

THE POWERS OF POETRY

CREATIVE WRITING FROM THE NIGER DELTA AS A TOOL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



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ABSTRACT

Inspired by centuries of activists who used creative writing as a tool to encourage reflections and inspire change, this thesis looks at the possibility of poetry to be used as an environmental justice tool. In particular the ability of poetry from Nigeria to engage Dutch people with problems around Shell's exploitation of the Niger Delta and its people, is investigated. Using decolonial and Critical Race Theory frameworks, historical and systemic injustices are discussed. Furthermore, the intersection of the concepts of climate change denial and slow violence is explored.

Expert interviews and an inductive literature review informed the design of this research, which uses online focus group research and questionnaires as the main method of data collection. This thesis concludes that poetry has a great potential to help break down colonial and racial inequalities in representation, although poetry is not a form that Dutch people engage with commonly. Even though the external validity of the research is low, it can be concluded that there are four main powers of poetry as an environmental justice tool, namely: creating emotional connections; overcoming distance; addressing overwhelming solutions; and exposing systemic inequalities.

Keywords: Human Ecology, Environmental Justice, Poetry, Writer Activism, Niger Delta, Shell, Decoloniality

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1 INTRODUCTION

"How, indeed, are we to act ethically toward human and biotic communities that lie beyond our sensory ken? [...] How do we both make slow violence visible yet also challenge the privileging of the visible?"

(Nixon, 2011, p.15)

In 1860 Eduard Douwes Dekker, under the pseudonym Multatuli¹, wrote the book *Max Havelaar or the Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company*. The author was a Dutch colonial officer in present day Indonesia, and in his persona as Multatuli he critically described the exploitation and abuse of the Javanese locals in the coffee production process that he witnessed. The book strongly condemns the inhumane practices of the Dutch colonial government and it sparked a lot of discussion in the Netherlands about the ethics of colonialism. *Max Havelaar* was translated into many languages and is now a classic work in post-colonial literature (Salverda, 2005). I was first introduced to the book when I was in primary school, and I remember doing a dedicated school project about it when I was eleven.

In the many years that went by since I first read *Max Havelaar*, I grew up to become a fervent reader and political activist. I do not know whether that is due to the influence of this book in particular, or the fact that I was generally strongly encouraged by my parents to read, write, and think critically. I suspect it was the latter, or some combination of the two. I also more or less forgot about Multatuli's decolonial appeal over the years, while I was being introduced to other critical writers and activists. One of these writers was, for example, Robert Nixon the author of *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011). In this book Nixon gives several examples of writer-activists – authors who inspire, activate, and help people to apprehend social and ecological threats in imaginative ways, among them a writer-activist from the Niger Delta in Nigeria.

Then, in January of this year I read in the news about a court case in The Hague in which Shell was ordered to pay damages to farmers in the Niger Delta who had suffered greatly due to oil spills. Although this legal case was certainly a victory for these farmers in particular, this single ruling did not, in my opinion, do sufficient justice to the decades of environmental and social harm which communities in the Niger Delta have endured. I also did not have the impression that news items about the case managed to engage many Dutch people with the intricacies of the situation in Nigeria, and by extension the global climate crisis – which is for

¹ Multatuli is Latin for 'I have endured much'

a large part perpetuated by fossil fuel companies and which these communities are the first victims of. Additionally, I felt that the emphasis on the link between Shell's actions in Nigeria and the companies' connection to the Netherlands and its colonial past were missing. It occurred to me then that literature had, already as early as 1860, helped Dutch people to reflect upon inequalities and coloniality, and I wondered if a form of creative writing could help do that again.

There is ample evidence, also from more recently than the 19th century, which shows that creative writing has the ability to promote reflection, discussion, and inspire social change. In particular feminist scholars have found that storytelling is an important tool for teaching, empowering, and activating people (Razack, 1993; Wånggren, 2016). Researchers in the field of environmental sustainability have also looked at the potential of stories to help address climate change (Harrison, 2017; Jones & Peterson, 2017; Meifert-Menhard, 2020; Moezzi, Janda, & Rotmann, 2017). In the thesis I will explore particularly how creative writing in the form of poetry from the Niger Delta can be used to raise awareness among Dutch people about ongoing cases of slow violence, social injustice, and ecological degradation, using the case of Shell as an example.

1.1 AIM AND PURPOSE

With this research I aim to show that creative writing can be a powerful and practical *applied environmental justice tool*, as Dickinson (2012) described it. I also want to learn what advantages there are to using stories to communicate complex problems, concerning the climate crisis in particular, to a broader public. For this thesis I will use the case of Shell's oil exploitation and pollution in the Niger Delta in particular, to investigate if poetry created by local Nigerian activists can teach Dutch people more about this case. Nigerian authors have long used forms of storytelling such as poetry, in spoken and written form, to address the environmental degeneration in their region, but their voices have not always been widely heard. By using these poems in my research, I hope to help increase their visibility and I aim to contribute to wider decolonial efforts in academia.

An important purpose of this research is to contribute to the existing body of work that shows how helpful creative writing, and arts in general, can be for academia. As mentioned previously, this research will particularly help to show the importance of empowered and amplified voices of people that are not always heard in Europe when speaking about the

climate crisis. In general, I also think it is important to find ways to effectively communicate research – especially about societal issues – and to find ways to break through people’s (climate) denial, and this research will provide more insight into how to do that.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

These are the two research questions that I will answer in this thesis:

1. How can poetry enhance Dutch people’s understanding of environmental injustice cases?
2. Using the case of Nigerian poetry and Shell, which aspects of poetry can play a role in relating to environmental justice?

To answer the first question, I will examine if and how the form of poetry² is particularly persuasive in informing people about the environmental injustice case that I am focussing on. For the second question, I will specifically research what the aspects or powers are through which the poems I use in my research can be tools for environmental justice.

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

In the next chapter I will explain which theoretical frameworks and concepts I draw upon during this thesis. Prominent among them are Critical Race Theory and Decolonial Theory, but I also combine these theories with a number of other concepts, making my work a reflection of the diversity and interdisciplinarity that is the field of Human Ecology. I will also provide more background to the current situation in the Niger Delta, and the history of Shell and the oil extractive industry in Nigeria. In Chapter 3 I will explain which research methods I used, namely some initial expert interviews and a literature review, and then focus groups with a questionnaire component for my main data collection. I will expand on the different data collection processes and justify my methods, and I will also shortly describe my methodology. Then, in Chapter 4, I will present my key findings and analyse them. I will not separate the qualitative and quantitative data, rather the chapter is divided by the different topics up for analysis and both the quantitative and qualitative findings will be drawn upon throughout the analysis. Finally, I will finish this thesis with a conclusion in Chapter 5.

² For the purpose of this thesis, I define poetry as a literary form that uses the arrangement of language, through aesthetics, rhyme, sound, and/or rhythm, to convey a message. I do not include lyrics set to music in this definition and I focus particularly on poems from the Niger Delta in this research.

2 BACKGROUND & THEORY

"The way in which society pollutes – and cleans – [...] tells us something about that society, its ideas about fairness' and 'health.' In other words, the 'smoke' a society produces is a 'mirror' of the social relationships of that society."

(E. Melanie Dupuis, quoted in Sluyterman, 2010)

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

I will use several theories and key concepts to guide me throughout this thesis. Firstly, I will use *Critical Race Theory* (CRT) as a theoretical framework, CRT can be seen as an extension or a product of the Environmental Justice movement (Dickinson, 2012; Kurtz, 2009). Environmental Justice scholars in the US, where the movement began, have long ago established that racial³ inequality leaves non-white communities, which are generally poorer, more vulnerable to exposure to environmentally harmful practices or toxic substances (Bullard, 1996, 2001; Roberts, 2007). This issue extends far outside of the US though, and it is perpetuated by – among other things – ‘traditional liberal civil rights discourses’ and the exclusion of experiential and different forms of knowledge. By amplifying the lived reality of those people that are most victimised, marginalised, and often ignored, CRT aims to transform the relationships between the dominant and suppressed groups (Love, 2004). CRT scholars try to expose racial inequality and to add onto existing research methods, and importantly storytelling is one of the methods CRT scholars propose using (Dickinson, 2012). Specifically this emphasis of CRT, on the ability of stories’ power to reform/transform in cases of environmental injustice, is important in this thesis.

Additionally, I will utilise *Decolonial Theory* throughout this thesis. CRT and decolonial theory are similar in many ways, for example in how they recognise that different modes of knowledge and perspectives have been repressed by the colonial system. Decolonial theorists also recognise that the relationship between “‘western’ culture, and the others, continues to be one of colonial domination” (Quijano, 2007, p.169). So, even though the formal period of physical colonialism is largely over, the colonality in global trade, power, and social relationships still exists (Escobar, 2007). Furthermore, Escobar (2007) describes how these unequal relationships are actively kept in place because the ‘modern’ way of life in the West necessitates them. In the next section I will explain more about the colonial and

³ In this thesis I define race as a socio-political construct based on historical, physical and social components that organise people into social groups (Dickinson, 2012).

environmental history of the Niger Delta, which will make it easier to understand the current issues that this research deals with, in particular within a CRT and decolonial framework.

There are also some key concepts that I will work with in connection to climate change denial in the West, and within the aforementioned frameworks. Climate change denial and ‘double-mindedness’, as used by Norgaard (2011) and Orange (2017), are concepts that identify and describe the lack of concern and action – particularly in the West – to the climate crisis. Denial and inaction in the face of the current climate crisis do not seem to be caused primarily by a lack of information about climate change, but rather by social forces (Harrison, 2017; Norgaard, 2011). When Norgaard describes the problem of socially organized denial, she discusses firstly the distance – emotionally and geographically – between our daily lives in the West and the environmental issues that our way of life expedites. This distance means that people “must struggle to imagine the reality of our current situation” (p. 223). Secondly, Norgaard describes how drastic or extreme measures, which are needed to counter the climate crisis, seem unfeasible. Orange also focuses on this in relation to the term *climate trauma*: “the problems seem so large and systemic, so intractable in the face of gigantic moneyed interests [...] that we find ourselves paralyzed.” (p. 14). This paralysis translates to inaction, particularly when facing large, institutionalised, and complex systems.

Interestingly, the two obstacles for overcoming denial and inaction – of distance from the issues and overwhelming solutions – that are described by Norgaard (2011) and Orange (2017), match almost exactly with what Nixon (2011) defines as key parts to understanding *slow violence*. Slow violence is “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.” (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). An important aspect of slow violence, which I recognise as being linked to continued coloniality and cases of environmental injustice – as discussed previously – is that this violence is deliberately kept out of sight of people in the West. Nixon describes how “Big Oil” and other powerful actors make doubt and inaction into a bankable product; the more of it there is in the West, the richer they will be. Much like CRT theorists believe in how “storytelling can help expose the dominant racial forces that materialize through lived experiences” (Dickinson, 2012, p.59), Nixon poses that writer-activists can “help render decipherable the illegible distance between a far-off neoliberal ideology and its long-lasting local fallout.” (p.42). I will explore the intersection of these different theories and concepts in this study.

2.2 OIL EXTRACTION AND THE NIGER DELTA

2.2.1 Shell and oil exploration

Early oil exploration started in the Crown Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria in 1903, when the demand for oil in Britain started outstripping their domestic supply (Steyn, 2009). The initial search for oil in present-day Nigeria was relatively unsuccessful, between 1903 and 1914 several companies searched for oil and other resources – such as coal and bitumen – but none managed to find enough oil of good quality (Umejesi & Akpan, 2013). Many companies also found the working environment challenging because of the rainy seasons, limited drilling site choices due to swampy terrain, lack of infrastructure, and the uncooperative local communities (Steyn, 2009). After World War One the demand for oil products in Europe increased dramatically, and the search for oil was prioritised by the British government (Steyn, 2009). One of the companies that attempted the search for oil in Nigeria in 1918 was the Anglo-Persian *D’Arcy Exploration Corporation* (D’Arcy for short). However, in 1924 D’Arcy let their exploration license lapse, when no oil had been discovered and the Nigerian environment was again found to be too tough (Steyn, 2009).

