

Sanity amidst Chaos: Navigating the Lagos Cityscape in Nigerian Poetry

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the delineation of the phenomenology of Lagos's cityscape in the cross-sectional poems of contemporary Nigerian poets. While there is abundant literature on the city and fiction, the same cannot be said for the city and poetry, especially from the African perspective. Being often referenced in the portrayal of social contradictions, Lagos in Nigerian fiction has been explored to represent sophistication, decadence and anonymity. Again, while fewer articles and anthologies/collections have drawn attention to the pervading anonymity, chaos and inclusiveness of Lagos in poetry, several essays and books intersecting the city and fiction have been harvested on the cityscape's boisterous posturing. Given the paucity of essays on its imaginative portrayal in poetry, we focus, in this paper, on the stylistic representations of the mystique of Lagos in the works of selected Nigerian poets. Apparently, Lagos was the former Nigeria's political capital, but now serves as its economic capital, and has attracted varied writers in the past years. Although many people come to Lagos for different reasons, not all of these migrants capture their experiences in poetic engagement. Utilising the concept of political ecology, the paper seeks to evaluate how the selected poets have portrayed the complex linkages between living in Lagos and surmounting the daunting challenges posed by the cityscape. Poems have been selected from Niyi Osundare's *Songs of the Season* (1990), John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo's *State of the Union* (1985), Rashida Ismaili's "Lagos" (1995), Remi Raji's *Webs of Remembrance* (2000) and Odia Ofeimun's *Lagos of the Poets* (2010). The paper looks at how the selected poets have represented the ideas of Lagos's cityscape in their poems.

Keywords: navigating the Lagos cityscape in poetry; a complex linkage between



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living and surmounting daily challenges posed by the cityscape; searing poverty against limitless opportunities; selected Nigerian poets; Odiá Ofeimun; *Lagos of the Poets*; Nigeria

Introduction

Lagos metaphorically typifies the heartbeat of Nigeria where things happen with unpredictable regularity to foreground the tension between civility and incivility. This palpable tension is represented in the stylistics of urban narratives grounded in the selected poems discussed in the paper. Poems have been selected from Niyi Osundare's *Songs of the Season* (1990), John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo's *State of the Union* (1985) Rashida Ismaili's "Lagos" (1995), Remi Raji's *Webs of Remembrance* (2000) and Odiá Ofeimun's *Lagos of the Poets* (2010). Named after the voluptuous lagoon which cascades over the greater portion of its landscape, if the city could be read as a text, Lagos should be read as an urban imaginary to explore the trajectories of different classes of people that dwell, visit or interact with it. It only suffices to state that due to its spontaneity, neither fiction, nor drama, but poetry tends to seamlessly express the full range of the Lagos cityscape's unmistakable ambience of pollution, traffic congestion, poverty and anonymity. Years of military rule, decades of pseudo-democratic governance and the successive years of destructive economic policies in Nigeria have increasingly tasked the new generation of Nigerian poets who reside in Lagos to create new and often subversive forms of poetic vocabulary which speak to the real and imagined tensions that revolve around the binaries of individual/public, inclusion/alienation, poverty/prosperity, highbrow habitation/rundown ghettos, as a backlash against Lagos's social contradictions in their poetry. Even though the underlying magnificence of the buildings may yet hold the cityscape in its sway, Lagos still contends with the complexities of urbanity. Rather than being celebratory, the varied thematics in the Lagos poetry are audacious and critical of these identifiable complexities. They are often products of lived experiences that are strikingly premised on the complexity of a growing Lagos cosmopolitan and its attendant harsh realities of poor living standards in the suburbs. Raising the signification of city as a theme, Andreas Thorpe has argued that "the metaphors of city as text, or a commingling of the textual and the real, is both ubiquitous and particularly associated with the *modern* urban subject" (2018, 308). Stressing further the literary importance of a cityscape in literature, Ayo Kehinde (2007 cited in Akpome 2018) has observed that Lagos operates as "a topos, a theme, a trope, a metaphor and a symbol in fictional texts that use different versions of mimetic realism and naturalism to explore the social and environmental factors that impact the living conditions of urban Africans" (Akpome 2018, 6). Kehinde's observation condenses the striking connection between a city and its representation in the selected poems in the paper.

The paper attempts to reflect the ecstasy, excitement and difficulties experienced while living in the city, and how these challenges impinge upon the individual poets' sensibilities captured in the lucidity of the imagination expressed in the selected poems.

Lagos within the Context of Political Ecology

Political ecology refers to outright politicisation of the intersection of economic and social variables as they impact on a given environment. Arguably, political ecology is primarily situated within the field of environmental studies. In literature, the evocation of ecology has acquired a renewed interest, and underlines quite accurately how political power impinges on policies that affect nature and society. Beyond its essential function of moderating the relationship between a group of living things and their environment, ecology constitutes a kernel of activities around which a series of actions related to politics, economy, climate and society revolve. In the words of M. J. Watts, political ecology tends to delineate the complex relation between nature and society “through a careful analysis of what one might call the forms of access and control over resources and their implications for environmental health and sustainable livelihoods” (Watts 2000, 257). Furthermore, Blaikie and Brookfield have reiterated that political ecology “combines the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy. Together this encompasses the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself” (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987, 17). Paul Robbins has equally argued in *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction* that the “problems and crises throughout the world are the result of inadequate adoption and implementation of ‘modern’ economic techniques of management, exploitation, and conservation” (Robbins 2012, 18). The selected poems in the paper will be analysed within the context of the theory of political ecology.

A Portrayal of the Lagos Cityscape in Nigerian Literature

To most people the very name Lagos reverberates paradoxical images of population explosion, chaos, nagging traffic jams, filth, disarming wealth and limitless opportunities in contrast to suffocating poverty and shameful beggary. Lagos is home to more than 16 million people and it also stands as a monument to the contradiction between opulence and poverty in postcolonial Nigeria. Arguably, Lagos is the most populous city in Nigeria, as well as the second most populous city in Africa. In the aftermath of decades of poor governance in Nigeria where the simple act of eking out a living has become a difficult task for the well-off few and a daily struggle for the majority, Lagos has continued to witness an influx of people running away from the searing poverty ravaging the adjoining provincials. Owing to different perceptions Lagos has created in the minds of the people familiar with it, the city somewhat stands as a tree with many branches that are closely tied into one giant form. Ostensibly, the creative enthusiasm embedded in the mystique of Lagos has yielded multiplicities of identities in the works of earlier Nigerian writers, like Cyprian Ekwensi’s *People of the City* (1954), *Jagua Nana* (1961), *Jagua Nana’s Daughter* (1987), Rasheed Gbadamosi’s *Echoes from the Lagoon* (1973) and Wole Soyinka’s *The Interpreters* (1965). While Lagos as a shocking city of erotica is portrayed in Naiwu Osahon’s *Sex Is a Nigger* (1971), Dillibe Onyeama’s *Sex Is a Nigger’s Game* (1976) and Edia Apolo’s *Lagos Na Waa, I Swear* (1982), its proclivity to be a predatory enclave where dreams die fast

