

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Literature is a carrier and reflector of society which captures the life and essence of a people's existence in totality. Terry Eagleton in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* posits that "literature is concrete rather than abstract, displays life in all its rich variousness and rejects barren conceptual enquiry for the feel and taste of what it is to be alive" (196). The Literature of a given society illustrates lucidly the composition of that particular society in relation to their culture, history and experiences.

Arts in its diverse forms is used to capture the realities of human experiences, and these experiences can only thrive within an environment. Abalogu Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu in *21st Century Literature* confirms, thus: "no meaningful or serious literary creation can ever achieve credibility and authenticity if it discountenances the environment"(55). Undoubtedly, the environment shapes the content and texture of the literature. No work of art achieves credibility if it is extricated from the environment that produced it.

The environment indeed plays a significant role in the lives of humans. One can also appreciate the issues of environmental concerns as forming the centre point of present day global writing. The environment, which involves man, the air space, land and water, is seen as a world or system with unified elements that are interdependent. A.C. Emeribe in his article "Environmental Management and Protection in Budgeting" asserts that "the environment is that which gives physical sustenance and affords man the opportunity for intellectual, spiritual and social growth...the natural and manmade are essential for his wellbeing and enjoyment of basic human rights" (208). This explains the reason why the 19th century Romantic poets yearned for nature. Passion for nature, a yearning for the past and freedom of imagination were three impulses of the Romantic Movement. Poets such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, Gordon Byron upheld the Romantic Movement which consist in its attitude to nature. For Wordsworth and his contemporaries, nature was not mere physical loveliness, but something deeper. As such, these poets worshipped their environment, because they

saw in all natural objects the indwelling of the Supreme Being. The Romantic poets discovered that nature is a healer and a teacher. In Wordsworth's words as quoted in R.D. Trivedi: "One impulse from a vernal wood may teach you more of man, of moral and of good, than all the sages can" (331). A clean environment was, for Nature Poets, an exclusive concern. For them, it translated to religion, thus making it a goal to convert humanity into this new religion. Theirs is an advocacy for simplicity, love for one's neighbour and faith in divine providence.

James Ewah states it clearly in his essay, "Ecodrama and Conservation Policy" that "man and nature depend on each other for ecological balance and optimum survival" (293). In essence, the environment aids man's growth at all existential levels and generally constitute the foundation upon which his enjoyment of basic human rights is built.

In traditional African societies, humanity's sustenance basically was from plants and animals. Mankind also held aspects of nature sacred; the forests for instance were basically the home of ancestors, the rivers and streams, a coven for men's potency and women's fertility. This brief explanation inspires what Cherryll Glotfelty calls, "the relationship between human culture and the environment" (xv). Earlier in the 20th century however, the renowned English historian, Arnold Tonybee noted the dangers human activities posed on the biosphere. Expressing his fear over an environmental disaster, Tonybee in *Love Glen*, warns that humanity now has the "capacity to make the biosphere inhabitable and will, in fact, produce this suicidal result within a foreseeable period of time if humans do not now take prompt and vigorous concerted action to check the pollution and despoliation that are being inflicted upon the biosphere by shortsighted human greed"(25). Undoubtedly, the devastating blows constantly thrown at the natural environment by humanity's sense of capitalist industrialism and consumerism steadily but unfortunately accounts for the disappearance of the non human world. Mankind's inordinate exploitation of natural resources continues to make human existence precarious. Niyi Osundare in his *Eye of the Earth* therefore voices out:

What we have now is a remembered landscape, echoes of an Eden long departed, when the rain forests were terrifyingly green...Left mostly now are echoes whispered in the stubborn ears of memory.

Most of ^{those} trees so vivaciously native to this forest have met a rapid death in the hands of....merchants with the exploitative improvidence.
(x-xi)

The natural environment is usually a place of naivety and innocence, where species thrive naturally and harmoniously in an atmosphere devoid of rancour or acrimony. However, with the advent of technologies, the world is reduced to what is commonly called a global village, thereby rendering the natural innocence of most environments vulnerable to alien, often harmful cultural forces. Environmental problems result from natural changes and also human activities. Naturally occurring environmental problems are basically ecological changes, which may also be aggravated by human activities. Examples of these changes are earthquakes, erosions, flood, wind storm, stream siltation, etc. However anthropogenic environmental problems principally include pollution and other vices resulting from industrial, agricultural, commercial, domestic and socio-economic activities such as waste dumping, gas flaring, oil spillage, drilling, bush burning, deforestation, over population. The well-being or otherwise of every specie in the ecosystem depend largely on the level of tolerance and of willingness of all to stretch their natural desires and capacities only to the limits of acceptability by all; failure of which leads to dissensions.

One of the most pressing issues the world continues to contend with is the unimaginable disappearance of the non human world. Mankind's sustenance and existence depends on the non human world which places it more important than humans since it provides the material support base for the latter. Man's attention has been drawn to his inordinate exploitation of natural resources that continues to make his existence precarious. The twenty first century person according to Ogaga Okuyade in *Ecocritical Literature: Regreening the African Landscape* "negotiates existence under chaotic environmental conditions; a situation created by mankind's uncanny translation of the functions of the environment to meet his ever insatiate greed for satisfying his unquenching taste for resources" (xii). Capitalist acts of consumerism such as oil exploration, uncontrolled cutting down of trees, burning of forests etc endanger mankind's existence because as the natural resources continues to be depleted without conscious efforts of their replenishment, life expectancy of man is being reduced. These careless and rough handling of the environment amount to degradation.

The environment is indeed a common heritage of humanity and needs to be protected, but unfortunately, deterioration of the environment through human actions continues unabated. Mankind has continued to consistently reduce the environment to a mere object or item that can be exploited for his sustenance and greed. Raj Kumar Mishra in *Ecocritical Literature* laments that:

Today, we live in a world of tropical warmth, chronic drought, desertification, deforestation, acidifying oceans, frequent coastal inundation, tsunami, cyclones, increasing food and shelter shortages, accidents at nuclear power stations, oxytocin applied vegetables, industrial pollution and many more lethal activities. (1)

Ecological degradation therefore refers to the filth, ruin and dilapidation that arise from unwholesome environmental practices, a situation where human beings, plants or animals, are exposed to contaminants and hazards at such level that adverse effects occur. The contaminants of an environment may include industrial operations, activities of construction, mining companies, smokes or fumes resulting from combustion or burning, the release of gaseous chemicals in the air as well as the use of pesticides in mechanized agriculture.

According to the environmental critic, Partha Das Sharna, basic concepts of ecological degradation include "eco-system imbalance, forest deterioration, fresh water degradation, soil degradation, air pollution, and global warming". Each of these issues, according to him, is attributable to the substantial and progressive rise in human population and in technological sophistication.

Cynthia Deitering in her essay titled "The Postnatural Novel: Toxic Consciousness in Fiction of the 1980s" paints a picture of a world living in fear of an alarming level of ecological degradation arising from toxic waste productions and dumping on both lands and waters. Her study is a descriptive survey "that reveals man's progressive preoccupation with the "toiletization" of the planet ... a shift from a culture defined by its production to a culture defined by its waste" (196).

Ecological degradation is one of the biggest problems of our world today. Mankind is in a perpetual state of crisis; a situation created by the destructive translation of the functions of environment to meet human's ever insatiable greed for satisfying his taste for resources. As human beings advance in intellectual knowledge and technological

abilities, their desires expand and grow, far beyond the provisions of basic necessities of life, to that of construction of larger than life structures, far away from basic comforts but mostly for mere fantasy and aesthetic satisfaction. From one generation to the other, there exists in humans the urge to overthrow systems, destroy and waste existing structures in order to rebuild. The reckless need and bizarre satisfaction to deconstruct in order to reconstruct occupies an alarming space in the activities of humanity. Adekoya (qtd in Edward O. Wilson) therefore avers that “humanity has so far played the role of planetary killer, concerned only with its own short term survival. We have cut much of the heart out of biodiversity... all human beings, without exception are geological agents and participate in different degrees in the gradual killing of the planet Earth” (299).

The results of these activities and desires are dirt, pollution and degradation. Indeed, a denuding of the local environment through exploitation of earth and water resources becomes a constant reality that humans and non human natural organism have to grapple with. The insensitive desire to conquer, subdue and subjugate inform much of the degradations in the ecosystem. The result of degradation amount to a denigration of the socio cultural, moral and economic structures of the physical environment.

Regrettably, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is an apt example of one of the most battered ecosystems of the world. The processes of exploration, drilling, production, marketing and distribution of crude oil, gas and their products are the prime sources of human induced degradation of the Delta environment. The activities of oil industries in the area have induced remarkable degrees of negative impact, which amounts to deterioration, degradation, rape and despoliation. The intensive exploitation of the area’s rich oil resources brought with it severe environmental degradation. Ken Saro-Wiwa in *Genocide in Nigera: The Ogoni Tragedy* describes in a detailed manner the despoliation that has beset his homeland thus:

Oil exploration has turned Ogoni into a waste land; lands, streams, creeks are totally and continually polluted, the atmosphere has been poisoned, charged as it is with hydrocarbon vapour, methane, carbon monoxide and soot emitted by gas which has been flared twenty four hours a day for thirty- three years in very close proximity to human habitation. Acid rain, oil spillages and blow

outs have devastated Ogoni territory. High pressure oil, pipelines crisscross the surface of Ogoni farmlands and villages dangerously. (96)

Niger Delta today, in the hands of oil explorers and exploiters is a wasteland. Iniodu Ukpong agrees with Ken Saro-Wiwa as he describes the region in his poem *Niger Delta Blues* as a chimney, where smoke of death oozes, a city of David, where terrorists conduct experiments. In despair, he describes the region as devastated, dejected, endangered, exploited, marginalized and militarized.

G. G. Darah, in *Revolutionary Pressures* observes of the Niger Delta:

In the Niger Delta, the extractive industry of the oil and gas has inflicted tragedies worse than has been experienced elsewhere in the world...because the Niger Delta is the most populated of all the Deltas on the earth, negative effects of oil mining and other ecological disasters have had more devastating consequences on human beings. (5)

Onyema Chris quoting J.Ushie bemoans the degradation in the Niger Delta environment and the mindless crude exploitation that goes on in the area, thus:

The Niger Delta is completely vandalized, its once fertile land soaked in and sterilized by crude oil, its people living in thatch and mud shacks, its rivers, streams and creeks poisoned, its fishes murdered, its people left uneducated, left without drinkable water, left without electricity supply, left without jobs, left without health facilities, and without food...live in the midst of oil spillages and round the clock gas flaring. (442)

The people of the area as a result of their degraded environment are unfortunately bedeviled by poverty. The loss of farmlands and aquatic life have left the inhabitants devastated and pauperized.

Alamieyeseigha D.S.P in his paper, "Niger Delta Crisis, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" decries the situation of the Niger Deltans:

The people of Niger Delta region are highly dependent on their environment (land, water and forest) for sustenance. They were attached to their environment and made their living from the exploitation of its resources as farmers, fishermen, hunters and forest product gatherers. As a result of environmental degradation and petro business activities, the economic activities of the people were soon dislocated... the impaired capacity of the people due to a degraded and devastated environment is a major cause of poverty in the region.

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is traditionally defined as the area drained by the tributaries of the River Niger before it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. The Niger Delta can be referred to as the “oil zone” of Nigeria. According to Ken Saro-Wiwa Jnr:

The oil zone of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, comprises of about 37 million people, spread in about 1,600 communities that harbour the various tributaries through which the Niger – the largest river in West Africa and the longest in Africa – empties its waters into the Atlantic Ocean. It has been described as one of the most densely populated parts of the world and one of the world’s greatest ecosystems; Africa’s largest and the world’s third largest mangrove forest, the most expansive fresh water swamp in Western and Central Africa and Nigeria’s major forest concentration of high biodiversity and the centre for endemism. (45)

The area as Iniodu Ukpong argues, “ is rich in natural and mineral deposit (Crude Oil and Gas) discovered in 1956, and has remained the economic backbone of the Nigerian nation, geographically, covered within the geological Niger Delta includes the six states of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers. However, a more inclusive geopolitical definition extends to the Oil producing states of Abia, Imo and Ondo”(3). Ashton Jones points out that “the Niger Delta Region lies within the West African tropical rain forest biome and its natural ecosystems can be described by six distinct ecological zones namely, Fresh water swamp forest, Tropical Rain Forest, Derived Savannah, Mangrove Swamp forest, Sand Barrier Islands and Estuaries”(21). Ukpong posits that:

The sub regional area of southern Nigeria had been named variously in line with the prevailing interests. During the era of flourishing slave trade, it was christened among the Slave Coast... In the 1850's during the era of real commodity business in Palm oil and Palm kernel, the region was popular as the Oil Rivers, with places like Bonny, Brass and Calabar as major trade centres ... The British declared a protectorate over it in 1885, hence the region became the Oil Rivers Protectorate and in 1893 was renamed the Niger Delta Protectorate. (2)

Situated in the Niger Delta is an abundant reserve of mineral resources of high economic value on land and in the waters. It includes a wide variety of solid minerals, crude oil and natural gas. Some of the exploitable minerals found in the region are granite, marble, phosphate rock, gypsum, sand, clay, salt, limestone, coal, silver etc. However, crude oil is the most extensively exploited mineral resource in Nigeria. The Niger Delta, Ukpong insists “ is the most prospective of the five major Sedimentary basins in Nigeria; the Anambra Basin, the Chad Basin, the Benin and Benue Basin, where oil exploration has taken place. Crude oil, discovered in Oloibiri, a community in Bayelsa State of Nigeria in 1956, has since formed the pivot of the nation's economy” (12). Ashton Jones posits that “the Niger Delta holds the largest oil reserve in Africa and the tenth globally, thus contributes about 10% of the world's light crude oil which is highly valued for high yield of light oil products and low sulphur content... crude oil has been the object of Nigeria's monotypic economy with revenues accounting for 25% of GDP, about 90% foreign exchange earnings and 70% budgetary expenditure” (5). The oil has grossly succeeded in enriching the nation and securing a pride of place for the country in the international arena, but the paradox of poverty in the midst of wealth holds true for the Niger Delta people, whose environment is daily battered; their resources feed others while they go hungry and wallow in neglect.

Nigeria, reputed as the most populous Black nation ranks among the top global producers and exporters of crude oil which has been the major revenue for Nigerian nation for over fifty years. The proceeds from oil has built and continues to build the nation's capital – Abuja, even Lagos and some states up North into world class socio-political sites. The oil proceeds has indeed acquired for the nation respect and pride.

G.G. Darah, highlights the role of the oil gains from the Niger Delta in the execution of Nigeria's International Military and Diplomatic Duties thus:

Nigeria's financial and diplomatic muscle was decisive in compelling the apartheid tyrants to "step aside" from power. All the money that funded Nigeria's involvement in the anti apartheid struggle came from the oil wealth of the Niger Delta. The same is true about the N13 billion Nigeria expended in waging ECOMOG wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. (114)

The rise of oil as a key world socio-political and economic issue is indeed one of the most incontestable facts of the modern world. Oil, in all its capacity is a top global revenue earner; it is also undoubtedly a propellant of crisis situation and a huge figure in the international conversation on ecological degradation. Oil, the most traded commodity in the present age has contributed in no small measure to the world's discomfiting position. Oil spillages, gas flaring, and other toxic substances have left the environment degraded and depreciated and the people poorer due to loss of their natural occupation – farming and fishing.

The narrative of degraded environments, decimated cultures and misappropriated economies remains the same in many African Countries. The narrator in *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* says of Ecuador "By 1968, Texaco had discovered petroleum in Ecuador's Amazon region. Today, oil accounts for nearly half the country's export. A trans Andean pipeline built... has since leaked over a million barrels of oil into the fragile rainforest" (3). The narrator observes with dismay "that vast areas of rainforest has fallen, macaws and jaguars have all but vanished, three Ecuadorian indigenous cultures have been driven to the edge of collapse and pristine rivers have been transformed into flaming cesspools"(4). "Exploration and exploitation activities", he decries, "leaves Ecuador battered in many ways: destruction of indigenous cultures, human lives, hundreds of thousands of species of animals, reptiles, fishes, insects, plants" (6). In this same vein, Niger Delta today, in the hands of oil explorers and exploiters is a wasteland.

The violation of the environment share a similar narrative with the violation of females in the society (the woman and the girl child). Both are victims of subjugation and subjection powered by the willful obnoxious activities of Capitalism and

Patriarchy. The portraiture of a battered nature and the denigration of females are juxtaposed in this study. The violation of nature and women, have necessitated a global call for renegotiation and a change in attitude towards unhealthy and counter activities meted out on them which culminate in tragic climaxes.

Apparent violations of the female folk are woven around the strictures that surround them. In order to ensure that women are not victims of violence, the General Assembly of the United Nations in its Resolution of 48/104 1993 made a proclamation tagged, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW). The declaration defines violence against women thus:

a violation of human rights...a form of discrimination against women...all acts of gender based violence that results in or are likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats, coercion of such acts, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (1993, Article 1)

Some of the forms of violence perpetuated against women include rape, female genital mutilation, honour killings (a form of violence against women in which women and girls are killed by family members because the women are believed to have brought shame or dishonor upon the family. This is commonly practised in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Jordan Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen), Acid throwing (also known as Acid Attack, throwing of acid on the body of a person with the intention of injuring or disfiguring them out of jealousy or revenge. This is usually common in countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Cambodia in such mild disputes as dowry dispute, refusal of marriage or sexual advances), Forced marriage (in which one or both parties is/are married against his/her/their will), human trafficking (the transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion...to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation), mistreatment of widows (widows subjected to serious forms of abuse often fuelled by traditional practices such as widow inheritance), unfounded accusation against women of witchcraft, stoning, flogging, marriage by abduction, breast ironing or breast flattening forced marriage and much more. These are some of the issues women and

girl children battle with even as they face gendered challenges in their local environments which further stifle their wellbeing.

Aduke Adebayo, in “Feminism in Francophone African Literature: From Liberalism to Militancy” asserts:

whether she lived in the bush or in the city, however, the African woman was and is still doubly oppressed. Firstly, she is oppressed by colonialism and neo-colonialism like her male counterpart and, secondly, she is oppressed by her patriarchal arrangement whereby the women and the children belong to the minority group in the sense that they are denied some privileges and freedom, which society normally allows for the dominant group. In this case, the dominant group is male. (69)

The African woman, belongs to the minority group and is considered as an individual with overwhelming problems. She struggles because she is a woman, secondly, she has to assert herself as a black woman and finally, she struggles for social integration.

The society approves of a woman once she is married and considers her successful when she bears children, even more successful when she bears sons. She is commended when she allows an unequal alliance between her and her husband. In her book, *Getting Rid of It*, Lindsey Collen draws a direct parallel between the institutions of marriage and of slavery. “Like slaves, women are voiceless, without agency or freedom, particularly in patrilineal systems” (38). In these, a woman can be passed from the authority of her natal male relatives to ownership by her husband’s family without ever acquiring autonomy.

Ini Obong Uko observes in “A Failed Sexual Rebellion” that:

The dominant socio-political structures that exist in African society are those that impede the full development of women’s potential... These commence in the girl child who is conditioned to stay home and do domestic work, enjoy almost no leisure, unlike her male counterpart who is free to play and associate. At adolescence, the essence of her life revolves around serving her father and brothers, and she is made to believe that these roles make and define ideal womanhood. At

adulthood and in marriage, the woman is assumed to have been properly grounded in servitude, muteness, invisibility and dependence with a natural acceptance of a corresponding male superiority and dominance. (130)

Patriarchy and female exploitation are a phenomenon which have bedeviled womanhood and by extension our society. Justina Okoye in *Gender Consciousness* describes patriarchy as “a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions; a system ruled by men in which women are inferior”(60).

As such, Juliet Mitchell in *Woman's Estate* agrees that, “economically, women are the most highly exploited group; they are also the most physically determined as inferior’ (67). In many situations, men and their ideologies control women’s reproductive and sexual capacities, and as a result, women are trapped by their men’s reproductive anatomy, capability and by a dogma of compulsory heterosexuality.

Beating wives and forced sex in marriage is a socially acceptable expression of male authority in marriage in several African cultures. A sociological research made by Dorcas Appiah in Ghana found ‘a high level of acceptance for beating women as a way of training and bringing them to order’. This research and evidence from the novels suggest that such marital violence is often condoned by the social group. Unfortunately so, physical abuse (unless it is severe enough to endanger the woman’s life) is not usually seen as a reason to end a marriage. In fact, it is more likely to be viewed as a vital mechanism for sustaining marriages because it teaches women to conform to behavioural patterns that are acceptable to their husbands. In such cultural situations, women are expected to be content with docility. In Yvonne Vera’s *Butterfly Burning* for instance, there is a subtle tension between Fumbatha and Phephelaphi. He assumes that Phephelaphi will be content with a domestic and reproductive role. For him, it is simple: “we are happy together. I work. I take care of you. It is not necessary for you to find something else” (59).

In fact, Helen Chukwuma posits in *Feminism in African Literature* that, “most African women are trained and oriented from infancy to realize themselves and their true worth outside themselves, thereby negating any knowledge of self. A woman’s greatest aspiration is finding a male and thereafter bearing children. Every other thing

is secondary: education, a career, material wealth, social acclaim. All these are subsumed to marriage and motherhood” (x). The young girls are unfortunately raised to remain content with a second place position in relation to the boys, such that she grows into a woman still looking up to the man. Ngozi Ohaeto quoting Simone de Beauvoir agrees with this assertion, thus: “...humanity is male and man defines the woman not in herself but as relative to him...she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute. She is the other” (26).

Chimamanda Adichie decries the situation of women as she states in her “Feminist Quotes” that “we do a much greater disservice to girls because we raise them to cater to the fragile egos of males. We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller...we make them feel as though being born females they’re already guilty of something. So girls grow to be women who silence themselves. They grow up to be women who cannot say what they really think...they grow up to be women who have turned pretence into an art form”.

The violation of the Niger Delta environment is indeed as horrendous as it is overwhelming, these violations are replicated in the lives of women in the area whose mainstay and sustenance hinges on their immediate environment. The women in the Niger Delta are victims, first, of general gender based discriminatory practices and disadvantages. There is generally a disproportionate representation of women in every strategic sector in the region. Women are under represented in the strategic heights of politics, government, economy, educational institutions and employed labour.

Majority of women residing in the Niger Delta are peasants who have been marginalized in the process of production and distribution. Women are victims of economic crisis. Women bear greater consequences of social disruption arising from economic crisis in the Niger Delta. Considering that women are more sedentary and constitute a greater proportion of subsistence farmers, they suffer most from the adverse effects of soil degradation and pollution. They suffer losses in farmlands and fishing waters. As subsistence fisherwomen, they suffer from the pollution of the creeks and rivers and the decline in fish stocks. Filomina Steady in her article “Gender Equity and Eco system Balance” points out that “women in developing countries are among the primary victims of the synergistic effects of environmental degradation and poverty. In view of the heavy reliance of poor women on natural

resources, they are among the first to notice and feel the effects of environmental stress, often increasing their work load, reducing their access to land and other resources undermining their health”.

Women’s health becomes endangered by environmental degradation resulting from scarcity of clean water, desertification exposable to toxic chemicals and hazardous waste. The women, much more than men are inflicted with the horrendous fate of oil induced health issues in the Niger Delta; with their exposure to poisonous gases from gas flare platforms, use of polluted water, females in the region stand a higher risk than their male counterparts due to their physiologies. Most women in the area are faced with the travail of deformity and death as a result of illnesses and diseases such as cancer of the lungs, skin, womb and various respiratory tract diseases. Cases of miscarriages, infertility and malformed babies are also rampant in the degraded region. The women in Ojaide’s *The Activist* raise an alarm: “there is much more happening to us women in recent years. Our pregnant women are delivering so many malformed babies. What used to be a rarity is now common place... newly married young women complain openly about the weakness of their men” (219).

A UN world Report, qtd in Filomina Steady states that “women in Africa are constantly exposed to health hazards, have a high maternal morbidity and mortality rate, low life expectancy and suffer child loss as a result of high infant mortality rates”. In her article, “Gender Equality and Ecosystem Balance”, Steady indicates that an emergent trend of carcinogenic diseases in the Niger Delta is traceable to the exposure of these people to the radioactive element of gas flaring.”

Women are the least beneficiaries from employment in the Oil Companies. They are also excluded from the token compensation arising from acquisition, pollution and devastation of farmlands and fishing waters. Compensation claims are made by traditional rulers and local elites, and women are least recognized as owners of land and water resources.

Women are also victims of other consequences of the social economy, young girls in the region are lured and deceived into responding to oil workers’ lusts. Most of them impregnate the girls, abandon them to their fate, leaving the girls saddled with the responsibility of nurturing children who would never know their fathers. The incidences of female prostitution, teenage pregnancies and broken homes have

become more pervasive. Most of these women are also separated from their husbands by the exigencies of work, as the men migrate into cities in search of greener pasture.

Today, farming in the area has become an exercise in futility; the land has been raped of its virginity, deprived of its fertility through the continuous exploitation and irresponsibility of the oil multinationals. The fact that women in this degraded area have been as battered as their environment cannot be over emphasized. They are raped and dispossessed of their mainstay. Ukpong highlights the state of despair as caused by:

Indiscriminate cutting of pristine forests, terminal scare of wildlife, extinction of biodiversity, loss of soil fertility and fecundity of rivers, acidified atmosphere, corroded roofs, disease conflicts, militarization, extra judicial killing, inflation, poverty, prostitution, rape, death. The realities of an abused Delta are made manifest in physical, biological and socio-economic environments. The communities sprawl in abject poverty and untold misery as their traditional economy powered by fishing and farming collapses before their presence. (21)

Unarguably, women, metaphorically associated with the earth and their children are worse hit by the tortured Niger Delta environment. The loss of farmlands and aquatic life as a result of battered environment affects the women much more than anyone as they hold the responsibility of running the familial base. The women are also affected psychologically, their lives are benumbed with intense fear, deprivation and abuse which often manifests in disorganized and agitative behaviours. In recent times, therefore, women have been involved in the struggle to rescue, preserve and conserve the environment from being destroyed completely. They (women) strongly believe that in finding justice for the environment, they would have found justice for the womenfolk and by extension for humanity. Women have since begun to question the repressions that are rife in the society, rejecting all forms of social misrule and obnoxious practices which continue to put her down. Women have indeed arisen to demand for their rights and the need for society to understand their roles as indispensable partners. Adebayo Aduke in “Feminism in Francophone African Literature: From Liberalism to Militancy” insists that “it is the woman’s right to demand her autonomy, her independence; to decide for herself, in her mind and

conscience, in her capacity as a full-fledged individual; to exercise control over her body, her desires and aspirations” (292).