In 1936 D’Arcy returned to Nigeria, after promising reports of widespread oil seepages along the coast (Steyn, 2009). This time they commenced their explorations as a joint venture with Royal Dutch Shell (hereafter D’Arcy/Shell). In 1907 the Dutch *Royal Dutch Petroleum Company*⁴ and the British company *Shell Transport and Trading Company Ltd.* had amalgamated their business under the name Royal⁵ Dutch Shell (Hennchen, 2015; Rosenthal & Young, 1990). Steyn (2009) posits that D’Arcy/Shell probably cooperated in Nigeria because of the general British oil policy and the colony’s Mineral Oils Ordinance in particular, which determined that oil concessions in the British Empire should only be given to companies registered in Britain or its colonies. This thus barred Dutch-controlled Shell from getting access in Nigeria. These kinds of ordinances or laws, which exclusively gave colonial powers concessions for the mineral resources in their colonies, were a common way of ensuring that resource wealth was not shared with anyone other than the coloniser (Umejesi & Akpan, 2013). Additionally, these sole concessions enabled companies to operate as though

⁴ The Royal Dutch Petroleum Company was founded in 1890 and has strong colonial roots in the Dutch East Indies, present-day Indonesia (Salverda, 2008)

⁵ The designation ‘Royal’ [*Koninklijk*] is an honorary title that can be granted to Dutch companies, foundations, or institutions by the ruling monarch and head of state of the Netherlands. The designation symbolises the respect, appreciation, and the trust that the monarch has in the receiver (Koninklijk Huis, 2021), it can be seen as a powerful sign of approval by the Dutch State for the work of the receiver.

they owned the resources, rather than just the right to extract it (Asante, 1979; Umejisi & Akpan, 2013). Asante (1979) explains that “[this] concession regime created an enclave status for the transnational corporation fortified by a regime of economic and legal arrangements so formidable and pervasive that it overtly challenged the sovereignty of the host government over its natural resources.” (p.339).

With these extensive concessions granted, D’Arcy/Shell established their offices in Owerri, in south-east Nigeria (Umejisi & Akpan, 2013). After fourteen years of intensive surveying, D’Arcy/Shell drilled its first exploratory oil well in 1951 (Steyn, 2009; Umejisi & Akpan, 2013). For the next five years they drilled several more wells, and in January of 1956 “oil of commercial quantity and quality was finally discovered by Shell/D’Arcy at Oloibiri, situated 72km west of Port Harcourt” (Steyn, 2009, p.32). In 1958 Shell, by that time no longer in collaboration with D’Arcy, commenced oil production in Nigeria. Two years later, on October 1st of 1960, Nigeria gained its independence from Britain. However, “the oil industry in the country retained its enclave character within the Nigerian economy during the independent era” (Steyn, 2009, p.35). Asante (1979) describes that newly independent governments were often persuaded by their former colonisers and invested companies to preserve concessions that were given during the colonial era, on the grounds of “sanctity of contract”. Obviously the “foreign control of natural resources of developing countries made nonsense of their newly acquired national sovereignty and effectively undermined their efforts to develop and control these vital economic resources.” (Asante, 1979, p.340). More than five decades later Nigeria is a cornerstone for Shell’s operations, and even though the oil industry in Nigeria has diversified somewhat, Shell is still the largest oil operator in the country⁶ (Greyl et al., 2013; Hennchen, 2015). To a large extent, “what currently prevails in the Niger Delta oil enclave is a specific variant of internal colonialism [with] exploitative and grossly inequitable entitlement-relations between the Nigerian state and the oil communities” (Abba & Onyemachi, 2020, p.3).

In 2005 Royal Dutch Shell became a public limited company (plc) which solidified the 1907 merger and made Royal Dutch Shell⁷ formally one parent company (Sluyterman, 2010). Today, Shell’s headquarters are in The Hague, the Netherlands, although the company is incorporated in Britain and still has many different ‘daughter companies’ in different

⁶ Shell’s continued colonial influence in Nigeria resembles what they did in other countries too, such as India (Verma & Abdelrehim, 2017)

⁷ Throughout this paper I will refer to this plc simply as ‘Shell’

countries which are directly and/or indirectly owned (Hennchen, 2015). Currently, Shell is Europe's largest oil producer (Hennchen, 2015), and Shell is also seen as the most carbon intensive oil company in the world (Greyl et al., 2013). In 2020 Shell was the overall 5th biggest company in the world according to Fortune 500's ranking, Shell's annual revenue that year was more than USD 352 billion (Fortune 500, 2020).

2.2.2 Engagement with local communities

There are records from as early as the 1930s that show the vocal opposition by local communities in Nigeria against oil exploration activities (Umejesi & Akpan, 2013). Local communities clashed with the colonial state and commercial companies particularly over a different understanding of the forms of rights over the land that they thought they had. Umejesi and Akpan (2013) describe that generally “the state acquires and transfers land to mining companies in indigenous communities, but local people see their claim to the land as ‘aboriginal’” (p.115). This understanding of transferable land rights is particularly clear in the aforementioned Mineral Oils Ordinance:

“the legislative context in which [D’Arcy/Shell] operated in Nigeria [...] did not require the joint venture to obtain permission from any land owners to conduct exploratory work, but it did guarantee the oil exploration parties protection from any person who might interfere with their work, who was liable on conviction to be fined or imprisoned.” (Steyn, 2009, p.26)

Local people were angry about what they saw as a dispossession of their land, as well as about the secretive nature of D’Arcy/Shell work, and the damage to the environment that was done. Umejesi and Akpan found records in a Nigerian archive from 1940, of a landowner who petitioned the colonial District Officer in his district because his land was seized by D’Arcy/Shell without his permission. This land owner said: “Your company, your people, the oil people they call themselves [D’Arcy/Shell] destroy my land, yam, cocoyam, and palms. I do not give them permission” (p.122). D’Arcy/Shell were, however, not required by the colonial laws to take any regard for the communities. What is more, D’Arcy/Shell actively worked together with the colonial government to disregard the claims of oppositional groups, and “the colonial government did not hesitate to use force or the threat thereof against communities, and willingly sent police to protect the exploration parties” (Steyn, 2009, p.28).

Throughout the following decades, local resistance against the oil industry remained, although local interests often became subordinate to, and tangled up in, nationalist movements and regional independence struggles. Shell strategically utilised this situation to tighten its grip on the oil concession sites (Steyn, 2009), and also rejected initiatives to get government

representatives appointed to its Board who would provide some government supervision (Umejesi & Akpan, 2013). Steyn describes how Shell did eventually, in the 1950s, adopt a policy of Nigerianisation of their operation, however, the Nigerianisation moved extremely slowly. After several years Shell had only appointed three Nigerians in senior positions. “The slow tempo of the company’s Nigerianisation seem to have stemmed from a deliberate decision made by it [Shell/D’Arcy] to train only a few senior grade Nigerians for integration with their senior grade European staff” (Steyn, 2009, p.31).

As described previously, the independence of Nigeria did not cause much change in Shell’s business in the country. What is more, independent Nigeria “was a fractious Nigeria resulting from the divisive politics of the former colonizers” (Agbonifo, 2002). Thus, even when the independent Nigerian government obtained a majority share in the country’s oil industry, this did not mean that local communities had adequate representation or control over the industry (Steyn, 2009). Throughout the years protests from local communities, individuals, or united groups followed, and suppression from Shell and the Nigerian government or military also followed. Sometimes protesters resorted to sabotage or civil disobedience to get their causes attention, but many of the protests just took the form of peaceful demonstrations and/or media campaigns. Most famous of these campaigns is probably the fight for the Ogoni people and the fate of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his fellow activists, who were executed in 1995. I do not have the space in this thesis to do justice to the struggle of the Ogoni’s, which in any case has already been excellently written about by many others (see Agbonifo, 2002; Corley, Fallon, & Cox, 2017; Nixon, 2011) and not least by Saro-Wiwa himself (see Saro-Wiwa, 1992). Rather I hope that this brief historical overview informs about the extensive resistance which forms the background for the current situation in the Niger Delta. In the last part of this chapter, I will focus some more on the writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa, as well as other Nigerians who use poetry in particular for activism.

2.2.3 Environmental impact

Both the exploration and exploitation of oil is extremely damaging to natural environments. In a report by EJOLT (Environmental Justice Organizations, Liabilities and Trade) some of the main impacts of the oil industry on local ecosystems are discussed:

“[oil] exploitation affects animals and plants through oil spills and gas flaring, condemning some to extinction and irreversibly damaging ecosystems, thus causing an important loss of biodiversity. Deforestation associated with oil-extraction induces not only the destruction of biodiversity reserves, it also destroys a major sink of CO₂, turning forests and swamps into a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions, exacerbated by discharges of toxic chemicals.

Toxic waste leaks and the incineration or flaring of unwanted chemicals and gases pollute air, rivers and water basins on a large scale [...] Crops are destroyed because of water and soil pollution and food is contaminated. Even areas appearing to be untouched are in fact affected by long, continuous and still unnoticed spills.” (Greyl et al., 2013, p.10)

The human and nonhuman communities of the Niger Delta have had to deal with all of these devastating impacts for decades. In particular oil spills are a significant problem for the people in the region, as the spills pollute the water and farming grounds that locals depend on (Greyl et al., 2013). In total “it is estimated that spills in Nigeria amount to 100 000 to 200 000 tons per year and have been doing so for almost 60 years.” (Pålsson & Linden, 2014, p.1706). Shell’s response to these spills and their impact has generally been negligent, slow, and/or inadequate (Byrnes, Deligio, Kote-Witah, & Ryerson, 2019; Greyl et al., 2013). For a study conducted in Ogoniland, researchers found extensive contamination and destruction of mangroves and wetlands because of chronic oil spills (Pålsson & Linden, 2014; UNEP, 2011). Mangroves are essential spawning and nursery areas for fish, they are also important in combating coastal erosion, and in places where mangroves have died off invasive plant species move in (UNEP, 2011). The example of oil spills and mangroves just serves as an illustration of the damage to the ecosystem at large that has been done in the Niger Delta⁸, due to the limited scope of this research I will not expand further, however much more has been written about this topic elsewhere (see Aghalino & Eyinla, 2009; Bassey, 2016; Ejiba, Onya, & Adams, 2016; Raji & Abejide, 2013).

2.2.4 Legal cases

Against this background of environmentally and socially damaging oil practices, some inhabitants of the Niger Delta have turned to litigation to try to get some recognition and/or compensation. Local communities initially, starting from the mid-1970s, sued Shell in Nigerian courts, but the results of this were often disappointing. Shell frequently frustrated or delayed the legal process, and on numerous occasions Shell simply refused to comply with court orders (Bassey, 2016). Shell also settled out of court on a few occasions, in 2009 they for example paid \$15.5 million to put to rest a lawsuit in the US over alleged human rights abuses in the case of Ken Saro-Wiwa (Henchen, 2015). Byrnes et al. (2019, p.6) describe that the “way legal systems continue to embody colonial legacies” make it very difficult for most Nigerians to truly achieve justice this way.

⁸ Shell is not the only party guilty of the environmental damage in the Niger Delta, in the referenced sources much is also written about other actors – Chevron, Mobil, and Texaco for example – that share responsibility

In 2008 four fishermen from three different villages in the Niger Delta, together with the Dutch branch of *Friends of the Earth* (called *Milieudefensie*), sued Shell in a Dutch court in The Hague⁹ (Greyl et al., 2013; Milieudefensie, 2021b). In 2015 the court in the Netherlands ruled that Shell had to pay a compensation to some villages in oil spill affected regions, however, Shell appealed that decision (Milieudefensie, 2021b). While this case was unfolding in Dutch courts, there was also a legal case brought against Shell in the UK. In 2011 Shell was found to be legally liable in the UK for big oil leaks due to equipment failure in 2008 and 2009 (Hennchen, 2014). This was a ruling of major importance, for it showed that Shell, the parent company with its offices in Western Europe, could be held legally responsible for its actions in the former colony. On the 29th of January of this year, the Dutch higher court decided that Shell is indeed liable for the damages caused by oil spills in several of the villages in the Delta, and that they will have to pay compensation (Milieudefensie, 2021a). It is this case and the recent ruling that I have used in my research as a central topic for discussion with the participants of my focus groups.

2.3 NIGERIAN POETRY IN ACTIVISM

Although legal challenges have recently become an important and relatively successful part of the Niger Delta peoples' quest for justice, a much more historically and culturally significant part of the protests is, and has been, literature and poetry. In my interviews with two experts in the field – Nnimmo Bassey and Dr Nkiru Onyemachi – both described how poems and songs were traditionally tools of sharing information and social expectations in Nigeria. Bassey said, songs were “used to expose wrongdoing and to shame the people who are committing social offenses or crimes, and it is also used as a tool for correction and a tool for mobilisation, and for celebration also.” (personal communication, March 4, 2021). Dr Onyemachi added that:

“The advent of the written literature sort of relegated song and ushered in other forms such as the novel which is an easier form of communication and entertainment to the educated and ‘semi-educated’ due to its use of everyday language unlike poetry. But in recent times, the introduction of free verse in poetry has erased the restriction on poetry that limits its understanding [...] especially the Niger-Deltans can relate very well with most poems [...].”

