of gas flares robs life of its fun. This also applies to the poet or creative writer who loses his habitat. Gas flaring is accompanied by problems like pollution of the environment and the emissions causing various health hazards. What is a way of life in Nigeria has been put under control in various countries of the world, Russia, for instance, puts in full use its gas. Until recently, most of Western Europe purchased their gas from Russia. Time has come for Nigeria to really channel the gas into commercial and domestic uses, to make the bushes cleaner. This write up reveals how the models of the Romantics can be adopted in combating environmental degradation. It is aimed to compel the authorities and communities around the gas flaring sites to imagine the enormous loss of wealth as well as the *environmental* damage and onslaught on literary creativity that gas flaring causes. The research is based on observations made by this author. Materials were obtained from books, journal articles and newspaper publications.

Keywords: Gas flaring, fire colonial, romantics, poetry, writer

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to ascertain the quality life of individuals in communities that are exposed to gas flaring as well as the obligations of the state and writers alike in such circumstances. The work seeks improvement in the lives of the affected people by demanding outright discontinuation of the practice of gas flaring. The destructive nature of gas flaring has never been in doubt. The people are drowned in quite disturbing noise from gas flares. Black dust comes down on houses, clothes and streams. Gas flaring is responsible for numerous health issues prevalent in those communities, placing the people in awkward psychological state. Oil companies and the Nigerian government, with their coffers overflowing with wealth generated from these operations, frustrate attempts to look for remedies for the problems. The oil concerns and the government prefer exerting force with arms to other measures, and this attitude usually leaves the communities bleeding or fractured. The judiciary is an extended arm of this deplorable assault on the people. The government and their partners are averse to compensation to the people. Overall, revolutionary tactics are required. One strategy that has been identified in this regard, but which has always been applied, is the literary effort to combat the menace. It would mean subjecting the actors to intense scrutiny in written enquiries. It is a compelling responsibility of writers, as the environment is a major source of inspiration for creative writing (Elehinde 142-146).

Gas flaring is an attribute of the Niger Delta region. Ironically, it is wealth being squandered continuously. It is worrisome that it has been going on for decades. Gas flaring causes numerous health hazards. Plants shed their leaves prematurely while pregnancies fail. Various pregnancy-related problems happen partly as a result of hormonal changes in women. Many other strange illnesses are reported. Among the high-profile cases is cancer. Flaring of gas causes the people discomfort with the people never enjoying the pleasures of night time. Plants and animals are

not spared. Carbon dioxide and related gases drift far and wide from the gas flare locations, contributing to climate problems globally. When carbon dioxide and other gases accumulate in the atmosphere for a considerable length of time, they build up to make the earth hotter. It comes with accompanying problems like rise in ocean levels, thawing of ice glaciers and seasonal changes. There are also issues like deforestation, crop failures and extinction of numerous plants and animals. This is why some commentators even advocate for humane treatment of insects.

One of the things a first-time Nigerian traveler to the industrialized countries discovers is unceasing power supply. Even as the African is amazed, a country like Germany has thought about and is set to close all its nuclear plants, who supply power. Interestingly, this is a time a country like Nigeria has sent experts to visit the site of its planned nuclear program for electricity generation. Solar and wind-powered electricity have their own share of power generation, even as they happen at a very small scale. Germany is partly guided by the nuclear disasters in Chernobyl and Japan, as well as the challenges of managing her own nuclear program. The country is even overwhelmed by domestic criticism, especially the standoff with anti-nuclear energy activists. Nuclear leaks in Germany have been under reported. The nuclear waste is first taken to France for processing and degradation, before it finds its way back to Germany, where it is lowered deep into the earth. It takes hundreds of years for it to lose its radiation and to pass as harmless. Environmentalists dramatize their willingness to be run over by the snail-speed-moving trains conveying the nuclear waste back from France, by tying themselves onto the rails. Police then do what is necessary; which is to clear the paths, with minimal harm to the activists. A few months later, another round of fight starts. It helps the rising profile of the Green Party or Die Grune (Wing, Zhizhin). These types of experiences are unknown in Nigeria or in Otuoke, for instance.

As the rural areas undergo transformation and become urbanized, they lose their purity. Urbanization opens them to all kinds of harmful wastes. It becomes necessary to purge these places of these negative features. Slime and sludge are known to flourish in the urban slums. It can be pointed out that man does not spare himself. Man actually must refrain from depriving other creatures the full enjoyment of the earth and its resources. Unlike in Nigeria, Western writers have not abandoned their responsibilities to the environment. This is why the states are firm in outlawing practices like gas flaring.