Women’s special connectedness to the earth have propelled them to demand for justice. Women infer that since humans are dependent upon the earth for survival, the earth and all life forms should be treated as sacred and must be preserved. Adichie, on this stand, advocates for “a different world, a fairer world, a world of happier men and happier women who are truer to themselves”. Earth, for women, is an ecosystem where all life is connected and humans live in balance with nature, devoid of any discrimination in gender, class or race. Ecological justice therefore serves as the only panacea to minimizing the excruciating pain women in the Niger Delta region suffer, given that when justice is done to the environment, it invariably trickles down to women, the highest victims of environmental degradation. As such, Tanure Ojaide in *Ecocritical Literature*, agitates for an “ecology of justice; human rights that will bring harmony to the relationship between humans and their environment for the respective wellbeing in the interconnected cycles of life” (66).

In an attempt to gain ecological justice therefore, women around the world have since risen to the occasion. They no longer sit back to stare while the environment is abused and debased. Such women include Maathai Wangari of Kenya, whose initiative, the Green Belt Movement (GBM) has become for many a symbol of women’s quest for environmental citizenship. According to Edlyne Anugwom in *Empowering Women for Gender Equity* “the GBM founded by Maathai in 1977 is a national movement and its goals are to reclaim land and replenish soil, by planting trees to promote environmental conservation and rational land use and to give employment opportunities to rural women of Africa”(75). The movement Anugwom continues “has spread to over twelve African countries and responsible for having planted over ten million trees in Kenya and for producing income for over 50,000 women”(75). Maathai who was once attacked by the Kenyan Police for mobilizing a group of women to plant seedlings in Karura (a government commercial area) in the outskirts of Nairobi in Kenya, was not deterred, owing to her conviction that the environment alone ensures the survival of humans and must be treated with utmost repute.

The effectiveness of grass root feminist awareness and environmental advocacy is also explicitly illustrated in the Chipko Movement, where women in India

successfully mobilized to protect their forests and natural resources. As forests began to be felled for commerce and industry, Indian women mobilized themselves to protect their livelihood. According to Vandana Shiva, “in 1977, a forest on Salet, India, was threatened by loggers, the women adopted the strategy of Hugging the trees to save them, recognizing fully, the importance of forests as sources of fuel, fodder, timber, medicine and food” (25).

Ecofeminism, coined in 1974 by French feminist, Françoise d'Eaubonne, expresses a connection of the ecology and women. The philosophy of ecofeminism specifically emphasizes the way both women and nature are treated by the patriarchal society. Sussan Griffin explains that “ecofeminism is a movement that focuses on the historical linkage between the denigration of nature and the female”. Stating further, she says that “Ecofeminism continues the progression within traditional feminism from attention to sexism to all systems of human oppression such as racism, classism, ageism, heterosexism” (9). Ecofeminism appeals for the right of every living thing to exist, while also campaigning against masculinity and the mentality that devours and destroys the bodies of women and their sexuality. Indeed, the loss of farmlands and aquatic life, violence from the military, rape and brutalization bring forth a trampling on the rights of the people and untold misery on the lives of women and children.

These despoliations wrought on the environment has indeed jolted writers into a painful consciousness of our dying world and in line with Nnimo Bassey's insistence in “The Land is Dying”, writers have deployed creative energy towards “promoting the cause of environmental conservation, remediation and restoration”. Chris Onyema observes in “Jungle and Oil Green: Currents in Environmental Discourse” that “much of the recent eco critical discourse in Nigeria is focused on works by writers from the inland Niger Delta area in a way that tends to give Nigerian eco writers a monochromatic view of distraught sensibilities from eco oppression, toxicity, and pollution discourse”(189). Arts for Arts Sake does not apply in the grid of contemporary writers. Writers engage themselves with what happens in the society. Through their works, critical analysis of the trends that rock the society are projected, for according to Saro-Wiwa, “Literature must serve society by steeping itself...by intervention, writers must not only write to amuse or take a bemused, critical look at society, they must play an interventionist role...the writers must be l'homme engage, for the word is power and even more powerful is it when it is expressed in common

currency” (81). This work will study Tanure Ojaide’s *Stars of the Long Night*, Vincent Egbuson’s *Love my Planet*, John Million’s *Amongst the Survivors*, and Kaine Agary’s *Yellow Yellow*. Through these works, the researcher shall examine how writers have recreated females as major victims of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region and its implications.

Statement of the Problem

The ecological experience of the Niger Delta area of Nigeria has remained a major issue of global discourse in recent years. Efforts have been made by writers to showcase to the world what goes on inside the region in terms of disastrous oil exploration and exploitation by multinational companies, enabled by the insensitivity of the indigenous government. The statement of the problem is that there has been palpable multiplicity of environmental issues in the Niger Delta, especially as it affects females in the region. This, thus, has agitated concern towards a conscious probing as to how this ailing challenge can be ameliorated, if not, arrested wholly, as represented by Kaine Agary in her novel *Yellow Yellow*, Vincent Egbuson in *Love My Planet*, Million John in *Amongst the Survivors* and Tanure Ojaide in *Stars of the Long Night*.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of the Niger Delta environment as presented by the writers. This study analyses the various portraits of degradation in the area; the physical environment, the moral depravity, and decadence in leadership. This study analyses also the nature of the characters that inhabit this environment .It interprets the environmental, psychological, economical and emotional impact of environmental degradation with particular reference to the females (women and young girls).This study analyses the mistreatment of women as encouraged by patriarchy and interprets the relationship between the sexes arising from the peculiar nature of the Niger Delta environment.

Scope of the Study

Literary writers have written copiously on the gory experiences of the people in the devastated Niger Delta. It definitely would not be practicable to peer into all the works and their authors within this space. Therefore, four novels by Nigerian writers

of Niger Delta Origin have been selected for study in this research. They are: *Love my planet* by Vincent Egbuson,(2008) *Stars of the Long Night*(2012) by Tanure Ojaide, *Amongst the survivors*(2010) by Million John and *Yellow Yellow* (2006)by Kaine Agary.

Vincent Egbuson's *Love My Planet* centres on Toundi, a young girl whose love for the earth is deep. She explores various environmental problems traumatizing the Nigerian society. The problems explored ranges from gas flaring, water pollution, flood and oil spillage, which results to hunger, poverty, disease, malnutrition, armed robbery, prostitution.

Toundi stands out in the novel as a quintessential ecofeminist who showcases to the world the suffering and pains of the women in her society. Egbuson in his work, brings to the fore the degenerate situation of the Niger Delta. He describes that the interaction of the people of the Niger Delta with their environment has seriously been influenced by many forms of oil generated environmental pollution. He regrets that the ordinary people, especially women and children are the most traumatized victims.

Tanure Ojaide in *Stars of the Long Night*, agitates for the restoration of a pristine environment in which pastoral beauty is enthroned. Ojaide prides in his traditional Agbon community blessed with ecological endowments, a community where men and women thrived in farming, fishing, weaving of mats, production of palm oil, but who for their desecration against nature and the gods eventually loses their eco harmony. Ojaide questions the repressed position of the woman in this community, her encumbrances and her struggles in a patriarchal traditional society. He brings to bare, the different shades of violation which the woman faces in her local environment.

Million John in *Amongst the Survivors* portrays his once eco harmonious Niger Delta environment before the arrival of oil explorers. He laments over the distorted fecundity of the area as a result of the activities of the Seismographic Company, counting their losses in farm lands and aquatic life. John presents women whose lives are violated and traumatized by poverty as a result of the activities of the oil companies. He also x-rays the lives of the youths, especially girls whose moral decadence are as a result of the degradation of their environment. He also questions the Nigerian government's complicit gaze at the excesses of the oil companies who neither subscribes to accepted standards of exploration nor extends any form of duty

care to the people. John, through his work calls for a retrieval of a healthy environment, one in which plants, animals, and humans will cohabit and sustain each other.

Kaine Agary in her novel *Yellow Yellow* brings to the fore, the violation and debasement of both the land and the woman. Zilayefa, the protagonist is an intelligent young girl who encounters the difficulties of growing up in a region wrecked by neo-colonial exploitation and environmental degradation. The inner turmoil and confusion of the protagonist denotes the chaotic state of the region as it affects the woman and the girl child. The novel is an exposition of the travails of women as they struggle to find existential fulfillment in the devastated Niger Delta.

This research is restricted within the boundaries of literary art, but with a wider view of literature from broad and related fields of Humanities and Social Sciences. Considering also, that ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary study of literature and environment, such opinions from geographers, geologists and social scientists are relevant to the understanding and treatment of issues in this study.

The writers whose works are studied in this research represent very sensitive minds whose energy has shown an unprecedented commitment to the issues which are the concerns of this work. The writers here are all natives of the Niger Delta region who are consumed by their abiding passion for their place of birth and the need to draw the attention of the world to the degradation of the area through their works.

This piece of work considers the contemporariness of the select works written between 2006 and 2017. Although, interest on Niger Delta environmental issues is well over fifty years, yet, it obviously received greater attention after the gruesome hanging of the environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others in 1995. The aftermath of his death continues to resonate as seen in the resolve of more youths who are ready to give up their lives rather than be muffled in this struggle.

Methodology

This work focuses on females as victims of environmental degradation in contemporary Niger Delta. The work will be conducted based on the Qualitative Content Analysis Methodology which is apt in analyzing text details.

The work therefore entails a close examination of events in the local Niger Delta environment and how they affect characters depicted in the novels. To this end, the primary data sources of the research are drawn from the novels to be studied; *Yellow Yellow* by Kaine Agary, *Love my Planet* by Vincent Egbuson, *Amongst the Survivors* by Million John, and *Stars of the Long Night* by Tanure Ojaide. The researcher has consciously chosen the texts because they bother mainly on the despoliations on our immediate environment with women as receptors of the excruciating travails. Each of the novels treats the identified problem of pollution/degradation of the area and how it informs the violation of the female characters therein. These primary sources reveal first hand experiences through which the analysis of the problem is made.

Data from other literature considered secondary are also utilized in order to enrich this study and also situate the work within a global context. The work is explored through access to articles, texts, conference papers, magazines on environment, pictorial and video clips on the Niger Delta disposition. This study in its interdisciplinary nature sought views from authorities in other fields such as ecology, health sciences and geography to enhance data analysis and interpretation.

Significance of the Study

The work studies a repertoire of themes that uniquely portray concerns about women. It sets out to give a nuanced view of the woman entrapped in the Niger Delta turmoil which will elicit an advocacy for raising consciousness for women in the area of violence whilst also highlighting their rights in a degraded environment. This study will therefore contribute in enriching the literature in the area of ecofeminism.

Strong attachments to the natural environment in the works of 19th century English Romantic Poets such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge are proofs that literature and the environment enjoy strong natural affinities. However, Critics such as William Slaymaker argue that African Literature has not contributed much to ecocriticism or environmental literature because according to Slaymaker, “African writers see ecocriticism as western and in conflict with African concerns”. This work seeks to debunk this assertion because it has the potential of affirming that the African writer has always given expression to environmental issues citing such instances as Chinua Achebe whose debut novel, *Things Fall Apart*, though an exploration to the colonial incursion in Africa gives life to the environment. Besides, there are others as

Niyi Osundare whose *Eye of the Earth* makes overwhelming input on environmental concerns down to today's writers especially of the Niger Delta breed.

This research which studies females as victims in a degraded environment would undoubtedly contribute richly to interdisciplinary discourse on women and the environment which is topical in global agenda. It will acquaint and provide readers with a lee way to understanding and appreciating, not just literature but their links to environmental sensitization, sustainability and human development anchored on the agitation for the protection of women's rights and social justice.

The work will thus serve as a reference point to uphold women as vanguards in the effort to preserve, protect and safeguard the environment.

It will equally contribute strongly to the body of knowledge and stimulate researchers in the area of gender and environmental studies.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT SCHOLARSHIP

Theoretical Framework

Ecofeminism

Feminist writers and environmental activists began explicitly articulating the analysis and practical politics that paid close attention, to the similarities and connections between patriarchal mistreatment of women and the mistreatment of nature in the 1970. Their positive energy brought to bear on gender discourse and led to the idea of Ecofeminism. It is around this theory that this study revolves.

According to Lois Ann Lorentzen, in *Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy*, “ In 1974, French feminist, Francoise d'Eaubonne published the word ecofeminisme for the first time to refer to the movement by women necessary to save the planet ...but it was not until later that the term ecofeminism came to refer to a distinct stream within U.S feminist politics”(6). The central insight of ecofeminism as d'Eaubonne says (qtd in C. Spretnak) “is that a historical, symbolic and political relationship exists between the denigration of nature and females” (1).

Ecofeminism's logic of identity, is represented in Carolyn Merchant's work qtd in Catriona Sandilands in which she says:

The word ecology derives from the Greek word “oikos” meaning house. Ecology then, is the science of the household- the Earth's household. The connection between the earth and the house has historically been mediated by women. (4)

In ecofeminism, the fact of being a woman is understood to lie at the base of one's experience of ecological degradation, of one's interests in ecological protection, preservation and reconstruction. Ecofeminism is “an umbrella term” for according to Karen Warren as qtd in *Ecofeminism and Globalization*:

Ecofeminism involves a wide variety of perspectives, some of which are compatible with each other and others that are contradictory. What hold these disparate positions together are the interconnections among all systems of unjustified human domination and that in these relationships, women suffer more...it begins with gender as a category of analysis not because gender oppression is more important than other forms of oppression...it is because a focus on women reveals important features

of interconnected systems of human domination: first, among white people, among people of colour, poor people, children, the elderly, colonized people so-called third world people, and other human groups harmed by environmental destruction, it is often women who suffer disproportionately higher risk and harms than men. (62)

The search for historical origins for the patriarchal degradation of women led to a considerable emphasis on tracing women's status- especially their relationship with a degraded nature. Rosemary Radford Ruether in her book *New Woman/New Earth* was one of the first to outline explicitly the destructive significance of patriarchal religion for both women and nature. She asserts:

Since women have been traditionally identified with nature, and nature in turn has been seen as an object of domination by man (males) it is...a truism that the mentality that regarded the natural environment as an object of domination drew an imagery and attitudes based on male domination of women...sexism and ecological destructiveness are related in the symbolic patterns of the patriarchal consciousness... (and) they take intensive socioeconomic form in modern industrial society. (28)

Where Ortner Sherry insists on the eradication of women and nature connection, Francoise d'Eaubonne in *Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy* recognizes it as a means of celebrating those aspects of life degraded and distorted through centuries of patriarchal, cultural and economic domination. She contends: "Therefore with a society at last in the feminine gender...it will be proved that no other human group could have brought about the ecological revolution because none other was so directly concerned at all levels...and the planet in the feminine gender will become green again for all" (7).

Ynestra King in "Healing the Wounds" sees ecofeminism as both a distinct theoretical framework for feminist ecology and a distinct activist possibility for feminist writings on nature. She states:

We believe that a culture against nature is a culture against women. We know we must get out from under the feet of men as they go about their projects of violence. In pursuing these projects, men deny and dominate

both women and nature and of peace and freedom, and it is women who can show the way. We have to be the voice of the invisible, of nature who cannot speak for herself in the political arenas of our society. (138)

As the environmental movement along with environmental crisis raised the consciousness of women to the decay of the earth, women began to see a parallel between the devaluation of the earth and devaluation of women. King still observes:

Women began to see the link as not a false construction of weakness, but as a strong unifying force that clarified the violation of women and the earth as part of the same drama of male control... No part of living nature can ignore the extreme threat to life on Earth. We are faced with worldwide deforestation, the disappearance of hundreds of species of life and the increasing pollution of the gene pool by poisons and low level radiation. (136)

There is a connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature. Vandana Shiva posits that “in the rupture within nature and between man and nature, and its associated transformation from a life force that sustains, to an exploitable resource characterizes the Cartesian view which has displaced more ecological world views and created a development paradigm which cripples nature and women simultaneously” (80). The violation of nature is synonymous with the violation of women, this inspires women’s resolve to redeem our dying environment. The earth (environment) and the woman share the same qualities and women believe that there is an urgent need and their responsibility as well to ensure a sustainable earth. Catrina Sandiland remarks also that “women’s concern for the natural environment is rooted in our concern for the health and well being of our family and community... because we have traditionally been mother, nurse and guardian for the home and community, women have been quick to perceive the threat to health and lives of our families and neighbours that is posed by polluted water and toxic chemicals” (ix).

The dependence on nature and environment for survival is common among third world women. This dependence obviously creates a deeply rooted connection between women and their surroundings. The dependency women have on natural

resources based on their responsibility creates a specific interest that may be different from the interest of men. On this, J. Jiggins suggest that:

The views women have on nature are unique in that they connect the land to immediate survival and concern for future generation, rather than simply looking at the land as a resource with monetary value... women are closer to nature more than men are. This closeness, therefore makes women more nurturing and caring towards their environment... women are hurt even much more when the environment is violated... environmental degradation affects women the most, furthering the inequalities between men and women. (8-9)

Women and environment are considered as exploitable resources that are significantly undervalued. This argument supports ecofeminism in that women, especially the rural poor rely on nature to survive therefore the destruction of the environment results in elimination of women's method of survival.

The work of feminist thinkers and activists similarly concerned with connections between women and nature has come to be known as Ecofeminism. Shiva on this premise posits that "ecofeminism links the domination of women and the exploitation of the environment to the system of patriarchy". As such, advocates that "women need to overthrow patriarchy which will liberate and put an end to the domination of nature" (4).

A foundational aspect of ecofeminism is the belief that for feminism to adequately address the realities and specificities of women's oppression, we must pay explicit attention to how that oppression relies on and fuels the devaluation and exploitation of non human, natural beings and entities.

Ecofeminism encompasses a variety of views but has its focus on patriarchal oppression and the social construction relating to women and the environment. Citing connections between the mistreatment of women and the mistreatment of non human nature, and rejecting women's traditional roles as housekeepers, Mary Daly wrote in *Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy*:

Rachael Carson, whose credibility was weakened by her sex, was greeted with superficial attention and deep inattentiveness. Ecologists deny her recognizing, maintaining dishonest silence. Meanwhile the springs are becoming more silent as the necrophilia leaders of

phallotechnic society are carrying out their programmes of planned poisoning for all life on planet. (21)

Leach Green in *Feminism and Ecological Communities* however argues that “ women do not have a special relationship or affinity with the environment but rather the relationship has been structurally imposed upon women . It is thus through this forced association between the women and the environment, that the women have an enhanced knowledge about the environment” (270).

Ecofeminists believe in the interconnection between the domination of women and nature. The superior power, they believe treats all subordinates the same. So, Ecofeminism takes into account female violence and nature degradation. Karren Warren in *Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy* observes that:

Language, practices and values behind women's oppression are often similar and sometimes identical to those through which nature is radically altered and sometimes irreparably thus; women are described in animal terms as pets, foxes, cows, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old hens, mother hens, pussy cats, cheetahs, bird... mother nature is raped, mastered, conquered, mined; her secrets are penetrated, 'her womb' is to be put into the service of the 'man of science, virgin timber is felled, lit down, fertile land is tilled and land that lies 'fallow' is 'barren', useless. The exploitation of nature and animals is justified by feminizing thus; the exploitation of women is justified by naturalizing them. (29)

Today, women struggle against alarming global trends, but are working together to effect change. By establishing domestic, international and government organizations, many women have recognized themselves and acknowledged to the world that they not only have the right to participate in environmental dilemma but they have different relationships with environment including different needs, responsibilities and knowledge about natural resources. Women are often more directly affected by environmental issues, and so have become more concerned about environmental problems.

The researcher posits that the activism of ecofeminism does not only include striving for gender, race and class equity but also include a commitment to re-imagine a planet where all life forms, human and non human find themselves protected against violence, destruction, annihilation, disease, abuse and mistreatment.

Conceptual Framework

Environment and Ecology

P. Nwanze traces the origin of the term Ecology to a human biologist, Ernest Heckel who in 1866 coined two words, Oikos meaning home and Logos meaning study. According to him therefore, Ecology, could be defined as “the study of organisms in their homes or surrounding” (1).

A. Uwadiogwu describes Ecology as “that branch of biology that deals with the total complex interrelationships or interactions between or among the different living organisms and the environment in which they live” (49). He also defines the environment as “a collective term used in describing all living and non-living things that make up man's surrounding comprising these major components, physical, biological, social or psychological” (54). Environment in Ogaga Okuyade’s interpretation means :

... space and all that is in it namely: Matter (organic and inorganic); human beings who are oriented by pride, bred by the view to separate themselves from nature and power to erroneously perceive themselves collectively as its controller and Lord; animals (visible and invisible) that are placed by the human race on a lower level on the great chain of being; plants, water, air, their interaction, activities and processes; and all ideas and objects produced by humans as they struggle relentlessly with nature in order to create culture and civilization. (291)

A.C. Emeribe quoting the United Nations Stockholm Conference on Human Environment posits that “...man’s environment is that which gives him physical sustenance and affords him the opportunity, instinctual, spiritual and social growth” (208).

From the definitions above, the relationship between ecology and environment could be rightly described as inseparable. The environment consists of the home, the surrounding both the physical, social, economic, psychological and the cultural which

directly or indirectly influences the living organisms that exist in the surrounding. In like manner, ecology as the study that deals with the interrelationship among these organisms which exist in the environment becomes an intricate aspect of the environment.

By the foregoing, one sees that living creatures strongly connect to their natural world, such that in the two, there exist a form of relationship or interdependence. Ecology, without doubt therefore, can be used simultaneously with Environment to refer to the natural human and non-human partnership in an interdependent relationship.

Literary writers understandably, often concentrate on and reflect the sensibilities of their age. Literary writers draw from the experiences of man and his environment, exploring different subject matters and thematic concerns. Often times, the concerns of literary works implicate the major concern and temperament of an age. Little wonder then, concepts such as Elizabethan, Medieval, Classical, Neoclassical and Romantic periods are used in designating different periods in literary history.

Against this background, one can appreciate the issues of environmental concerns as forming part of the centre point of the present day global literary writings. Situating environmental concerns within the centre of present day global interest, Isidore Okpewho as quoted in Bagu states that:

The environment has become a paramount but complex and multi dimensional issue on the public policy agenda of states and International Organizations. This transformation after a long period of benign neglect began in Rio in 1992. The issue of environment is today perceived not simply as a narrow ecological problem of how to ensure a symbiotic and congruent interface between man and his environment. It is more than that. Its inner core has political, developmental, sociological and scientific ramifications, all of which are anchored on the new concepts. (189-190)

It is pertinent to point out that as much as the natural environment featured so prominently in the writings of Williams Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, D.H. Lawrence and other Romantic writers; there is a departure in their manner of presenting experiences with what could be said to constitute the focus of eco-

literature. The Romantic writers are known for their great indulgence in creating feelings far removed from everyday living; they dwell on feelings of fancy, while eco-literary writers prefer writings that elicit actuality. Thus, while the former prefers to gaze into nature's twinkling stars and the beautiful sun, the latter engages in the challenging realities that surround man in his physical environment.

No doubt, eco-literature and its criticism currently enjoy a special space in the literary domain obviously due to observable shifts from the Romantic writers. It is obvious that human beings have failed in their relationship with the environment, through human activities. The dialectical contradictions initiated by human pursuit of capitalism reflect not only in the relationship among men, but extends to the human relationship with the entire natural world. Capitalism has exploitation as a permanent index and man extends such exploitation to his relationship with the environment. Literary writers as responsive observers of the happenings in their society are swiftly re-examining this relationship between human beings and the environment. It is this type of writing that has given rise to the concepts of eco-literature and ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism

Today, the respect for the natural world and its central position in human life has led to major interests of literature about environment. Ecocritical works which are endeavours aimed primarily at attacking and hopefully mitigating unjustifiable ecological practices in the environment now abound. Ecocritical Literature and all it brings to bear cannot be fully represented without acknowledging Cheryll Glotfelty and Harrold Fromm who popularized this literature through their seminal work entitled *The Eco-criticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996). Their succinct description contends that "ecocriticism is a study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xv). Consistent arguments tend to advance that Glotfelty's call for the adoption of ecocriticism as a replacement for what was then known as the study of nature writing, at a meeting of Western Literature Association in 1989 marked a milestone in the popularity of the concept. This call by Glotfelty blossomed with the realization of her already mentioned publication with Fromm . As Fromm opines, referring to Glotfelty in the preface of their book cited above, "she has in fact promulgated an awareness of ecocriticism (a term often credited to the essay we have included by William H. Rueckert), she has produced her anthology, and she has indeed become, as far as we know the first academic whose

appointment includes 'literature and the environment in its title' (xi-xii). At the time, concern was for a properly articulated response by literary artists and critics to the global problem, for according to Glotfelty:

Although scholarship claims to have responded to contemporary pressures, it has apparently ignored the most pressing contemporary issue of all, namely, the global environmental crisis...oil spills, lead and asbestos poisoning, toxic waste contamination, extinction of species at an unprecedented rate, battles over public land use, protests over nuclear waste dumps, a growing hole in the ozone layer, predictions of global warming, acid rain, loss of topsoil, destruction of the tropical rain forest ... famines, droughts, floods, hurricanes.... (xv - xvi)

Harold Fromm observes however, that writers "were unwittingly doing ecocriticism for centuries before the genre burst forth onto the academic scene in the early 1990s" (1). Glotfelty herself concurs (in support of the concern for the environment by literary scholars) that "in actual fact ... individual literary and cultural scholars have been developing ecologically informed criticism and theory since the seventies ..." (xvi). The real problem, perhaps, is that "they did not organize themselves into an identifiable group; hence their various efforts were not recognized as belonging to a distinct critical school or movement".

