

**WOMEN AS ECO-ACTIVISTS IN SELECTED NIGER DELTA NOVELS AND
PLAYS**

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this research was carried out by **NKECHINYERE CHUKWU** of the Department of English, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

To God,

My tower of strength

And to

Uchenna Chukwu and Amb. Matthias Okafor

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ABSTRACT

Eco-activists, including those portrayed in Niger Delta literature, are advocates of sustainable environmental practices. Existing studies on the struggle against environmental degradation in Niger Delta literature have concentrated on men as leading eco-activists, while women are marginalised and treated as victims. This study was, therefore, designed to examine the roles of women as eco-activists in selected Niger Delta novels and plays, with a view to establishing the significance of women in the struggle for environmental regeneration.

Ecofeminism was adopted as framework, while interpretive design was used. Six novels: Vincent

Egbuson's *Love My Planet*, May Ifeoma Nwoye's *Oil Cemetery*, Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*, and Promise Ogochukwu's *Outrage*; and two plays: Tess Onwueme's *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said It* were purposely selected for their shared thematic foci on ecological issues and women's eco-resistance activities. The texts were subjected to literary analysis.

Collectively and individually, eco-activism is championed by women in the selected texts. In *Love My Planet*, *Outrage*, *The Activist*, *Oil Cemetery*, *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said It*, women collectively protest against environmental injustice. In *Love My Planet*, women engage in tree planting activities to enhance environmental regeneration. In *Outrage*, women halt the activities of KP Oil in protest against environmental pollution. In *Oil Cemetery* and *The Activist*, women's nude protests show the seriousness of their agitation against environmental pollution. However, in *Love My Planet*, *Oil Cemetery*, *Oil on Water*, and *Yellow-Yellow*, women individually protest against environmental degradation. Toundi, in *Love My Planet*, protests against environmental despoliation by creating awareness on the effects of gas flaring in Daglobe Delta. She also, through her article entitled, "I care for the environment", sensitises the people on the need to care for the environment. In *Oil on Water*, Boma joins a religious group to preserve Irikefe Island. In *Oil Cemetery*, Rita sues and wins her law suit against Zebulon Oil Company for degrading the environment of Ubolu community. Zilayefa, in *Yellow-Yellow*, courageously extricates herself from the web of financial dependence on environmental exploiters in Port Harcourt, which metaphorically suggests that the Niger Delta should sever herself from any relationship that encourages environmental pollution in the region. In all the texts, except Onwueme's *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said It*, women privilege non-violent protest in their resistance against environmental degradation. In *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said It*, women uphold a more radical approach to eco-activism by abducting the exploiters of environment to demand the stoppage of environmental pollution in Sufferland and Hungeria respectively. Female characters in all the texts resist environmental despoliation.

The selected novels and plays depict women as eco-activists, and the significance of their resistance and pro-active initiatives in checking environmental degradation in the region of Niger Delta.

Keywords: Niger Delta literature, Eco-activism in literature, Women and the environment

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Women and Nature: An Overview

Women have deeper affinity with nature. This is because they depend on nature's resources for meaningful existence. They rely on land, forests, rivers and air for provision of food, clean water, fuel, medicinal herbs, income generation and fresh air. Dankelman and Davidson (1988) support this view by acknowledging that ninety percent of women from the third world depend on land for their survival. As a result of these benefits, the women tend to preserve the environment more than anyone else. Certain roles and features that women and nature share in common also contribute to knit their relationship. The connection between women and nature is attributed to similar nurturing characteristics that they share in common. In the wake of technological advancement, land, rivers, forests and air, which serve as sources of women's needs are degraded and the effects are greatly felt by women. They suffer unemployment, poverty, diseases as well as gynaecological problems. This explains why Jahan (2008) asserts that women suffer most from degradation of the environment. Also, such roles as "daily manager of natural resources, caretakers of environment and decision-maker of domestic consumption and production patterns" [played by women] "become harder through environmental degradation." Nasrin (2012: 151)

Advancement in science and technology also contributes to displacing women of the above roles as pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, hybridisation of crops, and mechanisation of agricultural activities are introduced. These deny women natural knowledge and techniques of conservation of natural resources. It also has unemployment implication for people in general and women in particular, especially in some parts of Africa where the responsibility to provide for the family is more on the woman.

Dankelman and Davidson (1988) observe that as a result of the above, women's only means of control over their livelihoods is threatened; their sources of resources continue to dwindle while their responsibilities continue to increase (Jahan, 2008). The above problems that affect women physically are also reflected in their image in literary representation. Women, especially in literary works, are sometimes portrayed as victims. Such an image is perhaps incontestable due to societal vices and environmental decadence which principally affect women, especially in the developing countries of the world. These societal deformities include various forms of abuse, human trafficking, sexual harassment, verbal assault, violence of all kinds, intimidation, among others affect women most.

Nasrin (2012) has identified western colonisation, technological advancement in agriculture, the sharpening worldwide division of labour, religious fundamentalism among others as some factors that have brought extra problems for women. Among them, she agrees that "environmental degradation is the most and latest threat to women" (165) especially with the increase in climate change. In recent times, climate change induces threats to the existence of human and non-human entities. This has attracted global attention such that environmental regeneration has become urgent and paramount in global discussion. As a result, every field of study deems it necessary to participate in the creation of awareness on the need to care for the environment if planet earth must continue to exist meaningfully. Literature is not left out in this project. Creative writers engage literature towards achieving this goal. Considering the fact that women suffer victimisation most in time of environmental crisis, writers deploy their artistry to interrogate the women's space with regard to championing the cause of protecting the environment. In the late 1960s, women's awareness and their connection with the

environment were primarily initiated by Boserup with a book titled *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970). She argues that the role of women in terms of environmental sustainability is undermined and therefore, requires some sort of awareness.

In “Eco-feminism: role of women in environmental governance and management,” Mukherjee (2013) admits that women are closer to nature than men and this makes them perfect managers of the eco-system. They try to preserve the eco-system because their survival is tied to it. The rural women, for instance, largely depend on the forest to meet her daily needs of water, food, fuel, fruit, condiment, medicinal herbs, and others. The attitude and perspective of women to the environment is different from the men's. Women view the environment as an important resource for survival. As a result, there is an immediate instinct towards preserving and regenerating it for sustainability of life. Annabel (1991) affirms that in India, rural women collect dead woods in the forest for fuel rather than cut down live trees. This preservative instinct is also common in many rural as well as urban communities in Africa. The dependence on nature for survival is common among Third World women (Agarwal (1997). As a result, they play essential roles in the preservation and management of natural resources such as soil, trees, forests, water bodies and others. Literature is used to capture this reality. This study, therefore, explores how the roles of women in regeneration of the Niger Delta eco-system are depicted in selected novels and plays on environmental crisis in the region.

Phallogocentrism simply relates to privileging of the masculine (the phallus) in terms of social relations or bias towards male power. Feminist discourse reacts to the physical, economic and political tyranny of patriarchal states. From the pioneer feminists such as Virginia Woolf, Mary Wollstonecraft to the contemporary exponents of feminism, emphasis has been on emancipation of women from the grip or control of male dominated society. This control is however not limited to women but extends to the environment.

Human beings, out of quest for power and control and for the acquisition of material things, tend to forget the foundation of their existence which is located in a healthy ecosystem. Ecosystem is a web that comprises human and non-human members that live and interact interdependently. The interdependent relationship that exists among

human and non-human beings is what makes the ecosystem complete. If by omission or commission the ecosystem is distorted, survival of humans alongside the non-humans would be at risk. This explains why Okuyade (2013: ix) opines that “the non-human world appears to be more important than the human since it provides the material support base for the latter”. This simply foregrounds the significance of environment and importance of environmental preservation and sustainability. Mishra (2011) concurs with this opinion by stating that:

Today we live in a world of tropical warmth, chronic drought, desertification, deforestation, acidifying of oceans, frequent coastal inundation, tsunami, cyclones, increasing food and shelter shortage. It is a global phenomenon. Hence, the whole world whether partially or fully affected, should come forward and launch a global campaign with honesty for the service of environment and the restoration of healthy environment. (1)

This foregrounds that irrespective of race, gender, tribe, and religion, everyone requires a healthy environment to make a worthwhile existence. Environment plays a significant role in the life of every human being. For this reason, care for the environment becomes the responsibility of all human beings.

The link between women and nature is metaphorically expressed in literature. Such feminine attributes of fertility and nurturing are associated with both women and nature. Hutner (2010:2) further elucidates that:

The Earth is depicted (both currently and historically) in and protective (stereotypically maternal); sexualised and feminised terms. ...nature is portrayed as fertile, nurturing, seductive (observed and possessed by men); and wild, dark, and dangerous (needing to be tamed and civilized).

The association between women and the environment is not passive but saturated with creativity which leads to the maintenance of life (Shiva, 1994). Shiva's postulation is quite different from most views on women and the environment, which usually portray women as victims of environmental degradation. Domination of nature is akin to oppression of women. Just as women are treated as objects to be used and dumped, nature is exploited and abandoned when it becomes irreparably degraded and unproductive. This explains why women feel most the effects of environmental degradation. In such a situation, it

appears that they are overcome by the situation evident in their emotional outburst of weeping or lamentation. Their voices are of the frustrated, helpless, marginalised, hopeless and victimised. The same portraiture is noticed in the literary works that are produced about such situations. But Shiva seems to have a counter view when she asserts that “the women who participate in and lead ecological movements in different parts of the world are not speaking merely as victims. Their voices are the voices of liberation and transformation which provide new categories of thought and new exploratory directions.”(5) She further illustrates that in the perspective of women’s involvement in survival struggles, which are simultaneously struggles for protection of nature, women and nature are intimately related, and their domination and liberation are similarly linked. She goes further to explain that:

In their fight to survive the onslaughts of both, women have begun a struggle that challenges the most fundamental categories of western patriarchy – its concepts of nature and women, and of science and development. Their ecological struggles are aimed simultaneously at liberating nature from ceaseless exploitation and themselves from limitless marginalisation. They are creating a feminist ideology that transcends gender and a political practice that is humanly inclusive.” (ibid)

This ecological struggle by the women that is aimed at liberating, restoring, and preserving the essence of nature is now recognised as ecofeminism. At the forefront of such struggles are Rachel Carson, Vandana Shiva, Wangari Maathai, Petra Kelly, Lois Gibbs, Julia Butterfly Hill as well as many other women around the world who channel their activism towards environmental preservation and regeneration. Eco-activism, any effort that is made by an individual or a group of people to preserve or regenerate the environment, is depicted by the above-mentioned women and others in one way or another. This study, therefore, examines the roles of women as eco-activists in selected Niger Delta novels and plays.

1.1 African Literature and the Environment

African writers are important in society; they remind the people of the past, make them more aware of their present in order to usher them into the future. They are

conscious of their responsibility to the society. Echenim (2004:21) corroborates this view by admitting that “writers consider that theirs is a sacred mission which involves imparting knowledge on social and cultural phenomena which characterise society, and thereby creating social and political awareness in their readership.” Nigerian writers have continued to rise to the occasion by using their works to make the people to become more conscious of the current state of things especially in their locality. One of Nigeria’s great literary writers is Tanure Ojaide whose poetry finds expression in his advocacy for environmental resuscitation in the Niger Delta. He is regarded as an environment-conscious poet. Perhaps more famous is late Ken Saro-Wiwa, a writer cum activist, whose literary and physical activism centre on the struggle against the despoliation of Niger Delta eco-system. Therefore, the searchlight of Nigerian writers has continued to examine diverse socio-political and cultural issues which have emanated in the region as a result of environmental degradation.

African literary writers respond to the issues of environment in their writings. They use their works to reflect the significance of the environment to African communities. For instance, the caves and groves (forest) have both cultural and religious significance. An instance is seen in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, where Agbala, the oracles that presides over the affairs of the people of Umuofia, is said to live “on the hills and in the caves.” (1958:39) Also, in Ojaide’s *The Activist*, Ezeani, the traditional herbalist who cures Udoma and his wife of barrenness, lives in a cave that is situated inside the forest. This is indicative of the importance of the African environment in meeting the socio-cultural and religious needs of the people.

It is worthy of note that in many African settings, the herbalist is believed to be inspired supernaturally, this explains why they usually live in a forest or a cave, places that are believed to be the abode of supernatural beings. In this case, caves and forests become spiritual house power of the herbalists. But in a situation where caves and forest are destroyed, the people are bound to be faced with a lot of crises. The problems that the spiritual beings would usually guide people to solve are now rampant and unattended to. Herbs which serve medicinal purposes for the African people are got from the natural environment. Yero (2019) in *Naja* explains that herbs are used by midwives to make

delivery faster for women in Northern Nigeria. For instance, Mai Faskare's daughter was given a cup of herbal medicine made from a herb called 'hannu' and "she delivered in no time." (64)

In East Africa, Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of the most influential writers who use their works to raise consciousness about the environment, land especially. His works centre primarily on the struggle for land between two races, Africans and Europeans. He makes this point clear when he explains that "the basic objective of Mau Mau revolutionaries was to drive out the Europeans... and give back to the Kenyan peasants their stolen land." (1982: 28) Simon, Akung and Bassey (2014) lay emphasis on the significant role that land plays in the lives of Africans. The study submits that land is tied to people's cultural, spiritual and physical heritage. Simon (2010:155) also opines that "land ... is regarded as a sacred entity as well as symbol of life and status". This is why struggle for land ownership has always led to conflict among people in Africa. In the case of the Niger Delta, struggle for ownership of land where crude oil is found has generated conflicts and its impact has made life totally unbearable for the people. Ojaide (2013:vi) sums up the point thus:

The Niger Delta area of Nigeria [*is*] where multinational oil corporations have done massive environmental damage through oil spills, blowouts, gas flares, and other forms of ecological despoliation. The health hazards are enormous and go unchecked, such as the methane and other chemicals that poison the people from air they breathe, the land they farm, and the water they drink.

The people of the region are faced with a deleterious situation owing to the degradation of the environment by gas flaring and oil spillage. The exploration and exploitation of crude oil has brought a lot of woes to the people. Due to release of dangerous gas into the air, ailments like asthma, bronchitis, cancer and their likes are commonly suffered by the people. Chinaka (2011: 30) unveils that:

The flaring of gas has the tendency of unlashng such diseases as cancers, asthma, bronchitis, blood disorder, etc. subsequently, against the region's ecosystem, the people are forced to share their neighbourhood with such unfriendly phenomena as acid rain, global heat, deforestation, wildfires, contaminated toxic waters, etc.

The negative impact of oil exploitation seems to have outweighed the benefit. Despite the fact that the Niger Delta is a host to the major source of the country's revenue, the discovery and exploitation of oil in the region turned to what Ushie (2011:531) and Ojaruega (2011:496) describe as "a curse." The resources obtained from the region are used to develop other parts of the country. Nevertheless, the region still remains underdeveloped and backward in terms of education, infrastructure, socio-economic progress, health facilities, political stability, etc. No wonder Ojaide (1996:122) and Awhefeada (2013:96) describe the situation as "oil boom that has become doom" for the people of the region.

The exploration and exploitation of oil in the Niger Delta has negative effects on the environment as well as the people of the region. This has attracted attention from writers and critics. Oil politics and its attendant struggle is what give the literature of the Niger Delta its uniqueness. What is commonly noticed in the literature of the region from the colonial to the post-independent eras is the lachrymal voice of protest. The writers nostalgically lament degradation of the pristine environment that made life more meaningful in the pre-colonial era. Niyi Osundare (1986: xiv-xv), in his poetry collection, *Eye of the Earth*, vividly describes this past as:

A remembered landscape, echoes of an Eden long departed when the rain forest was terrifyingly green though each tree, each vine, each herb, each beast, each insect, had its name in the baffling baptism of Nature. 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 timber merchants [with their] exploitative improvidence.

The colonial and post-independence periods provide the roadmap which set the African literary landmark as it is today. Colonial effects, among other postcolonial experiences, are vividly reflected in African literature. The African literary writers lament the loss of individual as well as collective independence and every other negativity that come with colonialism. In East Africa, the loss of land is greatly mourned. To East Africans, loss of land means loss of identity, dignity and the very human essence. This is one of the pronounced thematic preoccupations in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's literary works. In South Africa, excruciating pains suffered from apartheid practices are vividly reflected in the works produced within that period. Writers lament a great deal the inhuman treatment

suffered by South Africans as a result of racial discrimination. In West Africa and Central Africa, the effects of colonialism, especially the 'loss' that Africans experienced during colonial period are glaring in the works that are produced in that period. In Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal*, the protagonist, Meka, is a quintessential example of victim of loss. Nnolim (2009:257) rightly illustrates that:

Having lost her pride through slavery and colonialism, modern African literature arose from the ashes of her past experiences. It becomes a literature with a strong sense of loss of dignity; loss of our culture and tradition; loss of our religion, loss of our land; loss of our very humanity.

This loss also reflects in the Niger Delta ecosystem. Literary writers use their works to mourn the loss of pristine Niger Delta ecosystem. The disappearance of flora and fauna, and rapid depreciation of human life is lamented in their literary works. Tone of lament is greatly reflected in most of the titles of literary works produced about environmental crisis in the region.

Okpewho's *Tides* suggests instability of life in the region. Obari's *Canticle of a Broken Glass* suggests chattered dream of better life the people expect from oil exploitation. Also, Okere's *The River Died* reflects the termination of hope. While Ogbowei's *Song of a Dying River* revolves around subject matter of the aquatic life that is going into extinction, Onyema's *Crude Waves of the Delta* portrays impaired hope of the people of the region who thought that exploitation of crude oil in the region would bring a better future but that hope is dashed. Abagha's *Cry Niger Delta* suggests frustration. Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* focuses on the emotional distress that the Niger Delta people have been subjected to because of environmental degradation. In Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood*, readers relate with the themes of deceitfulness and disappointment that come with establishment of oil business in the region. Ogochukwu's *Outrage* is indicative of the tone of 'anger and bitterness' expressed by people of the region against environmental injustice. Nwoye's *Oil Cemetery* x-rays characters battle with hopelessness and pathetic death caused by explosion of oil pipes and oil related crisis. Nengi-Ilagha's *Condolence* suggests mourning of disappearing landscape of the Niger Delta. While Million's *Shadows of the River Nun* portrays degradation of natural

environment. Apoko's *Tears in the Basket* shows lamentation over degraded environment which renders the efforts of the farmers and the fishermen futile. These and many other titles of literary works on environmental problems in the region unveil the agony that the Niger Delta people experience as a result of oil exploration and exploitation in the region.

The people of the region engage in protest to express their dissatisfaction with environmental injustice. At the initial stage of the struggle, they lament over their fading environment but employ more revolutionary strategies when the lamentation seems not to have yielded the desired result. The people protest to demand for positive changes. The entrapment of the people in a degraded environment as it is captured in their writings has given birth to protest tone that is common to their literary productions. This gives literature of Niger Delta what Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2011) refer to as dual aesthetics of lachrymal and the revolutionary. Whereas the lachrymal justifies the protest by drawing attention to the suffering, anguish, oppression, dehumanisation, subjugation as well as environmental degradation, the revolutionary spurs the people to fight against such ills.

In the world over (literary world inclusive), protest is one of the veritable tools that can be used to achieve necessary change. Ushie (2011) refers to protest literature as a distinct form of writing in Nigeria. African writers adopt this type of writing with the view to exposing ills and deformities in a society in order to demand for changes. Certainly, writers on the Niger Delta adopt protest writing as a means of resistance to injustice in the region. Onuekwusi (1986:212) describes this category of writers as those who “not only highlight in very bold terms the weaknesses and calumny of society and the causes of these, but also propose revolutionary trends that will hopefully restore the permanent values of society – justice, freedom and human dignity.” Udentia (1993: xix) also describes this kind of writing as “the literature of the angst-filled existential despair of critical realism”. Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2011:55) corroborate this view by stating that “the Niger Delta is a veritable practising arena for revolution-inclined writers” who use their works to demand for positive changes in the region.

The creative writers deploy their intellectual prowess towards eco-activism and to achieve what Okuyade (2013: 152) refers to as ‘eco-literacy’; which is not only meant to

expose the level of devastation that is done to the natural environment but also to show “the sense of immediacy and compelling urgency needed to remedy the situation.” (Awhefeada, 2013:97) Among these writers are the poets, the playwrights and the novelists who use their creativity to promote the cause of environmental conservation, remediation and restoration (Bassey, 2001) in the Niger Delta.

1.2 Niger Delta Women and Eco-activism

It is on record that in July 2002, over two thousand Niger Delta women converged at Escravos Tank Farm, the largest Chevron oil terminal located in Warri, Delta state, Nigeria to protest against the oil company for environmental damage caused by its activities in the Niger Delta. Participation of women in that protest in such a large number at the time when most of the primary texts used in this study have not been published, attests that women’s eco-activism does not just take place only in literary world. Existence of such acts in literary works is a documentation of actions initiated by women of the region in their physical domain. Since then, women of the region in different approaches engage in eco-activism evident in eco-activism displayed by female characters in the es under study. For instance, Mama Nengi’s environmental activism in *Outrage* is a good attestation that women’s struggle against environmental injustice in the Niger Delta is as old as the problem itself. It shows that before now, the women have been at the forefront of eco-activism. Boma and the solidarity women group in the same novel also fit into this instance because of the significant roles they play in the protest against environmental despoliation. Niger, Benue, and Obida in *Then She Said It* and Oshimi, River Niger, Imo and Omi in *What Mama Said* are examples of women who actively participated in the struggle against degradation of the environment. Rita in *Oil Cemetery* and Ebi in *The Activist* just like Toundi in *Love My Planet* deserve a good place in citing examples of women who dare all obstacles to preserve the environment.

The roles played by the afore-mentioned women are indications that women are in forefront of eco-activism. Little wonder Shiva (1994:6) asserts that “as far as the environment is concerned, there is no better person to be informed or used than the woman because her life is closely woven with it.” She equally observes that since the 1970s, women’s groups and organisations have been very active in promoting

environmental awareness, education and protection. But before then, Carson from the United States published a book titled *Silent Spring* (1962), which focuses on the danger of pesticides on the environment and its inhabitants. It creates some sorts of awareness on the need to stop such human activities that have negative impact on the environment.

In Africa, environmental activism championed by women cannot be mentioned without acknowledging the remarkable effort of Wangari Maathai from Kenya who through her eco-activism initiated a project of planting trees in order to restore lush vegetation in Kenyan society. With the establishment of Green Belt Movement as one of her eco-intervention strategies, she distinguishes herself as one of the most recognised women eco-activists in Africa in her time. She mobilised other women in Kenya to plant trees in order to preserve the environment. The United Nations conference on Environment and Development, otherwise known as the Earth Summit was held in Rio in June 1992. It was a gathering of women from different parts of the world to deliberate on the issues of environmental health as being critical to meaningful development. It established women as key players in environmental management and conservation of natural resources. The Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration states that: “women play vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieving sustainable development”.

The gathering proves that the whole world is more aware and has come to the recognition of the indispensability of women if the Earth and its inhabitants must be preserved. In the same way, the awareness has been recorded in various fields of studies, literature inclusive. The need to preserve the Niger Delta environment and the effort made by the women to that effect is reflected in the literary creativity of the region. The women from the region take active participation in the struggle against environmental degradation. Ekwierhoma and Yacim (2011:261) lend credence to this by asserting that “women are not left out of this struggle...The women who have taken up arms alongside their male counterparts defy the stance of dramatic creativity that seeks to limit the Niger Delta women to the periphery of community rather than the centre where power refers”. Environmental degradation has many tentacles, in the form of contaminated water bodies, polluted air, polluted land, deforestation and their negative effects are usually enormous.

The Niger Delta is one of the regions in Africa whose ecosystem has been adversely affected. The water bodies are polluted by oil spillage. Land pollution and destruction of vegetation also occur; as a result, land becomes infertile for any agricultural purpose. This goes a long way to negatively affect the Niger Delta people who depend on the land resources for their sustenance.

1.3 Statement of the Research Problem

Various studies have been carried out on literature of the Niger Delta with regard to the region's affiliation with ecocritical issues. Researchers have given special attention to the impact of environmental degradation on the region. Such studies include Aghalino (2011) who explores the effects of environmental crisis on the region from a cultural perspective. He argues that it has led to mutation of indigenous culture and displacement of the people. Religious crises, ethnic conflict and sexual exploitation of women also emanate from it. Ojaruega (2013) and Feghabo (2014) examine the effects of environmental degradation on the Niger Delta from a socio-economic angle. It causes unemployment and poverty, which further lead to vices like prostitution, armed robbery, abduction, restiveness, stealing and others. While effort made by men in the struggle against environmental degradation is illustrated in their studies, women are only treated as victims and their roles in the struggle are not examined. This leaves a gap that this study intends to fill.

Orife (2011), Awhefeada (2013), Chuma-Ude (2013), Simon (2010) and Jeremiah (2014) examine the effects of environmental degradation in the region particularly on women. They opine that women experience victimisation most in a region like the Niger Delta that is going through serious environmental threat. The women that depend on nature for provision of food, employment, shelter, portable water, medicinal support and income generation are left to suffer unemployment, hunger, poverty and diseases, because nature which is the source of such provisions has been destroyed. Besides, as a result of economic problems which result from the degradation, women of the region become preys in the hands of financially buoyant oil company workers who offer them financial help in exchange for sexual gratification. Women who are involved in such affairs may end up with sexually transmitted diseases. Also, if a clash occurs in the Niger Delta as a result of

struggle for ownership of land where crude oil is found, or between militants and government security agents, women are usually the ones that would die in greater numbers. This is because women are believed to be the most vulnerable. Having exposed the agony that women go through in the Niger Delta as a result of degradation of the environment, the above studies do not consider the women's roles in tackling the problem. This leaves a gap in their studies.

The above studies do not examine women's roles in the struggle against environmental degradation, giving an impression that women have not shown interest in the issue of the environment, this leaves a gap which this study intends to fill.

1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims at examining the roles of women as eco-activists in eight purposely selected texts with a view to:

1. establishing the significance of women in the struggle for environmental regeneration in *Love My Planet, Oil Cemetery* and *Oil on Water*.
2. investigating the impact of environmental degradation on the Niger Delta in *Outrage, The Activist* and *Yellow-Yellow*.
3. identifying points of convergence and divergence between women's approaches to eco-activism in *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said It*.

1.5 Research Questions

This research provides answers to the following questions:

1. What is the significance of women in the struggle for environmental regeneration in *Love My Planet, Oil Cemetery* and *Oil on Water*?
2. What is the impact of environmental degradation on the Niger Delta in *Outrage, The Activist* and *Yellow-Yellow*?
3. What are the points of convergence and divergence between women's approaches to eco-activism in *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said It*?

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on eight selected literary works on Niger Delta crisis, with specific attention to roles of women as eco-activists. The texts are six novels : Vincent Egbuson's *Love My Planet*, May Ifeoma Nwoye's *Oil Cemetery*, Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* and Promise Ogochukwu's *Outrage*; and two plays : Tess Onwueme's *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said It*. The texts were purposely selected for their shared thematic foci on ecological issues as well as their in-depth provision of insights on the roles of women as eco-activists.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Francoise d'Eaubonne's approach to Ecofeminism is adopted as theoretical framework. Ecofeminism was coined by d'Eaubonne in 1974 to express connection between oppression of women and domination of nature as well as women's roles in ending such oppression and domination. According to Glotfelty (1996: xxiv), ecofeminism is a "hybrid label to describe a theoretical discourse whose theme is the link between oppression of women and domination of nature." Also, Gaard (1993) postulates that ecofeminism is a movement that cuts across a whole gamut of feminist disciplines, activisms and advocacy platforms like peace and anti-nuclear activism, feminist spirituality, animal liberation, environmentalism and antitoxic movements. Eaton (2005:11) opines that ecofeminism is "a convergence of the ecological and feminist analyses and movements." She stresses further that ecofeminism represents varieties of theoretical, practical and critical efforts to understand and resist the interrelated dominations of women and nature."

The social perception of the connection between women and nature is rooted in patriarchy which other literary theories have failed to tackle; the ecofeminists intervene with an ideology that is "aimed simultaneously at liberating nature from ceaseless exploitation and themselves [women] from limitless marginalisation. They are creating a feminist ideology that transcends gender and a political practice that is humanly inclusive" Shiva (1994:5); this is now known as ecofeminism. In line with ecofeminists' vision, Reuther (1975: 204) insists that:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socio-economic relations and the underlying values of the ... society.

Some scholars like Agarwal (1997), Biehl (1991) and Nanda (1991) corroborate the view of Jackson (1993:398) who points out that ecofeminist perspective is “ethnocentric, essentialist, blind to class, ethnicity and other differentiating cleavages, ahistorical and neglects the material sphere.” Rao (2012:128) concurs with the above view by asserting that “ecofeminist literature portrays the historical exploitation and domination of women and nature as going hand in hand, and both are seen as victims of development.” She further stresses that “none of the ecofeminist literature attempts to establish this linkage through concrete evidence or strong argument.” (128) For this, she insists that interrelatedness between domination of nature and that of women is an ideology, and fails to take into cognizance what Agarwal (1992:122) refers to as “interrelated material sources of dominance based on economic advantage and political power.” Biehl (1991:15) extends this argument by stating that ecofeminist image of the women still “retain the patriarchal stereotypes of what men expect women to be” and “they ...freeze women as merely caring and nurturing beings instead of expanding the full range of women's human potentialities and abilities.” This study corroborate Biehl's position; instead of entrapping women in the web of nurturing which undermines their real identity and ability, it is better they are viewed as personalities with human capacities effective enough to make significant contributions to the progress of the society.

1.8 Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study, a literary analysis of texts. Ecofeminism was adopted as theoretical framework and interpretative design was used. Six novels: Vincent Egbuson's *Love My Planet*, May Ifeoma Nwoye's *Oil Cemetery*, Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow*, Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* and Promise Ogochukwu's *Outrage*; and two plays: Tess Onwueme's *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said It* were purposely selected owing to their common depiction of ecological issues. Besides, women's eco-

resistance activities are meticulously reflected in the selected novels and plays. The tenets of ecofeminism were deployed to interrogate the interphase between environment and the roles of women in its sustainability. Secondary sources include library books and essays in journals.

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the current global project of using literature to create awareness of the need to promote a healthy environment; this is one of the visions of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), an international body. This need arises as a result of multifaceted environmental problems ravaging the earth. To make the earth a habitable place, it is necessary to sensitise human beings on the need to care for the environment. Besides, the findings of this study will encourage further studies by future researchers who would like to undertake ecocritical studies.

1.10 Justification of the Study

The exploration and exploitation of crude oil in the Niger Delta have led to environmental degradation. Unemployment, poverty, armed robbery, hostage-taking, sexual exploitation, diseases and insecurity are some of the effects of the degradation. Existing studies on the selected novels and plays with regard to the struggle against environmental injustice in Niger Delta have concentrated on men as leading eco-activists while women are presented as victims without adequately highlighting the roles of women as eco-activists. This gives an impression that women are passive and less concerned about the situation. This study argues that it is not enough to show that women are victims of environmental degradation; there is also a need to illustrate women's roles in the struggle. Against this backdrop, this study becomes necessary as it focuses on the roles of women in the struggle for environmental health in order to prove that women make significant efforts in the struggle against environmental despoliation as well as its regeneration. Also, there is dearth of study on the selected texts with regard to women's involvement in the struggle against environmental degradation in the Niger Delta; this necessitated this research.

1.11 Organisation of the Study

This study is organised into six chapters. Chapter One is the background to the study. Chapter Two is the review of related literature and the theory of Ecocriticism and Ecofeminism. Chapter Three focuses on the literary analysis of Vincent Egbuson's *Love My Planet*, May Ifeoma Nwoye's *Oil Cemetery* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*. In Chapter Four, Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*, Promise Ogochukwu's *Outrage* and Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* are critically examined. Chapter Five is the analysis of Tess Onwueme's *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said It*. Chapter Six is the summary, conclusion and recommendation of the research.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

What is known today as literature of the Niger Delta historically emerged from the age-long environmental crisis that was brought upon the region by the discovery and exploitation of crude oil at Oloibiri community in Ogbia Local Government Area, Bayelsa State. Degradation of farmland and rivers by oil spillage and gas flaring wrought devastation on the people who depend on them for a worthwhile livelihood. The consequences of this degradation abound. Poverty and insecurity set in. The region became the shadow of itself. The people of the region having been fed up by the rate of injustice in the land, rose up in agitation against injustice in the region. Different individuals and groups emerged with different strategies for combating this unfair treatment from oil companies and the federal government. Among such individuals are the creative writers who employ works as tools of protest against injustice in the Niger Delta. This chapter examines among other issues the responses of the literary writers to the Niger Delta environmental crisis.

2.1 African Writers and Eco-consciousness

In his contentious essay, “Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses”, Slaymaker (2007) accuses African writers and critics of eco-hesitation. According to him, “The African echo of global green approaches to literature and literary criticism has been faint.” (683) To him, the reason for this reluctance is Africans’ suspicion of ecocriticism to be another dominating discourse from the West. But to Hochman (1998:190), the reason for this eco-hesitation is that “the white have more time for nature than the blacks since blacks must use a great deal of energy in resisting or

coping with white hegemony. Whites, more than blacks, also have greater access to some semblance of nature because blacks have been forced into urban areas for jobs.” Slaymaker goes further to argue that “African nature writing and criticism that analyse the extraordinary megafauna and megaf flora of East and South African savannas and forests, do not qualify as genuine ecolit or ecocrit as Kroeber and Buell would define it.” (683) He concretises his stance by mentioning that most reviews on Osundare’s *The Eye of the Earth* “explore political corruption in Nigeria, his support of peasants and farmers and others who live on and off the land, and his thematic examinations of history and revolution against *environmental exploitation*.”(686, emphasis added by me). He bluntly debunk’s Aderemi Bamikunle’s categorisation of Osundare as ‘a nature poet because Osundare does not exactly “use the words *ecology* and *environment* in any of their current incarnations in the developing lexicon of ecocrit and ecolit.” (686) By this argument, Slaymaker creates an erroneous impression that African literature lacks eco-merit.

He also opines that the eco-crit is “meagre” where it even exists. These allegations are not true because “there has been some form of ecocriticism in African scholarship long before it became [the] vogue in the western Academy” (Ojaide, 2013: vii) Besides, such opinion exposes a deficiency in Slaymaker’s scholarship because Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* published as far back as 1958 “a time when most critics had no awareness of the environment” Ojaide (2013: vii) can be viewed with ecocritical lens because the author who clearly understands his environment is very much aware that the Africans have a deep affinity with nature, and as such, explores that in the novel. In line with this, Asoo (2009:65) insists on analysing *Things Fall Apart* from an ecocritical angle because it adds “another angle to these vast criticisms by examining the novel from an ecological and environmental consciousness [and its] reliance on natural phenomena such as trees, rivers, mountains, forest and animal life.” In his ecocritical reading of the novel, Barau (2009: 92) opines that nature is revered, adored, and ... abused in the African physical environment. This reverence, adoration and abuse reveal the realty of the intertwined relationship that exists among members of ecosystem. Also, having considered the ecological qualities that the novel is imbue with, Asoo (2009:75) agrees that “there is enough evidence in *Things Fall Apart* to justify application of methods of literary ecological assessment to its analysis.”

To Okolo (2013:16), “it is criticism on African literature that appears not to have considered the need to promote an ecological dimension in the examination of African writings”. Vambe (2013:1) corroborates this view when she opines that “in Africa, ... published works on criticism of the representations of the environment in fiction are scarce”. The paucity of criticism in African literature concerning environmental issues could be attributed to the anti-colonial struggle and realities of post-independence Africa. During the colonial era, liberation struggles and the defence of African identity were the major concerns of African writers as at that time. The reconstruction of the African identity and image which has been misconstrued by Joseph Conrad and other non-Africans was one of the major concerns of African writers in the period. Later, they used their works to attack corruption, disillusionment, political tussle, unemployment, betrayal, greed, restiveness, leadership insensitivity, selfishness, and other vices that the African countries were plunged into after the achievement of independence. In sum, what seemed to be of priority to African writers and critics at that time were the liberation struggle and reconstruction of the African identity as well as the protection of African dignity; this vision became their urgent need at that time. Considering the urgency needed to achieve this vision, any African creative writer or critic whose vision did not align with the African need may “end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames.” (Achebe, 1975:78) African literary writers must weave their story with the thread of the realities of the African environment if they must remain relevant and visible on the scene of African literature of commitment.

Slaymaker disagrees with Bamikunle’s classification of Osundare as “a nature poet interested in both Edenic and exploited West African landscapes” (686) and others who explore “his support of peasants and farmers and others who live on and off the land ...” Slaymaker should have noted that land as a part of the environment occupies a very vital position in the African cosmology. It is a metaphor for identity; this explains why an African man is not at ease if he is denied access to his piece of land. If he wants to understand his real identity, he traces it to the land i.e ‘where’ he has his ancestral root/origin. Denying an African access to his land is denying him of his very identity. Unarguably, virtually every activity on earth is carried out on land, trees grow on land,

man walks on land to be able to carry out his activities, an airplane at the end of a flight descends on the land, bodies of water like rivers, oceans, and seas if drain may end up exposing the land. From the above insight, land and landscape assume the identity of nature that has “taken on a personality, a character of its own that is identifiable and requiring close study of its growth and metamorphosis” (Okolo, 2013:15-16). If virtually every activity on earth is executed on the land as a part of nature, then, there is no reason why someone should refute description of Oundare and Ngugi as eco-writers because they explore land-related issues in their creative works. What then is ecocriticism if not the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment? (Glotfelty, 1996)

The idea that critics on Oundare’s poetry explore “his support for peasants and farmers and others who live on and off the land” might compel the readers to think that he is not committed to ecocritical vision especially when one considers that even the farmers contribute to depletion of the environment by felling of trees in the process of cultivation, felling of trees for firewood as well as other activities that farmers engage in that contribute to depletion of the flora and fauna, but that is not enough to disqualify him as an eco-writer because such acts of human beings help to prove the *interdependency that exists among the members of the ecosystem*. Human beings and the environment are intertwined and complement each other. This explains why the application of ecocriticism in Africa is different from that of the Euro-Americans’, and as such, Graham Huggan makes a case for postcolonial ecocriticism. Therefore, it is not out of place to view Ngugi as an eco-activist considering how deeply he explores land-related issues and the beauty of the Kenyan landscape in his literary works, evident in *Wizard of Crow* and others.

Slaymaker’s criticism admits that “Black African writers take nature seriously in their creative and academic writing, but many have resisted or neglected the paradigms that inform much of global ecocriticism.” (684) Murphy (2009:14) disagrees with Slaymaker’s view of global paradigm of ecocriticism. According to him, “to achieve its goals and remain honest to the literature ... ecocriticism should remain pivotal, rather than foundational, and localist, rather than global, in its grounding orientation”. His response shows a critic with clear understanding of the role of context in the application of

ecocriticism especially when it comes to a peculiar African environment. He concretises his stance by insisting that ecocriticism should play key and critical roles in contexts and circumstances rather than assume a fixated ideological or philosophical anchorage that every endeavour must adhere to (2009).

Also, Caminero-Santangelo's response in "Different Shades of Green: Ecocriticism and African Literature" (2007) exposes a limitation in Slaymaker's argument. The criteria that Slaymaker uses in determining whether a piece of writing is truly ecocritical are Euro-American. To him, it is when it complies with global ecocriticism which involves the "application of the science to literature and with deep ecology." (2007:698) The criteria with which Slaymaker adjudges the ecocritical input of a work is purely based on European's and American's concept of ecocriticism; a model that is informed by their 'romanticised' experiences. This Euro-American standard of ecocriticism as suggested by Slaymaker prompts a sharp response from Caminero-Santangelo who is of the view that using such as a yardstick will exclude African literature and criticism from ecocritical discourse. In fact, this is to say that a Euro-American model of ecocriticism is completely inapplicable in Africa due to the uniqueness of her environment. As such, Africa needs a model of ecocriticism that could carry the weight of the realities of her peculiar experiences without necessarily deviating from the major concerns raised by ecocriticism. Caminero-Santangelo therefore proposes a model that could be able to examine "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) The application and appreciation of ecocriticism in the western parts of the world cannot be the same in Africa considering her peculiar history that is hinged on cultural, economic, socio-political and religious realities. As such, African literary writers could not afford to abandon these realities for a romanticised approach adopted by the Western writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, Terry Tempest Williams, Wendell Berry, Gary Snyder, and others who are celebrated by Jay Parini in his essay, 'The Greening of the Humanities' published in *The New York Times* Sunday

magazine on October 1995 as those behind the rise to prominence of environmentalism in the humanities.

Contrary to Slaymaker's view, Nixon (2007) opines that African literary writers have explored ecological issues in abundance in their works but have been denied of recognition in the canon of Euro-American ecocriticism. No wonder he frowns at the non-inclusion of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a remarkable Nigerian eco-activist in Parini's list. Commenting on Saro-Wiwa whom he recognises as Africa's most visible environmental martyr, Nixon describes him as "a novelist, poet, memoirist and essayist – who had died fighting the ruination of his Ogoni people's farmland and fishing waters by European and American oil conglomerates in cahoots with a despotic African regime. Yet, Saro-Wiwa's writings were unlikely to find a home in the kind of environmental literary lineage outlined by Parini (715). One thing very striking about Parini's list is that out of twenty-five persons, none is an African. They are all from "the same self-selecting genealogy of American Writers." (715) For Parini, the absence of Africans in the list could mean their absence on the scene of environmental discourse. The reason for this exclusion could be that for him, Africans have not taken active part or convincing participation in the field enough to be recognised and included in the list. His judgement could have been informed by the romanticised application of ecocriticism in the urbanised Euro-American environment, the type which Slaymaker admonishes the white to mount a global campaign to preserve because it gives them pleasure and is not tied to their daily subsistence (684). While non-humans' interest is at the centre of environmental study in the Euro-American case, the interest of human beings is at the centre in African approach to environmental study. This correlates to Olaoluwa's (2012:126) observation that:

Slaymaker offers a paternalistic explanation for what he calls African's 'ecohesitation'. He sees Africa's alleged rejection of ecocriticism as informed by the lingering memory of Western imperialist (133). It goes without saying that the uncertainty about *whose interest is ultimately served in the ecocritical pursuit is at the heart of this perceived African reluctance* (my emphasis).

In the light of the above, this study contends that ecocritical consciousness has been a constitutive element of African literature from its inception till date as against the notion

of Slaymaker who through his essay may leave a reader with an erroneous impression: writings and criticisms on African literature have been meagre or dearth on environmental discourses.

2.2 Emergence of Ecofeminism

The inquiries about affinity between women and nature initiated the emergence of Ecofeminism. Women and nature are bonded. This is reflected in their metaphoric link as life givers. This explains why the earth is referred to as “Mother Earth” Yalan (2007). Rao (2012) opines that ecofeminism emerged in the West as a product of the peace, feminist and ecological movements of the late 1970s and the early 1980s. The term was coined by Francois d’Eaubonne, a French feminist in her book, *Feminism or Death* (1974). The concept is further developed by King in 1976 in her book, *The Ecofeminist Imperative*. With the publication of an article titled “what is ecofeminism?” (1987), which appeared in the *The Nation*, King challenges all Americans to have a rethink over the ways in which their belief systems allow for the exploitative use of the earth and the further oppression of women.

Some scholars acknowledge that the concept of ecofeminism is popularised by works of authors like Reuther’s *New Woman, New Earth-Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (1975), Griffin’s *Woman and Nature – the Woman, Ecology and the Roaring Inside Her* (1978), Merchant’s *The Death of Nature –Scientific Revolution* (1980), Daly’s *Gyn/Ecolgy* (1979), Warren’s *Ecofeminist philosophy: Western Perspective on what It Is and Why It Matters* (2000), Mies and Shiva’s *Ecofeminism* (1993), Plumwood’s *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), King’s *The Ecofeminist Imperative* (1976) and others. The works of these scholars and others, contributed to laying a significant background to the development of ecofeminism.