receives its affirmation in the works of third generation writers, like Stella and Frank Chipasula's *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry* (1995), Toyin Adewale's *Twenty-Five New Nigerian Poets* (2000) and *Naked Testimonies* (1995), Remi Raji's *Webs of Remembrance* (2000), Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* (2000) and Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004). Lagos as a metropole of pernicious corruption is further illustrated in Teju Cole's *Everyday Is for the Thief* (2007). Complementing the cityscape's frayed and knotted narratives of the bizarre, Ben Okri's *Flowers and Shadows* (1980) and *Stars of the New Curfew* (1989) affirm a determined hustling which compromises the lives of the powerless, and whose descriptions are rendered in the magic-realistic mode. From the foregoing, anyone interested in the particularities and trajectories of the "cityness" of Lagos cannot but be struck by an avalanche of fictional works against the relatively small number of poetry collections and plays on the Lagos cityscape. Correspondingly, Odia Ofeimun's edited *Lagos of the Poets* (2010), a compendium of earlier published poems, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo's *State of the Union* (1985) and Niyi Osundare's *Songs of the Season* (1990) contain poems that are bristling with the imaginative possibilities offered by the seemingly contradictory imagery of the Lagos cityscape. However, if there is one defining feature of the Lagos cityscape in African literature, it is the fact that it often cuts inescapable, enigmatic imagery in these diverse literary productions. This enigma is unmistakably located in a contradiction strikingly portrayed in Pat Kasia Nwachukwu's "Lagos": "You're first hit by it / The aquatic splendour of the lagoons / Then the dirt / The Riches / And the extreme poverty / Lying in sync of beauty and ugliness" (*Lagos of the Poets* 2010, 322).¹

A metropolis, its vivid portrayals as a trope in the works of Nigerian writers continues to accentuate the invention, re-invention and de-invention of Lagos as a paradoxical city of limitless opportunities, with dizzying traffic congestion, constant power outages, population explosion, armed robberies, unresolved incidents of ritual killing, the menace of cult groups, avalanches of cybercrimes which have morphed into humongous internet frauds otherwise called "Yahoo-Yahoo" in the Nigerian parlance committed by an army of Nigerian youth, in conjunction with the alarming frequency of co-ordinated cases of kidnapping. The cityscape also strikes an ostensible image as a harbinger of early and needless deaths, deriving from the accrued stress of daily hustling. Interestingly, Lagos's prevailing chaos seems to be offset by the undeniable fact that the cityscape serves as the Nigerian parallel to a melting pot. This notion has been corroborated by Odia Ofeimun, who asserts "it is the most open ground for the meeting of nationalities and the criss-cross of individual talent in this country" (Ofeimun 2001, 132). The centrality of the Lagos cityscape to Nigerians from far and near is further buttressed by Peter Lewis's observation that "amid hardships and disarray, a strong current of vitality runs through this metropolis. Nigeria's financial, professional, business, media, and cultural worlds are centred in Lagos, with links across West Africa

¹ All poems that appear in Odia Ofeimun's edited *Lagos of the Poets* (2010) will hereafter be cited using the abbreviation LOP.

and as far south as Cape Town” (Lewis 2009, 115). Analysing the propelling drive for the “rhyme and reason” in the configuration of the Lagos cityscape, Babatunde A. Ahonsi contends that as chaotic, disfigured, unstable, and disorganised as metropolitan Lagos may look and feel to visitors, unengaged urbanists, and recent migrants, “it is not really fundamentally perceived or experienced as a dysfunctional city by those of us, Lagosians, who have been part of its social, demographic, spatial, political, and ecological transformation for much of the last 25 years” (Ahonsi 2002, 30). Arguably, the bedlam of Lagos cityscape’s chaos tends to be offset by the seeming sanity that resides in the abundant job opportunities offered by the multinationals, the banks, the media houses, the world-class breweries and the private businesses. The selected poems in the paper also look at aspects of the cityscape’s architecture as an important conduit of spatial beauty. It bears remarking that the architecture of Lagos is as diverse as the cultural influences that constituted its transformations in the past decades. For instance, the inner parts of Lagos Island like the Ita Faaji and Agarawu quarters feature the influence of Portuguese and Brazilian architecture, while areas like Ikeja, Victoria Island and Lekki Peninsula feature more modern designs. Regarding the contradictory image associated with Lagos, Charles Nnolim has argued that “Lagos as setting has come to assume a special place in contemporary Nigerian fiction enough to assume a character all its own, enough to become a symbol in its own right, symbol of corruption, hedonism, debauchery and shenanigans” (Nnolim 2009, 206). Essentially, Odia Ofeimun in the preface to *Lagos of the Poets* describes Lagos as “big, boisterous, chaotic, with busy-body propensities in full play, Lagos has always been our all-comers city. She takes you over while you may be nursing irritations about things that do not work as they should” (2010, xxii). Lagos’s mystique is further underscored in the words of Alex Newton whose scathing remark on Lagos is jumpy and prickly: “Lagos, however, has given Nigeria’s reputation a black eye. It is West Africa’s largest city and, by many criteria, Africa’s worst city. It has the highest crime rate and is the most congested. It’s hot and muggy and ugly as sin” (Newton 1988, 342). The thematics of its negative reputation is further pursued in Teju Cole’s *Everyday Is for the Thief* to problematise the scourge of endemic corruption as it affects the cityscape when the narrator blurts out that Lagos is a “patronage society” (Cole 2007, 19). The cityscape of Lagos in Chris Abani’s *Graceland* (2004) is seen “through a rookery, a tenement city called Maroko” (Ouma 2012, 141). Dennis Osadebey’s “Lagos” has poetically deconstructed the Lagos cityscape as follows: “O Lagos, land that calls with luring voice, / O town of slums and seat of deafening noise; / A port of boiling Politics, / O Circle full of smiles and tricks” (LOP 2010, 116). With its ever increasing population and the prospect of becoming Africa’s largest city with the highest demographics in the next 10 years, Lagos can be described as an emerging global city. In the introduction to the special issue of *Interventions* “Reevaluating the Postcolonial City: Production, Reconstruction, Representation” (Chambers and Huggan 2015), a distinction was made between global cities and postcolonial cities. While the global city is best understood as a relatively recent phenomenon, coextensive with economic developments in late capitalist modernity and allied to “spiralling increases in world population,” the

postcolonial city is informed and transformed by the “long” colonial histories that shape it, as well as by more recent patterns of migration, and the social dynamics “which are in turn often linked directly or indirectly to the colonial past” (Chambers and Huggan 2015, 786). However, in exploring the aesthetic attributes rooted in the city space, the selected poems reflect passionate expressions which dwell on Lagos’s physical appeal, locale and its environmental distractions. Individual poets in the selected poems have artistically constructed experiences of their contact with the cityscape.