Gas flaring

The Niger Delta region where gas is flared is known for its oil deposit. It is because of this region that Nigeria is a member of the elitist Oil Producing and Exporting Countries (OPEC). The main oil-producing states in Nigeria are Anambra, Ondo, Imo, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Cross Rivers and Abia states. Bayelsa state is one that was detached from Rivers state. Yenagoa, the capital of Bayelsa state would have been therefore another city in Rivers state, whose capital is Port Harcourt. Yenagoa and Port Harcourt are so close that they do not have notable cities between them on the East-West expressway. During journeys between the two states the areas of demarcation between them are hardly visible, making flares at night times appear continuous. Oil spillage in the region has over the years gained international attention. Next to oil spillage in the environmental oil and gas discourse is gas flaring. As crude oil is conveyed from the earth, various hydrocarbons known as gases are discharged. There is a chance of finding various uses both commercial and domestic. But the most appealing option is burning it off or letting it out, even though the oil companies can make available containers to put them in (Ochuko 21).

According to Indriani, "[f]lare refers to an arrangement of piping and a burner to dispose of surplus combustible vapour [...]." He continues, saying, "The gas flare is located a lot of times in the surrounding area of a gasoline plant refinery, or production well (Indriana)." They are propped on raised platforms sky high like silos, with cone-shaped fire puffing upwards. It also results from rupture of pipelines. Indriana, quoting the World Bank, states that in the year 2000 worldwide 108 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas flaring was recorded. He goes on to give further figures, saying that Indonesia and other nations like Nigeria, Russia, Algeria and Angola flare gases. He explains the components of the types of gasses dispensed. According to him, "[t]he amount of GHG emissions depends on gas production, its composition, and the levels of management of the process." Management skills, he avers, are determined by the composition of the flow stream, gas flow rate and wind velocity. The remnant is released as methane, "which has a higher greenhouse intensity" (Indriana). Indriana points out that calculations of management ability dangles between 20% and 99%. This is why this calculation is unreliable in ascertaining how much harm gas flaring does to the environment. Gases from different locations are diverse. Statistics drawn from one will not fit another. This is why it is difficult to identify the effect of each as well as the collective effect on the environment. "In general," Aktar, *et al.* state, "gas flaring led to higher heavy metals, lower microbial activity and degraded soil properties, emphasizing environmental concerns (2-5)." In addition, its

"emission of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄) is a factor of global warming and climate change." Indriana adds that in "2002, 199 to 262 million tons of CO₂ emissions resulted from gas flaring in the world, i.e. 3% of the total emissions." There is absence of sufficient worldwide measuring apparatus for calculating the flaring of gas. It means that the degree of damage gas flaring causes to the environment is underestimated. The gasses can be channeled to other needs. One clear example is power generation, "which is neglected. It is not an environmentally friendly act, just as it is a waste of resources (Mafimisebi.2224-2231)." Quoting Arthenius, Ochuko explains that greenhouse gasses - which include carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane, water vapor, and certain industrial chemicals such as chlorofluorocarbon—are transparent to sunlight but selectively absorb the infrared radiation through which the earth returns energy to space. (31)

Solutions

To put an end to the misery, there are different solutions that can be applied. Among these are technical and political solutions as well as literary solutions. Political solution refers to pronouncements, use and deployment of state resources or the resources of organizations and some persons to eradicate or minimize gas flaring. The technical solution concerns the execution of these plans. There is also the literary approach. This literary approach takes different forms. It can be viewed through the convictions of the Romantics in British and, later, the early American literary movements. There is also the radical schemes of the Naturphilosophie model. One other pattern is the ecomimetic form or what is known as the Deleuzian framework, whereby coexistence between humans and non-humans is pursued as a goal. These three forms are discussed below, beginning with the political and technical type.

Various bodies make serious contributions to the gas flaring debate one of them is The International Energy Agency (EIA). The EIA, Oghifo says, reported in 2004 that if warnings on gas flaring continue to be ignored, the increase yearly will be between 1999 and 2020 jump by 60%. There are policies and steps being taken to bring it down to tolerable levels. This is what carbon tax activated by some countries is supposed to do. The law in Nigeria is so weak that offenders can do as they choose. Norway, in spite of strong indications of compliance to existing legislation, imposed the tax on oil companies. Some observers believe it will be curtailed if policies taken will be beneficial to everybody, corporations, and individuals; at least if markets and sources of revenue will be found internationally and locally for the gasses (30).