The Ecofeminist movement was born out of a series of conferences and workshops held in the United States by a coalition of academic and professional women during the late 1970s and early 1980s. They met to discuss the ways in which feminism and environmentalism might be combined to promote respect for women and the natural world. In the conference, the connections between feminism, militarism, health and

ecology were examined. This led to the formation of the Women's Pentagon Action, Anti-militarist, Anti-nuclear war, and other groups through which women championed protest against degradation of the environment and oppression of women. Such groups like Chipko Movement in India, Appiko Movement in India, Save Silent Valley Movement in India, Anti-militarist movement in Europe and the United States, Movement against Dumping of Hazardous Wastes in the United States, and Green Belt Movement in Kenya have emerged. Women through such ecofeminist movements demonstrated what Quinby (1990) refers to as the "resistance politics" in demand for environmental preservation and regeneration.

According to Birkeland (1993:18), Ecofeminism is defined as "a value system, a social movement, and practice ... [which] also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction." She goes further to highlight that it is an "awareness that begins with the realisation that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western man's attitude towards women and tribes' cultures..." Warren (1994) considers ecofeminism to be a field bridging ecological and feminist ethics that seeks to explore the conceptual connections between environmental degradation and sexist oppression. The theory, according to Gaad (1993) scrutinises connection between many issues like environmental degradation, economics, electoral politics, animal liberation, reproductive politics, biotechnology, spirituality, holistic health practices, sustainable agriculture, and racism. Various ecofeminist writers hold different opinions about the theory but they come under the term ecofeminism. King (1983) sees ecofeminism as political theory and practice. King (1983) and Spretnak (1990) are of the opinion that earth-centred spirituality and goddess reverence is placed at the centre in ecofeminist study. Focus is on ill-treatment of animals in ecofeminist study according to Collard and Contrucci (1988), Adams (1990) and Gaard (1993). Issues of pollution, deforestation, toxic waste dumps, agricultural development and sustainability, animal rights and nuclear energy and waste come under discussions within the umbrella term of eco-feminism, along with classism, racism and sexism (Warren, 1996)

2.2.1 Tenets of Ecofeminism

Agarwal (1997) prescribes four main tenets of ecofeminism. First, domination of nature and oppression of women are interconnected. Second, men are more related to culture and women are more related to environment. As a result, men exercise domination over women and nature. Third, oppression of women and exploitation of nature occur simultaneously and for this reason, women have a responsibility to end male domination over both. Fourth, ecofeminism seeks to combine feminist and ecological thoughts (ideologies) in order to achieve egalitarian, non-hierarchical structures.

In the 1980s and 1990s, when ecofeminism became an academic discourse (Manion, 2002), it was associated with such proponents like Shiva, Gaard, Plumwood, Sturgeon, Warren, Salleh, Mies, etc. Their document titled Women's Action Agenda 21 (which focuses on Healthy planet) gives them voice in United Nations conference on 'environment and development' held in Rio in 1992.

2.2.2 Types of Ecofeminism

Cultural/Spiritual Ecofeminism

Cultural ecofeminists believe that women maintain close link with nature because of their gender roles (as nurturers and providers of food) and biological qualities (menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation). They believe that these peculiar features, make the women more sensitive to the matters concerning nature (its degradation and preservation). They hold the opinion that women as givers of life are engendered to close connections with the earth (Sturgeon 1997). Cultural ecofeminists believe that women are different from men and such biological differences that make women nurturers make them care for nature more than anyone else. Spiritual ecofeminists further extend this view by arguing that reproductive roles common to both women and nature as life givers serve as their bonding factor, and this gives the theory a spiritual angle.

Radical Ecofeminism

Radical ecofeminists are of the view that exploitation of both women and nature is caused by patriarchal dualism. In this case, humans are perceived as being superior to

nature and are hierarchically placed above nature. By this perception, human beings exercise domination over nature. Radical feminists argue that the conceptual binaries (men and women, culture and nature) and ideological hierarchies such as higher-ranking categories and lower-ranking categories are the tools used to re-affirm oppression and exploitation. This is owing to the fact that those in high-ranking category will always exert domination over the lower-ranking ones, e.g men over women and culture over nature. Radical ecofeminists analyse environmental problems from within their critique of patriarchy and offer alternatives that could liberate both women and nature (Merchant, 1995). They believe that men, women, culture and nature should be given fair treatment.

Radical ecofeminists also elucidate that environmental degradation which engenders oppression of women and nature is caused by industrial and technological developments which are rapidly distorting the natural pattern of doing things to the detriment of women. Technological advancement leads to exploitation of nature for economic advantages. They contend that exploitation of natural resources for industrial usage as well as lack of regulation of the use of pesticides which further exacerbates environmental crisis affects women. For instance, many health challenges that confront women are caused by low-level radiation, pesticides, toxics as well as other pollutants. They suggest that this problem can be solved by encouraging production of pesticides that are environment friendly. To achieve this, good knowledge of science, adequate conservation laws and practices are required. They propose for equal educational opportunities for men and women. This would enable the women to become scientists, natural resource conservators, and lawyers like the men. With this equal opportunity, the women can be involved in scientific research and passage of laws that are environment friendly. They kick against technological advancement that degrades environment and compounds victimisation of women.

Socialist Ecofeminism

Socialist Ecofeminists hold the opinion that certain social constructs are responsible for exploitation of women and nature. Plumwood (1992) upholds that it is steeped in historical rhetoric, going back as far as the Greeks to the inferiorisation of women and nature. They resist the urge to overestimate social constructs such as male

(oppressor) / female (oppressed) and so place it in a position to be more open to other oppression groups (Twine 2001).

2.2.3 Critiques of Ecofeminism

Some scholars contend that ecofeminist study is more related to feminism than Ecocriticism. This view is associated with scholars like Warren (1987, 1990), Daly (1978), Merchant (1980), Griffin (1978) and Plumwood (1993). Ecofeminism interrogates the connection between abuse of nature and oppression of women in order to highlight “why feminist issues can be addressed in terms of environmental concern” (Gaard 1993:4). However, the contention that ecofeminism is more related to feminist or ecocritical ideology is still contestable. While some scholars take either side, Manion (2002) maintains that ecofeminist theory is formulated by feminists at the time when the green movement was popular but the ecological ethics were of primary concern.

Ecofeminism just like every other literary approach has its loopholes. Many different proponents with diverse range of opinions are the challenges confronting it. Manion (2002:9) submits that “The cleavages between the differing types of ecofeminism leave the overall theory full of holes.” A lot of critical arguments have arisen against different types of ecofeminism.

Cultural ecofeminists are criticised for linking women/nature connection to women’s gender roles and biological make-up. This is because their viewpoint encourages gender stereotypes and could further lead to exploitation of both women and nature. Agarwal (1992:123) argues that cultural ecofeminists appear to have failed to consider that culture, nature and gender concepts are “historically and socially constructed and vary across and within cultures and time periods”. She substantiates her argument by frowning at their failure to “differentiate among women by class, race, ethnicity and so on” (1992:122).

Spiritual ecofeminists are criticised for trying to replace politics with religious ideas and subsequently engaging in spiritual a activity instead of serious thought about how to improve the state of the world (Tong, 1998). Twine (2001) also points out that such a view is anti-academic and sentimental in today’s ecofeminism. Sturgeon (1997)

contends that such opinion is anti-intellectual and as a result, some people would not want to associate with or use the term 'ecofeminism' because being associated with it seems negative. Biehl (1991:17) further argues that "the use of metaphors of women as 'nurturing' – like the earth, and of the earth as female-abound are regressive rather than liberating women." Radical ecofeminists are criticised for not giving consideration to developmental needs of the society by arguing that degradation of nature as well as oppression of women is caused by industrial and technological developments.

Irrespective of the various diverse viewpoints of the ecofeminists, they are unified under one basic view that exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are interconnected and women should rise to combat it.

2.2.4 Ecofeminism in practice: Women Environmental Movement (Global perspectives)

Women Environmental Movements all over the world was committed to championing a cause of the environment. They emerged from reactions against numerous environmental problems ravaging the earth. In various parts of the world, women actively participate in protest against environmental degradation in their various communities, and this is sometimes done under a group referred to as a movement. Environmental movements include Green Belt Movement in Kenya, Chipko Movement in India, Appiko Movement in India, Save Silent Valley Movement in India, Love Canal-Niagara Fall in the United States, Anti-Militarist Movement in Europe, Movement against dumping of hazardous wastes in the United States to mention but a few.

Chipko Movement in India

Chipko Movement emerged in India at the time when indigenous forest trees were being cut down and were replaced by commercial trees. This threatened the women's ability to provide for their families. In protest, women hug trees in order to prevent them from being cut. They also influence government policy on tree-felling. Through the women's activism further environmental damage like soil erosion and loss of biodiversity were prevented.

Love Canal-Niagara Fall in the United States

In 1979, a suburb of the Niagara Falls, Love Canal experienced a number of health problems, especially gynecological issues like miscarriage, stillbirth and birth defects. Lois Gibbs discovered that the problems were caused by environmental pollution which results from waste dump containing twenty thousand tons of toxic waste. This served as a confirmation of a predictive book of Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) in which she warns against the effects of herbicides and pesticides. Lois Gibbs launched a two-year campaign demanding relocation of the dumping site to a safer place.

Green Belt Movement in Kenya

Green Belt Movement was established in Kenya by Wangari Maathai at the time when the country experienced attack on its biodiversity that did not only pose threat to non-humans but also to humans. Kenya was threatened by industrial and technological advancement which led to destruction of indigenous trees. Aquatic lives and terrestrial beings were being forced into extinction by the environmental crisis. Erosion and desertification seemed to be encroaching faster as forests were cleared for industrial purposes. In fact, the existence of people was seriously threatened as “[t]he connection between the symptoms of environmental degradation and their causes – deforestation, devegetation, unsustainable agriculture, and soil loss” (Maathai, 2007:125) abound. To combat these, Maathai made a resolution to engage in a-tree-planting campaign in order to regenerate the Kenyan environment. While contemplating how to solve the environmental problems, a thought came into her mind, “Why not plant trees?” (125) because:

The trees would provide of wood that would enable women to cook nutritious foods. They would also have wood for fencing and fodder for cattle and goats. The trees would offer shade for humans and animals, protect watersheds and bind the soil, and, if they were fruit trees, provide food. They would also heal the land by bringing back birds and small animals and regenerate the vitality of the earth. This is how the Green Belt Movement began. (125)

Through the initiative, she encouraged and engaged the women of Kenya in tree-planting activities. Women were encouraged to plant trees in order to avert desert encroachment and erosion which are threatening the very existence of the people of Kenya. The women

planted over forty hundred million trees in Kenya. Through the movement also, the women set up over six hundred thousand tree nurseries in the country.

2.2.5 Women Environmentalists: A Global Perspective

Rachel Carson, with the publication of a book titled *Silent Spring* (1962), created awareness on the effects of chemicals and pesticides on the environment of the United States. Lois Gibbs through her environmental group known as 'The Centre for Health, Environment and Justice' in the United States created awareness on the hazardous effects of toxic waste particularly on women and children. She launched a two-year campaign and demanded relocation of the dumping site to a safer place. Vandana Shiva through the establishment of Navdanya biodiversity conservation programme in India, raised awareness about the danger of genetic engineering. She also promoted sustainable agriculture. Through her group, numerous farmers were trained in seed sovereignty and sustainable agriculture. Julia Butterfly Hill through her eco-activism promoted sustainable environment in California. She "saves a one-thousand-five-hundred-year-old Californian red wood tree from being cut down by Pacific Lumber Company." Nasrin (2012: 161) Wangari Maathai is an eco-activist from Kenya. Through the establishment of Green Belt Movement, she engaged in planting of trees to conserve the natural environment of Kenya. Maathai encouraged women to plant trees by payment of incentives. Through planting of trees, women of Kenya have helped to preserve the natural environment of Kenya. Following her remarkable contributions to environmental sustainability, democracy and peace in Kenya, she was honoured with Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

2.3 Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism as defined by Glotfelty (1996: xviii) is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Also, Buell (2005) defines ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis. Estok (2001) argues that ecocriticism goes beyond just the study of nature and natural things. He substantiates his point in 'Shakespeare and Ecocriticism', where he states that ecocriticism is more than:

Simply the study of nature or natural things in literature; rather, it is any theory that is committed to effective change by analysing the function – thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical or otherwise of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other) that contribute to material practices in material worlds (16-17).

In his essay, '*Some Principles of Ecocriticism*', William Howarth defines the ecocritic as “a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action” (1996:69). Howarth also examines the theoretical principles of marxist theory which fights against class stratification and capitalism. To him, it is obvious the marxists fight in favour of the oppressed and marginalised especially in the society where capitalist tendencies seem to dominate the economy and means of production, but they fail to tackle the contribution of the marginalised to ecocide. Though they are marginalised, that does not in any way exonerate them from ecocide because they through their various activities, contribute to destruction of nature. He also frowns at the absence of nature or natural science in the post-structuralists principles. The loophole in Howarth’s postulation is that it fails to consider the realities of the developing countries where concern for nature cannot in any way be totally divorced from the economic realities of the people especially the lower class.

In establishing ecocriticism and its practicability with specific emphasis on the use of the term ‘environ’, Glotfelty (1996: xx) argues that “environ” in its connotation is “anthropocentric and dualistic, implying that we humans are at the centre, surrounded by everything that is not us, the environment.” Buell has a different view on this issue. To him, the “implicit narrowness of the term ‘eco’ ...connotes the “natural” rather than the “built” environment and, still more specifically the field of ecology.” (2005:12) He further elucidates that environmental criticism equally extends to “the interweave of built and natural dimensions in every locale, and the interpretation of the local.” (12) In clarifying the agenda of ecocriticism, Buell (2005:9-10) points out that:

...literature-and-environment studies have striven almost from the start to define their position on the critical map analytically as well as through narrative practice. One strategy has been to

build selectively on poststructuralist theory while resisting the totalising implications of its linguistic turn and its aftermaths, such that the word-world gets decoupled from the material world to the point of making it impossible to conceive of literary discourse as other than tropology or linguistic play or ideological formation.

O'Brien (2007:182) observes that contemporary ecocriticism adopts the approach prescribed by Rueckert "which uses concepts from ecology – systems, energy transfer, and interdependence – in order to explain the way in which literature functions in the world". The restriction in Rueckert's approach is that it concentrated specifically on the application of the science of ecology to the study of literature. In the same vein, Love (2003:38) explains that "the new study of literature and nature is connected to the science of ecology – taking from it not only the popular term ecocriticism but also the basic premise of the interrelatedness of a human cultural activity like literature and the natural world that encompasses it."

The development of ecocriticism is also traced to the activities of the eighteenth century English romantic poets like Wordsworth and Blake. The glaring feature of their poetic expressions is that they are nature-centered. They centre on what (Buell, 2005:3) describes as "the critical pre-occupation with nature and its fascination with the rustic". Romantic poets draw their inspiration from nature. Landscape, flora and fauna, river, forest, etc become the persistent subjects of poetic expressions of the earlier writers (Abrams, 1999). These romantic poets and others focus on appreciation of nature. However, Love (2003) acknowledges that the widespread concern over nuclear annihilation, population burst, loss of wildlife and accelerated extinction of some species that greeted the 1960s was responsible for a heightened environmental consciousness. Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) that was used to raise alarm on the danger of pesticide in America, is worth mentioning while discussing writings that have made a significant contribution to awareness creation on environmental preservation.

Ecocriticism is considered new in literary discourse but Buell (2005:2) contends that:

... if environmental criticism today is still an emergent discourse, it is one with very ancient roots. In one form or

another, the “idea of nature” has been a dominant or at least residual concern for literary scholars and intellectual historians ever since these fields came into being.

Rueckert, according to Barry (1995) has been identified as the first person to use the term, ecocriticism in the 1970s. But before then, Norman Foerster had already published *Nature in American Literature* in 1923, which could be regarded as having given birth to an emergent ecocritical angle in American literature. Later, other books like Marx’s *The Machine and the Garden: Technology and the pastoral ideal in American Culture* (1964) and William’s *The Country and the City* (1973) were published, that serve as a kind of boost to the emergent field of study. With the publication of an essay titled “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (1996), Rueckert brings to limelight the ecocritical theory and accords it more recognition in the American literary field. His major purpose in that essay was to initiate the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, which was achieved, as evident in the recognition of ecocriticism as a practicable theory in the literary studies in the departments of literature of many American universities.

2.4 Waves of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism has undergone several stages of development. Glotfelty (1996) postulates the waves of ecocriticism based on its developmental stages. Buell (2005) describes the first wave in which all concentration is on nature writing. In this stage, no concern is shown to other environmental constituents. All consideration as well as attention is given to nature alone. Glotfelty observes that this stage raises consciousness on the stereotypical representations of nature like “Edenic, Arcadia and virgin land” in literary writings. Investigating further on this stage, Howart (1996:21) observes that at this stage, ecocritics examine “the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action”. The first wave witnessed a whole lot of concentration that favoured nature. It raised in the “human consciousness” (Love, 2003: 16) the need to appreciate, conserve, and protect nature from destruction by human culture.

In the second wave, Goltfelty underscores 'nature writings' with special aim to evaluating their contribution to raising awareness in the human consciousness the need to appreciate and preserve nature. He identifies some literary works which have contributed to the agenda of awareness creation. Some of the works include Emerson's *Nature* (1836), Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), and others who use their works in raising ecological consciousness. Others whose literary works fit into this stage include Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850) and *The Excursion* (1814). Wordsworth employs most of his poems to celebrate the beauty and serenity of nature. He is a romantic poet and that has earned him remarkable commendation in English literature. Other poets in this category include Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Lord Byron, and Percy Shelley.

In this stage, Glotfelty asserts that the environmental conditions of an author influence his entire literary works. He explores the influence of "place" on the imagination of an author. He opines that the place an author resides in has the ability to exert influence on how he presents nature and the environment in his work. However, ecocritics have argued that pinning ecocriticism to a romanticised form would not only limit its practicability but hinder its development.

The third wave of ecocriticism as prescribed by Glotfelty (1996) is the stage that explores the link between the oppression of women and domination of nature, which is known as Ecofeminism, which has been examined in this chapter.

2.5 Literature of the Niger Delta

Literature does not create things in a vacuum; it draws its raw materials from the realities of the people's existence, treating issues of currency and the most nagging situation of the moment; and that is exactly what writers of literature of and on the Niger Delta have responded to. Literature 'of' the Niger Delta is used to refer to literary works that centre on the life of people of the Niger Delta written by those who are of the Niger Delta origin. Literature 'on' the Niger Delta is used to refer to literary works that center on the life of the people of Niger Delta but written by those who are not indigenous to the region. This research will make use of both literature of and on the Niger Delta but uses literature of the Niger Delta as a general term (to include both). Literature in this study

specifically refers to poetry, drama and prose in their written forms. No detailed account of any oral material is given in this research work but references may be made to any where necessary.

Literary writers respond to the unjust treatment meted against the people of the Niger Delta and their environment. This unjust treatment prompts confrontational tone in their writings and attracts attention. Since all efforts made by the people to get the Nigerian government and the oil companies to restore the degraded environment fell on deaf ears, the people launch revolutionary attacks against the oppressors in their quest for justice. This explains why “ a writer like Ojaide whose works agitate for the restoration of a more pristine environment for the region in spite of on-going oil exploration activities is regarded as being involved in intellectual activism for the enthronement of environmental right and justices” (Ojaruega, 2011: 496). Though there are physical activisms being carried out by various groups in the region, the literary writers have chronicle these prevalent issues in their writings with the aim of playing ‘an interventionist role’ just as Echenim (2004:21) submits that:

Writers consider that theirs is a sacred mission which involves imparting knowledge on social and cultural phenomena which characterise society, and thereby creating social and political awareness in their readership; and sometimes they go further to promote what they consider as an alternative VISION of the type of social relations that should exist among the different strata of the society.

Though the agitation for a positive change in the region has earned the agitators negative names such as ‘militants’, ‘rebels’, ‘restive youths’, etc. especially by the government-favoured media but it should be noted that the sole aim for the agitation is for the ‘enshrinement of justice’. Ojaruega (2011: 496) captures the notion behind the activism thus:

...the notion of activism with respect to the literature of and on the Niger Delta can be interpreted as closely tied to the efforts of such writers to raise local and global awareness to the dangers inherent in the continued exploration and exploitation of crude oil without adequate infrastructural or economic amelioration

programmes put in place and measure taken by the oil companies to remedy the already damaged environment and ecology.

The literary writers, having examined the cultural, economic, and socio-political challenges faced by the people of the Niger Delta, consider it pertinent to use their literary works to usher in change in adherence to the postulation of Bassey (2001) who suggests that:

Nigerian writers can (therefore) strengthen the voice of the impoverished communities, by facilitating the exposure of the culpability of the TNC (Trans National Corporations) and local big business in the impoverishment of our peoples through the devastating impacts of their activities on our environment.

Writers of literature of the Niger Delta use their literary works as tools for environmental advocacy and this indicates why “advocacy for environmental safety and justice is a strident theme in the poetry of the late 1990s.” “Literature has become an extension of the politics of emancipation and human rights” in the region (Darah, 2011:13). Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2011:53) validate this point when they submit that:

Nigeria Literature has a long standing predilection for the most momentous social issues in the country’s history. The crisis in the Niger Delta has been part of this explosive socio-historical process and has duly received literary attention, both from writers who are indigenous to the Niger Delta and those that are not.

The emergence of literature of the Niger Delta is obviously traced to the prevalent socio-political and economic problems as are orchestrated by the discovery and exploitation of crude oil in the region. The writers of the area curve the people’s condition in their writings, making it a cynosure of the national and international interest, while the attraction of intervention forms their motivational factor. This affirms Lucian Goldmann’s opinion that “periods of crisis... are particularly favourable to the birth of great works of literature because of the multiplicity of problems and experiences that they bring to men and of the great widening of affective and intellectual horizons that they provoke” (qtd in Nwahunanya, 2011:10). This boils down to the fact that crisis of any form – cultural, economic, social, political and/or even religious helps to shape the literature of that

particular society where such crisis occurs, thus widening the scope of such literature. Environmental crisis in the Niger Delta has not only shaped the literature of the area but has also widened the literary domain of Nigerian literature.

Nwizu (2011:315) opines that “Nigerian creative writers usually create from the socio-historical, political and cultural milieu of their environment. Writers from the south-south geopolitical zone have exploited the ecological problems in their area in weaving their stories”. Discovery and exploration of crude oil in the Niger Delta of Nigeria have immensely informed their literature and that has arguably formed the basis for ecocritical consciousness in Nigerian literature.

Apart from the work of Olaudah Equiano, the trans-atlantic slave whose state of origin is still debatable, the literary works of early writers from the Niger Delta have responded to environmental sensitivity that is peculiar to the region though in various degrees. Catherine Acholonu argues that Equiano is from Owerri district now Imo State. She bases her argument on the reason that Essaka, a name that appears in Equiano’s autobiographical book, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), is native to Owerri. Some other critics seem to counter her view by observing that it is the spelling of the Ashaka, which is a name native to Delta State that is incorrect. Darah (2011:6-7) appears to be in support of the view that Equiano’s region of origin is Niger Delta by contending that the sociological details of culture, indigenous administration and kinship networks provided by Equiano in the book seem to him to be closer to Benin influence than they are to the Imo side of the River Niger. Whatever the argument is, it is on record that Equiano’s publication contributes a big stepping stone to the development of African and Nigerian literature. One of the glaring features of the early works of pioneer literary writers from the Niger Delta is rejection of colonial imperialism. They use their works to attack the influence of colonial culture on African esteemed culture. Their literary works are employed for the celebration and promotion of African cultural heritage thereby totally rejecting the inferiorisation of African cultural values. Some instances are given below.

Dennis Osadebay, Gabriel Okara, Ene Henshaw, Elechi Amadi and J.P Cark are identified as some of the major pioneer contributors to the development of Nigerian

literature in general and literature of the Niger Delta in particular in their written tradition. Osadebay and Okara are specifically known for the commendable feat they attained in the genre of poetry. With the publication of *Africa Sings* in 1952, Osadebay is rated the “first African to achieve that feat in English language.” Darah (2011:7) The historical antecedent and the urgent need to project and protect the African image as at that time greatly influenced his literary imagination. Like Leopold Senghor, David Diop, and Aime Cesaire, Osadebay uses his poems to promote negritude ideology, which Ogude (2011:80) describes as a re-assertion of pride in the cultural validity and beauty of the black race. His debut, *Africa Sings* was published at the time when the reconstruction of the African image is the most momentous issue and the most urgent need of African society. He uses his artistic agility to frown at colonial imperialistic tendencies that place African way of life inferior to that of the European and to achieve what Achebe (2009) perceives as the black man’s re-assessment of himself after centuries of negative representation by the European races. This is also evident in ‘young Africa’s Plea’, ‘To the Women of New Africa’, and others.

As a poet and novelist, Okara’s artistic worldview is majorly influenced by the realities of the Niger Delta environment. The imagery and idioms that run through most of his poems are rooted in the Niger Delta. His popular poem, “Piano and Drums” explores the clash between European and African cultures. With lachrymal tone in “The Fisherman’s Invocation” and “The Call of the River Nun” he laments pollution of the rivers, which makes the aquatic inhabitants to go into extinction and disorganises the economic lives of the people whose livelihood is dependent on the river resources. Some of his poems as mentioned above were used to launch attack on environmental degradation while his novel, *The Voice* (1964) protests against marginalisation of Ogoni people as a minority. This qualifies him as both an environmental advocate and human right activist. This confirms Theo Vincent’s judgement in the ‘introduction’ to “The Fisherman’s Invocation” that “...Okara is (concerned) with suffering, oppression, the futility of superficial pleasure of life and general lack of love in human relationships”(xi).

Clark is a renowned poet and playwright from the region who deploys his works to expose the devastating impact of the Nigerian civil war on one hand (evident in his poem

“Casualty”) and on the other hand, the predicament brought upon the oil rich but economically and socio-politically suppressed people of the Niger Delta. Darah (2011:8) attests to this view when he observes that “with *The Raft*, Clark appears to have settled down to exploring the folklore of the Niger Delta waterways and wetlands”. In his drama, Clark appears to be more conscious of colonialism and neo-colonialism, and as a result, employs a more radical approach towards such issues. For instance, what is common in his *All for Oil* and *The Wives Revolt* is attack on neo-colonialism which is Africans oppressing their fellow Africans. *All for Oil* portrays the struggle for the control of the trade in palm oil between the colonial agents and the indigenous communities. In the play, Dore Numa betrays his people because of his selfish gain from the colonial government. In *The wives revolts*, the women are cheated by the men (their own husbands) by being totally excluded from the sharing of compensation from oil companies. As a result, the women organise themselves and revolt against the men but the revolt leads to more complex issues, destabilisation of family and individual lives. Deeper examination of the two plays reveals that the major problem is people who are indigenous to the Niger Delta. Clark seems to be remarking that the major problem that the Niger Delta people are facing is the greedy ones among them. An existing opinion on the two plays observes that Clark strives to show that the devastating effect of the twentieth century control of the palm oil trade in the Niger. Delta is not in any way different from the twenty-first century rape of the same region by the misappropriation of her crude oil wealth. His other works include *Ozidi Zaga*, *Song of a Goat*, *Full Tide*, and many others.

Henshaw’s *This is Our Chance* occupies an inaugural position in the area of drama in its written form in Nigerian literature. This view is supported by Darah (2011:7) who attests that Henshaw “inaugurated the Nigerian tradition of literary drama and he shares the historical limelight with the Ijebu-Yoruba folk dramatist, Hubert Ogunde”. Among his works are *Dinner for Promotion*, *Enough is Enough*, *Children of the Goddess*, *Jewels of the Shrine*, *Medicine for Love*, etc. In the area of drama, are other playwrights like Esiaba Irobi, Julie Okoh, Sam Ukala, Tess Onwueme and many others who have deployed plays as a weapon against environmental injustice in the Niger Delta.

Elechi Amadi's *The Great Ponds* and *The Concubine* reflect a water-based myth that is peculiar to his riverine area. Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra* like Ken Saro-Wiwa's *On a Darkling Plain: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War* (1989) and *Sozaboy* (1985) pays attention to the tragedy of the Nigerian civil war. It is worthy of note that the majority of Saro-Wiwa's creative works are committed to the exposition of the predicament of Ogoni people and by extension, the people of the Niger Delta. As a human right activist, he engages his works to play an interventionist role, championing a cause towards the emancipation of the Ogoni people who have suffered oppression, dispossession, subjugation, alienation, and marginalisation in the hands of the Nigerian government and the oil companies. In his essay on *On a Darkling Plain: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War*, Oriaku (2011:227) observes that Saro-Wiwa "tried to present an idyllic picture of pre-colonial Ogoni society and then goes on to imply that this Arcadian state was ruined only when British colonial rule brought the Ogoni into the protectorate of Nigeria and under Igbo domination". His literary stamina is channelled towards environmental activism in the region. Simon (2010:157) describes him as "one of the greatest activists of our time because of his fight for social justice and minority right which has drawn local and international attention." This is also noticed in his work like *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* (1995), *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (1992). Some novelists whose literary works focus on the environmental devastation in the region include Isidore Okpewho, Camillus Ukah, Bina Nengi-Ilagha, Vincent Egbuson, Promise Ogochukwu, Kaine Agary, May Ifeoma Nwoye, and others.

Other poets from the region include Odia Ofeimun, Onookome Okome, Tanure Ojaide, Nnimmo Bassey, Joseph Ushie, Ogaga Ifowodo, Ebi Yeibo, Hope Eghagha, Ebinyo Ogbowei, Barine Ngaage, Sophis Obi-Apoko, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Ibiwari Ikiriko, and Tonyo Biriabebe, to mention but a few who use their poems to raise awareness on the dangers of environmental degradation in the region. Irrespective of the genre one writes in, the pivotal message common to their works remains that economic, socio-political and environmental problems suffered by the people of Niger Delta are brought about by oil exploration and exploitation in the region and there is a need to curb them if the existence of the people must be meaningful.

There are also strident voices from the region – the women. Female creative writers like Flora Nwapa, Zulu Sofola, Mabel Segun, Buchi Emecheta, Chimamanda Adichie, Tess Onwueme and others are feminist writers who have “risen to the challenge by countering and bringing to the fore politics of exclusion and marginalisation against the female being” (Akpah, 2018:222) Some of their works are used to attack harmful practices and perceptions that affect women. Adefarasin (2018) identifies some of these harmful practices as follows: child marriage and early pregnancy, widowhood rite, male child preference, discriminatory laws and customs and politics, and denial of right to inherit or own property. Others focus on the Nigerian civil war and its negative impact. Though some of their earlier works do not centre on environmental issues, they have made significant contributions to the development of literature of the Niger Delta in particular and Nigerian/African literature in general. There are others like Kaine Agary, Promise Ogochukwu, May Ifeoma Nwoye, Bina Nengi-Ilagha and others whose works are used not only to show that women are mostly affected by environmental degradation but also their responses to the challenge. They also use their works to demonstrate the significant roles played by women in the struggle against environmental pollution in the region. Thus, indicating that women have mobilised against environmental degradation and by extension oppression of women. These female writers can be described as radical feminist writers who deploy their literary works to achieve what Abiola (2018:504) refers to as “a re-ordering of gender roles.” In doing this, they totally reject all negative stereotyped images given to women by the patriarchal system. Sanusi (2015: 92) agrees with this view when he avers that these writers in their literary pieces “confront the system that subjects them and defy it by breaking the silence.” They lend their voices to the treatment of women in order to show a new road map to gender issues in Africa.

The consciousness which *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said it* evoke does not only present Tess Onwueme as one of the most radical female voices from Niger Delta but also as one of the most committed and focused feminist writers because of the high level of concern which she has demonstrated in the issue of women empowerment and emancipation in her works. This theme has been the most recurrent subject matter in most of her drama works. While *Go Tell It to Women* is based on gender politics, *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said it* focus on environmental sensitivity but female emancipation is at

the centre of the works. By the creation of more radical female characters imbued with extra-revolutionary strength capable of subduing all structures that are meant to make the woman permanently irrelevant, she has earned for herself a distinctive remark not only in the literary firmament of the Niger Delta but also in Nigerian literature, especially in the area of drama. A meticulous examination of her works unveils her quest for an egalitarian society where both men and women would be given equal opportunity for meaningful existence.

African literature, from its inception has always performed its utilitarian function. It projects and defends the entirety of the people's identity, captures the realities of the people's experiences from pre-colonial to post-independence eras. Ojaruega (2011:496) acknowledges that:

The nature of Modern African Literature has largely been to reflect the experiences of the people in socio-cultural, political, and economic dimensions. In order to remain relevant to his society, an African writer is therefore expected to reflect on various aspects of human experiences and project a vision towards the amelioration of the harsh living conditions of the people.

The need to care for the environment has prompted responses in various fields of endeavour, literature inclusive. Writers and researchers use their works to embark on what Okuyade (2013:152) refers to as 'eco-literacy' in order to redeem the earth from vanishing. In keeping with this task, the writer assumed the position of 'a town crier' in the traditional African setting and that of 'a prophet' whose duty is not only to reveal that there is a problem pervading the society but also to show the people a way out.

The execution of Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni men was intended to permanently silence any voice that would rise against agents and agencies of oppression in the Niger Delta but that turned out to be ironic as the tears that emanated from the execution irrigated the spring up of many radical voices more especially from the angle of literature. Since then, the region has recorded colossal literary sprouts that combine both lachrymal and revolutionary tones to demand the changes that the people crave for. Literary writers from the region become more conscious of the environmental woes ravaging their area, as a result, they use their works to launch attack on them. This leads to

the emergence of more protest-inclined writings in literature of the region. It is important to note that what makes their works unique from the earlier writings is that they are revolutionary in nature in the demand for justice. They use literature to demonstrate high level of commitment to the freedom of their people.

Ojaide as the now world-acclaimed poet of Urhobo descent for creative literature and the most committed and consistent literary artist of the Niger Delta crisis subject (Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 2011:56) is an expert in the genre of protest writing. This is evident in his works like *Labyrinths of the Delta*, *The Eagle's Vision*, *The Fate of Vultures and Other Poems*, *The Blood of Peace*, and others that are used to express his objection to environmental disaster as well as the general exploitation going on in the Niger Delta. Like Ojaide's *Delta Blues*, *Home Songs* and *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems*, Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*, Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood*, and *Patriots and Cockroaches* adopt the dual aesthetics of lamentation and revolution in registering their concern for the Niger Delta people's plight. Uba Ofei's *Beyond Fear and Fury* and *After the Fire* are equally on that group of works that are employed by their authors to demonstrate advocacy for environmental justice. Also, Ojaide's novel, *The Activist*, is a clear attestation to his human right activism. The novel is a clarion call to the intellectuals to judiciously use their academic prowess in fighting against environmental exploitation, human oppression, violence and other act of man's inhumanity to man in the Niger Delta. In-depth examination of Ojaide's literary oeuvre reveals the dauntless effort of an environmental advocate who is committed to charting the course of liberation.

Okpewho's *Tides* (1994), like Ojaide's *The Activist* suggests a more radical approach in tackling the Niger Delta environmental crisis. The revolution-inclined strategy seems to be efficacious in such a devastated region where aged-long weeping has failed. Protest becomes a veritable tool in the hands of the oppressed for the achievement of freedom. The involvement of the intellectuals in the revolutionary pressure is a clear attestation to the novelists' suggestive stance in resolving the problems in the region. Other works by Okpewho include *The Victims* (1970), *The Last Duty* (1976), and *Call Me by My Rightful Name* (2004) .

Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* like Yerima's *Hard ground* explores the impact of oil exploration and exploitation on the Niger Delta from a psychological angle. They use their works to show that such a devastated environment has the tendency of producing psychologically disturbed individuals. The individuals in the struggle for survival in the case of Zilayefa in *Yellow-Yellow* and in the name of freedom fighter in the case of Nimi in *Hard ground* end up causing more harm to the individual self as well as the larger society. The writers use these literary media to call on the agents of oppression as well as the oppressed in the struggle to have a rethink on their approaches in proffering a lasting solution to Niger Delta crisis.

2.6 Environmental degradation: The Niger Delta Experience

The exploration and exploitation of crude oil in the Niger Delta region have made lives of human and non-human unbearable. The pollution of land, water, and air has led to numerous problems in the region (Evoh, 2009; Aghalino, 2009; 2011; 2012; Aghalino and Okolie-Osemene, 2014). Economic challenges such as abject poverty, hunger and hardship abound; social problems such as prostitution, restiveness, armed robbery, kidnapping now happens daily; political problems are also common. Commenting on environmental problems in the Niger Delta, Simon, Akung and Bassey (2014:384) stress that “the neglect of the region has led to environmental degradation, pollution, loss of traditional occupations, rise in social vices like gun-running, kidnapping, militancy, oil theft as well as health hazards”. In support of this view, Apter (1998:122) avers that “in the global media, the struggle came to represent the rapacious appetite of oil capitalism and the ruthless abandon of military dictatorship, as oil-spills, burn-off and blowouts destroyed the creeks and farms of the Ogoni people ...”

The effects of environmental degradation in the region are numerous. The destruction of wetlands and its inhabitants like fish and crustaceans, wide life migration, the destruction of farmlands, the displacement of people and the spread of water-borne epidemics are common (Afinotan and Ojekarotu, 2009; Eyinla and Ukpo, 2006; Chima-Ude, 2013). On environmental despoliation in the region, Oviasuyi and Uwadiae (2010:113) reveal that:

The region has been faced with the problems of oil spillages and gas flaring, which have caused serious atmospheric pollution, ground water and soil contamination, constant heat around the flare pits and abnormal salinity of the pool water, resulting in serious health hazards for the local inhabitants, and of course grave disturbance to the life cycles of plants and animals in the region.

Aghalino (2011:1) accounts that, “the location of massive oil and gas deposits which have been exploited since 1956” has negative implications for the people of the region. Oil has generated a huge revenue for Nigeria since the exploitation began and despite this, the people of the region suffer what Ekpu (2004:10) describes as “grinding poverty in the midst of vulgar opulence. To him, it is the case of a man who lives on the bank of a river and washes his hand with spittle. It is the case of a people who live on a farm and die of hunger”. Lending their voices on the impact of environmental degradation on the region, Eregha and Irughe (2009:4) expose that “the incidence of poverty is [on the] increase in the region...poverty has become a way of life due to economic stagnation, unemployment, malnutrition, poor quality of life as well as unhealthy environment in the region”. Evidence of this hardship abounds in the selected novels for this study and other literary materials written about the situation of the Niger Delta people. The wealth from the region are used to develop other parts of the country, yet children from the region drop out of school because, their parents could not afford sponsorship their education. People from within and outside the country are gainfully employed in the oil companies in the area but the youth of the region wallow in hardship due to unemployment; the children and even the adults roam the streets begging for what to eat while the oil company workers and the selfish government leaders wallow in ostentatious living due to excessive money they gain from the oil business. Ojaruega (2011:496) illustrates this situation in the following excerpt:

While the Niger Delta region provides the Federal Nigerian Government billions of dollars from oil and gas with [resource] to develop other areas of the country, it is sad to note that the region continues to wallow in penury as there are little or no developmental programmes put in place to improve the lot of the people. This is a clear example of a blessing turned to a curse as the people are perpetually oppressed and left in a

marginalised state in spite of generating so much revenue for the nation.

Balogun (2011:561) points out that “it is ironic that with the statistical evidence of funds over \$600 million [?] derived from the region’s oil deposits, there is no proof of corresponding impact on the people of such economic derivation from the region”. Despite having the treasure that the whole world needs and enjoys, the people suffer a lot of negligence and injustice. Even the oil that is produced at their backyard is sold to them at exorbitant prices, if it is available at all. Many people from the region can not meet their daily needs because of the destruction of their means of livelihood. In the report of Amnesty international (2009:9), it is revealed that:

Widespread and unchecked human rights violations related to the oil industry have pushed many people deeper into poverty and deprivation, fueled conflict and led to pervasive sense of powerlessness and frustration.... Oil spills, waste dumping and gas flaring are endemic in the Niger Delta. This pollution which has affected the area for decades has damaged the soil, water and air quality. Hundreds of thousands of people are affected, particularly the poorest and those who rely on traditional livelihoods such as fishing and agriculture.

The insensitivity of the Nigerian government and the oil companies to the plight of the people has exacerbated the situation. They are after selfish gain from the oil business with little or no consideration for the people of the host communities whose totality of existence is tied to the land and water resources. The destruction of these means of livelihood has made life completely unbearable. In confirmation, Saro-Wiwa (1995:96) unfolds thus:

Oil exploration has turned Ogoni into waste land: lands, streams, and creeks are totally and continually polluted; the atmosphere has been poisoned, charged as it is with hydrocarbon vapour, methane, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide 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 oil blowouts have devastated Ogoni territory.

This situation is further captured by Amnesty International (2009:9) thus:

The Niger Delta is the location of massive oil deposits, which have been extracted for decades by the government of Nigeria and by the

multinational oil companies. Oil has generated an estimated \$600 billion since the 1960s. Despite this, the majority of Niger Delta's population lives in poverty. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) describes the region as suffering from "administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructures and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth, squalor, and endemic conflict"... . Their poverty, and its contrast with the wealth generated by oil, has become one of the world's starkest and most disturbing examples of the "resource curse".

The above excerpt is clear evidence of the extent to which environmental problems have created alarm at both national and international levels. The pathetic situation expressed by Amnesty International is not different from the one found in the novels under study. For instance, in *Yellow-Yellow*, the main cause of Zilayefa's predicament is the loss of her mother's source of livelihood to oil spillage. Chukwuma (2011) concurs to this opinion when he opines that "*Yellow-Yellow* ...is still seen as a work that resulted from the despoliation of Nigeria's Niger Delta". He further explains that the loss of Zilayefa's mother's main source of livelihood opens a new chapter of lack, deprivation and impoverishment". At the international level, the Amnesty International (2009:7-8) records that:

Deltas (sic) have to drink, cook with, and wash in polluted water; then eat fish contaminated with oil and other toxins. The health of the environment and the lives of the people are intertwined with the health of the water system. The food, water and cultural identity of many local people are closely related to the delta ecosystem. The activities of the oil companies have engendered land hunger and subsequently distorted the cultural practices of the people that are tied to their land.

As revealed in the background to this study, the destruction of any member of the chain known as the ecosystem constitutes a problem to other members, the destruction of the water and land as evident in the Niger Delta, renders whole existence of man as a member of the ecosystem whose survival is tied to the non-humans almost meaningless. Ushie (2006:8) laments the situation of the people thus, "the Niger Delta is completely vandalised, its once fertile land soaked in and sterilised by crude oil, its people living in thatch and shacks, its rivers, streams and creeks poisoned, its fish murdered, ... [people] live in the midst of oil spillages and around the clock gas flares." The inhalation of

poisonous gas released from air and drinking of contaminated water have led to a lot of health problems. Chinaka (2011: 30), in support of this view, observes that:

The flaring of gas has the tendency of unleashing such diseases as cancers, asthma, bronchitis, blood disorders, etc. subsequently, against the region's ecosystem, the people are forced to share their neighbourhood with such unfriendly phenomena as acid rain, global heat, deforestation, wildfires, contaminated toxic waters, etc. As one thing leads to another, the people who have been driven to the point of mental frustration resort to taking the option of bunkering and smuggling for the main reason of survival. In the process there are incidents of oil spillages.