So “poetry has been adopted as a powerful tool for addressing environmental degeneration mostly caused by [oil] exploitation and exploration.” (Nkiru Onyemachi, personal

⁹ These are actually five different cases, combined into three suits with some significant formal and legal differences, all initially tried at the District Court Of The Hague (Greyl et al., 2013)

communication, March 27, 2021) by many activists. Other scholars also describe how, in general “Modern African literature from its onset has been (and still is) a literature of engagement as writers deploy their artistic resources toward addressing important issues concerning the individual and corporate existence of their various societies.” (Ojaruega, 2013, p.32). According to Egya (2016), poets from the Niger Delta also manage to give their poetry great “representational power”, by “not only capturing the condition of the people and the environment but, more importantly, in confronting those responsible for the condition.” (p.9).

The poets of which I will use poetry in my research are Ken Saro-Wiwa and Nnimmo Bassey, who I have both mentioned before. Ken Saro-Wiwa was an activist, journalist, novelist, and poet who advocated against the ecological destruction in Ogoniland, a region in the Niger Delta. Saro-Wiwa founded MOSOP (the Movement for Survival of the Ogoni People) with which he campaigned for the Ogoni – a local ethnic minority – people’s environmental and social rights (Corley et al., 2017; Nixon, 2011). Saro-Wiwa believed in non-violent action and he used his writings to protest the abuses of the Nigerian government and foreign oil companies against his people and their land (Esamagu, 2020). Saro-Wiwa’s “prolific writings [...] lay the ground for a broader estimation of the global cost, above all to micro-minorities, of the ongoing romance between unanswerable corporations and unspeakable regimes” (Nixon, 2011, p.105). In November of 1995 Saro-Wiwa was executed by the military Government of Nigeria, along with eight other Ogoni activists (Corley et al., 2017). This execution, and the show trial that preceded it, was globally condemned, and “triggered the formation of more pressure groups and the emergence of a new crop of writers who see themselves as successors of the struggle” (Egya, 2016, p.8).

It is this legacy that poet Nnimmo Bassey acknowledges building upon with his writings (Abba & Onyemachi, 2020). Bassey was born in the Niger Delta in 1958 and is currently one of Nigeria’s foremost environmental rights advocates (Aghoghovwia, 2014a, 2014b). He originally trained as an architect but has dedicated his life to advocate against the environmental and social destruction of the Niger Delta caused by oil production, and to strengthen the environmental movement in Nigeria as well as globally. Bassey heavily critiques environmental imperialism in his writings (Aghoghovwia, 2014b) and campaigns for oil extraction to be stopped altogether (Aghoghovwia, 2016). Egya (2016) describes Bassey’s poetry style as “utterly combative, [Bassey] does not shy away from naming names of the oppressors of the Niger Delta’s people, and calling on the people to rise against the oppressors.” (p.9).

3 RESEARCH METHODS & METHODOLOGY

“While untruth is common, ‘truth’ is a matter of degree and perspective.”
(Moezzi et al., 2017, p.1)

3.1 METHODS

I used a multi-mixed methods approach for this research, gathering both quantitative data and qualitative data from focus groups, as well as collecting qualitative data from several experts. Additionally, I have done a literature review to understand the background of my case and theoretical frameworks. The largest section of this chapter is dedicated to describing the focus group research, as that was my main source of data collection.

3.1.1 Expert interviews and literature review

Before commencing with my focus group sessions, I conducted an interview via Skype with Nnimmo Bassey, the renowned Nigerian environmental rights activist, winner of the 2010 Right Livelihood award (Right Livelihood Foundation, 2013), and author of several books and poems – two of which I used in this research. The interview was semi-structured and served to add depth to the questions for my questionnaire and to give me as a researcher a better understanding of the background of this case. I was also in touch with Nkiru Onyemachi, a Doctor of English and Literary Studies, and Lecturer at the Edwin Clark University in Nigeria. Sadly, we were unable to find a time to schedule an interview, but instead Dr Onyemachi responded to a set of questions via email. Since Dr Onyemachi’s area of expertise is Literary studies, her answers gave me a particular insight into the history and importance of poetry in the Niger Delta. According to Bogner et al. (2009) talking to experts in the exploratory phase of research is an effective and efficient way of gathering good data. Bogner et al. also describe that experts may have knowledge that is less accessible to others and that it is important to get that knowledge directly from the source.

In addition to contacting the experts, I also conducted an inductive literature review to learn more about the situation in Nigeria, and the existing studies and theories about activism – in particular through poetry – against the oil industry. This is what Bryman (2012) describes as a narrative review, a form of literature review that serves to gain “an initial impression of the topic area” (p.110). The results of this literature review, in combination with insights that I gained from the expert interviews, can be found in the previous chapter.

3.1.2 Focus groups and questionnaires

Focus groups are a qualitative research method that was initially primarily used for market research but gained popularity since the 1980s in other fields of research as well (Bryman, 2012; Sagoe, 2012). During focus group sessions, participants – often between 5-10 – are asked to respond to questions posed by a moderator, and more importantly to respond to each other. As is described by Sagoe (2012) “the idea behind focus group methodology is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one-to-one interview.” (p.2). As (Cyr, 2016) also explains, “focus groups allow participants to discuss potentially complex phenomena, such as identity, power, or race, in a more amenable setting.” (p.235). Because my research deals with complex topics such as environmental injustice and the climate crisis at large, and I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of respondent’s views, focus groups are well suited.

The first of two downsides to the method of focus groups that Sagoe (2012) identified, is the fact that in a group setting some people can feel uncomfortable discussing sensitive topics. Additionally, sometimes dominant voices in group sessions can overpower the opinions of others. Although these could indeed be potential problems, I do not think that the topic of my research was not so personally sensitive to respondents that they would feel uncomfortable answering any questions. I also think that the strength of a discussion space, rather than one-on-one interviews, as described before, weighs stronger than the potential downside in this case. Furthermore, as the moderator I was aware of the potential issue of dominant participants and I had strategies ready to deal with this if necessary. For example, I had questions prepared to ask the group in turn, so as to divide the speaking time. Of course, another downside of this is the fact that some of my questions and statements specifically prompted people to talk about certain topics, thus influencing the results as to which topics participants discussed most. Although I think the impact of my prompts during the discussions is rather limited, there is no way to verify this, and I will have to accept this as a shortcoming of my research. Lastly, focus group research also usually has a low external validity or generalisability (Sagoe, 2012). Because of the limited scope of this research that will also be the case for this study, and this is a downside that I cannot mitigate.

Of course, focus groups are usually conducted in real life, but given the current COVID-19 pandemic this was not an option for this research, instead I conducted all focus groups online. For online focus groups researchers suggest forming smaller groups than traditional –

between 3-5 people – and keeping the sessions short – between 60-90 minutes – and engaging participants through interactive tools (UXalliance, 2020). Therefore, I planned four digital focus groups that were 90 minutes long and had between three and five participants. As a way of keeping participants engaged in this online setting, I chose a mix of text and video pieces for them to respond to. Additionally, I sent the participants digital questionnaires which they filled out individually after seeing the different media pieces. As Cyr (2016) describes this possibility to combine research methods and glean “initially elicit rapid, individual-level feedback” (p.234) in addition to learning more about group consensus, interpretations, and emotions in the ensuing conversation, is another advantage of focus groups.

The questionnaires, or surveys, did constrain the participants’ responses only to the topics and categories which I asked about and did not leave room for spontaneous engagement, as is a downside of this method (Secor, 2010). The data from the questionnaires was therefore mainly used as supplementary to my more substantial qualitative data from the focus group discussions, and to triangulate findings. The questionnaires also served to inform me about some basic characteristics of the participants.

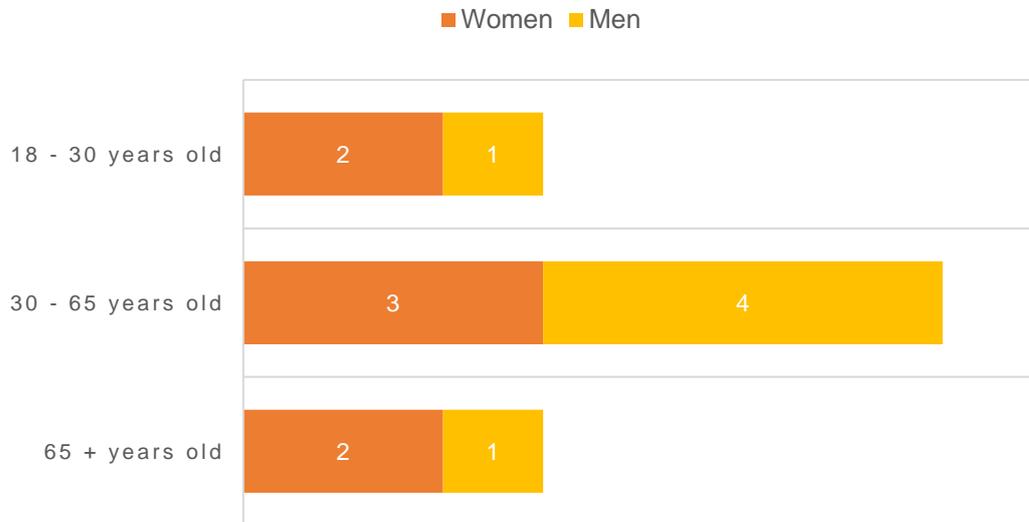
All four focus group sessions were conducted via Zoom, which is a tool I am well acquainted with, and it is easy to record sessions through this medium. Previous to the sessions I asked all participants if they were comfortable with using Zoom, or if they preferred other videoconferencing tools, none of the participants reported any issues. Previous to the first focus group session I ran a complete test session with two volunteers, and I also did several partial technical run-throughs. I acted as the moderator for all the sessions.

3.1.2.1 Focus group participants

The participants were selected through purposive sampling and snowball sampling, through my personal network in the Netherlands. Initially, 18 individuals were identified as suitable participants and were willing to partake in the research. However, two of these individuals were unable to participate at the set focus group times, and another three participants had to cancel at the last minute due to illness or other circumstances. In total there were thus 13 participants that I collected data from. The participants were all ethnically white Dutch citizens, but within that cluster the participants constituted a diverse group of people in terms of age, gender identity, education, and occupation. None of the participants were in groups with people that they knew well prior to the session. Figure 1. shows a visual breakdown of the participants by age group and gender.

Figure 1

Gender and age of focus group participants



Note. Number of participants per age group, broken down in gender. In total there were 13 participants, per age group there were respectively 3, 7, and 3 participants.

Prior to participating in the focus groups all participants were informed about the general nature of the research and the handling of their personal data. All participants consented to the recording of the focus group sessions and their responses to the questionnaires, in the understanding that their data would be handled confidentially and anonymised when used in the research. After the completion of their focus group session all participants also received further details about when their data would be deleted and how to reach out to me or the thesis supervisor in case of questions. None of the participants communicated any objections or concerns to me.

3.1.2.2 Focus group content

Each focus group session started with a short introduction by me, the moderator, and with the participants introducing themselves to each other. Then, to ensure that all participants had a relatively similar and good understanding of the court case against Shell and the arguments and circumstances of the local farmers in the Niger Delta, I showed the participants a selection of news items and articles about the case. These items are from four¹⁰ of the five most used news outlets in the country; NOS Nieuws (2021), RTL Nieuws (RTL Z/ANP, 2017), AD (Vogels, 2019), De Telegraaf (2021), as well as a video from Een Vandaag (2021).

¹⁰ NU.nl is the only outlet of the biggest 5 that is missing, that is simply because their news coverage of this case was not as useful to me as compared to the others. Instead, I added a news item by EenVandaag.

In the Dutch *Mediamonitor 2019*, a report compiled by the *Commissariaat voor de Media* [Dutch Media Authority] the former four outlets are identified as the most used news media in the Netherlands. The different outlets together represent media that a diverse majority of Dutch people consume on a regular basis. The vast majority of Dutch people generally trust the news that they get from these outlets, according to the same report by the Dutch Media Authority (p.62). The selected articles were chosen because I felt that together they gave a good overview of the court case against Shell in The Hague, the environmental situation in the Niger Delta, and the complex social circumstances in the region.

After reviewing all the news items, the participants filled out the first questionnaire and responded to statements about Shell, the Niger Delta, and oil production and pollution in general. In Appendices A and B copies of the full questionnaires can be found, the 12 statements which are key to my quantitative research are numbered and will be referred to by their numbers throughout this thesis. These 12 statements were formulated with the literature review and my research questions in mind, and some specifically served to spark a discussion amongst the participants. Once the participants had completed the questionnaires, they returned to the group via Zoom to discuss the statements and to reflect on the issues. As the moderator, I asked prompting questions to guide the discussion. After 20-25 minutes I brought this first discussion to a close, and the second part of the session then started.