From the outset, writers have continued to reflect their diverse experiences with cities in their creative works. For example, the ancient cities of Athens, London and Dublin have produced writers such as Aristophanes, Sophocles and Euripides, Shakespeare, Johnson and Marlowe, Yeats and O’Casey respectively. Conspicuous in these writers’ works are issues that border on environmental anxiety and aesthetic mirroring of the cities that appeal to the sensibilities of their readers. As an eclectic site of cultural functions, the city unlocks a myriad of windows for the chroniclers of urban realities. No wonder “writers, painters, planners, photographers, performers have deemed the city as the loci of their desire, conflict, passion, memory of quotidian life in various intricate forms and configurations” (Mukherjee and Bhattacharya 2017, 1).

Cities are perpetually in the making, bearing marks of continuous tasking and “unfinished-ness” within the context of globalisation and cosmopolitanism. Cities are very important to literary creativity because “they suggest themes and imagery for creative works and by so doing often assist in shaping the attitude and feelings conveyed by many of such works” (Jaye and Watts 1981, ix). Far from being composed of neighbourhoods, the city can be a sphere of distance that requires varied means of access. Since it has been seen as a “mosaic of anarchic diversity and messy contradictions [with] ... a rich source of inspiration for practitioners of creative arts (Mukherjee and Bhattacharya 2017, 1), the city can assume a “body of custom and traditions” (Park 1967, 578). Its ambience reinforces the contours that draw the aspirations, disappointments, hopes, emotions and thoughts of many creative writers. The city, therefore, serves as a space to be traversed, a region to be manipulated or overcome in the individual’s search for a given destination and self-realisation.

This opinion ostensibly affirms the false sense of sanity offered by the Lagos cityscape, as a melting pot of divergent cultural backgrounds which accommodate differing Nigerian ethnic groups whose collective desire is driven by a singular motive or pursuit: the economic prosperity which Lagos offers. Lagos remains a tree with many branches: a centre with peripheries that are closely knitted in both space (physical description) and time (historical connotations). Consequently, cities like Lagos located in different parts of the world “have continued to inspire writers in their search for subjects” (Raji 2012, 246). The Lagos cityscape actually represents the main thematic in the works of the selected poets.

Inevitably, these poets reflect not only on the character of Lagos as a geographical space, but on the human actions of its inhabitants. The selected poets in the paper deploy various poetic strategies to illustrate some profound ironies which are stumbled upon in their interactions with the cityscape, its landmass and territories as they impinge on their creative sensibilities. The varied artistic stylistics embedded in the selected poems demonstrate a display of personal convictions and misgivings about the cityscape.

The Lagos Cityscape and Its Suburbs

Lagos is the former capital of Nigeria and the commercial nerve centre of Nigeria.² It is the second largest city in Africa after Cairo. It was created as a state on May 27, 1967 by virtue of the *State Creation and Transitional Provisions*, Decree No. 14, of 1967 (Opoko and Oluwatayo 2014, 16). “Lagos is a melting pot and mini-Nigeria [since] it has all the ethnic groups fully represented albeit with the Yoruba as most prominent ethnic group” (Fadayomi et al. 1992, 18). It has a population density which varies from 4000 to 20,000 people per 5 sq. km. Lagos bears a multicultural outlook which promotes the diverse interests of the Nigerian populace. This great city lies approximately between longitude 2^o 24E and 3^o 42E and latitudes 6^o 22 N and 6^o 52 along the Atlantic coastline just above the Gulf of Guinea (Fadayomi et al. 1992, 4).

Lagos is located in South-West Nigeria, with its southern boundary formed along 180 km of Atlantic coastline. While its northern and eastern boundaries border Ogun State, the Republic of Benin forms its western boundary. In all, as at 2015, unofficial figures put the population of Lagos at 21 million, going by the Nigerian annual growth rate of 6.8 per cent (Nigeria = 2.4%). Its population density is 4193 persons per sq. km.³ Prior to its creation, Lagos was under the administration of the Federal Government as a federal territory, and was supervised by the Federal Ministry of Lagos Affairs. It became a state when towns presently within its territory such as Ikeja, Ikorodu, Epe, Badagry, Agege and Mushin were excised from the Western Region to create what is today known as Lagos State. While Badagry, Ikorodu, Ibeju-Lekki and Epe serve as satellite cities in Lagos State, they are not located within the Lagos city metropolis. In 2003, the 20 local government areas of the city state were split into municipalities also known as Local Council Development Areas (LCDA) for administrative purposes.

Accordingly, all the LCDAs make up units which include the following: Agbado-Oke-Odo, Agboyi-Ketu, Agege, Ajeromi, Alimosho, Apapa, Apapa-Iganmu, Ayobo-Ipaja, Badagry West, Badagry, Bariga, Coker-Aguda, Egbe-Idimu, Ejigbo, Epe, Eredo, Eti-Osa East, Eti-Osa West, Iba, Isolo, Imota, Ikoyi, Ibeju, Ifako-Ijaiye, Ifelodun, Igando-

²In terms of administration, Lagos is not a municipality and has therefore no overall city administration.

The Municipality of Lagos, which covered Lagos Island, Ikoyi and Victoria Island as well as some mainland territory, was managed by the Lagos City Council (LCC), but it was disbanded in 1979 and divided into several Local Government Areas which comprise Lagos Island LGA, Lagos Mainland LGA and Eti-Osa LGA.

³ *The Punch*, January 18, 2017, p. 25.

Ikotun, Igbogbo-Bayeku, Ijede, Ikeja, Ikorodu North, Ikorodu West, Ikosi-Ejinrin, Ikorodu, Ikorodu West, Iru-Victoria Island, Itire-Ikate, Kosofe, Lagos Island West, Lagos Island East, Lagos Mainland, Lekki, Mosan/Okunola, Mushin, Odi-Olowo/Ojuwoye, Ojo, Ojodu, Ojokoro, Olorunda, Onigbongbo, Oriade, Orile-Agege, Oshodi, Oto-Awori, Shomolu, Surulere and Yaba. In 2006, the metropolitan areas around Lagos which had continuously built up land areas of about 1,535.4 sq. km expanded the Lagos cityscape to the point that it has now attained the status of a mega city. As at today, the area referred to as *Lagos* is often the urban area also known as “Metropolitan Lagos.” This area is made up of the *Islands* and the *Mainland suburbs*. The rest of the paper is dedicated to how the selected poets have captured the experiences they have had with these areas in their poems.