Ecocriticism has been variously described by scholars. Glotfelty and Fromm as pointed out earlier defined it as "...the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". According to them, "Ecocriticism takes as its subject, the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman" (xix). Linking it to green criticism and describing it as one of the most recent interdisciplinary fields to have emerged, Ursula K. Heise on "The Emergence of Ecocriticism" states:

Ecocriticism analyses the role that the natural environment plays in the imagination of a cultural community at a specific historical moment, examining how the concept of 'nature' is defined, what values are

assigned to it or denied it and why, and the way in which the relationship between humans and nature is envisioned. More specifically, it investigates how nature is used literally or metaphorically in certain literary or aesthetic genre or tropes and what assumptions about nature underlie genres that may not address this topic directly. (1)

Ecocriticism basically theorizes the unending environmental crisis and invokes different strategies as a means to bridge the frightening gap between humans and the environment hence Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells remark that the dominant tradition of ecocriticism is “to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to the environmental crisis” (5). For Kerridge and Sammells, ecocriticism is a socially committed practice, and therefore, should aim at effecting change thereby highlighting the social commitment of ecocriticism and redeeming from the confines of mere nature discourse. Glotfelty and Fromm write that, ecocriticism involves "studying the reciprocal relationship between humans and land, considering nature not just as a stage which human story is acted out, but as an actor in the drama" (xii).

Generally, ecocritical study is an exploration into the ways a text reflects and influences human interaction with the environment. Such a study also acknowledges that language and literature are vital aspects of human and human culture is connected with the physical world which it affects and vice versa. Importantly also is the view according to Glen Love that “there is need for prompt and vigorous action to check the pollution and despoliation that are being inflicted upon the biosphere by shortsighted human greed” (225).

William Slaymaker, one of Africa's scholars in the field of Ecology, identifies the fact that African writers and critics have all together not been ignorant of environmental issues. He identifies a great deal of African literary writings which he categorized as belonging to what he calls "the rubric of nature writing". Much of the African perspectives to ecoactivism, ecowritings, and ecopolitics have really been represented by him in his "Echoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses". One of his positive, initial and most important submissions, is that:

Black African writers and critics have traditionally embraced nature writing, land issues, and landscape issues that are pertinent to national

and local cultural claims and that also function as pastoral reminiscences or even projections of a golden age when many of the environmental evils resulting from colonialism and the exploitation of indigenous resources have been remediated (684)

In spite of these however, Slaymaker still strongly believes that "African echo of global green approaches to literature and literary criticism has been faint" (683). His strongest criticism of African form of ecocriticism, according to him, is its lack of "the paradigms that inform much of global ecocriticism".

Byron Caminero-Santangelo, a contemporary of Slaymaker, in his paper "Different Shades of Green: Ecocriticism and African Literature" equally recognizes and underscores this limitation in Slaymaker's work, insisting after all that the criteria, according to Slaymaker, of basing literary ecological studies on "application of the sciences to literature and with deep ecology ..." is essentially Western or "Anglo-American", as he put it (698). Apparently in a sharp response to Slaymaker's position, Caminero-Santangelo proposes, and rightly too, that rather than apply the pure Euro - American standard, which would largely exclude African literature and criticism from the realm of ecocriticism, a more all-embracing model may be sought. While not condemning what he explains as "Anglo-American ecocritical framework, associated with the application of sciences to literature and with deep ecology, which focuses on attacking anthropocentrism" (699). Caminero-Santangelo's opinion is that "if one uses these criteria, there has certainly been little environmental writing - literary or critical - from Africa". He therefore proposes an examination, as he says, of "African literary texts in light of issues raised by ecocriticism and African environmental history (and the relationship between them) in order ... to enable them to contribute to developing discussions *within* ecocriticism and African environmental history" (699).

Ecocritical study, therefore, forms a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary study, informed by the sources of its data critical inspiration: science, philosophy, history, literature, language, and its focal interest is on environment. In examining environment however, these different sources stand as pillars upon which the examination is built. According to Glotfelty and Fromm, the notion is that environment does not have an independent existence from these other aspects of

existence. Thus, Heise in "*Science and Ecocriticism*" has grouped the interdisciplinary influences on ecocritical discourses into four constructions as:

The discursive construction which foregrounds the extent to which the very distinction of nature and culture is itself dependent on specific cultural values; the aesthetic construction which places value on nature for its beauty, complexities, or wildness; the political construction, which emphasizes the power interests that inform any valuation or devaluation of nature; and finally, the scientific construction which aims at the description of the functioning of natural systems. (2)

Similarly, Glotfelty and Fromm identify that various disciplines in the humanities have a stake in one way or the other in ecocritical discourse. According to them,

Anthropologists should interest themselves with the connection between culture and geography, concentrating on the sustainability of values and culture systems. Psychologists should explore the link between environmental conditions and mental health. Philosophers have a role in exploring ethical foundations and their relationship with the earth. Also, theologians' role should be hinged on explaining the connection between nature and spirituality, then, literary scholars rely on the concepts of value, meaning, tradition, point of view, and language to queue into environmental thinking and discourse". (xi-xii)

The concern of humanities scholars, by this argument, should be to assess ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by environmental crisis, and for language and literary scholars, it is to assess how language and literature transmit values with profound ecological implications.

For the researcher, ecocriticism is that study that investigates critical writings which explore the relations between literature and the physical environment conducted with a deep rooted awareness of the damage being meted on the environment by human (industrial) activities.

Feminism

The history of women's struggle to change their lives is a long one. Feminism as a social movement, according to Amara Duru in *Women and Society*, made “its first appearance in the social lexicon in France and the Netherlands in 1872, Great Britain in 1890 and the United States in 1910...it was greatly inspired by the French revolution in 1789, though attention was not directed to gender issues, but on equality among mankind. This however gave a boost to feminist ideology” (49). Feminist movements have always featured striving for women's equal rights, freedom from oppressive constraints of sex, self expression and autonomy. Bourgeois women in England and France were at the time left without any productive role in the economy and irked by this, challenged their purported irrelevance and dependence on men with new claims for a society ordered by reason rather than hierarchies of privilege.

Mary Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which is a landmark expression of the rights of women jurists insists that individuals have natural rights to self determination and suggests reasons by which liberal enlightenment opposed to the divine right of kings and aristocracies should be used against the divine rights of husbands. For her, “the alleged inferiority of women on which men's rule is based had to be challenged” (91). She therefore insisted on providing women with education, reason being that it would “allow them the autonomy and the independence to participate equally in the opportunities in society” (91).

Liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill reiterates Wollstonecraft's equality perspective in his essay "The subjection of women". Mill argued against women's inherent inferiority to men and advocates for their rights to education, public office and political participation on a par with their male peers. The philosophy and writing of French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir cannot be forgotten. His classic the *Second Sex* with its famous pronouncement on women's lives posit that “one is not born but rather becomes a woman... No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in society. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creatures described as female” (93).

Betty Friedan through her publication of *Feminine Mystique* has been credited with the reshaping of attitudes towards women's lives and rights in the West. In Friedan's diagnoses of women's situation, she insists that “freedom of men's lives should be

equally available to women and that both men and women should have equal responsibilities in all significant aspects of social life” (95).

However, African female scholars, have overtime reacted against the mainstream Western Feminism, they are consciously expunging externally enforced ideologies which might negate the evolution and progression of their conceptualized interpretation of African womanhood. One perceives on the African literary scene a conglomeration of heterogeneous theories, being propounded to define the consciousness of the African female. Irked undoubtedly by the western Feminism's exclusion of her male and a debilitating struggle for equality, she (the African women) positions and asserts herself as one who in her quest for wholesomeness and empowerment would not exclude the male. As Modupe Kolawole observes:

The African women seek self fulfillment within the plural cultural context. The Average African woman is not a hater of men nor does she seek to build a wall around her gender across which she throws ideological missiles. She desires self respect, an active role, dynamic participation in all areas of social development and dignity alongside the men. (36)

African Feminism opts for what Chikwenye Ogunyemi calls Womanism. She explains that “womanism is black centred. It is accomodationist. It wants a meaningful union between black women and men and children, and will see to it that men will change from their sexist stand” (46). The womanists believe in complementarity where the roles of the men complement their wives’ roles. In as much as they do not want total equality with men, they do not wish to be subdued or relegated to the background as in the preliterate society where men are seen as Lords with the women having little or no opinion of their own concerning their affairs. The obvious and most important connection between African and western Feminism is that both identify gender – specific issues and recognize women’s position internationally as one of second class status and “otherness and seek to correct that. Monique Ekpong in her article "Feminist Tendencies" describes “Feminism as the commitment to the achievement for women of full legal, political, social, economic and educational equality with men, or as the struggle for woman’s emancipation” . In the context of this study, Feminism advocates for the recognition of the claims of

women for equal rights with men; legal, political, economic, social, mentally and otherwise. Its movement talks about women's liberation and empowerment and freedom from all harmful practices presented by culture and tradition.

Maggie Humm in her classical work entitled *Modern Feminism* submits as follows ".... the emergence of feminist ideas and feminist politics depends on the understanding that in all societies which divide the sexes into differing cultural, economic or political spheres, women are less valued than men"(1).

Helen Chukwuma in *Feminism in African Literature* asserts that:

Feminism means a reflection of inferiority and a striving for recognition. It seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy, effectual and contributing human being. Feminism is a reaction to such stereotypes of women which deny them positive identity... the ability and strive of women to take their destiny in their own hands and forge a path of progress and relevance. (ix)

Feminist writing in African literature (as in other world literatures) is essentially radical and revolutionary. In J.A. Cuddon's *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*, it is seen as "a literature of protest committed to the task of challenging traditional and accepted male ideas about the nature of women and about how women feel, act and think and how in general they respond to life and living" (315).

Akachi Ezeigbo insisting on the complementarity of sexes also anchors her feminism on womanism. She is guided by the words of the strong character in one of her novels *Children of the Eagle* where she says that "all that is wholesome in our culture should be protected and preserved.....repudiate the multitude of African customs that mortify the soul" (319).

Theresa Njoku, in her essay, "Patriarchy, Gender and the Plays of Tess Onwueme" explains that:

Feminism is a theory in philosophical and literary thought. In this regard, it provides a body of knowledge, which attempts to change the human society. Those changes focus primarily on the elimination of discrimination against women. Both the feminist writer and reader are

interested in the emancipation of women. While the writers promote ideas favourable to the growth of womanhood, the reader evaluates the text in order to explore how gender female experiences and actions are portrayed in them in order to encode female presence in literary works. (277)

Feminists assert that women should define themselves and declare their own voices in the areas of politics, society, education and religion. In this regard, Molara Ogundipe Leslie in her essay “African Women, Culture and Another Development” insists that “it is up to women to combat their social disabilities, to fight for their own fundamental and democratic rights, without waiting for the happy day when men will, willingly share power and privileges with them, a day that will never come”. The pessimism in Ogundipe-Leslie’s view is due to her belief that “colonialism swept off previous female political structures in the society, and modern society inherited the new male dominated structures” (2).

The brand of feminism projected by the African woman is commendably that created with a lot of provision for accommodation and symbiosis with their males. As Emecheta, qtd in *Women Writers in Africa* says: “I am a feminist with a small ‘f’, I love men and good men are the salt of the earth.... Personally, I’d like to see the ideal happy marriage, but if it doesn’t work for goodness sake, call it off” (36).

A liberated society is indeed that one in which everyone is accommodated and not looked down on. A society where men, women and children recognize the need to cohabit with each other from an angle of tolerance and mutual respect. Sheila Rowbotham puts it succinctly when she reveals in her work, *Woman’s Consciousness, Man’s World* that:

Feminism has given expression to a new consciousness among women and that the cultural and economic liberation of women is inseparable from the creation of a society in which all people no longer have their life stolen from them, and in which the conditions of their production and reproduction will no longer be distorted or held back by the subordination of sex, race and class”. (9)

Feminism has been about challenging the representations of women and arguing for better conditions for them. In her introduction to *The Black women Cross Culturally*, Filomina Steady as qtd in *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* posits that the African brand of feminism includes: Female autonomy and cooperation, an emphasis on nature over culture, the centrality of children, multiple mothering and kinship... true feminism is an abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and reliant'. (561)

African feminism understands the interconnectedness of race, class and sex oppression, thus, it of necessity has a socialist orientation. Kenyan critic, Micere Mugo, qtd in "Some Notes on Feminism" posits:

...we cannot only speak of women's oppression by men, In capitalist system, women tend to be exploited by the very of the society particularly the working and peasant women, just as men are exploited. The difference is that women are hit particularly hard. The most obvious hardship is being educationally disadvantaged. Then you have forms of abuse that cut across class lines: sexual abuse, wife beating and the fact that men take advantage of the woman's role as child bearer. But I won't give the impression that I foster any illusions. Sexual abuse, rape etc. do take place in socialist societies, but I believe statistics would bear one out that the degree of such abuses is less than in capitalist societies where conditions of misdistribution and ownership tend to breed many social problems.(564)

For the sake of this, she projects a system where all the oppressive institutions are dismantled politically, socially for the sake of men and women.

Omolara Ogundipe's argument in *The Female Writer and Her Commitment* is in furtherance of the argument. She posits that "African men who challenge the traditional, social and political dominance of patriarchy and who support women's issues are obvious partners".

Ngugi wa Thiong'o advocating for feminism sees the woman's struggle as inextricably intertwined with the total struggle. In a 1982 interview with Nancy Owano on his novel *Devil on the Cross and Detained: A writer's Prison Diary*, Ngugi describes women as "the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class, exploited as workers and at home and also by backward elements in the

culture”, as a result he says. “I would create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle against the conditions of her present being”.

The central concern of feminism the researcher believes, is not only to validate the claim that women are oppressed by a patriarchal order or demythologize negative images of women but to evolve a feminist basis of social relations, aimed at enhancing women’s self esteem and helping them find their voice in a male dominated social order.

Environmental Degradation

Ovuoke Owhofasa in his essay “Women as Victims and Environmentalists” explains that ecological degradation involves “ the misuse and abuse of the environment, their various ways and means ranging from destruction of trees, pollution of water, pollution of farmlands, and its pastoral beauty” (123).

Excessive logging, urbanization, road building, recreational development and air pollution are reducing forested areas around the world thereby increasing degradation. A World Wildlife Fund Report released in 2006 simply referred to the Niger Delta as “one of the most polluted places on the face of the earth”. Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas observe that; “Oil Producing Communities therefore see SHELL as the number one culprit in the ecological war...slowly but relentless, such oil production activities as gas flaring, oil spillage, indiscriminate construction of canals and waste dumping have brought the human ecosystem of the Niger Delta to the point of near collapse” (12). African Timber and Plywood as stated by Nnimo Bassey,

...depleted the Okomu forest Reserve in the Ovia South West LGA in Edo State. It is estimated that the company felled a total of 5.6million logs in a 50 year period of timber exploitation. Besides, it opened up the forest for illegal game hunting... environment to have to free samplings and undergrowth as well and failed to either launch a reforestation... oil exploration operations in the Niger Delta are done without the least regard for the safety of the least community and the environment. (45-58)

Environmental degradation is of course an index of under development and violence. B.Davidson in *The Black Man's Burden* decries the situation of African continent thus:

...the actual and present condition of Africa is one of deep trouble, sometimes, a deeper trouble than the worst imposed during the colonial years. For some time now, deserts have widened year by year. Broad savannahs and their communities have lost all means of existence. Tropical savannahs such as the world will never see again have fed the export means. (2)

Ibiwari Ikiriko graphically portraying Environmental degradation in *Oily Tears of the Delta*, laments; “pipelines criss-cross the seabed piping, not drinkable water to the population, But siphoning oil and gas to enrich other Lands and lives. Upcountry well away from the smoke and stench of the oil wells, oil concessionaires of all sorts wake up millionaires on a daily basis. Down the Delta, in the fountain of oil and gas, the natives wake up bereft of their traditional means of livelihood” (7).

Raj Kumar Mishra in his essay, “The Village by the Sea:An Ecocritical Reading” remarks; “today, we live in a world of tropical warmth, chronic drought, desertification, deforestation, acidifying of oceans, frequent coastal inundation, tsunamic, cyclones, increasing food and shelter shortage, accidents at nuclear power stations, oxytocin applied vegetables, industrial pollution and many more lethal activities” (7).

This is indeed is unfortunate as Ogaga okuyade contends in his edited work, *Ecocritical Literature:Regreening the African Landscape that*; “raping – the materialist wastage of the environment for the advancement of the society – is problematic by all standards. This is so because such capitalist acts cannot help sustain human development but rather endanger mankind's existence because as the natural resources continue to be depleted without conscious effort for their replenishment, the life expectancy of man will definitely be reduced”. (xi) Capitalism and its main focus on profit maximization has brought nothing but brutality on the environment. Niyi Osundare, in his *Eye of the Earth*, bemoans the despoliation of the environment, caused by the White merchants. He laments the fact that the lakes, the seas, the mountains, all has been defaced. He therefore laments: Lynched the Lakes/Slaughtered the seas /Mauled the mountains/Here, there, everywhere/A lake is

killed by the /Arsenic urine/From the bladder of profit/Factories... coughing chaos/In the sickly sea (50) .

Apparently, the non preservation of forest trees and wild life as well as the natural sea shores in the wake of modern architectural development are key factors responsible for the ongoing environmental despoliation being experienced in some parts of the world. In addition, environmental pollution also comes in the forms of blow out, gas flares, oil spills arising from oil exploration and exploitation activities as is witnessed in the Niger Delta today.

Ogo Okorie aptly decries the debilitating situation faced by the Niger Deltans:

Today, Shell oil exploration has left the vast agrarians swamps and mash lands of the Niger Delta devastated and inhabitable. There are often reports of acid rains in the area.... In parts of the communities, the aquatic life, the mainstay of the rural fishing communities, has been completely destroyed. (x-xi)

The eco writer Tanure Ojaide in an interview with Charles Bodunde in 1999 admitted his inexorable passion towards environmental concerns whilst decrying the degradation in the Niger Delta environment; he states as follows:

The Delta has a special appeal to me...the vegetable, the ever green, the heavy rains almost all year round, but you know this has been complicated by the coming of the oil companies...there has been a great change in the environment since they came...now the environment is destroyed with gas being flared, the farms are not good, fishes are driven from rivers, everywhere is polluted and government does nothing to help the people.

The world appears to be at the brink of environmental catastrophe. A situation created by human being's uncanny translation of the functions of the environment to meet humanity's ever insatiable quest for satisfying the unending taste for resources. The earth has virtually become a mere object to be constantly consumed. This scenario currently provides ample materials to creative writers worldwide who are concerned with biodiversity and environmental sustainability.

Humanity has played the role of planetary killer in the Niger Delta and females are found at the centre of this environmental catastrophe. The women are physically tortured, psychologically maimed and culturally suppressed. The destruction of the environment results in the elimination of women's major means of survival. The exploitation of nature and domination of women are therefore linked to patriarchy. This scenario inspires the researcher's quest for the recreation of a planet where all life forms, human and non human, male or female find themselves protected against violence, destruction, abuse and mistreatment.

CHAPTER THREE

PORTRAITS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Degradation of the environment, as portrayed in the novels goes beyond just the physical environmental elements to those of structures, of culture and of values. Therefore, different nuances of the term ecological degradation are applied in analyzing settings and characters in the novels. Specific attention is paid on how the socio-cultural fabrics of the place have been affected by introduction of alien cultures and practices, in the process of exploitation of the natural resources of the place. Some of these are the degradation of the people's cultural values, degradation of their moral values and degradation of socio-economic cultures of the place. All these are explored with a view to underscore their impact on the place and the individuals in the area. The researcher will explore these through the eye and pulse of four Niger Delta writers; Kaine Agary, Vincent Egbuson, Tanure Ojaide and Million John, whose concern for their environment and the survival of women in the face of modern day realities is deep.

Degradation of Space

Evidences in the novels reveal an environment of squalor occasioned partly by man's reckless denigration of the gods, and majorly by the activities of the Oil Companies. John Enemugwem validates the state of degradation of the Niger Delta environment and its association with oil exploits when he writes that: "In the Niger Delta region that spans 75,000sq.km..., no earthquake and windstorm had devastated this sedimentary environment of Nigeria. Water hyacinth was there but did not cause the disaster that came with petroleum exploration" (55).

Space, in this context refers to the physical environment as the home and centre of activity of persons and non-human organisms. It is where persons and organisms live, thrive, work, and socialize. Well-being of persons and organisms is, therefore, predicated on the conviviality of such a place. Besides, literary work would have no base outside a space.

A space (environment) therefore is the natural world in which people, plants and animals live. It is the quality of life of plants, animals and human beings. When therefore, this natural world is being damaged, destroyed or reduced from its original

quality to a lesser value, for which its potentials are hindered, it is called environmental degradation.

Kaine Agary, in her work *Yellow Yellow*, brings to the fore the violation and debasement of both the land and the woman. The involvement of the protagonist as victim, speaking directly to the audience conjures emotional effects. A vivid portrayal of the degradation in the environment is reflected through the protagonist, Zilayefa aka *Yellow Yellow*, whose name, actually connotes a withered environment, an environment devoid of fruitful succulence and fecundity. A yellow environment is arid and of course averse to green. Zilayefa hurriedly exposes oil as the major detractor in the wellbeing of her environment and by extension her life's journey, thus, the novel opens with her, recounting the destruction brought upon her mother's farmland by oil. She laments:

During my second to last year in secondary school, one of the crude oil pipes that ran through my village broke and spilled oil over several hectares of land, my mother's farm included... what could have happened that left her void of words.... Oil, she said.... I ran to my mother's farm.... I watched as the thick liquid spread out, covering more land and drowning small animals in its path. It just kept spreading and I wondered if it would stop.... Then there was a smell... it was so strong – so strong it made my head hurt and turned my stomach. (3-4)

These personal documentations are carriers of Zilayefa's innate and private experiences. She depicts an environment so squeezed and frazzled by crude oil which poses hazardous consequences. Unveiling her travails through a day to day account of her experiences both in her hometown and the city, brings the reader close enough to feel her pain. The pervasiveness of the destruction wrought by oil spill is of ecocidal proportion. She says, "I watched as the thick liquid spread out, covering more land and drowning small animals in its path...there was so much oil and we could do nothing with it...and so it was that in a single day, my mother had lost her main source of sustenance" (9).

The degradation of the physical environment drums only the sounds of exit into the ruffled ears of the people especially the youth, as represented by Zilayefa, thus

facilitating the journey motif. The protagonist, Zilayefa is an ordinary, intelligent young girl encountering the difficulties of growing up in a region wrecked by neo-colonial exploitation, environmental degradation and social destruction perpetuated by Western Oil Companies. “She simply wanted a way out of the village” (23). She spends “so many months dreaming and thinking of nothing else but my exit from the village” (45). She desperately needs to move away she says, “do something besides the daily chores of (degraded) village life that threatened to choke me to death” (33). To stay back in the village is believed as tortuous, considering the despoliation of the place. Therefore, for Zilayefa “the only option (she) was unwilling to consider, that tormented (her) quiet moments the most, was to remain in the village” (39). Zilayefa is however, enabled to move from her village to the city in her search for self development.

The activities of the United Geophysical Company in John Million’s *Amongst the Survivors* is consistently mentioned as a dominant factor in the despoliation of the place; “The River Nun used to be a calm river but now the turbulent waves crested at the middle of the river tossed and splashed at the bank of the river, not because of the inclement weather, but due to the frequent up and downstream movements of the company tugboats and speedboats” (97). The writer identifies with the pristine and healthy state of the environment, before the intrusion of the Seismographic operators. Million John in the introduction of his work, reminisces his pristine and eco peaceful Niger Delta environment, around the coast of “the Atlantic Ocean where the forest, was very dense and evergreen” (3). He describes the River Nun as the only clean and single source of water that satisfies the members of the community, thus, “The River Nun water was the only source of water supply for the villagers. It served them very well because the salinity was less than one percent” (29). John praises his Niger Delta environment.

The pristine nature Million John projects, serves as a nostalgic memorialization that instills a psychological throwback to the ecoharmony that prevailed in the pre-crude Delta in order to give fillip to the degree of loss, devastation and suffering spilled (presently) by crude (oil) exploration. An environment whose pristine ecological attributes could serenade an aching soul now battered by oil explorers. The fecundity and peace that the community enjoyed is shattered by the arrival of the Geophysical Company whose activities would eventually devastate their Water and Landscape.

The consequences of environmental pollution explored as themes in the eighteen chapter novel are loss of means of livelihood, poverty, immorality, greed, to mention but a few. The harrowing experiences of the people are highlighted, depicting the lives of the poor women, the youths, the elders, all enmeshed in the vicious web matted by these explorers.

The arrival of the United Geophysical Company heralded the onslaught of degradation in the area. The Company spokesman, Mr. Edith, introduced themselves to the ironically excited villagers as workers of the United Geophysical Company. Theirs is a Seismographic Company, he says. Continuing, he explains that they have come to “survey the land, and would cut and construct seismic lines. The second phase of their operation entails drilling; “they will drill long iron pipes into the earth’s crust, and the last phase will be the shooters, the shooters will come with heavy dynamites, explosives” (73). Their job description above by Mr. Edith which includes cutting, constructing, earth crust drilling and shooting emphasizes the tools through which the environment would face degradation. The onomatopoeic sounds; “explosives”, “thunder bolt”, “explosion”, “blast”, are symbolic of the destructions that accompany the activities of the oil workers. The narrator acknowledges that the to and fro movement of the boats constitutes a big threat and attendant pollution to their only source of water, thus: “Our only source of water have been badly polluted and we cannot drink from it, the to and fro movement of the boats and fuel spills have rendered our water surface dirty and oily. Even their daily wastes are not properly disposed of. Every morning, the driver of the tug boat empties them into our River Nun, which is our only source of drinkable water” (88-89). Worse, yet, claiming the lives of the people, “These constant movements of tug boats, speed boats in the River Nun have caused unnatural wave actions... they are owned by the United Geophysical Company.... The unnatural waves caused by the reckless party drivers had capsized the canoe... the unnatural waves claimed human lives in the River Nun at Isonibiri town” (103-104).