For the second part of the focus groups, the participants respond to three poems, namely *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood*, by Nnimmo Bassey (Bassey, 1999); *When The Earth Bleeds*, by Nnimmo Bassey (taken from Ribeiro & Dimon, 2011, p.3); and *The Call*, by Ken Saro-Wiwa (taken from Corley et al., 2017, p.194). The first poem, *We Thought It Was Blood*, was firstly presented to the participants as spoken word poetry, in a video in which the author Bassey briefly speaks about why he wrote the poem and then reads the poem out loud (VirtualMigrants, 2020). After watching this video, the participants were given the text of the poem with a literal translation to Dutch¹¹. The participants then also received the other two poems with a free/creative translation to Dutch¹¹. There is of course an immense selection of Nigerian poetry, of which I felt I could only pick three – for time purposes – to present during the focus group sessions. My choice fell on these specific poems for several reasons, the most important of which is that the themes of these poems reflected the similar themes covered in the news items that the participants got to see. Having the poems be about the same things

¹¹ All poems were translated to Dutch by me personally and these translations are thus not officially recognised.

would, I felt, remove an unnecessary variable of uneven information from my research. In Appendix C the poems and their translations can be found.

The participants filled out questionnaire 2 after reviewing the poems, and then a second discussion followed. Again, I moderated the discussions and asked the participants for responses to each other and/or specific statements in the questionnaire, or to elaborate on their answers. After another 20-25 minutes the session was wrapped up and the participants were thanked for their participation.

3.1.2.3 Transcription and coding

After each focus group session, I firstly exported the data from the two questionnaires, and highlighted any trends that jumped out. I also looked at the notes I took throughout the sessions. I then started the laborious process of transcribing the focus group sessions which I wanted to complete as soon as possible after they were over, so that the discussions were still fresh in my mind. As Secor (2010) describes it, the process of “transcribing interviews and focus groups is a one of interpretation and, often, translation. The transcripts that result are not mere reflections of the interview or focus group encounters, but new texts that have been assembled through these processes.” (p.202). In addition to reflecting on my initial impression of the data, I indeed also literally translated all data to English during the transcription process, and thus sometimes had to rephrase and interpret what participants said.

The transcription of recordings can be seen as the first level of analysis (Sagoe, 2012), and the major themes that I saw emerging from the data in this first analysis informed the way in which I coded the transcripts. I used different colour codes to sort participants’ statements into themes that then determined my concepts and the focus of my analysis. This way of generating concepts for analysis is described by Bryman (2012, p.569) as open coding.

3.1.2.4 Ethical considerations and positionality

As with any form of social research there are ethical considerations to take into account for focus group research (Sagoe, 2012). As I have described throughout this chapter, I obtained participants’ informed consent for participating in the sessions prior to the focus groups, and also provided information and means of contacting me or my supervisor afterwards. Through careful preparation, test runs, and moderator strategies, I ensured that the sessions were a safe space for all participants. For previous research in 2017, I completed a

course of Human Subjects Research (IRB) Training¹², which prepared me for handling participant interactions in research properly, and ethically dealing with personal information.

Although I made every attempt to be a neutral moderator during the focus group sessions, I approached this thesis in general with a clear objective; namely, to find out how poetry can be used as an activist tool. I have strong personal opinions about the responsibility of Shell in the Niger Delta, and which political, judicial, and systematic changes I think would be needed for a socially and environmentally just solution. I am thus a research scholar whilst also being an activist; a scholar activist (Piven, 2010). I do not see this as problematic to my research, rather I think that recognizing and challenging my own place in this research is an important part of my reflexive methodology (Burawoy, 1998). It is also inherent to my decolonial and CRT framework that I critically challenge the exclusive and colonial way in which Western science is often carried out (Dickinson, 2012; de Sousa Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007). Lastly, I want to clarify here that I am not a psychologist or psychoanalyst, and although I will do my best to analyse my participants' responses and interaction during the focus group, they should not be understood as psychological assessments.

3.2 METHODOLOGY

Throughout this thesis I have had a reflexive approach to my research, which allowed me to continuously reflect and, when necessary, slightly adapt my methods and the focus of my analysis. This is in line with grounded theory (Bryman, 2012, p.567), which is the main methodological framework that I use. Grounded theory is an inductive approach to research which assumes that we can develop theory and concepts by studying or listening to participants in research who experience processes (Creswell, 2013). This way, theory is 'grounded' in the actions and social processes of people, rather than in 'off the shelf' research (Creswell, 2013). Epistemologically I place the experiential knowledge of groups who have long been suppressed at the centre of my research, this is in line with the general CRT epistemology (Love, 2004).

¹² Certification of this course can be verified [here](#)

4 FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

“If overcoming this belief gap requires linking environmental facts to emotion, metaphor, and symbolism, then [...] we must consider what role literary narratives can play in this process.”

(Harrison, 2017, p.458)

4.1 POETRY’S POWERS

In this chapter I will present and analyse the key results from my focus group research. Because of the large amount of data and the limited focus of this research, I had to leave out some findings. I will only describe the most significant findings and limit my analysis to the most relevant points to my research questions. Throughout this study I found no correlation between age or gender and comments or ideas that the participants had, or the way in which the statements were rated, therefore I will not focus on that in this chapter. For a full overview of all the responses to the statements from all participants in both questionnaires, see Appendix D.

Below I will firstly discuss the four powers which I have identified poetry as an environmental justice tool to have, namely: creating emotional connections; overcoming distance; addressing overwhelming solutions; and exposing systemic inequalities. In this section I will discuss them individually, while sharing the findings from both my quantitative and qualitative data related to them. However, these four powers of poetry are all interconnected – overcoming distance is easier though an emotional connection for example – and some sections will thus share many similarities. Later in this chapter I will also look specifically at the decolonizing potential of the poems I used, and I will analyse what participants thought of poetry as the vessel of environmental justice.

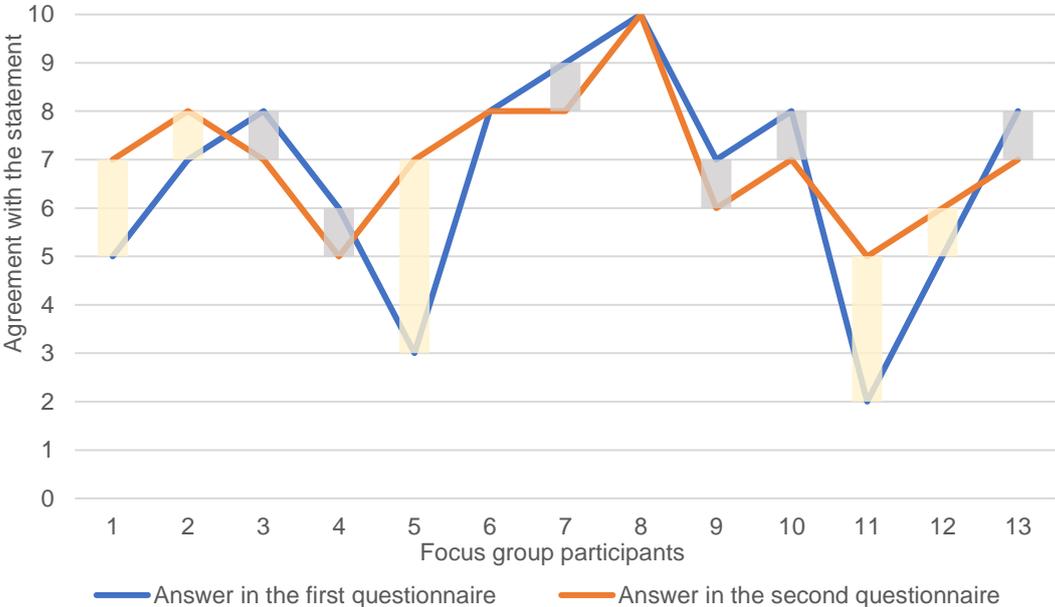
4.1.1 Creating emotional connections

During the focus group sessions’ first discussion, after the participants had read the news items and had completed the first questionnaire, none of the participants mentioned that they felt particular emotions towards the Nigerian farmers or empathy about their situation. Once the participants had listened to and read the poems however, feelings of sadness, compassion and sympathy were mentioned during the discussion in every single focus group. Some participants explicitly mentioned that they now felt more empathy towards the Nigerian

farmers and their situation, for example Olivia¹³ who said, “what these poems do is to awaken some compassion [...] for the people that they are about.”¹⁴. Others highlighted how the emotions in the poems touched them and increased their understanding of the case, Julia said “when you read this [the poems] there are feelings of people involved, [...] it does give me a stronger understanding of what is going on with these farmers than just the news items, this is really their emotion.”. The stark contrast in the participants’ emotional engagement, and their expression of compassion towards the Nigerian people, before and after reading the poems is a clear indication of the ability of poems to create empathy and emotional connections.

Figure 2

Participants’ opinions about statement 10



Note. Line graph of the participants answers to statement 10 in both questionnaires: ‘I can, thanks to these new items/poems [respectively], imagine the situation of the Nigerian farmers well’. The yellow bars indicate an upwardly changed answer, and the grey bars indicate a downwards change in the participants’ answers.

From the quantitative data it is also clear that the poems changed the participants’ emotional engagement with this case. As can be seen in Figure 2, all but two participants gave a different rating in the second questionnaire compared to the first in response to statement 10: ‘I can, thanks to these news items/poems [respectively], imagine the situation of the

¹³ All participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identity.
¹⁴ All quotes by participants used throughout this thesis are translated from Dutch into English by me. In situations where I struggled to find a proper translation for words, I have added the original word in Dutch in square brackets or added a footnote for further explanations.

Nigerian farmers well.’ This is the only statement for which there was so much change in the participants’ answers. Figure 2 shows that there was no consistency in whether the participants’ scored this question higher or lower. But even in spite of this I think that the fact that so many participants changed their answer, in whichever direction, shows that the poems had an impact. Particularly because it became clear during the discussions that for some participants scoring this question lower after the poems, could be a sign of more empathy and understanding of the farmers’ situation. As Karl explained:

“... on the one hand I could imagine the situation well, because we are all humans right, and these are emotions that you feel. When you see that man speak and when you read it, you are gripped. But it also made me realise how much of a different reality it is, so I struggled to imagine what it is like for the person that I see speak.”

Both the quantitative and qualitative data from the focus groups thus suggests that poems are an effective tool to engage people emotionally and create empathy.

This finding is in line with what other researchers have found. In their study about teaching students in the field of social work about human rights through arts activism and poetry, McPherson and Mazza (2014) found that students were touched on an emotional level by the poems that they engaged with. In a report (Starre, 2017) by the Dutch Literacy Foundation [*Stichting Lezen*], it was also concluded that most Dutch people engage with poetry because they want to be emotionally touched. Dr Onyemachi also specifically mentioned that, compared to other kinds of media, poetry can create empathy in readers, because “poets make use of few but deep words that awaken powerful surge of emotions in the reader.”

Because a lack of emotional engagement is an important factor in inaction over climate change and social injustice (Norgaard, 2011; Orange, 2017), the ability to create empathy with victims of the oil extractive industry in this case is very important. However, a next step towards possibly radically altering society in a more humane way, demands not only developing compassion, but also creating hope, as Orange (2017) argues. Norgaard (2011) also emphasises the importance of sending a hopeful, motivating message when educating people about difficult topics such as climate change. Although not unanimous, some participants did mention feeling a little hopeful after reading the poems. Iris in particular said about the last verses of the poem *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood*, “that had a certain positivity, a form of hope. [...] Very powerful.”. When I spoke to Bassey he explained that that poem is indeed meant to display boldness and strength: “It is a note of defiance and saying, ‘look I am not afraid of you, you have done your worst and you cannot do any worse

than this'. And we are coming to raise the hope." When writing about this poem by Bassey in particular, Aghoghovwia (2014b) also describes the hope, persistence, and power that speaks from it. So, even though it cannot be concluded that hope is an emotion that these poems create in all readers, it definitely seems that this poetry has the potential to create both empathy and hope.