Experts started taking notice when it was first observed by Joseph Fourier in 1824. It became more likely a problem following experiments conducted by John Tyndall in 1885. There was dragging of feet until the world decided it must be tackled if mankind will be saved. This led to the Kyoto meeting where various questions were presented and resolutions taken. The world therefore showed the assembly how committed they are in dealing with climate change. It gave birth to the Kyoto Protocol. Oil companies in Nigeria have not attended to the issue as is the attitude elsewhere (Ochuko 30-40).

Nigeria is among the countries where the least results have been recorded, with 40% of the gas burnt off. This is “about 2.5 Billion standard cubic feet per day” (Ochuko 40). The profile of Russia in European circles has grown over the years. This is because of the role Russia played in homes across Europe, with Russia being European Union’s major gas supplier (Bella). Gas flare is also known as stack. Gas can be found in oil and gas wells, rigs, refineries, chemical plants, natural gas plants, and landfills. Ochuko reveals how “[g]as is released via pressure relief valves when needed to ease the strain on equipment. This protects gas processing equipment from being over pressurized” (34). The British colonial government in Nigeria under whom prospecting for oil started, did not show interest in curbing gas flaring. Gas flaring was brought to the attention of the government, with the secretary of state to the colonies Lord Homes saying that could happen if there were markets for the gasses as well as storage facilities like “pipelines and storage tanks (34).” Shell explains its 2009 good record in scaling down gas flaring, saying it came short of its goals as a result of security concerns in the oil-producing region. The issue of gas flaring got all the way to the Nigerian House of Representatives where, in January 2010, after deliberations, a date was fixed to stop gas flaring. That date, 31st December 2010, has come and gone and no cheering news has been heard. Hardly will record keepers remember how many deadlines have been set. With Shell being responsible for 7.7 million tonnes of emissions in 2008 and still active lifting oil one will understand government’s laxity on the issue. Other producers include ExxonMobil and Chevron, Total and Agip. In 2007, Shell promised that before 2009 it would deactivate any facility found incapable of covering the cost of or managing satisfactorily the gas in its threshold. Shell says the path to eliminating gas flaring is a most expensive one (Ochuko 36-37). This would be difficult to ascertain in the Otuoke conditions.

The romantic models as solution to environmental degradation

A writer wants to do the writing business in a clean environment, one devoid of gas flaring. Writers have always glorified nature. This is what David Thoreau tried to do, as depicted in his book *Walden* and his essay “Civil Disobedience.” His sermons were about securing a friendly environment while accomplishing scientific feats. We have a duty to perform for nature. Man needs solitude sometimes. That was why Thoreau used to take leisurely strolls through the forests of Massachusetts. He desired the closeness of nature and what natures bore. He also loved the controlling influence of nature in its distinct existence. The forests should be delightful within as they are from outside. Nature denotes moral harmony. The symphony of birds singing indicates if a place can be suitable for poetic exercise. The writer should engage in retreats in a boat or simply in a secure enclosure. Thoreau did that, which spanned a period of two years, from 1945 to 1947. The place had the effect of a home and Thoreau was delighted to enjoy the sociability associated with the homestead, like hosting friends and relations in the same place. Profound writing took place there. In addition to deep reflections, he engaged in literary activities and farming in the process (Thoreau, Walls 2-3). The measure questions consumerism and capitalist greed and also a disapproval of materialism. Acquisitions. It sows the seeds for radical observations. It leads to resistance of faulty management of societal affairs. Self-assessment is

quite possible in such a situation. The objective is to promote moral purity. It seeks a solution to social alienation. It implores us to acquire habits that make respect for nature paramount. It is where reason triumphs. Its continuing effect points to Immanuel Kant’s “Critique of Pure Reason.” Waldo Emerson did the same thing.

British Romantic writers pioneered this disposition. William Wordsworth, William Blake, John Keats and Mary Shelley, nature devotees, as much as necessary, produced works that observe nature. When we read *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, we notice how Shelley strongly conveys her message. The characters the monster and Victor Frankenstein demonstrate how we rely on nature. When they are in their moments of deep tribulations, they turn to nature. The seasons change the moods of the characters. Thus, we have the lines: “As winter thaws into spring, the monster notices that the cottagers, particularly Felix, seem unhappy (Shelley 105-106).”