A Panorama of Lagos City State

The Lagos Island

Geographically, Lagos is broadly divided into two main areas known as the Lagos Island and the Lagos Mainland. The Lagos Island is a loose area separated from the Mainland by the Lagos Lagoon and the Atlantic Ocean. It has many other islands which are separated from one another by creeks of different sizes. Lagos Island has areas where most business activities are transacted. For example, Amuwo-Odofin, Apapa, and Eti-Osa where Lekki is located and connected by the Carter, the Eko and the Third Mainland bridges are part of Lagos Island. As an area which charts dynamic incongruous interlocking spaces, Lagos Island is characterised by high buildings which serve as headquarters to many companies and contains many of Lagos’s largest markets such as the Balogun and Idumota markets. Lagos Island has the National Museum, the Central Mosque, the Glover Memorial Hall, the Oba’s palace (Iga Idu Ganran) and Christ’s Church Cathedral (CMS). Lagos Island also houses Tinubu Square, the spot where the 1914 amalgamation ceremony which unified the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria took place.

Lagos Island is believed to be home to the wealthiest class of the city. It is clustered by old and magnificent houses of different architectural designs. Lagos Island’s major nemesis is its unwarranted noise, air and water pollution exemplified in Niyi Osundare’s “EKO.” Lagos, in the poem, is described as being lost to the bedlam of “the venal Alleluiah of pentecostal noises / the soporific Allahu Akbir of sword-wielding Sacracens; / God, the Blackman’s Nemesis, his drug, his dragon, watched countless prayers crushed by pagan waves” (LOP 2010, 98–99). The poem poignantly unmasks the ever-present noise pollution as it ravages the tranquillity of the Lagos cityscape. The menace of Lagos’s noise pollution constitutes an enduring chaos when examined within the context of political ecology. The noise pollution reinforces a negative distraction that marks Lagos as a city trapped in the throes of confusion. The maddening cacophonous clash of loud, clamorous, hooting vehicle horns, the hubbub of prayers from the churches/mosques and the screams of buyers and sellers on the streets

constitute a social problem which the people have to contend with on a daily basis and its description is most explicit in Osundare's "EKO." Pursuing the theme of ecological degradation further, Rashidah Ismaili in "Lagos" (Ismaili 1995) cryptically captures the terrifying imprint of pollution on the cityscape:

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

Austyn Njoku's "Lagos Island" does not appear comfortable with the chaos associated with noise pollution which characterises the day-to-day actions of the people who live and work in the Lagos cityscape. Njoku has represented this disorderliness in his poem "Lagos Island": "Hasty hustlers all around / Haranguing my lobes / They hoot they shout ... / How I hate this jazz / Cacophonous in the noon-cancerous clusters of cars / With sharp shrilled tones" (LOP 2010, 69). In the never-ending discomfort associated with living in this area caused by noise pollution, he sees the cityscape's life and the people's attitude to work and their environment as an abuse against nature's wellbeing. The poet further appropriates the trope of political ecology to condemn the environmental degradation of Lagos Island in "Our Island": "But the sea still surges forward / like a haunted dragon fuming fury / It vomits saline septic aciduria / into the plum domiciles dotting / The drowning lukewarm Island / Standing proud on nostoc graves" (LOP 2010, 71). Sounding a note of warning concerning the indiscriminate construction of houses on the waterways in Lagos, Njoku in the poem points to the dangers of environmental degradation resulting from the poor management of the land reclamation from the sea. He regrets how man satisfies his desire temporarily and ends up creating inherent contradictions for himself. Njoku's concern for the environment is a sustained cry which is targeted at saving the earth from unhealthy human manipulation. For Njoku, a reckless handling of ecological concerns in the Lagos cityscape constitutes a high risk which could precipitate a devastating ocean surge anytime soon. He wonders why Lagosians often embrace negative conveniences that tend to compromise environmental safety and security.

Victoria Island

Victoria Island is an harbour expanse which lies sprawling on the Lagos Lagoon. It originally started as a fishing village which grew into the modern city of Lagos. Victoria Island is connected to the mainland by three large bridges which cross the Lagos Lagoon to Ebute Metta. It is an affluent area that serves as the main business and financial hub in the Lagos cityscape. Victoria Island lies within the boundaries of the Eti-Osa Local Government Area.

Maroko

The parallels between Victoria Island and Maroko justify the latter being described as an eyesore. Victoria Island has in its neighbourhood Maroko, which is seen as a

significant flicker of human memory. Despite its deplorable condition, which emphasises that its ecological degradation and retrogressive habitation are inseparable, Maroko serves as an important annex of Ikoyi and an indispensable peninsula of the Lagos Island. A retreat to Maroko peninsula should have offered a needed break from the Lagos cityscape's daily routine. However, Maroko, before its demolition, was a fragile, "swampy city" suspended "on rickety stilts and wooden planks" (Abani 2004, 6). Its fragility is an indictment of compromised governance in the postcolonial Nigeria nation-state. Within the context of urban poverty, Maroko's fragility affirms its status as the "ghettos of exclusion," aptly delineated in Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen's *Globalizing Cities* (2000, 19). Before its demolition, Maroko as a ghetto epitomised an embarrassment which continued to indict the postcolonial Nigerian government for deliberate neglect of its vulnerable population. As hope of social renewal continues to elude Maroko, Wole Soyinka draws attention to its burden of degradation in "Maroko": "Maroko o what a ruckus / Over a wretched shanty town / It was stinking / It was sinking ... / No electricity or piped water / No sewage or garbage disposal" (LOP 2010, 149). Maroko's ecological degradation in Soyinka's poem is indubitably shocking as it draws attention to the government's irresponsibility towards its citizens. Inspired by the horrendous displacement of its inhabitants, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's "Maroko" in *State of the Union* critiques how the squatters of Maroko, a littoral but sore part of Victoria Island, were dispossessed of their land by the military government of Colonel Raji Rasaki, the then military administrator of Lagos state. Specifically, the Ilaje squatters of Maroko were violently and forcefully ejected without compensation or alternative homes to live in. Maroko's sudden demolition reinvents a timely study of the ways in which the postcolonial Nigerian nation-state has launched an organised violence against the Ilaje squatters and other entrepreneurial but disempowered citizens who were trapped in the peninsula. The enclave was a main attraction to the Ilaje because "Maroko's terrain is littoral and its topography is conducive to consistent fishing, which is the major preoccupation of the majority of Ilaje" (Akingbe 2015, 134). It is not surprising that waves of Clark-Bekederemo's anger are perceptibly engulfing in the poem: "That three hundred thousand may not drown / In the one shanty spread in town / Too close for the comfort of a colony / Swelling nightly by the sea, / Col. Raji Rasaki, / Governor of Lagos, / Man of action defying all laws, / Has done in seven days clear / What God and war did not in many a year" (Clark-Bekederemo 1999, 17). Disappointingly, some of the top military officers and multinational companies that later transformed such places into their head offices were alleged to have shared the contentious Maroko peninsula among themselves. Injustice derived from the Maroko squatters' eviction further provoked Clark-Bekederemo to launch a tirade against government officials who have appropriated a strip of land belonging to an unnamed family in "Victoria Island." The land borders the Atlantic Ocean at Victoria Island in Lagos Island: "In the interest of the public / They took over land a family / Owned before the country began" (LOP 2010, 80). The force with which the government grabbed the land from the landowners, using all sorts of state laws and policies, dramatises this brazen action as inimical to the growth of postcolonial Nigeria.