4.1.2 Overcoming distance

In the focus group discussions previous to reading the poems, there were some participants who remarked upon the fact that the situation of the Nigerian farmers and the issues in the Niger Delta are very far removed from their day-to-day reality. These participants mainly mentioned this in relation to the question of responsibility for the dangers and damages of the oil industry – in general participants thought that Shell was mainly responsible for mitigating this. The participants seemed to feel that there was a rather insurmountable distance between them and the local farmers. This distance followed from the way in which large economic interests and systems work, so none of the participants could imagine how to overcome it. Additionally, participants remarked upon how easy it felt to them, as consumers in a Western country, to not engage with these issues on an emotional level. Olivia for example said, "These days everything is so much more anonymous, so much easier, that I don't feel that [moral] appeal anymore and so I do all these things [getting gas from Shell] more easily." And in another focus group Xander said "... oil is available now and we've been using it for a long while, [...] so it is very comfortable, we aren't really motivated as a society to do something about that [the problems at production sites]."

The fact that the participants in the focus group generally agreed that they – previous to reading the poems – did not feel emotionally close to the problems in the Niger Delta, and that the physical distance to the region left them feeling unconnected to the problems, is telling. It is commonly understood that closeness to an issue increases people's engagement with it, and Norgaard (2011) describes how the social experience of distance can be constructed and influenced. Through consistent (news) coverage or information about a region, feelings of distance could be overcome. From a CRT and decolonial perspective I would argue that the systematic lack of such attempts to overcome distance in cases such as these is deliberate. Nixon (2011) describes how 'distancing' is a strategy used as a way of keeping the slow but destructive violence that is done by, for example, the oil industry, out of sight of the general Western population. As Egya (2016) put it, it is in "the interest of the

powerful few, from the global North and the global South, that millions of innocent ones, like those in the Niger Delta region, are left to suffer in neglect” (p.7).

After reading the poems, there were more participants who mentioned the issue of distance during the ensuing discussions, and they reflected specifically upon their personal position and responsibility as consumers in the West. The participants’ reflections often built upon their deepened emotional connection to the case, as discussed in the previous section. Olivia, for example, now said that “It [the poems] made it more concrete that it is about people, who really struggle because of it [pollution].”. The other participants in her group also agreed that even though the geographical distance was still the same, the emotional and artistic properties of the poems had managed to bridge this distance somewhat. The impact on the participants was complex and not uniform however. As Karl put it:

“I do find that [because of the poems] I realise how far away this truly is for me [...] on the one hand it makes me feel closer to the case, through imagination and empathy, but on the other hand it makes me feel further removed too.”

Some participants also recognised that reading these poems temporarily made them feel closer to the issues, but that it did nothing to overcome the systemic distance which they had discussed before. Hedda for example said, “we are only looking at this now because we get offered this information, but actually it is a problem that still feels really far away [*het is een beetje een ver van je bed show*¹⁵].”. This reflection suggests that poetry could be an effective tool for helping people overcome distance to particular environmental justice cases, and possibly even climate change in general, but that the effect of the poems would not be very long lasting¹⁶. In the aforementioned study by McPherson and Mazza (2014) about arts activism and poetry to encourage human rights engagement, the participating students “increased their human rights exposure by 36% over the course of the semester and showed significantly higher levels of human rights engagement than similar students in a comparison classroom” (p.955). The number of students in this study was, however, very low (8) so these findings are not generalisable for a wider population. It remains then, that participants in the discussions which directly followed their engagement with the poems, talked more about distance to the issues in the Niger Delta, and talking about and engaging with these poems could be a good way to overcome emotional distance. This goes both for the personal distance

¹⁵ The participant used the Dutch idiom ‘*ver van mijn bed show*’ which literally translated means ‘far from my bed show’ and is a way to express that an issue is geographically, and therefore emotionally, remote. It usually signifies that the individual does not feel the need to be very engaged or concerned with the issue.

¹⁶ Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to do follow-up sessions with my participants due to the limited time of this research, so I cannot be sure about the longevity of the poems’ effects.

that people felt as Western consumers, and for reflections about systemic distance, which is central to the last of poetry's powers that I will discuss in a later section.

4.1.3 Addressing overwhelming solutions

Building on to the previous section, the participants already discussed the topic of overwhelming solutions a lot before reading the poems. One particular problem that was discussed in all the different groups during the first discussions, and for which participants could see no feasible solution, was the corruption within Nigeria and the might of a multinational company like Shell. Beth for example said, "... it is very difficult to tackle [*aanpakken*] such a company. Because they have got the best lawyers working for them, and if a court case does turn out badly for them, they will just sue again.". In addition to these considerations, it was discussed in several groups that even if the framers would manage to get Shell to change their systems and secure their pipelines in such a way that oil spills and/or sabotage decreased, this would still not be the end of the problems. Erik said the following:

"I think there is only one solution which is to leave there [Nigeria] as the Dutch, as Shell. [...] just imagine that Shell would adhere to the safety rules that there are for European countries too, then that would mean that the illegal infrastructure which the Nigerian government seems to profit from so much would lose a lot of money. That is such a big market, just like illegal drugs. So, it is so hard as a company to do right there, that I think you should say; we are leaving here. Only then of course 70 percent of the economy is dependent on oil so if Shell leaves probably Esso or some other company will come. So, it is so hard!"

The task of challenging a government and military riddled with corruption, and of fighting one of the richest companies in the world seemed overwhelming to all participants, as also mentioned in the previous section. Many of the points made by the participants transcended just Shell and Nigeria, but were about global and systemic inequalities, which will be further discussed in the next section.

In each of the different sessions the participants also discussed the heavy dependency on fossil fuels that we have in the Netherlands. The participants generally were pessimistic about the possibility of lessening our society's oil consumption. Thomas said, for example:

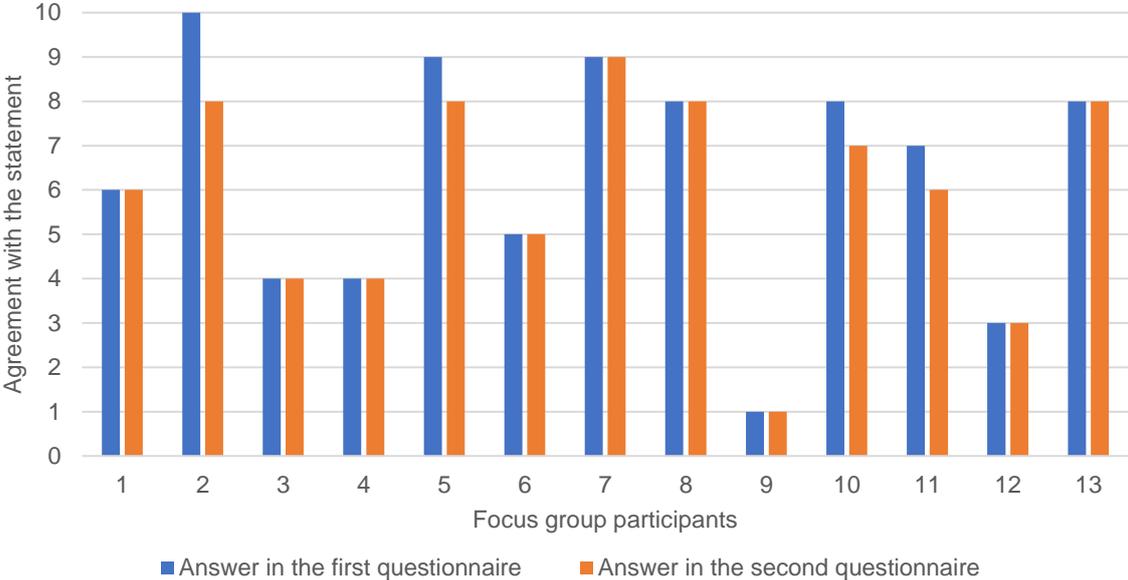
"we don't realise fully how many products are actually made out of oil. It is not just fuel it is also all kinds of plastics. I don't know the percentages of that, but I can just imagine that less oil is used in fuels than in the production process of all kinds of materials. So yeah [...] it's hard."

In most groups there was consensus that doing completely without oil in our society within the foreseeable future was not possible. Although most of the participants did agree that it would be best to collectively use less oil, it seemed an insurmountable solution. From the quantitative data the same conclusion can be drawn. As can be seen in Figure 3, a majority (8)

of the participants filled in a number 6 or higher at statement 9; ‘We will never be able to completely do without oil in our society’. These participants thus all think that it is very unlikely that we will ever be able to do without oil completely. Among the participants that filled in lower numbers at this statement in the questionnaire, most were still pessimistic during the discussion about how quickly a transition to a less oil dependent or even oil free society would take. Beth and James for example discussed how public transport would first need to be cheaper and more available before they could imagine driving less.

Figure 3

Participants’ opinions about statement 9



Note. Graph of the participants answers to statement 9 in both questionnaires: ‘We will never be able to completely do without oil in our society

During the second rounds of discussions, after seeing the poems, the consensus in most groups, that they could not see how to overcome corruption and the power of Shell, had not changed much. As Hendrik said, “I would want to make the corruption in the country illegal and find a way to punish it, and including the corruption within the government, only how do you do that? I have no idea!”. When looking specifically at the participants’ answers to question 9 again, there is however a small change discernible. As can be seen in Figure 3, a few (4) participants changed their answer to this statement when compared to the first questionnaire, and only by one or two points. It is nonetheless interesting to note that the four participants (numbers 2, 5, 10, and 11 in Figure 3.) who changed their answers were among those that had initially scored this question the highest, and all of them now choose a lower

number. This is the only question at which the participants' response was so consistent in terms of change in only one 'direction'. Even though these were not large changes, this thus means that after the poems, in total the participants agree to a lesser extent with the idea that our society will never be able to do without oil.

During the second discussion some participants also expressed that they thought the poems would make them think about the impact of oil production more the next time they were at the gas station. As can be seen in Appendix D, about half (6) of the participants indicated that they were more likely, after reading the poems, to think of the negative effects of oil extraction when they would next be at a gas station. These participants namely all scored statement 11 higher than they did in the first questionnaire. However, during the discussions most participants remained relatively pessimistic about feasible solutions to practically change their impact. As Hendrik put it:

“I feel like I really struggle to do without a car. I do try to take the train whenever that is a good alternative, so I do that whenever I can. But yeah, at the same time I am just another car owner. So I can't really compliment myself on being so sustainable, but I do think about it. And I think with electric cars it is so difficult ... Like I don't see that as a solution. Maybe we won't have to drill for oil anymore for that, but to manufacture electric cars a lot of other things will still have to be dug up from the ground.”

This is much like what Norgaard describes in her book *Living in Denial* (2011), namely that the people she researched¹⁷ were concerned with, and well informed about, climate change but at the same time they did not change their day-to-day behaviour. The solution of using less oil – at least in the form of fuel – to overcome the issues in the Niger Delta simply continued to seem too overwhelming to the participants, also after reading the poems.

So, although the poems did make the participants discuss the issue and possible solutions in depth, they doubted whether an oil free society was possible and if management of the oil resources would be able to be handled by another than a big multinational company. The production of this doubt, both about climate change science and possible solutions, and about the capability of local people to govern their own resources, is a “bankable product” as Nixon (2011) said. Poetry is recognised by therapists for its ability to promote reflection and education (Mazza, 2017; McPherson & Mazza, 2014), and could thus play a role in overcoming doubt and developing achievable solutions. However, more research will be needed to be done to fully explore this possibility.

¹⁷ As Norgaard's research took place in Norway, a Western European country with a similar level of education, and public and political awareness of climate change, I think these findings are very comparable.

4.1.4 Exposing systemic inequalities

The topic of systemic and global inequalities – such as systemic racism and colonial remnants in financial markets – were discussed by many of the participants previous to, as well as after, reading the poems. The disparity between the careful safety measures that Shell takes when working in the Netherlands, versus the careless way in which they seem to disregard safety in Nigeria¹⁸, was discussed in three out of four groups in the first discussion. The participants saw this disparity as a manifestation of systemic inequalities. Hendrik, for example, said, “I think that this has to do with the whole way in which trade relations and power relations between rich and poor countries are.”. To this Thomas responded:

“Imagine if we would turn the problem around, like Nigeria would have an oil company and they would cause pollution here. But the government of Nigeria is the government of Nigeria and the Netherlands has the government that we have, well then I think within the week everything would have been solved I think!”

James, who was part of another group, also said, “Shell has a double standard in the way that they install infrastructure in Nigeria. They don’t do it there in the same way as they do here. So, they are clearly utilising the unstable situation in the country.”.

In some groups, the racism that lays at the base of the differential treatment the participants identified was specifically discussed. Xander said:

“...things like racism for example [...] if you are more powerful or belong to a majority in a situation, then it’s very easy to step over other people which is my perspective on this case; it’s all about money and that is the only thing.”