Victor says, “[t]he rain depressed me; my old feelings recurred, and I was miserable (Shelley 116).” Shelley aligns Victor with the Romantic movement of late-eighteenth- to mid-nineteenth-century Europe, which emphasized a turn to nature for sublime experience—feelings of awe, hope, and ecstasy. Victor’s affinity with nature is of particular significance because of the monster’s ties to nature. Both distinctly at home in nature and unnatural almost by definition, the monster becomes a symbol of Victor’s folly in trying to emulate the natural forces of creation.

The author dedicates much time to talk lavishly about nature. The writer hints on ice boulders in the arctic, mentioning the snow-capped mountains of Switzerland and the rivers in Germany (Shelley). It is stressed in ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ when the poet speaker speaks of “beechen green, and shadows numberless,” a serene place where the nightingale sits. Nature becomes a place of refuge. He wants to disengage from the afflictions of this earth and informs the nightingale that he will “leave the world unseen,/And with thee fade away into the forest dim (Saha 1312).” This can only be possible in a place entirely free of sorrow and pleasures. The poet speaker wants to disappear from this uncomfortable place, where he observes further that men sit and hear each other groan;/Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs;/Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;/Where but to think is to be full of sorrow/And leaden-eyed despairs. (Sasha 1312)

The poet speaker says again, “Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown/Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways (Sasha 1312).” He elevates the location to a heavenly one. The sun can hardly penetrate the vicinity, which is a pass in thick vegetation. The ground the poet speaker stands on is laid with vegetation (Saha 1310-1311).

Clearly, employing literature in the service is a duty to mankind, as we have a common interest here. What is the level of contribution of contemporary Nigerian writers? The forests in southern Nigeria are full of gas flares. The fires are sometimes invisible even at close range. How can the nightingale sing in such a place? How can a poet exercise the poetic vision in such a place? How can he venture into the grooves when a poet like David Thoreau settled in the Merrie Merks for months? Literary creation can occur in the Nigerian Niger Delta area. The region has adequate eco habitat to sustain literary life. The resources of nature which it boasts cannot be discarded. What is required is a green movement by writers.

Spiritual rejuvenation and flaring

Gas flaring has left a stain on the image of the wild. It is a scene of combustion. It is an unending outburst of what it emits, which is death. It is gloomy, surface level massive gas fire, which causes skin irritation, blemishes on the skin, ruining the night as the night has become unfit for its various roles. Obviously, it prevents the night from ever being relevant in the lives of the people of the place. It is like torch light cast permanently over communities, inflicting on communities black ash while the air quality is reduced considerably. Life loses its true meaning in such circumstances.

The relationship between humanity and nature has degenerated. This assumption is based on Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plough over the Bones of the Dead*. In the work is an ico-aesthetic figure for whom the gap between humanity and nature proves intolerable. Tokarczuk suggests an engagement by ecocritics of an orientation that will delight in 'ecomimetic thinking. If Morton preaches that the 'beautiful soul' should address and champion 'environmentalism,' to create harmony between humans and non-humans, we should then consider Deleuze's own critique of the beautiful soul. We have to observe the pastoral and eco-critical approaches. Bearing this in mind, Matts informs us thus,

First-wave ecocritic Joseph Meeker supplies a significant resource in this connection; bearing many affinities with our Deleuzian framework, not least in his denigration of such tragic heroes as Hamlet, and his subsequent proposal that the picaresque literary form suggests a path beyond narcissistic anthropomorphism. (188)

He refers to such works like *The Monkeywrench Gang*, which provoke committal to endeavors in the eco crusade. The work responds to those it tags eco saboteurs. It is a very effective way of advancing the cause of environmental responsibility. Matts writes that the book "is popularly credited with inspiring the earliest instances of Earth First! Activism in the United States of the 1970s." As a result of this activism, activism he invented the popular word 'monkeywrenching.' Morton, *In Ecology without Nature*, indicates how life on earth amounts to identifying with sadness. He declares that the relationship "between the melancholic and the 'earthly' is a tantalising one indeed for a study such as ours, concerned as it is with an eco-clinical relationship to literature (Matts 188). Revolutionary tactics upon which these discourses are based, offer(s) a ready-made category via which to account for those feelings of anguish and injustice particular to the ecocritical orientation. Hippocrates, he says, states 'that the understanding of the body presupposed an understanding of surrounding nature.' This radical ecology movement bears relationship with the Romantic ideal. Ecological critics highlight the features humans and non-humans have in common. Ecocritics are unaware "that a genuine appreciation for the natural world can only be obtained through the mediation of aesthetic concepts and artistic devices (such as a refined style, lyrical tone, and diction) that are prevalent in the Romantic theory of nature (Zambianchi)." Worthy examples of a level of identifiable personalities of high standing, Zambianchi points out are those of the likes of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and William Wordsworth. Their contributions had depth. Through them, we are aware of "late eighteenth-century ideas of nature, aesthetics and ethics," The romantics sought to establish a moral order.