Clark-Bekederemo utilises the third person pronoun “they” to refer to the Nigerian military government in the poem, which portrays the military as being alienated from the masses. This perception poignantly stresses the mutual distrust between the ruler and the ruled. Further, “they” is employed as a metatheatrical leitmotif to condemn the referenced dispossession (Akingbe 2014, 18–31).

Apart from this forceful eviction, the poet deploys the trope of political ecology to raise concern about the environmental degradation as a result of how certain portions of the land on the island were reclaimed from the sea through an act known as “sand filling.” In other words, the military elites, upon identifying portions they felt were best for the erection of homes and businesses, brought in heavy machines and tractors to sand-fill them and erect magnificent edifices. Looking with perplexity at the various mansions on Victoria Island inhabited by several millionaires, Clark-Bekederemo wonders: “Why should the country not be sick?” In other words, the Nigerian government should be held accountable for the evil act of displacement launched against its vulnerable people. For this reason, the poet criticises the lack of conscience on the part of the Nigerian powerful elite who have robbed people of their inheritance: “With public seal and money / They reclaimed it from swamp and sea. / Then while the people looked on / In wonder; they parceled out the land” (LOP 2010, 80).

In a similar attitude, Clark-Bekederemo’s “Victoria Island Re-visited” mocks the new occupants who continue to struggle with the Atlantic Ocean’s ferocious surge: “They say the sea is raging at the Bar Beach / of Lagos, knocking at the doors / Of homes built by contract finance / On public land for a few to collect / Millions ... / Next they will be drawing upon / The public purse to salvage the hulk” (Clark-Bekederemo 1985, 26). The land grabbers who have built gigantic structures for private use have to contend with environmental threats as a result of continuous sea encroachment into their new homes. As with Njoku’s “Our Island,” whose concern for the environment exposes the insensitivity of government policies to the people, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo’s “Victoria Island Re-visited” regrets that man is an agent of destruction. He therefore blames the powerful elite for their selfish policies that are only geared toward destroying rather than saving the people they are meant to protect. The theme of ecological degradation is further pursued to condemn the pollution of the Atlantic Ocean that borders Victoria Island. This degradation is represented in Remi Raji’s untitled poem in *Webs of Remembrance* (Raji 2000, 34):

Where are you oh Olokun
They rape you and raid your children
They march on your fertile brows
And rig rods of crude pain in your veins

In the same light, Simbo Olorunfemi’s “Maroko” reveals how the military government destroyed Maroko: “And they gathered / bent on reclaiming / the sea / from the fishes / And they instructed the one at Alausa / to redraw the map / for allocation / to the new

gods” (LOP 2010, 243). Alausa is the seat of the Lagos State Government. The poem criticises the brutal force deployed by the military government of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, who instructed the then military governor of Lagos State, Colonel Raji Rasaki to invade Maroko and chase out the squatters. Curiously, after the destruction of Maroko by the military, the peninsula was redistributed among the elite of the Nigerian armed forces: “Soon, they took notice / of Maroko too / and sent the green ones / to pull down structures / and splinter hopes” (LOP 2010, 243). The “green ones” refer to the soldiers deployed to Maroko who carried out acts of destruction. In frustration, Olorunfemi asks, “Who am I / to ask / what becomes / of the necks dispossessed of heads / by the Alausa warlord?” (LOP 2010, 247). Looking at the magnitude of destruction carried out by the soldiers, the poet gives up in despair: “I’ve rested my case / for, / there is indeed, none. / Maroko now belongs to yesterday / —a pool of rubbles / and shattered dreams” (LOP 2010, 248).

Ikoyi

An area which rests on the eastern half of Lagos Island, adjacent to Victoria Island, is Ikoyi. The former Federal Secretariat, the police and military barracks, the Federal High Court and the prison are all situated within a circumference which formerly served as the seat of the Nigerian Federal Government. This portion is joined to Victoria Island by the popular Falomo Bridge and has a number of hotels, recreation centres and night clubs. Akeem Lasisi’s “A Song for Lagos” sees Ikoyi as a garden green “where every almond is glazed with gold / Courts of pearls, meadows of myrrh / With this oasis in aquatic desert” (LOP 2010, 2–3). Ikoyi, which is mostly occupied by the *crème de la crème* of the society, is further given a heaven-like description: “Sibling of Victory High-land / Where glass houses and marble bricks / Contest the sky with angels and God” (LOP 2010, 3). The poet thereafter juxtaposes Ikoyi, his “mini-London’s skyscrapers” with the Victoria “High-land,” Victoria Island’s avalanche of glass houses struggling for space. In other words, Ikoyi typifies an abode for the high and mighty. Addressing Ikoyi as an exceptional abode of the rich, Lasisi concludes: “I have traversed the North and South / But have not seen another clime / Where every street is a paradise of jeeps / Where there are 20 pupils in a golden class” (LOP 2010, 3). In the poem, Ikoyi cuts the image of a place of distinction owing to a display of its striking opulence against the blistering poverty in Lasisi’s “Ajegunle,” which he has described as “J for a notorious jungle in our aquatic clan / Ajegunle / Prime slum in city of dreams” (LOP 2010, 3). Arguably, Ikoyi appeals to the physical display of wealth in the Lagos city state as it facilitates enduring aesthetic savouring, which constitutes a complex formulation of the theme of socio-economic bewilderment that contrasts the lives of the rich and the poor in the Lagos cityscape.