And later in the same discussion Xander added:

“So – and apologies for saying it so bluntly – we white people, who live safely in Europe and don’t have this happening in our backyard. So generally, we don’t care about it so much. [...] those inequalities are everywhere, especially between such a powerful company and the government they are at play”

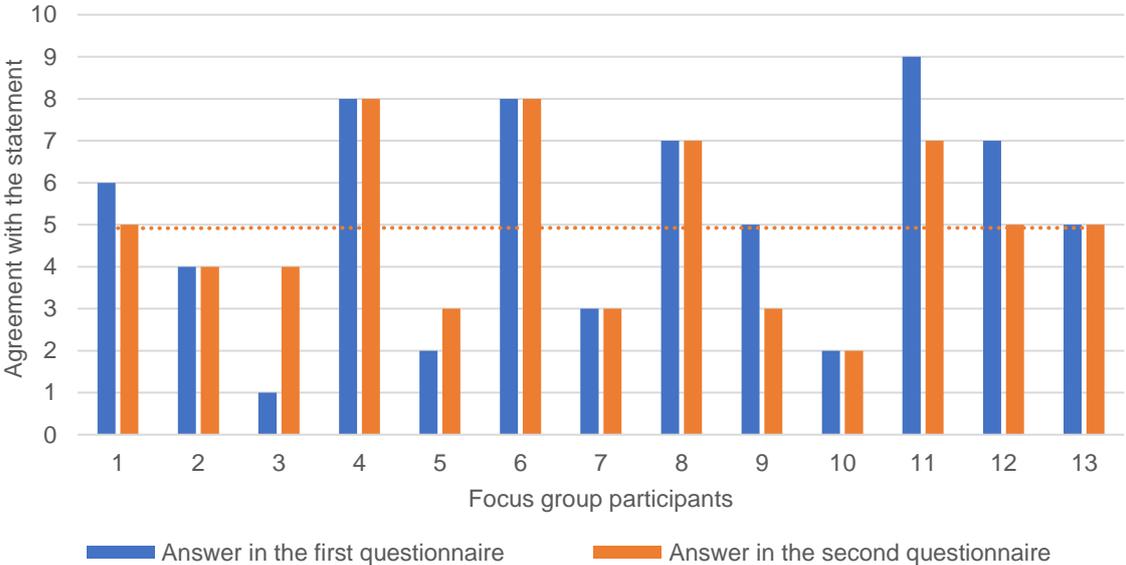
What Xander describes here is exactly the kind of environmental racism which the environmental justice movement and CRT scholars try to address. The news items that the participants saw, thus already seemed rather effective in exposing systemic inequalities.

After having read the poems, every group talked about these systemic inequalities during the discussions, including the participants of the group who did not talk about it during the first discussion. Similar to what I noted in the previous section, the participants were left relatively overwhelmed by the complexity of the powerful systems at play here. Several

¹⁸ In the news item by Een Vandaag (2021) the participants saw how the Trans-Niger Pipeline in some places is hardly buried into the ground, so that people walk directly on top of it, and it could easily break.

participants noted again that there was environmental racism in the treatment of European versus Nigerian people and their environment. Rosie for example said, “I think if such oil pipelines were here in the Netherlands, they wouldn’t have been installed like that [exposed and with poor safety measures].”. And Iris said, “it shouldn’t be that the local people there are to such an extent carrying the negative effects [...] They see something disappearing from their own ground/earth which they do not benefit from at all.”.

Figure 4
Participants’ opinions about statement 6



Note. Graph of the answers of the participants to statement 6 in both questionnaires: ‘If the local people are unhappy about oil extraction in their region, they should bring that up to their governments rather than Dutch courts’.

In Figure 4, the participants’ answers to statement 6 – about whether the local people should go to their governments for help rather than suing Shell – from both before and after reading the poems, are compared. Although a small majority (7) of the participants did not change their answer to this statement, those who changed it almost all adjusted their answer in such a way that their second answer was less extreme than their first. The participants’ answers thus moved closer to the ‘neutral’ middle, as indicated by the dotted line in the Figure 4. It is also interesting to note that the participants who initially gave the most ‘extreme’ answers were among those who changed their answer. The participant who firstly scored this statement at a 1 (disagreeing completely) increased their score to a 3 after reading the poems, while the participant who scored the statement highest the first time (almost completely agreeing) now dropped their score by 2 points.

The change in the quantitative data could be indicative of the participants' increased understanding of the complexity of the larger systems in which these problems take place. Additionally, the fact that even in the group where systemic issues were not really discussed previous to the poems, but afterwards were, is an indication of the fact that these poems helped expose systemic inequalities. I do not, however, want to contribute this change entirely to the poems. The participants also received a lot of background information about the situation in the Niger Delta, both through the discussions and from the news items. The context and background knowledge that the participants got almost certainly played an important role in their experience and understanding of the poems. During my interview, Nnimmo Bassey said the following about this:

“it is always helpful if you know the context of that piece of creative work. If you don't understand the context the artform has very little value. I mean, it could be that people enjoy art just for art's sake, and that's okay. [...] But [...] most poems are better understood when we reflect on the context that gave birth to it”

For highly specific and topical poems like the ones I used for my research to be impactful, they thus need to be accompanied by proper information about the context of the poem or author. The next section of this chapter will deal more with the specific value of the art form of poetry and its ability to convey messages.

4.2 POETRY AS THE VESSEL

The final question in the second questionnaire was a new one compared to the first questionnaire, namely ‘Do you think that your answers were influenced more by the previous discussion or mainly by the poems?’. In Table 1 the results of this question are visible. A majority (8) of the respondents said they were influenced by the poems either a lot, a little bit, or a little bit in addition to being influenced by the discussions, when they filled out the

Table 1

Participants' responses to the last question in the second questionnaire

	Mainly influenced by the poems	A little bit influenced by the poems	A little bit influenced by the poems and the discussion	A little bit influenced by the discussion and not the poems	Neither/my opinions did not change	Other
Number	1	5	2	2	2	1
Percentage	7.69%	38.46%	15.38%	15.38%	15.38%	7.69%

Note. Frequency table displaying what participants answered to the question ‘Do you think that your answers were influenced more by the previous discussion or mainly by the poems?’

second questionnaire. This thus shows that, at least by their own assessment, the participants were more influenced by the poems than the discussions. It also means that the change in the participants' opinions and reflections, which I described in the previous sections, really can be contributed to the powers of poetry.

Although poetry seems relatively impactful according to the above findings, poetry is an uncommon environmental justice tool and also a pretty uncommon form of art or media to actively engage with for most Dutch people (Starre, 2017). A lot of the participants said during the discussions that poetry in general was a form of writing that they did not encounter on a regular basis. Tessa for example said, "I hardly ever read poems, [...] must have been in high school that I read any poems last.", to which one of her fellow discussants responded that it was a similarly long time ago for them too. This finding is in line with findings by the aforementioned Dutch literacy foundation *Stichting Lezen*, which concluded that Dutch people usually encounter poetry in spoken form, rather than in written form (Starre, 2017). Moreover, this report by *Stichting Lezen* showed that Dutch people are used to experiencing poetry "collectively" for example during weddings, memorial services, or via TV broadcasts (Starre, 2017, p.3). Individually reading poetry, in the way that the participants experienced two of the poems in my focus groups, is very uncommon, and from my participants' responses it became clear that written poetry also seemed less engaging to them.

The consensus during the discussions in several focus groups was that the spoken word poetry which the participants viewed together as a group, gripped participants more than the poems they read individually. As Hedda put it:

"... the way it [the poem] is spoken is of course very different than when you read it. When I read a poem I actually have to read it twice to give it the right 'tune'. But if you get a poem spoken/performed for you, then the cadence is already in it so then you grasp that feeling/emotion better."

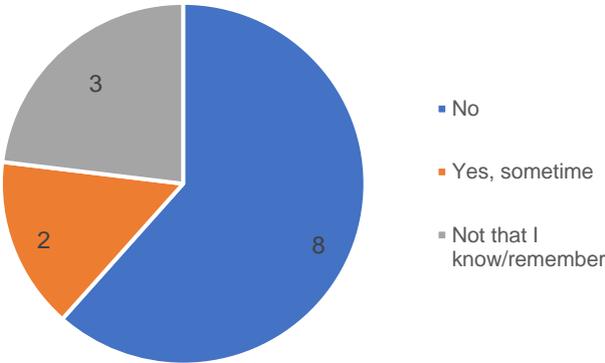
Hedda's comment shows that Dutch people engage more with spoken word poetry, in line with the conclusions of Starre (2017), and because this is more common it logically follows that it is also easier for them to quickly understand or be moved by this form of poetry. Given the short timeframe that the participants had to read the poems and answer the questionnaire – approximately 10 minutes – engaging with an unfamiliar format was a tall order. Participant Iris explicitly said, "for *reading* poems I would need more time."

There were, however, also some participants who already engaged with poetry a lot in their day-to-day lives, and they were very positive about reading poetry about such a difficult

environmental justice topic. For example, participant Olivia said, “I really like poetry so I am thinking how wonderful it is if you can write that down so beautifully. Especially the first poem, with that cadence/repetition. Like wow, that really hit me!”. Although these outspoken fans of poetry were a minority among my participants, I could not find any correlation in my data between disliking poetry in general and receptiveness to the poems’ powers that I identified. Even participants who said to generally dislike poetry still sometimes changed their answers in the second questionnaire, or vice versa. Figure 6 shows that participants most often answered that they thought the poems were beautiful and gripping in the questions before the statements in the second questionnaire. Although a large group here also said that poems were not really their thing. As can also be seen in Figure 6, none of the participants answered that they thought the poems were bad or were uninterested in them.

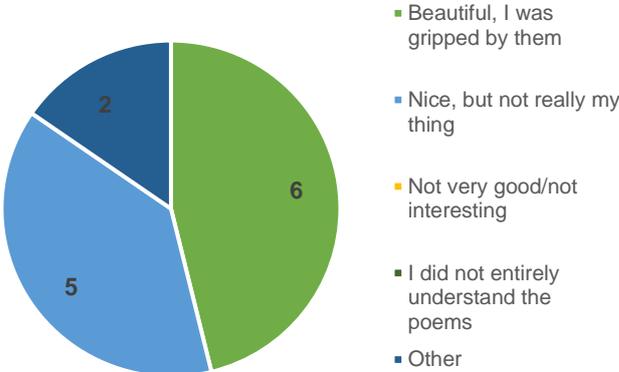
Interestingly, several participants across different focus groups, who said to not like poetry so much, specifically mentioned they would prefer to see visual art. They also said that they thought this would be a good form to use for an environmental justice issue and that it may impact them even more than poetry. Erik, for example, said “I think that change will only come once people are so shocked that they see the need. So, then I am not sure that a poem can do that. Maybe shocking imagery can do that more.”. Other participants were less explicit but did say that they are generally visually oriented and thus think that paintings or pictures may grip them more than poems.

Figure 5
Participants’ responses to question 2



Note. Chart displaying participants' answers to the question ‘Did you, previous to this focus group, ever read any stories or poems by Nigerian authors?’

Figure 6
Participants’ responses to question 6



Note. Chart displaying participants' answers to the question ‘What did you think of these poems?’.

4.2.1 Decolonial potential

Having established that poetry in general is not a very common media to most Dutch people, it is perhaps not surprising that poems by Nigerian authors, and about the topic of the oil industry in the Niger Delta, was completely new to almost all participants. In Figure 5, the participants' answers to the second question in the second questionnaire are visible. As can be seen, only two participants stated that they had – previous to the focus groups – ever read stories or poems by Nigerian authors¹⁹. It is a pity that there were so few who had experienced this kind of storytelling, as stories – especially when written by witnesses to events that the story is about – can help break down racial or colonial inequalities. As Dickinson (2012) argues, stories “allow readers to be inserted into the lived realities of those most affected by a racialized society and expose the ridiculousness, irrationality, and dire implications of racism” (p.59).

Furthermore, from a decolonial perspective I think it is very important to introduce Westerners to these writings by people who have historically not been listened to. The importance does not just lay in the helpfulness for, or impact to, Dutch people – or other Westerners – that poems can have, but it lies simply in the fact that these are stories that deserve to be told and heard. As (Smith, 1999) wrote:

“Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes. It is not simply about giving an oral account or a genealogical naming of the land and the events which raged over it, but a very powerful need to give testimony and restore a spirit” (p.28)

It matters what perspective stories are told from, which voices tell them, and who gets to decide what format stories are in. These poems, with their long cultural history in the Niger Delta, ought to be heard more widely, rather than just hearing from Nigerians when they are for example asked to speak in a news item that is predetermined by Western news media. Those kinds of media pieces reproduce – albeit unintendedly – coloniality and the dominant-subordinate relationship in which the locals are just portrayed as victims or eyewitnesses of destruction, rather than strong peoples with their own stories and agency. Because “any “story” that claims to include or refer to the lives of subordinated peoples is incomplete until it takes into account and includes the voices of those people who have lived the experience of subordination” (Love, 2004, p.228). The Nigerian poems have the potential to provide complete stories, and to decolonise dominant racial narratives.