Million John in his *Amongst the Survivors*, effectively employs the use of Irony to buttress the level of degradation as he presents excited villagers who innocently welcome the oil explorers. There was an uproar in town. They all shouted “the people have come! At last, they have come. The Seismographic workers have come! There were voices here and there making happy comments” (78). The arrival of the oil

workers in Isonibiri foregrounds the degradation of the people's innocence. The unsuspecting villagers whose hopes for a better future is raised by the presence of the Whiteman would eventually get bruised by an exploited and degraded environment. Such is the fate of the place; their treasured river, their once serenaded environment, the greenery, their Delta which the writer describes in details, thus; "...village life was raw...the village situated in one of the tributaries of the river nun that led into the delta plains, the forest, very dense and evergreen(9). John's narrative implicates nostalgic memorialization for eco peace enjoyed in primeval Delta of yore before its infestation by poaching merchants of oil. In a detailed explanation of the drilling process and its consequences on the physical environment of the Niger Delta, the narrator brings to the fore how the drilling works, how the drilling eats into the bowels of the earth:

The drilling business was a tedious one. The first iron pipe that would break through and enter the soil had a rough and sharp end. The chew casing had a twisted end that was as sharp as a blade, it would crack down the soil particles, and then the other pipes were joined... so that the hole went deep down the soil. The hose for the pumping machine was fitted to the top of the last iron pipe... they rotate the iron pipe holding unto the clippers, as the water rushed out through the hose to the pipes and to the soil and the shot point hole increased deep down the soil, the chew casing eating deep into the soil and gradually a deep hole As the turners changed from one pipe to another so did the depth of the hole also increase. (*Amongst ...*92-93)

The narrator in a mournful tone laments that "the drillers caused a lot of damages to the earth's ecosystem and consequently discharged thick, turbid liquid into the surrounding swamp water forest, as lakes and ponds were adversely affected" (93). The black contractor who spoke up at the meeting between the Whiteman and the contractors boldly reveals the harm their activities inflict on the people and their environment; "we are in other people's land, we destroy their ecosystem every day" (*Amongst ...*93).

The dynamite blast by the shooters were no less a menace to the environment. The explosive sounds so vibrated the ground leaving the inhabitants with as much the

same shock of an earthquake; “the shooters had special geodetic instruments, a platform equipped with modern technological equipment. Their workers laid cables in the seismic lines throughout all the shot points... the licensed shooter... would sit on the badge in the platforms and communicate with all the cable men... sometimes the explosion would be a terrible one, it would be so loud that the swamp forest would shake and vibrate like a thunder bolt and gradually die down. The feeling was like the shock of an earthquake or land tremor” (*Amongst*...100-101).

The narrator mournfully refers to the despoliation of the place as a wound meted to the despondent villagers. One of the elders, Amafa Odubor laments; “These wounds will not heal easily, even if they do, the scars would be with us for a long time” (102). He continues “I mean ocean waves are seasonal and come with changes in the tidal movements, but these regular and turbulent wave splashes every hour is indeed a new thing, it is as though the Izon race has got a wound” (102). The dynamite’s role in the decimation of aquatic life is highlighted through Ofoni’s response to Orisa; “it is a useful thing for fishermen like you, our people also call it ‘water way.’ People use it to kill fishes instantly and in great quantities... the dynamite is a powerful explosive as you can see... when exploded under water, it kills any fish or aquatic animal that comes in contact or comes into a close range within the area of the explosion” (*Amongst*...150).

John, through his omniscient narrator points out painfully though, the connivance of the indigenous government with the Oil companies. He raises issues on the national government’s violations against her own, he also questions the Nigerian government’s complicit gaze at the excesses of insensitive oil companies who neither subscribe to accepted standards of exploration nor bother about extending any form of duty care to the people. Niyi Osundare in his poem, ‘What the Earth Said’ refers to government as “native executives (who) hold fort for alien whores” (46). Both Multi National Companies (MNC’s) and Government connive in degrading the physical environment and decimation of human lives, plants and sea food. Mosambaka’s father who had just returned from Southern Cameroun was amongst the spectators at the scene of the dynamite kill; “he saw the heaped fishes and could not control his emotions. “So this thing is allowed to be used freely in Nigerian territorial waters? No one can do this in the Republic of Cameroun...The Camerounian government would have sued them for environmental degradation and wanton destruction of marine and aquatic ecology”

(*Amongst...*153). The members of the community, disillusioned by the awry relationship between them, (the living) and their dead as a result of the recent desecrations on their waters and the land mourn. Grandma cries out at the level of degradation which of course would keep her ancestors forlorn. She laments: “these wounds the white man has inflicted on us would not heal easily, even if they get healed, scars of the wound will remain until tomorrow... When I get there, what will I tell my ancestors” (13). The writer observes in despair that “the villagers predominantly farmers, fishermen, canoe carvers, lumberjacks”(11), are denied of their daily sustenance as a result of their polluted environment.

Vincent Egbuson in his work *Love My Planet* espouses environmental problems through the eyes of his omniscient narrator. The Niger Delta environment forms the ambience of the novel’s plot in which the themes of oil spillage, gas flaring, flood run through its nine chapters. In Egbuson’s work, the resultant effects of these problems include poverty, hunger, disease and malnutrition, lack of drinking water, bad roads, armed robbery, prostitution and youth restiveness. The flaring of gas amongst other environmental concerns constitutes a major theme in his work. Gas flaring, a situation whereby the gases from a petroleum product are allowed to be released into the atmosphere causes pollution of the air and as a result of its adverse impacts threatens the lives of the Niger Delta inhabitants. Given also that the location of flares are very close to villages and communities, it damages vegetations as no vegetation can sustain the enormous heat produced by the flares of gas. The inhabitants tells the media: “Dat place, you no fit go near am oh – at all at all, even dis place wey hot so, na because of that fire wey no dey quench. Yam, cocoyam and vegetable no dey grow well for our area like places wey no near de fire” (*Love My ...*243).Toundi observes that her “sandy village was perennially under water...the dead were buried in water filled graves.”(*Love...*282) Zilayefa points out also that “about two hundred meters away from her house... could still see the orange sun, fading away into the sky, through the layer of smoke from the gas flares in the neighbouring villages” (*Yellow ...*21).

A major ecological principle is the imperativeness of the association of organisms; the interdependence of one on the other. All creatures must interact with one another and with other species. Unfortunately, mankind is guilty of upsetting and exploiting nature specifically for selfish interests. In the bid for example, to satisfy the human craving for comfort, the environment and other creatures are sacrificed. Ojaide buttresses this

fact in *Stars of the Long Night* where the free gifts of nature experiences a downward review facilitated by the actions of humans in the community. Set in Agbon, in Nigeria's Niger Delta, a recognizable primordial locale, the forty chapter novel, *Stars of the Long Night*, adumbrates Tanure Ojaide's agitation for the restoration of a pristine environment in which pastoral beauty is enthroned. The writer prides in this traditional Agbon community blessed with ecological endowments. A community where men and women thrived in farming, fishing, weaving of mats, production of palm oil etc. Regrettably, Ojaide points out that the community's derailment along the line; their desecrations against the gods would later constitute a problem between the people and their gods. The work, written in a simple and accessible language, is revealed to the reader through the Omniscient Narrator through whose perspective the essence of the novel is made known, such as man's connectivity with the non human world, women's repressed positions and their emergence.

The environment held in pure bliss by the writer, is unfortunately debased by her inhabitants. The Agbon community portrayed as endowed by nature, to the writer's dismay experiences a downward review of all these free gifts of nature, of course facilitated by humanity. Ojaide pensively indicates that "the Agbon men (unfortunately) planted no trees since they attributed planting trees in their afforested land as the onset of madness"(32). They placed more value on the economic returns of these gifts of nature, thus: "Rubber trees were recent and were tapped only to make money" (32). Mindless and continuous deforestation of their bushes were perpetuated in the quest for the realization of male comfort. This is seen through the Orhawha joint (a male-only relaxation joint) situated in all towns and communities of Agbon, whose well-arranged and soothing seats were made out of bamboo trees. This joint, typical with its bamboo seat arrangement is replicated in all the towns and communities of Agbon thus encouraging a mindless and continuous deforestation of their bushes whilst prioritizing male comfort. Their bushes pine away and so also does their wild. The Edjenu festival which was held thirty years ago was said to have been celebrated with elephants but the writer observed that at present "hunters would have loved to eat elephant meat but these animals were fast disappearing from Agbon forests" (214). Ojaide's strongest criticism of the Agbon men is their wanton cutting down of trees for their Orhawha joints. The real crisis is however felt with the coming of the drought. One can deduce that the felling of the trees at a continuous rate exposes

the land adversely. Trees are known to absorb and store large amounts of water quickly during rainfall. Thus when trees are cut, it disrupts the natural cycle of water flow, which in turn can lead to drought or flood. The trees also known for enhancing the purity of air in the area have their lives violently snuffed out, creating an imbalance in atmospheric compositions. The omniscient narrator views the ecological degradation in Agbon as from their disloyalty and irresponsibility towards the gods of the land. He empathizes with Agbon;

Agbon folks had their fair share of strange things. They experienced drought that brought them misery and no tears to weep in the scathing suffering... the severe drought which came when it only drizzled in the raining season defiled their normal reasoning. They learned that regularity should not be taken for granted. These were people used to having it rain without stop for seven days in the long rainy season... During the drought, the sea water was as good as no water for drinking and cooking. With the creeks starved of water, the people became also starved of fish and crops.... (44)

Tanure Ojaide blames mankind's irresponsibility towards nature as the reason for the disruption in the natural flow of events, thus; "the streams are so violated by the fishermen that the people's health are endangered. Sadly, Ovwhodo, Amraibure's wife reveals to the reader how some of the fishermen pour "Gamalin 20 or poisonous barks of trees over an expanse of water to kill as many fishes around the fishing areas" (122). With dismay, the writer points out nature's anger against the prodigious community:

This was not the raining season but the rivers, creeks and streams were filled up to the banks... As the rivers filled up their banks, the hyacinths came in droves. They came on each other's backs and the winds and currents accelerated their journey to spread themselves to wherever there was water. They drifted with the flood to take over Agbon's rivers. As if to defy explanation, some appeared in ponds that were not close to flowing water. They sneaked into wherever there was water to show their determination to escape being eliminated. They were a fertile breed... The Water hyacinths were plants that grew in water. Their roots

might not touch the river bed but they went deep... boats could not travel as their courses were no longer thoroughfare. When the banterers and fishers cleared them, they massively sprang up and to warn against their being harassed, they seemed keen on redoubling themselves. (131)

In confusion, the people of Agbon try hard to figure this out to no avail. They just wonder. "Strange things came to Agbon with a vengeance. Like an outnumbered army caught unarmed and in an exposed plain, the people felt helpless. Wherever they came from, they appeared so confident in their positions as if they had come to stay forever in Agbon waters. They had moved in gradually from the west and spread eastwards. Those fishers spoke of a blanket that could suffocate Olokun, the sea goddess or make her blind to the plight of her devotees on land" (128).

Ojaide reveals that "Agbon Community which had enjoyed the largesse of nature, whose inhabitants had found themselves in the land of vast bounties, abundance of fish, animals, crops, flowers and forests" (88) are currently undergoing hardship, "they who once grew only yams....now grow mere cocoyams. They, who were called upon to help others now cry out for assistance, they who stood tall and erect bow their heads in embarrassment. They who gave out beg for survival... (and) it was for the bad experiences they had initiated a festival to take place only once in a generation to make sacrifices for good fortune" (88). The writer reveals that the ecological systems which are the basis of life for the Agbon Community are gradually tilting to a state of disrepair. Fragmented by the assaults of humans, the resilience of the system to stress continues to be undermined. The reader sees the signs and results of exploitation through the ravishing drought, the water hyacinths, the flood and malnourished farm produce which they experience. The pains that slid through the community's voices are felt:

Agbon experienced drought that brought them misery How could a people who lived close to the sea and had many rivers, streams suffer drought... while drought continued, there was grasshoppers everywhere ravaging yam leaves... the hyacinths came in droves obstructing river traffic... since the stubborn flowers took over the creeks, there had been mishaps in the streams, rivers and creeks. (130 – 132)

The climax of the novel is ushered in by the Edjenu festival which would inspire the reconciliation between the humans and the gods. The once in a life time festival is the people's hope of reconciling with their gods whom as a result of the people's trampling and desecration has brought mishaps their way. The narrator worries that the people have had it quite rough, he exclaims. "Many adversities had struck Agbon people these thirty years.... things had not been well with Agbon"(126).

The environment is what knits all of the people together; so that whatever affects the environment affects them all. With the coming of oil and the pollution of land and water that come with it, people's means of livelihood are decimated. Pollution of the riverine environment within which the people thrive and derive economic, social and cultural benefits, and to which they are virtually inextricably tied makes the protagonist in *Yellow Yellow*, Zilayefa, like most young persons, want to give anything to get away from the place; making the impact of the degradation such that the environment repels the people and makes them want to get away from it all. The denuding of the environment; decimation of the plants and aquatic life stand out threateningly as the undoing of the Niger Delta region.

Moral Depravity

The writer images an environment of decadence through the exploration of the characters. Their actions reveal how the degradation of the physical environment brings about other forms of degradation such as corruption, bribery, embezzlement, misappropriation of public funds, injustice. The devastation meted upon the environment by oil explorers exposes the young men to frustrations and rascality while the young girls take on to prostitution. These youths are indeed the most devastatingly affected by these cankerworms that bedevil the society. The men on their own part, unable to engage in meaningful and viable activities resort to drinking alcohol and fighting their womenfolk, the girls engage in prostitution in the bid to partake in the oil loot, the young men in their joblessness act on rumours and are willing to take up arms against their perceived corrupt leadership. Monetization of the economy by the selfish oil companies means that those into whose hands the easy money gets become equally selfish and bereft of all legitimate means of improving the lot of the people and place. Corruption rate increases as a few people's pockets are

filled with money they have not worked for and the degradation continues. There is an increase in willful moral dethronement and immoral enthronement in our society, its effect being felt in every facet of the nation.

The extravagant and disdainful display of money affected negatively the lives of the people. The young girls/wives are overpowered by the temptation of money while the young boys who are hitherto decent become criminalized. In Million John's *Amongst the Survivors*, Oruka, for instance "was happy in her husband's house but the temptation of money overpowered her" (84). Mr. Brown, one of the oil workers had taken it upon himself to elope with Oruka even while she was still married. He presented her with overwhelming gifts, such gifts as she had never seen before, money and material gifts. The presence of oil workers had brought into the sleepy quiet town, bars and hotels whose names symbolized the putrefaction breeding in the place. Such as 'Gomorra Inn'. In one of such inns, Oruka, defiles her body: "It was a narrow room. A very clean carpet covered the floor, a cabinet bed, the largest size, shone with recent polish and a bed well dressed.... Mr. Brown gently removed her sleeveless garment and exposed her erect breasts.... They twisted each other in a moment of semi orgasm While they were sexually involved, her baby cried at home" (86-87).

The girls, whose purity was not in doubt, now throw caution to the wind, in their pursuit for naira notes. "Oruka and many other girls were estranged from their husbands as they went in pursuit of naira notes from the young party boys" (88). The representative of the town's cultural stool, His Royal Highness J.B. Diriye laments: "In our towns and villages, our girls were known for their purity, having no blemishes, now the world has changed. These party men have wounded us on our faces, these scars will tell the tales tomorrow... How can we regain our pride of place, our glory" (88).

The sexual rascality of the oil explorers, their defiling of farmlands, female bodies and homes of their hosts symbolizes the invasion of the white man into the virgin lands of Africa. Their presence with their technological knowhow brought about a disvirgining of Africa's innocence and an erosion of cultures. The degraded value systems of the people affect not only the females but the males. The boys are swept off their feet by the activities of these rich oil workers, who have turned their towns

upside down, spending so much money on drinks, parties and women. The boys, unfortunately, jettison their education, in order to be part of these big spenders. Again Million John brings these debilitating transformations alive through his characters, thus, “Ofoni was a quiet boy from childhood. He was unfortunate when the employments were made... he was not employed even as a casual worker... these days he came home late in the evenings and would go out all night... he had specialized in the scooping out of buried dynamites from the seismic lines shot points already loaded with explosives.... People say the consequences of their actions were equal to armed robbery” (85). The boys in the region have suddenly become wild, with enough money to spend and nice clothes to change. Mosambaka brazenly says “my friends and I had more than enough money to spend... we looked well dressed, and had refused to go to school anymore. We refused to help our parents in domestic chores... some of us had become independent. We had started smoking Indian hemp with the party boys” (87). Values are flagrantly trampled upon. The madness over oil exploration had defaced their environments, the people’s culture, mocked and abused, and according to the writer “the girls (and boys) had lost their pride and dignity” (*Amongst the...89*).

Restiveness, acutely reflected in the youths’ new lifestyle and their degenerate value system is portrayed as a product of environmental degradation. These youths who no longer believe that hard work pays, idly roam about, waiting for ‘easy money’, drinking away their lives and ready to be used in the futility of senseless inter tribal wars. One notices that the misadventures of these youths also contribute to the problems faced by the inhabitants of the area. Zilayefa notices while she was with her new friend Sergio, that it had gotten dark (rather too early).She observes; “I looked behind us towards the village, and all was pitch-black. Some boys were suspected to have stolen and sold the transformer for the village generator, so there was no electricity” (*Yellow Yellow*22). Now, with the advent of oil, the youths who literally reside on top of wealth are turned into thugs. The young boys and ladies are swayed by the frenzy of their new town in which the spendthrift oil workers in their dancing shoes and “bongo trousers swept the bare carpet floor and their naira notes flow in the night air” (*Amongst...80*).

The introduction of oil exploration into the town amounted to a degradation of their innocence as well. The naive and timid boys who were contented with their once eco

peaceful environment, had become ‘untamed, had smoked Indian hemp and had become wild... they were like untrained animals ready to do anything to have a fair share of the company money... the boys in the town had increasingly become lawless and the girls became call girls and street walkers in their own rural town” (*Amongst...* 94). The beautiful serenaded town, at the instance of the oil workers is transformed into a town with lost values. “Storehouses remained opened even after midnight. The beer parlourthe Gomorrah Inn, could not accommodate these boys who wanted a cool place for drinking and relaxation The music was kept loud... society ladies travelled with the party men” (*Amongst...*79).The urge to conform to such life style of ‘freedom’ had some “auxiliary teachers put in resignation letters in order to join the seismic party workers” (80), even the middle aged men longed to be at the middle of it all, such that “Chief Nelson.... who stood at a distance gazing at the party dancers.... could not control his emotions as he shouted, “how I wish I was a young man born to this generation. Naira notes, not even coins are trampled under feet”(*Amongst...*80). The once reputed environment now exhibits an unsavoury night life, with cheap sex and drinks at the disposal of the oil men, girls of the area launching all out into prostitution with impunity, connoting a total breakdown of societal moral fibre and social values. The girls get involved in sex commercialization either in Bonny, Warri or Port Harcourt, “the base of expatriates working for oil companies” ... some girls did that in order to send money home to their families” (35). Regrettably, the narrator in *Yellow Yellow* observes, “many young girls were eager to follow in the path of these visitors” (36).

Mosambaka’s grandmother worries over his new lifestyle. She admonishes him thus: “Mosambaka, there is something I want to talk to you about. I understand you no longer go to school, you live in the company of Indian hemp smokers and lead a worthless, reckless life. You have joined a group that stay awake all night like the evil owls who work and eat in the night, while others have gone to bed, you do things that are evil” (*Amongst ...*114).The boys are engaged in criminal conducts, they are also ever ready to fight, all in protest against the Oil Companies and their local allies. Pitiably, Zilayefa observes, “boys wandered about the village aimlessly, dropping the phrase ‘Aluta Continua’ at the slightest provocation. As for the girls, they dropped out of school to have their babies or, as my mother would say turn ‘Ofogorious’ with jobless boys in town” (*Yellow Yellow* 34).These youths, whose psyche has totally

been directed towards the path of violence become repulsive, as they engage in certain distasteful activities such as kidnapping in order to have their own share of the Oil. Zilayefa indicates: “sometimes, when I would sit outside with boys and girls in my age group, we would listen to the radio and sometimes we could hear an Ijaw person...speaking about how the oil companies had destroyed our Niger Delta with impunity... these broadcasts drove the boys in my village to violence. If we had to suffer amidst such plenty, then these boys would cause as much havoc as possible.... Some of them joined boys from other villages to kidnap oil executives or bar oil company workers from doing their work” (9). Such is the fate of the young, based in the Niger Delta, despoiled in character and action. The narrator points out that the so-called youth groups had become well oiled extortion machines all in the name of the struggle. “They stole, blackmailed and vandalized for the progress and development of the Ijaw nation, the Niger Delta” (*Yellow...* 158).

The elites in the community are overpowered by the craze for materialism embedded in selfishness and disregard for others thereby shamelessly throwing their cultural values to the dogs. The title chiefs made money off the oil dividends at the expense of their people, thus, “Amananowei and the elders received monetary compensation meant for the village from the oil company and shared among themselves”.(*Yellow...*40),In same manner, John points out that “The Amananowei and his councilors had a lot of money derived from their co-operation with the Seismographic Party. “The lines contract elevated the paramount ruler high. As soon as the company left for Delta State, he started the construction of a three storey building. He went to Port Harcourt, bought five hundred bags of Eagle brand cement...employed more than thirty labourers...two architectural engineers...headpans, shovels, rods and many other types of building materials were bought for the construction”(*Amongst ...*146).

The character, Orisa, in *Amongst the Survivors* with his son is representative of criminal minded individuals whose mischievous inclinations are repressed by a culture and natural environment of honesty and hard work. Theirs is a culture where survival is guaranteed only through generally accepted means – honest labour. Fishing, hunting and farming are some of the traditionally accepted ways identified in the novel, but such ethos are destroyed and unjustifiably replaced by the dishonest and destructive means that are associated with the technology of the oil prospectors.

Orisa, aided by his son is seen employing dishonest and irresponsible means, in his bid to earn himself much more fishes through the dynamite shooting. Degradation of the natural environment of a people therefore potentially translates into pollution of the psychological environment of certain individuals in the locality, as well as degradation of the people's culture and ethical values.

The erosion of culture is attributed to the prodigious activities of the oil companies. The culture of hard work, honesty, harmonious living is eroded while selfishness and mistrust is enthroned. The medicine man Orukari burdened with the situation of events addressed the people;

We have watched in silence the events and happenings in this village. Certainly, no one would claim ignorance of its implications in our different households. Our children no longer join us to learn our trades, especially in the production of palm oil. They no longer go to farm with our wives. Only recently, the challenge went beyond absence from labour, and encroached into our very existence. Our god of wine and fertility has received insults, all because the people want their children to cross overseas. (*Amongst the ...*121)

Issues of ancestral worship and deification are being flung away, thereby severing the link between the living and the pantheon of their forbears. The quest for oil has radically altered and crudely battered the moral economy of affection that sustained the communities of the region.

Erosion of values is further illustrated in *Yellow Yellow* by Zilayefa's resolution, in an environment of communal and fraternal living, to disregard whatever consequences her sudden disappearance from her village may have on her mother: "One day.... I came up with my master escape plan from my... claustrophobic village. I decided I would have to find someone to take me away... I figured it would be easy to slip away from my mother's watchful eyes and meet that special someone who would save me from my claustrophobic village" (17). Her determination is, indicative of the state of the mind and attitude of the young people in the area. The arrival of environmental imperialists in forms of oil explorers and timber loggers (like Sergio and his local collaborator Tarilabo) brings about erosion of the people's values and attitudes. Like her mother before her, Zilayefa is poised to seek comfort in the arms of

a total stranger, “that special someone” rather than remain in her native environment, which becomes claustrophobic; too small and too stagnating to her, owing to the false impressions made on the villagers through foreign media – the radio and insincere city-dwellers. The ubiquitous presence of persons and oil workers from the city, with their strangely alluring ways, pollute the communal ethos of the rural people. The arrival of Sergio with the Semokes, for example, strangely coincides with the budding desire of Zilayefa, like many other youths, to get away from the village: a desire, which has earlier been rendered plausible by the crude intrusion of corrupt city ways through the radio. “Much of what the youth know of the outside is from the negative values they learn from the radios, and especially the erotic music that blares from it”(15).

The days of glory, are nostalgically recounted in *Yellow Yellow*;

When every husband was expected to give his new wife a dugout canoe that he had carved out and crafted himself. The wife would use this canoe to fish, earn a living, and help to feed the family. Those were the days when boys carved out decorative paddles that carried the legends of the Ijaws in every curve... the days when the Ijaw woman could ignore the nature of the Ijaw man because she had means of earning a living and providing the needs of her children. (39 – 40)

The traditional values of working in the farms and fishing having been eroded by the advent of oil exploitation in the area; the typical Ijaw woman, from the above summation has little or no alternative but get involved in ways of living that are diametrically opposed to the people’s culture.

Decadence in Leadership

Commercial exploitation of oil in the Niger Delta started in 1958. As the first company to secure oil exploration and exploitation rights, Shell was able to establish control over the major oil reserves in Nigeria and consolidated its lead over the other oil corporations who arrived later. These transnational corporations operate as joint ventures with the Nigerian Government, represented by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) which holds equity stake in most. Today, the going consequences of competitive exploration of oil have taken a toll on the socio-

economic life of host communities in the Niger Delta region. The consequences are the frequent oil spills which pollute the springs and rivers that provide host communities with drinking water and sea food. The spills also destroy agricultural land. In addition to this, gas is flared throughout the region, round the clock, while those in whose hands leadership is entrusted turns a blind eye.

Leadership amongst the political class in Nigeria unfortunately has turned out to be a self serving venture. People in appointive or elective positions no longer look out for the benefits of the ordinary citizens, rather a primitive accumulation of wealth is seen thriving in the midst of the elitist class. Gross misappropriations of oil revenues constitute a wanton degradation of the Delta, of course without any recourse towards sustainability. Toundi, appalled by a government official's appropriation of large sums of money to himself is inspired to write a letter to the editor of *People's Word* on "the huge amounts public officials in Daglobe were fond of embezzling... conceding that no amount or type of punishment could eradicate the evil, she appealed to her fellow Daglobans who had the mind to embezzle public funds to think of the possible profound effect of their action on the country's little people and for love's sake moderate their greed" (*Love My Planet* 247).

The degradations in the environment are exacerbated by the decadent leadership obtainable in the country. The high handedness and militarization with which the people are boxed into a corner repels Zilayefa who points out that though she is "sheltered by the comforts that living with Sisi provided her in Port Harcourt, there was a lot for the people to complain about, but not many people dared to do so publicly"(98). She says, "the same poverty and discontent in the village that I was running away from was in Port Harcourt, there was nothing much the people could have done. All those who dared complain about the land's leader mysteriously disappeared. One after the other, people who spoke out against the government were jailed, attacked and killed by "armed robbers" or invited to meetings where they were served poisoned tea" (99).