Just like the Nigerian civil war, environmental degradation has tremendous effects on women and children mostly. The women whose sources of sustenance are destroyed are compelled into prostitution as an alternative means of coping with the situation. Husbands could not provide for their families and wives could not afford their daily needs. As a result, women yield to sexual advances of oil company workers for financial benefits. Ekine (1999) and Anikpo (1996) confirmed that prostitution is on the increase following the influx of male workers from other parts of the country into the Niger Delta. They exploit the women sexually and give them money in exchange. The most pathetic part of the game is that the women are abandoned if the contact results in pregnancy. In the same vein, Adalikwu (2007) and Brisibi (2001) identify poverty and lack of alternatives means of livelihood for the girls of the region as contributory factors that force them into prostitution. This confirms why there is high influx of young girls into Port Harcourt, the heart city of oil producing states. Even girls from other parts of the country live there as sex workers for financial benefits. At times, this business could lead to death. May be in the process of trying to terminate an unwanted pregnancy or in the case of brutal sexual activities, the woman could die. The predicament of the women in a degraded environment cannot be discussed exhaustively, and it would not be out of place to say that the women are the most victimised and vandalised in a context.

The crisis of the Niger Delta "has been identified to be anchored on the logic that despite the vast wealth produced in the area, the people remain poorer" (Akpuru Aja, 2007:104) and this has generated a lot of revolutionary pressures from various groups who take to violent approaches in demanding justice. Nwankwo (2015:384) identifies a number

of factors that are responsible for the conflict in the region to be “revenue allocation formula and resource control, federalism, environmental degradation, state imposed poverty, unfulfilled promises made by the government, etc.” This is in coherence with Onukaogu and Onyerinwu (2011:70) assertion that the “Niger Delta has metamorphosed into one of the deadliest militia zones in Africa” due to the activities of the militants who mobilise themselves into violent resistance against oppressors. This view is supported by Nwizu (2011:315) when she avers that, “the agitation and struggle for adequate compensation and restoration of the land and improvement of life by the people of the Niger Delta has been the crux of the crisis in the area. Their demands are simple and clear: “clean environment, respect for life and property, a fair proportion of what comes from their land, and, above all, a say in their affairs” (Akpan, 2000:148)

In the process of protesting against injustice in the region, numerous lives have been lost in the hands of security agencies that are sent by the federal government to protect the oil companies and their facilities. For instance, in the protests organised by the people of Ogoni on January 4, 1997 to mark the fourth anniversary of the Ogoni national political rally against environmental degradation, an eye-witness account reveals that the Nigerian army killed five Ogoni indigenes and injured many others in the Ogoni town of Zaakpon and other Ogoni villages. Many villages have been destroyed in this oil war thereby rendering the occupants homeless in their own land. In the sharing formula of the oil proceeds, the people from whose land the crude oil is extracted and who bear the brunt of such extraction are not fairly compensated. All these and other provocative issues usually compel the people to engage in protest to register their discontent. While some deploy physical strength to the protests, others like the novelists, poets, playwrights as well as the critics deploy literature as a veritable tool of attack against such injustice. Otete-Akpofure (2011:255) equally stresses that:

There has also been reckless dumping of usually toxic by-products of oil drilling and refining in fresh water used for drinking, fishing and other household activities. On the other hand, the percolation of waste from oil industry into the soil contaminates ground water. At the same time, gas flaring within the vicinity of human dwelling, and high pressure oil pipelines forming a mesh across farm lands, have been

conducive to acid rain, deforestation and destruction of wild life.

Tracing the reason for the emergence of the crisis in the Niger Delta, Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2011: 51) project that “the crisis situated in the Niger Delta has emanated from the dissatisfaction of the citizens of the region over a number of issues that are associated with oil exploration and exploitation, and can be said to be as old as the trade itself.” The exploration and exploitation of oil are unarguably identified as the major causes of environmental degradation in the region but what exacerbates the situation is insensitivity of the agents of oppression represented by oil companies and the Nigerian government who are after the economic benefits of the oil. Watts (2009:18) highlights this view by stating that “nowhere are the failures [by the authorities] more profound and visible than across the oil fields of the Niger Delta...oil has brought only misery, violence and a dying ecosystem”. Etim (2007:24) corroborates this view when he asserts that without being exaggerative, “the Niger Delta region could be described as a disaster zone given the spate of ecological degradation, human exploitation and dehumanisation, social emasculation and trauma that the Niger deltas are currently passing through”.

All these views together boil down to the fact that the crisis in the Niger Delta is caused by marginalisation, oppression, and subjugation of the people of the region in all spheres of life, and that has resulted in violent agitation for justice in the region. This has led to emergence of revolutionary groups whose aim is to demand justice. According to Darah (2010:101), Isaac Adaka Boro arguably formed the first Niger Delta militant group known as the Niger Delta Volunteer Force in 1966 to protest against injustice meted out to the region. Though short-lived by the sudden death of the founder, “the spirit of Isaac Boro...has been raising consciousness and mobilisation combats since 1966.” (Darah 2011:11) Nwankwo (2015:385) opines that struggle for the economic empowerment of the Niger Delta people first manifested itself in 1966 when Isaac Adaka Boro led a revolution leading to the emergence of the Niger Delta Republic. Even though it failed but it created the basis for the continuing agitation among concerned groups that are fighting for the liberation of the Niger Delta people.

Other groups that also emerged include Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) formed by Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ijaw National Congress (INC) have

instigated more revolutionary groups who are ready to die in as much as the enshrinement of justice is concerned. Other groups that engage in the struggle for the liberation of the people of the region include Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta Peoples' Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC), and Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEN). There are other groups who are particularly interested in the welfare of Ogoni people; they include Federation of Ogoni Women Association (FOWA), Council of Ogoni Professionals (COP), Conference of Ogoni Churches (COC), Ogoni Teachers Union (OTU), National Union of Ogoni Students (NUOS), Ogoni Students Union (OSU), National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), and others. The desire for justice according to Beloveth Nwankwo (2015) generated the emergence of environmental rights activism by civil society groups; some of the groups include the Pan-Niger Delta Resistance Movement (PNDRM), the Environmental Rights Action (ERA), the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) and Movement for Reparation to Ogbia (MORETO). All these groups and others are committed to the agenda of Isaac Boro and Ken Saro Wiwa, which is rooted in quest for *justice* for the people of the region.

2.7 Niger Delta Crisis: Roles of Writers

In line with the role of literature to reflect and refract the society, Nigerian literary writers consider it their duty to urgently intervene in the situation of the people of the Niger Delta. Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2011:55) observe that:

The Niger Delta has provided a veritable practicing arena for these revolution-inclined writers. They have recommended the dialectics of force as the supreme panacea to the problem of the Niger Deltan, for whom other strategies, including protracted lamentation have failed.

They further illustrate that:

In Nigerian literature for instance, there arose a group of writers in the 1970s and 1980 who sought to utilize the revolutionary capacities of literature in bringing about a change in the Nigerian society that was already neck deep in the ocean of inept leadership. These writer condemned political highhandedness in an extremely uncompromising, vitriolic fashion. They demanded

change from a radical perspective and preached justice and freedom ... (55).

The relevance of literary writers in African society cannot be over-emphasised. They use their literary force to usher in change especially in time of crisis. Nigerian literary writers have responded to the situation of the Niger Delta with a very sense of urgency. They use their works to condemn injustice done against the people of the area. Their works help in attracting national and international intervention to the situation. Onuekwusi (1986:212) describes these writers as those who, “not only highlight in very bold terms the weakness and calumny of society and the causes of these but also propose revolutionary trends that will hopefully restore the permanent values of society - justice, freedom, peace and human dignity”.

Such writers use their works to protest against any act that militates against justice and human rights. This reveals why their approach is confrontational. Among such writers are Tanure Ojaide, Nnimmo Bassey, Vincent Egbuson, Festus Iyayi, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Tess Onwueme, Ayo Akinfe, Promise Ogochukwu, and many others. The Niger Delta crisis in no doubt has served as the bedrock of protest literature of the Niger Delta. Ushie (2011:531) concurs that the Niger Delta situation has given birth to an emerging genre of literature known as Niger Delta protest literature ...” The writer on the literature of and on the Niger Delta make conscious efforts to help the oppressed get a glimpse of the reality of their situation and imbue them with the strength to fight against the oppressive system. In Ojaide’s *The Activist*, for instance, the collective roles of men and women are needed for oppressive tendencies of the oppressor to be curbed. Egbuson’s *Love My Planet*, Ogochukwu’s *Outrage*, Agary’s *Yellow-Yellow*, Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* and May Nwoye’s *Oil Cemetery*, Tess Onwueme’s *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said It* demonstrate that women are indispensably needed for justice to be ushered into the Niger Delta. To Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2011:55), “much of this writing achieved a reputation for both committed national literature and considerable environmental sensitivity.” Nwahunanya (2011:38) agrees that “the writers make efforts to propose

through their creative works that the people on whose land the oil is located are respected and recognised as the true owners of the land and oil; and that the environment is restored, as an important aspect of this recognition.”

2.8 Nigerian Women and Activism

The opinion of some scholars that African women lack audibility and visibility may not be completely true when one considers in detail their influential position in the pre-colonial setting before “religious and socio-political colonialism negatively corroded the privileged life of the African woman” (Acholonu, 1995:3) In lending credence to Acholonu’s view, Orife (2011:177) opines that “colonialism and imperialism are two factors that are responsible for the oppressive norms in the society against women”. In the pre-colonial era, the African women in general and the Nigerian women in particular occupy certain position of influence and through active resistance to unjust system earn for themselves certain degree of respect and honour. At that period, through individual and collective efforts, they attained a certain level of socio-political power and economic independence that did not only make them relevant to their families but also to their communities. The aim of including this subtitle in this study is to assert that apart from eco-activism, Nigerian women from pre-colonial times to the post-independence era have been engaging in different levels of activism that contribute to positive changes in the society.

In Northern Nigeria for instance, the queen mothers known as magajiya are remarkably respected because of their strong political influence on the affairs of their communities. Abubakar corroborates this view by observing that

Women have been quite active socially and politically in the affairs of their community in Nigeria. The Northern part of the country is full of many examples. In Borno, women officials such as the magira (queen mother), the Gumsu and the Magaram, the official elder sister of the Mai (ruler), wielded tremendous power and influence right from the time of the establishment of the Sefuwa dynasty. (quoted in Kolawole, 1997:45)

In Zau Zau empire (now Zaria) Kaduna State, Queen Amina attracted a great commendation for the outstanding role she played that gained conquest for the empire.

Some versions of the historical account have it that Queen Amina whose exploit is well documented succeeded her mother, Bakwa Turunku (1536-1566) whose remarkable deeds have not been adequately recorded but Zau Zau empire recorded significant expansion and progress during her reign.

In Igala, Kogi State, a woman known as Inikpi also performed a heroic feat by volunteering to be buried alive like a sacrificial lamb so that her people will gain victory over their enemies, the invisible warriors of Junkun. She gave her life willingly to save the lives of others even when she knew that the implication was death. No wonder some historical accounts have it that the founder of the state is a woman. Queen Kambasa of Bonny in Delta area, is a warrior who through her effort defended the kingdom of her people when it was confronted by enemies. She brings the war to an end through her heroic role. This kind of task is particularly associated with men but a woman embarks on it and achieves a positive result. The Aba women uprising in 1929 is worthy of mention in citing examples of women who dare oppressive situation and achieve desired results. They through their collective struggle force the colonial government to reverse its policy on tax payment in favour of the women. In the Eastern part of Nigeria, the *Umuada*, a solidarity women group with great influence is also in this group. They sanction any man that bullies a woman; the same measure is given to any woman who thinks herself too strong to maltreat her husband. In fact, *Umuada* serves as a watch dog over their society. They take action against anybody that breaks the law of the society. They exert so much influence that they serve as ‘a mediator’ on any serious matter to be resolved among husbands and wives, co-wives, parents and children, old and young, rich and poor, and siblings. They help to a greater extent in maintaining peaceful co-existence among people of different status in their communities.

Efunsetan Aniwura as an Iyalode of Ibadan “became a terror to the men in 1887. She was a very prosperous businesswoman, a creditor, and so became a political bigwig and a member of the Ibadan City Council” (Kolawole, 1997:46-47). This is evident that Nigerian women in particular and African women in general enjoyed financial independence through their resourcefulness in the pre-colonial era. This makes them capable of helping to provide the needs of their families. They were supportive of their

family and society through their personal and collective efforts. This is quite contrary to the image of the women in post-independence Ghana as Amah depicts in his novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are not yet Born*. The materialistic dependence exhibited by the man's wife (the man - the protagonist) and his mother-in-law attracts scorn of the reader. To Oyo (his wife) and his mother-in-law, the real man is that man who by whatever means can provide the material needs of his family, like Koomson did. It is this over-dependence on her husband for material needs that makes Oyo use a derogatory metaphor 'chichidodo' in describing her husband, because he refuses to get involved in corruption in order to enrich himself. 'Chichidodo' is a bird that feeds on maggots but detests excrement. In the same vein, Baako in Armah's *Fragment* also faces attack from his family members, especially his mother, for failure to meet their material expectations in terms of cars, buildings, etc. The greedy attitude of these women as well as their parasitic tendencies towards the men makes them attract the scorn of the readers rather than their admiration.

How much more can be said of Endei of Afinifelodun in Kwara State whose struggle against male domination has earned her a remarkable space in the history of her people? What of Aina Orosun from Osun State? Historical account has it that she did not only lead her people in a war between Ara and Ilorin, known as the 'Nasamu war' but also freed the men from taxation of the then colonial government. These feats are most of the time attributed to men but women break such gender barriers through resilience, courage and most importantly through activism aimed at the enshrinement of justice and peace in the human society.

In Lagos also, the legendary footprint of Madam Tinubu is too glaring to be ignored. It is on historical record that she was dauntless and courageous enough to fight the oppressive colonial government. She also exerted a great influence on the then king of Lagos who had to seek her cooperation for a successful reign. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti in Abeokuta is another example of a woman who played significant roles in mobilising women against the oppressive system in her area. She also played a remarkable role in the political sphere of her society. The roles of Mrs Ransome-Kuti, Eniola Soyinka (wild Christian), Mrs Odufuwa as well as the rural market women from Isara and Abeokuta made them so visible and audible that any serious-minded and committed literary writers

like Soyinka could not just ignore them. Their economic resourcefulness and socio-political activism make them irresistible to Soyinka who meticulously underscored these qualities in his autobiographical work, *Ake, The years of childhood*.

The remarkable roles played by the woman before now have located them beyond the family or motherhood margin where “her importance is limited to her uses to the man in terms of giving him sexual pleasure or bearing and nurturing his children” (Oriaku, 1996: 75), to societal space where they are not just seen but heard; where they are not confined but are defined by their beneficial worth to humanity. From the family level to the societal sphere, the women have been playing indispensable roles in preserving humanity; not only in terms of procreation to ensure continuity of human existence but also through involvement in activism aimed at keeping humanity together irrespective of one’s sex, educational, religious, economic, and socio-political status. Therefore, it is not out of place to say that the society cannot exist without women because of their naturally endowed motherly qualities that make them humane, considerate, accommodating and fair in their sense of judgment and treatment of others.

2.9 Image of Women in Literature

Literatures of the world cannot be complete without women featuring in them; this is perhaps due to the indispensability of women to humanity. Sustainability of humanity is to a greater extent dependent on women. Suffice it to say that different literatures of the world cannot be complete without women being represented. This representation of women in literary works varies from one cultural environment to another. It also depends on what is fashionable about women’s existence at the time of a literary production. It equally depends on the perception of the society in which such literary work exists about women.

Portraiture of women in literature is as old as literature itself. Women feature as important characters and play significant roles in both oral and written literary materials. Portrayal of women in ancient Greek and Roman writings by Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas validates this point. Aristotle opines that a female is a female because she lacks certain qualities [which a male possesses]. Aquinas describes a woman as an imperfect man. He substantiates his point on the personality of a woman by stressing that:

The woman is subject to the man on account of the weakness of her nature, both of the mind and of the body ... Man is the beginning of woman and her end, just as God is the beginning and end of every creature ... (1974:218)

The description of women in the above excerpt, clearly betrays Aquinas' relegation for women. In Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, women are depicted negatively. To the above-mentioned writers and most of their contemporaries, women were inferior beings and "harbingers of misfortune" (Evwierhoma, 2002: 53) In fact, to them, women are always the cause of men's ill luck.

The image of women in the pre-colonial Africa is still under contention. While some scholars like Kolawale (1997), Akorede (2011), and Krama (2006), among others, argue that women wielded great influence and were not oppressed as some critics say it, Amaefula (2016) vehemently counters that such influence pales into insignificance when juxtaposed with the weight of the men's influence in that period. Portraiture of women is not only noticed in written literary materials but women feature as important characters in oral literature. Akorede supports this view by stating that "the oral traditions of most African communities confirm the active roles of women in the socio-economic running of the indigenous African societies." (64) She validates her position by opining that women function meaningfully in the African oral narratives and poetry, which are among the major means of acculturation and socialisation, evident in female characters in African indigenous folktales, legends, myth, proverbs, stories, oral poetry, etc. Evwierhoma (2002:84) corroborates Akorede's view when she observes that "African oral tradition and history are full of the exploits of ... women." Akorede further illustrates that in the:

Oral history of the Yoruba of Nigeria, the Fon of Benin Republic, the Kikuyu of Kenya, and the Ashanti, the Akin speaking people of modern day Ghana showed that the non-literate African women occupy very important positions in the political and economic administration of their different society (64-65).

The historical accounts of many African communities clearly attest to the important roles played by women in the management of the communities. In the pre-colonial era, the influence of women in the religious, socio-political and economic settings

confirms their relevance to the society. Historical account had it that women occupy very sensitive socio-political positions in Yoruba land, western part of Nigeria. Iya-Oba, Iyalode, Iya-Kere, Iyaloja are some of the titles of female kings and chiefs who are known for their remarkable influences in their various areas. There are also Yeye-Sorun in Akure, Basorun in Oyo, Lobun in Ondo, to mention but a few influential positions of women in different areas of that region. Ogunshakin (1976:56) clearly notes that “the Lobun is the women chiefs, who supervise markets and play an important role in installing the Oba.” There is Magira (Queen mother) in Borno who also left an indelible footprint in her society on what the existence of women should be not only in Northern Nigeria but also in the world over; the woman should try as much as possible to make her existence positively count.

Religious posts held by women in the pre-colonial era show that the relevance of women goes beyond the domestic domain. Women preside over the worship of gods as priestesses and exert great influence in that sphere. Iya Leori, Iya Lemole, Iya Naso, Iya-fin-iku are some of the religious titles conferred on women in the western part of Nigeria. Akorede (70) reveals that even though “Ifa worship is a semi-secret and predominantly male cult”, Iya Lemole was the “head of the Babalawos (Ifa priests) in the city.” (Johnson, 1921: 64)

In the Eastern part of Nigeria, the positions of the woman as *Ezenwanyi* (Queen) and also as priestess confirm that women’s relevance goes beyond family circle. *Umuada* and *Ndiyom* are other women groups whose impact in the administration of their indigenous communities cannot be undermined. In the Eastern part of Nigeria, women function as Ezenwanyi (Queen) and also as priestess. The post of Chielo as the priestess of Agbala in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is an attestation to this influential religious position a woman can occupy in Igbo society. Chika is also a priestess that is greatly respected and revered for her possession of spiritual authority. It is clearly stated that:

Many years ago when Okonkwo was still a boy his father, Unoka, had gone to consult Agbala. The priestess in those days was a woman called Chika. *She was full of the power of her god, and she was greatly feared.* (13) (Italics not in the original)

Earlier before the encounter between Unoka and the priestess, it was made clear that “Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children.” (11) The above description portrays Okonkwo as a stern personality whose verdict on any matter is final. However, with such austere disposition, he could not object to Chielo (a woman and priestess of Agbala) taking Ezinma to the god in the night. In fact, it is obviously stated that “Okonkwo pleaded with her to come back in the morning because Ezinma was now asleep.” (80) But when “Chielo ignored what he was trying to say ...”, the strict and harsh Okonkwo would have roared like a lion as he did to his most senior wife when she inquired to know whether Ikemefuna was going to stay long with them. Okonkwo shouts her down thus, “Do what you are told, woman; when did you become one of the ndichie of Umuofia?” (12) The woman “took Ikemefuna to her hut and asked no more questions.” (12) Later, Okonkwo who sent his wife into a shell of silence did not even display persuasiveness to another woman, Chielo. This is perhaps owing to his being conscious of her position as a spiritual authority, and being cautious of the implication of countering her words. With this consciousness, Okonkwo “was ... pleading” (80) rather than yelling at her as he usually did to his wives at any minor provocation.

Kolawole (1997:43) avers that “there is a catalogue of African women rulers and leaders who have charted their people’s history in a remarkable way while the marks left by collective group actions remain indelible.” Some of these women include Madam Tinubu of Lagos, Efunsetan of Ibadan, and many others who through individual and collective effort displays higher level of intelligence, discretion, and activism in the management of the societal affairs. Johnson (1921) observes that the oral histories of the Africans show that the pre-literate African women were strong and respectable people. On the image of African women in the pre-colonial era, Akorede (2011:75) asserts that women:

[R]ubbed shoulders with their male counterparts in the political and economic administration of the society. Pre-colonial African women, especially among the Ashante and Yoruba ... were not mere appendages to their men in the socio-political and economic spheres of existence. Women held important

political positions successfully before the advent of the Europeans.

Akorede's last statement in the above excerpt implies that women witnessed a shift (from positive to negative) with regard to their status in the colonial period.

The treatment of individuals is highly dependent of the perception on such individuals by others who are not of equal status with them as well as the society in which they live. The perception of such individuals also reflects on their portraiture in literary works. Linking this opinion to the portrayal of women in African literature, Akorede concurs that, "the portrayal of women in African literature is influenced greatly by the beliefs and values attached to the female in the society. In most male-dominated societies, women are usually regarded as servants of men within and outside the family unit."(114) One of these services, as Ogunyemi (1988:66) describes it, is "to carry and serve foo-foo and soup to men dealing with 'important' matters." This servitude of women becomes worse with the introduction of colonial system of government in Africa.

Africans had their esteemed way of life before the colonisers came. They had their indigenous languages. They had their oral literature which was preserved and passed from one generation to another through the indigenous languages. The colonisers ignored these esteemed African values and cultures; introduced their languages and literatures. As western education was established, written literature which was in the language of the colonizer was also introduced to schools in Africa. According to Adebayo (1995:2), colonialism leaned on "the prejudiced notion of the innate inferiority and deficiency of civilisation of the Africans." With this erroneous opinion in mind, the coloniser wrote literary works about Africa and Africans in foreign languages. These wrong notions were glaringly reflected in the depiction of Africa as a dark nation and Africans as inferior people in the literary works produced by the colonizers. With the introduction of western education, the Africans learnt how to read and write in the colonisers' languages. Sanusi (2015:2) chronicles the advantages of this to the Africans thus:

The result was that, after being armed with the colonizers' language, the African man appeared on the African literary scene to tell his own stories and attack erroneous colonial writings in a view to combating arrogant views of the

superiority of European culture. Thus, exposing the colonizer's misdeeds on the continent.

Evidence of this appearance is seen in Achebe and other pioneer African literary writers who used their works to play interventionist roles. Their works serve as counter responses to erroneous portrayals of Africa and Africans by non-African writers like Joseph Conrad and others. They deploy their literary works to correct wrong impression about Africa by colonizers. Memmi (1991) believes that one of these erroneous impressions was that the colonizer saw himself as civilised and the colonized as savage; for this reason, there was the need for the coloniser to use his civilising experience to make Africans know about their continent from his perspective. The colonisers consider the colonised, empty individuals who do not know anything and have to learn much from them. This wrong perception spurs African writers to used literature as a veritable tool for counter attack against the colonisers.

It is true that all Africans suffer the consequences of colonialism, but it hits harder on the woman. Her voice begins to dwindle as the implications of colonialism create nagging distress for all but heaps piles of burden on the woman. This impediment of colonialism to a greater extent constitutes encumbrance to her development. Colonialism as a “hydra headed phenomenon” as Nwankwo (1996:15) describes it, constitutes a great setback for the woman especially in the socio-political and economic aspects of her life. Parpart and Standt (1989: 210) support this view by stating that:

For most African women the colonial period was characterised by insignificant losses in both power and authority. Colonial officials accepted western gender stereotypes which assigned women to the domestic domain leaving economic and political matters to men. Although many African suffered under colonialism, new opportunities eventually appeared for them while women's economic and political rights often diminished.

The socio-political relevance of women began to wane within this period. The colonial masters betrayed their relegation of women by the functions they assign to them in offices, colonial residences and religious centres. In these places, women are only allowed to devotedly carry out domestic works like cooking, washing of clothes, cleaning and arranging of rooms, and most importantly, to the colonizer, serve as objects which help the

coloniser to clean up their pipes and relax their nerves after the day's stress. Uko (2006:82) notices that:

Colonisation had little or no place for women. The positive [aspect] of British colonisation in particular, were largely targeted towards men. Men serve as assistants to the colonial officers, interpreters in courts, workers in the churches, while women were condemned to domestic chores and featured only as shadowy beings that served the sexual and other needs of the man.

Treatment of women by the colonial masters seems to be worse in the political domain. In the system of indirect rule, men were given prominence by the coloniser while women were totally excluded. This idea is substantiated by Chukukere (1995:4) who reveals that:

The colonial officers regrettably failed to perceive the political contributions of women, believing that politics is a man's exclusive domain. Consequently warrant chiefs symbols of the destructive elements of indirect rule were created and women particularly suffered under their arbitrary jurisdiction.

Omonubi-McDonnel (2003:10) corroborates this view by affirming that:

Colonialism was disengaging experience that obliterated and stifled the voice of African women. The circuitous control created a gender-oriented executive establishment that endures in spite of colonisation. The British government's socio-economic approaches that handicapped women and the political arrangement that empower men to rule women are continually blamed for the current disadvantaged status of women in Africa. Both strategies robbed women of their traditional authority.

The above attestations boil down to the fact that every African suffered pathetically during the colonial regime but its consequences were too harsh and much heavier on the African woman. The colonisers did not have any positive consideration for women. Colonialism just like patriarchy brought down the significance of the woman to base. The duo do not give her room to be directly involved in the decision-making on matters concerning her personal life, let alone other issues in the larger society where she is plunged into total invisibility.

Oppression against women does not only exist in context but also extends to their portraiture in literary works, especially the ones written by male authors as some critics noted. The notion that pioneer African male authors misrepresented the woman in their earlier works, is common with critics like Chikwenye Ogunyemi, Obioma Nnaemeka, Kerz Okafor, Charles Nnolim, Chioma Opara, Modupe Kolawole, Joy Eyisi and Chinoso Okolo, Florence Stratton, and others. This notion, according to the critics, is informed by derogatory and insignificant roles assigned to female characters in earlier literary works of some male authors. Female characters whose existence is tied to the service of men in their lives, either as father, husband or male relatives, do not have a life of their own. Emecheta (1976: 28) sums up the contrasting perceptions on both men and women thus:

It is so even today in Nigeria: when you have lost your father, you have lost your parents. Your mother is only a woman, and women are supposed to be boneless. A fatherless family is a family without parents, in fact a non-existing family. Such traditions do not change very much.

Emecheta, through the above juxtaposition, draws a sharp contrast between relegation of women's personhood and promotion of men's dignity in a male-favoured society. In that kind of system, the woman suffers a double yoke of motherhood and wifhood. The position of the critics on the perceived relegation of women by pioneer African male-authors is not true if the realities of women's lives at that time, in which those male authors wrote, are meticulously subjected to scrutiny. However, struggle against colonialism, projection of African cultural heritage, protection of African dignity as well as defence against inferiorisation of Africa and Africans, which orchestrated the production of the pioneer literary works, should not be overlooked in making such an argument. It appears that such critics fail to consider the above-mentioned factors as what spurred the writers into using literature as a weapon of attack against the selfish superiority tendencies of the colonizers.

The writers could not have avoided this interventionist roles and such matter of exigency, which is very sensitive to African evolving historical period to focus on other issues that were considered less-pressing. Whoever that does that at that time, Achebe (1978:78) states, would become "completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb

who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames.” It is worthy of note that the image of the woman as portrayed in those pioneer works is not in any way different from the realities of her existence in such patriarchal domain at that time. In that period, a woman was just like a sacrificial lamb on the altar of a stern chauvinistic society, where her life is tied to motherhood and wifeness. In such a society for instance, if a woman does not bear children, she has failed because procreation is regarded as her primary assignment in a marital relationship. If she gives birth to only female children, she has failed because her core duty is to produce male children in order to ensure continuity of her husband’s lineage. The names such as *Ahamefula* (may my name never get lost) and *Onochienna* (replacement of the father), *Okemefula*, *Okpumechila*, *Obiechila*, and others that are given to male children in Igbo society affirm that expectation of the woman.

In such a male-centered world, the relevance of a woman is defined by culture. The experience of the woman at that time, is different from what it became ‘later and now’ which could be described as a period of transition for all Africans in general and the African woman in particular. For instance, unlike women in the earlier times, any woman that is struggling with having a child now has options like adoption of children, in-vitro fertilization (IVF), and others. In a case of a hellish marriage, “walking away” can be a better option for the contemporary woman. Such options were not available to the woman at the time in which the pioneer male authors wrote. This explains why the image of a childless woman in those pioneer literary works, is that of the helpless, hopeless and rejected.

The male authors use their works to bring to the fore the condition of the woman and what she is made to go through if she fails to meet the societal expectation of her at that time. In a case of a hellish marriage, culture requires a woman to remain there till death, because, it is “for better, for worse.” Ekwefi’s act in *Things Fall Apart*, is a rare exceptional case. She courageously runs out of an unfavourable marriage to a desirable one with Okonkwo (a resourceful man of title, wealth and honour in Umuofia); the female characters in their works were portrayed to vividly reflect the realities of women’s existence. Against this backdrop, this study convincingly believes that the pioneer male authors do not in anyway misrepresent the woman; rather the female characters and the

roles they played in the works were truism of the lives of women at the time those works were produced.

For instance, some critics frown at the portrayal of Anasi in *Things Fall Apart*. In one of those occasions of Okonkwo's visits to Nwakibie, wine was presented to the guest from which the host has to share. Nwakibie invited his wives to partake in the drinking of the wine. It was revealed that Anasi, Nwakibie's first wife "walked up to her husband and accepted the horn from him. She then went down on one knee, drank a little and handed back the horn." (16) Critics quarrel with the way in which the male author makes the female character, Anasi to *go down on one of her knees*. They interpreted it to mean relegation of the woman. To this study, the action of kneeling down to collect the wine from her husband does not mean diminution of the woman; it is simply the culture of the people.

Against this backdrop, this study maintains that the male author does not intentionally relegate the female character, Anasi. The act of kneeling down makes her fit into the obtainable reality of the woman's existence as the cultural environment requires at the time of the literary production. This point can be substantiated by examining the culture of the Yoruba in Nigeria. In Yoruba land, western part of Nigeria, it is the culture of the people for both male and female to either kneel down or prostrate to greet the elder or people in higher authority like the traditional leaders (males and females). Even today, when the society has undergone evolutionary changes, culture demands that the groom and his kindred must prostrate before the bride's people on the day of traditional marriage rite. This does not mean in any way that the groom and his people were relegated. It is simply the culture of the people.

Nevertheless, based on the perceived relegation of women in the earlier works of male authors as the critics alleged, it is noticed that women are assigned negative roles. Their roles are limited within the confines of domesticity. Negative depiction of women in literary works by male writers can be perceived as a continuation of colonial and patriarchal inclinations. Ruth Sheila frowns at a system which sees nothing good about the woman. She notices that "the patriarchal image of women reflects them as human beings with less intelligence ... physically almost disabled, less able physically, psychologically

and spiritually; small of body, mind, and character; often bad or destructive.” (1980:65)
Her stance is further authenticated by Ibeli (2016:230) who discovered that:

The image of women presented in the works of some male playwrights has largely demonstrated in the image of the patriarchal order, and consistently given negative images of women. Male writers presented women as pathetic characters that are supposed to be used as toys in the hands of their husbands or in the arms of their lovers. ... while some of the male writers clothe their negative portrayal of women in metaphoric terms, others not only leave their portraiture bare and ungarnished, but also tend to lure the reader to accept the portrayal as legitimate and realistic representation of women.

Eyisi and Okolo (2016:154-155) document this unfair portrayal thus:

Women are as disadvantageous and deprived masses. One thing that women in Africa have in common is the undisputed fact that they are the pillars of production and the bedrock of the family. ... most of the literary scholars not only portrayed the African female character as a victim of the African male domination and of traditional customs and practices; they also overlook or minimize these lofty roles of women in the development of the continent.

Misrepresentation of women in the literary works written by male authors is vividly captured by Eyisi and Okolo who further substantiate their point of view by recounting that the male writers “have in their earlier works downplayed the potential roles of women as naivetes and inconsequential fellows. They subjugate the female characters and present them as the ne’er-d-wells. ... Women’s subjugation and subordinated position are always the issues in most of the works.” (158) In those works, it seems that the men wrote about themselves, their exploits and influence which are usually cast in a such palatable way that could attract the envy or admiration of a reader; women’s image is exactly opposite of that of the men in those works. An instance is seen in *Things Fall Apart*, “the elders sat in a circle and singers went round singing each man’s praise as they came before him. They had something to say for every man.” (94) These men are either title holders or are highly placed individuals who are respected for their influential or wealthy status in Umuofia and the neighbouring communities. Okonkwo was praised for attaining an elevated feat as ‘the greatest wrestler and warrior’. The impression that a reader gets from such portrayal is that

no woman has taken a title in Umuofia and no woman has carried out any exploit worthy of recognition as in the case with the men.

The image of women in the earlier works of male authors most times signals negativity. The female characters are portrayed as the helpless, hopeless, depressed and weak who do nothing but weeping and wailing to change their situation. This is exactly the image of women in Akinfe's *Fuelling the Delta Fires*. Women in the novel do not directly participate in the struggle against environmental degradation. Rather, they hid from the oppressors while things deteriorate in their indigenous communities. According to Okeke (1998: 145), the male authors "relegate their female characters to secondary spaces, indeed to a literary ghetto, as lovers, bedmates, entertainers and sexual battlegrounds for man in power." Ayo's women just as the nurse in *Habila's Oil on Water*, failed to get actively involved in activism that is intended to bring positive changes to their society; they only serve as sexual succour to the men in activism. Another way in which women are denigrated by male authors is, by portraying them in the light of moral laxity.

In Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*, Wini resorts to prostitution in order to cope with the hard economic condition. She also exhibits an attitude that presents her as untrustworthy person. When the condition seems not to meet her expectation, she elopes with a white man, abandoning, Ben, her partner and their child. The elopement perhaps is as a result of materialistic tendencies. In the fictional Karara centre in the same work, the women are seen around, taking up prostitution as a means of survival. They may try to justify their act by attributing it to harsh economic conditions. But this position appears to this study as propounding a philosophy to soothe someone's predicament. This study inquires, apart from a shameful act like prostitution, is there no other resourceful thing the women can engage in? In Karara centre, Ben observes:

The women are not looking too good today. Harlots never look too good anywhere at the end of the month. They look sleepy and overworked from last night and the night before. They also look hungry, murderously grovelling for more. In two weeks the bars will be empty, cold, and peaceful. Left only to the waiters

and their flies and the sale-price hookers. These will go around wearing ON-SALE pinned to the fronts of their skirts till next month (119).

The portrayal of morally loose women, who do nothing than to rely on men for economic provision, worsens the image of women. Such could be interpreted to be indolence and over-dependence on men on the side of the women. Though some critics argue that engaging in prostitution is another way of fighting back against a system that does not create a space for women to thrive, one wonders how truthful this statement is. Some equally see prostitution as a way for the women to use what they have to get what they need. Such position may be deceitful and detrimental not just to women's image but to the lives of women owing to the danger it might pose to their personhood.

One of such risks is attraction of verbal assault from the men. Ocholla in Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*, abandons his two wives and runs to Nairobi in order to avoid the responsibility of catering for them. The abandonment is caused by hardship in their country. Working at a construction company where he is paid a meagre salary, it could not sustain him let alone the addition of his two wives and children. Out of this frustration of working heavily but earning poorly, he resorts to drinking "Karara" to enable him forget his helplessness. He out of this frustration of the burden of being over-dependend on by the wives, rains curses on the wives when he is requested to fulfill his fatherly responsibility. To him "all women are bastards. Children are sick, school fees are up, and they want new dresses! Wives are animals,... children and dresses, that is all they know... where do they think I am digging the money?" (62). This expression is an indication that the women have lost their respect before their him because of over-dependence on men; no wonder he refers to them as 'animals'.

In the commercial/economic domain, if women are assigned any role, it cannot be more than that of petty-traders or errand girls for resourceful men who own and control many-million-naira businesses. In the religious setting, women are cast in the image of observers or *cleaners of the outside*. Achebe's women are appropriate examples here. In that *Things Fall Apart*, membership of the *egwugwu* cult is open to men. Women are only meant to keep the outside of the shrine clean and attractive for the men. It is shown that:

These women never saw the inside of the hut. No woman ever did. They scrubbed and painted the outside walls under the supervision of men. If they imagined what was inside, they kept their imagination to themselves. No woman ever asked questions about the most powerful and the most sacred cult in the clan” (71).

In the social arena, women are portrayed as objects of entertainment for the men. They serve no other need than to entertain the men with cat-walk or thrilling dance steps that would ease their stress after strenuous deliberation on important matters. Achebe’s women are good examples to be sited here. After active participation in the rigorous exercise of marriage rites, the men were entertained by the girls who “came from the inner compound to dance.” (94) It is possible that the women went back to the inner compound where they were before the dance, just as they did after welcoming the guests, “the women retired.” (93)

In some male authored literary works, women are depicted as nagging individuals who make the home uncomfortable for the men (husbands). Sometimes, they would be given the image of conflict instigators. This is commonly noticed in co-wives, mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship, and neighbourhood relationships. According to Frank (1987), women are portrayed as “purveyors of sorrow” in the literary works written by men. Amadi’s protagonist is a victim of this portrayal. Ihuoma in *The Concubine* is suspected to be responsible for the untimely death of Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme. These men meet their mysterious death after having married her or while trying to get closer to her (either as a husband or as a lover). Readers are meant to understand from the novel that:

As soon as Emenike married Ihuoma his life was forfeit and nothing would have saved him. ... Madume’s real trouble began after he had assaulted Ihuoma while she was harvesting plantains. Added to this was the fact that he had a secret desire to make Ihuoma his lover or may be marry her. (1966:195)

It is revealed that the tragic deaths of these men are caused by Ihuoma’s sea king husband, that is, a jealous spiritual husband who would not spare any man making or nursing advances towards her. Here, she is seen to be responsible for the misfortune of the three men. This validates the stance of Bryan. While investigating the image of women in

the earlier works of Soyinka, she discovered that the female character is depicted as a man-eater who “sucks the vigour and vitality from men, leaving them like sugar cane pulp, squeezed dry.” (1987:123) She further substantiates her opinion on the portrayal of female characters in male-authored texts by observing that these women are sometimes depicted to be “corollaries in nature, the bee, the ant, the praying mantis which often involuntarily eats its mate during the act of love making.” (123). It is this perceived misrepresentation of women in male-authored works, this study believes, that informed the impression of Ojo-Ade on African literature and portrayal of women. According to him,

African literature is a male-created, male-oriented, chauvinistic art. ... Male is the master; male constitutes majority. The fact is well documented in our colonial history. The white civilizer, as cunning as ever, carefully chose his black counterparts to run the affairs of the 'Dark Continent'. Woman is considered to be a flower, not a worker. Woman is supposed to be relegated to the gilded cage; she is not the contributor to, the creator of a civilization. (1983:158)

Chukwuma expresses her dissatisfaction over what some critics refer to as a one-eyed writing by male authors. She lashes her vexatious feeling on such male authors in the following queries:

The men wrote about themselves, their wives, homes, their ideals, aspirations and conflicts, their confrontation with the white man and his ways, in sum, their society at large. They were the masters and the traditionally accepted mouthpiece of their women folk. But did they say it all? Can any being overtake the place of another? Can a male writer feel the depth of a woman's consciousness, sensibilities, femininity, impulses and indeed her weakness? (2000: 101)

Implied here are deliberations on how egocentric the men are in projection of themselves; placing themselves on top and the women below, one might be compelled to imagine what constitutes this difference. Do both men and women not have the same brain that can make them co-ordinate ideas and put them in writing? Do they all not feel emotions that are characterised of all mortal human beings?

This perceived misrepresentation of women has spurred counter responses from African female authors. This move is said to have been initiated by pioneer African women writers like Flora Nwapa, Zulu Sofola, and Mabel Segun, among others. These female writers use their works to do what could be described as launching missile attack in the literary male barrack, with the intention to playing redemptive roles with regard to the image of women that was bitterly battered by the male authors. This attack could be seen as a literary version of Aba women's uprising in 1929, which has remained one of the indelible women's activism as historical records have it.

With this consciousness in mind, the women engage their works in engendering "deconstruction of the phallo-discursive strategies that have kept them in the bondage of otherness for a very long time." Jegede (2011:210) As a result of this awareness also, the female writers employ literature "to redefine themselves" and "to project themselves as they feel they should be presented" as Nwapa (2007:527) points out. They seriously agitate for a change in status quo through the power of the pen. Though this agitation is not a placard-carrying type or the type carried out by Aba women in 1929, its effect is tremendously felt in the literary scene as is evident in the transformation of women's image over the years. The evidence of women's appearance on the literary scene is chronicled by Adebayo (2018:174) who remarks that:

The African womanhood has undergone constant modification in its form, state and nature over the time. Such modification has been occasioned by the agitation of concerned critics about the conditions and fate of the African woman. Such concerned individuals have argued that the African woman is in a deplorable social condition. To them, the social construct in Africa ... favours the male gender [*and must be changed*]

In order to debunk such negative perception about women by the men, Taiwo (1984:25) asserts that "women write to show that the male position is not unassailable and try to correct certain fallacies which have gained currency in a male oriented society. ... female novelists do not feel that women should accept the roles carved out for them by the men and society." The female writers use their works to do what Akpah (2018:232) describes as "negotiating a society where women are given equal chances to operate and pursue their goals without sexist hindrances." This transformation in womanhood is glaring in

“post-colonial Nigerian literature” in which there is indication of “an improvement on the image of women.” Amaefula (2016:261)

Indyer and Fanyam (2016:337) note that “disagreement between male and female sexes started long before the wide awareness on feminist discourse.” Idegu (2009:18) in concurrence with this view asserts that:

In 1929 Nigeria when this conscious, deliberate and well-orchestrated fight by the women was staged, there was nothing close to feminism in most parts of the world, not to talk of Nigeria ... before the Nigerian women was educated enough to comprehend feminist aesthetics, their great grandmothers had gone far ahead of them ... the consciousness to identify injustice against humankind, and particularly, women, can be strongly argued to be inborn; nevertheless awaiting some re-awakening and re-focusing to give it broader and deeper followership. This is where Nigerian female intellectuals, and men who are women-struggles sympathetic come in; so that where the Aba women used natural “weapon” of cassava sticks and the use of coordinated force, women of this generation can be far more acidic in their criticism and struggle, but by the use of the barrel of the pen.

Idegu in the above excerpt, charges the female writers to use their works to embark on a rescue mission in the African literary field where the image of the woman is derisively battered by male authors. In this charge, literature becomes an absolute tool of correction in the hands of writers on a mission.

Some scholars are of the opinion that what is commonly noticed in the works of the first generation African female writers is a mere narration of the woman’s ordeals in the patriarchal African society. At that stage, it is obvious that there was no conscious effort made to change the denigrated perception and treatment of the woman by the early female writers. According to Awuawuer (2009:337):

What dominated the theme of a number of Nigerian female dramatists (*as well as writers on other literary genres at the early stage of African literature in its written form*) like Zulu Sofola ... and others were the presentations of women’s position under cultural practices which negate their rights without actually making an attempt to extricate themselves from such conditions.”