Highlighting the mystique of Ikoyi further, Niyi Osundare’s “Ikoyi” is described as a place of total quietude. Since Ikoyi is an outstanding residential area for the rich, the silence and peace that permeate its ambience are an expression of both human and natural design. Strikingly, Ikoyi symbolises a well cultivated serenity that stokes poetic

inspiration: “The moon here / Is a laundered lawn / Its grass the softness of infant fluff; / Silence grazes like a joyous lamb, / Doors romp on lazy hinges / The ceiling is a sky. / Weighted down by chandeliers / Of pampered stars” (LOP 2010, 94). Just like Lasisi, Osundare’s “Ikoyi” compares affluence embedded in the physical structures to what is obtainable in the subliminal world. Thus, Osundare’s iteration of resplendent images that underscore romance and idealism appropriate both the biblical allusion of the “joyous lamb” and the romantic nuances of “infant fluff” and “pampered stars” to delineate the ease which accompanies the life lived in Ikoyi.

The Lagos Bar Beach

A number of sandy beaches along the Atlantic Ocean reiterate the aquatic essence of Lagos Island. The Lagos Bar Beach is a major seashore along the Atlantic and is located in Victoria Island. It stretches about 100 kilometres (62 miles) east and west of the south providing fresh air from the sea and stimulating the muse for creativity. Akeem Lasisi’s “Lagos Bar Beach” celebrates the Lagos beach as it stands out as the epicentre of relaxation in the cityscape: “At the Bar Beach, the city comes alive / In secular grace. / Like Kuramo and Lekki Beach, / The Atlantic in its erratic splendour / Teases the eye with saline waves / Especially at the Bar Beach” (LOP 2010, 4). The beckoning conviviality of the Bar Beach is further deconstructed when “[t]he buka man and buka woman / Dialogue in dishes and a river of beers: / A contagious laughter into the anonymous nights” (LOP 2010, 4). What we see here is a description of the succour and relief from the Lagos cityscape’s stress, which the Bar Beach conveniently offers people running away from the typical hassles that accompany survival in Lagos. The business of wining and dining is indicative of the abundance of pleasure offered by the beach: “a river of beers,” “A contagious laughter,” and “anonymous laughter.”

The Lagos Lagoon

The city of Lagos has been called many names ranging from Chiedu Ezeanah’s “City of waters” (LOP 2010, 212), Simbo Olorunfemi’s “Eko is a sea” (LOP 2010, 242), Adebayo Lamikanra’s “a city on a fetid Lagoon” (LOP 2010, 270), to Pat Kasie Nwachukwu’s “the aquatic splendor of the lagoons” (LOP 2010, 322). Associating Lagos with the bodies of water mentioned by these poets only goes to show how the topography of the Lagos cityscape is greatly impinged on by its watery ecology. In the poems, Lagos’s marshy landscape bursts into the coastal lines as it invokes a poetic discourse. It is only natural that the Bar Beach, the Lagos Lagoon and the Atlantic oceanic fronts would elicit a fecund imagination from the Lagos poets. Lagos’s watery essence imbues a poetic candour that switches into varied images, as Odia Ofeimun declaims his admiration of Lagos within the frame of the lagoon. He explores the cityscape from an eagle’s eye point of view. Thus, the lagoon, for him, weaves a rich tapestry of imagination that references his personal experience. Therefore, he sees the lagoon as a connecting tissue of memory which foregrounds his past, his present and future, as revealed in the poem “Lagoon” (LOP 2010, 173):

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

The Lagoon speaks!
Like a foetus remembering the future,
listening from the depths of formless song.

Gleaning through an intricate web of memory, the lived experience of the poet becomes a tool for interrogating imagery of the Lagos cityscape. Thus, the lagoon becomes a muse that enables Ofeimun to comment on the good, the bad and the ugly perceptions of the cityscape. Senayon Olaoluwa (2006) has argued that it is, of course, true that there is an enduring relationship between the lagoon and the Lagos cityscape. Like most coastal cities and settlements, the place of the maritime phenomenon of the lagoon in the history of Lagos cannot be overemphasised. For the lagoon has always been there from time immemorial. It was indeed a witness to the pre-history of Lagos and “when this island was founded in the pre-colonial time by the Yoruba *of the Ilaje extraction* bounded by the Egun of Badagry to the south, the lagoon must have played an active role as a collaborator and facilitator of movement, migration and settlement” (Olaoluwa 2006, 256–57; my emphasis). Due to its undeniably littoral habitation which oscillates between a network of the islands and peninsulas, the Ilaje is a coastal and seafaring ethnic unit of the Yoruba group in South Western Nigeria. It is a resilient, migratory coastal people scattered along the coastal belts of the Lagos, Ogun and Ondo states of Nigeria, but has its original ancestral homeland in the four historical kingdoms of Mahin, Ugbo, Aheri and Etikan in the present-day Ondo state of Nigeria. The Ilaje’s fishing and coastal navigational dexterity is underlined by a popular saying that *ubo eri pa to, Ilaje gwa to rin*, meaning “wherever the river current runs through, there you will find the Ilaje.” In lending credence to this assertion, one is led to recognise that in the recent years, many migrant Ilaje fishermen have been sighted fishing in the waters of Epe, Oron, Warri, Nembe, Togo, Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe (Akingbe 2013, 329). On the same note, Esiaba Irobi’s “The Lagoon” dwells on the aesthetic signification of the Lagos Lagoon. Irobi celebrates the beauty of the Lagos cityscape in “The Lagoon” when he calls the attention of his friend to the elegance accompanying its presence: “Niyi, there are landscapes within. / Liquid, clean, pure as spring water. / Somewhere fishermen do not return / At sunset with empty fishing nets. / Lagoons where sailing boats do not capsize / In an ambush of water hyacinths” (LOP 2010, 107–8). Ofeimun’s performative expressions are reverberated in Joe Ushie’s “On Lagos Beach” as it portrays the water as a binding force which unites the world in its movement across borders of every continent: “I tread this sand-hilling beach, / this shoreline that belts / earth’s waist, beginning / here where lies my umbilical cord, / then pointing to the Antarctica, Asia, Australia ...” (LOP 2010, 311). To him, the beautiful watery environment is a reminder of his youthful experiences. Joe Ushie’s poem recalls a nostalgic exploration of the beach in his younger days.

Lagos Mainland

Conversely, the mainland contains a huge population of people who live in mostly crowded neighbourhoods. This part of the Lagos cityscape is prominent for its commercial activities and remarkable for its nightlife's carousal. Lagos Mainland contains areas such as Surulere, Ajeromi-Ifelodun, Agege, Apapa, Mushin, Oshodi-Isolo, and Ikeja. Other areas of the mainland include Ebute-Metta, Yaba and Ejigbo. Many of the Lagos poets reflect on their individual attachment to some of these areas in tones that betray the anger, pain, happiness and disappointments they have experienced.