This is considered to be devoid of religious leaning. It is akin to capitalist models that ushered in modernization. As Zambianchi observes, [T]he Romantic concept of nature has advanced the development of modern environmentalism, and that it may play a prominent role in establishing a better environmental order of the future.

He further states that reliance on purity is important in appreciating our environment. Therefore, interpreting culture and literature through the point of view of the environment has long been the norm. Ecocriticism, he counsels, must interact with "modern and postmodern theory and aesthetics" to increase and sustain interest in it. Zapf restates this point when he affirms thus, "It has become evident that ecocriticism can only fully realize its rich potential through its dialogue with modern and postmodern theory and aesthetics (Zapf 205-215)." Indeed, there must be a blend between aesthetics and ecological discourse, Schliephake reviews this opinion when he asserts that "in the same way in which the latter needs to be redefined in new, more complex ways by the inclusion of an ecological dimension into their discourses. (196-200)."

Naturphilosophie provides us with a similar perspective, though rendered differently. Naturphilosophie accounts for ecological reevaluation. It is a natural concept promoted by players like Johann Gottfried Herder, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Schelling and Immanuel Kant. Generally, relating culture, which is literature, to nature is a desirable exercise. It can be restorative and therapeutic. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt school of critical theory, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* reveal that art enables nature to overcome adversity.

Some commentators advocate that people should retrace their steps in appropriate submission to nature, with nature being seen as 'a source of "truth, authenticity, and intrinsic value" outside human intrusion' (Zapf). Romantic poetry acknowledges nature's distinctness. Adorno, for instance, projects the passion for nature and its sustenance as a contradiction to commodification of earthly resources and extreme industrialization. Nature compares to Edenic experience mentally and physically. This is why its subversion by gas flaring is unacceptable. There must be political technological and literary investment to propel to commit to protecting the environment. The ideal would be attained when mankind would refrain from posing any threat to nature.

It places of pressure on 'non-human' populations, makes the connection of what is referred to as revolutionary criticism. It is also termed 'subversive criticism.' One is being responsive to environmental issues. The literary engagement with environmental issues is peculiar because it contrasts with the commonly encountered response on the subject. He explains that the Sloven writer Detela counts as one of the intellectuals behind revolutionary ecological movement push in Slovenia. Other Sloven writers he mentions are Iztok Geister, Barbara Korun and Iztok Osojnik. The country is usually associated with high pitch resolve and commitment in the drive against ecological degradation. He lists Rosa Luxemburg and Kernev Štrajn, J among those who applied literary activism in their conversations.

Conclusion

Earth warming is the holding of heat from the sun in the earth's atmosphere. Greenhouse gasses, when emitted, hold

up in the atmosphere heat from the sun, thereby making the earth warmer. This gives rise to the 'green house' effect. The gasses release infrared radiation. The world has been left with no option but to cut down on these emissions. Many discussions about recent development all over the world center on this issue (Ochuko 30).

The night time skyline in many regions in southern Nigeria are decorated with red glows that signify gas flaring. Many communities see it as proof that they are naturally endowed. They do not reckon with the fact that they are impoverished and their health put in danger. They do not know that they can dispense with the problem or with those who should tackle the problem but who simply do nothing. Gas flaring is just one of many environmentally dangerous cultures of man in the said region. In this family are also oil spillage from burst pipelines, practices by oil prospectors, fumes from vehicles and generators, etc. The authorities have long stopped discussing these issues. No flaring deadline has been met or even referred to. Fatigue seems to have set in with regard to the gas flaring disclosures. Perpetrators have succeeded in carrying on with their actions undisturbed.

The environment influences us a lot. We cannot be productive to our optimal capacity when we live in an environment that takes this type of assault. We must again prick the conscience of leaders of our society. Complacency is not desirable in this situation. Records show that in many countries of the world, people live in cleaner environments. The CEOs of the major oil companies in Nigeria are products of these societies. Why do they avoid the issues of applying the best standards in obtaining oil? They flaunt their monetary gains but are not disturbed by the sludge they leave behind. This is a failure on the part of humanity. It should also form part of our stories when we discuss our lives in novels, poems and works of drama. It should constitute a crucial part of cultural studies there should not be a void between text and context.

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