Awuawuer's observation is corroborated by Kolawole (2000:120) who notices that "the first wave of women's literature in Africa reveals a relatively passive attitude in presenting women's reality as early women writers wrote cautiously without confronting gender issues overtly." What flooded the women writings in that early stage, is exposition of victimisation of women in men-favoured culture. Emecheta's portraiture of Alice Ogbanje Ojebeta in *Head Above Water*, is a good example to illustrate this point. According to her,

My mother, Alice Ogbanje Ojebeta, that laughing, loud-voiced, six-foot-tall, black glossy slave girl ... my laughing mother, who forgave a brother that sold her to a relative in Onitsha so that he could use the money to buy ichafo siliki-silk head ties for his coming-of-age dance ... my mother, that slave girl who had the courage to free herself and return to her people in Ibusa, and still stooped and allowed the culture of her people to re-enslave her, and then permitted Christianity to tighten the knot of enslavement.
(3)

Even in the hand of 'a brother', that is, a close male relative, a woman's life is insecure. Adebayo (1996:42) detects that "whether in life or death, the man continues to oppress the woman." This is exactly the experience of one of Emecheta's female characters in *The Slave Girl*. She:

[W]as forbidden to visit the stream, to bathe, to enter any hut where the man of the family had a title. In fact, a woman in mourning was not really expected to survive long after the death of the husband. She was confined to her hut like a prisoner until her months of mourning were over. (27-28)

In the above excerpt, the ordeal of Ojebeta's mother is recounted. The widow is subjected to traumatic widowhood practices as the culture demands. The rites usually last for seven months in which the mourner is not expected to live a normal life. Her movement is highly restricted and above all, she is not expected to engage in any normal life activity that guarantees comfort; bathing and eating, are examples of such. This is the situation that the female character and other women that are entrapped by obnoxious cultural practices around Africa find themselves in. In such a culture, a woman (the girl child especially) is perceived and treated like an ordinary commodity, which can be sold to realise money for other needs. This is the situation that Ojebeta finds herself. It is told that her brother, Okolie, "... was giving his sister away into the keeping of this rich lady, and getting some

money ... [and later], she might be given to a suitable husband and could collect the bride price” (36). While pondering on why a woman should be sold like an ordinary ‘thing’, she is made to understand that “every woman, whether slave or free, belonged to some males. At birth you were owned by your people, and when you were sold you belonged to a new master; when you grow up your new master who had paid something for you would control you.” (117)

The experience of Ogwoma in Sofola’s *Wedlock of the Gods* is similar to that of Ojebeta. Ogwoma is forced against her will to marry Adigwu who is richer than Uloko, the man she loves. This is because Adigwu can afford to pay her bride price. Her parents want her to marry the richer suitor because they intend to use the money realised from her bride price to offer sacrifice for the healing of their son, Ogwoma’s brother. For this reason she “was tied and whipped along the road to Adigwu” (21), the man she does not like. This shows how low the woman is placed by men in patriarchal culture. She is treated as a person who neither has a will of her own nor has a future that requires to be invested in. In this case, her future is used as an alternative that is forgone to meet the most pressing need, which is the security of the man’s destiny. In that culture, she is not equally secure in the hand of fellow women who have been made to accept and live with low perception of themselves. Odibei, her mother-in-law, accuses her of being responsible for the death of Adigwu. Though the performance of widowhood rite is what the culture stipulates for the widow, the accusation of her mother-in-law strengthens the rite, which appears to be a punishment for killing her husband. Ogwoma is subjected to three-month compulsory mourning for her late husband. During the period of mourning, she is not to sleep in the inner room but near the fire place. The condition of the mourning room gives a clear picture of her subjection to sorrow. It is revealed that:

The room reflects a place of mourning. Some stools and household utensils are placed at random on the floor, shelves and by the sleeping mat, all near a fireplace where cooking materials are also kept. *There is an inner room, but Ogwoma sleeps by the fire as she is still in mourning.* The fire is out, but there are ashes and a few pieces of firewood. (5) (emphasis mine)

Later, Ogwoma starts having a love affair with Uloko, the man she loves, within the period of mourning. This is a taboo according to the culture of the people, but to her, the

end or death of Adigwu is the beginning of her freedom. She makes this view clear in the following statement, "...I have fought for the past four years to marry a man I love, but these people will not let it be. I was tied and whip along the road to Adiwgu. Now that God has freed me ...” (21). She expresses a total refutation to culture that demeans a woman in an open confrontation with her mother, Nneka, thus:

NNEKA: I heard everything and I cannot walk on the road for shame ... Did we do anything that the land forbids? Is it not as others give their daughters away in marriage to husbands that we give you away to one?

OGWOMA: No, it is not the way others are given away to their husbands that you and father threw me away to Adigwu. No, mother, you and father were so hungry for money that you tied me like a goat and threw me away to a man I hate. (21)

The above confrontational expression is a total objection to any system that demeans a woman. With this, the playwright makes her feminist stance clear. It is a call not only to women but to individuals around the world to raise protest against any system that is not favourable to the development of the woman.

In chronicling this experience as it is reflected in the portrayal of female characters in the early works of female writers, Stratton (1988:147) states that:

Their female characters are enclosed in the restricted spheres of behaviour of the stereotypes of a male tradition, their human potential buried in shallow definitions of their sex. Silence, like the slave woman, by blows, - either to their bodies or psyches - they are forced to submit to the necessity of conforming to the externally imposed requirements of their masculine societies. Living in bondage to men, but desiring to live freely and fully, they are bewildered by, or seethe with inner rage at their servitude to a structure of values matched to the needs of others ... They are schizophrenic, their personalities fragmented by their desire both to accept and reject their condition.

If a woman experiences restriction in a society that is culture-bound, it is even worse in rigid religious communities where cultural inclinations and religious doctrines are combined to compound the woman's agony. El Saadawi's *A Daughter of Isis* illustrates this. The work shows the agony of the repressive Egyptian culture inflicts on a woman. In such oppressive Egyptian culture, a man is mandated to "beat his bride on the wedding

day ... “. (31) Such brutality, this study believes would inflict on the woman involved not only with physical injuries but also with emotional pains.

Women are treated as victims of men’s brutality and cruelty in El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*. In the text, Firdaus, the female protagonist, right from her natal home to the outside world, is a victim of men’s brutality. As a child, she experiences a father who beats his wife severely and turns his female children to beasts of burden. She laments, “My father, a poor peasant farmer..., knew very few things in life..., how to beat his wife and make her bite the dust each night” (12). Firdaus’ mother is a victim of the brutality of her husband who beats her and makes her eat dust, a form of dehumanisation that the women pass through in the hands of the men who are like slave masters in the guise of husbands. The mother is also bullied whenever her male child dies because of the significance that the husband places on the male but when it is the female that dies, he takes it as nothing: “When one of his female children died, my father would eat his supper... he would go to sleep, just as he did every night. When the child that died was a boy, he would beat my mother, then have his supper and lie down to sleep” (18).

His brutality is also seen in his exposition of Firdaus to harshness of cold weather, “our hut was cold, yet in winter my father used to shift my straw mat and my pillow to the small room facing north, and occupy my corner in the oven room” (17). Even when there is little food in the house, the father eats it alone leaving the wife and the children hungry, “my father never went to bed without supper no matter what happened. When there was no food at home we would all go to bed with empty stomach. But he would never fail to have a meal...one evening I dared to stretch out my hand to his plate, but he struck me a sharp blow over the back of my fingers” (18-19). The father (the man of the house) turns Firdaus into a beast of burden and her mother a waiting slave who has been brainwashed to believe that everything should be done in favour of men; she washes his feet and reserves food for him alone even when she and the children go hungry. And this oppression makes Firdaus to be inquisitive about her paternal identity, “Who was I? Who was my father? Was I going to spend my life sweeping the dung out from under the animals, carrying manure on my head, kneading dough, and baking bread?”(16). She laments thus:

On one occasion he hit me all over with his shoe. My face and body became swollen and bruised. So I left the house and went to my uncle. But my uncle told me that all husband beats their wives, and my uncle's wife added that her husband often beat her. I said my uncle was a respected Sheikh, well versed in the teachings of religion, and he, therefore, could not possibly be in the habit of beating his wife. She replied that it was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives. The precepts of religion permitted such punishment. A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience (44).

In such men-centered domain, women suffer double yokes of cultural and religious biddings. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie takes a general look at the life of the African woman after colonialism, the implication of the foreign culture on Africans in general and the woman in particular. Abandonment of African indigenous religion to embrace foreign ones brings tales of woes to the woman. Female characters in the novel, are the victims of the male repression. Kambili and her mother, Beatrice Achike, are circumscribed by her the father's fanaticism and the wall of their prison-like home. He almost burnt Kambili to death with hot water in the name of trying to cleanse her of sin because of her visit to Papa Nnukwu who practises African traditional religion. He pours the water on her leg for cleansing and that give her burns and excruciating pain (201). Beatrice is also beaten to the extent that she miscarries her pregnancy. She laments thus: "You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, nne? Your father broke it on my belly. ... My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there is nothing he could do to save it." (201) Eugene Achike out of religious zealousness rules everybody around him with a hard hand. Even though Jaja, his son is a victim but all the women around him experience worse victimisation. Irrespective of how deeply devoted he is in the practice of the new religion, whose doctrine is rooted in love, he still exhibits tyrannical acts towards others. This is because the adherents of the new way of life cannot be different from those who brought it, who themselves are oppressors.

In *Everything Good Will Come*, the society treats women as passive beings and dehumanises them like common objects that could be inherited. After the death of Sheri's father, her uncle inherits her, her siblings and her stepmothers in accordance with the stipulation of the custom, which makes the women property of the men. African culture in

general, places significance and power on the shoulder of the men thereby relegating the women to the background. This inheritance as family property of the man is also seen in *Purple Hibiscus* when Kambili wonders why Auntie Ifeoma calls her mother “Nwunye m’ (My wife). Papa explains that it is the tradition of the people that the family and not the man alone that marries a wife (81). In Africa generally, women’s subjugation is an issue that has generated a revolutionary tone in the voice of literary writers.

The agony that women are made to go through in Senegalese culture with stiff Islamic practices does not only drown the voice of women but also renders their image invisible, is brought to bear in Mariama Ba’s *So Long A Letter*. The women are subjected and subjugated in an inhuman way. Harmful widowhood practices further plunge the agony of the woman into complexity. The female writers also show the fate and experiences of the woman in patriarchal environment where her importance is tied to procreation. In the case of childlessness, the woman is always alleged as the cause of childlessness. For this reason, she is subjected to serious assault, mockery, and derogatory treatment if she fails to fulfil this responsibility.

Nkem in *The Triumph of the Water Lily* is a victim of the stigmatisation that is attached to childlessness. She narrates her ordeal thus, “the malice of so-called friends and members of his family was threatening to turn our relationship sour. There had been pressures on Odili to marry again since I was assumed to be barren and incapable of begetting children for him.” (18) In most cases, the woman is accused of being responsible for her childlessness. It is either she has a spirit husband who prevents her from being fruitful in the physical world or she is spiritually a cannibal in nature. This means that she has eaten up the children she is supposed to physically give birth to. All these and more are the major pre-occupations of the first group of female writers. Most of their literary imports hinge on oppression of women. Such issues as childlessness, harmful widowhood practices, ‘thingification’ of the woman through bride price system, using a woman as an opportunity cost of a more important need, as well as sexism are some out of many themes that they wrote about.

Sankar and Rajeshkanna (2014:196) notice that “women have been represented as the weaker sex or the second sex and stereotyped with negative qualities such as

sensitive, emotional, fragile, indecisive, submissive ...” without adequately showing a way out of this relegation. Though the first group of female writers appears not to have protested against oppression of women in confrontational manners like the post-feminist writers, their works lay a significant background for the development of African female writings in particular and African literature in general. What is known today as feminist and gender studies in and out of their African context have their foundation in the significant contributions of those writers to African literature.

New Image of the African Woman in Female-authored Literary Works

For the reason of the perceived passive representation of women in the earlier works of African female writers, Ogundipe-Leslie (1987:10) charges the female writers to “rise up and rigorously change the docile images of women with the power of their pen.” Having been entrusted with this responsibility, Sanusi (2015:12) believes that the third generation female writers:

... used their writings mostly to seek a redress of the situation by portraying a positive image of the African woman and challenging the domination of African life socially, politically and economically by African men. They hope to bring about necessary changes in society through their works, thereby removing obstacles that had for so long silenced and dominated women.

Sanusi substantiates his point of view by stating that “in attacking patriarchal traditions and striving to create positive images for African women, these writers sought to bring women out of invisibility.”(12-13) The primary duty of such writers becomes to negotiate a balance space that would encourage the woman to assert her individuality and specifically re-define her humanness. The female writers, Evwierhoma (2002:4) perceives, have the task of “depicting characters of the same sex as themselves, making great exploits in the text.” In compliance to this task, Adimora-Ezigbo in her work, *The Last of the Strong Ones*, creates female characters that are assertive and courageous enough to demand a positive change in their community. For all women, a female character like Ejimnaka and others are transformational archetypes who have transcended docility to agility. These women initiated a shift from the ‘background’ to the ‘forefront’ where an individual’s worth is defined not by sex but by the individual’s relevance to the society.

The commitment of the female writers, therefore, is to use their pen to usher the woman to the centre stage where she can become an active actor in definition of herself through the display of those qualities that imbue human beings with dignity. In line with this, Uko (1992:143) notes that these female writers “have carefully steered away from the thesis of woman-as-victim, woman-as-pawn in the hands of men, and woman-as-sexual vignette whose major role is to gladden men’s hearts” to women who are direct actors on a stage of life to define womanhood.

In Africa, a lot of women have carved a niche for themselves. Their remarkable positive contributions to the progress of their different communities have made them irresistible for historical documentation. Some of these women include Ama Zingha, the Queen of Metama in Central Africa; Yaa Asantewa of Ghana; Winnie Mandela of South Africa, Nawal El-Saadawi of Egypt, Mme Kathilili and Wangari Mathai of Kenya, to mention but a few women from other countries in Africa. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Queen Kambas of Bonny, Queen Amina of Zaria are few out of many women from Nigeria whose relevance in the society have not only made them to attain recognition but are celebrated as historical icons.

The new generation African female writers can be described as a team that emerged on the stage with new vigour to retell the woman’s story, rewrite her history and give her a definition that would be able to vividly capture what it really means to be a woman. This they do with a new distinctive clue of dignity for the woman. They employ characterisation as a medium for achieving this new vision. These writers include Chimamanda Adichie, Nawal El Saadawi, Mariama Ba, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Stella Osammor, Tess Onwueme, Stella Oyedepo, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Sefi Atta, and many other African female writers who use their works to agitate for women’s emancipation. In *She No Longer Weeps*, Dangarembga’s protagonist challenges male domination. Martha challenges men’s oppression against women. Freddy jilts her after impregnating her on the ground that he is not yet prepared to carry out the responsibilities that come with marriage and fatherhood. She goes back to her father’s house with hope at least to get succour. This hope turns out a mirage as her father also rejected her on the ground that he cannot violate what he preaches in church as a religious leader against pre-marital sexual relationship and

pre-marital pregnancy. Her mother's hostile attitude adds salt to her injury. Martha challenges the oppressors thus:

... you had a daughter, but I am becoming a woman, and things are changing. To be a woman is no longer a crime punishable by a life time servitude to man. I know in your days there were many pressures that prevented a woman from becoming independent. I know that there were not even many women who could be independent because they couldn't work for a wage or a salary ... But the time has come for us to live differently; I don't have to be tied by those beliefs because I can support myself and I will not sacrifice myself to a man's eye just because the society says I ought to (20-21)

In Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested*, women devise a revolutionary strategy against sexist treatments that have long kept them in servitude. The women form a movement known as Bumpy-Chested Movement. In this women's group, they are convinced that being confined in child-bearing and domestic works are acts of slavery against the women, therefore, the women are incited to challenge it in their various homes in order to opt for reversal of roles between them and the men (husbands). The women's protest yields an expected result but in the aspect of child-bearing. The men could not but start doing those duties that are perceived to be exclusively women's.

Through the characters of Ejimnaka and Auntie Ifeoma in Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* respectively, the female writers demonstrate that the African woman has transcended the margin. Female characters in the works exhibit bravery that is regarded to be exclusively men's. In *The Last of the Strong Ones*, it is noticed that "Ejimnaka did not wait to hear more. With unbelievable dexterity, she grasped the trunk of the tree and began to climb "wait until I get to you", she cried. (147) Ejimnaka energetically climbs an oil bean tree with such energy and vigour to show her objection against a boy that climbs the tree without her consent. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Auntie Ifeoma takes up a role that is believed to be that of the first son of a family in Igbo land. She courageously carries the dead body of her father (fondly called Papa Nnukwu) from the village to Nsukka while his elder brother, Uncle Eugene who is expected to do that is afraid for the alleged fetish practices of Papa Nnukwu. The display of such

gallantry by the women clearly demonstrates that they have transcended the image of a ‘weaker vessel’ to strong individuals who can take the bull by the horn, if occasion arises.

Moreover, by the creation of a female character that is educated, contented and economically independent, Adichie makes her feminist statement clear. For her, education is a veritable tool of emancipation for the African woman. It opens her eyes to the sources of oppression, and equips her with the courage that is required to combat them. Auntie Ifeoma is a complete image of an emancipated woman. She refuses to accept suppression from her husband and Eugene (her brother). The freedom she creates around her household is evident. Kambili thinks, ‘Nsukka could free something deep inside your belly that would rise up to your throat and come out as a freedom song’ (299). Auntie Ifeoma, through education, is a fully emancipated woman and does not put herself under the subjugation of the men for economic benefits. She refuses to stoop too low to men for the sake of getting what they have. She reminds Beatrice of the incidence that transpired between her and Eugene thus:

Have you forgotten that Eugene offered to buy me a car?.... But first he wanted us to join the knights of St John. He wanted us to send Amaka to convent school. He even wanted me to stop wearing make-up! I want new car, nwunyem, and I wanted to use my gas cooker again and I want a new freezer and I wanted money so that I will not have to unravel the seams of Chima’s trousers when he outgrows them. But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things (95).

Ifeoma is an exemplary African woman, who would not like to turn herself to a parasite, waiting to suck life out of the men as the hosts. She is contented with what she has while making relentless effort to improve her condition through economic resourcefulness.

In the same vein, Atta in *Everything Good Will Come* creates a well-educated woman, Enitan, a well educated lawyer who uses her education to champion the liberation of her father and other men in prison. She remains defiant to any piece of advice from anybody to stay at home because of her pregnancy. By invention of a successful career woman, intelligent and dauntless enough to negotiate freedom for the men, Atta uses this medium to assert that the biological make up of a woman does not in any way put her at a disadvantageous position. In consonance with this position, Nwapa (2007:528) makes a

clarion call to all women to use their platforms as individuals, social groups and professionals to vehemently:

Debunk the erroneous concept that the husband is the lord and master and the woman is nothing but his property ... debunk the notion that the woman is dependent on her husband. The woman not only holds her own, she is astonishingly independent of her husband ... [and] to analyze the woman's independent economic position [or] the power she wields by the mere fact that she controls the pestle and the cooking gas.

Adeniyi (2018:57) in his examination of post-feminist consciousness and how the application of the term has helped to guide the contemporary female writings in shaping the image of their female characters to suit the expectation on the woman, concludes that the African female writers have successfully used their works to engage in the:

[E]nthronement of socio-economic, political, cultural, legal, religious, educational structures that will enthrone the regime of male Other, female Self. ... Since gender inequality has often led to injustice; patriarchal tradition, in which male become Subject and female Object, needs reconstruction so as to assuage the pang of betrayal and brutalisation of female gender by men. (69)

Evidence of this commitment is very glaring in most works of the 'post-feminist' writers as Adeniyi points out. These writers use their works to challenge and change the already existing erroneous worldview on the African woman. They achieve this task by using what that can be described as role-reversal technique. Through this, a man becomes the 'other' and woman assumes the image of 'self'. Adizua in Nwapa's *Efuru* is a good example to be cited here. He is economically incapacitated such that he could not pay his wife's bride price not to talk of provision of basic needs of the family. His wife, Efuru takes up this role successfully. To Adeniyi, Adizua "metaphorises patriarchal figure whose capacity deliberately uses the tool of economic deprivation to create a man that post-feminists desire – a man tied to the apron strings of his wife" (67). By the creation of a female character on whom a man depends, Adeniyi believes that "Nwapa ... succeeds in

engendering a post-feminist agenda through the creation of a wife-husband and husband-wife motif in the novel.” (68)

Besides, the feminist writers (females and males inclusive) in their commitment to helping the African woman to regain her lost dignity and honour have steered away from the age-long depiction of the woman as a victim, weaker vessel, appendage, the oppressed, hopeless, helpless, needy, ‘object’ and the ‘other’ in earlier African literary works, to reconstructing a new bridge to pave a way for women’s entry to those exclusively men’s domain, hence defining themselves from the point of reality. Efuru, the character in *Efuru*, Ejimnaka in Ezigbo’s *The Last of Strong Ones*, Aunty Ifeoma in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, Boma in Ogochukwu’s *Outrage*, Toundi in Egbuson’s *Love My Planet*, Rita in Nwoye’s *Oil Cemetery*, Naja in Yero’s *Naja* to mention but a few female characters who through assertiveness, bravery and resourcefulness leave indelible marks in different fields of endeavour, are worthy of mention.

2.10 Reviews on Previous Studies on the Selected Novels and Plays

One of the studies that have been carried out on *Love My Planet* is done by Aboh (2015). He examines the text from a linguistic perspective. In his essay “Investigating Nigerian novelists use of slangs in describing sex, sexual acts and identity in Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* and Egbuson’s *Love my Planet*”, Aboh examines the novelists’ use of slangs in describing sex, sexual acts and identity in the texts.

In “Alienation and Eco-activism in selected works on the Niger Delta crisis”, Feghabo (2014) contends that feeling of alienation is one of the impacts of injustice on the Niger Delta in the works. He argues that revolutionary acts of the people of the region are manifestation of erosion of self as a result of oppressive actions of the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian leadership. Feghabo points out that the author holds the multinational oil companies and government responsible for despoliation of the environment of the Niger Delta. This accounts for the numerous political and socio-economic problems which abound in the region. To him, engaging in violent acts like armed robbery, kidnapping, hostage-taking and restiveness are expressions of alienation felt by the people of the region who are excluded from the management of their society. They are disappointed that one of the most lucrative mineral resources is exploited from

their land and yet the region is plagued with poverty and hardship. This injustice leads to revolutionary pressure in the works. In the examination of the text, the researcher particularly focuses on men's eco-activism.

In the same study, Feghabo explores how injustice perpetuated by oil companies and the government result to degradation of the environment in *The Activist*. This further affects every area of the people's life. Psychologically, the people feel alienated and devise means of fighting back. The researcher reveals that engaging in militancy, kidnapping, oil pilfering and the likes are expressions of alienation by the people. The people are compelled to protest against the oppression. He pays particular attention to men's agitation against pollution of their environment in the texts, leaving out the aspect of women's eco-resistance. This creates a gap in the study; which this study intends to fill.

In his essay, "Degraded Environment and Destabilised women in Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*", Awhefeada (2013) explores the issue of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta and how it affects women in particular. He holds multinational oil companies responsible for the damage done to women and the environment. Just like the ecofeminists, he argues that there is a connection between oppression of women and exploitation of nature. As the nature which serves as a source for basic needs of women is destroyed, the women are plunged into economic austerity. They suffer unemployment, poverty and lack. In the course of looking for means of survival, they become preys in the hands oil workers who lure into prostitution. They are lured by financially buoyant oil workers who offer them financial or material assistance in exchange for sexual pleasure. This is glaring in the novel. The predicament of the protagonist, Zilayefa is initiated by the destruction of land (for farming) and rivers (for fishing), her mother's sources of livelihood. This compelled her to move to Port Hercourt in search of survival. In the process she becomes a victim in the hand of expatriate workres who sexually exploits her. Awhefeada is specifically concerned with victimisation of women as brought about by the effects of environmental degradation. The aspect of women's role in the struggle against environmental degradation is overlooked. This informs the choice to embark on this research.

In her essay, "The Niger Delta Region and the women's predicament: A case Study of Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*", Simon (2010) examines environmental pollution and its

consequences on the woman. She opines that such degradation incubates joblessness, poverty and hardship. These further breed vices like prostitution. The women in the survival struggle become victims of environmental despoliation caused by activities of the multinational companies. She hinges her argument on the facts that women who engage in prostitution in order to survive economic implication of environmental despoliation end up incurring more problems like unwanted pregnancies as well as sexually transmitted diseases in some cases.

In “The Displacement of Father-figure in Agary’s *Yellow-Yellow*, and Walker’s *The Color Purple*, Chukwuma (2011) employs Sigmund Freud’s psycho-analytical theory to interrogate the interphase between environmental despoliation and women victimisation in the Niger Delta. She links sexual exploitation that the protagonist of the novel, Zilayefa encounters to the search for a father figure. This endless search leads her to traumatic implications of such exploitation.

In “The Niger Delta, environment, women and the politics of survival in Kaine Agary’s *Yellow-Yellow*”, Chuma-Ude (2013) is of the opinion that environmental despoliation in the Niger Delta is caused by the activities of the multinational oil company. Its effects like joblessness, poverty and unbearable hardship in turn wrought degradation on womanhood.

In “Ecological Degradation in Selected Niger Delta Novels”, Ugwu (2014) examines how degradation of the environment of the Niger Delta leads to degradation of the innocence as well as degradation of the psyche as exemplified by the character of Zilayefa. She indicts the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian government for such degradation. The Nigerian government provides licence and security for the oil companies to carry out oil exploration and exploitation. The oil companies on the other hand carry out their business without consideration for the people whose environment is being destroyed in the process. She argues that though the environmental crisis affects the people in general, the women bear the brunt of the effects most. The roles of women in the struggle against environmental pollution is the gap that is left out in the study, which this study intends to fill.

Also, in response to the question: “What’s the novel about”, which Umaisha (2008) poses to the author of the novel (*Yellow-Yellow*), Agary describes it thus: “It is a coming of age story; a young girl growing up in the Niger Delta area and trying to come to terms with her racial identity and the perceptions of society on her racial identity. It covers the politics and economics of oil” in the Niger Delta. The politics and economics of oil, issues of racial identity, and perceptions of the society as identify by the author have a direct link to the big issue of environmental degradation and victimization of women central to the plot of the novel. The study does not examine women’s eco-activism

In “Agary’s Yellowing of people’s hope”, Ofili (2007), takes into scrutiny the aftermath of the sexual escapades of white expatriates in the oil rich Niger Delta which usually results in fatherless children who resemble them in complexion, hence they are commonly referred to as “yellow-yellow”. They are generally referred to as “African profit, born troways, ashawo pickins, father-unknowns” (Agary, 2006: 171). These labels create identity crisis for the children and, as a result, they face social stigma in the society. The study does not highlight women’s eco-activism.

In “Alienation and Eco-activism in Selected Works on the Niger Delta Crisis”, Feghabo (2014) argues that though the consequences of oil politics is felt by both males and females, it brought extra burden to the female gender in *Yellow-Yellow*. He further asserts that apart from contending with the capitalist system as members of the Third World and women oppression in patriarchal society like Africa, the women of the Niger Delta also are confronted by environmental despoliation. The effects of such environmental crisis to a greater extent increase the suffering of the women of the region and locate them within the concept of otherness. He buttresses this point by citing how degradation of Binaebi’s farmland cut short her dream of giving her only daughter sound education. This further affects her daughter, Zilayefa who leaves the poor village to the city in search of better living condition. The better living condition eludes her as her encounter with male oppressors leads to the complexity of her problem.

In the same study, Feghabo inquires in to the extent does to which perception of ‘other’ by the big ‘other’ contributes to the crisis in the Niger Delta in *Oil on Water*. He contends that in contrast to those within the periphery of marginality, there are people who are the beneficiaries of oil politics in the region. Among the oppressed people of the Niger

Delta (the other), there are persons who make gains out of the oil politics. The ‘other’ represented by the common persons who do not have access to the agents of oppression are left to suffer the consequences of environmental degradation most. The Niger Delta leadership especially (the traditional chiefs and politicians) and lawyers represent this ‘big other’ who as a result of their direct access to oil companies and government by the virtue of their positions enjoy the dividends of the oil business, as a result do not directly feel the effects of environmental degradation in the region. He illustrates that the counter aggressive action taken by the marginalised in the novel is a manifestation of erosion of self and alienation felt by the oppressed as a result of destruction of their ecosystem. The study does not examine women’s eco-activism.

In “Environmental Degradation, Militancy/Kidnapping and Oil Theft in Habila’s *Oil on Water*” Simon, Akung and Bassey (2014) identify environmental degradation, militancy/kidnapping and oil theft as the major thematic imports of the novel. According to them, the people of the oil-producing communities in the novel engage in militancy and kidnapping in order to express dissatisfaction with pollution of their environment and its negative effects. Having been frustrated by pollution of farmland and rivers, main source of livelihood, the people are forced into oil theft by economic austerity. They argue that degradation of the the people’s land is enough to drive the people crazy because it is one of the major parts of their identity; this is why conflict is noticed in any area where there is land dispute. Militancy and kidnapping also lead to alarming security threats in the region both for people of the region and the expatriates who work in the oil companies.

In “Interrogating Sexual Pre-occupations in Ojaide’s *The Activist*”, Okolo (2014) explores the roles of sexuality in the development of plot of the text. She opines that sexuality plays a significant role in the development of characters in the novel. The roles that each of the characters plays in the text is dependent on their understanding of their sexuality especially as it relates with others and thus, contributes to their reaction to situations and circumstances as the story unfolds. She admits that the major thematic focus of the novel is on ecological issues like oil exploitation, environmental degradation and eco-activism but the area of interest of her study is how sexuality is deployed to drive these themes home. Women’s eco-activism is an important aspect that the study does not cater for.

Nwoye's *Oil Cemetery* as one of the novels used in this study, is yet to receive more critical attentions. However, in a review of the novel, Okediran (2015) opines that it is a story of human suffering, misery and survival at all costs. According to him, it is a work that advocates for dialogue between oil companies and their host communities in finding solutions to the challenges of oil exploration. While he recognises advocacy for dialogue as a way of finding a lasting solution to environmental problems in the Niger Delta, the roles of women as eco-activists is the gap left in the review, which this study is intended to fill.

In "Ideology and Commitment in female creativity: A focus on the Drama of Tess Onwueme", Evwierhoma (2003) examines *Then She Said It* from a feminist perspective. She investigates how the playwright employs feminist ideology in her dramatic creativity. She admits that the play centres on oil politics but the focus of her study is on how the female characters like Obida, Niger and Osun lead a protest against the male oppressors in order to gain emancipation. The women become activists and launch attacks against the oil director, the government official and their local collaborator, the chief. These corrupt individuals connive, degrade the environment of Hungeria and display a high level of insensitivity to the aftermath of the degradation suffered by the poor masses. Unemployment, poverty, displacement, sexual exploitation, child trafficking and restiveness abound in the land. This gets the women angry and they engage in a protest against the oppressors, which is least expected by the oppressors (males). Having examined the plays from a feminist point of view, the study concludes that by the creation of valiant female characters who revolted against an oppressive system, the playwright is committed to a feminist agenda.

In "Corruption and Rape of the Land in Osonye Tess Onwueme's *Shakara: Dance-Hall Queen, Then She Said It* and *What Mama Said* and *No Vacancy*", Diala-Ogamba (2011) investigates how the playwright uses the play to condemn the corrupt behaviour of the people in positions of authority. She considers how pollution of the environment as well as its attendant effects like socio-political and economic problems affect the people in general and women in particular. This is made worse by the corrupt acts of oil directors, the government officials and the chiefs who connive to pursue their egocentric interest to the detriment of the people. Corruption is bad but it is more

disgusting when it is exhibited by the people's representatives, Ethiope and Pipeline who are busy negotiating for financial and material compensation from the oil directors while their people are suffering and dying.

In "Tess Onwueme and the Niger Delta Crisis in *Then She Said It* and *What Mama Said*", Nwizu (2011) examines the playwright's position on the Niger Delta crisis. She identifies violation of human right by multinational oil company as the cause of crisis in Hungeria and Sufferland respectively. The women and the youth are forced to agitate by the ill-treatment meted against them by oil companies' representatives, the government officials and the chiefs. Insincerity and insensitivity of the people's representatives do not only lead to despoliation of environment but also displacement and exploitation of the people of the host communities. All these force women and youth who are hardest hit by the situation to lead a protest against the expoiters. To her, the playwright seems to be on the side of the masses, sympathizes with them because of their plight. This explains why she leaves the revolutionary acts in the hands of women who play active roles in fighting against oppressive system.

In "A Bleeding Motherland: Tess Onwueme's Imagery of Environmental Degradation in Nigeria's Niger Delta in *What Mama Said*", Nyager (2011) examines how the playwright through a feminine imagery of land as the abused and exploited, draws a comparison between the national plight and the plight of women in the Niger Delta. The pollution of land is akin to exploitation of women in the region. The women who rely on the environment for provision of daily needs do not only face economic challenges but also abuse of all kinds. The women who would have engaged in farming and fishing now become preys in the hand of oil company workers who sexually abuse them. Oil company workers take advantage of economic austerity, lure the women with their buoyant offers and exploit them sexually. This further increases the pain of women. Words like draining, drilling, sapping, smelly and bleeding are intentionally used by the playwright to give a picture of devastation suffered by both land and women as a result of oil exploitation.

In "Gender and Topicality in Onwueme's Plays", Nyager (2011) looks at the sensitivity of the playwright to the issues of gender. To her, Onwueme touches a lot of issues like local and global politics of oil, injustice, violation of human rights, degradation of environment, human trafficking as well as exploitation of women. She points out that

the playwright uses her works to respond to sensitive issues like gender, lending voice to women as the voiceless and exploited.

In “Protest, Resistance and Activism in the Drama of Onwueme”, Affiah (2012) investigates the playwright’s position on issues of oppression and exploitation in the Nigerian society. He stresses that Onwueme adopts a revolutionary approach in addressing such issues especially with regard to their peculiar effects on women. It is obvious that lamentation has failed to tackle protracted injustice, oppression and exploitation that have eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society. The people, therefore, need to rise against the perpetrators of ills. Onwueme uses dramatic medium to sensitise the people and bring into their consciousness the reality of their situation in order to urge them to take their destiny into their hands. Revolution becomes the most veritable channel to achieve this.

Iniobong (2004) in a critical assessment of *Then She Said It* in “Gender and Identity in the works of Osonye Tess Onwueme” opines that Onwueme x-rays “multi-faceted dimensions of protest against the abuse of womanhood, against male dominance and patriarchal repression of women and against female marginalisation and inhuman treatment.” (164) For her, the playwright is committed and unique especially in the way she responds to the issue of gender and projection of women’s identity. She imbues her female characters with a revolutionary spirit that is required to bring positive changes in the society.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 FEMALE AGENCY IN THE STRUGGLE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL REGENERATION IN *LOVE MY PLANET, OIL CEMETERY* AND *OIL ON WATER*

Environmental health plays an important role in the existence of human and non-human beings. With the alarming rate at which environment-related problems increase in the twenty-first century, it is obvious that care for environment is an exigency. This accounts for the reason environment experts warn that if the earth must be safe from effacement, the attitude of man must be checked. Certain activities of man that cause havocs like global warming, erosion, desert encroachment and degradation of the environment should be carried out with caution and consciousness of environmental protection. If this is not properly curbed, the existence of the earth and its inhabitants would be endangered.

This explains why the need for environmental preservation has become a topical issue in both academic and non-academic discourse. Every field of study, literature inclusive, now engages in creating awareness for safety of the environment. African literature joins other literatures of the world in the campaign for preservation of the environment. African literary critics have responded to this issue to examine how the issue of environment is represented in African literature. Also, Niger Delta literary writers use their works to expose environmental damage in the region and to seek intervention in the situation of Niger Delta people. They use literature as a medium to succinctly warn Nigerians and the people of the region about the danger that environmental despoliation in the region portends for the people if not adequately tackled with a sense of urgency. Such dangers like insecurity of lives and property and economic hardship are now commonly

experienced by the people. Many human lives are been wasted by pipeline blow outs. Frequent rapes make lives of women in the region more stressful. Poverty and unbearable hardship which were mere stories for the people when crude oil had not been discovered and exploited in the region, are now parts of the realities of their existence. Polluted air and contaminated water which result from gas flares and oil spills leave the people with strange diseases.

Nigerian literary writers employ literature to engage in what Onyema (2011:422) refers to as “ecological rights campaigns” in order to attract intervention to the region. They respond to the issues of oil spillage and gas flaring as well as their implications on the region. Oil exploration and exploitation in the region and their consequent ecological despoilation have affected every area of the people’s lives. Socio-economic strangulation, political mayhem, educational backwardness, religious distortion and cultural destabilization are some of the consequences. In Ushie’s view,

The Niger Delta [is] completely vandalised, its once fertile land soaked in and sterilised by crude oil, ... its rivers and streams and creeks poisoned, its fishes murdered, its people uneducated, left without drinking water, left without electricity supply, left without jobs, left without health facilities and left without food ... live in the midst of oil spillage and round-the-clock gas flares. (2006:8)

A situation whereby people from the Niger Delta, the economic hub of Nigeria, languish in unimaginable poverty and lack is described by Odoemene (2011:108) as “agony in the garden.” Injustice and oppression meted against [sic] the region by the Nigerian government in collaboration with multinational oil companies, have generated agitation among the people. In support of this view, Darah (2011:3) pointed out that injustice in the region has birthed literary outputs which are used as a weapon of emancipation from the “avaricious grip of the Federal Government and its international allies.” Among such literary works are Egbuson’s *Love My Planet*, Nwoye’s *Oil Cemetery* and Habila’s *Oil on Water* which are deployed to map a serious campaign against environmental degradation in the Niger Delta in order to demonstrate women’s response to such anormally.

Oil exploitation and its attendant effects have led to what Nwahunanya (2011) describes as moving “from boom to doom”. Destruction of the natural environment of

Niger Delta affects every angle of the people's life. Economically, they are strangled. Culturally, they are alienated. Physically, they are frustrated. Socially, they are distressed. Politically, they are cheated. Psychologically, they are destabilised. Oil has brought tragedy and calamity to the people who once lived peacefully and enjoyed abundant resources of the river and fertile land, but now wallow in abject poverty and hardship. Akinyele (2018:77) observes that oil boom in the region has given rise to "militancy, kidnapping, corruption at its peak, higher level of migration, prostitution and disease, increase in the miscegenation syndrome called 'yellow', abject poverty and gradual erosion of nationalistic value, among others." Environmental degradation and its effects like high rate of unemployment, lack of basic infrastructure, prostitution, loss of family values, armed robbery, kidnapping, loss of lives and property, hardship, political instability, cultural crisis, to mention but a few are common in the Niger Delta.

3.1 Poverty and Hardship in *Love My Planet*

In *Love My Planet*, pollution of farmland and rivers by oil spillage results in high level of poverty and hardship in the oil region. As the people are occupationally displaced, the rate of poverty and hardship becomes alarming in Daglobe Delta in particular. Non-replacement of worn out oil installation causes crude oil to spill on farmland and renders it infertile. Also, Siting of oil facilities without proper construction of water drainages causes flood, which degrades the environment. An instance is the flood that occurs in Ogazza, the oil city. One would expect that Ogazza, the oil city would be exempted when it comes to the issue of flood but the "oil city was under water too" (Egbuson, 224). Gesibebe, a native of Ogazza explains that the flood is caused by "siting of oil city where it was ... where rain drained into from the primary school area.... A few people agreed with him – the flooding of the primary school compound started when oil city was built" (173).

On the same issue, the case is different in Balazza area where channels are built for water from the village into the river and the river banks are raised (173). The villages in the Daglobe Delta are prone to flood because there are no proper water channels. In the host communities, there are no good road networks; even where they exist they are carelessly constructed. It is noticed that "Ogazza had been under water for some days

...many mud houses had crumbled and nearly all the people had left Ogazza. After a two storey building in the village collapsed, Jonah's family and Toundi's paternal grandparents ...had to leave the village too" because of the flood (Egbuson, 224). The above-mentioned people and others are displaced from their homes. This affects their livelihood. Moving to a new environment without any occupation would mean plunging them into unbearable poverty and hardship.

In Maria's (Toundi's aunt) compound for instance, the pathetic condition of a family reveals their misery thus:

In a dingy room a family of four was imprisoned in poverty, hunger and disease. The parents were on the bed while the two sons were on a mat on the floor. The father managed to sit up as Wenni greeted them...the visitors noticed their swollen bodies and the pustules on their skins ...we were taking injection till money finished Eglee is my eldest son. I sent Eglee to my brother in Inoge State yesterday he has not come back, and since then we have not eaten, because all the remaining money in the house he took to manage to take him to Inoge. If he does not see my brother or my brother does not have money I do not know how he will come back (Egbuson, 88-89).

"Imprisoned in poverty" conveys a state of lack that renders the sufferer incapacitated at all angles. Their situation is so bad to the extent that they could neither afford daily meals nor medications. Before the above scene, a terrible condition of Maria's family that is being tormented by poverty is unveiled thus, "Maria's house was an 8ft by 10ft bedsit in one of the houses consisting of ten rooms, five on each side of the corridor. Each house also had an outhouse kitchen, an outhouse bathroom and a latrine" (Egbuson, 89). When the visitors enter into their room, they are shown "three dirty-looking dull blue chairs" but they prefer standing to sitting on those seats that appear as if they would make their clothes dirty. The most disgusting is their toilet. Wenni requests to be taken to where he could urinate, he was led to "a small wooden structure with gaps between some of the planks so that if a person placed their face on the wall they could see the person inside." (90) When "the piece of wood covering the hole" was removed, "a wave of heat and flies rising from their feast hit Wenni's face – he flew away from the place like a fly escaping from the prison of a wicked person's fist. He spat several times and went to his jeep"

(Egbuson, 91). The dirty condition of the latrine presumably pushed the urine back to the visitor's bladder.

The situation is not different in Ogazza. When Larami, Toundi and Rareh travel to Toundi's maternal home in Ogazza, Rareh is surprised to see that "shit is falling from under that house into the river" (Egbuson, 141). The above situation shows that the people are so poor that they cannot afford toilet facilities. In Ogazza, when Toundi inquires from her aunt about a sick woman in her neighbourhood, she replies thus, "I think she (mama Agidi) is more hungry than sick... the thing hunger is doing to people in this Ogazza, it is not what the mouth can describe" (Egbuson, 159). The people of Daglobe Delta suffer hunger-induced sickness because their means of sustenance have been rendered unproductive by oil spillage and gas flaring. However, the living conditions of the foreigners who live and work in companies in the Oil City is different from that of those who are indigenous to the city. The Oil City is described thus:

Oil City, the city of light, where there was electricity 24/7, sprang up from where wet land was cleared and sand filled – oil city tickled the young women of Ogazza also with its paradoxical (sic) grid of paved ways, mini football pitch, 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 residents are Filipinos, Britons and Chinese. There were a handful of Nigerians and Venezuelans and Daglobans, no one from Ogazza, no one from Daglobe Delta (*Love* 160).

The above description of oil city is in sharp contrast to "a swamp forest inhabited by Daglobeans whose homes were stick and thatch huts resting on stakes" (Egbuson, 243). In a press conference with many media houses for the hostages of the militant group, the hostages express that they are pleased with the treatment given to them. When they were asked why by an NTA reporter, one of them replies that, it is because the people's condition in the village is not in any way better than their present condition. In his opinion, "the people's chains of poverty, hunger, diseases, ignorance, environmental contamination and such like were worse than the hostages' handcuffs" (Egbuson,

243).The author in the following excerpt draws a sharp contrast between the oil city and the villages all within the same oil vicinity. After the press conference held in Daglobe Delta,

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 breasted middle-aged woman with a sore running on her left shin sitting a little away from him, busy with waving away the flies from her sore with a rag, her flabby breasts 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 (Egbuson, 243).