Allen Avenue

Notably, Allen Avenue, an area within Ikeja, the state's capital, is situated within the metropolitan area of the Lagos cityscape. Allen used to be one of the busiest places in Ikeja, in the 1980s and early 1990s. It is notorious because a lot of social disruptions happened there. Specifics of these disruptions are underlined in Uche Nduka's "Allen Avenue": "The land is not yet a land / The moving lives are the hints of life ... / The good is of the good / The bad is of the sickening brood" (LOP 2010, 6). What this suggests is that Allen Avenue is a place where both the good and the bad converge. Therefore, in Allen Avenue, anything goes as one is left to one's fate in any given situation. Allen Avenue gives her residents the freedom to express themselves without any fear or limitation: "No store is vacant there / No billboard is alone there / No ware is neglected there / No warrior, no warrior, no warrior surrenders" (LOP 2010, 7). A visitor is expected to be smart here because "every conman wants to milk your day" in Allen.

Perhaps it is Helon Habila's "Allen Avenue" that gives the most vivid representation of the life of the prostitutes on Allen Avenue: "some mother's daughter on her knees, behind the hedge, / In one hand a cigarette, painted nails, the red in coke / The other hand on his bare bottom, some wife's / Husband, backing the light, his after work bag in / One hand, the evening paper in the other, a beatific / Smile on his face. / Her mouth stuck to his member / Remember? Allen Avenue" (LOP 2010, 209). The graphic image of two lovebirds in a compromising posture in the full glare of the public on the street is an indication that night life in Allen Avenue is permissive. Thus, in Allen, night is not the time to sleep or rest from the day's work, but a time to be cuddled by some prostitute who is only doing her job to get "the evening paper" (money) from some other woman's husband, as the poet has shown in his lines.

Oshodi

As a dark spot in the cityscape, Oshodi is located in the Metropolitan Lagos suburban area alongside other local government areas such as Agege, Apapa, Mushin and Isolo. A test of the impact of ecology on the Lagos cityscape, Oshodi suffers from overpopulation, environmental abuse or degradation and social insecurity. This is underscored in Wumi Raji's "On Seeing a Dead Body at Oshodi." The poem talks about

the lack of a social and spiritual value system pervading the Lagos megacity. The poet frowns at the nonchalant attitude of many Lagosians who go about their daily affairs selfishly, most often not caring what dangers befall their fellow men. The poem is indeed a lamentation which portrays man's insensitivity to the plight of others. Upon sighting the corpse of a dead woman, the poet persona is moved with pity but regrets the failing in the nature of man. As people go about their hustle in Lagos, not minding whether any life is lost or not, he wonders aloud: "She has been lying there for days / In her own pool of blood: / flies feast on her flesh, / Nobody cares" (LOP 2010, 25). When he tries to interrogate the neglect of the corpse, the people around him demanded to know "if she was my mother / or my aunt / or my sister / Or any relation of mine" (LOP 2010, 25). As adherence to the tenets of humanism disintegrates due to the pressure of daily hustling for survival in Lagos, the people have become indifferent to the plight of others to the extent that so long as the tragedy does not involve their families directly, there is no reason why they should bother. Wumi Raji inconsolably laments the possibility of his own death in a world where collective conscience has been seared and the hearts of men have grown desperately wicked.

In a similar manner, Tade Ipadeola presents Oshodi as a neighbourhood where both the intelligent and street urchins, popularly called "Area Boys" or *Agbero*, interact with one another in "Oshodi." For Ipadeola, Oshodi is a microcosm where people of differing religions, cultures and inclinations converge: "Oshodi throbs with expectations great and small— / Is a mighty mosque of marabouts and seers" (LOP 2010, 192). In the same vein, Obu Udeozo's "Oshodi" depicts a "Shoppers palace and paradise of pickpockets, / forever ablaze with forests of voices which / drown daylight with pleas for discounts, / in second here; life is found or lost / Oshodi, OshodiOoo" (LOP 2010, 331). He sees Oshodi as a very vulnerable enclave where the bizarre happens regularly, including untimely death. Oshodi cuts a more frightening spectacle in Uche Peter Umez's "At Oshodi": "I saw you / bruised arms flung overhead / face bloodied, your own voice droning / under the teeth of whips cutting / welts of agony into your soul" (LOP 2010, 344). Just as we have seen in Wumi Raji's experience where nobody seems to care about the dead woman on the street, Umez's "At Oshodi" is a further revelation of the ecological subversion of Oshodi: "the air choked on quick fumes, / while danfoes and molues jostled each other / cracking the day with more dissonant static, / amid another surge of on-lookers" (LOP 2010, 344). In other words, people are not concerned about the predicaments of others and the state of the environment.

Ajgunle

Ajgunle, like Oshodi, is a place known for its high levels of insecurity, overpopulation and fierce struggle for survival. Beyond being a euphemism for disorderliness, Aj-city, as Ajgunle is fondly called, serves as a creative hub for many accomplished Nigerian and Lagos-based musical artists like Daddy Showkey, Daddy Fresh, Baba Fryo, Baba D, Oritsheimi and others. Nevertheless, striking imagery of dilapidation, a rundown enclave and deliberate neglect is displayed in Akeem Lasisi's "Ajgunle" to

imaginatively evoke “a notorious jungle in our water orb / a notorious jungle in our aquatic clan / Prime plum in city of dreams” (LOP 2010, 3). Ajegunle’s notoriety for providing poor standards of living further resonates as a depressing variable of the paradoxical constituent of the Lagos cityscape. Lasisi further delineates the extent of Ajegunle’s deprivation, to illustrate the deplorable humanitarian situation where a single living room “harbours 40 children / Where the toilet shares a room with kitchen and bath.” As the most extreme expression of concern for humanity living on the precarious fringes of the Lagos cityscape, Niyi Osundare’s “Ajegunle” describes the deplorable condition in Ajegunle as not only regrettable for humans but nature as well. This is captured in the following lines: “Here the moon / Is a jungle, / Sad like a forgotten beard / With tensioned climbers” (LOP 2010, 95). However, in “A Song for Ajegunle” Osundare concentrates on the depredation of Ajegunle: “You stretched out your calloused hands / switched on your weed-infested smile / and spread your battle history / like a tattered mat for my calling feet” (LOP 2010, 96). This ironic description of Ajegunle invokes images of poverty, hunger and deliberate abandonment by the government. Juxtaposing Ikoyi with Ajegunle evinces the opposition between positive anarchy and cultivated orderliness. While Ikoyi’s roads network is paved and has a police presence, Ajegunle is depicted as a wasteland inhabited by the “wretched of the earth,” which serves as a mockery of Ikoyi’s opulence and serenity. Ajegunle’s neglect by the Nigerian government further illustrates the significance of political ecology as it draws on “a synthesis of political economy, with its insistence on the need to link the distribution of power with productive activity and ecological analysis, with its broader vision of bio-environmental relationship” (Greenberg and Park 1994, 1). Ajegunle’s parlous state is heightened in the third stanza: “Through roads potholed by callous rains / Through hovels caves-deep in swelling pools / Through gutters heavy with burdens / of cholera bowels / Through feverish orchestra / of a million mosquitoes” (LOP 2010, 96–97). Osundare’s “Song” is an expression of grief; a sad tune that laments the depressing condition of Ajegunle and by extension, Lagos city. In the poem, Ajegunle is presented as a city ravaged by compromising environmental and health challenges.