The citizens of Nigeria and particularly, the Niger Deltans have not had it rosy as regards the issue of leadership, both at the centre and the various states. Primitive accumulation of wealth by persons in authority remains a clog in the development of the nation. The Federal Government's insensitivity towards the plight of the Niger

Deltans and their degraded environment has aroused condemnation from various quarters. Toundi in *Love My Planet* sorely exposes the wickedness of those in authority who responds to the peoples' plight only when violence is applied. "A rickety thirty year old bridge collapses claiming eleven lives", the Federal government flimsily explains that "the road was one of the projects waiting for interested entrepreneurs to take over under its new BOT(Build Operate and Transfer)System"(242). Of course this infuriates the militant group, Simple Justice (SJ) who "kidnaps eight oil workers and gave the government till Sunday to start work on restoring the bridge...gripped in full tension, the federal government ordered the immediate rehabilitation of Ogazza and Yenge...and the repair of the collapsed bridge"(242). Also at the instance of the kidnap of three foreign nationals and a government aide, the government heeded SJ's demand for the provision of electricity; "after three weeks, the federal government announce that the people of Nanunomda had been provided power and the hostages were released"(245). Egbuson therefore condemns all governments who would not execute their duties except through compulsion or violence.

In real terms, corruption has eaten deep into the fibre of the Niger Delta states and it now constitutes a clog in the development of the region. The appropriate use of oil revenues for development by political leadership in the region has been a major source of concern within and beyond the region. The inability of the state governments to achieve development in the region through the oil revenues accruing to them is best explained as corruption. Corruption, which is common among public officials in Nigeria is quite manifest in the Niger Delta. Although political leaders of the Niger Delta region argue for resource control, fiscal federalism and greater share of oil revenues, they seem hypocritical given their own mismanagement of oil revenues. The fact that the government of the region engages in personalization of common wealth, the use of state funds to finance party politics and the maintenance of their patrimonial ties with the national political leaders cannot be overemphasized.

One sees the flagrant looting by Government contractors aided and abated by government officials who receive a 'share' to the detriment of the masses. Toundi reveals that Ogazza is not developed because "the government cared less about the people's welfare and intellectual capacity. Rather the government concentrates of course, on media propaganda to sell lies to unsuspecting international community".

Toundi's friend decries the fact that the "stories and images of the Nigerian paradise on foreign TV channels and in foreign Newspapers were products of powerful propaganda from the government... Nigeria had brains who were ready to prostitute their creative imagination and the government had money to pay the intellectual prostitutes to produce beautiful propaganda" (*Love My ...*168). Exasperated, Toundi frowns at the decadence in governance. "Balazza was just about one hour from Ogazza by speedboat... only one speed boat passed through Ogazza to Balazza (daily). The road the government tried to build so that people can go to Ogazza by car, the contractor collected the money and abandoned the project for more than five years now" (*Love My Planet* 168). The narrator in *Love My Planet* regrets that Government officials are not in any way punished for their actions rather they are encouraged by every strata in the society. He illustrates: "EFCC tries to cease the assets or close the bank account of a corrupt governor, the governor goes to court to be set free on the grounds of immunity, the governor goes to church for thanksgiving, he reads the first lesson, his wife reads the second lesson and the pastor praises God for their victory in court"(183).

Agary makes reference to the military dictatorship of the then Head of State, General Sani Abacha, indicating that inter tribal conflicts and wars were incensed by the government at the Centre. This is representative of what is obtainable even in today's democratic dispensation, of which the aim is to serve as a distraction to the warring communities whose land is plundered, ravaged while their real enemies gloat as they feed off the natural resources, building other arid areas into world class and divesting monies into private pockets. The leadership cares only about what she stands to gain from the Oil Companies. The narrator in *Yellow Yellow* therefore exposes the government:

Communities were fighting over who legitimately owned what land after more local government areas were created, after local government boundaries were reviewed and after local government headquarters were relocated. Due largely to the politics involved in the distribution of funds by the federal government and the oil companies in the Niger Delta, all believed, rightly or wrongly that whoever owned the land controlled LG and whatever fund it received... people were convinced that the land's unpredictable leader

was deliberately fanning the embers of ethnic conflict to shift focus from himself. (*Yellow*...109)

As it is obtainable today, killings, maiming, looting, despair, human rights abuses, embezzlements, lack of integrity before the International Community and much more were obtainable, but “all that mattered to the military Head of State was oil. As long as the world was still buying Nigeria’s oil, our Head of State did not care from which international union we were suspended for human rights abuses” (*Yellow* ...105).

Egbuson in *Love My Planet* employs protest as a tool to buttress the people’s rejection of injustice and marginalization. In the protest towards controlling their resources, their rejection of besetting poverty, unemployment and degraded environments arouse kidnapping, oil bunkery, sabotage, hostage taking and all such vices. An activist organization named Simple Justice headed by a young university undergraduate, Araba, calls for justice in Daglobe, “the organization defined justice and gave the government one month to tell the people of Daglobe how it intended to tackle the numerous political and social problems of the country, one of which was the unjust formula for sharing the nation’s oil revenue. The non-negotiable demand of the people of the Daglobe Delta for at least fifty percent of the monthly oil revenue for them to develop their region themselves was paramount” (225). “The militant group, Simple Justice had given the government an ultimatum of two weeks to substantially relieve the people of Ogazza of their present hardship, fill the potholes on the East West Road, the single road that connected the oil producing states in Daglobe” (226), and “had at the expiration of the two weeks ultimatum, kidnapped the President’s aide on Information and claimed responsibility for it” (227).

Armed conflict, mayhem, kidnapping, cultism, political thuggery and other criminal and violent activities in the Niger Delta are traceable to greed for profit and the failure of the government and oil companies to develop the land that supplies the resource that generates wealth for the entire country. The consequence is the emergence of several ethnic militias and liberation movements such as the Egbesu, the Chikoko Movement, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). In spite of the repressive and oppressive instruments used against them, the people of the Niger Delta have been resolute in their struggle to redeem their violated rights. Armed

resistance was adopted by the Isaac Adaka Boro insurgent group in 1966, though defeated by the Federal Government, the groups have not relented even till date. The 1990's saw the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Ijaw National Congress (INC) for all 500 Ijaw communities. Under Ken Saro- Wiwa's leadership, MOSOP submitted a memorandum to the government for autonomy over their resources, demanded the payment of N30B reparation, and the clean up and remediation of their degraded environment. The politics of oil and the institutional malfeasance associated with it form the pulsating trajectory that courses through the actions and agitations of the people of the Niger Delta.

The agitations by militant groups are seen to be on the increase because the government whose eyes and interest is mainly on the oil resources earned from the oil firms have not been able to bring themselves to discuss meaningfully with these groups. One sees in *Love My Planet* "a plethora of militant groups...When a car bomb explosion killed over twenty soldiers...The Daglobe Delta Youths, All Daglobe Patriots, Youths without Borders, The Moral Question, Just Justice, even Paradigm Shift claimed responsibility for the violence" (228 – 229). The militants are not assuaged in any way as they go ahead to unleash terrors of kidnap on government officials and multinational workers. "SJ Kidnapped eight foreign oil workers and gave the government till Sunday to start work on restoring the bridge for immediate and temporary use... on Monday morning, SJ kidnapped three foreigners working on an oil rig. A few hours later, the Filipino among them was killed as a warning to government and foreign national" (*Love My...*242).The agitations as a result of the degradations their environment faced is rife. The government's failure to deliver on their promises, their flagrant looting of the peoples' resources triggers off intense bitterness on the minds of the youths whose future remain forlorn. The youths have gone wild with bitterness and the various dissenting communities, raging against one another. Toundi's aunt in Ogazza asks even as she laments, "Does any week pass without people shooting guns and turning people into prisoners in their own houses? We are prisoners in this village. How many days now? No farming because of fear of being killed by the people of Balazza village, if not Balazza people it is this our bad boys" (*Love My...*156).

Zilayefa reveals that while in the village, on many occasions the young boys were agitated and spurred into violence over the distressing news of the oil company's

destruction of their environment. “They would discuss how the Ijaws and other ethnic groups were suffering and even dying while the wealth of their soil fed others... some of them joined the boys from other villages to kidnap oil company executives or bar oil company workers from doing their work. Mostly they were successful, but sometimes one or two of our boys failed to return from a mission” (*Yellow...* 10).

Deep rooted corruption, putrefaction and cutting of corners is felt in all activities in the area. This of course is fuelled by the failed leadership status of both the federal and the state government. The narrator in *Yellow Yellow* observes with dismay; “because of how rough times were in the country, you had to grease someone’s palm to get anywhere, ... If you went to a business office for the first time... you had to grease a line of palms, from the porter to the front desk person, before you reached the secretary, who would also need some palm-greasing to loosen her lips about oga’s availability and whereabouts” (*Yellow...*76). Zilayefa reveals the decay in the system as she discloses: “three thousand naira got me my license without a driving test. The normal procedure required a driving test, but with adequate palm greasing, the licensing officers did not insist on it, technically anyone could get a driving license even before they knew how to drive if they gave money to the right officers”(85). The environment has been so derided, objectified and degraded that all is enmeshed in the rot. A situation where confidence is no longer reposed in the dispensers of justice, where the courts no longer stand as the last hope of the common man. The narrator yet again observes; “people did not call the police to settle disputes, and even on those rare occasions when they did and a matter was charged to court, there was little confidence in the fairness of justice, very few waited for court’s decision. The judges were so corrupt that a simple case would be adjourned over and over again until the litigants and their lawyers got the message and paid some bribe to the Judge. Whoever acted quicker received a judgment in their favour” (*Yellow...*106).

The Nigerian Government in spite of her gains from oil has failed to provide services, infrastructure and even jobs in the region. Education and educational facilities which is the most enduring investment a society can make for its members is glaringly lacking in the Niger Delta. Education makes for a rounded, wholistic individual who can positively contribute towards a wholesome society. Akachi Ezeigbo posits in *Current Trends in Literature*: “Education is the basic tool to bring about emancipation ... education is the liberating force that can free all individuals especially women and

bring them to awareness” (13). Vincent Egbuson promotes Education Rights as he presents an abused Maria in *Love my planet*, whose incapacitation in her matrimonial home is fuelled by her lack of education. Maria laments: “This school that I did not go, I am a man’s slave forever, produce children, cook his food, clean the house, wash his clothes – that is all that I am living for ... my marriage is a prison” (87). D.D. Darah in *Niger Delta Resource Control* regrets that “educational opportunity for the girl child is often aborted on the grounds of poverty and early marriage” (53). Zilayefa is appalled that the girls in her class were fewer than the boys: “In my graduating class, I was one of five girls in a class of twenty four students who took the final examinations... the schools year had started with twelve girls... they dropped out....” (*Yellow...34*).

The infrastructure vital for quality education is grossly lacking. Indeed education levels in the Niger Delta are below the national average and are particularly low for women. Egbuson therefore berates the government officials who under their watch allow the decimation of educational facilities. The condition of schools as presented in the novels are nothing to write home about. Toundi bemoans the situation of Edota Boys and Girls Secondary School. She describes:

... a dilapidated sign board unashamedly announcing the name of the school ... the students under the trees were not relaxing, they were in class, each group of student sitting on wooden chairs, without desk, in front of the teacher who was backing a black board nailed to a tree. She saw the reason. Two buildings were unusable, their roofs having fallen off and some of the walls broken .(*Love My Planet* 131)

This is the hopeless situation of education in a region where their lands and rivers produce the mainstay and foreign exchange of the nation. Again, Toundi is shown by her cousin a distressing sight of a school in their community Ogazza: “... a huge pile of broken chairs and desks... the floors of the classrooms are broken. That is where the children sit and put their exercise books to write. The children that have portmanteaus put (their exercise books on their portmanteaus to write ... the children carry the teachers’ chairs and tables from the teachers’ houses when they close” (*Love My...150*).

The government's lack of interest cuts across both the lower and higher institutions. Unpaid salaries and attendant agitation by lecturers, restiveness by the youths and increase in crime rates are fall outs of strike actions which unfortunately do not ruffle the government. The politicians have their children and wards in universities abroad where the system works and care less about what happens in the lives of ordinary citizens, tax payers, on whose monies they gloat. Olivia in *Love my Planet* explains that her boyfriend Gesibebe is in Ogazza, where they idle around as a result of the strike embarked on by Nigerian universities; "Olivia introduces her boyfriend (Gesibebe) to Toundi, a 200 level student in a Nigerian university but was in Ogazza because university teachers had been on strike for over two months due to the government's lack of interest in education and the neglect of the universities" (167). Olivia explains further that Nigeria has the best of human resources and intellectuals but under utilizes their intellect; "the best books on any subject were written by Nigerian professors yet the Nigerian society did not value their professor...that was why some Nigerian professors were leaving the country and the politicians who didn't care were sending their own children to Ghana and South Africa" (167 – 168). Enabling environment for studying is considered a luxury in Nigerian universities. The monies are not made available for such provisions but are divested into white elephant projects and even private pockets of those in authority. As such, the lecture halls are crowded, research is stalled and quality education is only but a mirage. Toundi and her course mates observe: "No lecture hall in the University was intended for more than a hundred students but...the wooden benches that were made for three students each were shared by four students each, every available space in the hall was taken up by students who had to stand throughout the lecture and the spillover of students had to stand outside by the windows" (*Love My*...249).

Zilayefa regrets that "there were not just enough spots to meet the demands of prospective students each year and after four or five years in the university which were peppered with teachers' strikes, student's demonstrations and shutdowns, students emerged with bachelor's degrees that they would only use for the one year of mandatory National Youth Service Corps as teachers in a rural school with little or no hopes at all of being gainfully employed" (*Yellow*...32). Mosambaka in *Amongst the Survivors* observes however, that the village school and the school in town were not too different from each other. "The village school was a mud house demarcated into

two apartments, surrounded with half walls... the class room desks were new, some pupils in the junior stream were made to sit down on the bare floor” (17), while the school house in the big town was a large building, built through community efforts. Importantly though, all realized the need for quality education. The narrator says, “That year, all the people in town and those of the subordinate villages were levied with taxes in form of sand, periwinkles, also money levies and everyone happily responded in realization of the importance of education to the community” (69). The narrator lays emphasis on the importance of education. He bemoans the fact that they cannot fight for environmental justice nor bring the perpetrators of injustice (the seismic exploration party) to book because they do not have anyone in the community who is armed with such knowledge. He laments:

This was how the unnatural waves claimed human lives in the River Nun at Isonibiri town. But our people do not know safety rules in the river and creeks. We have not got a person who studied Marine Law to write to the company and tell them what their tugboats and speedboats cause on the river’s high water ways... we did not have turbulent waves until these party men came, but who would bring them to justice?.

(Amongst...104)

The degradation would be on the increase if the indigenous people of the Delta do not take their education serious. They would remain imprisoned in poverty and under a perpetual bondage if they are not able to interpret the ways of the books. Grandma reasons therefore: “Any of our children that would not go to school, that would not read the Whiteman’s books would be like the ancient slaves taken away from our lands, that laboured for them through their life time” (115).

Poverty, the result of environmental degradation powered by failed leadership could be described as a process which deprives a people of their basic means of livelihood and undermines their physical, cultural and spiritual wellbeing. Poverty is a plague afflicting a lot of people all over the world and it is considered as one of the symptoms of underdevelopment. It could be experienced in terms of an individual’s inability to have daily nutritional intake, safe drinking water, basic sanitation, a livelihood that can support survival, access to essential health services, access to basic social amenities like good roads, stable electricity and water supply. African leaders

have not shown commitment and zeal in developing Africa. Poor economic governance and corruption have pervaded the continent; the results are poverty and disease. Indeed, poverty is a reflection of the appalling situation in the Niger Delta occasioned by the injustices and insensitivity of the indigenous government and the multi National Companies. The expropriation of the natural resources of the people, together with the attendant ecological damage has combined to impoverish the people. The activities of the oil companies under the complicit gaze of the Federal government have wrought environmental degradation in the area. The indigenous people of the area are very poor. Many residents of this region live in mud houses, without electricity, drink from dirty ponds and rivers, defecate in the same rivers from which they drink and live far below subsistence level.

Electricity, drinkable water, roads, river craft and land facilities, hospitals, schools is below national average. Facilities are generally either non-existent, grossly inadequate, dilapidated and abandoned. In some communities, particularly those that have been invaded by Federal Army – hospitals, schools etc have been deliberately destroyed. Most communities are yet to be linked by road, railway or air travel just as telecommunications or functional postal facilities are not available. To access medical facility, the people had to do three to five hours journey by local transport. Toundi in *Love My Planet* reveals to the reader the stark poverty that surrounds the inhabitants of the area. She says to her father, “come and see a family in excessive poverty... In a dingy room, a family of four was imprisoned in poverty, hunger and disease... As he was making the effort to speak, the visitors noticed their swollen bodies and the pustules on their skins” (89). A family so sick that they are not able to afford proper medications nor food, rather they wait for death. The sick man narrates, “It started from him and he was taking injection from the chemist nearby then one by one, we got it and we were taking injection till money finished... we have not eaten since yesterday” (89). In like manner, Toundi describes the squalor in which her aunt and her family habits; “Maria’s house was an 18ft by 10ft bedsit in one of the houses consisting of ten rooms, five on each side of the corridor. Each home also had an outhouse kitchen, an outhouse bathroom and a latrine” (89). This is the level of poverty the people of the Niger Delta experience. Egbuson employs the imagery of hunger, disease, prison and deprivation to foreground the inevitable accompaniment of environmental despoliation on the people of the Niger Delta. The wait for death as

explained by the sick man images the hopelessness and blighted situation of the Niger Delta region and her inhabitants.

A look into the lavatories used by these poverty stricken residents of the area knocks Wenni completely off. He feels “defiled and in need of a bathe” (91) for ever contacting with such a place. “The toilet was made of wooden structure with gaps between some of the planks ... He removed the piece of the wood covering the hole on the concrete floor. A wave of heat and flies rising from their feast hit Wenni’s face” (91). The putrefaction of the toilet in more ways than one describes the Nigerian environment where despite the abundance of natural resources, the economy, the basic infrastructure and administration are all in a state of disrepair. The depiction of diseased individuals, putrid toilets and even stench filled rooms images the degradation in the Niger Delta environment.

Poverty in the area is grossly exacerbated by environmental degradation. The environmental damage brings about a disruption of the people’s means of livelihood, this is manifest in Bibi’s letter to her daughter where she, (Bibi) stated that she was looking for “some other work as farming was getting less and less profitable” (*Yellow*78).

The dire situation in the Niger Delta has turned the indigenes to beggars. Toundi who accompanies her mother to the village is drawn to tears upon hearing a poor woman’s harrowing situation. “My daughter, see, she said, pointing at two plates in front of her. This is all I have for today... in one plate was eba that could not satisfy a three year old child and in the other plate that looks like oily dish water” (*Love My ...*149). The desolate environment cannot nurture the inhabitants and they seem to be trapped in this wasteland contoured with the potholes of environmental pollution. Such expressions as ‘haggard’, ‘squalor’ ‘ragged’, ‘prematurely old’ with which the writer describes the poverty in the lives of these people is an allusion to the Niger Delta whose bowels produce oil yet remains blighted.

The writers ironically project the people’s concordance with nature and their folklore, streams, flora and fauna, They contrast the environmentally harmonious setting of the past with that of the chaotic present through the apt employment of images of diseases and environmental disaster ravaging the region. This contrast is aptly captured by Agary, thus; “I was told of the days one was expected to give his new wife a dug out

canoe...the wife would use this canoe to fish, earn a living and help feed the family...their farms held plantain trees so fertile that there was more plantain than anyone knew what to do with- roasted, boiled, mashed, green and yellow. The possibilities were endless. Those were the days” (*Yellow...*39-40).The image of the environmentally affectionate setting of the farms and the healthy aquatic life in the creeks, streams and rivers is further foregrounded with the use of pronominals “I”, “we”, “our” which projects a people living in agreement with nature and happily engaged in their fishing and farming.

The social background of the Niger Delta and its inhabitants reveals a blighted image. The Niger Delta is one of the poorest and most underdeveloped parts of the country. The inhabitants, most of who still live in a rural subsistence characterized by a total absence of such basic facilities as electricity, pipe borne water, hospitals, proper housing and roads are weighed down by debilitating poverty, malnutrition and diseases”. Zilayefa forlornly reveals that the same degraded river in which the villagers bathe, defecate also serve drinking purposes; “How many more times could I bear the pain like a hundred razor blades slashing my private part because the river water that washed it was the same water that received the waste rejected by my body in its attempt to cleanse itself. The water that flowed... as drops of oil escaped from the pipelines that moved the wealth from beneath my land and into the pockets of the select few who ruled Nigeria was the same water I drunk.” (*Yellow...*39). Egbuson satirically condemns the use of pier toilets in the area, he achieves this through Rareh, Larami’s house girl, who, while on their journey to the village beholds this awful sight and is thrown aback as she hysterically, though innocently shouts “see shit is falling from under that house into the river. See shit is falling again” (141), while the villagers who were used to that laughed at her innocence. The same debilitating situation is x-rayed in *Amongst the Survivors*. The visitors (the oil explorers) were appalled because “the house they occupied had no toilet facilities, the strangers had to walk across the road to use a plank house at the water front. The same happened when they wanted to take their baths. The River Nun was extremely dirty and turgid. Dr. Opunda was feeling uncomfortable because of the brownish colour of the river water, yet he had to use it because there was no alternative supply” (143).

There is a total breakdown resulting in unimaginable hunger and poverty in the land. The inhabitants of this region live in mud houses, without electricity, drink from dirty

rivers, without toilet facilities, and defecate in the same rivers from which they drink, live far below subsistence level as opposed to the opulence and flamboyance in which the oil workers thrived. Majority of Nigerians are suffering from abject poverty despite the huge amount of oil money accruing to the nation every day. In a press conference organized by the activists in Egbuson's *Love My Planet* in order to show the international community the indignities brought upon the people by oil induced poverty, the reader appreciates "the real Daglobans whose homes were stick and thatch huts resting on stakes" (243). A graphic picture of these poverty stricken individuals are presented thus;

The people's conditions are explained as chains of poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance, and environmental contamination. The NTA screen showed the people of the village: Barefoot adults in ragged clothes, naked children, a lot of them with distended stomachs due to malnutrition: a bare-chested old man puffing on his heavenly pipe in front of his hut, a bare breasted middle aged woman with a running sore on her left shin, busy with waving away the flies from her sore with a rag, her flabbing breast swinging as she did so; a close up of the slimy edge of a watery dump for household rubbish and human excrement; all the houses were the same sticks and thatch on stakes".
(*Love My ...*243)

The decrepit description above insulates the psyche. The debilitating situation is bizarre and ironical all at once, given the fact that the Niger delta is where the belly of the oil reside, yet the very region that produces the wealth of the nation remain the poorest area in the country. The indigenous people of the area are very poor. Egbuson contrasts the poverty in the area with the opulence that pervades around the Oil Company's Quarters, thus:

Oil city, the city of light, where there was electricity 24/7, sprang up from where wetland was cleared and sand filled... a mini football pitch, a concrete court for lawn tennis, many comfortable portakabins, one shiny prefabricated bungalow, a swimming pool and a borehole that supplied running water. The bulk of its residence were Filipinos, Britons

and Chinese... a couple of Venezuelans. No one from Ogazza, no one from Daglobe Delta. (160)

The life of luxury with which the oil workers are identified is palpable; it contrasts with the wrenching poverty afflicting the villagers. The oil workers' houseboats are kept even more comfortable than a complete house, for which the narrator in *Amongst the Survivors* referred to them as no ordinary men, thus: "The electric light in the houseboats cast a gleam of silver lines, shining elegantly on the surface of the river water. The fluorescent lights gave the sense of sight a great pleasure as it glittered all over the balconies of the house boat. The people in there were no ordinary men. They lived a special kind of life" (90).

The Niger Delta situation is indeed depressing. The degradation in the area is rife and the inhabitants are endangered. Theirs is an all round melancholic narrative. The air is thick, darkened with soot, the water is bitter, the soil is soaked, the crops are brown, the rivers are empty, their trees are falling, their wealth is moving, their hospitals are mere structures, their roads are death traps, their infants are dying, their youths are fighting, their neighbourhoods are burning and the future remains blighted.

CHAPTER FOUR

FEMALE CHARACTERS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

Environmental Victims

In the socio-economic and cultural structure of the Niger Delta communities, women are subordinate to men. Though traditionally, women of this region neither own nor inherit land, they bear the burden of raising and nurturing their families, thus, they provide the basic needs of their household; food, water and fuel through engaging mainly in fishing, farming and gathering of forest products. However, the poor management of oil and gas in this region coupled with pressures arising from natural environmental changes has undermined the livelihoods of women and the income they generate to sustain their families.

In the past fifty years, oil and gas exploration together with other related activities have undoubtedly unleashed unimaginable impacts on women inhabiting the Niger Delta states of Nigeria. Some of these impacts include ravaging of farmlands, destruction of aquatic life, loss of family houses through laying of oil pipelines and contamination of potable water. Other ramifying effects on women include increasing wave of prostitution, high incidence of teenage pregnancy, drug addiction, proliferation of sexually transmitted disease and patriarchy. The women cook, drink and wash in polluted waters. If and when they are lucky enough to find fishes in their polluted waters, the fishes are contaminated, their farmlands are also destroyed. A degraded environment is seen as a challenge to the resourcefulness of these women who depend totally on the viability of their environment.

Agary, in the first lines of *Yellow Yellow* subjectively captures the images of a despoiled environment as she brings the forlorn situations of the receptors of environmental harm to the fore:

During my second to last year in secondary school, one of the crude oil pipes that ran through my village broke and spilled oil over several hectares of land, my mother's farm included... what could have happened that left her void of words.... Oil, she said.... I ran to my mother's farm.... I watched as the thick liquid spread out, covering more land and drowning small animals in its path. It just

kept spreading and I wondered if it would stop.... Then there was a smell... it was so strong – so strong it made my head hurt and turned my stomach. (3-4)

The narrator explains that “this incident left her mother void of words” (1). Her mother’s inability to talk as a result of their mishap is strikingly projected as Zilayefa projects herself at the centre, directly expressing their travail in such manner that the reader imagines and experiences the pain. She exclaims in despair; “and so it was, that in a single day, my mother lost her main source of sustenance” (4). The protagonist’s tone is lachrymal as it is encased in a tone of lament. Agary effectively deploys the emotion of tears to elicit sympathy and draw the attention of men and women of conscience to their plight of oppression and exploitation.