It is ironic that in communities where oil that contributes ninety percent of the country's revenue is exploited, educational facilities do not exist; where they exist, they are in a dilapidated state. On another occasion when Toundi accompanies her father to Edota for a business meeting, they come across a school but the condition of the school compels Toundi to alight in order to have a closer look at the school. This is what she sees:

She saw a dilapidated sign board unashamedly announcing the name of the school: EDOTA BOYS AND GIRLS SECONDARY SCHOOL. The students under the trees were not relaxing – they were in class, each group of students sitting on wooden chairs, without desks, in front of the teacher who was backing a blackboard nailed to a tree. She saw the reason: two building were unusable, their roofs having fallen off and some of the walls broken (Egbuson, 131).

From the various poor conditions of people depicted in the novel, it is not an overstatement to say that environmental degradation is akin to poverty and hardship. Land, water and air pollution as well as their attendant effects become realities in the daily lives of the people of Ogazza.

3.2 Unemployment, Armed Robbery and Kidnapping in *Love My Planet*

The tripod is inextricable from any area that is undergoing environmental crisis. The destruction of the people's means of livelihood makes the tripod unavoidable in the oil producing region. The rate of unemployment is very high as farming and fishing activities are rendered less productive and unattractive by oil spillage and gas flaring. This has forced many people especially the youth into many unwholesome activities like armed

robbery, kidnapping and oil pilfering as means of survival. Their attendant effects like rape, insecurity and death abound. Incidences of armed robbery abound in *Love My Planet*. In Daglobe, armed robbery appears to have become one of the daily activities. In network news of Daglobe Television Authority (DTA), there is a report of armed robbery attack in a bank in which many innocent lives are wasted -- a police guard, an aged retiree and his teenage daughter, a female bank manager who is killed by two female robbers as well as many innocent persons the robbers kill as they try to escape (Egbuson, 6). While watching the news, Toundi and Yiba wonder “why has human life lost its sacredness in Daglobe?” (Egbuson, 7) The daily devaluation of human life is so mindboggling that one is forced to wonder where else would be safer than one’s home town.

In Daglobe, indigenous men resort to crimes because there are no jobs to engage in order to meet their daily needs. In Ogbo State, for instance, some robbers attack a family, threaten them to open the door or get killed if they fail to do so in five minutes. When the family fails to heed the warning, the robbers make a big hole in a wall and force their way in, rape and kill the single mother and her three daughters, and freely rob the house (Egbuson, 6). In another case, armed robbers who disguise in military uniforms waylay people on Yeila-Yama Road, rob them of their belongings and those that do not have property to surrender to them, pay with their lives (Egbuson, 7). In a similar experience, armed robbery attack is recorded in Ministry of Housing Estate. Following the armed robbery attack, a huge amount of money and lives were lost. Araba, Alhaji Maika, Atakora, Azama, and Rareh’s families are victims of armed robbery attacks on different occasions.

There is a radio report that a-seventy-year-old father of a local government chairman in Daglobe is kidnapped by some militants. Two different militant groups claim responsibility for the action. While one of the groups claims that the chairman failed to pay them their fee after winning the election for him as agreed, the other claims it is because he got the post through rigging; they want him to resign within forty-eight hours (184). The unemployed youth also engage in hostage-taking with the intention of getting money to meet their daily needs. An instance is seen in Daglobe where three Daglobans and two foreigners were kidnapped. The kidnapers demand a ransom of D\$100 million

per hostage either from the oil company or the federal government. They warn that if anyone makes any attempt to rescue the hostages by force they would all be killed. It is latter revealed that they are not in any way freedom fighters but common thieves (Egbuson, 239) who take advantage of the situation to perpetrate such evil. It is so pathetic that a man arranges for his wife to be kidnapped so that he can get a ransom of D\$100 million from her rich parents (Egbuson, 295) just in a bid to make money. The occupational displacement has forced people to turn such a vice into a lucrative business.

Besides, in Farnot State, in less than one week, a total of twenty-three Farnot indigenes are kidnapped by three separate criminal groups who demand a ransom of D\$100 million, D\$150 million and D\$600 million before they would release their victims (Egbuson, 293). In fact, the unemployed youth now regard kidnapping as ‘a-money-making’ business in Daglobe. Again, in Ogazza some youth turn into pirates. They terrorize travellers on the river for two years but are caught and killed one fateful day. The news as well as the sight of their six dead bodies keeps the Ogazzans wailing and weeping for the shame they brought upon their relatives (Egbuson, 164). The youth who turn into fake militants, armed robbers, and pirates might not have engaged in such activities if they were gainfully engaged in farming or fishing. They are idle, hungry and angry; as a result, they tend to devise means to meet their needs. The high rate of unemployment in the oil region is unbearable. Just as the saying goes, an idle mind is the devil’s workshop, their idleness makes them vulnerable to deceit. They are easily deceived into joining bad groups. They are easily convinced to take to vices like armed robbery, kidnapping and oil theft. They could also become preys to politicians who use them to rig elections in order to get political posts. Instances of how the indolent youth are used for things that are not worthwhile abound in *Love My Planet*.

The high level of insecurity of lives and property in Daglobe convinces Yiba that though no corner of the world is safe but “anywhere else is better than Daglobe” (Egbuson, 43). This may be true considering the fact that one is neither safe at home nor outside the home. Lorelei, the senate president’s daughter is also a victim of insecurity in Daglobe. She tells Toundi and Yiba how she escaped from the hands of thugs at the Daglobe Unity Party building. There is a report that the thugs have taken over the place,

people have to pay money called ‘passage fee’ to be allowed to pass (Egbuson, 108). This situation is not different in Ogazza where Toundi overhears some youth “discussing how to rob the traders returning home by river from Kenbai Market, Kabu town, who would be loaded with money...” (159) Daglobe Delta is allegory of Niger Delta in Nigeria where a lot of jobless youth have taken to armed robbery and kidnapping activities in order to survive the economic austerity.

3.3 Militancy and Hostage-taking as Strategies in *Love My Planet*

The people who have been cheated and oppressed without fair consideration from the government and the oil companies are compelled to engage in militancy and hostage-taking as means of demanding justice. In *Love My Planet*, Araba drops out of the university and becomes a militant in order to fight against environmental injustice in his region. He is the president of an activist organisation known as Simple Justice (SJ), whose agenda is simply to achieve justice for the oil region.

The group demands justice and fairness especially in the sharing of oil revenue. In the light of this, the organisation gives the federal government one month to tell the people of Daglobe how it intends to tackle the numerous political and social problems of the country, especially the unjust formula for sharing the nation’s oil revenue. The non-negotiable demand of the people of the Daglobe Delta is that at least fifty percent of the monthly oil revenue should be given to them to develop their region. Other demands include: The federal government should fill the potholes on the East-West Road, the single road that connects the oil-producing states in the Daglobe Delta. It should end plea bargaining in criminal cases of corruption, and prevail on the EFCC to put in motion a mechanism for bringing to book state government officials who collude with the governors of Daglobe Delta to loot the oil revenue in their states (Egbuson:225-26). All these among others are the demands of the activist group, Simple Justice. The group starts taking hostage oil company workers as well as government officials who collude with oil companies to exert insensitivity to the plight of their fellow people; it threatens to kill them if the government fails to respond within the time of the ultimatum. Dr Fitzgerald Alogu, the aide to the president on information is abducted and later killed for telling lies about the situation of the people of Daglobe Delta.

Also, nineteen foreigners are kidnapped from their beds in the housing estate of a foreign oil company in Port Lander (Egbuson, 230). As the federal government is stiff-necked over the demands, more kidnapping incidences are recorded. Simple Justice kidnaps six foreigners and three Daglobans working in an oil company terminal, sends the remaining workers away and stops work on the terminal. Following the recent incident, the company's production is reduced by 100,000 barrels per day. In another oil terminal of another company, foreigners are kidnapped and the company's production is cut down by 50,000 barrels per day (Egbuson, 236). This definitely would have negatively affected oil price in the world oil market. As a result, several foreign governments dissuade the Daglobe government from being intransigent and persuade them to respond to the demands of Simple Justice and appeal to the militants not to harm the hostages.

A British woman, whose diabetic and hypertensive husband is among the hostages, makes a passionate appeal to the militants to release him so that he could take his routine drugs. When her husband is released, she thanks the Simple Justice for their humane approach but wonders "why the government of a wealthy country like Daglobe could not do a simple thing as filling the potholes in a road that connected five oil-producing states whose oil provided 90% of the nation's revenue" (Egbuson, 237). After the surprise expression of the Briton about the unfair treatment on the Daglobe Delta, filling of potholes is commenced on the East-West Road the next day. Travellers on the road pray for God to bless Araba and all members of Simple Justice. For the narrator, may be "because a foreigner had said what the Daglobans had been saying" (Egbuson, 237) but are not listened to. The expiration of Simple Justice's ultimatum coincides with the collapse of a rickety thirty-two year old bridge on the East-West road.

The people blame the federal government for her intransigence toward the demand of Simple Justice to rebuild East-West road, if not a lot of deaths that have occurred as a result of that would not have taken place. The federal government explains that the road is one of the projects waiting for interested entrepreneurs to take over under its new BOT (Build, Operate, and Transfer) system. This infuriates the members of Simple Justice the more and they kidnap eight foreign oil company workers and give the government twenty-four hours to start work to restore the bridge. They later kidnap another three foreigners

working on an oil rig. A few hours later, the Filipino among them is killed. They warn all the oil companies in Daglobe Delta to shut down their operations immediately. Within twenty-four hours, oil production is further reduced by twenty-six percent (Egbuson, 242). This indicates that environmental injustice also has economic implications.

Apart from poverty-bred hardship, social decadence like loss of family values emanates from loss of environmental sanctity. Olivia tells Toundi how the girls in Balazza community are abandoned after being impregnated by oil workers leaving them with fatherless children. Toundi requests to know why they are referred to as fatherless since their mothers were impregnated by men. Olivia explains that it is “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. As for the women, they don’t know where to write to”. Toundi asks, “Can’t the girls’ parents prevent it? Olivia replies, “How many parents have authority over their children? Some of the parents enjoy the money their daughters bring home while the going is sweet. In fact, it is the money that sustains some families.”(Egbuson, 169) From the above conversation, it is clear that both culture and family lose their values and sacredness in the time of environmental crisis. Amama’s testimony lends credence to Olivia’s view that the youth no longer obey their parents. While lamenting on the death of Augustus and other five armed robbers that are caught and killed, Amama who knows their good parents very well regrets the loss of family values in the following words, “Augustus and others, we know all of them and who their fathers and mothers are. But their fathers and mothers have no control over them. How many fathers and mothers have control over their children in Ogazza?” (Egbuson, 153) Besides, ecological crisis in the region has produced psychologically disturbed individuals. It is understandable that farming and fishing as the people’s means of livelihood are no more attractive and productive but is there no other thing, handiwork or business they can engage in to earn a worthwhile living except prostitution, armed robbery, kidnapping, oil theft, etc? Perhaps, it is more psychological than physical.

3.4 Environmental Degradation: Women's Predicament in *Love My Planet*

Women bear the most demoralising aspect of environmental degradation. This justifies the view of the ecofeminists that there is a connection between the abuse of nature and the oppression of the women. Women are indiscriminately raped by jobless youth who carry out this atrocity in the process of armed robbery. Many cases of rape are recorded in the oil region of Daglobe. Aloe-Vera (Miss Daglobe), Hajia Mariama as well as her two daughters and many married women are victims of rape cases recorded during armed robbery attack in the Ministry of Housing Estate. (Egbuson,14, 17). Aloe-Vera who is traumatised by such an ordeal drinks 'kill me kwik' rat poison and dies (45). In recollection of his terrible experiences with the armed robbers, Araba feels "maybe death was better than this everyday terror of robbers, maimers and killers in Daglobe -- oh living was stressful" (10).

In *Love My Planet*, the women bear the greatest brunt of environmental despoliation. Poverty-bred prostitution is one of the consequences of environmental degradation in the region. It is not only that women are faced with domestic violence in the case of Maria, they are also used by oil workers to assuage their sexual urge in the case of Yiba, Sally, Akidi, Rareh, Silverline, etc. These women -- and many -- others are victims of fun-seeking oil workers at one time or another for either financial gains or material benefits. The description of the ostentatiously built Oil City with its flamboyant attraction is exactly opposite of the poverty-ridden families and villages where those women come from and that makes it easy for the financially comfortable workers to lure them into the immoral act of prostitution. Oil City is described thus:

Oil City where most of Ogazza's simple girls and a few housewives were bedazzled by the oil workers' mint-fresh money, well-fed looks and intriguing bedroom perversions. Oil City, the city of light, where there was electricity 24/7, sprang up from where wet land was cleared and sandfilled --- Oil City tickled the young women of Ogazza also with its paradisaical grid of paved ways, 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. (Egbuson, 160).

The women who would have met their daily needs through farming and fishing are now unengaged because their means of livelihood have been destroyed. As a result, they engage in prostitution in order to meet their daily needs. Girls go to oil city and offer their bodies for financial gains. This is clearly noticed in the character of Yiba, Toundi's friend. Toundi confronts Yiba about the rumour that she sleeps with the white men. While weeping, Yiba admits with the following lament:

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. Those white men are evil. ...Russians, Filipinos and Chinese. They use money from our oil to turn us into animals. Toundi, I can't tell you the things they do to us, she wept afresh, her mind on the very sadistic small-statured white-haired Chinese who was financially very generous to any girl who could manage to bear his perversions. (Egbuson,62)

The stories of how girls and wives are sexually exploited are not different in Akawai and Akowai communities. In Akawai, a sixty-one year old woman supervises the deflowering of her fifteen year old grand-daughter by the commander of the Rapid Response Camp (Egbuson, 353). It could not have been for the fun of it but financial offer from the army officer because of hardship. Women become victims in the hands of the fun-seeking commander who takes advantage of their poor situation to abuse them. One of such victims is Silverline, a thirty-year old mother of two who transfers her affection from her absent OPDC boyfriend to the commander. The promiscuous character of Silverline attracts the disgust of the readers more than their admiration. Orodu, her sixty-year-old husband who has not been able to stop her affair with the OPDC worker thought he could stop her from befriending an army commander. She reports her husband to the commander. The commander in his cocaine-intoxicated state of mind supervises the flogging of her husband in their marital home. This is not only a ridicule to manhood but also to family values. The Akawai youth who see in Orodu's condition the castration of man in all men are bitterly touched (Egbuson, 354). This leads to a more complex problem. The people seek the intervention of Simple Justice (SJ) to avenge the humiliation of Orodu. The battle line is drawn between the soldiers and the SJ. One hundred and twenty-three people are killed, forty-two civilians and eight-one soldiers in a clash between the two groups. (Egbuson, 354-355).

While interviewing the villagers in Akawai and Akowai about the situation of things especially their opinion about the eight (foreigners) hostages of SJ, one of the women commends the generosity (money and food) of the expatriates to the natives but expresses her disgust for their sexual exploitation on the women thus, “only say dem dey fuck de girls wey dey go there. Too much. E no good. Even some married women sef, dem dey fuck”. Another woman confirms this to be true in the following attestation, “yes, plenty girls dem for Akawai and Akowai, when dem born dem no dey see de oil company worker dem again. So dem pikin dem no get papa”. Another does not hesitate to unveil that, “... some women dey bring belle from oil worker and give dem husband. Na bad thing women dey do”. (Egbuson, 244). It is decipherable from the attestation of the women that sexual victimisation is one of the implications of environmental degradation.

In an oil city in Balazza, Amama, Ereki’s mother, confirms that the girls sell their bodies for money (Egbuson, 160). Sally, the beautiful girl that Ereki intends to marry always goes to the oil city for prostitution in order to get money. Ereki laments that “the oil company workers are turning the heads of our girls ... Instead of happiness it is sorrow Oil City is giving us” (160 -161). To Ereki, Oil City is synonymous with sorrow. He is optimistic that he would get employment in order to secure Sally’s love when the youth take over the affairs of Ogazza Improvement Union (OIU). Also, Akidi whose husband cannot provide for her due to hard economic situation in the oil region of Daglobe, insults him in the following words, “That is because you are not a man! That is why you have no shame. You are not ashamed that you cannot take care of your wife” (Egbuson, 170). In bid to cope with provision inadequacies in her marriage, she “spread her legs on the road for young boys to walk through.” (Egbuson, 45) Akidi’s son beats and asks her, “Is that why your vagina is where young boys play football?” The above scenario attracts the sympathy of the readers to the helpless situation of Akidi (who suffers both physical bully and psychological torture) and to her husband who is a victim of economic austerity associated with environmental degradation in the region. But the reader’s sympathy promptly turns to indictment against the agents of oppression: the government of Daglobe and the oil companies. The health implications of oil exploitation in the oil-producing communities are alarming. In *Love My Planet*, a woman testifies that in Akawai and Akowai communities, health problems abound thus:

How about de 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 he die last month, de doctor say na because we dey live near dat fire, and de rain water wey we dey drink. The doctor say de cancer done fill all him body, no way for cure am ... Wey Miranda? Where she dey? She sef get dat kind sickness (Egbuson, 244).

Environmental degradation is akin to degradation of womanhood. The women suffer sexual victimisation, poverty, hardship, diseases and insecurity. All these and more lead to physical, psychological and emotional destabilisation of women in such an environment.

3.5 Toundi as an Eco-activist in *Love My Planet*

Egbuson in *Love My Planet* creates a female protagonist that is equipped with education as a veritable tool for the assertiveness, determination, inquisitiveness, and courage required to champion environmental activism. Education helps the women to move away from what Chukwuma (1989:2) refers to as “the rural, back-house, timid subservient, lack-lustre... [persona]” to what Diala-Ogamba (2013: 146) describes as “resilient women who can take control of difficult situations when necessary.” It extricates a woman from the grip of ignorance, acquaints her with the rightful information about a situation and enables her to devise the most appropriate means of tackling a problem. Etuk (2013: 304) concurs with this when she asserts that “education gives women a vision of human experience beyond the narrow confines of their lives. It bestows a kind of perspective and possibility that enable the women to transcend the constraints of ... boundaries” of all kinds. This view is supported by Molemodile (1977:57) who avers that “education is the crucial liberating force” in the life of a woman.

In *Love My Planet*, Toundi’s activism is made possible and easy by her level of education. Unlike Larami, her mother who is intimidated by her husband because she is not enlightened enough to assert her individuality, Toundi refuses to be intimidated by anybody because of her sex. Her reactions to situations indicate a person who has undergone some sorts of self-discovery and accepts herself for whom she is and makes effort to make her existence count. While rebuking her mother for allowing herself to be

subjected to emotional torture by the dictates of the patriarchal system that has preference for male children, her mother replies, “because you are having good education, ...But what do I have? Standard 6 from a school in Ajegunle ...” (85) It is very obvious that her mother has come to the awareness that the level of freedom her daughter exercises is made possible by educational empowerment. In a family of four girls with a male-conscious father who neither sees anything good in her female children nor commends their good performances in school or at home, Toundi remains resilient because she “knows her right” (225). Toundi’s brilliance and inquisitiveness manifest in a gathering of students where nobody is able to ask a question after being lectured by a motivational speaker from America. Only Toundi asks “a question. A very intelligent question. Not on something they were taught in school. From her private study of the world.” (81) The principal of the school says to Toundi’s father with pride, “This is the brightest student this school has ever had – a girl. The brain of ten boys put together cannot match Toundi’s, a girl own.” (81) In Daglobe Royal Girls Secondary School, Toundi’s brilliance is mind-blowingly evident in her outstanding academic performances. It is noticed that her father:

Had never been excited seeing her results. He had always felt that the first position she had been taken didn’t come through intelligence and hard work, but just because she was a girl, and though she was his own daughter he had often looked for the shaming manifestation of the consequences on her body, but she was always strong, healthy, consistently shapely. (Egbuson, 82)

Despite the fact that her father does not appreciate her just because she is not a boy, it does not make her change her orientation about herself. According to her, “I know to accept myself for what I am. I’m a woman. I’m proud.” (85) This self-discovery contributes to the shaping of her consciousness about the realities of her environment and stirs her desire to make effort towards changing such orientation that portrays falsehood about women.

In keeping with the mandates of the ecofeminists that women should rise and end domination over nature and oppression against women, Toundi embarks on a project that brings restorative healing to the environment and puts to an end oppression of women in the society. She achieves this by setting up a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) called “Clean Daglobe” (Egbuson, 308). Through the NGO, she plants trees to restore lush vegetation in some parts of the country. Clean Daglobe comprises trade and literacy

centres where vocational, moral and literacy training are inculcated in the people. Interested persons are admitted to learn various vocations in the trade centre while the literacy centre takes care of the people's need for learning. In the literacy centre, sixty percent admission is reserved for women and forty percent for the men because for Toundi, "there was a need to release the vast majority of women from the cage of illiteracy and poverty and let them fly to the heights they wanted, wherever they wanted." (Egbuson, 91)

Toundi's passion to save the environment from destruction is demonstrated in the way she uses every opportunity to create awareness for its preservation. On one of such occasions, she produces catchy write ups about caring for the environment in flyers and shares them to people during the Dabaka African Festival of Arts and Culture, an occasion she uses as an opportunity to sensitise the people on the need to care for the environment. This is evident in the title of the flyers which is: 'I CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.' (Egbuson, 334)

Toundi equally demonstrates deeper passion for the preservation of the 'planet earth' by bringing this awareness to anyone that comes around her. The first thing that captures the attention of every visitor to her office at Clean Daglobe Centre is 'a laminated piece of cardboard on the wall painting of a globe captioned 'LOVE MY PLANET,' listing thirty-three ways humans can take care of the earth, concluding with a resolute statement, 'I shall do all these and more because I love my planet.' (344) It is the first thing that attracts Madi's attention in Toundi's office. The manager of Daglobe Coastal Bank also has an experience similar to that of Madi. The first thing that attracts his attention is the cardboard showing the globe painted in green. He could not resist asking, 'Why is this painting in green?' Toundi explains that it is a symbol of the second phase of the Clean Daglobe project. She further explains that "the first phase is Educate Daglobe. After it has been firmly established, we'll start Green Daglobe" (364). Toundi's efforts are aimed at bringing to the consciousness of every human being that the most urgent need of the earth is care of the planet if it must continue to support lives. Apart from Port Lander, Clean Daglobe project is also carried out in other parts of Daglobe like Aranarak, Bendella as well as other villages. It is also extended to the northern part of Daglobe where tree

planting activities are embarked upon in order to reforest the area (384). It is practical activism towards environmental regeneration. The peace and progress of all living creatures is dependent on that of the environment, thus making its preservation non-negotiable. Considering such efforts to disseminate information about caring for the environment, Toundi is an environmental advocate.

Militant organisations in the *Love My Planet* seek attention of the government and the oil companies by blowing up the crude oil pipelines; this causes more damage to the environment of the region. It is understandable that exploration and exploitation of crude oil in the region have brought a lot of environmental challenges but the bitter truth that must be told is that the approaches through which the militant groups demand justice also worsen the situation. It has led to more complex problems like air, water, land pollution, and their adverse effects like poverty, hardship, diseases, insecurity, prostitution and others have manifested. No wonder an article in *The People's Word* editorial calls the action of the militants 'GOOD GOALS, MISTAKEN MEANS' (335). In the same vein, while contemplating on the activities of the militants, Madi wonders "[i]sn't militants committing injustices against the planet? Injustice against the natural environment, injustice against human beings, injustice against moral consciousness" (335). It is a well-known fact that the activities of the militants do not favour the environment but no one has the courage to dissuade them from such activities. Considering the degradation which the activities of the militant organisations have caused the environment (that is dear to her heart), Toundi decides to intervene through her NGO. Her resolve is made known in the following excerpt:

I think Clean Daglobe should write an appeal in some newspapers to SJ and the other militant organisations to stop breaking crude oil pipelines. They are polluting and damaging the environment they said they are partly fighting for. Take the case of Ayere village where the people can no longer drink the water from the river or from underground following the destruction of the Zion 2 pipeline three times last month (Egbuson,334-335).

The above resolve is an indication of her commitment to championing the cause of the environment.

After listening to the manifestoes of the presidential candidate of the People Power Party (PPP), it is obvious that he does not have any useful project for the people of Daglobe Delta; a region that is the major revenue powerhouse of the entire Daglobe but has been the most economically and socio-politically cheated. It is not surprising that he does not have any agenda for developmental programmes for the region, no wonder he refers to them as “mudfishes and crabs who should be contained in their holes in the mudflat ...”(348). It baffles Toundi that such an economically viable region is totally abandoned as is evident in the attitudes of all the presidential candidates. It keeps Toundi wondering that even Umya Song, the only female presidential aspirant does not choose a Dagloban as a running mate, how sincere is she about the Daglobe Delta problem? This political negligence gets Toundi annoyed and “she strongly decided to ... start collecting data on the problem of gas flaring in the Daglobe Delta. She had to publish a pamphlet on it in three months [*because*] gas flaring was damaging her planet.” (348) The pamphlet is intended to bring to the notice of both national and international communities the problem of gas flaring in the Daglobe Delta. It also would conscientise the agents of environmental degradation, the federal government and the oil companies on the negative impact of their greedy and selfish oil business in the region.

Toundi demonstrates her commitment to championing the cause of the environment by embarking on the herculean task of collection of data on the problem of gas flaring in Daglobe Delta. She goes to two oil companies, Oyster Petroleum Development Company (OPDC) and Alcheringa Gaia International Petroleum (AGIP) for collection of the data. The responses of the companies appear to be delay tactics to discourage her but she refuses to yield to such discouragement. She goes to her alma mater, Institute of Pollution Studies, where enough data on gas flaring were provided for her. After studying the documents meticulously, she goes to Akawai community to verify some of the institute’s findings. This shows a woman who can go to any length to source information about the environment in order to fight against its destruction and this qualifies her an eco-activist.

As an environmental advocate, Toundi always maximises every opportunity either to get information about the environment or to disseminate information on how best to

care for it. One of those opportunities is the day she dashes into the children's room and comes across a sheet of paper whose content reads thus:

I LOVE MY PLANET: Until we make the moon, venus or the sun habitable there is no other place I can live except the earth. The earth is the only planet available to me. ... In return for all she is giving me I shall give her love, I shall care for her in any way I can, and I shall not waste her gifts to me. The earth is my mother. You who receive equally from her, she is your mother too, and you and I are siblings. I love you. I love my planet (351).

Acholonu's view concurs with the above opinion that the earth, the only planet that supports life needs to be cared for if she must continue to perform her motherly roles. Her opinion is contained in the message of the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janerio, Brazil, in 1992. She summarises it as follow:

The greatest message of the Earth Summit is that Mother Earth is dying and she is summoning her children for help. She is crying out for survival, she is clawing in every direction for support in her survival struggle. Our earth, our common mother is dying. ...she is suffocating from humanity's waste, from all the fumes and chemicals humanity has been pumping into her blood (the rivers and the oceans), and her body (the soil). In this and other ways, we have been killing off not only our mother earth but also other occupants of the planet – our brethren – who comprises the vegetation, the mineral and the animal kingdom. (1995:117-118)

The experience she gets from the content of the paper inspires Toundi the more to start collecting data on gas flaring. But before then, she spends over two hours on the internet searching for information about environment-related issues in order to broaden her knowledge in that area.

3.6 Struggle against Women Abuse in *Love My Planet*

Prior to the efforts made by Toundi in the struggle against environmental degradation, she is spurred by her personal encounter with various men in her life - Wenni (her father), Araba (her former admirer and later stepbrother, Veldeh (her school teacher) as well as the experiences of other women who are victims of the oppressive system of the society, to engage in a struggle against women abuse. In a patriarchal society, the woman and everything about her is used in the service of the man. From ensuring the continuity of

the man's lineage through procreation, serving his food, meeting his voracious sexual cravings, satisfaction of his limitless domestic needs, to serving as an object of entertainment for the men at tourist sites and relaxation centres. This spurs her to start a struggle against women abuse through her writings. One day, Toundi watches a morally disgusting TV news report of the vice president of Daglobe in the company of some foreign presidents and CEO's of multinationals watching bare-breasted teenagers in an East African country. It was a traditional rite of passage which the country is exploiting as an annual tourist activity. Toundi wonders, would these dignitaries subject their own daughters to such abuse? (264) This fires Toundi's sense of activism; she starts searching for information on women abuse on the internet because the report is not different from the situation of women in Daglobe. She writes an article on women abuse which was published in *The People's Word*. In the article, she frankly condemns:

Female genital mutilation, child marriages, harmful widowhood practices, the preference for male children, the bride price in Africa, the dowry system in India, women-degrading advertisements, catwalks and modelling exposing women's breasts and legs, the use of the female body as a tourist attraction, the use of scantily dressed female cheerleaders in sports, honour killing in India, Iran and Iraq, honour suicide in Turkey, the absence of female governors in Daglobe, absence of female presidents in the history of Daglobe, and the androcentric use of language (265)

Again, she fights against women abuse through her NGO, Clean Daglobe. One day, one of the students at the literacy centre, a twenty-two year old woman from Inoge, narrates her agony to Toundi. She could not marry because their custom mandates her not to marry but bear male children for her father. Every first daughter of every family has to obey it. Her father is happy at the first pregnancy which is a boy but become unnecessarily impatient for the second one that is a girl and is now suggesting men for her to be with. She tells Toundi that her fear is that the next pregnancy may not be a boy. Also, she wants to make a choice and marry a man of her choice. Toundi decides to intervene through the NGO. The intervention includes employing dialogue as an approach; Clean Daglobe would carefully dialogue with the chiefs and the custodians of culture, wisely educate and convince them of the need to change some obnoxious customs (319).

On another occasion, a girl is set ablaze in Aranarak community because she is in love with a man that belongs to another religion. The crowd that is stoning her burnt dead body explains that it is an honour killing initiated by the girl's younger brother. It baffled Toundi that the police men did not do anything about it but rather are enjoying the sight of a human being subjected to such inhuman torture. Toundi is downcast and feels guilty for being among the crowd who watch without protesting against killing of the girl but she takes consolation in the prospect of Clean Daglobe (education centre) which would be starting gender education for the people in Aranarak community.

Besides, she writes an article in the *Conscience* about "the young woman who was burnt because she was not a man, whose case had not been investigated in order to determine the culpability of the police on that day, because the head of the police is not a woman." (320) She writes an article on the problem of properly educating and bringing up of the young ones in Daglobean society where political thieves were the heroes of the people (296). Those who read the article in *The People's Word* are elated at the exposition of such bitter truth by Toundi. As a human right activist, Toundi does not concentrate only on women's issues but also extends her activism to other matters affecting her society. She reaches out to the entire Dagloban nation through her articles in newspapers. Through her articles, she condemns corruption, injustice, sexism, inhuman treatment, and so on. The aim is to conscientise the people, re-orientate them, and make them to redress their ways in order to become beneficial to the society. One of such articles is published in *The People's Word*. In the article, Toundi frowns at:

The huge amounts public officials in Daglobe were fond of embezzling. She called them mindless amounts because, to her, they were amounts no human could use up in several lifetimes. Conceding that no amount or type of punishment could eradicate the evil, she appeals to her fellow Daglobeans who had a mind to embezzle public funds to think of the possible profound effects of their actions on the country's little people. (247)

This article earns Toundi the commendation of many people especially her university classmates. This is evident in the comment of one of them who tells her, "you're doing a very good thing for the society". The above excerpt is an affirmation of the concept of 'Do Something Against Corruption' (364), which is the third phase of Clean Daglobe project.

The level of corruption in Daglobe shows that the negative impact of oil business in the country goes beyond despoliation of the physical environment; it has also caused degradation in the psyche of the individuals who now see corruption as well as other vices as means of survival. This is obvious in the situation where a governor does not have the mind to spend D\$2.8 billion to provide seats and desks for educational institutions but has the audacity to embezzle more than D\$2.5 billion in his insatiable luxuries (391). It is ugly to see a region that is the economic power house of the country, yet the few available schools have dilapidated classrooms, and in some other places the pupils hold their lessons under trees. They lack good road networks, medical facilities, potable water, and other basic amenities (391, 243). Besides, the citizens live in fear because of indiscriminate armed robbery activities in the region (156).

It is so bad that a man masterminds the kidnapping of his wife in order to get money (ransom) from her rich parents. Some women defile their marital sanctity in a bid to make money. Children disobey their parents. Few natives (local chiefs who claim to be the representatives of the host communities but are after their selfish interest with all manner of insincerity) collude with the oil companies to sabotage their people. There is no atom of hope from the government agents – the president, the governors, ministers, commissioners, local government chairmen, the army, the police, and other government representatives who are the same self-selected men who occupy themselves with the achievement of their egocentric goals. Toundi condemns these in her article in order to make the people have a rethink and seek redress for the good of the society.

3.7 Environmental Degradation in *Oil Cemetery*

In *Oil Cemetery*, environmental degradation with its attendant effects like unemployment, poverty, hardship, diseases, suffering and insecurity have plunged the oil-producing communities especially Ubolu into misery. It is “obvious that the people of Ubolu and its environs were living in environmental bondage” (132). Having considered the high level of environmental degradation which has brought untold hardship to the community, the protagonists of the novel, Rita wonders “what is the oil industry’s contribution to the development of our communities?” This is because:

Oil spillage causes frequent farmland depletion and forest fires as well as serious air pollution. It also poisons the earth, kills crops, and thus plunges many farmers into deeper poverty. More serious is the contamination of rivers, which not only deprives fishermen of their living but causes a shortage of drinking water” (Nwoye, 63).

The disappearance of the serene environment that encourages rich harvest as well as peaceful co-existence of the members of ecosystem is lamented in Ubolu where the “crops for which the community was renowned were no longer growing....the thatched-roof village, the golden savannah, the once-green forests that had characterised Ubolu for generations threatened to become mere memories in the wake of the oil exploration.” (Nwoye, 85) The destruction of fertile land and rivers by oil spillage and gas flaring has rendered the people who are farmers and fishermen by occupation jobless. While enumerating the consequences of environmental degradation on the host communities, Rita recounts that, “many of our people have lost their live and properties (sic) to the pipeline explosion. Most of the farmers have been plunged into abject poverty such that they could hardly provide for their families; most of the jobless young men have taken to vices” (Nwoye, 181). Dr. Jeremiah, an environmental expert that comes as a witness to the plaintiff during the court case explains that “whenever a spill occurs, dangerous hydrocarbons ..., which are constituents of the crude oil are released into the soil and water source. ... Polluting not only crops but marine life...as well as polluting source of water for domestic use.” (Nwoye, 183-184) He also affirms that destruction of biodiversity as well as the extinction of wildlife results from the situation. This has affected various areas especially the area of livelihood. Rita summarises the situation thus:

Their environment is totally polluted. Our water is contaminated... The rivers look like rivers of death. The fish are disappearing for lack of oxygen. When it rains, our surroundings are coated – not with raindrops – but with oil residue. Our livestock are dying. Our schools are dilapidated. Our roads are terrible. The three wooden bridges we constructed have collapsed. Our people are dying in numbers; there are no hospitals except for patent medicine stores (Nwoye, 143).

On a visit (from America) to her husband in Ubolu community in the Niger Delta, Brenda, the wife of Jefferson, the director of Zebulon Oil Company observes in astonishment, “I’ve wandered around here a little since the day I arrived but the few

houses ... are nothing but rat holes, and oh my God, the smell.” (Nwoye, 148) By the employment of metaphor, the author clearly conveys her message. ‘Rat holes’ is metaphorically used to refer to the wretched-looking houses in which the people of Ubolu reside. It vividly gives a picture of poor living condition of the people. A similar observation is made in the dinner party organised by Jefferson for the directors of various oil companies and their wives. One of the women in the party quips, “The most interesting people here are the crocodiles.” (Nwoye, 148) Crocodile is metaphorical here. There is a common belief among the Africans that crocodiles do not eat the fish in their territory. The situation of the people of the Niger Delta is likened to that of crocodiles, to show that the people of the oil-rich region struggle for survival even though one of the most lucrative natural resources is abundantly exploited from their land . They still wallow in lack. Rita recalls that before the coming of the companies, her people live abundantly with proceeds from their fertile land and richly-endowed fresh waters. But now, “the oil spillages caused frequent farmland and forest fires as well as serious air pollution.” (Nwoye, 180 – 181)

In one of the meetings that the directors of Zebulon oil company hold to deliberate on how to tackle the demands of the workers’ union as well as that of the natives who are planning to launch an attack on the expatriates and the oil facilities, one of the directors, Smith admits that it should be easy to buy someone over because of severity of poverty in the community. In fact, the people would even “sell their government to get money.” (Nwoye,76) This assertion is proven to be true by the corrupt attitude of the community’s representatives known as Men of Alphabet. They claim to be the middlemen between their community, Ubolu, and the oil companies. On one of those occasions, they collect twenty million naira from the oil companies. The companies’ directors tell them to give Rita, the woman activist ten million naira in order to dissuade her from continuing the struggle. They decide to give her two hundred thousand through her father but she rejects it and remains focused on championing the cause of the environment. ‘The Men of the Alphabet’ also meet idle youth (boys) under a tree one afternoon and give them two hundred thousand naira out of the huge amount offered by the oil companies as compensation. In the process of sharing the money, conflict ensued among the idle boys and Jude lost his

life. This is an indication that the oil business in the region does not only lead to destruction of the environment but also loss of lives and property.

Insecurity is one of the serious effects of environmental destabilisation. One of the major events that contribute to the development of the plot of the novel is missing of Brenda, the wife of the director of Zebulon oil. She is kidnapped from the residence of the oil workers at Ubolu community. The local oil workers are suspected to have carried out the act following their bragging to deal with Mr Jefferson, the director of Zebulon oil as a way of demanding justice (Nwoye, 156). The workers embark on strike action because of the unfair treatment they constantly receive from the director. The workers, indigenous to the host communities are unjustly laid off without their benefits. Izundu, Rita's father, is one of the victims of such unfair treatment. He is unjustly laid off after being enslaved with excessive workload and a promise to be retained with extra two months' salary as bonus; but it all turns out an empty promise and a fruitless effort as he is laid off after eleven months without these benefits. This renders his dependents, especially Rita and Joseph, helpless. Before the layoff, he is due for promotion but he is denied it. Besides, no serious job is given to the natives and even when they are given, it would be a contracted work. As a result, they are dismissed anyhow. In most cases, they are not recruited at all while people from different parts of the world are offered well-paid jobs in the oil companies operating in their communities. This act of injustice is what the people react against.

3.8 Unemployment, Oil Pilfering and Tragedy in *Oil Cemetery*

Pipeline explosion has become one of the regular occurrences in Ubolu, resulting not only in the degradation of land and rivers but also to loss of lives and property. Due to the insensitivity of the oil companies, they do not consider it necessary to replace worn out oil facilities like oil pipelines. As a result, oil spills and gas flares destroy the environment. In an effort to eke out a living, the unemployed youth who are being tortured by hardship due to lack of means of sustenance, attempt to steal crude oil for sale in the black market. In the process, an explosion occurs. The *Renaissance newspaper* reports that:

Tragedy occurred yesterday as an explosion damaged an oil pipeline in a remote part of the Delta. Over thirty people lost

their lives.... Some of the burnt bodies were seen floating in the nearby river. An eyewitness reported that some youths from the nearby villages besieged the site of an oil spillage with different types of containers, attempting to drill holes in the leaking pipes when an explosion occurred, followed by the fire (Nwoye, 79).

A similar incidence occurs in another part of the creek of Ubolu community when some idle boys destroy an oil pipe in order to collect fuel for sale (Nwoye,116). They see this as a means of escape from the economic austerity. But this turns out a mirage as the communities are filled with wailing, sorrow and misery following the explosion that occurs when a great number of people are struggling to scoop fuel into their containers. Amidst this struggle, metal buckets scrap each other, ignite, and the explosion that followed was like a thunderstorm. Fire breaks out instantly and spread around the environment. Shouts, cries and coughing fill the atmosphere but soon are heard no more. After that, “not less than sixty bodies of human beings were scattered all over the scene. Some were burnt beyond recognition. The stench of burning oil, burnt flesh, and burnt plastic filled the air.”(Nwoye, 117) This affirms the saying that oil boom has turned to doom for the people.

The insensitivity of the oil companies is highly manifested in their continuing to use worn out facilities without any plan to replace them; these facilities get broken and the highly inflammable substance explodes resulting in loss of many innocent lives. One afternoon, about fifteen of the youth are under the tree chattering idly when a young man runs to report that:

There was a massive leakage in one of the oil pipelines at the Ubolu community farmland. Eighteen people have been found dead from the effects of fumes they inhaled in the course of fishing and farm or carrying out their ordinary lives. The community was in chaos. People were running helter-skelter as the corpses were being brought into the village square. Men were moaning and gnashing their teeth while the women wailed uncontrollably. (Nwoye,89 - 90)

Following the above catastrophe at Ubolu where “the death of their kith and kin was too much to bear (Nwoye, 85), the youth go on rampage chanting “enough is enough.” The youth embark on such impromptu protest to register their fury against the calamity which has turned their land into an oil cemetery (Nwoye,181).The oil workers are not left out in

this matter, they embark on strike “because constant explosion of pipelines had led to a progressive layoff with a suspension of benefits. This caused a general outrage; the economy had dried up and hunger was knocking on most doors.” (Nwoye, 154) The one that constitutes a point of discussion at many joints is the latest pipeline explosion which killed an Ubolu woman and her daughter (Nwoye, 154).

Oil Cemetery consciously x-rays the effects of unemployment as it affects not only the individuals but also the entire society. While recounting the effects of unemployment, Rita states that “most of the jobless young men have taken to vice.” (Nwoye, 181) She gives more details of this menace thus:

The youthful population, which in better times would be engaged in fishing and farming, now hung about the community without direction or purpose. There were no reasonable schools for them to go to, as the few primary and secondary schools around were utterly dilapidated. Teachers posted to schools in these communities often bought their way out. With nothing productive to do, the youths resorted to hanging around in the village square, under the trees, moving around their family houses in packs (Nwoye, 89).

Another instance is noticed in Ubolu community. Alfred, Ben, Chris, Dan, and Edward who are popularly known as ‘The Men of the Alphabet’ (Nwoye, 152) are partners in crime. They are idle youth who take advantage of the oil business in their community to enrich themselves. They connive with the oil companies’ representatives to cheat the people of their community. The representatives of the oil companies are indicted because instead of going direct to the people of the community to find out what their needs are and provide them; they choose to use ‘The Men of the Alphabets’. They collect huge amounts of money from the oil companies and give their people who are frustrated by poverty a meager sum. The oil companies are neither humane nor considerate; they decide to go through shortcuts in order not to spend much money. They know that whatever amount of money is given to ‘The Men of the Alphabet’ cannot be enough to repair the damage done to the environment of the host communities.

On the other hand, ‘The Men of the Alphabet’ out of joblessness, selfishness, and greed take the advantage of the ugly situation to enrich themselves to the detriment of their people. This confirms the observation of Smith, one of the directors of oil companies.

He asserts that “it should be easy to buy someone over here. There is serious poverty here. They would even sell their government to get money; ... they need money, they need houses, they need cars, and they are dying to travel out of this country. Offer anyone of them any of these options, and you’ve got a deal.” (Nwoye, 76) Their affluent living is an attestation to Smith’s assertion. It is revealed that “they all have big houses, they all have cars, they sent their children to the city to big schools, and they eat with the oil company (Nwoye, 152).