¹⁹ These two participants were not familiar with the specific authors or poems used in the focus group sessions.

5 CONCLUSION

“For poets from the Niger Delta region, [...] poetry becomes a powerful instrument for conveying resistance; it historicizes the condition of the peoples and their lands, and by doing so raises a counter-narrative in confrontation against powerful institutions, governmental and otherwise, on behalf of the poor people and their environment.”
(Egya, 2016, p.11)

The Niger Delta in Nigeria has been exploited for its oil resources for decades. The process of exploitation was started by the region’s colonial occupiers, and the foreign companies associated with those colonisers continued their exploitation after Nigeria gained its independence. The communities in the Niger Delta have suffered much damage from the pollution and dispossession of their lands, and they have risen up in resistance many times. One form of their resistance has been to write and speak poems, to shame, confront and rally. These poems have been central to my research, as I have studied how poetry can enhance Dutch people’s understanding of this environmental injustice case. As well as exploring which aspects of these poems can play a role in helping Dutch people relate to this case.

Poetry as a vessel for explaining a case of environmental injustice is very uncommon in the Netherlands, in general poetry is not an artform that Dutch people engage with on a regular basis. Some participants who did engage with poetry often were quite positive about the written poems from the Niger Delta, but the spoken word poetry was appreciated in particular. Participants generally found the written poems harder to understand and engage with. Some participants also voiced that seeing environmental injustice through visual arts would be more impactful to them than the poems were. However, the particular cultural and historical importance of poetry from the Niger Delta has a great potential to help break down colonial and racial inequalities in representation.

From my research I can conclude that there are several significant ways in which Nigerian poetry changed the way in which my focus group participants related to the case of Shell and the Niger Delta. I identified four main powers of poetry, namely: creating emotional connections; overcoming distance; addressing overwhelming solutions; and exposing systemic inequalities, which I see as poetry’s most important aspects as an environmental justice tool. Firstly, the poems clearly produced emotional engagement and empathy in my focus group participants, and they encouraged participants to reflect on the situation of the farmers more. In addition to creating empathy, one of the emotions that some participants felt was hope, which is an important emotion to have for overcoming climate change denial.

Secondly, these poems had the ability to, partially through deepened emotional connections, overcome the distance to the issues in the Niger Delta that the participants felt – albeit to a limited degree. Thirdly, although the participants did discuss solutions to the problems of the oil industry, the poems did not help the majority of participants to imagine a solution to the overwhelming problems. Some participants were more positive about the possibility of an oil free society after reading the poems, but doubts about feasibility still persisted. Lastly, the poems seemed to make the participants’ understanding of systemic inequalities more nuanced, even though they already seemed to know a lot about the topic after having just read and seen the news items.

More research should be done about the longevity of the powers of poetry that I found, to conclude how long-lasting the effect of the powers are. For future research in the Netherlands, it may be most useful to focus on spoken word poetry, rather than written poems. A lot more research about the ability of poetry from other regions of the world would also be interesting, particularly to compare the differences or similarities between the powers of the poems. In addition to helping readers engage with environmental justice cases, poetry from around the world could maybe also help with overcoming doubt about climate change, which my research only very limitedly addressed. Even with these shortcomings and topics left to research further, and although this study had a low external validity, I do think that my findings indicate a promising potential in poetry as an environmental justice tool. Much like the work of Multatuli did with Dutch people in the 19th century, so did the Nigerian poems make my Dutch participants effectively discuss the inhumanities in global production processes and power systems.

With this in mind, I want to close of this thesis by paraphrasing the words of Multatuli in his final chapter of *Max Havelaar* and say that I see this thesis just ‘as an introduction’. I want to continue to work with creative writing and activism, and hopefully contribute to environmental and social justice in this and other cases, and ‘I shall grow in strength and my words will be sharper, as it be needed’.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. QUESTIONNAIRE 1

Focusgroep Vragenlijst 1 Original DUTCH

Deze vragenlijst is onderdeel van de focusgroepen voor het afstudeeronderzoek van Kerime van Opijnen. Door deel te nemen aan deze vragenlijst gaat u ermee akkoord dat uw gegevens worden gebruikt voor het onderzoek, alle persoonlijke data zal geanonimiseerd worden voordat het in het onderzoek gebruikt wordt.

Uw naam en hoe u de vragen op het eerste gedeelte van deze vragenlijst beantwoord zijn niet zichtbaar voor de andere deelnemers, maar de stellingen in het tweede gedeelte van de lijst worden gezamenlijk besproken.

Wat is uw naam?

Had u voorafgaand aan deze focus groep al veel informatie over de rechtzaak tegen Shell en/of de situatie in de Niger Delta?

- Ja, veel
- Ja, een beetje
- Nee

Als u bij de vorige vraag ja had ingevuld, waar had u deze eerdere informatie gezien? (Bijvoorbeeld NOS Journaal, sociale media, in de krant)

In hoeverre bent u het eens met deze stellingen?

Geef bij ieder van deze stelling aan in hoeverre u het met de stelling eens bent, 1 is geheel oneens en 10 is geheel eens.

In de focusgroep zullen de stellingen worden besproken, maar hoe u persoonlijk hebt geantwoord zal niet zichtbaar zijn. Geef alstublieft zo eerlijk mogelijk antwoord!

1. Ik ben er trots op dat zo'n groot bedrijf als Shell (half) Nederlands is

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

Shell heeft de Nederlandse economie altijd veel goed gedaan en verdient daar waardering voor

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

2. Na het zien van deze nieuwsberichten vind ik dat Shell meer zou moeten doen tegen klimaatverandering en/of milieuvervuiling in de Niger Delta

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

3. Na het zien van deze nieuwsberichten vind ik dat de directie van Shell in Nederland verantwoordelijk is voor lokale boeren in de Niger Delta

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

4. Na het zien van deze nieuwsberichten denk ik dat de vervuiling en problemen in de Niger Delta eerder worden veroorzaakt door wanbeleid en illegale sabotage door Nigerianen dan de werkwijze van Shell

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

5. Na het zien van deze nieuwsberichten denk ik dat de sabotage van oliepipleidingen hard bestraft moet worden

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

6. Als de lokale bevolking ontevreden is over oliewinning kunnen ze zich beter richten tot de Nigeriaanse overheid

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

7. Na het zien van deze nieuwsberichten denk ik dat de lokale bevolking uiteindelijk meer gebaat is bij de investeringen van grote oliebedrijven dan dat ze daar schade van ondervinden

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

8. Ik denk dat er moeilijk iets gedaan kan worden tegen de vervuiling en gevaren van oliewinning in de Niger Delta

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

9. We zullen nooit helemaal zonder olie kunnen in onze maatschappij

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

10. Ik kan me, dankzij deze nieuwsitems, een goede voorstelling maken van de situatie van de Nigeriaanse boeren

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

11. Als ik aan het tanken ben denk ik wel eens aan de impact van olie productie (Vul deze vraag ook in als je geen auto of rijbewijs hebt, is dit iets waar je over na zou denken voordat je een auto neemt?)

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

12. Ik ben bereid minder auto te rijden als dat beter is voor mens en milieu

Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

Focus group Questionnaire 1

Translation ENGLISH

This questionnaire is part of the focus groups of Kerime van Opijnen's thesis research. By filling out this questionnaire you agree that your data will be collected for this research, all personal information will be anonymised before it is used.

Your name and how you answered the questions in the first part of the questionnaire will not be visible for the other participants, but the statements in the second part of the questionnaire will be discussed by the group at large.

What is your name?

Did you, previous to this focus group, already know a lot about the situation in the Niger Delta/the court case against Shell?

- Yes, a lot
- Yes, a little bit
- No

If you answered yes on the previous question, where did you mainly get this information from (For example, the eight o'clock news, social media, newspapers)

To what extent do you agree with these statements?

For each statement indicate how much you agree, 1 is completely disagree and 10 is completely agree.

In the focus group session these statements will be discussed, but how you personally answered will not be visible to the group. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible!

1. I am proud that such a large company as Shell is (half) Dutch

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

Shell has always played an important role in aiding the Dutch economy and they deserve credit for that

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

2. After seeing these news items, I think that Shell should do more against climate change/pollution of the environment in the Niger Delta

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

3. After seeing these news items, I think that the board of Shell in the Netherlands is responsible for the local farmers in Niger Delta

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

4. After seeing these news items, I think that the pollution and related problems in the Niger Delta are caused more by illegal actions and sabotage by Nigerians, rather than Shell's methods

- Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree
5. After seeing these news items, I think that sabotage of oil pipes or oilfields needs to be punished hard
- Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree
6. If the local people are unhappy about oil extraction in their region, they should bring that up to their governments rather than Dutch courts
- Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree
7. After seeing these news items, I think that the local people in the Niger Delta are in the end better off because of the investments of large oil companies, more so than that they encounter damages
- Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree
8. I think it will be difficult to do something against the pollution and dangers of oil extraction in the Niger Delta
- Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree
9. We will never be able to completely do without oil in our society
- Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree
10. After seeing these news items, I can imagine the situation of the Nigerian farmers well
- Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree
11. When I am filling up my car with fuel, I sometimes think about the impact of oil production (also fill answer this statement if you do not have a car or driver's license, is this something you would consider?)
- Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree
12. I am willing to drive less if that is better for the environment and a sustainable future
- Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

APPENDIX B. QUESTIONNAIRE 2

Focusgroep Vragenlijst 2 Original Dutch

Deze vragenlijst is onderdeel van de focusgroepen voor het afstudeeronderzoek van Kerime van Opijnen. Door deel te nemen aan deze vragenlijst gaat u ermee akkoord dat uw gegevens worden gebruikt voor het onderzoek, alle persoonlijke data zal geanonimiseerd worden voordat het in het onderzoek gebruikt wordt.

Uw naam en hoe u de vragen op het eerste gedeelte van deze vragenlijst beantwoord zijn niet zichtbaar voor de andere deelnemers, maar de stellingen in het tweede gedeelte van de lijst worden gezamenlijk besproken.

Wat is uw naam?

Had u voorafgaand aan deze focus groep al eens verhalen of gedichten van Nigeriaanse schrijvers gelezen?

- Ja, vaak
- Ja, wel eens
- Nee
- Niet dat ik weet

Zou u interesse hebben om meer van deze schrijver of vergelijkbare schrijvers te lezen?

- Ja
- Nee
- Misschien

Wat vond u van deze gedichten?

- Mooi, ik werd er door gegrepen
- Wel mooi, maar niet helemaal mijn ding
- Niet zo goed/niet interessant
- Ik begreep de gedichten niet helemaal
- Other: _____

Wilt u nog iets anders zeggen over deze gedichten en wat ze met u deden?

In hoeverre bent u het eens met deze stellingen?

Geef in dit gedeelte van de vragenlijst bij ieder van deze stelling aan in hoeverre u het met de stelling eens bent, 1 is geheel oneens en 10 is geheel eens.

In de focusgroep zullen de stellingen worden besproken, maar hoe u persoonlijk hebt geantwoord zal niet zichtbaar zijn. Geef alstublieft zo eerlijk mogelijk antwoord!

Let op: niet alle vragen zijn hetzelfde als in de vorige lijst!

1. Ik ben er trots op dat zo'n groot bedrijf als Shell (half) Nederlands is

- Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens
2. Na het lezen van deze gedichten vind ik dat Shell meer zou moeten doen tegen klimaatverandering en/of milieuvervuiling in de Niger Delta
- Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens
3. Na het lezen van deze gedichten vind ik dat de directie van Shell in Nederland verantwoordelijk is voor lokale boeren in de Niger Delta
- Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens
4. Na het lezen van deze gedichten denk ik dat de vervuiling en problemen in de Niger Delta eerder veroorzaakt worden door wanbeleid en illegale sabotage door Nigerianen dan de werkwijze van Shell
- Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens
5. Na het lezen van deze gedichten denk ik dat de sabotage van oliepijpleidingen hard bestraft moet worden
- Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens
6. Als de lokale bevolking ontevreden is over oliewinning kunnen ze zich beter richten tot de Nigeriaanse overheid
- Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens
7. Na het lezen van deze gedichten denk ik dat de lokale bevolking uiteindelijk meer gebaat is bij de investeringen van grote oliebedrijven dan dat ze daar schade van ondervinden
- Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens
8. Ik denk dat er moeilijk iets gedaan kan worden tegen de vervuiling en gevaren van oliewinning in de Niger Delta
- Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens
9. We zullen nooit helemaal zonder olie kunnen in onze maatschappij
- Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens
10. Ik kan me, dankzij deze gedichten, een goede voorstelling maken van de situatie van de Nigeriaanse boeren
- Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens
11. Na het lezen van deze gedichten zal ik wel eens aan de impact van olie productie denken als ik aan het tanken ben (Vul deze vraag ook in als je geen eigen auto hebt, is dit iets waar je over na zou denken voordat je een auto neemt?)
- Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens
12. Ik ben bereid minder auto te rijden als dat beter is voor mens en milieu
- Helemaal mee oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Helemaal mee eens

Tot slot

Denkt u dat uw antwoorden op deze vragen meer zijn beïnvloed door de voorafgaande de discussie, of vooral door het lezen van de gedichten?