The destruction of Bibi’s land is a symbol of the distraught situation of the people. It becomes for the woman a dislocation of hope, a killer of dreams, a dismembering of fantasies and a death of her family’s future. Zilayefa explains: “The day my mother’s farmland was overrun by crude oil was the day her dream for me started to wither.... the black oil that spilled that day swallowed my mother’s crops and unraveled the thread that held together her fantasies for me. She was able to find a new farm land in another village but it was not the same” (10).

Women are directly affected by environmental activities. Cultivable land is the basic resource for meeting food needs and often for servicing livelihoods. Women are at the centre of subsistence food production. Made landless or pushed into marginal environments as a result of land degradation, women have to feed families from smaller and more impoverished plots, the work burdens of women are exacerbated by the need for them to travel greater distance to collect food, water and wood owing to the degradation of their immediate environment. Zilayefa laments: “Farming and fishing the occupations that had sustained my mother, her mother and her mother’s mother no longer provided again, had witnessed lands claimed by massive floods during the rainy season, the earth slowly melting into rivers. Women rowed their canoe farther and farther away to tend land for farming ... every year it was harder to catch fish, as though the water spirit had tied the fishes’ womb” (*Yellow...* 39). Such, as explained by Zilayefa is the adversity the females in the area grapple with. Life is virtually made unlivable for her and her mother, as their only source of livelihood is

decimated before their very eyes. The despoliation of the place is portrayed as synonymous with ruination of dreams. The narrator explains further that “the day my mother’s farm land was overrun by crude oil was the day her dream for me started to wither, but she carried on watering it with hope. The black oil that spilled that day swallowed my mother’s crops and unraveled the thread that held together her fantasies for me” (10). In the same manner, Nengi Ilagha expresses with dismay the predicaments of women in the face of environmental degradation, through one of her female characters in her novel, *Condolences*: “The ground no longer yields her strength because it has become too weak from drinking plenty of poison... I lost a grandchild to the evil oil about six years ago... I lost my mother’s farmland to the ceaseless fire... The great heat has dried up everything on the land. The rain is poisonous because of the bad air. Rain water now gives disease. Our lands are cracked, our women are not fertile as they used to be. Our land is dying” (154).

The identification of a healthy environment, for Zilayefa and the entire town is portrayed as that which is remembered with nostalgia. The days in which she enjoyed a habitable environment came as faded memories. She refers to those days as:

The days when the Ijaw woman could ignore the nature of the Ijaw man because she had a means of earning a living and providing the needs of her children. Those were the days when Ijaw women cooked a fresh pot of soup everyday because the rivers were teeming with fish. Their farms held more plantain trees so fertile that there was more plantain than anyone knew what to do with roasted, boiled, mashed, green and yellow, the possibilities were endless. Those were the days.
(*Yellow Yellow* 40)

John Million in *Amongst the Survivors*, through his omniscient narrator presents a graphic picture of the reality of the lives of most women in the Niger Delta. He presents images of hopelessness and pain. The consequences of environmental pollution are many and varied, seated destructively on the shoulders of women. Million demonstrates how deplorable the situation is, thus, Oruama, an old widow’s harrowing experience is highlighted;

One day, Oruama an old widow, went into her farmland in the morning. Opposite an existing seismic line... there was a long plank

constructed boat, with a yahama twenty five horse power engine anchored at the water front of the farm ... ravaging the farm, they cut sugar canes, plantain trees, banana trees and other crops. (80)

Oruama, “cried, weeping, everything is gone.... They have ravaged my farm like invading locusts” (80). In like manner, Mosambika’s great grandma whose skills and dexterity in the act of fishing is unrivaled “complained about the severe waves in the River Nun, when she was paddling back home from the fishing port, her canoe nearly capsized... she also complained about the fuels and diesel spills caused by the company tug boats and speed boats” (110). She cries out, “the Whiteman has inflicted a deep wound on us, it would take a long time to heal and the scars will be left for our children’s children to witness. The fuel and diesel spills have driven the aquatic animals; fishes, crabs, prawns, lobsters and crayfish, all have disappeared into high seas, never to return” (110).

The activities of the oil explorers ceaselessly foist untold hardship on the lives of the poor women of Isonibri town. The drillers having caused a lot of damage, with consequent discharge of thick, turbid liquid into the surrounding swamp forest adversely affecting the life of their sea supplies; Orukoroere had returned from the bush from checking her traps. Unfortunately all the fishes entrapped were found dead, due to the turbidity of the water. Orukoroere forlornly peers into a bleak future as she laments: “Shell Company you have come and made the young boys and girls rich, they have money to spend anyhow, but what about the old men and women that feed on the forest, should we die in hunger because of your oil?” (93) . Mosambaka’s grandma also grieves as she:

Wonders what the future of the Niger Delta will look like...The heavy noise of their dynamites, their to and fro movement, the constant drilling of deep holes in the soil, including the oil spills resulting from their drilling machines have killed the Bush fishes, crabs and all other mollusks, constaceans and other micro-organisms are all dead. Our bush traps lie empty, alluvial deposits and filamentous algae settle down on them, soon they get spoilt and wasted, and the bush smells like dead body. (111)

Women are known as basal providers of family food, water and fuel. Unfortunately, however, John points out that the terrible situation of their waters and land have plunged their families into hunger, thus bringing back memories of the horrendous experiences of the Nigerian Civil War. Million John alludes to the suffering and pain of the war, in order to drive home that the Niger Delta people are oppressively subjected to a war situation. One of the women exclaims, “this is strange! It is strange indeed! Hunger had stricken the people of the Niger Delta, even during the war fought by the Igbos and Nigeria, salt, pepper and fish were extremely scarce, but not as scarce as what is happening in Isonibiri today” (112). Ogbolomie-ebi, wife of Chief Amafere whose “entire farmland consisting of sugar canes had been devastated” (139) feels the pangs of violence meted all over her body as she is directed by the Assessment team of the seismographic party operations to wait in order that the level of devastation on her farm may be assessed. She sorrowfully asks, “How can a stranger know the number of sugar cane plants on my farm... are you a soothsayer?” (140).

One of the major obstacles to traditional fishing methods in the creeks and waterways is a result of the constant movement of the sea trucks travelling to and from the flow stations. Fishing lines, nets and traps are often torn, sea trucks continually destroy properties despite protests from communities. The operators of the sea trucks appear to have very little concern or compassion for the fishermen and women. Although, there are speed instructions, it appears they are often not enforced. The noise, waves and vibrations generated by the sea trucks is attributed by the local community as a prime reason for scaring away fishes which is evidenced by low fish yield.

Images of dispossession and powerlessness are drawn as one sees parents who can neither provide basic needs nor pay school fees. All these anomalies are blamed on environmentally induced poverty. On this Jike V.T. says:

The little school child is truant because the parents have been displaced from their farms and are unable to meet their obligations to provide food and the recommended textbooks for the child at school. The woman, (he insists) bears the brunt even more, because her typical Niger Delta man may find consolation in his drinks. The fisherman sits very early in the day guzzling locally brewed gin

(Ogogoro) in his sitting room because the fishes in his domain have been depleted ... by spillage and industrial effluent that have begun to introduce toxicity and distort aquatic balance, thereby forcing whole species to migrate or die. (87)

Consequently, the women suffer even much more on account of migration of their men to urban areas. As a result of the futility of life in their degraded environment, migration becomes the sought after choice by many. The men often migrate to mainland towns in search of wage labour. These men complain that they can no longer rely solely on fishing as an economically viable occupation as they had done in the past. A greater burden therefore, is placed upon the women because of the massive outward migration of men. Each day, women spend hours in the mangrove swamps gathering shell fish such as periwinkles and mangrove oysters. Grandma expresses: “my life is my paddle; without my paddle, we do not eat” (*Amongst the...* 114).

Women give in their all for the sake of love for their families and as such, they suffer even more in the face of their degraded environment. The discomfiting situations of their husbands and children are theirs to bear. Zilayefa and her friend Ebiere analyzes the situation of their mutual friend Priye who had been delivered of a baby; “Priye life sweet o, her mama throw party for her as she born”. “Dat na life? She no get work, de pickin papa no get work. But her mama go help her with the pickin” (42). The arrival of a new baby presents more difficulties than joy in the life of Priye’s poor mother.

Ebiere’s case is no less different as she mourns a husband who was killed in a communal feud, saddled with pregnancy and an absentee father, with a toiling mother as her only hope. “Her mother had young children who she was bringing up single handedly. Her father earned money that he spent every which way except to take care of his family. Ebiere had no work. The father of her unborn child had worked odd jobs... unfortunately he was with the wrong crowd when he was caught up in a feud that took his life” (42). The gloomy situation depicted above is such that Ebiere’s life is held still with only her mother’s toiling hands as sustenance. When asked how she would cope with life as a single mother, she dejectedly answers “I go care for de pickin now. How I go do again, dem dey troway pickin” (*Yellow ...*42).

Mothers are considered as hawks, guarding the lives of their family members with every breadth they can muster, despite the stagnation of their environment. Zilayefa in

all her eagerness to live the village for a better life in the city feared that she may not cope without her mother's protection. She wondered what would become of her when she eventually leaves the comfort of all that she had known for seventeen years, "to start life in a new place without my mother who had been my protector, my shield and who would have been, if she could breathe for me, my life support" (*Yellow...*17)

The women in *Love My Planet* lament that they have lost sons to their degraded environments. Their children have turned wild and uncontrollable; "their children have turned Ogazza into a prison of fear for everyone" (156). Ereki's mother, Amama rhetorically asks: "Does any week pass without people shooting guns and turning people into prisoners inside their houses?... we are prisoners in this village... no farming because of fear of being killed... can anyone leave before it is dawn for kenbal market... Nearly every day, Kpau Kpau Kpau in the villages, no peace. And your own son is among the bad boys, there is nothing you can do, because if you talk, he can abuse you or even beat you" (157). The unbecoming situation in the Niger Delta and the agonies and helplessness of the women stare the reader in the face. The community, which should be a haven, has turned hostile for the inhabitants. The woman can no longer walk around and carry out her obligations with a sense of vigour, added to her sorrow also, she loses the respect of her children who, as a result of their restive community despises decorum.

The women do not engage physically in conflicts but these conflicts eventually haunt her, even to her doorstep. The altercations either between the government and communities or the communities versus communities adversely affect the peace of the women. Sometimes, the consequences of such altercations and the attendant bloodshed throw the women into a state of sorrow. In *Love My Planet*, the youths kidnap elderly men- the executive members of Ogazza Improvement Union mandating them to write and sign letters to Oil Companies saying that the youths have taken over. Mareeba, whose sick husband was among those that had been kidnapped cries her heart out, insisting that she must not be made a widow or her children fatherless in the cause of the imbroglio. Therefore, she cries out to the father of one of the abductors: "Kpekpe, your son is their leader oh, you must know where he has taken my husband to, please tell him to send me back my husband, please help me and my children Oh.' She sat on the floor and rolled, slapping the floor with the flat of

her hands... where can I find him for him to release my husband and kill me instead of the father of my children” (153).

The volatile atmosphere in the Niger Delta is as a result of the long years of protest and deprivation. It is characterized by protest, agitation and communal conflict. The area has regrettably become a lawless zone where militant youths disrupt oil production activities at will, where also, communities frequently engaged, with little provocation, in destructive inter and intra community clashes. The boys reasoned: “If they had to suffer amidst such plenty, then, they would cause as much havoc as possible until someone took interest in their plight and until justice as they saw it prevailed...Some of them joined the boys from other villagers to kidnap oil company executives or bar oil company workers from doing their work. Mostly, they were successful, but sometimes one or two of our boys failed to return from a mission. The word around the village was the police had caught and killed them” (*Yellow ...9-10*). The young men in these communities are seen at the centre of these conflicts. Their lives are on many occasions cut short in their prime and they leave behind mothers, wives and even children who are thrown into mourning.

Women more often than imagined spend their lives looking after others – their children and the men in their lives. A woman’s work is not just limited to the home alone. She bolts off to the market, buys food stuffs, most times, ekes out the food, runs errands for her husband, attends to the children, washes and cleans up. She is subsumed in the family front that she sometimes forgets her own well being. The consequences of her family actions and inactions are borne by her. This is depicted by Million John through one of his characters Orisa, who distorted the peace of his family through his expensive adventure. Orisa and his son had embarked on an unlawful and nefarious act of dynamite shooting in order that their fishing expedition would ruffle the creeks and earn them much more fishes, unfortunately, this expedition turned out badly as the dynamite exploded and left Orisa mutilated. “In less than seven weeks, Orisa was healed but one thing remained; he was permanently disfigured. His right eye was stone blind and his left leg amputated from the knee” (*Amongst...165*). In the event of all these, Orisa takes to drinking as his source of escape while his wife, Ebiye becomes the main victim. Hence;

...the family burden is shifted and heaped upon her head... Her life eventually takes a nose dive on account of her husband's misfortune...She feeds and caters for the entire family. She cannot change her bush clothes, she wears them from dusk to dawn.... She daily shifts from one labour commitment to another, trying hard to meet the demands of her husband and children. In the morning, she would be in her farmland weeding and in the evening, she would be floating her net by the water front of the town to catch some fishes to make ends meet.... Ebiye cannot wait for the harvest season, her farms are harvested prematurely or else she and her children would die of starvation. (166)

Women's health, just like everyone in the area is endangered by environmental degradation resulting from scarcity of clean water, desertification exposable to toxic chemicals and hazardous waste. Females in the region stand a higher risk than their male counterparts due to their physiologies. Most women in the area are faced with the travail of deformity and death as a result of illnesses and diseases such as cancer of the lungs, skin, womb and various respiratory tract diseases. Cases of miscarriages, infertility and malformed babies are also rampant in the degraded region. The women in Ojaide's *The Activist* raise an alarm: "there is much more happening to us women in recent years. Our pregnant women are delivering so many malformed babies. What used to be a rarity is now common place... newly married young women complain openly about the weakness of their men" (219).

"The Aljazeera team who came into town "went over to a clearing somewhere in a swamp forest and showed a group of the Yenge people dying in misery... a nursing mother was dying of cholera. Several women were scratching their private parts and complaining of severe itching" (*Love my Planet* 228). Their health situations, the women screamed, are as a result of the deleterious consequences of oil pollution on their air, land and waters. To establish this, two women took the Aljazeera reporters to a stream in which they had bathed. When asked by the reporter, "but this water is polluted. It is obviously polluted by oil spillage why did you bathe there?" They answered "Na dis one clean pass, pointing at an oil stained wet track, 'de water there black well well ... we drink dis one... weytin we for drink" (228).

The description above of the type of water which the people consume is indeed disturbing, but this is not all of what they contend with. The sore voice of an environmentally brutalized woman draws attention to the gas flaring. She speaks up: “How about the type of sickness wey our people dey sick? Sometimes for night person no go fit breathe well, or skin dey scratch am. When Orolo go Local Government hospital before she die last month, the doctor say na because we dey live near dat fire, and the rain water wey we dey drink. The doctor say de cancer don fill all im body, no way for cure am ... wey Miranda? Where she dey? She sef get that kind sickness” (244).

There is inner turmoil and confusion in the lives of the female characters in the novels. The women encountered in the novels symbolize the average Niger Delta woman, struggling to rise above the surf of the debilitating effects of a degraded environment. The novels are an exposition on the travails of women as they struggle to find existential fulfillment in their devastated lands.

Psychological Trauma

Psychological trauma, a damage to the mind that occurs as a result of a severely distressing situation, can be seen as a major problem in the lives of women in the Niger Delta as shown in the novels. Their lives are inundated with intense fear, helplessness and horror which often manifests in disorganized and agitative behaviours. Bibi, Zilayefa’s mother had been so dealt with by the loss of her only source of sustenance(her farm), her emotions tortured by the whiteman who impregnated and abandoned her, such that her life became a shift from the normal life. She would no longer hear nor approve of a man, she would not conform with the social life that her contemporaries belonged to, she reclines into her shell and bars her mind from experiencing happiness. She retorts harshly to a fellow woman who had come to ask for money for a uniform the women shared: “I no join dis una women group again sef. I neva see any beta wey commot from am”(8). Her daughter describes her as “very detached”(8).

The life of a woman whose impoverished situation is acute is depicted in *Love My Planet*: “sitting on a stool in front of a mud house...with two plates...eba that could not satisfy a three year old child and what looked like oily dish water...lost her husband and two children ”(148).The narrator says “she refuses to be happy nor stay

anywhere people are happy”(148). The traumatic experiences the women in the novels encounter shrink some of them and robs them of the strength to feel or speak. They are muted and their hopes receded into the background. Bibi’s losses “left her void of words”(1). Zilayefa and her Portharcourt friend, Emem, whose biracial identity keep uncomfortable are depicted as confused, sad, yearning and searching all at once. Zilayefa had a deep vacuum which she alone bore, hoping for a solution to her puzzle in relation to her identity. In her search for a father figure, she is impregnated by an elderly man, a pregnancy which she aborts in a most gruesome manner. She virtually forces the foetus down her leg, thus: “I returned to my room later and chewed up the plants I had picked, leaf and bark together...I had forced them down with water...I felt near the end when the cramps woke me up later that night, I lay curled up from the sweat and the blood that had gushed from between my legs...I feared that I might die”(178). This act of madness is schizophrenic but clearly manifests Zilayefa’s rejection of injustice and her claim to freedom. Ebiye’s life degenerates on account of family burdens. Her husband loses an eye and a limb, refuses to be rehabilitated and rather resorts to drinking. Ebiye takes up the position of the breadwinner, tortured both physically and emotionally, she almost loses her mind; “Ebiye cannot wait for the harvest season, her farms are harvested prematurely... does not change her bush clothes, she mutters while she walks by (*Amongst ...*88).

The horrors of survival leads to melancholia and the young girls undergo a kind of schizophrenia, for in chasing after whitemen for cash benefits, they endure barbarism by allowing the men push in harmful objects into their private parts, the young prostitutes in *Yellow Yellow* narrate; “You will not imagine the things we go through...sometimes the whitey’s push in bottles into our private part”(46).

The stigma of rape tortures the psyche of the women, most of whom lose the will to carry on after a rape incident or commit suicide in extreme conditions. Rape is the root of severe psychological and emotional consequences in life. Aloe Vera, having been raped by armed robbers, beats up herself, ponders over questions which society unjustifiably throws at victims of rape, thus; “I must not be put to shame...which man will marry me if they know that armed robbers raped me?”(*Love My ...*17). In a moment of madness she commits suicide. Maureen in *Love My Planet* suffers emotional trauma all through the novel owing to her being raped by Wenni when she was a young girl, and unfortunately this forestalls her full advancement as a woman.

Strong words of oppression contribute to violating the psyche of women. This is often times worse than other kinds of violence perpetuated against the female. Umukor's innocent questions about the whereabouts of the missing Amraibure stirs up insults from her husband who reprimands and humiliates her publicly, thus; "why don't you look before you ask foolish questions, woman... You have nothing doing and you must be everywhere"(137).

Childlessness in marriage subject the African woman to mental torture. She is sneered at, made uncomfortable by relations and in-laws and this, most times, makes the woman withdrawn and sinks into depression. "Oyeghe had experienced marriage in its most cruel condition. Ten years with a man and yet she remained childless"(Stars ...57). Her stunning beauty and humane nature could not make up for her loss in her traditional society. She is tortured mentally and emotionally, her society makes a caricature of her predicaments by calling her names; "a man", "a cock", "a barren tree", "a diminished palm wine"(Stars ...64). She unceremoniously walks away from the marriage and licks her wounds from afar.

The poverty/health challenges in which the women are engulfed rob them of the dignity of life, such that some of them almost give up hope. Maria, Toundi's aunt, whose debilitating poverty and abusive marriage has driven into depression laments; "this is the life I know, a wicked life...I am a man's slave forever...I look for death to come open the cell and take me out but it has refused to come"(87).She is so traumatized that she hopes for death as her only means of escape. "Women with distended bellies that resembled pregnancies caused by uterine fibroids were confined to their rooms because a diviner had investigated and confirmed them to be witches" (Yellow...40).Such secluded spaces in which women are subjected to is symbolic of the marginal position she is allowed in the secular society. Her feelings of minority, not being an integral part of the spaces created by nature is indeed traumatizing for the femalefolk.

Sexual Exploitation

As a fallout of the Niger Delta Crises, prostitution is common. Young girls seeking economic survival involve in prostitution in major towns and cities of the Niger Delta. These young girls receive a paltry sum at the end of every sexual meeting with these oil workers, who see the women as their human resource. The women engage in the

sale of their bodies in order to receive pittance out of the treasure (oil) which is fundamentally theirs. On many occasions, the women are turned into sex slaves. The girls often times are brutally handled by the unscrupulous exploiters of their natural resources. These young females whose only accesses to their commonwealth are the groins of foreign workers remain subdued. Misogynist activities are unleashed on these female bodies to the monstrous pleasure of their abysmal hosts-the men. The narratives of the prostituting girls in *Yellow Yellow* reveal in part what the girls go through; “Our visitors told of a time when they fell into the hands of a crazy whitey who beat them up or pushed objects like bottles into their privates as part of the fun. It seemed that sometimes there were so many unimaginable horrors to get through before the clients released the money” (37).

Sex Industry in the Niger Delta is directly linked to Oil Industry. It is majorly the oil company employers that patronize prostitutes. Oil company workers exploit and oppress the people in various communities where they are located, with their money. Since most of the women living in these communities where these companies are located are poor, the women get involved in the act of prostitution for material gains. The girls reveal that “the Whiteys were always the catch of the day, Whiteys gave a lot of money, bought gifts...and if the girls were lucky and had the right native doctor, they could get their Whiteys to fall in love with them and may be take them away to Whitey’s home country”(Yellow...37). Unfortunately, the girls do not receive the money/gifts on a platter. Inhuman treatments towards the female sex workers are reported in the novels under study. In *Love My Planet*, Yiba confirms the rumour that she sleeps with the white men in D’Alberto Estate. She weeps as she confesses to Toundi;

I can’t tell you the things those oil company workers do to us. Because they have money. It’s too shameful to tell anyone. Toundi, I don’t enjoy it. It’s for the money. Oh a woman’s life!... I am a victim of poverty. Those white men are evil Russians, Fillipinos and Chinese. They use the money from our oil to turn us into animals... She wept afresh, her mind on the very sadistic small – statured white haired Chinese who was financially generous to any girl who could manage to bear his perversions. (62)

Despite the stories of ill-treatment by these oil workers, many young girls still dreamt of a life that would at least sustain them and members of their families; “many young girls were eager to follow in this path...they dreamed of a life that would allow them enough cash to send money home once a month”(Yellow...36). Ereki, Toundi's cousin is not able to get a hold on his fiancée Sally. She is almost always at “Oil city where the oil workers live” (*Love My...160*). Ereki's mother reveals that “Sally is the girl he (Ereki) wants to marry, because of the beauty of her face, her legs and her voice. Anytime he cannot find her in Ogazza, it is in Oil city he will go and beg her to come back. “Oil city is where our girls sell their body for money” (160).

The girls not only have the white men to contend with, their experiences are made more difficult by the local boys, “in addition to worrying about the crazy Whiteys, they had to worry about the local boys... They would attack the shacks where the girls live, beat them up, steal their money and if their minds had been taken over by the evil spirit in booze and hard drugs, they would destroy all the property that had gotten in the way of their mission” (*Yellow...38*). The girls in their despondency exclaim “and na our money, our oil money! (38). Regrettably, these oil men do not just have cheap sex at their disposal, but worse still, most of these sexual meetings end up with children and the women are left to bear the burden of nurturing ‘fatherless babies’.

The unsuspecting young females are victimized through the incidence of teenage pregnancy. With the destruction of farmlands and fishes, women find it extremely difficult to make sufficient money to pay school fees particularly for their daughters. The effect of this imbalance is the exposure of their daughters to possibilities of prostitution in order to generate money. Most of the girls, under the gaze of their parents offer sex to willing male partners who give them various sums of money in return. Since most of the girls have little or no sex education, they end up with unwanted pregnancies. Olivia in *Love My Planet* tells Toundi of “the common story of girls who had dropped out of school after being impregnated by fun – seeking oil workers. The fair skinned one had one fatherless son while the black one had one fatherless daughter... when the men are transferred out of Oil city, that's the end of the relationship. The men don't write, they change their phone numbers and they don't care about the children” (199). Olivia reveals that “some of the parents enjoy the money their daughters bring home... In fact, it is the money that sustains some

families” (169). Toundi who tries to apportion blames to the girls and parents is rebuked by Olivia who strongly insists, “You and I cannot judge. Until we are in their condition. When we wake up in the morning and we don’t know whether we can have one meal that day, it is then we can judge” (169 – 170).

Furthermore, the restive youths referred to as militants victimize the females in the area as well. The angry and hungry young men fighting for their rights unjustly engage the bodies of young women. Among the roll call are the soldiers who are deployed to “protect” lives and property. The soldiers usually sent by the Federal Government to calm the rifting villagers find pleasure in the bodies of young women. They violently invade private homes, terrorizing residents, beating and raping women and young girls. In *Love My Planet*, there are harrowing stories of women caught up with the struggle at the instance of the conflict that emerged over the rigging in the Local Government elections. The military is called upon to wade into the matter and restore calm. The narrator explains:

A few mobile police and soldiers were guarding the secretariat of Daglobe Unity Party. In front were dead bodies... there was a pile of corpses... a young woman was crying and pointing to a looted department store and telling the reporters that two soldiers had raped her in there... plenty of us were there.... The soldiers come and start to shoot... after the soldiers drive out the men, dey begin to fuck us, we de women. (*Love My*...180)

The woman is unfortunately, a soft target in conflict situations. She is used either as a shield or target by men in crisis laden situations. Both women and adolescent young girls face the dangers of rape. The very young girls are abused in unsupervised environments even by close family members or friends. Egbuson in *Love my Planet* highlights this as he portrays Maureen, Toundi’s new found (elderly) friend who was once raped by Toundi’s father. After years of psychological trauma, Maureen meets Wenni again. She makes the revelation to him; “I am the primary school girl you raped in the gravel pit we used to swim in during the rainy season... I am the Maureen you raped when you came there and saw me alone in the shallow water that day” (17). Larami, in like manner “thought of how she lost her virginity to the uncle

she stayed with in Lagos... he had her several times before she returned to her parents” (212).