People of the host community to some extent contribute to the environmental problem in their community. The action of ‘The Men of Alphabet’ is a good example here. While some are seriously fighting for their right to considerably good living conditions, others are busy sabotaging such effort. The literary writers use literature as a medium to conscientise the partners in the environmental crimes (the government, the oil companies, and some of the indigenous people who are guilty of conniving with the duo for material gains) in the area in order to dissuade them from such. Though, it is a fact that some of the natives of the host community who engage in unwholesome activities like kidnapping, oil pilfering, armed robbery, assassination, sabotage, as well as other acts contribute to making lives unbearable in the region; they do that because of economic austerity but that does not in any way justify their acts. They are not exonerated from blame because their acts contribute in a greater way to degrading the environment.

3.9 Prostitution and Health Implications in *Oil Cemetery*

Prostitution in the oil region has a direct connection with environmental degradation and oil business. Oil company workers take advantage of their financial buoyancy and the women’s economic predicament to sexually exploit women of the region. Besides, the level of poverty in those communities where oil is exploited has compelled the women to indulge in prostitution as a survival strategy. They exchange sex for material gains especially money in order to cope with the economic hardship that the destruction of their means of livelihood has plunged them into. The destruction of their means of livelihood has resulted in abject poverty; a kind that forces people to go into immoral acts even when they know the implications. This is the kind of situation that the people of Niger Delta find themselves (the women in particular). Women (single and

married) unashamedly engage in prostitution in order to make money from the flamboyant oil workers to meet their daily needs. This was not the culture of the people *before* the era of oil business in the region. Before now, the people held sex sacred and did not deem it necessary to engage in it except for marital purposes. This notion no longer holds. Considering the rate at which women engage in illicit sex, this study concludes that oil exploitation has produced more psychologically destabilised individuals in the region. This conclusion is drawn from the facts that an individual who engages in prostitution is fully aware of the negative implications or must have seen the aftermath of such act from those who are already into.

In *Oil Cemetery*, oil business in Ubolu as well as other communities has not only degraded the environment but has lured the women into the lives of degradation. It has not only made the young men to take to vices but also has compelled the women into prostitution. While giving her evidence in the court about the negative impact of environmental degradation in her community, Rita states that “what we now have in abundance is unwanted pregnancies from under-aged girls lured by insensitive men into a life of degradation.” (181) Prostitution does not only lead to unwanted pregnancy, it also has other health implications. This is revealed in the following rhetorical question by Rita, “Can anyone imagine the health hazard of prostitution in recent times, to say nothing of the HIV pandemic?” (181)

Numerous health hazards are also recorded as a result of environmental despoliation in the region. Sickneses and diseases that are alien to the people are now common in the wake of oil exploitation in the region. During the legal battle between Ubolu community and Zebulon oil company, Dr. Jeremiah, a medical environmentalist asserts that the most worrisome aspect of oil pollution is the increase in occurrence of certain ailments that were previously less common in that area. He explains that “there is a correlation between exposure to oil pollution and the development of certain health problems.” (Nwoye,184) When he is asked to mention some of the health problems that can be caused by oil pollution, he lists them as follows: cancer, rashes, dermatitis, eye problems, gastrointestinal disorders, nutritional problems associated with poor diet, and respiratory problems traceable to oil pollution (Nwoye, 184). When such health problems

occur, the people die in large numbers because “there are no hospitals” (Nwoye, 143) where they can receive medical attention. Irrespective of the economic gains that oil companies make in the host communities, their representatives are insensitive to the plights of the people. This is deducible from the statement of one of the oil companies’ directors, Smith, who makes it clear that “our concern here is the oil. Let them do whatever they like, as long as we get oil in the end.” (Nwoye, 76) This is a display of high level of insensitivity and impunity as a result of greed.

3.10 Women as Eco-activists in *Oil Cemetery*

In *Oil Cemetery*, Nwoye consciously creates a female protagonist who is imbued with the determined, assertive and inquisitive spirit needed to champion eco-activism, which positively changes the history of her society. With the attainment of education, Rita is well equipped to source information to prepare herself for eco-activism in Ubolu in the fictional Niger Delta in the novel. Rita’s interest to move forward is seen in the diligence she displays not only in her domestic duties but also in her commitment to her educational career. Besides, she helps her guardian, Uncle Steve, to collate documents or read through his speeches (Nwoye, 59). This earns her the trust of Uncle Steve who out of confidence instructs her to go to the study room and bring an important document during one of the oil workers’ union meetings. She locates and takes it to him without wasting time because she has often been to the room reading through those documents. This avails Rita the opportunity to make inspiring comments in the union meeting for the first time. She uses the opportunity to react to unjust treatment meted out to the natives who work in the oil companies as well as numerous environmental problems that oil business has caused in the communities.

Through stream of consciousness, the reader is brought into the world of the protagonist who through research equips herself with enough information needed to champion environmental activism. By equipping the female protagonist with education that places her above docility and emotional entrapment and allows her to respond to the call of the ecofeminists to rise to overthrow the patriarchal structure that exerts domination over women and nature, the novel proposes that education is a veritable tool for women’s emancipation. As against the opinion of some of the men in the workers’ meeting, “It’s a

woman! What does she know?" (Nwoye, 62), Rita's inspiring comment gives them a shock and positively spurs the men into the right action. The high level of brilliance and eloquence she displays baffles all the men; this gives her acceptance among the men who now insist that she must be included in the decision-making body of the workers' union (Nwoye, 64). Rita's speech helps the workers to discover themselves and realise how much they have been unjustly treated; they go on strike. Rita's comment creates a problem for the oil companies (Nwoye, 65). This compels the oil companies to call for an emergency meeting to discuss the union demands and their strike.

By employment of third person point of view as a narrative technique, the reader is afforded the opportunity to observe the events as they unfold and see how they contribute to development of the plot and characters in the novel. The narrator reveals that Rita is a reservoir of information as far as matters of the environment are concerned. With this, the reader sees how Rita develops from being an observant child to a prudent adult psychologically and emotionally mature to champion a cause that brings positive changes to the society. After the news of the fuel disaster that occurs in Ubolu community, Rita's sense of activism is fired. She "told herself it was time she got involved in matters that affected the welfare of her people, especially since her father was a victim of injustice of the oil companies." (Nwoye, 122)

She travels home in the company of Angela and Timi to make inquiry about the recent disastrous explosion that led to the death a family - Mama Boy, her son and her husband. Rita's father, Izundu, takes them to the place where the husband and the wife are buried near the disaster ground. The community names the place "OIL CEMETERY, because it harboured the bodies of their sons and daughters brought down by the greed for oil." (Nwoye, 126) This meeting affords her the opportunity to address her people on the impact of oil exploitation on the community. She spurs them to take action against such injustice in the following words:

Our environment is totally polluted. Our water is contaminated. Go down to the creeks and see: the rivers look like rivers of death. The fish are disappearing for lack of oxygen. When it rains, our surroundings are coated – not with raindrops – but with oil residue. Our livestock are dying. Our schools are dilapidated.... Our people

are dying in great numbers; there are no hospitals What then will be our best line of action? What can we do to reclaim our heritage? There is urgent need for action. What we are saying is we are tired! Enough is enough! We have a right to be heard, they must listen to us. ... the time is now! (Nwoye, 143)

After the meeting, Rita files a case against Zebulon Oil Company. The effort (especially the huge financial offer) made by the oil company to make her drop the struggle proves abortive. By filing a case against the oil company for the numerous environmental havocs their oil exploitation has caused in the various communities in the Niger Delta especially Ubolu, Rita takes a giant stride towards achieving emancipation for both humans (women especially) and non-humans as the ecofeminists advocate. In the court, Rita exposes without reservation the environmental woes that oil business has caused her people. Silence fell in the courtroom as she finishes her touchy testimony during the hearing. While some persons feel compassion for the exploited, some feel guilt for their wickedness against the host communities.

While the case is still in court, the workers' union which has not been the same since the demise of their former able leader, Comrade Steve, develops rancour. This leads to two factions emerging in their leadership, the Abbas-led group and the Josiah-led group. Even more tension has risen since the recent litigation between Ubolu community and Zebulon Oil Company. The Abbas-led group has made it a point of duty to make at least one new demand from the oil company every week. After one of those meetings, the news of the latest pipeline explosion which kills an Ubolu woman and her daughter become a point for discussion at every joint. This raises more concern among the workers. While a hot argument ensued between two members of the different groups in one of those joints, the traitorous act of 'The Men of Alphabet' is brought to limelight. That caused the Abbas-led group to begin to sing war songs. They go on protest, breaking off tree branches as they make their way into the troubled community of Ubolu. They unleash mayhem on the homes of 'The Men of the Alphabet'. On hearing this, the villagers join them in the protest.

The older women who can no longer bear the agony of the tragic incidence of oil explosion begin to tear their clothes in protest. Despite the fact that most of their tobacco stained teeth have fallen off, they still sing sorrowful ancient songs in unison. The men unsettled at the sight of these nude old women, leave the scene. The women take over the protest to fully express their anger against the oil companies for numerous problems their activities have caused in the communities; also, for the unjust treatment given to the women in sharing of compensation paid by the oil companies. Widows are hardest hit. They have no man to speak on their behalf. Women are totally cheated out of their entitlements and out of any inheritance. To worsen it all, farming and fishing, the only occupations through which they would have fended for themselves are no longer productive due to environmental degradation.

At this juncture, the women take a decisive stance to end domination over nature and women as the ecofeminists propose. The younger women who had earlier been inspired by Rita's stirring speech have also joined their elders, tearing off their clothes. They are all eager to assert themselves in support of what the grey-haired women have initiated. They engage in protest by occupying all sites of the oil companies and decide that there would be no work unless their demands are met. The leader of the women speaks out:

Today, the women have spoken! They have taken control!
No more drilling, no more gas flaring, no more extraction
until all our demands are met. No form of work for gas
workers. No further activity on our land ... Everything must
stop! We must secure the future of our children – it's now or
never! (Nwoye, 192)

The people of the neighbouring communities get wind of this protest and this event is replicated in all other communities where oil exploitation is carried out. The sites of the oil companies are overrun by the women. They refuse to go back to their houses. They occupy the companies' sites to ensure that no work takes place. The impact of the women's nudity strategy is reflected in the reduction of the companies' daily production. Following the peaceful protest of the women, no activity takes place in the oil sites. The oil companies become worried because they are losing huge amounts of money every hour

(Nwoye, 198). The representatives of the oil companies visit Freedom Bench (the law firm that handles Ubolu's case) for intervention. They make it known that they are ready to negotiate with the women. They request for the intervention of Rita to plead with the women to cover their nakedness and most importantly leave the sites. Rita leads the representative of Freedom Bench to Ubolu community to discuss the terms of the negotiation. When the delegates pay a visit to the traditional ruler of the community, he commends the courage and intervention of the women thus, "the exploitation of our land has troubled us men for many years, but nothing had come out of it. Why? Because of selfishness and greed! *But now the women have taken control and the oil companies are on their knees.*" (Nwoye, 201; my emphasis)

After Rita and her colleagues have addressed the crowd concerning their mission, one of the women, Mama Timi, in response, thanks the women for their unity and force. She reveals in the following excerpt that:

The time is past when people can come to our communities and continue to exploit us by causing division among us. We have suffered all kinds of hardships, all kinds of humiliation. The days are gone when decisions concerning our welfare are made for us at some big office. The days are gone when others will tell us what we will need and like. (Nwoye, 202)

She goes on to elucidate that in as much as they want peace to reign in their communities, certain demands must be met by the oil companies. Immediately, the women start to list their needs as follow: hospitals, good roads, clean water, stop gas flaring, schools, jobs for the youth, allowance for the elderly, safe bridges, compensation for widows and orphans, turn swampy areas into farmland and reclaiming the rivers for fishing (Nwoye, 202-203). The women conclude their demands with a warning that they will not allow the oil companies to work unless their demands are met. All the people including the men chorused their agreement. The companies' businesses have been shut down for close to a week. The Freedom Bench and the representatives of the oil companies convene a meeting to discuss the demands of the women. In the meeting, the companies' representatives make it known that they have been losing millions of dollars following the protest by the

women. In fact, the periods of violence have taken a toll on their companies' operations. As a result, they are ready to commence projects as demanded by the women.

After the meeting, the companies' representatives sit back to review what has transpired at the just concluded meeting. It is at this point they express their worry over the strict demands of the women. Bill has a different opinion about the whole issue. He opines that if the money they have spent on the middlemen and their chiefs were channel towards the projects demanded by the women, it could have yielded better result. He quips, "Trust the women! ... It is from my mother that I learned to respect womenfolk." (Nwoye, 208) One of his colleagues agrees with him; he opines that, "The women are thinking of what will benefit the entire community. All the money the men have collected from us, they've used to marry new wives and take ridiculous titles." (Nwoye, 208)

What is of utmost importance to the oil companies is the issue of resumption of work because millions of naira had gone down the drain since operations ceased at their sites a few weeks ago because of the protest of the women. For them, anything that is needed to be done should be done to regain their ability to operate. After consultation with their different parties, the community team and the oil companies' representatives reconvene to continue their negotiation. The oil companies agree to comply with the demands of the women. They agree to commence developmental projects in the oil region and most importantly to reclaim the land and rivers to revitalise farming and fishing activities. At Ubolu village square, there is excitement on the faces of both men and women. Out of this excitement at the success of the women in such task, one of the men commends the women's effort thus: "The women have succeeded where we have failed! Is that not a shame?" (Nwoye, 213) Rita's father, Izundu, could not hold back his joy. He addresses the people thus, "Our women have done us proud by the challenge they posed to the oil companies. They spoke and were granted audience; they made demands and were answered. We must ... appreciate them." (Nwoye, 214)

While works on the project sites according to the demands of the women are going on, the legal battle between Ubolu community and Zebulon Oil Company is also going on. In the end, the case is won by Rita on behalf of Ubolu community. Concerning the project, the oil companies provide schools, hospitals, good roads, bridges, potable water among

others for the community. During the commissioning of the projects, the representative of the oil companies makes it known that in as much as the demands of the women are concerned; the oil companies are willing to comply. This is evident in the promise to reclaim the swampy areas which is caused by oil exploitation. (Nwoye, 240-241) The completion of the developmental projects championed by the women has not only brought peace, harmony and joy to Ubolu community, but also the patriarchal structure appears to have been subdued by the women as the men learnt to accept their women as important partners who can contribute meaningfully to the progress of their society. By this, the women are seen as resilient personalities whom the ecofeminists charge with the responsibility to end all forms of domination over nature and women. This suggests that for women to gain victory over oppression of any kind, unity of purpose is necessary. They must articulate their demands in unison and win their struggle through collective effort. With the remarkable roles played by the women in the struggle against the degradation of the environment in Ubolu community, which yields a desired result, they have complied with the postulation of the ecofeminists to end domination over nature and women.

Egbuson and Nwoye in *Love My Planet* and *Oil Cemetery* respectively have presumed that ecofeminist ideas, if appropriately applied to the Niger Delta, would solve the multifaceted problems caused by environmental degradation. The protagonists (females) alongside other female characters in the novels through individual and collective efforts engage in eco-activism that exerts restorative influence on environment and emancipation of women. By their attainment of certain levels of education which exposes them to informational sources, the protagonists take giant strides into environmental advocacy. Education becomes a metaphor for empowerment of the woman for her emancipation. Egbuson in *Love My Planet* argues that the problem of the Niger Delta can neither be solved by violent struggle as adopted by the men in various militant groups nor by the intransigence of the government in the matter of despoliation of the Niger Delta environment.

For him, the intervention of women is required for the realisation of a society conducive enough for men and women to fulfil their destinies. An instance is seen in the

involvement of the protagonist, Toundi, in various projects that bring restoration to Daglobe Delta. She establishes an NGO through which some persons are trained in various vocations following which they become financially independent, and as a result, desist from the vandalisation of oil pipeline that would have further destroyed the environment. Through it, she also fights against women abuse. She maximizes any opportunity of her life to fight for preservation of the environment. This is demonstrated by getting people enlightened on the need to care for the environment through her various write-ups with titles like 'I care for the environment' and 'Love my planet.' One of the projects she accomplishes through the NGO is planting of trees in some parts of Daglobe. When Araba asks her, "Besides Clean Daglobe what else are you doing? She responds thus, "It is a full occupation." (Egbuson, 403) Her response is an indication of a woman who wants to spend the rest of her life in preserving the environment. Using her NGO to engage in the struggle against oppression of women and destruction of the natural environment qualifies Toundi as an eco-feminist.

In *Oil Cemetery* also, the women of Ubolu through their individual and collective efforts engage in protest against the destruction of the environment, and the desired result is achieved. Rita, the protagonist sued the Zebulon oil company for the environmental havoc it has caused in Ubolu community. She wins the case. Also, the solidarity women group through their protest halts the activities of the oil companies; this compels the oil companies to commence developmental projects to restore the degraded environment. By their resolution to engage in a protest against destruction of natural environment and oppression of women, the women of Ubolu community live up to the responsibility of ending domination over nature and oppression against women as ecofeminists propose.

3.11 Ecocide: Militancy and Oil Pilfering in *Oil on Water*

The region of Niger Delta suffers the worse effects of under-development while the oil money that is used to positively transform other parts of the country is got from the area. Political instability and social vices in the region make life miserable for the poor masses. Worse still, compensation paid by the oil companies does not get to the common people; it ends in the pockets of a few individuals who parade themselves as the people's

representatives (traditional rulers and liaison officers). All these injustices could be referred to as violence against the people. This validates Festus Iyayi's opinion on violence. According to him,

Acts of violence are committed when a man is denied of the opportunity of being educated, of getting a job, of feeding himself and his family properly, of getting medical attention cheaply, quickly and promptly. We often do not realise that it is the society, the type of economic and political system which we are operating in our country ... that brutalises the individual, rapes his manhood. (1979:185)

The violence culminates in ecocide and despoliation of eco-system. Human beings who are at the receiving end are confronted with the consequences. People of the region engage in protest against this injustice. Having noticed the peril that pollution of the environment portends for the people, human rights cum environmental activists, Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni men advocated resource control. They are cruelly murdered by then Nigerian government for agitating for the right of the people to be allowed to use the resource in their land to develop the area in the way it would benefit the common man. The Nigerian government thinks that this violence would put an end to the struggle, but it turns out ironically. The violence has spurred protest not only in the area but also in the literary landscape of the region. The literary writers in a very clear term condemn ecocide and its effect on the region. Among such literary writers is Helon Habila who through his novel, *Oil on Water*, depicts ecological degradation and the people's response to it.

In *Oil on Water*, oil exploitation has negative implications for the people of Niger Delta. The people lost their means of livelihood to environmental pollution. As a result, the people are forced into oil pilfering and kidnapping to earn a living and to draw attention to their plight. These further constitute a security threat in the oil region. In agitation against such injustice, the jobless youth engage in kidnapping of foreign oil workers. This is the root cause of the search embarked upon by the two journalists in the novel. On a journey to look for a kidnapped wife of an expatriate, Isabel Floode, the first thing that attracts the attention of the journalists, Zaq and Rufus is "a dead fish on the polluted water" (4) as Tamuno and Michael guide them on the journey. As they continue

the journey to another area, they also notice that the atmosphere “grew heavy with the suspended stench of dead matters” (8), with dead birds and fish trapped in the polluted environment. The effects of environmental degradation are glaring in the following account of Rufus:

Soon we were in a dense mangrove swamp; the water underneath us had turned foul and sulfurous . . . The atmosphere grew heavy with the suspended stench of dead matter. We followed a bend in the river and in front of us we saw dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil; dead fish bobbed white-belled between tree roots. (Habila, 9-10)

The situation is not different in another village where oil spillage and its implicative pollution has left the village a shadow of itself. There, it is noticed that “the patch of grass growing by the water was suffocated by a film of oil, each blade covered with blotches like the liver spots on a smoker’s hands.” (Habila, 10)

The discovery and trading of crude oil has turned into a curse instead of a blessing. This is quite glaring in the novel. People of a village are happy when flares which they refer to as “orange fire” initially started, but this happiness turns into sadness as plants, animals as well as human beings begin to die from the pollution caused by the unquenchable fire. They people refuse to heed the warning of a medical doctor on the implication of the flares as the doctor tells Rufus:

Well, I did my duty as their doctor. I told them of the dangers that accompany that quenchless flare, but they wouldn’t listen. And then a year later, when the livestock began to die and the plants began to wither on the stalks, I took samples of the drinking water and in my lab I measured the level of the toxins in it: it was rising, steadily. (Habila, 153)

As time goes on, the ecosystem begins to wane and human health deteriorates. The doctor notices that “a man suddenly comes down with a mild headache, becomes feverish, then develops rashes, and suddenly a vital organ shuts down.” (154) Death now becomes one of the people’s daily experiences and human condition becomes more pathetic. The

incidence in the novel demonstrates that ecological degradation is akin to degradation of human lives.

The pivotal cause of militancy and kidnapping activities is the lack of jobs. Pollution of farmlands and rivers make farming and fishing less productive and less attractive, thereby plunging the people into unbearable hardship and suffering. As such, the jobless youth are forced into kidnapping which they now see as a lucrative business. No wonder Tamuno, a fisherman requests that the journalists should help him to take his son, Michael, to Port Harcourt and assist him to acquire good education. He makes this request because, for him, there is no future for the boy in their village. He tell them that “he no get future here ... wein he go do here? Nothing. No fish for river. Nothing. I fear he go join militants.” (36) This implies that militancy is induced by lack of employment that is caused by environmental degradation in Niger Delta as seen in the novel.

A neighbouring village to Chief Malabo had a similar experience. The people enjoy serenity and peace owing to their being in tune with nature. This accounts for the description of the village as paradise. It is recorded that though the village is small but the people lack nothing. They are satisfied and happy, because their living is made worthwhile by farming and fishing. But this peaceful living is disrupted when the oil explorers come and pollute the environment in the cause of drilling oil. The village becomes a shadow of itself. The land and river become polluted and useless for farming and fishing activities (39- 40). The people are displaced because the oil companies keep acquiring more pieces of land for their business. They start moving from one place to another in search of better condition of living, but their lives are made miserable by the displacement. Chief Malabo and his people take precaution so that the same thing would not happen to them. But the government connives with the explorer and forcefully drills oil in their land and the people suffer the consequences. Their environment becomes pathetically polluted. Poverty and suffering abound. Life becomes unbearable as “gas flares and rig go high.” (41) The people are forced to leave the village in search of a place where they can find peace but “it is too hard” (41) to find because they are continuously displaced as the explorers acquire more pieces of land to expand their business. This is how the people of Chief Ibiram’s

village become “wanderers without a home.” (45) As at the time he recounts this ordeal, he makes it clear that they have lived in five different places and are still moving.

Besides, a similar story is told about a deserted village (a camp) where the soldiers keep the captured militants. The medical doctor in the camp is distracted by “decomposing landscape” (55), a landscape that is fast disappearing. The doctor attests that the people of the village earn their living by fishing but frustration sets in when the environment gets degraded by oil spillage and gas flaring. The land and rivers are poisoned, fish are killed, plants as well as human beings are also endangered. The people are confronted with strange diseases as a result of drinking contaminated water, eating poisoned fish and breathing polluted air. As a result of these, untimely death now becomes a common experience among the people.

The situation is not different in a village known as Junction. People of the village totally depend on nature’s resources for a living. Rufus and his sister, Boma, realise money for sponsoring their education from the sales they get from hunting and selling crabs. People live in peace and earn a living by fishing and farming. This peaceful life in Junction village is reduced to a mere memory in the wake of oil exploitation. The rich landscape and rivers are polluted and the people suffer the effects. Life generally becomes boring in the village. The people are forced by unbearable hardship into oil theft. Rufus’ father and others meet their needs through this means. This explains why he advises Rufus not to stay back in the village but go back to Port Harcourt city after graduating as a photographer. He is concerned that his son may join militants, if he continues to stay in the village since fishing is no longer productive. His father was introduced to oil pilfering when he lost his job as a worker in ABZ Oil Company. He is easily drawn into it because it is “the only business booming in the village.” (Habila, 69)

The frustration that that comes with loss of their jobs turns Rufus’ father and John into drug addicts. Rufus notices a negative change in the lifestyle of his father after he lost his oil company job, and fishing is no more productive for him to fall back on. Rufus is surprised to notice that his father has adopted a new lifestyle. He says, “I saw how much my father had changed. He had turned his back on religion, and now smoked and drank *ogogoro* almost nonstop. He left home early in the morning ... and he returned home only

after midnight, often drunk.” (70) This is caused by frustration that comes with joblessness.

Boma equally observes a drastic change in the attitude of her husband, John, after he loses his job and has nothing, especially fishing, to fall back on. She notices that:

He had become very political, hanging out in backstreet barrooms with other unemployed youths to play cards and drink all day, always complaining about the government. He had been full of anger that often pushed one to blaspheme, or to rob a bank, or to join the militants. (Habila, 95)

The strange life of John raises a lot of concerns for his wife, Boma. Having lost his job as a mail sorter in a courier company, John behaves addly, joins other jobless youth to hang out in the street. Boma observes that he has been full of anger, a kind of anger that could force one into militancy or robbery. She also notices that the majority of her jobless “schoolmates have joined militancy and some have equally died” in the process (90). This implies that militancy and armed robbery in oil-producing region like the Niger Delta are most of the times caused by joblessness. In fewer cases, some indolent individuals in the guise of militancy perpetuate evil like kidnapping, armed robbery, oil theft, and the likes. However, in most cases, genuine militancy is borne out of agitation against injustice. A militant group known as ‘Simple Justice’ formed by Araba in *Love My Planet*, a militant group led by Sekibo in *Outrage*, and Niger Delta Liberation Movement (NDLM) formed by Mene Bene in Akinfe’s *Fuelling the Delta Fires* fit into instances of militant groups that are committed to fighting a genuine cause of justice.

Militancy, whether genuine or false, has implications for the people. For instance, innocent persons are usually victims if a clash occurs between militants and government security agents. This point is vividly portrayed *Oil on Water*. If a pipeline blast occurs, it is the poor people that are usually victims because they are the ones that go to collect oil from the broken pipes. It is recorded that Rufus village, Junction goes up in smoke and it is not unconnected to explosion from oil pilfering. Boma is a victim of this kind of blast. Her face is seriously damaged from the accident. This is how many persons become victims of pipeline blasts in Jesse and numerous other villages that are being burnt daily.

This is made clear in a conversation between a soldier and Rufus. The soldier has no sympathy for the people because according to him, the people bring the calamity upon themselves by engaging in oil theft. But Rufus refutes this view in the follow statement:

Junction, went up in smoke because of an accident associated with vandalism as you call it. But I don't blame them for wanting to get some benefits out of the pipelines, that have brought nothing but suffering to their lives, leaking into the rivers and wells; killing the fish and poisoning the farmlands... These people endure the worse conditions of any oil-producing community on earth... And you think the people are corrupt? No, they are just hungry, and tired. (Habila, 97)

Kidnapping makes life unsafe for foreigners and indigenous people of the oil-producing communities. In *Oil on Water*, some members of a militant group are strictly instructed to kidnap an expatriate but they unknowingly kidnap an albino whom they mistake to be an expatriate because of the colour of his skin. Their leader, whose intention for sending them on that mission is to collect a huge ransom for purchase of arms, is disappointed when he learns that the hostage is a native of the oil community; this accounts for the reason why nobody calls to negotiate a ransom for his release. This suggests that kidnapping makes life generally unbearable for everybody within the oil-producing area.

Militancy and insecurity are common in any environment that is under environmental threat. This salient point is illustrated in the work. The duo are inseparable. Security of life is not guaranteed in any area where militancy exists. The remarkable event that contributes to the plot and character development in the novel is kidnapping of Isabel Floode, the wife a foreign worker. She is kidnapped in retaliation for the unfair treatment her husband gives to her driver, Salomon. Salomon's fiancée, Koko, is impregnated by James Floode. She works as a domestic staff to James but things turn out sour as she is lured into an illicit sexual act by her master despite her being engaged to Salomon. This clearly illustrates that insecurity is a common phenomenon in any environment undergoing degradation. Every life within the degraded environment of the Niger Delta is under security threat, from non-human to human life.

In the novel, it is lack of jobs that compels Salomon to accept under-employment in the oil company as a driver regardless of the fact that he is a graduate. Koko becomes more vulnerable and is, convinced to leave a relationship she has built for years and accepts to marry a foreigner as a second wife because she seems not to have an alternative choice of what to do to earn a living should she refuse her master's sexual advances and the attractive financial benefits that follow. This is because the fishing occupation she would have fallen back on is no longer productive. This shows the level of insecurity the people experience in a polluted environment and the women are worse hit.

Those that mastermind the kidnapping of the wife of the expatriate are not also safe. Salomon, Bassey and Jamabo do not live to either collect or enjoy the ransom. Jamabo and Salomon are killed by the angry militants. Bassey is killed in a clash between the soldiers and the militants at Agbuki Island. Degradation of environment is akin to degradation of life in an area like the Niger Delta where crude oil is exploited with impunity and human life is cheap.

The militants in their quest for attention and hustling for means of livelihood sometimes, destroy oil installation, to express their anger against the injustice going on in their area. The leader of the militant group popularly known as professor tells Rufus that they would set one of the major oil depots ablaze. This decision is not unconnected to agitation for human right and environmental justice. Professor explains to Rufus that injustice against human right compels the unemployed youth into militancy.

In a clash between the militants and the soldiers at Agbaki Island, many lives are wasted. In another clash between the militants and the soldiers at Irikefe Island, five soldiers are killed (169). In retaliation, other soldiers come to the Island the following day and start shooting indiscriminately. This puts the island in a state of chaos as the people start:

Running and jumping into water. It was awful. Awful. The water turned red. Blood, it was blood. In the confusion, the rebels slipped away and left the villagers to face the soldiers. Now, see, everything is in ruins. Nothing is left ..." (Habila, 169)

The militants run away leaving the worshippers to bear the brunt of the clash. The objects of worship like statues are destroyed. With this incidence, the novel demonstrates that militancy does not only make the perpetrators of injustice like oil companies and government uncomfortable but also the people. It raises a question for the militants. It is accepted that they are fighting for enshrinement of human rights but is this purpose fulfilled when a lot of lives of the people they claim to be fighting for are wasted in the course of militancy? In the same vein, damaging of oil installations either for oil pilfering or seeking of attention through this means to a greater extent contributes to despoliation of the environment. From the hostage to the poor people who do not have a hand in pollution of the environment like the religious group on Irikefe Island, all suffer the effects of militancy.

In *Oil on Water*, Habila presents the reader with the idyllic state of the Niger Delta before the discovery and exploitation of crude oil in the area. But this sufficiency and happiness becomes a memory and a tale at night when oil business is established in the region. This is made known through Chief Ibiram who laments:

Once upon a time they lived in paradise. It was a small village close to Yellow Island. They lacked for nothing, fishing and hunting and farming and watching their children growing up before them, happy. The village was close-knit, made up of cousins and uncle and sister ...
(Habila, 42)

As the oil companies commence their activities, the environment deteriorates and the people suffer the consequences. Poverty and hardship are the effects of this degradation. The abject look of Tamuno and his son, Michael, shows the level of poverty and suffering in Chief Ibiram's village. It is stated that:

The boy looked no more than ten years old, but he might have been older, his growth stunted by poor diet. His hair was reddish and sparse, his arms were bony like his father's. They were both dressed in the same shapeless and faded homespun shirts and trousers, their hands looked rough and callused from seawater, they smelled of fish and seemed as elemental as seaweed. (Habila, 7)

Woe is brought upon the people as rivers are polluted. As a result, people are confronted by joblessness, poverty and hardship. The descriptions of the village of Chief Ibiram and his people as at the time the journalists meet with them vividly depict their poor living condition thus:

It was an entire village on stilts, situated by the river on a vast mud flat, which at that moment was underwater, so the village appeared to float; narrow passages of water divided one row of huts from the next, like streets. The houses were made from weeping willow bamboos and raffia palms and bits of zinc and plywood and cloth and it seemed anything else the builders were able to lay their hands on. The whole scarecrow settlement looked as if the next strong wind or wave would blow it away. (Habila, 16)

Apart from the fact that they do not have enough money to build solid structures due to economic strangulation occasioned by environmental degradation, they are displaced from time to time making it a wasted effort trying to build a strong structure in a place where they cannot live permanently. This makes the people to keep moving from one temporary settlement to another pending when the oil company would acquire the land for drilling of oil. The contrast between the appearance of the palace of the village head and the leadership position he holds further illustrates how poor the people are. A visitor would expect that Chief Ibiram as the village head would have his palace adequately furnished, but what Rufus and Zaq saw is far below the expectation. The description of the palace in the following excerpt sums up this point:

The living room was spacious, made more so by the absence of furniture and one large open window. The floor was covered with old straw mats on which we sat as if they were cushions of the softest down. The big man sat in the only chair in the room, an armchair by the window facing the veranda and the river outside. (Habila, 16-7)

One would expect that the palace of the chief would be different from the abodes of his subordinates. But the above description makes one to keep imagining what the condition of the people would be like. Of course, the degraded environment caused by oil

exploration and exploitation is responsible for this poor situation. Virtually every problem that confronts people since the execution of oil business in the Niger Delta has its root in environmental pollution, from joblessness to insecurity.

3.12 Boma Preserves Irikefe Island

Boma joins a religious community to preserve Irikefe Island. There are other women in the community but the peculiar experiences and reactions of Boma on and off the Island draw the attention of the reader to her. Having grown up in the village known as Junction, Boma has an ambition of becoming a medical doctor. But this dream is cut short when the peaceful environment is polluted. Farmlands and rivers are degraded, leaving the people who are farmers and fishermen by occupation jobless. Poverty and unbearable hardship set in, compelling the people to embark on oil pilfering in order to make a living. Fire outbreak occurs from the oil theft activities and Boma becomes a victim. Though she recovers after spending a long period of time in a hospital, her face is seriously disfigured by the accident. This affects her physically and psychologically. Her brother, Rufus, confirms that “her scarred face and even more scarred psyche” (127) make it difficult for her to be consoled. She becomes deeply depressed. Rufus’ effort to console and make her regain her emotional stability proves abortive.

Despite being in Port Harcourt where things are presumed to be lively, she could not get that type of peace that heals wholly due to the chaotic nature of activities in the city.

But things change when Boma in search of Rufus on Irikefe Island starts experiencing some sort of healing on the serene Island against the chaotic nature of life in Port Harcourt city where she could not find peace. As a result of this peculiar experience, she decides to stay there and join the people to preserve the island. She tells Rufus: “I have made up my mind to stay ... I can feel myself relaxing in a way I haven’t in a long time.” (226-227) She permanently joins the religious group, whose sole aim is to “bring a healing, to restore and conserve” (130) Irikefe Island.

From the brief history of the shrine on Irikefe Island, *Oil on Water* objectively shows that though the people of Niger Delta enjoyed many benefits in the period before crude oil was discovered, it was not without its negative experiences. History is told

through the voice of Naman, the chief priest of the shrine on Irikefe Island. The history has it that a terrible war once ensued among Irikefe communities. Many lives of human beings and animals were lost in that war. This wastage of lives desecrates the land as:

. . . the blood of the dead ran in the rivers and the water was so saturated with blood that the fishes died and the dead bodies of warriors floated for miles on the rivers until they were snagged on mangrove roots on the banks, or got stuck in the muddy swamps, half in and half out of the water. It was a terrible time. The land was so polluted that even the water in the wells turned red. (Habila, 128)

It was as a result of this desecration that priests from different shrines decide to build a shrine by the river of Irikefe Island for the land to be cleansed of that pollution. The chief priest explains that ever since then the worshippers try to preserve and keep the Island free from pollution of any kind. The sole duty of the worshipers is to preserve the island. This makes the island to retain its natural form unlike other islands and villages where oil spillage and gas flaring have polluted. Having discovered and benefited from the healing nature of Irikefe Island, Boma decides to stay back to preserve it.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 REPRESENTATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION ON NIGER DELTA IN *OUTRAGE, THE ACTIVIST* AND *YELLOW-YELLOW*

Considering the quantity of one of the most lucrative mineral resources _ crude oil that was discovered and exploited in the Nigeria's Niger Delta, one would expect that the region would be a paradise of its own; that the region would be adorned with the best infrastructure and the people would have and enjoy better living conditions. But this dream became a mirage as the discovery and exploitation of oil in the region bring woes and calamities to the people. Oil exploitation in the area causes environmental degradation that has negatively affected every area of the people's live. As a result, the region has become the worst of all the areas of the world where crude oil business is carried out. Unquantifiable environmental damage, worse infrastructural negligence, alarming social breakdown, cultural destabilization, educational backwardness and political instability are some of the effects. The insensitivity on the side of the government and the oil companies towards the environmental degradation resulting from oil exploration in the Niger Delta has compelled the oppressed to indulge in militancy, kidnapping, prostitution, armed robbery, etc as defensive mechanisms. Revolution is a common phenomenon in any environment that is ridden with injustice. Hence, when all the peaceful attempts to draw the attention of the government and the oil companies to the plight of the people fail, the oppressed people of the Niger Delta take revolutionary actions in their quest for justice. They engage in protests to demand positive changes.

Ogochukwu's *Outrage*, Ojaide's *The Activist* and Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* vividly depict the plight of people in the environmentally degraded oil communities of the Niger Delta. Oil spillage pollutes the land and the rivers of the region resulting in the despoilation of farmland and rivers that are the people's source of livelihood. Consequent

upon this destruction, the people are confronted by lack of jobs, poverty, hunger, diseases and insecurity. The people make effort to get the government and the oil companies to clean up the land and develop the region to improve their standard of living; but their efforts prove abortive. The youth resort to resistance in their quest for justice. They abduct the oil workers or their relatives and kill the community leaders who sabotage their people's effort to enrich their private pockets. All these do not yield desired results until the women embark on a peaceful protest that leads to the enthronement of justice in the region.

4.1 Consequences of Despoliation of Nature in *Outrage*

In *Outrage*, the people who depend on nature's provision for a meaningful existence are left to suffer when the environment is degraded. Ebiye, a spinster who draws inspiration from river and forest nostalgically laments the loss of nature in the following words. "We have discovered oil around us and now nothing else really exists here except oil. I do not know why I should live to see this beautiful place destroyed." (46) Ebiye dies after the rivers are polluted and the herbs are forced into extinction. She knows all kinds of herbs that can cure any kind of disease. The effects of environmental despoliation are noticed by Arogo when he returns from studying overseas and discovers that the environment has become a shadow of itself. He is surprised to notice that his people who live healthy lives as a result of dependence on nature have to battle with a lot of problems when nature is no more. He ruminates thus: "their protruding stomachs and yellowish eyes do not indicate sound health; even one has a gaping wound on his left leg which might have haboured tetanus." (48) He meets poverty-induced sickness on his return and the problem is made worse by unavailability of herbal plants that were used to cure diseases in the pre-oil era. It is obvious that oil exploration and exploitation bring a curse to the people instead of a blessing. It represents everything that is hardship, agony and tragedy. It spells doom for the people.

Ogochukwu seems to suggest that the disadvantages of oil business to the people of Niger Delta outweighs its benefits because "oil companies take and take" and leaves the region with acidic water, polluted environment, sickness and death. (Ogochukwu, 80) Donkuno, one of the activists confirms that the pollution "kill the sea creatures, kill the

earth, kill the people! ... the people are hungry and dying ...” (Ogochukwu, 81) but what matters to the oil companies is maximization of profit. It is noticed that the activities of Kazel Petroleum Company wreck havoc on the environment of the Kurazo community. Egun underscores the effects thus:

Fish has become a difficult thing to come by in Dukana which used to be the place of fish. The pollution of our waters had made it inhabitable for fish. A lot of our fishermen had packed up their fishing nets in frustration and joined a host of militant groups fighting those who made it impossible for them to feed their family. (Ogochukwu, 207)

It is deducible from the above excerpt that the degradation of environment results in unemployment, poverty and insecurity. Some boys like Sekibo and members of his militant group are forced into militancy by hard condition of things in their region. They are forced out of school by unbearable economic situation that made it impossible for them to afford educational sponsorship. They form the group as an avenue to fight against unjust treatment meted out to them by oil companies. They kidnap five foreign oil workers and demand provision of basic amenities as the only condition for their release. Also, one of the motivating factors for Isabel Kirpatrick establishing The People’s Relief Centre, a Non-governmental Organisation is to provide the people with succour and some sort of healing from the troubles that environmental degradation has caused them, because, oil spillage and gas flaring and their attendant pollution have caused the people a lot of discomfort. The frustration that comes with such pollution is expressed by a young boy at the centre when he was asked, ‘who are you?’, he replies thus:

I go to the bush to hunt and come back empty handed. I been dey think of joining one of these guerilla fighters when I hear about this place. I come to see wetin una get for wee, wey no go school, wey no sabi book, wey dey live for jungle. Wee everybody don forget sake of say we no dey up to standard to work the kind work wey dey now, as hunting no gi anything, fishing no gi anything, even farming self no gi anything. ...that na who I be. Person wey don waka so tee e tire. I fit do anything doable... (Ogochukwu, 304)

The above expression is an indication of frustration that comes with pollution of the environment. Loss of means of livelihood that brings unbearable suffering compels some persons to go into unwholesome activities. The eighteen-years-old man wants to join militancy even though he knows the truth that it is not a better option, because a militant may lose his life in the process but that seems to be the only available option for the youth in the polluted region of Niger Delta, because every other means through which the people can eke out a living has been degraded by oil and gas pollution. Another member of the centre narrates his plight thus:

I no dey live inside house. I just don knock together one small batcher inside bush. Where I wash the other day, rashes full my body. Wetin I wan do? My mama tell me say I dey suffer from craw craw. ... I scrub my body well well inside that yellow water. I get sponge from inside the bush, beat am well well with stone until e become proper sponge. I use the dark native soap wey my mama make and sponge myself well well. I see say rashes full my body. ... na only poor I poor. (Ogochukwu, 305)

The condition of the man described in the above excerpt is poverty-induced and the health challenge resulted from polluted water. In a visit to a sick member of the centre, Isabel and Boma see an outrageous situation. They:

... walked through foot-paths, farmlands, laterite roads destroyed obviously by the recent blow-outs in the place. ... She struggled with the gnawing pang as they boarded a boat which ferried them across a large expanse of the creeks. She marvelled at a myriad of floating thatched shacks on rafts with heavy planks tied to them to stop the shacks from being carried away to far off places. ...they walked through a stream where children were fetching water. At the end of the stream, some children were squatting, defecating. The water was yellowish and was full of spirogyra. There were reddish spots in the water, with metallic sparkles in them. (Ogochukwu, 315)

The above is the situation of the people of the Niger Delta. The people live in shacks with their life twisted by poverty. They are so poor that they could not afford solid houses and better toilets as well as health facilities.

4.2 Joblessness, Militancy and Insecurity in *Outrage*

Joblessness, militancy and insecurity are unavoidable phenomena in any area that is under environmental crisis. The youth are forced by lack of job to demand their right through militancy; and in the course of this, their activities constitute security challenges to the oil companies, the government as well as the masses. Sekibo drops out of school because the means of funding his education (farming and fishing) are destroyed by oil pollution. He forms a militant group to fight this injustice.

The group is responsible for an explosion that claims many lives and a lot of property during an anointing service in which Aunty Tabore is to be ordained a bishop. The meeting is convened by oil companies and government leaders to honour her for saving an abducted foreign oil worker from angry youth in the region. Bishop Doinme, Buruboyefe and others lost their lives in the explosion. Tabore nearly runs mad as a result of the trauma and weight of the loss. The militants also abduct five foreign workers – Mosco Ferguson, Samuel Longman Whitebred, Martin Klein, Henry Cockpit, and Franklin, and detain them in their hideout. This effort is geared towards drawing attention to the plight of their people, but it constitutes insecurity for the people.