- Erg beïnvloed door de discussie
- Een beetje beïnvloed door de discussie
- Vooral beïnvloed door de gedichten
- Een beetje beïnvloed door de gedichten
- Geen van beide
- Other: _____

Focus group Questionnaire 2

Translation ENGLISH

This questionnaire is part of the focus groups of Kerime van Opijnen's thesis research. By filling out this questionnaire you agree that your data will be collected for this research, all personal information will be anonymised before it is used.

Your name and how you answered the questions in the first part of the questionnaire will not be visible for the other participants, but the statements in the second part of the questionnaire will be discussed by the group at large.

What is your name?

Did you, previous to this focus group, ever read any stories or poems of Nigerian authors?

- Yes, often
- Yes, sometime
- No
- Not that I know/remember

Would you be interested in reading more from these or similar writers?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

What did you think of these poems?

- Beautiful, I was gripped by them
- Nice, but not really my thing
- Not very good/not interesting
- I did not entirely understand the poems
- Other: _____

Is there anything else you would like to add about what these poems did to you?

To what extent do you agree with these statements?

For each statement indicate how much you agree, 1 is completely disagree and 10 is completely agree.

In the focus group session these statements will be discussed, but how you personally answered will not be visible to the group. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible!

Mind you: not all questions are the same as in the last questionnaire!

1. I am proud that such a large company as Shell is (half) Dutch

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

2. After reading these poems, I think that Shell should do more against climate change/pollution of the environment in the Niger Delta

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

3. After reading these poems, I think that the board of Shell in the Netherlands is responsible for the local farmers in Niger Delta

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

4. After reading these poems, I think that the pollution and related problems in the Niger Delta are cause more by illegal actions and sabotage by Nigerians, rather than Shell's methods

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

5. After reading these poems, I think that sabotage of oil pipes or oilfields needs to be punished hard

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

6. If the local people are unhappy about oil extraction in their region, they should bring that up to their governments rather than Dutch courts

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

7. After reading these poems, I think that the local people in the Niger Delta are in the end better off because of the investments of large oil companies, more so than that they encounter damages

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

8. I think it will be difficult to do something against the pollution and dangers of oil extraction in the Niger Delta

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

9. We will never be able to completely do without oil in our society

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

10. After reading these poems, I can imagine the situation of the Nigerian farmers well

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

11. After reading these poems I will think about the impact of oil production when I am filling up my car with fuel (also fill answer this statement if you do not have a car or driver's license, is this something you would consider?)

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

12. I am willing to drive less if that is better for the environment and a sustainable future

Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely agree

Finally

Do you think that your answers to these questions were influenced more by the previous discussion or primarily by the poems?

A lot influenced by the discussion

- A little bit influenced by the discussion
- Mainly influenced by the poems
- A little bit influenced by the poems
- Neither
- Other: _____

APPENDIX C. POEMS PRESENTED IN THE FOCUS GROUPS



DE ROEP

Hoor de roep van het verwoeste land
De rauwe kreet van verhongerd zand
De doffe klaagzang van een vergiftigde lucht
De dichtgeslibde stromen slaken een zielige zucht

Hoor, oh, hoor!

Onvolgroeide gewassen bederven vlug
Vissen sterven en drijven op hun rug
Vlinders verliezen hun vleugelslag
De natuur bezwijkt aan deze aanslag



THE CALL

Hear the call of the ravaged land
The raucous cry of famished earth
The dull dirge of the poisoned air
The piteous wail of sludged streams

Hear, oh, hear!

Stunted crops fast decay
Fishes die and float away
Butterflies lose wing and fall
Nature succumbs to th'ecological war.

By Ken Saro-Wiwa

We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood

The other day
We danced in the street
Joy in our hearts
We thought we were free
Three young folks fell to our right
Countless more fell to our left
Looking up,
Far from the crowd
We beheld
Red-hot guns

We thought it was oil
But it was blood
We thought it was oil
But this was blood

Heart jumping
Into our mouths
Floating on
Emotion's dry wells
We leapt in fury
Knowing it wasn't funny
Then we beheld
Bright red pools

We thought it was oil
But it was blood
We thought it was oil
But this was blood

Dried tear bags
Polluted streams
Things are real
When found in dreams
We see their Shells
Behind military shields:
Evil, horrible, gallows called oil rigs
Drilling our souls

We thought it was oil
But it was blood
We thought it was oil
But this was blood

The heavens are open
Above our heads
Toasted dreams in a flared

We Dachten Dat Het Olie Was Maar Het Was Bloed

Gisteren nog
dansten we op straat
Met ons hart vol vreugde
We dachten dat we vrij waren
Drie jongeren vielen rechts
Ontelbaar veel meer vielen links
Omhoog kijkend,
Ver boven de menigte
Zagen we ze
Rood gloeiende geweren

We dachten dat het olie was
Maar het was bloed
We dachten dat het olie was
Maar het was bloed

Angst sloeg om ons hart
En kneep onze kelen dicht
Drijvend op
Uitgeputte emoties
We sprongen op in woede
Dit was geen grap
Toen zagen we
De donkerrode plassen

We dachten dat het olie was
Maar het was bloed
We dachten dat het olie was
Maar het was bloed

Uitgedroogde ogen
Vervuilde stromen
Dingen zijn echt
Wanneer ze in dromen worden gevonden
We zien hun Shells* [pantser]
Achter de schilden van het leger
Kwaadaardige galgen genaamd olieplatformen
Boren naar onze zielen

We dachten dat het olie was
Maar het was bloed
We dachten dat het olie was
Maar het was bloed

De hemel staat open
Boven ons hoofd
Verbrande dromen in een

And scrambled sky
A million black holes
In a burnt up sky
Their pipes may burst
But our dreams won't burst

We thought it was oil
But it was blood
We thought it was oil
But this was blood

They may kill all
But the blood will speak
They may gain all
But the soil will RISE
We may die but stay alive
Placed on the slab
Slaughtered by the day
We are the living
Long sacrificed

We thought it was oil
But it was blood
We thought it was oil
But this was blood.

Verscheurde lucht vol vlammen
Een miljoen zwarte gaten
In een verbrande lucht
Hun pijpen barsten misschien
Maar onze dromen zullen niet barsten

We dachten dat het olie was
Maar het was bloed
We dachten dat het olie was
Maar het was bloed

Ze kunnen ons allemaal doden
Maar het bloed zal spreken
Ze kunnen alle rijkdom krijgen
Maar de grond zal OPSTAAN
Misschien sterven wij maar blijven we leven
Op een plank weggedragen
Bij daglicht vermoord
Wij zijn de levende
Lang opgeofferd

We dachten dat het olie was
Maar het was bloed
We dachten dat het olie was
Maar het was bloed

By Nnimmo Bassey

* In het originele gedicht in het Engels heeft de schrijver er bewust voor gekozen om het woord 'Shell' met een hoofdletter te schrijven, daarmee verwijzend naar het oliebedrijf Shell. Daarom heb ik het woord Shell in de vertaling ook laten staan.

Als de Aarde Bloedt

Ik hoor dat olie
Dingen doet bewegen
Maar in werkelijkheid
Houdt olie het leven tegen
Want

**De olie vloeit alleen
Als de aarde bloedt**

Duizenden ontploffingen
Van onder een grond die bloeide
Zwetende boren, barstende pijpen
Deze olie vloeide
Vanuit de aarde's ziekbed
Want

**De olie vloeit alleen
Als de aarde bloedt**

Zij werken in het donker
Wij moeten licht laten schijnen
Hun affakel vlammen blussen
Hun hebzucht doen verdwijnen
Want

**De olie vloeit alleen
Als de aarde bloedt**

In vergaderruimtes
Praten we in stenen tuinen
De oceaan wast alles weg
Maar in de Niger Delta's duinen
Snakken we naar adem
Want

**De olie vloeit alleen
Als de aarde bloedt**

Wat moeten we doen?
Wat kunnen we kiezen?
Blijven we hier zitten?
En klagen en kniezen?
Sta op en sta samen
We zullen onze kracht vinden
En met onze vuisten
De aarde verbinden
Want

**De olie vloeit alleen
Als de aarde bloedt
De olie vloeit alleen
Als de aarde bloedt**

When the Earth Bleeds

I hear that oil
makes things move
In reality check
oil makes life stop
because

The oil only flows
When the earth bleeds

A thousand explosions
in the belly of the earth
bleeding rigs, bursting pipes
this oil flows
from the earth's sickbed
because

The oil only flows
When the earth bleeds

They work in the dark
We must lift up the light
Quench their gas flares
Expose their greed
Because

The oil only flows
When the earth bleeds

In conference halls
we talk in gardens of stones
the ocean waves bathe our eyes
but in Ogoniland we
can't even breathe
because

The oil only flows
When the earth bleeds

What shall we do?
What must we do?
Do we just sit?
Wail and mope?
Arise people, arise
Let's unite
with our fists
let's bandage the earth
because

The oil only flows
When the earth bleeds
The oil only flows
When the earth bleeds.

By Nnimmo Bassey

APPENDIX D. ALL RESPONSE TO STATEMENTS IN QUESTIONNAIRES

Participant's Pseudonyms *	Questionnaire number	1 Proudness of Shell	Appreciation economic impact Shell	2 Shell ought to do more against pollution and climate change	3 Shell's directorate in NL is responsible for Niger Delta	4 Problems in Niger Delta caused more by local sabotage than Shell	5 Sabotage ought to be punished severely	6 Locals should run to Nigerian government	7 More profits than problems for locals through oil	8 It is hard to fix pollution in the Niger Delta	9 We can never do without oil	10 Can imagine the situation well	11 When getting gas I think about impact oil	12 Willingness to drive less
Beth	1	7	7	8	8	5	6	6	4	4	4	5	6	5
	2	7		8	7	5	8	5	4	5	4	7	7	7
Erik	1	6	6	10	10	3	10	7	5	1	8	10	7	10
	2	7		10	10	3	10	7	5	3	7	10	8	10
Hedda	1	7	7	10	10	2	9	2	5	2	9	8	5	7
	2	7		9	9	2	9	3	5	2	9	7	8	7
Hendrik	1	3	3	8	8	5	5	7	5	3	6	5	7	7
	2	3		8	8	5	5	5	3	3	6	6	7	7
Iris	1	8	7	10	10	5	5	8	5	1	8	8	8	10
	2	8		10	8	3	5	8	4	1	8	8	8	8
James	1	5	5	8	8	6	7	8	6	3	5	6	7	8
	2	5		8	8	4	6	8	5	4	5	5	6	7
Julia	1	5	5	7	7	6	7	5	4	5	7	7	6	6
	2	5		8	7	5	7	3	4	6	6	6	6	5
Karl	1	1	4	8	6	2	3	9	5	8	8	2	2	9
	2	2		3	8	3	1	7	4	7	8	5	5	9
Olivia	1	5	7	7	6	8	6	1	7	2	9	8	8	5
	2	7		8	3	5	8	4	7	5	8	7	8	8
Rosie	1	4	5	10	9	7	7	4	1	5	4	7	10	10
	2	3		10	8	4	10	4	1	5	4	8	10	10
Tessa	1	3	4	10	9	4	4	2	3	3	3	8	8	10
	2	3		2**	2**	2**	2**	2	2	4	3	7	8	10
Thomas	1	9	8	9	6	4	9	5	5	3	10	3	2	2
	2	7		8	5	4	8	5	4	3	8	7	4	2
Xander	1	1	3	10	10	5	5	3	3	1	1	9	1	8
	2	1		7	7	3	2	3	1	1	1	8	2	9

* These are not the participants' real names but the pseudonyms I have given them to easily refer to the different individuals throughout this research

** This participant made it clear during the discussions that she had interpreted these statements very differently from other participants and had answered in such a way that her responses lose some validity