Rape and sexual confrontations are portrayed by these writers as part of the destructive narrative on which degraded environments thrive and through which injustices and inequalities are perpetuated. Bad and inefficient leadership extends the claws of approval towards such debilitating acts as rape. Ojaide berates the leadership of the past warriors in *Stars of the Long Night* where their lust, recklessness and insensitivity of their actions irk the gods and mar the lives of their followers. About the leader, Odjugo, the narrator says of him; “he got what he wanted with force and intimidation. He unleashed his livery of beastly warriors on the people and looting and pillaging became the qualities of leadership. Those who robbed were decorated with new titles. Those who raped other people’s wives got praised for their manhood” (77). Acts of rape against the women symbolizes also the rape perpetuated by the Multinationals and Indigenous government against the people of the Niger Delta

These female sex violators come in different forms and shades .They sometimes come as armed robbers, whose dastardly act against their fellow masses are their only conceived channels of protesting against the inequities prevalent in their environment. There is a resonating sound of protest in the voice of one of the robbers in Egbuson’s *Love My Planet*, thus: “the head robber addressed Araba.... ‘have you been to our villages’ when last were you there to see how our people are living? Is that life? Despite all the oil from our land....no job, no money. I demand justice” (12) yet, in the robbers’ demand for justice, they denigrate the bodies of their female victims; “an unearthly yell from the house. It was a female voice. Araba silently wished they would only rape Aloe-vera and not kill them” (*Love My Planet* 13). The society further torments the psyche of the woman through the stigmatization of rape. The violated women, Aloe Vera and her flat mate appeal to their neighbours; “please we don’t want to say we were raped... Please help us...they must not put us to shame... which man will marry me if they know that armed robbers raped me?”(15). In like manner, Alhaji Maitha in his report to the police deliberately “omitted to say his younger wife and two daughters were raped”(*Love My Planet* 17).

The story of the young Bibi, is presented as a metaphor for degradation of primal innocence. She falls victim as her detractor takes undue advantage of her innocence.

Bibi, “a young and naive eighteen-year-old who has just moved to Port Harcourt from her small village” represents the innocence of the natural African ecology. Like every unguarded innocence, she succumbs to the ravaging power and corruption of the western world, personified in the character of the Greek sailor, Plato Papadopoulos. The Greek sailor, like the Portuguese trader father of Emem, Zilayefa’s Port Harcourt friend, symbolizes Western experience and corruptibility, tempting and with lots of money to spend. The narrator, Zilayefa exposes the naivety of her mother in the following words:

For the few weeks that he was in Port Harcourt, she was in heaven. She believed that she had found her life partner and that this man would take care of her. I don’t think my father ever told her that he would marry her; she just assumed that he would. Instead, he left Port Harcourt without saying good-bye. She went to the port to look for him one day, as had become her habit, and was told that his ship had left. There was no message; he was just gone, leaving behind his planted seed in my mother’s *belle*. (7)

By this very act of seducing, planting of his ‘seed’ in the womb of the young girl, the Greek sailor has only succeeded in ruining her innocence and replacing it prematurely and rudely to the reality of a callous world, which makes mockery of and seeks destruction of innocence.

The narrator deliberately weaves the story of the environment and Zilayefa’s mother into one inseparable predicament. A Greek sailor, Plato Papadopolous, impregnates and abandons Ina Binaebi, (Zilayefa’s mother), thereby stalling her aspirations in life. Zilayefa reveals:

My father was a Greek sailor whose ship had docked briefly in Nigeria about one year before I was born. After months at sea, he was just happy to see a woman...the woman he chose was my mother, a young and naive eighteen year old, who had just moved to Port Harcourt from her small village with visions of instant prosperity ...she believed that she had found her life partner and that this man would take care of her, she just believed that he would....Instead he left Port Harcourt without saying good-bye...There was no message;

he was just gone leaving behind his planted seed in my mother's belle. (7)

The oil exploration which ravages the environment is largely, a European affliction. Intertwined in the story therefore, is a deliberate undoing of the environment and the woman by dubious foreign interests. The narrator and product of the 'hit and run' sexual escapade, describes her mother's travails, thus: "Disillusioned, my mother went back to her village to face the shame of being an unwed mother" (8). Hidden in that simple explanation, but volubly expressed through other events, are the sufferings, hunger and deprivation the abandoned young mother goes through in her struggle for the survival of both herself and her child.

The relationship, which develops between the seventeen-year-old Zilayefa and the Admiral who is in his late sixties, is yet another instance of victimization, the females experience, which the researcher believes is facilitated by the destruction of the Niger Delta environment. In the same way that water and land are pillaged, the females are exploited. They are led like a lamb to the slaughter. Between pages 138 – 144 of *Yellow-Yellow*, there is a vivid narration of the seductive guiles and eventual ruining of the seventeen-year-old Zilayefa for whom the elderly man has just one intention; his personal satisfaction, as the girl confesses ".....I gave up my virginity to Admiral". Zilayefa's ruin is thus a metaphor for the ruin of the Delta by those who callously pursue selfish gains at the expense of others. This callousness is revealed in the response of the affluent and experienced elder to the hurt the teenage Zilayefa feels. "He saw the tears in my eyes after he was done and laughed... Admiral had taken my innocence, which I had given willingly. ... I hope it gave me a special place in his heart" (144).

Zilayefa's final statement reveals the innocent hope of an innocent mind, which is far from the reality as her later experiences reveal. "I was jolted into reality", Zilayefa indicates as follow up to Admiral's response to news of her pregnancy: "Go to Island clinic and ask for Dr. George. Tell him you need a pregnancy test, and if you are pregnant, he will help you get rid of it" (162). Not only is the life of the girl placed in danger, but the life of the unborn child must be sacrificed to appease the insatiable lust of the Admiral. It is Zilayefa that now needs help, and she is the one the doctor 'will help get rid of it'.

Admiral no doubt feels as much absolved of any blame as the oil engineer who claims government prospecting franchise as equal license for his use of the environment the way he likes, even in total disregard of the wellbeing of others in the environment. The franchise he has is bought at a great amount; so is Admiral's spending on the teenager who hardly knows what to do with the money she is given as this excerpts illustrates:

Then he reached under his seat and brought out a bundle of money, which he handed over to me. "For your running around." I was taken aback. I refused to take the money, but he insisted, so I thanked him and bolted out of his car. I was embarrassed. I was not expecting him to give me money... I questioned and reasoned, and still I was not comfortable with the bundle of money I held in my hand. I gripped the notes so tightly that my hand began to hurt. The security guard opened the gate for me and asked, "Auntie, you dey okay?" I mumbled an answer, handed the bundle of money to him, and said "thank you. I sabi say I don disturb you plenty dis night." Without a word, I hurried to the house and let myself in. it was the first time I had left Sisi's house without permission. (139)

This clearly reveals the innocence of the teenage girl. The experienced Admiral pays her in advance for the defilement of her young body. But she does not know this, and also expects and suspects nothing.

Chained by Tradition

Victimization of women come in various shades and is often culture specific. Women are affected by all manner of repressive traditions. They are also core victims of ecological degradation, caused by natural occurrences and mostly by anthropogenic activities. Indeed, a mixture of these and other cultural afflictions worsen the fate of women. Ojaide in his *Stars of the Long Night* depicts struggles of women in a patriarchal traditional society, their repression viz-a-viz the repression of nature, and the need for humanity to value one another even as humans and the gods live in harmony. Ojaide points out that "men actually committed many abominations, killed and robbed and got away with real atrocities. A man suspected of being a wizard would be described as a strong man. A strong man indeed, (while) women only

needed to be suspected, and they would be condemned as guilty by public opinion” (*Stars of the Long Night* 4).

The patriarchal disposition of Agbon Community, the high handedness of men weighed heavily on the shoulders of women. The women folk are discriminated upon, blamed of malevolent activities such as witchcraft, adultery, childlessness, and are also forced to endure obnoxious burial practices. Traditionally, women and nature were often depicted as chaotic, irrational and in need of control while men were characterized as rational, orderly and thus capable of the use and control of women, hence, the women are restrained from the eco-friendly Orhwarha joints. They are barred from enjoying the space that nature created for humanity: “The men were hostile to any wife who came there... should a man’s wife come there, she would be insulted by all the men. No man dare picked a quarrel with other men for insulting his wife... in fact joined in humiliating his own wife” (*Stars of...*33).

While enduring psychological violation, the women are also physically violated, for in trying to resist their ban from the joint, “The boldest of them wanted to deny sex to their husbands to force them to abrogate the unfair rule, but on the night of the protest, most women did not resist when the men started beating their wife for denying them sex which they felt was their right by virtue of marriage” (*Stars of...*34). The woman is considered as ‘the other’. This gives room for physical abuse which in most cases thrives in the face of economic dependence, which of course is the most compelling factor of female subjugation. Larami’s sister, Maria is constantly battered by her husband and she obviously is depicted as having resigned to fate. Amidst her bruised and swollen face, blood stained and ragged clothes, she blurts out: “It must be my agreement with God before I was sent into this world, it is the life I know. It is a wicked life... just because I told him to give me small money... Hey! This school that I did not go – I am a man’s slave forever. Produce children, cook his food, clean the house, wash his clothes – that is all I am living for... my marriage is a prison” (*Love My...*87).

Traditionally, some men indulge in wife battery. The Agbon community however accepts this as normal. In many cases, it is believed that the man as the head of the home may choose to discipline an erring wife by beating her up. The women, most times, helpless as it were, accept this violation in subdued silence, thus: “Ovwode

(Amraibure's wife) had to get his morning food ready before he returned. She was not prepared to be struck by the thunder of a husband she had. He was a forceful man at all times but ferocious when hungry" (121).

Agary notes that the men in their frustration turn the women into punching bags. "Some women walked around deaf in one ear because they had dared to question their husband's wisdom in spending the last kobo in the house on booze" (*Yellow...40*). The narrator in *Yellow Yellow* brings to the fore the unbearable tantrums thrown by the men against their women. Their actions are mostly borne out of the frustrations of their environment. Hear her:

Nowadays, the men were even more oppressive than the women alive could remember. They demanded a healthy meal when they were hungry, disregarding the fact that the women had to walk extra kilometers to get firewood or cultivate and harvest the food now fertilized by their sweat and blood... the men claimed that according to tradition, it was their exclusive right to make all the decisions inside and outside the home. (40)

The repression and exploitation of women in Agbon community continually increases in sickening proportions. Titi is a victim of the Agbon practice of exiling or selling into faraway lands, their young, poor, helpless women who are accused of witchcraft. Titi, as an individual represents the entirety of the women who suffer unjustly in their male dominated societies. Obnoxious widowhood practices form part of the challenges that exasperate women as the writer indicates that "as a widow, she (Kena) had to perform disgusting rituals to prove she had nothing to do with her husband's death" (199).

The women in the cultural context earn the society's approval through marriage and become fulfilled through motherhood. A woman is considered a social failure if she remained unmarried or divorced, thus, Oyeghe's return to her parents home after she had left her husband becomes quite discomfoting for her parents; "the longer she stayed at home, the more embarrassing it was for the parents to explain why a woman who should be married was living with them... Oyeghe understood. She knew that she was causing her mother unnecessary stress." (*Stars of ...67*). Unfortunately for the women folk, cases of divorce portrays the woman in bad light while the man is

exonerated of any culpability. “In Agbon, a divorcee was a taboo to men. Even if she was an ageless beauty like Oyeghe, men avoided close relationship with her for fear of being laughed at as dealing with an over-experienced woman”(67 *Stars...*)Portraits of child marriage/forced marriage and abuse make dominant marks in the novels under study. In *Love My Planet*, Toundi is incensed as she is shown a man, married to a girl young enough to be his grandchild; “Chief Agga was over eighty years – married a seventeen year old girl last year, she is pregnant now”(149). This same girl is coerced by her family members yet again, to marry Toundi’s father as his second wife even after she had been sold to another man. “Her parents gave her to chief Agga because they couldn’t pay back the money they owed him. Now they want to sell her out again” (192).

Childlessness could cause untold misery in the life of a woman. The Agbon Community in Ojaide’s *Stars of the Long Night* insists that “a child is the honey of marriage”(188). Hence, “Whenever a daughter married and paid a visit home, her parents and relatives look out for signs of pregnancy. If she was pregnant, she received praises, if not yet pregnant, she would be embarrassed with questions on when she hoped to be pregnant” (103). The situation is so intense that “men and women feared being referred to as childless. If you had no child, you had to continue trying until you were to have at least one to show that you were not sterile” (83). “The prayer of every woman was for her to have children. One child after another until the house fills up” (183). A childless woman is often referred to as barren, as is seen in Oyeghe’s case. Her stunning beauty and graceful nature were not able to carry her through as she was maligned in the community. Malicious questions were posed to her loving husband Okotete; “How long does a man live to spend the better days and years of his life waiting for a barren tree to bear fruit” (56). The taunts that came from all angles against Oyeghe broke her husband’s resolve to keep faith with her. The horrors women go through in their desperation to bear children is also portrayed through Utekpe, the masseur, who leisurely took advantage of the poor childless women that consult him for solutions. “In the process of examining her body to know that every part of her as a woman was complete or right, he began fondling her breasts beyond the expected limits that she expected a healer to go” (60). Oyeghe in her grief cries out “What hard fate women had to endure” (68). The women are victimized by supposed helpers set up by the patriarchal establishment. Of course, childlessness in

marriage is considered a woman's fault, so she seeks help from the masseur, who takes advantage of desperate young women pressured upon by the society to bring forth children in their homes.

Helen Chukwuma in *Feminism in African Literature* contends that: "the discrimination against the sexes, the preference of male children to the female children is one reality that confronts and contributes immensely to the subjugation of the women. The idea that boys lift up the prestige of the family and keep the family's name alive is one big hoax with which the woman is victimized" (xxii). Wenni, in *Love My Planet* daily torments his wife, who wonders if her inability to bear her husband a male child is entirely her fault. She laments; "the things he says before he pays his children's school fees as if I was the one who put girls in my womb" (53). The writer presents Toundi's father (Wenni) as representing the traditional African man whose preference for male children over the female is undisputed. Through Toundi's bitter rumination, the reader understands that "her father was a wealthy man but it had taken hard persuasion by his wife and his wife's relations for him to send Toundi to secondary school because he did not feel that it was his duty to train at such high level the issue of a woman who was capable of producing only female children – four girls... not a single boy... It was his persuasion that female education was a waste of resources" (23). In desperation to earn her husband's approval, Larami subjects her already frail body to yet another pregnancy hoping to be delivered of a male child. She surveys her position, "what do I have? Standard 6 from a school in Ajegunle... If I leave this house what will happen to my children?" (85). She lets out "Oh let it be a boy" (85). The preference of a male child over the female is portrayed in Okotere's wishes, thus: "after her son's long struggle for a child, a boy as first child would be most welcome.... She prayed to God for a male child.... the ancestors would be offered plenty of drinks and food. There was no time to waste. A boy alone would be preferable to a girl alone" (63).

Egbuson alludes to other cultures to illustrate further the harsh conditions which blatantly stare in the wry faces of the females. In Toundi's conversation with her father's doctor, the man educates her: "listen, in one of the hospitals in India where I worked for many years, when a woman comes, if it is a girl, she aborts it. Many families don't want girls because of the heavy dowry system" (133).

Cultural trappings grant the men, even the never-do-wells the primal position to subjugate their women. Zilayefa observes that:

Nowadays, the men were even more oppressive than the women alive could remember. They demanded a healthy meal when they were hungry, disregarding the fact that the women had to work extra kilometers to get firewood.... The men claimed that according to tradition, it was their exclusive right to make all the decisions inside and outside the home. They drew the line at women participating in communal meetings or serious town issues. “If we allowed women full access to the meeting, they reasoned, “where would it end? The next thing they would want to do is to mount their men in the bedroom.
(*Yellow Yellow* 40)

Women are put through excruciating widowhood rites to prove that they are innocent of their husband’s death. IniObong Uko in *The Feminine Ontology and the African Reality*, explains that: “widowhood in Africa often portends evil. Not only is the widow subjected to rigorous, oppressive and humiliating mourning rites as stipulated by tradition but her husband’s relatives often strip her of her the family’s properties. In many cases, the children she had with her husband are taken from her and she is expected to get inherited by her deceased husband’s relative in the tradition of leviration”(1). In *Stars of the Long Night*, Kena’s rejection of the tradition that put women down serves as a leap in the direction towards the attainment of full redemption. She strongly voices out her refusal to be transferred to her husband’s relations after her husband’s death, insisting that her body is not transferable, thus:“She had refused to be transferred to her senior mates son whom she had seen born, she has seen the boy from his naked days till he was a young man.... Her body would never warm up towards this child as her man” (156).

Docility and complete subjugation of will is demanded of the woman. Her shadowy movements at the background pleases the male community, thus she is not allowed any form of identity or assertion even through praise names; “Agbon women are forbidden by men from having praise names. Occasionally, wives were called their husband’s praise names and daughters their father’s praise names” (*Stars*...89). In this regard, Akachi Ezeigbo notes in *Gender Issues in Nigeria* that :

Ours is a society where women's achievements are barely recognized. More often than not, women who have been conferred with titles are so honored along with their husbands...the society prescribed silence, reticence, complaisance, patience, and gentleness as the greatest virtues of the feminine gender, thus creating an objective that Virginia Woolf derogatorily described as "the Angel in the house" in her book *A Room of One's own*. Women are exhorted to be long suffering. They refrain from speaking because of their fear of opposition or reprisal from members of their families or even from religious bodies they belong to. (40)

The women are traditionally given a backseat where they lurk around at the background in deference to their superiors (the males). The Amananowei, in expectation of his visitors, the oil explorers, calls on his wife, Marian who was seated at the veranda making new patterns in her hair; "He called her and said, "Please go to the kitchen, visitors are coming around"(Amongst...43). The wife obeyed her husband without hesitation. By implication, the man of the house makes it crystal clear to his wife that she has no business being projected to the fore, that her place remained in the kitchen. This is replicated also in Ojaide's *Stars of the Long Night*, where the women trapped by culture are bound to stay far behind their men in public functions. Gender oppression is often a basic feature in novels written not only in Africa but all over the world. It has its source in religion, tradition and politics. These aspects of society have been structured and solidified by patriarchy to marginalize and silence women. Women often constitute followership. In most societies also, the laws that govern and pattern human behaviour are detrimental to women's progress, leaving them in a state of powerlessness.

The elites in the Niger Delta – the chiefs and elders convene to take important decisions, to the exclusion of their women. The men make decisions while information is handed down to the women who struggle for a space at the background. The narrator in *Yellow Yellow* expresses that "the men claimed that, according to tradition, it was their exclusive right to make all the decisions inside and outside the home. Most times.... they drew the line at women participating in communal meetings on serious town issues" (40). Women's lives in the degraded environment are defined by poverty. From afar, they watch as the rich expatriates live

comfortably from the proceeds of their land. They also watch as the village Heads receive and appropriate bribes received from both the indigenous government and the Multinational Companies.

The injustices against women are further laid bare, as she is blamed for her actions and inactions thus, on the instance of Amraibure's disappearance, Ovhode fidgeted and fluttered at home;

How would she tell people that her husband who had gone fishing has not come back? Women feared to tell others that their husbands were sick. Should the sickness become serious or the man dies the wife who announced the bad news to others would be accused of being a witch and the killer of her dear one. Women were in a double bind when it came to such matters... If she expressed her fear publicly, she might be accused of causing whatever problem her husband was experiencing. And if she kept quiet, she might be accused of not caring for her husband. She would be condemned for whatever she did or did not do. (*Stars of ...*124)

The women however wonder what happened to justice. Why the men delighted in treating women as second fiddle, why the women are preyed upon by the men, why women were servants to cater for the man's needs and comfort. Ojaide, completely inflamed by these stereotypes decries the position of women. He reels out:

Agbon was a land in which women were blamed for whatever went wrong in the family. If a man did not progress in his life, his wife would be accused for witchcraft and of causing the man's wretchedness even if he were lazy. If a couple failed to have children, the wife was blamed... even when Agbon folks knew that many men had wax sperm that could not impregnate women however often they made love. (*Stars of ...*59)

Speaking at the Conference on the People's of the Niger Delta and the 1999 Constitution, Odia Ofeimun expresses his worry over the dichotomization of women especially in the Niger Delta struggle, explaining that the dichotomization that leads to marginalization of one part over the other is inspired by the distinctions made

between the kinds of activity men can participate and women may not. Making a case for the women, Ofeimun insists that women must indeed stand side by side with the men, for if they are subjected to the background, they draw back the hands of time, and as such our collective success is not guaranteed. The writers in the study however suggest that love remains a feminized weapon towards achieving redemption. Kena and Oyeghe's burden over who wears the mother mask is inspired by love. Love for nature and humanity. Kena's love for her sick child which she equates with love for her earth on the one hand, and Oyeghe's love for Obie (who for his commitment and dedication has injected a fresh life in her). The writer reveals Kena's thoughts:

To get Ese (the earth) back on his feet to live normally, she would go to any length, she would cross seven rivers..... She was ready to be tried by ogres and spirits for a healing reward. She would starve, work the farthest possible place, peel her soles, limp or drag herself to wherever promised to heal. (195)

Such is a mothers' love for a child and an earth that must be healed. This strong show of love is felt in Iyabo's prosaic poem in Egbuson's *Love My Planet*, which reads "the earth is the only planet available to me. It is the only planet I know because I have never been anywhere else, in return, I shall give her love...the earth is my mother... she is your mother too... I love my planet" (350). Females in the works studied, are portrayed as ordinary people, undaunted by life's challenges. People who by sheer courage, hard work, dedication, commitment and concerted efforts would break barriers that limit their capabilities. Women who would redeem their images and also redeem their earth. The women know of a fact that the earth has been violated and the only way to appease the land and the gods would be a total cleansing. This is actualized through Kena's performance at the festival. Through the mother mask, all men, women and children would be cleansed, healed and redeemed such that there would be an utter reconciliation with the living and the non-living.

The ecofeminist goal as impressed by Rosemary Reuther, projects the equality of men and women, partnership of both towards the restoration of the environment devoid of class, sex and race. As such in carving the oni-edjo(the mother mask), "Obie wanted the assembly of humans, animals, birds and plants he was convening on the wood to

remain impressed there for all times” (*Stars of ...*161). The mother mask stands as “a mirror through which all men and women, children and adults, would see themselves in a new light” (*Stars of ...*169). The mother mask which incorporates everyone heralds a new light, a new era, a new world in which all in the society would see themselves as equal and closely knitted as one big family.

STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

A stylistic analysis according to Eno Nta in “Style and Contemporary Governance” in Niyi Osundare’s *The State Visit* is to see through the texts for the purpose of discovering the actual message(88).The content of the writer’s work and how the writer weaves this content on paper matter a lot in any literary work. Abrams and Harpham note that “style has traditionally been defined as the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse.How speakers or writers say what it is that they say”(384).Technique refers to the technical devices that the writer employs in unfolding his plot.It is the totality of the writer’s organization of his material to achieve meaning and convey his message to his reader.

The writers in this study make use of words of location/place to show that the novels are environmentally based. These word choices identify the Niger Delta as a peculiar place. The lexicon include words associated with the riverine areas like Niger Delta, swamps, fish, crabs, periwinkles, Island, paddle, oil, crude oil, oil well, lakes, creeks, riverside, pipelines, drill, gas-flaring, spillage, pollution. Proper nouns of persons and places; Ina Binaebi, Zilayefa, Priye, Amraibure, Oyeghe, Tamuno, Saro-Wiwa, Kolokuma, Port harcourt, Bayelsa, Warri, Ijaw, are all locative. Similarly, there is ample use of ecological terms such as trees, forests, flowers, water, streams, air, birds. trunk, green, etc., that mark the texts as eco narratives based on nature-dominated concerns, just as their destruction gives fillip to the message of eco-devastation.

The narratives exude a metaphor of a lost heritage, a negative transformation and a shift from fecundity, peace and rebirth to emptiness, drought and aridity and the consequent migration of biotic lives because of the progressive squelching of the flora and fauna. This epitomizes the life of the woman whose fecundity is daily tortured and peace eroded as result of her ailing environment. In *Love My Planet*, there is a sensory and tactile representation of “naked children”, “barefooted”, “bare breasted women” and “drained eyes”. There is also the use of adverse terms as “poverty”,

“decaying”, “women’s rough palms” “empty baskets”, “thread bare nets”, “groaning bellies”, “tattered children”, “restive youths”, “drooping breasts”, “parched faces” as symbols of devastation, decadence and death.

The writers employ adjectives which convey the plight of the Niger Delta and their land. The people of the Delta and their fauna are described as helpless, thirsty souls, baffled hearts, weak and wasted, faded glory. These adjectives portray not only the extent of environmental damage but also show the unprotected and defenseless plight of the Niger Delta people.

The writers bemoan the stifling of women’s life and vision. Agary reflects this stifling in the lineation of their actions through unusual short lines, the cutting short of the woman’s life span and ecosystem is here reflected through short length in lines and full stops, thus; “Oruama cried. This constant tugboat. This is strange.” (*Amongst...*22), “My mother said. Bring me soap. Bring me towel. Oil Zilayefa” (*Yellow...*2).

The writers employ a lachrymal tone in some of the novels; a tone encased in lament. Agary and John consciously employ this style to elicit sympathy for the human condition. Such emotion of tears draw the attention of men and women of conscience to the plight of the exploited, the oppressed and the subjugated, marooned as it were in their natural habitat. The writers employ weeping and shedding of tears to express sadness, a sense of loss, rape and ravishing loss of innocence. The despoliation of the environment is referred to as a wound, a deep cut by one of the characters in *Amongst the Survivors*; “these wounds will not heal easily even if they do the scars will be with us for a long time” (102). Grandma, oppressed and depressed as a result of the state of their farms and water cries out: “what will I tell my ancestors...