Further, Osundare captures the debased life in Ajegunle within a 24-hour time frame: “Morning— ... here is a crow without a cork / Taps without water, tables without bread / children without school.” In the Evening, what we find in Ajegunle are “pale smokes / snaking out of idle kitchen / The toothless swagger of beer parlours / The battering clamour of weeping wives / The satanic rumble of supperless stomachs / The salaaming clarion of manacled mosques” (Osundare 1990, 18). With this, Osundare in “A Song for Ajegunle” presents Ajegunle as an isolated city that suffers from environmental soreness ranging from noise, air, and water pollution to the deprivation of basic social amenities and security.

Atan Cemetery

A section in the Lagos cityscape that attracts the least imaginative reflection by the Lagos poets is the burial site known as Atan Cemetery, and it is no wonder it has only

a single entry in Ofeimun's compendium *Lagos of the Poets*. Tony Marinho's "Atan Cemetery" hinges on a meditative tone that touches on human mortality and its accrued signification to capture a range of elegiac lines: "Yes, you are dead, / An Echo O'MOG, / You the spawn of parental lustful loins, / Then ignorant of the seed to germinate, / Grow and fly away to die in faraway Freetown" (LOP 2010, 316). The poem recalls the brutal fate of many Nigerian soldiers who were killed on a peace-keeping mission in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The soldiers were buried in Atan Cemetery. Apparently, the intertwining of fate and mortality in the poem cuts loose from Atan's iconography as a readable site. Stressing the relevance of memory to the recollection of events in the city, Boyer has argued that "our memory of the city, of pictorialized space and time, must be revitalized by reexamining the writing of history as representation and by reawakening utopian involvement invested" (Boyer 1994, 5–6). The poem is a mockery of the often contentious African democracy that frequently results in civil wars and other political crises. The first phase of the Liberian Civil War (between 1989 and 1997) started as a rebellion against President Samuel Doe in which about 250 000 thousand civilians were killed. The Liberian Civil War spilled over into Sierra Leone in 1991, when Foday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front (RUF), aided by the special forces of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), launched a military assault on Freetown in an attempt to overthrow Joseph Momoh, the then president of Sierra Leone. The intensity of both civil wars necessitated the intervention of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) who hastily put together and deployed to Monrovia a military outfit known as the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to restore peace to the two beleaguered countries. Nigeria provided the bulk of the soldiers and military armaments utilised by the ECOMOG and its armed forces also suffered the highest number of casualties in the West African sub-region. The poem declaims that the fallen soldiers now have a permanent home address and will henceforth be spared the agony of deployment to war fronts. Moreover, while celebrating these soldiers for their gallantry, the poet writes: "You marched through / Childhood and adolescence, / Marked out for a special fate. / You dodged and inflicted the missiles of strife / When you signed up for life. / You signed up for death in Freetown's furnace, / At the crossroads of life" (LOP 2010, 316–17). Most unfortunately, some of these soldiers died in their prime as their ages ranged from 17 to 35. Thus, from a bitter point of view, the persona believes that the peace keepers may have died in vain, as the political elite of both Liberia and Sierra Leone may not have learnt any significant lesson that could deter them from plunging their countries into another round of civil war in the immediate future. Drawing on the tragedy of amnesia, Mark Crinson in *Urban Memory* contends that "memory evokes loss, indeed, the very triggering of memory is a symptom of the disappearance of close organic communities living in continuity with their pasts" (Crinson 2005, xiv). While excoriating the poor handling of the burial site, which is deplorably overgrown and littered from years of neglect, Marinho laments the regrettable abandonment of the soldiers to the decrepit Atan Cemetery: "Atan cemetery / Scantly shaded from /

Neglect, rain dirt and burning sun, / Near naked to the / Solitary pain of death, / The only real evidence of battle, / The body count. / How many?" (LOP 2010, 316–17).

Conclusion

The paper has examined literary portrayals of the Lagos cityscape in the poetry of Niyi Osundare, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, Remi Raji, Rashida Ismaili and other selected poets from *Lagos of the Poets* (2010), a compendium edited by Odia Ofeimun, within the context of political ecology. The article has delineated the Lagos cityscape as a phenomenon that harbours contradictions, as poignantly exemplified in the contrast between the relatively neater/cleaner suburbs like Ikoyi and Victoria Island against the chaotic slums of Oshodi and the Maroko peninsula. In spite of what has been misinterpreted as a deconstruction of the cityscape's phenomenology, a seeming sanity amidst enduring chaos tends to be fashioned in the assuring fact that Lagos, as the second most populous city in Africa, indubitably stands out as the only city in postcolonial Nigeria that accommodates people from the country's federated units. Essentially, as cities are not finished products but bespeak their transforming adaptability, Lagos cityscape's heterogeneous demographics keep growing as affirmation of its entrepreneurial disposition. Suffice it to state that what needs to be underscored here is the simple and obvious fact that the fleeting and elusive sanity in the Lagos cityscape is unambiguously rooted in its capability to attract more Nigerians, running away from the debilitating poverty ravaging the provincials, who upon coming to Lagos are often employed by a number of multinationals, numerous banks, media houses, telecommunication giants like MTN and Globacom. Also, other individual companies have always employed many Nigerians and a significant number of foreigners on a continuous basis. Exploring the complexities imbedded in the correlation of urbanity and population growth within the context of political ecology, the poems of Osundare, Clark-Bekederemo, Raji, Ismaili and most of the poems in the compendium, especially those selected for the paper, were crafted to articulate personal experiences of the poets. It is, therefore, not an exaggeration to conclude that while some of these poets only express their emotional attachment to the city of Lagos, others are able to address the ecological failings which tend to compromise the living standards of Lagos's population.

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