The abandonment of the people is lamented by the leader of the Niger Delta Development Movement, Mr. Barikpega, in the meeting convened to deliberate on the situation of the people, thus:

See how we move about in the dark. Common electricity we do not have, common fuel which is taken from our backyard, we cannot get. It is so exorbitant even when we get to see it. Common transportation, we don't have. Common land reclamation money, we don't see. Common anything modern, we don't have (Ogochukwu, 336).

The representative of the council of chiefs of the oil communities, The Buluemele of Egbeje, recounts that the people of the Niger Delta are living in peace with functional governance where the community has the control over her people and her resources as well as takes responsibility for her citizens. But when they lose control of their leadership, they lose their basic means of livelihood. Even though Chief Buluemele of Egbeje is among those community leaders who take advantage of their position to enrich themselves to the detriment of the people, he still acknowledges that his people are under the grip of injustice. He goes further to stress that:

... oil exploration has despoiled our land and decimated the basis of our existence; we who never knew hunger, now are hungry. Hunger has kindled the anger of our youths as well as the anger of everybody who loves justice ... We are living like animals fighting and tearing things apart (Ogochukwu, 337).

The lives of the people are made totally miserable by the activities of oil companies in the area. The security agents employed by the government accuse and harass people indiscriminately, especially the youth indiscriminately for any damage to the oil pipeline. They always accuse the youth of the crime in order to kill them. One of the indigenous boys, Donkuno, laments thus:

They are killing us off. All they need do is accuse a man of vandalising the oil pipes, and they have enough reason to swoop on him and kill him. Nobody bothers to find out if the accused is guilty. Yet every day, they vandalise our lives, or don't they know it is our lives they are vandalising? They are here everyday discovering and taking all the oil our land produces. Acidic water, polluted environment, sickness, death! (Ogochukwu, 80)

Ogochukwu further captures how the protracted negligence on the side of the government and the oil companies arouses anger in the people who, in turn, take violent actions against them. This is exposed by the mood of Sekibo, leader of the activists group. According to him, the people's "suffering was driving crazy and at times he felt he was going to explode. It seems as if nothing could stop him but a reversal of the injustice meted out against (sic) his people." (Ogochukwu, 75) It is this quest for justice that makes the boys to organise themselves to fight against the oppressors. Sekibo is challenged not to be daunted in the pursuit for justice by his father who advises him thus, "listen carefully, my son. The struggle must go on until justice is done. Remember, your grandfather, Arogo died fighting, so am I dying fighting, and if need be, so will you." (Ogochukwu, 85) This reveals that the injustice done to the people of the Niger Delta has been a protracted one and that has spurred them into resistance.

The pieces of advice from Sekibo's father shows that they are actually fed up and must do something about it – fighting even at the point of death in as much as the enshrinement of justice is concerned. This unfolds Ogochukwu's belief that the fight for

justice is a relentless one; it is a battle that must continue until justice is enthroned. Boma describes the readiness of the men to combat injustice thus, “these were men who were ready to give their lives in for the equity and fairplay.” (Ogochukwu, 211)

For Ogochukwu, injustice is more of internal than external, therefore, the oppressed should look inward to fish out the oppressors among them. She expressed this view by the creation of characters that do not only fight against external sources of injustice, but also are determined to fish out those who perpetuate it internally. She uses this medium to call for internal examination of self instead of concentrating on others. The activists capture Baraka, a man who is indigenous to the Niger Delta but who sees the oil business in the area as an opportunity to enrich himself. He forms an opposition group sponsored by the government and oil company leaders to attack Sekibo’s group (the real activist group). He collects twenty thousand naira from his sponsors in agreement to launch an attack against the real activists without considering the plights of his people. Owupa tries to conscientise him thus:

So because they offered you some money, and have probably promised you a paradise only you will enjoy, you suddenly disregard the ecological disasters their oil exploration causes here? The fact that we can no longer drink clean water doesn’t bother you anymore, eh? You used to be concerned about the fact that we do not have basic modern amenities. It no longer bothers you, right? Nothing bothers you anymore since you have reached agreement with them to take care of your stomach! (Ogochukwu, 212)

Ogochukwu’s proposal of inward examination of self suggests that internally perpetuated injustice is as dangerous as external one.

4.3 Women’s Eco-activism in *Outrage*

With the reaction of women to environmental problems in the Niger Delta, which produces a positive result, the novel suggests that the struggle against environmental despoliation in the region would yield effective results if women get actively involved and committed. In both physical and literary worlds, women have undergone transformational immersion that gives them extra stamina to actively participate in the management of the

affairs of the society. Their image is no longer that of emotionally entrapped beings. Their roles are no longer restricted to petty business like trading, procreation and domestic duties; they have extended their role from serving their family to serving the society, socio-politically, economically, and even religiously. The writers of modern African literature are conscious of this fact. They do not only reflect the human predicament, but also envision the way forward.

In *Outrage*, women play remarkable roles in the struggle for preservation of the environment in the Niger Delta. For instance, Mama Nengi, Sekibo's grandmother, is a woman of valour that appeals to the reader. Though aged, she still fights the cause of her people with regard to safeguarding the environment. She refuses to run away from her home when everyone else has done so in order to avert being killed during the violent attack from the government. While telling Boma about her, Sekibo commends her as being not only beautiful but also strong. At the age of forty, she leads her people in a struggle against the oppression by oil companies. Sekibo's mother reveals the following succinct information about her:

My mother in-law, Mama-Nengi has been fighting our war since she was only a girl . . . she got even more involved the day they killed her husband, Arogo, when she was barely twenty-seven. And she is fighting still at fifty-one. That's why she has refused to leave her compound. She said that anybody who wants to kill her should come there to kill her ... This evening, I heard that she is meeting with that Mr. Kirkpatrick on our behalf. And that is a woman that has aged with all the troubles of the Niger Delta! But she is not chicken-hearted . . . Mama-Nengi . . . has gotten on in years and yet is still fighting (Ogochukwu, 191-192).

Sekibo's grandmother, Mama-Nengi, also urges him into action against injustice in his village by first showing him the dirty deep blue-black coloured water that stinks badly, polluted by oil spillage. She urges him thus:

Inside this water, were the bodies of some of your townsmen who were thrown in there because they wondered aloud like you did, why they could not go to school. I brought you here so that you will know you are not the only one thinking about it. ... He went to school, came back and told us that we deserved to live better

than we were living. He told everybody that too and we started thinking about it . . . we are doing something about it (Ogochukwu, 231).

It is obvious from the above excerpt that Mama-Nengi is a strong woman who can go to any length in fighting for enshrinement of justice. She tries all she could to bring peace between the oil company and the indigenous people. Sekibo's mother also never likes any form of injustice. She is happy that Kazel Petroleum Station is destroyed by the youth because Kurazo, the host community is rapaciously sapped of life and abandoned without such basic social amenities as good road network, electricity, well-equipped school, hospital, etc.

In *Outrage*, women engage in protest against destruction of the environment of the fictional Niger Delta. From Mama-Nengi who "has gotten on in years and yet is still fighting" (191-192) against degradation of Niger Delta environment and Boma who resolves that even if they have to die, they will die fighting. To a group of women who protests against despoliation of the Niger Delta environment by oil companies, the novel makes women's involvement in the struggle indispensable. Over two thousand women of the Niger Delta engage in a peaceful protest against KP Oil for environmental problems its activities has caused in the host communities and their efforts yielded tremendous positive results. Their massive number scares the workers, the security men as well as the gatekeeper. The women go there with a letter containing their demands and insist that a memorandum of understanding must be signed between them and the management of KP Oil. The leader of the women reads out their demands as contained in the letter thus:

Number one, we want you to do everything you can do to stop polluting our physical and natural environment. Number two, we want you to make at least one of us a member of your board, to protect our interest as you operate in our land. Number three, we want economic empowerment for our youths through job offers. Number four, we need you to provide us with basic amenities such as power supply, good road, boats for marine transport, and good water supply. (Ogochukwu, 422)

Making request for stoppage of environmental pollution the first thing in their scale of preference does not only present the women as people that love environmental purity but also as eco-activists. They prioritise environmental preservation because they know that sustainability of every member of the ecosystem is dependent on it. Most importantly, they demand for the release of Barikpega, the leader of the Niger Delta Development Movement who is arrested for protesting against injustice. The women are determined to camp in the site of the oil company for six days until they receive a convincing response to their request. On the third day, Eldren sets up a team to look into their matter. On the fourth day, when he calls Lionel (The representative of the oil company) on phone to intimate him with the action of the women, Lionel wonders thus:

I am really surprised at these women. It beats me how they are able to co-ordinate their affairs in an orderly manner. How they have attributed their needs and are even insisting that memorandum of understanding be signed and that dates of delivery must accompany set targets. (Ogochukwu, 427)

The reaction of the women to Lionel on the sixth day of the protest shows that they are not ready to take “no” for an answer in as much as enshrinement of justice is concerned. As he drinks a glass of water while addressing and assuring them that their request would be looked into, one of the women requests to know where he gets the water. He is so embarrassed by this question that he remains mute. The woman says, “you see, I am sure, that one is imported from Lagos or Port Harcourt. You won’t dare drink our water here. Or will you? If I bring the water we drink and give you, will you be able to drink it? What is that your wife’s church says?” The women chorused, “Do unto other as you would be done by.” The leader continues, “If you were to explore oil in the so-called civilised centres, will you destroy their environment as you destroy ours with impunity? No you won’t! We are human beings too like they are over there. What is good for the geese _ is also good for the gander” (Ogochukwu, 427 - 428).

This is a very big attack on any person whose conscience is alive. Their reference to the Holy Bible with the injunction of God on equity and fairness indicates that everybody on earth irrespective of gender, race, and status deserves a fair treatment, including the Niger Delta people especially with regard to their environment, the source of

their sustenance. When the news of the women's unorthodox approach to the issues gets to Sekibo, he says:

Where the youths would have come with rifles, bombs, stones, and violence, these women came with green leaves of peace and a song. Where the traditional leaders would have come with threats, arguments and perhaps a little begging bowl, these women came in humility, with their own food and with even a little kindness. It is not surprising that KP feels completely disarmed and unsure of what to do. (Ogochukwu, 418-9)

Ogochukwu envisions the women's peaceful protest as an effective alternative to the violent approach adopted by men in their demand for justice in the Niger Delta. The efforts of the women yield the desired result as revealed in the statement of Donkuno that the KP Oil commences provision of basic amenities following the women's demonstration. Pipe-borne water, good schools and other basic amenities are made available to them (Ogochukwu, 447). Sekibo, the leader of the militant group has this to say about the women's non-violent protest and its remarkable impact, "They have beaten us to it, these women! What we have spent years, killing ourselves to achieve, they have clinched in no time." (418) This is an indication that even the men acknowledge that women take active part in the transformation agenda.

4.4 Devastated Ecosystem and the People's Frustration in Ojaide's *The Activist*

Before the commencement of oil business in Niger Delta, the people live in peace owing to their affinity with nature. Food, water, fresh air which sustain the people are provided by nature. The different types of food that help to nourish the body were available. But when they are no more, the people are confronted by those problems that nature helps to solve. Ebi nostalgically recalls a list of luxuries of the past and wonders:

What happened to our oil-beans, breadfruit, mushroom, urhurhu grapes, owe apple, and otie cherry fruit? Either gone or barely available what are the water-leaf, greens, water yam, ikpaho groundnuts, lemon leaves, plantation peas, okpeyin yam, taro roots, and sweet cassava that were such a pleasure to eat? (Ojaide, 104)

The childhood experience of The Activist (the protagonist) equally confirms that things were better during the time before oil was discovered and exploited in Niger Delta. He recalls that there is no famine in the years of his childhood. At that time, “People were robust and healthy. One did not need to buy so many good things; they were either readily available from the soil and waters ...” (Ojaide, 105) These natural gift of soil, rivers and their inhabitants are forced into extinction as:

Those lakes and wetlands have been filled, first with rubber trees, trees then now road and developments that left the people hungry, diseased, malnutrition and alienated from their root. Now the oil companies are pouring poisons into them, giving these natural sustainers of the people a final deathblow.” (Ojaide, 104)

Chief Tobi Ishaka affirms that the people “even lived better in the days before this abundance of oil” (140) but when land and rivers are polluted, hunger and hardship begin to torment the people. The worst part of it is that they could no longer produce food to feed their families. But now, they travel outside their villages to buy what they used to produce like plantain, yams, beans, and cassava and other food (138). It is noticed that:

Pipes had been laid across groves, villages, and towns, intruding into the private spaces of animal, plant, and human populations. All the storks, kingfishers, weaverbirds, sunbirds, and many others had disappeared. The herbs and flowers were almost gone and only the old remembered them by their names. Simple herbs that cured many ailments had disappeared with the coming of oil. ... In addition to losing curatives for known ailments, new sicknesses had come in without known cures. (Ojaide, 242-243)

The people of the host community appeal to Bell Oil Company “to stop these blowouts that continue to destroy our villages, kill us, and destroy not only our property but our sources of livelihood.” (219)

Armed robbery and oil theft become lucrative as unemployment forces jobless youth into such unwholesome activities. Pere in a group of four or five usually engages in stealing, robbing and kidnapping especially at Enerhe Junction where they molest people and “stole money, snatched wristwatches, ladies’ handbags, and gold necklaces and

earrings.” (147) They rob helpless elderly women and he feels disturbed when he gets home (147). This indicates that he does not take pleasure in such activities but was forced into them by joblessness and its consequent untold hardship.

The youth who would have been earning their living by being gainfully engaged in farming and fishing activities are now compelled to go into robbery and oil pilfering. Haggard looking Owumi who “could barely take two meals a day some years earlier” (149) is forced into oil theft by joblessness and his life becomes financially better. He usually sends his boys to “break pipes and from the outflow filled his tanker. He sold some on his way to town and emptied the remainder into underground tanks.” (148) He confesses that “The world is not waiting for anybody and I had to join this business to make ends meet. I could not remain poor and desperate all my life when the means were there to improve my lot.” (149) The ‘means’ he refers to here is oil theft which does not only improve his life financially but his social status. Also, many rich men are involved in oil pilfering. Notable men like Chief Young Kpeke who “owned several estates in Port Harcourt and Warri and also once owned an airline” (150) and dresses in expensive chieftaincy apparel to prove his affluence, gets his wealth from oil pilfering. Pere discovers that a prominent man like

Chief Goodluck Ede whose wealth filled so many banks in recent years and was a frequent donor to philanthropic organisations was also in the bunkering business. He had a fleet of the most expensive cars that included Cadillac, Rover and Jaguar in his palatial mansion in Ometan Street. ... he gave out right and left even bigger amounts on subsequent occasions. (Ojaide, 150)

Security agents are not left out in the issue of oil theft; though they are not forced into it by hardship but by greed and an insatiable desire for wealth acquisition. They turn to steal what they are paid to secure. It is annoying that:

The head of the military junta was himself a bunkering chieftain. He had associates who did the job for him to enjoy the huge profits. Many of the generals had their own tankers taking crude oil to the spot market in Rotterdam. Others tapped the refined oil and shipped their loot to neighbouring poor countries to sell.... To be a favoured general in the Nigerian Army was to be a

bunkering chief and a multimillionaire! With the commander-in-chief and his officers involved in bunkering, it had become a semi-official lucrative business despite the many decrees. (Ojaide, 151)

Ojaide argues that corrupt acts of greedy security agents to a greater extent contribute to despoliation of the Niger Delta environment. Pere introduces The Activist (the protagonist of the novel) to oil pilfering business. While The Activist is particularly concerned about how safe the business is because of tight security personnels guiding the oil installation, Pere assures him that the business is safe because “many army officers are involved in oil theft business” because “you don see goat dey guard leaves? Or you don see pigeon dey guard corn? (149-150) and “If thief catch thief, wetin e go do? Of course he will do nothing (151). Pere considers oil theft because engaging in such activity is the same thing as reclaiming his “birthright” (152). This is because the military decree is an instrument of coercion, exploitation, and oppression that is used to forcefully take land from its owners. For him, the illegal acts of the outsiders - military personnel and the oil companies have to be resisted by the insiders _ the people of Niger Delta. The crude oil is a God-given resource in their land and if they are not allowed to have access to land, water and air, then it is injustice which the people must fight against. The people see oil pilfering as one of the ways of getting back what is rightfully theirs.

The Activist “saw bunkering as a weapon against the two principal outsiders that are robbing and destroying the people of the Niger Delta.” (155) In fact, it would be good if the oil companies whose activities degraded their environment could bleed to death so that the Federal Military Government would lose much of its oil revenue that had been sustaining the dictatorship (157); which has not only made Nigeria miserable but has confined the Niger Delta in the web of injustice. For this, engaging in oil pilfering for Pere, Owumi and The Activist means taking back what is rightfully theirs. For them, fighting against the oppressors through this way may make them to leave their land so that the people can enjoy the proceeds of nature. Pere compares the situation of things before and after establishment of oil business and he observes that:

His people needed the fish that had sustained them from the beginning of time. So also did they need the farmlands to cultivate cassava, yam, and other subsistence crops to live on! They also had to grow vegetables. And, of course, they had to live a healthy life. The air used to be slicks, blowouts, and gas flares had destroyed that life. ... Their forests used to have deep green and lush foliage, the pride of the tropics, but that had change, since fires often followed oil and gas accidents. (Ojaide, 82)

The people believe that breaking of oil pipelines would make the oppressors leave so that they can have access to the abundance of nature. This is ironic because their approach does not only lead to destruction of the environment but also makes the lives of the people of the Niger Delta more miserable. Oil spillage and gas-flaring that occur in the process of oil theft would not only degrade the environment but also degrade the lives of the people as diseases that emanate from this degradation could lead to death.

The situation of the Niger Delta is that of a people entrapped in injustice. The situation of the people can be compared to that of a proverbial man who lives at the bank of a river but washes his hand with spittle; a man living in abundance of food but is dying of hunger. People from international communities and other parts of Nigeria are gainfully employed in the oil companies but the people of the Niger Delta from where oil is exploited suffer high rates of unemployment, poverty and hardship. Even when they are employed, they are only allowed to do casual jobs while the main petroleum engineering is carried out by the white (foreigners) thereby totally denying the natives the real knowledge of oil extraction skills. This unfair treatment keeps Chief Ishaka worried. He laments that:

... all the engineers were white people. The few Nigerians at the senior staff level were administrators, including the community development officers, who knew nothing about how the oil was extracted from the soil. The foreign engineers used the middle-ranked workers trained at the Petroleum Training Institute at Effurun to do the tedious job without teaching them the full knowledge of drilling ... Who would protect the creeks, streams, and rivers more than the children of fishermen and women? (Ojaide, 178)

With this in mind, Chief Ishaka encourages his son to study petroleum engineering. This is to enable him gain adequate knowlegde of oil exploitation so that he can drill oil in their family land but this dream ended an illusion. Having graduated as a petroleum engineer, Dennis Ishaka was employed in Bell Oil Company. He was only allowed to “share in all the luxuries, privileges and benefits of the company but not in its technical expertise and experience.” and “allowing him to acquire technical drilling experience would be suicidal for the expatriate staff and business.” (299)

One of the major effects of oil exploration and exploitation is insecurity. Before the discovery of crude oil in Niger Delta, the peace-loving people of the region maintain cordial relationship with one another. But things change in the wake of oil business. Most times, it starts with conflict over ownership of land where oil is found. This time, it takes a different angle - ethnic clash breaks out in the Niger Delta after sharing of fishing nets by the Federal Military Government. Each of the major ethnic groups in Warri - the Itsekiri, Izon and Urhobo claims to have been cheated in the sharing of the nets. The ethnic groups start fighting against one another. During the peroid of the conflict, ownership of Warri becomes contentious among the ethnic groups. Mayhem breaks out in Warri as: “Houses were set ablaze. Flames ... leapt from one roof to another indiscriminately. The flames, mindless like the people, covered the whole town with clouds of smoke.” (232). None of the three ethnic groups is safe in Warri because of the chaos that erupts from the contention. During the crisis:

Heinous atrocities took place. Breast of women and genitals of rival groups were hacked off. Pregnant women were disemboweled and the premature babies torn off and thrown into street gutters to die. Izon with Itsekiri wives, Itsekiri women with Izon or Urhobo husbands, and Itsekiri husbands with Izon or Urhobo wives were asked to kill their spouses with machete or poison. (Ojaide, 232-233)

The Federal Military Government does not intervene until a lot of damage has taken place. Killings occur throughout a whole week. This indicates negligence that is tied to injustice meted out to the people on whose land the crude oil that yields the greater part of revenue; they cannot be given security by the same government.

Ironically, the soldiers and policemen who are deployed to secure lives and property in the area instead pose a security threat to the people. It is noted that “The soldiers in charge of security harassed people, extorted money, raped women, robbed, and shot dead those who resisted the extortion and robbery and described them as saboteurs of peace.” (233) They take advantage of the situation not only to enrich themselves but to send more people to early graves. It is recorded that the “town lost another hundred people or more in one week from the military intervention.” (234) When the soldiers were replaced by policemen, it appears more like replacing one wicked master with another. They sell guns to armed robbers; extort money from the people and sexually molest women. The women under this chaotic environment are lured into prostitution by the policemen. No wonder “Only young ladies and prostitutes were friends of the police who helped to spread HIV/AIDS infections to them for onward transmission to others in town.” (235) The soldiers “saw women as only sex mates” (244) and nothing more. The women who are rendered financially incapacitated due to destruction of the means of livelihood become preys in the hands of the security agents; they are lured into sexual atrocities and at times left with pathetic scars – diseases, unwanted pregnancies, children with unknown fathers and others.

4.5 Ecological Despoliation and Women’s Protest in *The Activist*

The level of insecurity increases as houses, villages and communities are burnt down during the crisis. The displaced people run to the refugee camp for safety. The camp is over-crowded by internally displaced persons who now become refugees in their native land. The women are so much touched by the situation that they gather to discuss the state of things in the region. In the meeting, they enumerate the various problems that oil business has brought upon the Niger Delta and how they have affected the people in general and the women in particular. One of the women, Umutor, clearly unveils that:

... in the Oginibo area the women are finding it difficult to conceive. This is a recent problem. You can see that I have given out my best, but I am concerned about our young ones. Are they not of the same stock as their mothers that delivered so many children? A mother does not proclaim the number of children she has but our mothers were really fertile. (Ojaide, 239)

In support of Umutor's view, Titi notes that "... there is much more happening to us women in recent years. Our pregnant women are delivering so many malformed babies." (239) This abnormal occurrence is attributed to the effects of polluted water, air and fish by oil spillage and gas flaring. Matije concurs by observing that what affects the women also affects the men because:

... many of our men are now sick. Newly married young women complain openly about the weakness of their men; we older women see for ourselves what is happening. To be blunt about it, our husbands are losing their manhood at a very early age. How can old men be stronger than younger men? (Ojaide, 240)

To Matije, in as much as a man's reproductive life is affected, it is the woman (his wife) that bears the brunt of the problem. First, conception may become difficult for her. She may not enjoy conjugal life. This may compel her to easily be seduced by other men especially the oil company workers who offer sexual pleasure with attractive material benefits. Little wonder "Young wives, especially those who are yet to have children, went even further; they eloped with their oil-company lovers." (242)

It is observed that gynaecological related challenges increased in the region in the wake of oil extraction. Early menopause that was aliens to the women of the region has now become common. Maomi observes that in Niger Delta "many women now reach their menopause before forty in the same area where women used to conceive even when over fifty." (240) Mrs Taylor recounts the health implication of the pollution for the women thus:

Our mothers did not complain of any burning inside their bodies ... It is as if a fire is blazing inside me. I have heard others complain of the same burning that our educated sisters call hot flushes. Where did those flushes hide before oil came into our lives? Imagine me roasting in the harmattan cold! The discomfort of being a woman has definitely increased with the discovery of oil in our backyard. (Ojaide, 240 - 241)

The oil company workers sexually take advantage of the women with financial and material offers. The following excerpt validates this point:

The Bell Oil field workers came from the town and seduced them with money. ... The single women became girlfriends and concubines to the workers, who brought dresses, provisions, and money to them from town. These strangers were so charming that even many married women easily fell for them. Yes married women ran after the men from the town to flirt and make love!... The sexual deals that took place were unprecedented. (Ojaide, 241-242)

As the environment which provides the basic needs of women is being polluted, the women's bodies are equally defiled. It is not out of point to say that environmental pollution is akin to pollution of women's bodies. This validates the argument of ecofeminists that domination over nature and oppression against women are connected. The impact like diseases have manifested as evidence of this pollution.

Women of the Delta Forum (WODEFOR) in their first meeting resolve to "talk to the oil companies to persuade them to arrest the deteriorating environmental situation in the Niger Delta" (244), so that the communities of the oil-producing areas can:

... breathe fresh and clean air; they wanted to drink clean water; they wanted to swim and fish in their streams and rivers. They did not want to eat fish that harboured poisons in them. They wanted to farm their own crops to be self-reliant on food. They wanted to live a healthy life and they wanted the damage already done to the environment to be treated seriously. Let the profiteers spend a fraction of their wealth to restore the environment, they demanded. (Ojaide, 243)

The last straw that broke the women's back is fire outbreak in Ekakpamre community which is caused by "an oil blowout, exacerbated by a pipe leakage and fuelled by gas flares, threw Ekakpamre and its people into an unprecedented state of anxiety." (260) The oil company demonstrates high level of negligence and abandonment by not making any effort to put out the fire. It is noticed that:

Bell Oil knew very well that there was a blowout but did not ask its fire-fighting team to put out the fire. The Uto River was literally burning. Evergreen plants, dry leaves, and shrubs that stood by the river all became combustible materials. The poisonous methane gas fumes engulfed plants, wildlife, and

humans around for days. Houses in the riverside town people stood the chance of losing many of their homes. (Ojaide, 261)

The effects of this environmental pollution are heavily felt by the women and children. The pregnant women experience abortion of the pregnancies as a result of the heat and tension that emanates from the fire accident. Though everyone feel the situation but the women experience the most pathetic part of it. It is on record that:

The residents found themselves helpless before this monstrous fire. They were all black from the soot of smoke and ashes. There were many premature births because some pregnant women went into sudden labour. Babies coughed relentlessly. The old wheezed. Eyes itched and those already with poor eyesight had their problems worsened by the fire and smoke. No one was safe from the fuming blaze (Ojaide, 261)

People come out to protest against this injustice but many of the protesters were killed by security agents. The women set out for action. They engage in a protest against Bell Oil Company and the Federal Military Government. They planned a nude protest to express their anger on injustice against the Niger Delta people. The women “agreed to use their naked strength against the tyrants. They would do this in a most dramatic way by seizing a flow station and an oil-loading facility and then stripping there in protest. This was in keeping with traditional practice of cursing the oppressor” (265) for numerous problems they have caused in the region. Though the protest was carried out half way before it was aborted, its impact on the struggle is remarkable. Less than an hour after it started, news of the protest spreads around the world and Bell Oil immediately sent firefighters to quench the fire which had burnt for twelve days. The CNN International news carries the report of how and why Niger Delta women take a protest against Bell Oil Company and the Federal Military Government. Bell Oil knows quite well that there is a blowout in Ekakpamre community but does nothing to put it out until the news of the environmental damage was reported by CNN following the women’s protest. It is decipherable from the novel that what triggered women’s protest is environmental degradation. The women engage in a demonstration to demand the restoration of their environment in order to make the Niger Delta a worthwhile place for their existence.

Though the protest was aborted, the women remain dauntless in the struggle against environmental pollution. They resolve thus: “We cannot sit and watch our land made unlivable by outsiders. We will continue to fight to hand over the land, waters, and air of our birth to our children in a livable state.” (273) The women intend to use the protest to let the world know their plight and demands. This desired impact made by the women’s demonstration does not only qualify them as eco-activists but also makes them relevant personalities who measure up to world standard in terms of contributing meaningfully to the progress of the society.

4.6 Ecological Despoliation and Women’s Predicament in *Yellow-Yellow*

Considering the role of crude oil in Nigeria’s economy, it is expected that it would also have transformational impact on the region from where such lucrative natural resources is exploited. This expectation is dashed as the discovery and extraction of crude oil in the region turns to a curse instead of a blessing to the people of the region. Instead of becoming the garden of flowers, it becomes “hot beds of perpetual conflicts, inequalities, hatred, under-development and abject poverty.” Orife (2011:170) In fact, establishment of oil business has spelt doom for the Niger Delta. Oil spillage and gas flaring cause heavy ecological damage that negatively affects every aspect of the people’s life -- socio-economic, cultural, political, religious, and psychological. As farmland and rivers that are the main sources of sustenance in the region are polluted, the people are plunged into unimaginable poverty, hardship and insecurity.

In an effort to cope with this unpalatable situation, the people indulge in militancy, oil pilfering, kidnapping, prostitution and armed robbery. These further make the problems more complex as the region gets worse in terms of insecurity for the people in general and the women in particular. The region is a victim of insensitivity of the oil companies and Nigerian government. The duo collaborate to carry out violence against the region; they are interested in economic benefits of oil without any atom of consideration for human rights. Pieces of farmland are directly or indirectly taken away from the people, thereby forcing them out of their villages to strange locations. As a result of this displacement, they keep wandering from one place to another. Some migrate to the city in search of better living conditions. In most cases, they come back disillusioned as the better

living conditions they seek in the cities elude them; they might encounter a different problem in the city that might make their situation worse. Those who stay back in the villages meet worse situations. Lack of jobs constrains them to engage in unwholesome activities while people from different parts of the world are gainfully employed in the oil companies in their communities.

In *Yellow-Yellow*, Agary employs allegory as a literary tool to convey two major messages to the readers and to the world. First, ecological despoliation and its consequent loss of means of livelihood in the Niger Delta are caused by oil exploration and exploitation. Secondly, women are sexually exploited by foreign and indigenous men, and the implication of such exploitation is detrimental to the individuals involved as well as the progress of the larger Niger Delta society. Simply put the novel centres on violation of land and exploitation of women. The opening of the novel clearly validates the stance of the ecofeminists that domination of nature and exploitation of women are closely linked. Women in the region who rely on nature for the provision of their daily needs are faced with a lot of challenges when the environment is degraded. The plight of Binaebi, the mother of the protagonist validates this point. Zilayefa narrates her mother's experience thus:

During my second to last year in secondary school, one of the crude oil pipes that run through my village broke and spilled oil over several hectares of land, my mother's farm included. I was at home that day when she returned shortly after leaving for the farm. When she got to the house, she knocked on the door and said very coolly, "Zilayefa, bring me my bathing soap and sponge." As I was wondering why she needed them, I saw that her legs were stained black. (Agary, 3)

The protagonist goes further to recount how pipeline breakage results in oil spillage that pollutes her mother's farmland. The oil spill has also gone into the rivers to pollute and kill aquatic lives. The pollution of farmland and rivers implies loss of means of livelihood for Zilayefa's mother and her fellow villagers who are farmers and fishermen by occupation. The weight of the unanticipated event makes her mother "void of words" (3). Zilayefa gives account of the woes that oil spillage brings upon the people in the following words:

I ... ran to my mother's farm. It was the first time I saw what crude oil looked like. I watched as the thick liquid spread out, covering more land and drowning small animals in its path. ... And so it was that, in a single day, my mother lost her main source of sustenance. However, I think she had lost that land a long time ago, because each season yielded less than the season before. ... the village had gradually lost, year after year, the creatures of the rivers to oil spills, acid rain, gas flares, and who knows what else ... (Agary, 4)

The destruction of non-human lives wrought woes on the humans who depends on the former for survival. The loss of land not just to Zilayefa's mother but to other people especially the women means the loss of her livelihood. The women who depend on nature's resource for actualisation of meaningful existence are now confronted with numerous challenges. This confirms why the duo share metaphoric qualities as life givers and providers (nurturers) and the abuse of the latter usually leads to the devastation of the former. As a single mother (whose role is to nurture) and provider for the family, the task becomes more difficult for Binaebi with the pollution of land and rivers.

Through flashback, the reader is brought to the world of Binaebi before oil spillage wreaks havoc on the land. The people lived meaningful lives before the establishment of oil business in the region. They meet their daily needs through farming and fishing. Though human wants are insatiable, but Binaebi meets her basic needs with the proceeds from farming and fishing. Zilayefa recalls that her mother "... farmed, and sometimes she would go fishing. With the proceeds, she was able to feed us and pay my school fees. She took care of all my needs and ... to make sure that I got an education." (8) Binaebi makes these efforts with hope that her dream for Zilayefa to get good education, become self-reliant and have a better and brighter future would be realised.

The hope is amputated and the dream turns into a mirage as the farmland and rivers are polluted, rendering farming and fishing less productive. Joblessness, poverty and nagging hardship set in. The implications of the trio make life insecure, especially for the women. A media chat with an indigene of Niger Delta reveals that "oil companies had destroyed the Niger Delta with impunity"(9), plunging the people into what that can be referred to as starving to death in the midst of plenty (abundance). Suffice it to say that

loss of land and rivers means loss of destiny for the people of Niger Delta. It means termination of hope and truncation of future for the people.

This incidence cripples the economic wing of Zilayefa's mother and makes it very difficult for her to sponsor Zilayefa's education. As a result, Zilayefa decides to leave the village for Port Harcourt in order for her to escape economic hardship and, hopefully, in anticipation of a better and brighter future in the city. This shows that the effects of environmental degradation upon the women are unbearable. Young girls are forced by economic difficulties to go to Port Harcourt in search of better living conditions. When Zilayefa gets to Port Harcourt, she notices that:

...most of the young girls who were looking to escape their poverty were looking to white men to rescue them. Every night, girls trooped into the hotel lobby, looking for a chance to snatch up a white man. Hundreds of girls left their villages to go to places like Warri or Bonny to get their chance with a whitey. (Agary, 167 – 168)

As the story unfolds, the novel reveals that the root cause of Binaebi's predicament is still the same search for economic independence, which makes her to leave her poverty-ridden village to Port Harcourt. *Yellow-Yellow* is the title of the novel and also a name given to the protagonist by the villagers because of her fair complexion. The protagonist, Yellow-Yellow is a product of an illicit sexual contact between her mother (an Ijaw girl) and a Greek sailor. After her secondary education, her mother at the age of eighteen moves to Port Harcourt in search of greener pastures. She hopes to get a secretarial job. But this hope is abruptly terminated when she is impregnated by a foreign sailor whom she has not seen again after the occurrence of the pregnancy. This situation forces her to go back to the village and face the burden of raising the child, Zilayefa, alone. Binaebi is a microcosmic representation of many girls in the Niger Delta who in a bid to escape economic austerity in their villages migrate to Port Harcourt and other urban areas in Nigeria. But the comfort they seek eludes them as they encounter more problems in the city that disrupt their destiny and compound their burden. Having been disillusioned, Binaebi's problem is compounded when economic austerity has emotional trauma added

to it as a result of the unprepared pregnancy as well as being abandoned with the responsibility of taking care of the child alone (absence of fatherhood).

The situation that surrounds the birth of ‘Yellow-Yellow’ exposes the reason for the presence of many biracial children in the Niger Delta. Their birth result from sexual relationships between the Niger Delta women and foreigners – Greece, Filipino, American, British, Portuguese, Europeans, Syrian, Chinese, Lebanese and others who come to the region for business purpose. This makes Zilayefa understand why:

... there were generations of yellows in the Niger Delta area, and each one had a different story. There were the yellows from the 1800s, the days of the Royal Niger Company, later known as the United Africa Company (UAC), which the British had set up to maximise their gains from the palm oil trade. There were also yellows from Portuguese traders ... The next generation were those from Syrian, Lebanese, and Greek businessmen and sailors, some of whom had married Nigerian women. ... Our crop of yellows was full of variety, coloured by the Filipinos, the Chinese, the British, and the Americans who worked in the oil sector. (Agary, 74)

It is clear that as far back as the time of palm oil business in the Niger Delta, women have been sexually exploited by foreigners. For instance, Emem’s mother is a product of sexual escapade of a Portuguese trader just as Sisi and her brother are products of her mother’s sexual contact with a Whiteman who neither performed traditional marriage rites nor is available for her. A child born out of this relationship usually faces racial prejudice. According to Babara Christian (1980:16) “the fruit of miscegenation is tragedy, regardless of what other positive characteristics the mulatta might possess.” Biracial persons may at times experience stigmatisation to the extent of being killed. Sisi confirms that in her place, “some oyinbo children were killed at birth because it was a shameful thing to have a half-caste in the family.” (101) Sisi is also a victim of such racial bias. At the age of nineteen, she was impregnated by a Niger Delta indigene who wanted to marry her but his father refused simply because she was a half-caste. This cost her the chance and she is still not married as at the time of this discussion with Zilayefa.

The derogatory names like “African-profits”, “born-troways”, “Ashawo-pickins”, “father-unknowns”, given to these half-castes by indigenous people attest to this

stigmatisation. The bearer has to suffer the effects of this stigmatisation coupled with the absence of a father figure and the attendant emotional trauma. Before Zilayefa leaves the village, out of the desire for filling the emotional vacuum created by absence of a father figure, she gets infatuated for Sergio, a white businessman, the relationship ends abruptly as Sergio leaves the village without informing her. But meeting Admiral later in Port Harcourt seems to be an answer to such emotional cravings. Retired Admiral Kenneth Alaoui Amalayefa is an Ijaw man. He is married to an Equatorial Guinean, Pilar who had two children for him but they are separated. Though both of them have not remarried, Admiral has been having “string of girlfriends, often young women” to satisfy his voracious sexual desire. Zilayefa becomes one of them when she moves to Port Harcourt. The longing to assuage her emotional hunger is what makes Zilayefa get into a love relationship with a sixty-year-old man, Admiral who is old enough to be her father.

At the initial stage of their relationship, Zilayefa confesses that she “felt a deep sense of longing for him, not because of the comfort ... which was money, but because I was hoping that the relationship would give me a taste of close paternal affection that I had never had.” (138) Her emotional bond with Admiral tightens as the relationship goes on. She makes it clear that, “I wanted to make him happy and hope that in return I would experience the emotional comfort, attention, and protection” that she should have got from a father (145). Though Zilayefa also enjoys financial benefits from Admiral but what is of utmost importance to her is the emotional bond which she had not experienced owing to the circumstance surrounding her birth. She “wanted Admiral for more than money; was yearning for an emotional bond with him.”(149) She gets angry with Admiral for not asking after her for about two weeks after their first sexual encounter but this anger immediately was erased by the memories of tenderness and affection she enjoys with him coupled with his promises to sponsor her university education. With this, she feels relaxed and secure. At least, the relationship can help her realise her educational dream, especially as has been initially hoped by her mother, Binaebi.

Binaebi makes efforts to ensure that her daughter does not repeat the same mistake she made with the unreliable white man, her father. After impregnating her, he left Port Harcourt without telling her. She becomes disillusioned, goes back to the village

with nothing but the dream about her unborn child. Her resolve is that she would make sure that her daughter accomplishes what she could not. This is why she makes an unrelenting effort to ensure that her daughter fares better than her. She sees education as the only means of escape for her. She always admonishes her in line with that dream, “Your books should be your best friends. Spend more time with them than any other friends.” (78) This dream is aborted when Admiral impregnated Zilayafe and thinking that he would marry her would be like building a castle in the air because he is already married with children.

Zilayefa was disappointed with the reaction of Admiral when she tells him that she is pregnant. He stops coming to look for her and shows less concern towards her. Disappointedly, all the affection, admiration and tenderness he often poured on her suddenly disappear. He gives her money and refers her to one Dr George for an abortion. She is left in the dilemma of the choice between aborting and leaving the pregnancy. Since that day, he neither comes to look for her nor does he ask after her and she, on her part, decides not to look for him. This is not surprising because Admiral is one of those “men in high society who had no problem sleeping with their lower-class mothers but remembered their social status when they got someone pregnant.” (174)

The emotion that beclouds the reality is revealed with the reaction of Admiral. It dawns on Zilayefa that all the promises he was making about helping her to be successful in life as well as the financial offers are just baits to seduce her for satisfaction of his sexual urge. No wonder his tender tone, body language and affectional disposition towards her suddenly disappear immediately he was told about the pregnancy. He does not show concern for the unborn child nor border about the implication of the abortion for Zilayefa. For this reason, hoping that he would marry her would be like chasing a shadow. It is very clear that he is only using her to keep his bed warm.

Agary uses this medium to reveal that the Niger Delta women are not only abused by foreign exploiters but also by men indigenous to the region. The financially buoyant local men also help to perpetuate women’s oppression. They discriminate against the women in the sharing of compensation from oil companies as seen in the novel under study. There is a rumour that the village head, the Amananaowei, and his elders collect the

money paid by the oil companies as compensation and share among themselves excluding the people. Women who bear the responsibility of providing for their families are mostly affected by this discrimination. Clark's *Wives Revolt* and Nwoye's *Oil Cemetery* treat this practice of women being excluded from the sharing of compensation paid by oil companies. These writers and others use their works to comment on oil (palm or crude) and the predicament of women in the Niger Delta.

Agary at this juncture joins the string of African feminists like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Tess Onwueme, Nawal El Saadawi among others, to condemn discrimination, subjugation and any form of oppression against women as well as to show the way out. Admiral represents local individuals or groups who directly or indirectly oppress women. He takes advantage of Zilayefa's situation and sexually exploits her. It is unfair and pathetic that Admiral, Zilayefa's kinsman, who is expected to protect and secure her turns out to be an agent of exploitation. Precious Ona (2009:35) summarises this point thus:

Oil wealth encourages men in the region to take advantage of their perceived economic buoyancy by engaging in sexual intercourse with many girls often without protection... The Delta's oil economy has generated several moral contradictions by creating a class of rich who flaunt their wealth and gain access to an extensive network of female sexual partners. ... Agary believes strongly that the environmental predicament contributes to social and economic deprivation, further complicating the development situation of women in the region.

Zilayefa's inability to live up to the expectations of her mother, Sisi and Lolo does not only frustrate her but also is a disappointment to these women. These women are quintessential feminist characters whose lives point an exemplary cursor to what reactions of women to situations of life should be. They lay a standard of living worthy of emulation by women.

The novel shows that experiences of women in other parts Africa are not different from what is obtainable in the Niger Delta; a society where women are not expected to have a say when important decisions are being made even in the matter that concerns them. A woman is neither expected to own property nor attain greater heights in life. Her duty is to cook and serve the man food. In fact, she is remembered when it comes to

procreation in order to ensure the continuity of the man's lineage on earth. It appears her sole duty is to make sure the man's name does not go into extinction. As for her, she neither has a name nor an image to protect because she is only an appendage to any man that marries her.

By exposing how women are being relegated to the background by the oppressive society, Agary joins other African feminists in the campaign against gender oppression. The novel show that it is still the same selfish interest of a man that makes a woman to be accused of being a witch if she has a distended belly as a result of uterine fibroid which may sometime prevents her from getting pregnant. As a result, she would be confined to her room, because not giving birth is as good as not being in existence. In the *Yellow-Yellow*, it is noticed that in recent time, the men have become more oppressive. In a family, the man rather prefers to spend his money on drinks and if the woman inquires to know about his expenses, she would receive battering from him (40). This oppression is extended to societal sphere where women are excluded from decision-making. The novel makes it known that:

The men claim that, according to tradition, it was their exclusive right to make all the decisions inside and outside the home. Most times, because they did not succeed in the home, they drew the line at women participating in communal meetings on serious town issues. "If we allowed women free access to these meetings", they reasoned, "where would it end? The next thing they would want to do is mount their men in the bedroom!" No real man could accept that. It just wasn't done! (Agary, 40)

By the creation of female characters that are resourceful and self-reliant, Agary's debut has come at the right time; a period Nwapa describes as the "age of female awakening and feminist consciousness" (2007: 529) when African female writers seek to define and project women as "they feel they should be presented" (Nwapa, 527). It becomes their duty to take up the responsibility as prescribed by Nwapa that:

The woman writer cannot fail to see the woman's power in her home and society. She sees her economic importance both as mother, farmer, and trader. *She writes stories that affirm the woman*, thus challenging the male writers and, making them aware of woman's inherent vitality, independence of views,

courage, self-confidence, and of course, her desire for gain and high social status.” (529)

With literary surveillance, Agary makes a point that women have transcended from the background of societal map that demeans them to the forefront where relevance is determined by self-definition and significance. For instance, Sisi and Lolo are successful business women who through diligence become significant and reputable personalities in the society. By creation of women who measure up to world class standard by their business acumen, she sternly opines that relevance or irrelevance should not be defined by sex but by significance of an individual to his/her society.