Theirs is an agonizing cry of frustration. Their pains and attendant cries are predicated on the nostalgic remembrance of what the land was like before its degradation and the apparent lack of concern by the perpetrators. The women cry out for lack of fish in the rivers, insisting that something deadlier than war has been unleashed on the inhabitants of the Niger Delta. One of the ladies who could not scramble for the limited fishes Grandma eked out from the sea exclaims: “This is strange. It is strange indeed! Hunger has stricken the people of the Niger Delta. Even during the war...salt, pepper and fish were extremely scarce but not as scarce as what is happening in

Isonibiri today”(111-112).The effect of the tone on the reader is overwhelming and the impact is total. Zilayefa in *Yellow Yellow* bemoans the fact that their waters that flowed with streaks of blue, purple and red as drops of oil escaped from the pipelines that moved wealth from beneath their lands into the pockets of the select few that ruled Nigeria was the same water she drank”(39).

Agary adopts a personal documentation style in *Yellow Yellow*. The reader peers into the life of the protagonist who brings to the fore the violation and debasement of both the land and the woman. The involvement of the protagonist as victim speaking directly to the reader conjures emotional effects. These personal documentations are carriers of Zilayefa’s innate and private experiences. Revealing her travails in a detailed manner draw the reader deeper into her life and finds the reader sharing in her pain. The writers in the novels; *Stars of the Long Night*, *Love My Planet* and *Amongst the Survivors* adopt the omniscient narrator from whose eye and perspective the debilitating situation in the Niger Delta environment is laid bare.

Bildungsroman, described in M. H. Abraham’s *A Glossary of Literary Terms* as “a German term signifying novel of formation or novel of education(growth), focuses on the development of the protagonist’s mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences into maturity” (256). Zilayefa is depicted first in her naivety, a seventeen year old girl, very much an appendage of her mother, disillusioned by their ravaged farmland, troubled by the absence of a father figure in her life and inundated by the wild thoughts of moving away from the village. She evolves as she makes that move to the city. The writer endows her with the zeal and fortitude to undertake the journey from her rural community(wherein she felt trapped) to the city to discover herself. Her stay with her new found mentor, her work experience in the hotel, her deeper quest to discover an absentee father, her sexual relationship with Admiral are core experiences that run through the course of her growth. She eventually emerges, resolute and declarative of what and how her life must be. She declares: “To live is an opportunity for a personal rebirth...I would focus only on completing my education and making my mother proud of me (177 *Yellow...*). Titi in *Stars of the Long Night* who was unjustly sent away, journeyed in a far away land and comes home forty years after, transformed, prosperous, self actualized, mature, thus: “like the cat seeking freedom, she had gone into the forest,

where she could live a life of abandon without Okpara's containment of her potential...she had returned, calm, soft spoken, firm and dignified" (31 *Stars*...).

Egbuson's protagonist in *Love My Planet*, Toundi, perseveres as she stands up to her father whose rejection of her and her siblings are condemnable. She takes recourse to education to transcend the dehumanizing attitude of her father. She adamantly struggles through secondary into the university where she makes her mark in questioning the corruptibility and insensitivity of government functionaries. She grows into a mature lady, whose voice resonates as she advocates for the poverty stricken inhabitants of her degraded Niger Delta. The characters move out from their restricted spaces to their point of personal freedom.

The authors in this study explored the avant garde technique, a term explained by Edward Wilson as "an intellectual or artistic movement in any age that breaks with tradition and therefore seems ahead of its time"(197). Their works are deeply rooted in a tradition of struggle. The avant garde tradition is a revolutionary one. The females discussed in this work show a world of struggle in the face of pains where the women did not resign to fate in a seeming existential situation but continued to exert energy in order to better their lot in an abysmal hopelessness, hence they were able to achieve, amongst all odds, observable success. In spite of the entire terrible situation, there have always been marked efforts by women to achieve survival. The point being made here is that struggle and hope are anecdotes to that light at the end of the tunnel.

Ojaide reveals that "women in Agbon had more than proved themselves in areas where men had been incapable. They worked hard to fend for their families, while some men sat at home and drank gin from morning till night" (*Stars* ...185).The relegation of and discrimination against women in Africa have continued till date but women have struggled in various ways and have surmounted several of the oppressive structures and debilitating stereotypes. Women have been able to achieve inclusiveness and be identified with several activities that reveal that they are credible and strong personalities with potentials. They also make significant contributions to the development of the family and society and challenge the validity of many patriarchal structures that they find obnoxious in current realities. Ojaide deliberately creates in his work female characters who despite their pain and limitations participate in the restoration of their environment. The reader encounters Nene, the priestess who

like Chielo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is revered. She is referred to as the mother of all;

Nene was the mother of all. She was everybody's mother not because of her age... by virtue of her protection of all. She was recognized as the greatest mother in the Land. In her white dress of priesthood, she commanded respect from everybody, young and old...she interceded on behalf of the community for and healthy, peace and prosperity. Her following was large... It was only her voice hastened by priestly candor that the ancestors and gods took seriously. Only the mother of all possessed the dignity to do the invitation that would take gods and ancestors from their respective abodes to be received by Agbon folks. (*Stars ...90*)

The writer endues so much honour on the priestess, who, like the mother earth, oversees the welfare of the inhabitants of the earth. She is considered as the acknowledged one whom the people, ancestors and gods respected.

In like manner, Kena, a woman, would eventually be accorded the irregular honour of wearing the mother-mask. The mother mask, steeped with the responsibility of changing the lives of the people from the mishaps and trials of the past years to a prosperous new era. An individual, 'most appropriately', a man is needed to dance the mother mask (the Oniedjo), but the choice is left for the gods. Everyone hopes or rather believes in Amraibure (a man), but the gods conscientiously takes Amraibure away from the scene in order to give another a chance, a woman! Kena it is also, who after her sojourn in marriage would return to her mother as a widow, saddled with a sick child. Her sick child, Ese, becomes synonymous with her sick community whom she must redeem by wearing the mother mask in the Edjenu festival. Kena fills the vacuum created by Amraibure's disappearance. She takes up the burden of performing the mother mask. She would eventually turn out to be her community's saviour for in wearing the mask and performing the dance, her prayers and gestures would be heard and heeded by the ancestors and gods. She would carry the people's offerings to the gods and eventually save the land. Amraibure, the 'perfect' one for the dance as long as Agbon, the male dominated community was concerned, was missing for days. Kena rises to the occasion as she contends: "Nobody resolves an

entire people's problem with a penis. The woman's womb gave birth to the whole world. Womanhood has the capacity to bear any labour... I can carry the mother of all masks. I can be the great masquerade. I can do it; I surely can" (196).

Kena's action is in swift response to Wangari Maathai, who, in her Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech, insists that "Women are called to assist the earth heal her wounds and in the process heal their own". "A people could not be deficient of a standard bearer" Kena reasoned. "One would always be available, be it man or woman" (247). The entire community would soon discover through Kena's redemptive performance that everyone was of value. The women's courage was emboldened therefore to break forth and overstep the limitations set for them by the community. In her honour (Kena) and by extension, all other women, a new song emerged, no longer a derogatory but an esteemed one. Ojaide's artistic juxtaposition in the narrative of saving the environment by the woman and disrobing the man is symbolic as this sends a note of warning, to the men in respect of their willful denigration of women and the gods. Through empowering a woman (in the place of a man) for the sacrificial role of reconciliation (the reconciliation of the gods and humanity), Ojaide successfully creates a perfect metaphor for the consequence of the men's unjustifiable exploitation of nature and debasement of women.

Agary presents women who refuse to be swallowed by their environment, women whose conditions do not deter from seeking fulfillment. . Bibi loses her farmland but rows farther in search of sustenance. Grandma in *Amongst the Survivors* paddles deep into the sea and moves back to land in her stride to eke out a living. He portrays females, who through their resolve and strong convictions typify a rock. The women in *Yellow Yellow* whose bodies alongside their land are pillaged, yet convinced that education alone can bring equal opportunity for the sexes. They reasoned that it is only through intellectual maturity and economic viability that they can withstand or survive the destabilizing effects of their harsh environment. Sisi encourages Zilayefa to forget all about her elusive father and concentrate on her studies. She says, "study, pass your exams and get your education. If you do that, no one can take your future away from you" (13). Sisi admonishes Zilayefa; "we are all workaday girls here so you too have to pull your weight and learn how to be independent, so that you can take care of yourself and maybe send some money to your mother. The next thing is to get your degree, if you don't have your degree it will be hard for you .You must be

up and doing” (68-69). Education, Zilayefa’s mother believes, is the only channel through which empowerment could be attained by her daughter. As Ezeigbo would say, “women’s empowerment can only be achieved through proper education. Only then can women hope to break the patriarchal power and the age old traditions which combine to slow down women’s progress” (12). Bibi (Zilayefa’s mother) consumed with this belief, considers her daughter’s education paramount. Zilayefa confirms this: “unlike other parents who kept their children busy, my mother would not allow me to do too many chores around the house or follow her into the bush for firewood... It was almost as though she was obsessed, consumed by the idea that my education would save me from what I had yet to understand and what she could not explain. Perchance in saving me, she hoped to save herself” (9). For Bibi, education alone can liberate her and her daughter from their debilitating environment, it will bring them their much desired freedom from the shackles of poverty, as such, she admonishes her daughter; “your books should be your best friends. Spend more time with them than any other friends” (78). In same manner, the violated women in John’s *Amongst the Survivors* agree with the inscription on the school signboard, ‘knowledge is power’, they believe it would take education alone to attain justice over their degraded environment. Grandma therefore expresses her utter amazement on the strength of education and agrees to its redemptive powers, as she beckons her grand child on the need for education:

You must go to school. These party men that you see. I mean the White men, all of them are educated. They are wonderful human beings, they stay in their house boats reading books about the usefulness of our soil and rivers, their books tell them about our forest’s rich resources, and the usefulness of our trees, as they stay inside their houses, they understand our creeks, streams and rivulets even more than the oldest woman in our town. (*Amongst*... 114)

Oyeghe is pushed but not crushed. Having had her agonizing moments and literarily pushed out of marriage, on the grounds of childlessness, she finds fulfillment as she becomes self reliant (concentrating on farming and fishing), enjoying a new lease of life devoid of entanglements nor slavery. She also finds love: “She is now happy and self reliant in many ways... now laughed happily... had been relieved of a burden, slept deeply like a baby... turned into a fresh woman” (*Stars of* ...221). Just like

Chieme in Ezeigbo's *Last of The Strong Ones* who lost out in marriage because of her childlessness "determined to live her life in full" (40), thriving in her kolanut trade and chanting business, she attaches importance to happiness, her voice permeates; "every living being or thing created by Chukwu strives for freedom and deserves to be happy" (70). Oyeghe in her divorced image takes control and pays more attention to her body, as "she did things that enhanced her beauty, and she remained a beautiful woman at all times. Those who knew her were surprised that she was more than ever, becoming more attractive... at an age when other women had started to lose their luster" (*Stars* ...152). In Oyeghe, Ojaide creates a victim who is not further submerged in self pity.

The writers juxtapose the position of nature and that of the woman, drawing out the similitude between the two thus; the creation process for instance is a process of birth, the woman in like manner also brings forth her young. The earth weaves life; the woman does so as well. The woman, like the mother earth takes the huge responsibility of nurturing her children. Mothers' responsibility it is to "clean the children and throw away their shit...pissed upon.... Suffer the disquiet of their children's cries, feed the children when hungry... bathe the children after soiling themselves at play" (*Stars of* ...203). The woman's womb gives shelter to the foetus until delivery. She is also subjected to labour in the process. She is naturally imbued with the capability to endure labour. The land also has the capability to endure labour. The mother, just like the nature loves her children unconditionally. Both give out to the point of starvation, thus "only a mother could suffer deprivation to feed her young... men did not experience the labour that women bore to have her children" (*Stars of* ...99). Eco feminists see these connections of nurturing, mothering, and co-operation between women and nature as a source of women's empowerment and environmental liberation.

Imagistic representations of the woman as a metaphor for nature is portrayed by the writers. Ojaide, in *Stars of the Long Night* describes Oyeghe, the village beauty in relation to nature; He says of her: "she is made out of the rarest materials... Her smile was a heartwarming sun in the harmattan season, her oval face had the smoothness of a full moon...she had the complexion of Agbon's superior palm oil. She had the aura of a goddess... her ageless shape; her oval face... the moon in a permanent fullness in the night of Agbon...no unevenness on her body... everything fell into place in a

harmonious pattern” (156). The same features are ascribed to “mami wata, the beautiful goddess that lives in the sea” (143). The Black Alfara is said to have the capability “to survive all assaults from ants and termites... a stubborn will which ensured its survival” (161). The woman is expressed in the same light. Supple yet tough. “The image of Oyeghe stood between the carver and the tough but supple wood. The woman as far as the carver could tell was resilient like the wood” (162). The Black Alfara whose survival instincts are interpreted in terms of the woman’s survival instincts “would be the

sturdy gate through which the ancestors would cross from the spirit world to the land of humans” (161).

The environment is portrayed by the writers as a metaphor for patriarchy. The environment is abused, battered and pillaged in just the same way that the females are, in their relationship with the opposite sex. Bibi and her daughter on different occasions are abused, deceived, betrayed, ‘raped’, helpless. What the women go through in their traditional societies is what the Niger Delta environment goes through in the hands of multinationals and the indigenous government. The degradation of Bibi’s body by the Greek sailor, the abuse and betrayal of Zilayefa by the Admiral alludes to the degradation of the Niger Delta. The earth, Ojaide reckons is strong, carrying all Agbon on its back. “Women are wont to doing the same type of job daily without recognition” (250). They carry the basal responsibility of their homes gracefully without recognition. The patriarchal society set boundaries for the women. Ojaide in *Stars...* explains that “the line was not drawn with a chalk, it was not done with blood either. It was the limitation the men set for the women who accepted it for lack of nothing to do about it”(33)..

The writers make effective use of the oral tradition to illuminate the rich cultural heritage of the people. The dances and performances in *Stars of the Long Night* reiterate the religious world view of the people, reaffirming their faith in their gods and also using the occasion for social mobilization. Ojaide’s women, through the broom dance weave strong bonds of sisterhood as they yet again strive to rise above their limitation, to redeem both themselves and their environment. On the eve of the Edjenu festival, they dance around the streets with brooms. The broom, a product of nature (the palm tree), which is identified with cleaning the environment, would

sweep the Agbon community clean of every filth. The putrefaction in their environment which is engendered by man would be cleansed by virtue of the broom dance. The cleansing would redeem the earth. Toundi in Egbuson's *Love My Planet* sets up an NGO called Clean Daglobe, with the conviction that "anyone who cleaned their corner of the world was cleaning the globe" (75). In another way, these united women (both wives and daughters), would by this all important performance, redeem their images, restoring dignity to womanhood and motherhood. This cleaning which would hopefully salvage the land would acknowledge the woman, the unsung individual, "they (women) who are the eyes of the world, who go into every nook and cranny to remove dirt, who soil themselves (after their services), are thrown into a closet" (209). While performing, they declared that all women deserved respect and those who ignored them would be swept away like dirt, their insistence being that they are no longer to be trampled upon nor excluded from humanity, but must be allowed to share in the spaces they helped create. Together, they question and vehemently reject unjust practices foisted on their bodies by the male folk. Aggrieved, the women speak out:

Sex goes deep into our body, sex should be treated with solemnity. We should not laugh when the men think we are stupid. We are their playthings and we behave to them as if they were our gods. Your man calls you whenever he wants, you cannot tell him whenever you want him... and if you should open your mouth to ask.... he would wonder whether you were a wife or a prostitute. (*Stars* ...206)

The fact that the gods play a significant role in the life of the living is portrayed. Ojaide incorporates in his work the people's affinity with these gods. He relies heavily on Aridon – the god of memory. Aridon's devotees according to Ojaruega "in Urhobo serve, the god with a rite that involves a thread that symbolically, leads one back in memory and a lamp that also symbolically, brightens the memory for sharp recollection" (500). Tefe the story teller in *Stars of the Long Night* "prepared for every performance by invoking Aridon's direct assistance. Aridon blessed his tongue to be articulate and made his memory an indelible picture" (104). Tefe, through his dexterity in delivery is portrayed as a historian as well as a moral compass; it is through his story that the moral values of his people are beckoned. His story of the couple whose wickedness towards the beggar brings grave consequences to their

family calls out all the people in the society, both leaders and the led who are selfish. The story explains the marginalized condition of the less privileged class and makes a wry commentary on the selfishness of the rich, noting also greed, corruption and desire as the undoing of the country, Nigeria.

The writers employ also the use of songs to achieve aesthetic pleasure as well as sonorous beauty. Songs according to I. D. Nwoga “are composed...dealing with varying degrees of seriousness or humour with the failures and successes of society, and private or public individuals, expressing in general terms the deepest beliefs of society”(104). Kena’s bold move, her ability to fill the void in Agbon, her daring acts of fulfilling the need of her people earned her and the entire women a new song. The villagers praise her as they sing:

This thing has confounded the mouth

It is true it happened

An Okpara woman did not only wear a mask

But the very great one(*Stars*...260).

Tanure Ojaide as well as Million John captures the lushness of the pristine Niger Delta environment, its greenery, ebullience and the esteem which the people accorded their birth place before the arrival of the exploiters, thus Ojaide in *Stars of the Long Night* shows off the people’s confidence in their land as they sing:

Great Agbon! Great Agbon! Great Agbon!

Glory to the land of my birth

Glory to the land of my ancestors

In the next world that awaits us all

It is still Agbon that I want to come to

Everlasting glory to the land of my ancestors.

While John in *Amongst the Survivors* also showcases the happy inhabitants of Bayelsa in their pristine environment as they sing:

Bayelsa State is my home

Is my happy home, oh! oh! oh!

Bayelsa State is my happy home

Is my happy home(29).

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Humans crave to satisfy their yearnings and this need continue to hurt the nonhuman world. Natural resources are depleted at an alarming pace without a commensurate means for their replenishment. The non preservation of forest trees and wild life as well as natural sea shores in the wake of modern architectural development and the exploitative activities of oil explorers are seen in the study as key factors responsible for the ongoing environmental despoliation in the Niger Delta today. The forests undoubtedly play a special role; not only are the trees important in protecting watersheds, regulating water flows and maintaining soil fertility and air quality, it provides the benefits of food, fuel and herbs. The decimation of the forest trees therefore constitute a hounding of the environment. Also, activities orchestrated by oil explorers which include gas flaring, oil spillage and industrial effluents that are disposed in mangroves and water across the Niger Delta batter her environment as well. These distortions however, not only changes the natural environment but also results in decrease in the capacity of ecosystems to support the subsistence needs of the ever-growing population of the human world, the nonhuman world is also as a result of these, on the verge of complete annihilation.

This study showed that people of the Niger Delta depend on fishing, farming, and trading for sustenance. The researcher established that theirs is a close relationship with the land and strong emphasis placed on the care of the environment, believing it to be the life-giving source of the people and the dwelling place of their ancestors. The forests have provided for the people the base for lumbering, canoe carving and related crafts, traditional medicine, food and food additives, hunting and fibre-related gathering. Thus, livelihoods of the majority of the population continually depend on utilization of natural resources. The social consequences of the unleashed environmental nightmare, for the inhabitants is unbearable; their farmlands are expropriated, pipelines often crisscrossed valuable farmland and poisonous gases flared into the atmosphere close to communities. Aging oil equipment often failed and leaked oil into communities and farms without adequate clean-up or compensation. The standards applied by Multinational companies are completely destructive of the

environment, as well as the inhabitants whom are dependent upon the land and rivers for their survival.

The study portrayed various shades of degradation observable in the Niger Delta, ranging from the degradation of place, moral and ethical cultures, health and decadence in leadership. It showed that the degradation of place (land, air and water) unfortunately amounts to massive destruction of terrestrial and aquatic life. People are displaced of their farmlands and are forced to move as attested to by Zilayefa and her mother in *Yellow Yellow*.

The destruction of moral and ethical cultures of the people has also been emphasized; having been exposed to ‘easy money’ by the explorers and their local partners in crime, the young boys in the area turn wild, they take to alcoholism and violence while the girls take to prostitution, the elders also sear their consciences in order to receive money (bribe) barely enough to achieve any meaningful feat.

Failure in leadership is also explored as a major contributor to the degradation thriving in the area. The primitive accumulation of wealth and insensitivity exhibited by those in public offices is the bane of leadership in the country. The enthronement of self by politicians and even top civil servants have subjected the nation into a grueling state of despair and as such resulted in total breakdown. Basic infrastructural amenities are nonexistent as a result of the corruption engraved in the leadership whose actions endorse the pillaging of the environment. State corruption; the prevalence of fraud and acute mismanagement of oil revenue, a development which accounts for the non-translation of massive revenues from oil resources into meaningful physical development accounts for the predicaments of the Niger Delta people.

The study showed that poverty, which is in part as a result of the degradation, pervades the land. Poverty is exacerbated by environmental degradation. The damage brings about a disruption of the people’s means of livelihood. This is manifest in Bibi’s letter to her daughter where she, (Bibi) stated that she was looking for “some other work as farming was getting less and less profitable” (*Yellow*78). The people are turned beggars in their ironically rich environment. Oil has however contributed maximally to the rise of the nation’s economy but has proved detrimental to the life of

the ordinary man whose natural environment is daily battered by oil exploration processes.

Maladministration as explored by the writers is a direct consequence of the despoliation in the Niger Delta. The intrusion of oil explorers, their substandard practices and the indigenous governments' acceptance of them has put the environment and its inhabitants under threat. Million John in his *Amongst the Survivors* profusely expresses nostalgia over the once healthy environment his people enjoyed which has now become a shadow of itself as a result of the intrusion of oil explorers, thus: "Terma Gbema, the village situated in one of the tributaries of the River Nun, that led into the delta planes, the coast of the Atlantic Ocean...the forest, very dense and evergreen...the River Nun water was the only source of water supply for the villagers. It served them very well because the salinity was less than one percent" (29). Through the study, it was found that humans, the prodigal children of mother earth are seen through their activities, as a breed that lack filial love. The irresponsible activities of individuals and corporate bodies amount to waste and degradation of nature's resources.

This willful devastation of a natural ecosystem, the dearth of a healthy, balanced, independent and stable culture presents unacceptable human experiences to the inhabitants of the area, particularly, females. Vividly portrayed in the novels and supported by other literatures are realities of the degradation of women in the Niger Delta setting. The four novels used as basis for the problem bring these realities expressly to the fore. Pollution of large areas of farm lands and bodies of water delineate pages of the novels.

Oil is shown in the study as a natural mineral resource that possesses value and presides over life and living in Nigeria. Oil is presented as a life blood that lubricates but also burns the arteries of the nation, endows life but also murders, prospers the nation but also causes adversities, sustains the economy and has the paradoxical potentials of wounding and healing, of sickness and therapy. While it enriches a few, it impoverishes a bulk of the population. While it erects mansions and other magnificent edifices, it pollutes and degrades the environment that houses it. The degradation of the natural environment is presented as a dislocation of hope for the woman, a killer

of dreams as expressed by Zilayefa; “the day my mother’s farm land was overrun by crude oil was the day her dream for me started to wither”(10).

In the Niger Delta as has been observed through the selected works, women play critical roles in the region’s economy especially in rural communities where they are producers of food. They have the responsibility not only for producing but also for processing water, fuel, health, childcare, sanitation and the entire range of survival needs of the home. Women also participate in the commercial sector and local enterprise to generate income to meet the needs of their families. Traditionally, when an Ogoni woman gets married, her husband is required to give her a piece of land to farm. It is from this farm that she feeds her family and grows food for sale in order to buy other staples. This tradition also allowed women to enjoy a measure of independence. The fertility of the soil made it very fruitful for agriculture, producing high yields. The bountiful harvests left time for the women to invest in cultural activities such as art, dancing, singing, and pottery. However, the constant acquisition of new territory for oil exploitation and the resulting pollution from the industry has left the women with no means to feed or support their families. This has given rise to tensions in the home and community.

The work showed that the women’s ability to make a greater impact on the economy has been undermined by a combination of factors. One such factor relates to their general disempowerment due to environmental challenges. They are the most affected by the pollution of communal ponds and rivers that supply drinking water. The health hazards of polluted waters and toxic waste are borne more by females. The polluted landscape and water contribute to a decimation of women’s means of sustenance-farming and fishing. As a result, they are almost unable to feed their household. Women’s lives in this region are made difficult and unbearable. There is a life of intense struggle and dim hope. The females in the region are pillaged just as their environment is. They, unfortunately, constitute majority of the poor, the uneducated, the marginalized, ignorant and diseased. In order to achieve survival and access sustenance, the young girls/women respond to the lust of the oil workers who in return give paltry sum to them. The result include rising incidences of female prostitution, teenage pregnancies and broken homes.

The psychological experiences of the women and young girls in the novels were also explored. The researcher showed how their traumatic experiences in their local environment subject some of the women into acute mental and emotional pain. Trauma, permeates into their being, causing much more harm in the lives of these women who daily encounter stifling conditions of living.

The study showed also that females in the area are victims of unfavourable cultural practices. Women receive the blame on issues regarding childlessness in marriage. A woman goes through obnoxious burial practices in order to prove she has no hand in her husband's death. She is marginalized during claims and collection of compensation arising from land acquisition, pollution and devastation of farmland and fishing sites. The girl child is often forced to marry at a certain age and to an arranged spouse against her will.

In this study, there was a portrayal of irresponsibility on the part of the men; the local elites (the men) receive pittance and as such consent to the Multinational's battering of the environment. Some of the men who are seen also as heads of household seemingly seat back in defeat guzzling down their gin (ogogoro) while the women remained in the farms scratching out food from what is left in their degraded farmlands.

Despite their constraints however, the women refuse to be decimated. Irrespective of their many environmental, gender and cultural challenges, they remain undaunted. In the works therefore, the female voices resonate as they insist that all life forms are sacred. Females are seen in the study as indispensable partners in the quest for solutions besetting the society. Individuals, who rather than allow their situations stifle them to a halt, take actions towards the rescue of humanity. The writers enliven their heroines, presented females who through bonding and sharing of personal odysseys weaved networks of sisterhood. The women therefore, though victims muster strength and courage in order to assume the role of full human beings who would attain the much desired victory for herself and her environment.

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