4.7 Depiction of Eco-resistance in *Yellow-Yellow*

Agary, through *Yellow-Yellow* proposes an environmentally friendly society as the solution to the numerous problems of not just women but all mankind. Having been sexually exploited and battered by the trauma of the chattered dream, Binaebi has the option of staying back in Port Harcourt and live on prostitution like some other girls do but she courageously moves out of the exploitative environment to a more peaceful village where her needs are met by nature. The land and the river provide her with what she needs to take care of her daughter and herself. She deliberately goes back to the village where the pristine environment assures the “sustenance” of man (4). Following the establishment of oil industries, Zilayefa’s village loses its serene qualities. This is the reason why she and Sergio move to Wokiri Island where they escape from “the conflicts, the violence, and the depression that characterised our village more and more” (24) since the discovery and exploitation of oil. Their movement to the island in search of serenity and peace suggests that for man to make meaningful existence, he needs to go back to nature.

Zilayefa is left in dilemma as to whether to carry the pregnancy through or terminate it as was suggested to her by Admiral who gives her money and refers her to Dr. George for that purpose. Instead, she relies on nature for her freedom. She plucks a handful of leaves and barks of a plant and chews them together and that resulted in termination of the pregnancy (177). She goes back to nature to achieve what this study refers to as *termination of the seed of the exploiter*. This study strongly argues that for the Niger Delta to move forward, the seeds which the exploiters have sown among the people

must be uprooted. The seed of discord, greed, rivalry, restiveness, inter-ethnic enmity, loss of value for human life, cultural mutation, betrayal and their likes are negative seeds sown in the lives of the people by exploiters and must be eliminated for the region to move forward. The oil companies have corrupted the local leaders with oil money. They take advantage of their positions and the situation in the region to amass wealth to the detriment of their people. They can sell their people to gain more money from the oil companies. Pipeline and Ethiope in *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said It* are perfect examples of this act. The Men of the Alphabet in *Oil Cemetery* are also examples of the Niger Delta representatives who sabotage the people's struggle against environmental injustice. This is evidence of seed of greed sown in their lives by oil money.

The culture of the people is drastically getting eroded by the seeds of the exploiters. In the pre-oil era for instance, it is not a part of the people's culture for a woman (married and unmarried) to engage in illicit sexual relationship for whatsoever reason. But in the oil era, this cultural value is marred as some of their women see prostitution as a means of escape out of economic adversity. The seed of discord is equally sown among people of the Niger Delta. The exploiters know that with collective effort and unity of purpose, the people would win the war against exploitation. In order not to achieve this, the exploiters instigate division among the people and make them to fight against one another. In the payment of compensation, the people engage in land disputes especially over ownership of land where oil wells are sited. The seed of the exploiters is also noticed in *The Activist*. Chaos erupts among the major ethnic groups in Warri - the Itsekiri, the Izon, and the Urhobo, during the distribution of fishing nets sent by the federal government. Each of the group claims that they are cheated in the distribution. The distribution of nets is strategically used by the oppressor to put confusion and enmity among the people so as to distract them from the struggle; instead of fighting against the agents of exploitation (oil companies and the federal government), they rather turn against one another.

It is also glaring in the novel that other chiefs turn against Chief Ishaka because he refuses to dance to the dictates of the oppressor who buy the chiefs over to their side with huge financial offers. The exploiters capitalise on the greedy and materialistic disposition

of the local leadership to weaken their collective struggle. In *Outrage*, the exploiters want to distract the real freedom fighters by paying a splinter group who now becomes a government stooge that counteracts the efforts of the real activist group sincerely committed to the cause of justice. In fact, the exploiter can devise any strategy to sow seeds of division among the people to ensure the continuity of their exploitative mission. In this context, the woman is metaphorically viewed as the land. The oil explorers with their activities have invaded the land just as it has led to exploitation of women. The novel, therefore, suggests that progress would not be made in that region unless the seeds of the exploiters like discord, rivalry, greed, selfishness and hatred are eliminated just as Zilayefa in the *Yellow-Yellow* does to the seed of the exploiter and becomes free to fulfil her destiny.

Binaebi being able to put herself together and forge ahead after being impregnated and abandoned by the father of her unborn child is quite instructive. Women do not allow themselves to be weighed down by the gravity of failure; they learn to turn their failure to a motivating factor in order to move forward, as Binaebi has done. They do not allow themselves to be limited by circumstances of life but rather make use of varieties of available choice to create a brighter future not only for themselves but also for their dependants. Having gone through a lot of suffering in the hands of the exploiters, she learns her lesson though in a hard way. She decides that the mistake would not repeat itself in the life of her daughter. She seriously resolves to do her best to usher her daughter into that future she envisioned for her. This explains why she denies herself certain comfort to give Zilayefa quality education that would make her self-reliant. Her desire for Zilayefa is inscribed in the following words:

My mother used to tell me that I would be better than her, that, as long as I was educated, I would be able to take care of myself. I did not question her. She said it with such conviction and made so many sacrifices to make sure that I went to school that I believed it to be true. (Agary, 8-9)

Zilayefa being courageous enough to disentangle herself from the trap of financial and emotional dependence on the exploiters suggests that the Niger Delta people should disengage the region from any form of relationship (internal and external/ local and

international) that gives room for exploitation in the region, if the environmental conflict must be resolved. She resolves not to go back to the external and internal exploiters, Sergio and Admiral respectively; instead, she makes a resolution to reinforce herself with education for actualisation of selfhood. Here, education becomes a veritable tool for self-definition, self-reliance, self-actualisation and self-emancipation for women in general and African women in particular. She told herself that “I needed to refocus, and this time I would have to do it myself.” (177)

Agary uses this medium to convey an important message to women in particular and to humanity in general. She demystifies the mystery of heartbreak. Her message is simple, ‘refocus’ is an antidote for heartbreak or failure. On realising that she has been sexually exploited and if care is not taken the mistake would rob her of her future, Zilayefa refuses to remain on the ground where she fell down. She gets up, picks up the pieces of her broken heart, fixes it and strategises towards self-actualisation. She takes a gallant step out of the entanglement that necessitated the failure and refocuses on what she initially wants -- education. She resolves that the realisation of her mistake:

... was an opportunity for a personal rebirth ... I promised God and myself that I would focus only on completing my education and making my mother, Sisi and Lolo proud of me. As much as I enjoyed the drama of working at the hotel, I knew in my heart that it was not what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I wanted the confidence that Lolo had, and if Sisi was right, the choices also that came with an education. (Agary, 177)

She decides to forget the past and forge ahead in order to become whom she had wanted to be – a person of confidence who can stand out and make significant contribution to her society. She wants to be educated and set a standard for young women, just like Sisi and Lolo who not only promise to support her to get her dream of education realised but also serve as mentors who are ready to usher her into that future she desires. Sisi gives her moral support thus, “study, pass your exams, and get your education. If you do that no one can take your future away from you...” (101) This suggests that women should lend a helping hand to one another in order to surmount any obstacle to fulfilling their destiny especially in a patriarchal society like Africa. Although Zilayefa does not have an opportunity to be in the placard-carrying type of demonstration or join a group of women

to gather at the sites of the oil company in protest against environmental pollution as witnessed in 2002 when over two thousand Niger Delta women converged at Escravos Tank Farm, the largest Chevron oil terminal in Nigeria, her mode of resistance plays “an important role in shaping the on-going crisis” in the Niger Delta (Meredith Coffey, 2016:50). This suggests that the Niger Delta women should not wait for the time when many people would gather to protest; they should rather make use of what James Scott (1985) refers to as “every day forms of resistance” that are available to them on “a day-to-day basis” (Coffey, 51) to resist exploitation of the environment of the region.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE BETWEEN WOMEN'S APPROACHES TO ECO-ACTIVISM IN *WHAT MAMA SAID* AND *THEN SHE SAID IT*

Tess Onwueme is one of the Nigerian female playwrights of Niger Delta origin. In the literary field, she has stirred up themes like women emancipation, abject poverty, oppression, leadership insensitivity and others. Of all the subjects matter conveyed by her literary works, women's emancipation and environmental sensitivity appeared to be the most pronounced. The consciousness which her works evoke about women liberation from oppression of all kinds and radical women's protest against despoliation of the environment of the Niger Delta, does not only make her a feminist but also an eco-activist. Some of her literary outputs are responses or reactions to colossal environmental damage in the Niger Delta. She focuses most on how it affects the people in general and the women in particular. She has won many literary awards. Some of them include the Fonlon-Nichols Award (2009), the Phyllis Wheatley/Nwapa award for outstanding black writers (2008), Ford Foundation award (2000/2001) and Association of Nigerian Authors drama prize which she has won many times. Some of her literary works are *Riot in Heaven* (1996), *Go Tell It to Women* (1997), *Then She Said It* (2002), *What Mama Said* (2003), *No Vacancy* (2005), *The Missing Face* (2006), *Shakara: Dance-Hall Queen* (2006) and others. Most of these works, especially *Then She Said It* and *What Mama Said* are protest writings against degradation of Niger Delta environment. They are used to condemn injustice perpetuated by Nigerian government and Multinational oil companies against the region. Through imageries and metaphor, she satirises the selfish oil company directors, corrupt government officials, greedy and unpatriotic traditional leaders to expose such societal ills with the aim to reconstruct the society.

In Hungeria and Sufferland, the settings of *Then She Said It* (TSSI) and *What Mama Said* (WMS) respectively, the major factor that leads to women's protest is degradation of the environment caused by oil exploration and exploitation. The people who are farmers and fishermen by occupation are rendered jobless as land and rivers are despoiled. As a result, poverty, hardship, sexual exploitation, restiveness, insecurity and killings become daily experiences of the people of the region. The women through their collective effort revolt against the perpetrators of injustice. They kidnap the deputy oil directors, arrest the government officials and the traditional rulers and bind the oil directors. They damage oil installations. This drastically reduces the profit of the oil companies. The government represented by the general arrests the women activists and charges them to court. The women win the case.

5.1 Oil Exploitation, Pollution and People's Predicament in the Plays

Before crude oil was discovered in the Niger Delta, the people of the region lived peacefully owing to their being in tune with nature. As farmers and fishermen, their life was made interesting by the nature's provision. But exploration and exploitation of crude oil erode this serene environment and disorganise the peaceful life of the people. This is the situation of the people of Hungeria and Sufferland in *Then She Said It* and *What Mama Said* respectively. The problem starts when crude oil is discovered and exploited in the region. The oil companies continue to acquire more pieces of land for their business. As a result, the indigenous people are displaced from their villages and relocated to a camp because the oil companies need more pieces of land for more oil wells. They are relocated to an over-crowded camp without any plan for provision of basic social amenities; suffering and disease outbreak become high. Also, in the process of oil exploitation, the land and the rivers, which are the sources of livelihood of the people, are polluted. The implications of the degradation are heavily felt by the people. The women in *Then She Said It* lament the ecological degradation thus:

Obida: And look around you. See? They're not even killing us
alone. The trees too!

Niger: Our farmlands!

Benue: And rivers!

Niger: The environment.

Benue: Polluting.
Niger: Polluting the land, the rivers, our entire environment ...
Women: All polluted.
Obida: They've killed everything with their oil pollution and spillage. We cannot breathe clean air. Fishes die or get fried in the polluted simmering rivers. Water-water everywhere. But we have no clean water to drink! And now we lose the land too? (TSSI, 15)

Also, in *What Mama Said*, an applicant who is among the thousands of people seeking employment as a guard in Oil Club explains that he has nowhere to farm because his farmland has been taken for oil exploitation (123). If not, he would not have any business struggling for the post of a guard after getting a degree. This implies that the high rate of unemployment in the region is obviously caused by environmental pollution.

In a similar ordeal, the women in *What Mama Said* recount how the people lost everything to oil exploration and exploitation. Cross River asks "People of Sufferland! Our land bleeds! The land weeps! Tell me, who among you here, no matter how young, no matter how old, has not lost our blood?"(138) In response, the women affirm that their fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters are murdered or defiled. They further stress this predicament in the following excerpt:

Cross River: Ever since they discovered oil in our land, they drill, dry, and fry us alive with the fishes and farmlands all cooking in the oil.
Chorus of Women: The oil. Our oil!
Cross River: So what will become of us ... our children? Do you smell the decaying bodies of husbands, sons, and daughters?
Chorus of Women: Yes!
Cross River: Do you smell the fishes roasting in their hot oil poured over the rivers?
Chorus of Women: Yes! They've refined our oil into a curse!
Cross River: Plants, animals, children, men, women cooking in their oil. Oil sapped from the very soul of our sagging land. Ah! People of Sufferland! Do you see yourself drowning?
Chorus of Women: Yes! (WMS, 139)

The above testimony of the women confirms that oil exploitation has turned into a curse for the people. It has led to despoliation of environment and wastage of human lives.

Women feel the impact most; the task of providing for their families is made more difficult.

Unemployment which occurs as a result of destruction of the people's means of livelihood further breeds poverty and unbearable hardship. No wonder one hundred and twenty million people go for just a vacant at Oil Club (TSI, 58). It is so bad that people go for the post of a guard even after acquiring university degrees (TSSI, 61). This shows how frustrated and desperate they are to get a job in order to keep body and soul together. At the end, a non-indigenous person is employed while there are many qualified indigenous persons who can do the job. This injustice infuriates the applicants the more. People from different parts of the world are gainfully employed in the oil companies but indigenous of the host communities are without jobs. One of the applicants protests thus, "You see? They've hired again from another tribe. But we're here. They won't employ us." (TSSI, 66) In response, Atlantic, the oil director explains that it is his bargain with government of Hungeria.

The plays condemn unjust treatment that is given to the people of Niger Delta by the oil companies and the government. The oil company representatives do whatever they want with impunity because they have the support of the federal government who give them licence and provide them with adequate security. Hungeria and Sufferland are allegorically refer to the Niger Delta in Nigeria where environmental degradation and its attendant effects are ravaging the region and the oil companies whose activities cause the problems seem less concerned because they have the government's support. The people suffer abject poverty while the government officials wallow in affluence from oil dividend.

Hardship induced prostitution is also depicted in the plays. The girls engage in prostitution as a means of surviving the unbearable economic austerity brought about by lack of job. In *What Mama Said*, Omi is forced into prostitution by joblessness even after earning two degrees. She becomes the mistress of an oil director, Oceana, who refuses to pay her for service rendered. A quarrel ensues between them and the oil director is shocked to hear that Omi has two degrees but does not have a job. Omi : "...Yes, degrees. Not one, but two... worked my butt off to earn them both. And many others like me in this

land ... with a load of degrees! But see? Where are we now? Where? (WMS, 104) She insists that Oceana must pay her because she engages in prostitution to get money. She elucidates that she is forced into prostitution by lack of a job. She addresses him thus:

God decrees fairness! Look, White man. If not for this condition we're in? No jobs ... no amenities ... no rights Just this permanent condition of joblessness. Ah! You think I'll be here hawking my precious body to earn a living? And you, squeezing and taking undue advantage of me ... of us ... and everything? (WMS, 104)

In a similar scenario in *Then She Said It*, Atlantic has a problem with his mistress, Oshun, when he refuses to pay her after rendering services to him. She reveals that she is forced into prostitution by lack of a job and its attendant hardship. Even after earning two academic qualifications, she is one out of many educated persons without jobs in Hungaria. She explains that there are "... many others like me in this land ... with a load of degrees! But see? Where are we?" (53) Hadeja in *What Mama Said* opts for prostitution just like Koko in *Then She Said It* who ends up in petty trading and prostitution even after acquiring education but could not get a job. She resolves to join other girls in prostitution. Hadeja makes her resolve thus: "...Five years out of school. Robbed of life. Robbed of dignity. And what have I become? A petty trader. ...No. ... I am going to Europe ... to Italy where the business is hot... and I too will sell like hot cakes." (WMS, 70) she reveals the pitiable condition of unemployed youth thus:

Five good years of my youth, I struggled, studied, and suffered to get admitted into the university. What use is it now? What use? All those thousands and millions of educated youth who struggled to gain the education and find jobs? Where are they now? Where are the jobs? Where are the youths? On the streets! In graves or jails!..., I too am tired. I'm taking the easy way out. I'm joining my sister. Yes, Omi! She tells me the foreigner is taking her to Italy, America, or some other European city. I too am going! (WMS, 71)

It is deducible from the above excerpt that women of Sufferland are driven into prostitution by lack of jobs. Allegorically, in the Niger Delta, many able-bodied youth are easily forced into armed robbery, kidnapping and oil pilfering by joblessness. Women especially go into prostitution thinking that it is an easier way of escaping the hardship

situation in the region; they run to foreign countries but this easy life eludes them as the situation there is not better than the one they are running from in their country. They rather encounter more problems that worsen the complexity of their situation. Obida is a good example of a girl who follows a foreigner to his country hopefully for better living conditions. Her hope is dashed as she returns home more devastated than she was before she left. Out of her experience, she advises her friend, Koko, against going to other countries for prostitution. She tells her that, “The West. Weired place! Don’t go. No! Oh no please! Don’t! ... They’ll ruin you there. They’ll wreck you, turn you to prost ...” (32) Irrespective of this warning, Koko keeps insisting that she must go there to make money. Obida narrates her own experience to buttress her warning, “Bloody. They’ll get a dog to...to...Oh no, Don’t you see? Look at me. My own uncle gave me to the foreigners who gave me to...to...His dog?” (TSSI, 32).

A similar incidence is noticed in *What Mama Said*, Imo warns her friend, Hadeja against going to a foreign country for prostitution because of demeaning experience she had in the hands of the foreigners. Hadeja refuses to heed her friend’s warning because poverty and suffering are more than what she could bear in her country. This is evidence that some girls from the oil region are forced into immoral living by poverty and hardship occasioned by unemployment.

5.2 Insecurity and Leadership Insensitivity in the plays

The plays expose insecurity and leadership insensitivity in Hungeria and Sufferland, The oil directors, government officials and the traditional rulers connive to amass wealth through oil business to the detriment of the people. In *Then She Said It*, the corrupt government official, Kainji makes a deal with the crooked oil director thus:

Kainji: ...But trust me, I have a special offer. Let’s make a deal. You know the new offshore line?

Atlantic: Hmn ... Yes.

Kainji: We can make a fortune ... you and me ...

Atlantic: What?

Kainji: Pump a million barrels or more a day. No records. Ships waiting at sea. Sale sealed. Paid in dollars or pound sterling overseas into your account and mine. No hassles. Just that we’ll have to displace more villagers.

Atlantic: Order them to move out ... to...to...But where to?

Kainji: I know. The camp is bursting full. And there's been no running water for one year. No light and other amenities either.

Atlantic: Diseased. A cesspool of epidemics.

Kainji: Cholera gains ... (TSSI, 38-39)

Also, in *What Mama Said*, Yobe, the government official makes a deal with Oceana, the oil director for them to make money by secretly exporting a million barrel of oil or more overseas without any record of the sales (83-84). It is disappointing that the oil directors and government officials who are supposed to protect the interest of whom they represent turn out to pursue their selfish interest, not minding the negative implication of such act to the oil companies and the government.

Despite the pitiable situation of his people who are suffering from hunger and disease outbreak as a result of being relocated to an over-crowded camp without adequate provision of basic facilities, the chiefs in the both plays are busy allotting more pieces of land and negotiating for compensation from the oil companies. The main reason for asking for compensation is for the selfish interest of enriching themselves. In *Then She Said It*, Ethiope tells the oil director, "Ok. Pay a million then. Half for the community. The other half to me personally." (TSSI, 42) He requests that the payment should be made in his name after all, he is the traditional ruler of the host community and no one goes to the community land except through him (TSSI, 41).

The plays satirise high level of corruption in any area where crude oil is exploited. Atlantic, Kainji and Ethiope in *Then She Said It* as well as Oceana, Yobe and Pipeline in *What Mama Said* are typical examples of corrupt leaders who take advantage of their positions to siphon oil wealth. In *What Mama Said*, the traditional leader, Pipeline, for instance is busy negotiating for more compensation from the oil company so that he can get more money without considering what his people are going through as a result of the displacement. Besides, without making any effort to know how his niece, Imo, whom he offers to a foreigner in exchange for a car is faring, he is busy making another offer of his niece for another car (91). This shows how insensitive the leaders are, from the foreign to local leaders. They do not show concern for the plight of the people; they are rather

interested in what would favour them financially and materially. Greed and selfishness are lampooned in the character of the trio.

The playwright through this medium uses Sufferland and Hungeria as allegories for the Niger Delta where Nigerian government and some leaders who are indigenous to the region connive with oil business tycoons to achieve selfish goals leaving the region and its people marginalised, exploited and devastated. Onwueme, through the plays, opines that the problem of the Niger Delta is not only external but also internal. The external force represented by the oil directors who take no blame for whatever the people are going through because the oil activities are governed by their contract with the government. Oceana tells Omi "... Don't you ever blame me. I take what I can get. After all your so called leaders gave me the power." (WMS, 104) This means that the oil companies pollute the environment of the host communities the way they like because the government gives them license and provides them with adequate security to carry out their oil businesses. The internal force is represented by local leaders, Ethiope and Pipeline in *Then She Said It* and *What Mama Said* respectively, who take the advantage of their position to enrich themselves. They sabotage the people by allotting more pieces of land and offering the girls to the foreigners (oil company workers) without the consent of the people. They offer their nieces (Obida and Koko) in exchange for different types of cars. Ethiope makes a deal with the oil director thus:

Chief: And one more deal to keep you smiling all the way

Atlantic: Yes. Be quick.

Chief: In addition to my brother's daughter, OBIDA ...

Atlantic: Who?

Chief: A sweet daughter of the land. Take. Take her to Europe
... I mean to America for your next recess.

Atlantic: But chief. You can see my hands are full. My wife's out
there you know. And now...

Chief: KOKO?

Atlantic: OSHUN.

Chief: No. KOKO. Her sister.

Atlantic: Hnm...Let me think.

Chief: Feel free to pass her on to any of your friends over there.

All I ask in return is that you pass on your Landcruiser to
me.

Atlantic: What? My Landcruiser?

Chief: Yes. A very modest price for such a delicious offering...I mean gift...Most fertile land, my friend. Count your blessings.

Atlantic: As you like it. But what do you need this one for? You still have the other Range Rover you took for the other one...that OBIDA girl.

Chief: That was one deal. This is another. ... (TSSI , 42-43)

Onwueme uses Chief Ethiope in *Then She Said It* and chief Pipeline in *What Mama Said* to condemn greedy and selfish attitude of leaders of the oil-producing communities, who through their insensitivity contribute to the plights of their people. Chief Ethiope and chief Pipeline are practical examples to illustrate this point. They engage in human-trafficking; give their nieces to the expatriates in exchange for expensive cars. The chiefs do not consider what the girls have to go through in the hands of the foreigners as prostitutes; but the ostentatious wealth got from this deal is their major interest. No wonder the women reject them as their leaders. The women resolve that they are tired of being misled by the hypocritical indigenous leaders. In unity they exclaim “Enough! We reject all leaders of falsehood. We reject leaders that take and take and never give anything good in return. Away! Away with their lies! (TSSI,81/ WMS, 146) They offer the oil directors more pieces of land for money not minding the predicament this would cause the people who are displaced from their villages.

Insensitivity is also exposed through the character of the oil director in *Then She Said It*. Atlantic’s reaction to an explosion that occurs in Jesse-Delta in which two hundred and fifty people, mostly women and children die, shows how insensitive he is. All he could say is that “Life is cheap in Africa.” (WMS, 26) He does not show concern for the wasted human lives; he is rather worried about the security of his oil business. When he hears the sound of the protesters, he complains to Kainji and Ethiope “You hear that? Everyday, war. Agitation. The pipelines are no longer safe. We’re losing money...Losing staff... Drilling oil here is fast becoming a dangerous business.”(TSSI, 5) This preference for material things to human live is also displayed by Atlantic when he rejects chief Ethiope’s suggestion of provision of basic needs like job, food, electricity, water and hospital for the people of the host communities. The oil director rather prefers to build “a

clinic” (TSSI, 72) and hire “a good Vet-Doctor” (TSSI, 73) from Texas to take good care of his pets (dogs), while the people do not have a clinic let alone a hospital.

Instead of creating good job opportunities for the people, the oil director prefers to build a “nursery” where the indigenous women would be employed to take good care of his pets. According to Atlantic, “Our pets are suffering. Cabin fever. ... And these pets are really the only true friends... companions that we have in the field. We need to protect our own. Build a nursery for them.” (TSSI, 73) When the chief suggests that a general hospital should be provided for the people, he rejects the idea giving a reason that they cannot afford it. But they can afford to hire a qualified veterinary doctor just for the pets. He also rejects the suggestion of the chief on creation of reasonable jobs for the people but rather proposes that “all future employment that we offer be part-time. Temporary. Gives us the flexibility and controlling edge.” (TSSI, 73-74) This implies that offering the people temporary jobs gives the employer audacity to dismiss the employees at will. The only full-time job available is in the nursery for pets where “some will walk the dogs in the morning and others will have to walk them in the evening.” (TSSI, 74)

Atlantic attracts the rebuke of the reader with his acts of insensitivity. It does not bother him that the people are dying in hardship as a result of joblessness. This lends credence to Obida’s statement that he hates the people and loves the animals. The oil director’s love for the animals is illustrated in his emotional expression over the killing of his dogs by the protesters, “My Chariot. Baby Hero. Gone !” The chief tries to console him since it is not a human being that was killed. The response of the oil director would shock any person of conscience, he laments“.... Can’t you see the dog is my wife... I mean life.” (TSSI, 87)

A similar experience is noticed in *What Mama Said* when Oceana orders the newly employed guard to shoot at sight crowd who come for a job vacancy. He kills one of the applicants (a young man). The killing of the innocent youth does not bother Oceana but reduction in the profit of his oil business does. He complains, “You see? Much below expectation at least compared to the double-digit profit for last year and also projected for this year.” He goes further to complain to Chief Pipeline that “.... Just in the last month alone, with their riots, we’ve lost three million.” (126) This shows that he values his

money more than human life. This is insensitivity at its peak. While recounting the impact of oil business on the people of the host communities, Hadeja states that “since the Sweet Crude was discovered in their land, each of them has had their own personal tragic experiences. They’ve been without jobs, farming and fishing resources... painful, hard experiences that progressively changed their lives for the worse ...” (*WMS*, 193) This bothers neither the foreign oil director nor the traditional leader; they are rather much more concerned about their personal gains.

Degradation of environment is akin to degradation of human life in Hungeria and Sufferland in *Then She Said It* and *What Mama Said* respectively. Killing becomes more like a normal thing. Obida tells how the oil crisis renders her an orphan. While her father dies in an oil crisis, her mother is killed by oil pipeline blast. Oshun laments that “... all our people slaughtered and butchered for asking to get a bite, just a slice of what belongs to them. ... Resource control. That’s all we ask and yet they won’t let us. They shoot and kill us.” (TSSI, 10) Oil crisis causes loss of many lives in Hungeria.

5.3 Sexual Abuse of Women in the Plays

Women bear the brunt of oil exploitation. Women who would have been engaged in farming and fishing are now left to suffer hunger and hardship; as a result, they become preys in the hands of rich oil workers who take advantage of the situation to sexually exploit them. For instance Koko is raped when she goes to hawk at GRA/OIL Club. She blames her mother for sending her to hawk in such a dangerous place. But the poor woman remorsefully admits that “It’s my fault. But child, what could I do? We have nothing. Nothing to eat.” (TSSI, 30) This affirms that environmental despoliation makes women more vulnerable to various kinds of violation especially sexual abuse. The women lament how they are raped and killed in various oil communities thus:

Niger: Are they never tired of ruining...?

Obida: Killing us!

Benue: At Odi?

Women: They raped and killed women!

Niger: In Choba?

Women: They raped and killed women!

Benue: Across the sea?

Women: They raped and killed women!

Niger: In the land?
Women: They raped...tore up...aaaaaaah!
Benue: And still...
Women: They're raping, selling and killing us. (TSSI, 30)

In *What Mama Said*, women are raped and killed in different parts of Sufferland like Odi and Choba by security agents whose duty is to protect the people. Hadeja is raped when she goes to hawk at GRA/OIL Club by the soldier, police, oil director, government official and the chief (WMS, 68-69). Her mother, Oshimi admits that she sends her to hawk because they had nothing to eat. This is a confirmation that women of the region who are sometimes the breadwinners of their families suffer most if nature, the source of their sustenance is despoiled. The situation gets so bad that the women (mother and daughter-Niger and Omi in *What Mama Said*) resort to using what they have to get what they do not have without considering the implication of such decision. When Koko reprimands Niger, “[b]ut you let her, your daughter Oshun run to those foreigners...” Niger’s response is “She is selling too, daughter. She says she has to sell...what she has.” (TSSI, 31) As a result of suffering and hardship Koko considers going into prostitution as an easy way out of economic adversity. It is evident that some women of the oil-producing communities are forced into prostitution by unbearable hard situation. Onwueme in an interview with Iniobong Ukoh (2004:25) confirms this when she explains that:

Oshun’s actions in the play typify the common trends in Nigeria, since the last decade as impoverished young women resort to running after the expatriate and multinational oil entrepreneurs. The girls sell themselves; serve as the sexual workers.

This shows that prostitution among women in the oil-producing region is sometimes poverty-induced. Women indulge in that act to earn money for their upkeep.

5.4 Niger Delta Women as Eco-activists in the Plays

Women of Hungeria and Sufferland in *Then She Said It* and *What Mama Said* respectively, revolt against exploitation and marginalisation of oil companies’ representatives, government officials and traditional leaders (chiefs). The people start protesting against the unjust way in which their pieces of land are taken away from them;

they are displaced and rendered homeless in their land. Even though Ethiope is among traditional rulers who take advantage of their positions to enrich themselves, he still admits that his people are being marginalised. He sympathises with them especially for their land that is forcefully taken from them. He acknowledges that his people do not joke with their land because to them, land *is* Life. Kainji, though he is a government representative, does not deny the fact that the weight of degradation of land of the Niger Delta is enough to cause the people to protest. He says, "... , one can't blame them. What is a man worth without land, anyway? (TSSI, 6) To him, the people's protest is justified.

The women resolve to engage in a protest in order to draw national and international attention to their plight. The women make this known Thus: "Young women: Don't you think it's time? Time to take our case to the people... In short, the world? Chorus: yes, the world! People of the world. Let them judge. Give the verdict! ... Hear us and judge for yourself!" (TSSI, 1) Obida in *Then She Said It* suggests that they should try something new like kidnapping the oil director to "bring nation ... and international attention to their cause"; that's it! That's when they'll start to pay attention to us and our needs." (TSSI, 13) This decision is borne out of agitation against injustice especially when lachrymal approach has failed. The women decide to adopt a more radical approach to the struggle. The women lead the people in a protest to GRA/OIL Club to express their dissatisfaction over the injustice against their land. The women take a decisive stand and insist that all the oil companies must leave and pollution of the environment must be stopped. The people of Sufferland in *What Mama Said* organise themselves and start protesting, "We want jobs! ...Shell must go! Agip must go! Chevron must go! Texaco must go! Mobil must go! Willbros must go! Pollution must go! Leave! Leave our oil! Resource ! Resource !Resource control!" (32) The women continue to make their demand known during the protest by chanting, "We! We! Our land! We-must take back what is ours! Resource control! Resource control!" (TSSI, 81/ WMS, 146) Here, Onwueme suggests that for crisis in the Niger Delta to come to an end, the people should be allowed to control the resource in their land; this would give them opportunity to use it to develop their area.

Apart from pollution of the environment, what angers the women most is the raping and killing of women in various parts of the land. They take the protest to Oil Club

where Hadeja and Koko are raped in the course of hawking in *What Mama Said* and *Then She Said It* respectively. The victims of the rape attest that they are raped by the police, the soldier, the oil director, the government official and the chief. The women, in the demonstration, make the following demand:

Obida: The raping...
Women: Must be stopped!
Obida: The killing...
Women: Must be stopped!
Obida: The profiteering...
Women: Must be stopped!
Obida: The corruption...
Women: Must be stopped!
Benue: women. This is our fight...
Niger: Together! This is *our* fight! (TSSI, 33 /WMS, 72)

Onwueme insists that the women must unite to win the struggle against the oppressors. They must have unity of purpose and focus towards achieving it. This is made clear in the chorus of the women. Song as one of the dramatic techniques used to keep the actors energised and spur them into action, is used to admonish them thus “Together! together! together! Women stay together! (WMS, 66) This shows how necessary it is for women to work together to gain their freedom.

The women spearhead a protest against the exploiters. Niger (leader of market women), Benue (a widow) and Obida (an unemployed female youth) lead the people in a protest against the exploiters. Having gone through suppression in the hands of exploiters, the women activists mobilise their people especially the women to fight against such oppression. Obida seeks the assistance of their female ancestors in the following invocation: Obida: Rise up, mothers! ... wake! Wake up! Your daughters need you now. The tide is high, high up. The flood threatens to swallow us. And sharks, white and black, have taken over the shores. Our land. Arise mothers! Your daughters are sinking. Drowning. Gobbled as torn flesh by the ever hunger sharks now ruling our land. ... Mothers, arise! (76) Benue spurs the women into protest action by recounting what they have suffered owing to the discovery and trading of oil in their land. The women start chanting a war song and indicate their readiness to fight the oppressors thus:

Chorus of daughters: Mother. Sisters. Our time. Now!

Chorus of daughters: Lead, daughters. Lead the way. ...
Obida: Win or lose?
Niger & Benue : We are ready!
Chorus: Together.
Niger & Benue : Mothers and daughters of the delta!
Chorus: Eeeih!
Niger: Then take. Take back what is yours, women. (TSSI,
85)

In this mood, the women kill a dog, pet of the oil director which is very dear to him. This hurts him emotionally. They also kidnap the Texaco deputy oil director and set the new oil installation ablaze. They succeeded in drawing attention to their plight in line with their initial plan as seen in the statement of the General who worries about how:

Only a handful of terrorists and they're causing us all these damage? And now they've kidnapping our strange... I mean foreign business partners! And you know what that means to the image of this country?... . Can't you? All this embarrassment? International disgrace? And we're only just trying to clean up our messy image before the whole world?
(TSSI, 96)

In a like manner, Oshimi (the market women leader), River Niger (a widow) and Imo and Omi (unemployed youth) in *What Mama Said* lead the people in protest against the exploiters. The women devise a new strategy not only to draw external attention to their situation but also to sternly demand their right-- resource control. The activists kidnap the deputy oil company director, kill the dog of the director, and blast a new oil pipeline. The oil director expresses his dismay over the incredible acts of the women, which he refers to as international embarrassment. Later, the women arrest the government official and the traditional chief as well as the oil director. The condition for releasing them is summed up in their demand for a healthy environment and provision of basic amenities:

Oshun: Food!
Koko: Good roads! Not potholes!
Benue: Clean water for cooking and drinking!
Obida: Clean air! Clean environment.
Oshun: Yes. Unpolluted. (TSSI, 101)

Their demand suggests that a worthwhile existence is tied to healthy environment. The people, therefore, demand a clean environment that would encourage farming and fishing

activities and make human existence meaningful in the oil producing region. The general expresses his greatest chagrin over the unbelievable protest of the women thus:

The image of the nation has been beaten, battered and fried in the court of opinion. ... Where? Where has it ever happened that illiterate rural women ... women and mere girls rise up in arms against elected and established government? Women, militarised?... . Where have you ever heard that? (TSSI, 104/ WMS, 183)

The government represented by the general, charges the people to court. But by the provision of concrete evidence of injustice against the people, the women win the case. The oil director, the government official and the chief remorsefully apologise to the people for their exploitative acts.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.0 Conclusion

This study examined the roles of women as eco-activists in selected Niger Delta novels and plays, to establish how the creative writers depict degradation of the Niger Delta environment as well as the women's responses to it. Ecological damage that is caused by oil exploration and exploitation has socio-economic and health implications for the people in general and the women in particular. The literary writers call urgent attention to unemployment, poverty, hardship and insecurity that oil exploitation and its consequent environmental degradation cause in the region. Oil Companies with the support of the federal government carry out their business with little or no consideration for the people of the host communities whose peaceful life is disrupted. The women react against such injustice through protest.

In all the selected novels and plays, the impact of environmental degradation is projected and the efforts of women in combating the pollution are vividly captured. By the employment of metaphor, irony and allegory, the novels and plays show that the discovery of oil and its exploitation bring tragedy and curse to the Niger Delta. The women of the region who in most cases take the responsibility of providing for their families suffer the consequences of the pollution most. As a result, they engage in struggles against degradation of the environment and the desired result is achieved.

The people of the region adopt various measures in resisting environmental injustice. Sometimes, they engage in kidnapping of foreign company workers, destruction of oil installation, temporarily disrupt the activities of oil companies while demanding for

compensation and provision of basic amenities, and the likes. This raises an important question: Have all these strategies brought a lasting solution to the environmental problem in the Niger Delta?

In *Love My Planet*, the protagonist, Toundi embarks on a tree-planting campaign in some parts of Daglobe to enhance environmental resuscitation. She engages in collection of data on the negative effects of gas flaring in Daglobe Delta in order to make the people aware and to attract intervention. She also sensitises people on the need to care for the environment with her write-up titled “I care for the environment.” Though all these show her individual efforts towards curbing environmental degradation in Daglobe Delta but would they bring a lasting solution to it? Considering the fact that oil exploitations are still going on in the various communities of Daglobe Delta, how effective are Egbuson’s suggested strategies towards bringing a lasting solution to environmental crisis in the region?

In *Oil Cemetery*, Rita sues the oil companies for environmental damage that their activities cause in the host communities; she wins the case for the people. The women also through their collective protest bar the activities of the oil companies and demand that until basic amenities are provided for the host communities, they will not leave the sites of the oil companies. This raises an important question; namely, to what extent would these measures lead to a lasting solution to the environmental pollution in the region since the oil companies continue the activities that degrade the environment even after providing basic amenities for the host communities? This study does not deny the fact that the developmental projects would in a way make the lives of the people better; it argues that such projects are not directly targeted towards stopping environmental pollution which is the root cause of other crisis in the region.

In *Oil on Water*, a militant group led by a person known as professor kidnaps foreigners working in oil companies in order to collect ransom from the companies. They also break oil pipelines to express their anger over the damage done to their environment. It is recorded that “a foreign family was kidnapped, a man and his wife. Their company paid three million naira ransom for them” to be released (223). But all these measures do not stop the degradation of the environment. A woman’s effort to preserve the

environment is seen in the character, Boma, who joins a religious group to preserve Irikefe Island. Though such effort contributes to the struggle but how far would preservation of such an isolated island go in tackling the colossal environmental problems in the entire Niger Delta? In *Yellow-Yellow*, the youth rise against the oil company for the havoc their activities have wrought on the Niger Delta environment and other unjust act like non-payment of compensation, etc. They organise themselves, kidnap oil company executives and prevent the Oil Company from carry out its activities. How effective are these means in tackling environmental despoliation in the Niger Delta? However, by the creation of a female character, Zilayefa, who is courageous enough to disengage herself from the entanglement of the exploiters _ Sergio (foreign) and Admiral (local) _ and that enables her to exercise control over her body and destiny, the novel metaphorically suggests that for the region to achieve a desired result in the struggle against environmental crisis, she needs to disentangle herself from any link (national and international) that either causes or aids pollution of her environment (and her body). With the above point, Agary appears to be suggesting that resource control is the only solution to crisis in the Niger Delta; until the people of the region are allowed to have control over exploitation of oil in their land, any effort that is made to restore of peace and tranquility in the region may be futile.

In *Outrage*, the militants engage in kidnapping of oil company workers and destruction of oil instillations as means of demanding attention and justice but these fail to yield positive results. Collection of compensation from Oil Company by the representatives of the host communities does not contribute anything to solving the problem; because the money does not get to the people it is meant for and directly has nothing to do with the despoiled environment as the root cause of other problems. According to the observation of a member of Niger Delta delegate in a meeting between the oil companies and the host communities, the money that is paid as compensation usually “ends up in the fat bellies of many chiefs, many godfathers .” (340) He tells the representatives of the oil companies to “check all the people you put in charge of the derivation allocation. They have built houses for themselves in choice areas of the country and married more wives. They award contracts to their cousins and nieces, to themselves.” (341) It is further revealed that some of them built hotels in other countries with money that is meant for compensation of victims of environmental pollution. A similar situation

is noticed in *The Activist*, all the chiefs except Chief Tobi Ishaka are interested in their personal pockets. They claim to show concern for the plight of the people but in reality, they are interested in enriching their private pockets from the compensation from oil companies not even in the stoppage of environmental pollution. It is glaring that payment of compensation and provision of basic amenities would not put an end to eco-devastation in the region; this is because the compensation usually ends in the hands of few individuals and the basic amenities would deteriorate with time but the pollution remains. Since these measures do not directly address environmental degradation from which other problems emanate, it appears they do not have the prospect of achieving lasting peace and environmental sanity in the region.

It is the argument of this study that the above measures adopted by the people in resisting environmental pollution and its effects have not helped in solving the problem. It, therefore, suggests that the most effective way to provide a lasting solution to the environmental pollution in the region is to stop oil exploration and exploitation; this will allow the wounded environment to recuperate. Environmental regeneration on the other hand would revive farming and fishing activities. Through revival of the people's means of livelihood, the existence of the people in that region would be made more meaningful and a society of their desire would be born. Hence, this study suggests that the approaches by which the people of the Niger Delta seek solution to environmental injustice in the region require to be reviewed.

In *Then She Said It* and *What Mama Said*, the protesters break the oil installation and kidnap the exploiters (the oil directors, government officials and the traditional leaders) of the Niger Delta environment in demand for fair treatment. Even though the exploiters during the legal battle apologise to the people and promise to provide basic amenities and pay compensation to the people, if they are given another opportunity to exploit oil, would that put an end to the heavy environmental damage caused by oil exploitation in the region? Besides, the protesters demand for resource control as what they feel would bring a lasting peace to the region. Considering the actions of the selfish and greedy indigenous leaders like Ethiope (TSSI) and Pipeline (WMS) who sabotage the people's struggle by conniving with the company's and the government's representatives

to achieve their selfish interest to the detriment of the people, if this is a kind of proposition that the playwright presents as a solution to the environmental problems in the Niger Delta, what would happen if resource control is left in the hands of these egocentric indigenous leaders? However, agitation for resource control here seems to imply incorporation and fair inclusion of the Niger Delta people in the management plan of distribution of oil dividends. It shows the people's desire for their interest to be adequately represented and protected in the sharing of oil gains.

This study has demonstrated the portrayal of women as eco-activists in selected Niger Delta novels and plays. Women adopt different approaches to resisting environmental despoliation in their various communities in the plays; thus, making their involvement significant in the struggle. Women's resistance strategy to oppression, which is akin to nature's consequent resistance to degradation, is a logical theme in all the selected novels and plays. The resistance of both women and nature, therefore, becomes a check on the despoliation of environment and its harmful effects on society. Leaving the struggle in the hands of women in all the works, suggests that until the Niger Delta women get actively involved in the struggle, all attempts to achieving a lasting solution to environmental problems in the region may continue to amount to futility. By the creation of female characters that deploy more effective strategies in the struggle and achieve desired results, the study concludes that until the women take a centre stage in the struggle against environmental despoliation in the Niger Delta; all effort towards tackling the challenge would fail.

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