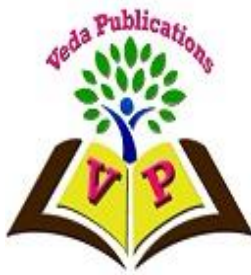




RESEARCH ARTICLE

**EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESECRATION: AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF KAINE AGARY'S YELLOW YELLOW**

Samuel Adewumi

Senior English Instructor, Omu-Aran High School, Kwara state Nigeria.saayomikun@gmail.comDoi: <http://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2022.9308>**ABSTRACT**

No doubt, numerous scholars have carried researches out on Nigeria's squalid state after her independence. The focus of many of these studies range from investigating many of the topical issues that have come to define the country— from war, economy, to politicking. However, not many scholars have paid the enough attention to the ecological concerns of Nigerians. This paper, therefore, examines Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* as a testament to the environmental mindfulness of Kaine Agary, Nigerian novelists. The choice of this text is informed by the fact that there is a dearth of serious scholarly research on the novel. Using the theory of Ecocriticism, this study finds out that the author, Agary, is not unaware of the ecological implications of man's exploitative tendencies on earth's resources. In fact, he uses his work to berate these forces that promote the unchecked desecration of the mother earth, using the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as a case study.

Keywords: *Environmental mindfulness, Ecocriticism, Ecological implications, Desecration, Earth.*



INTRODUCTION

Nigeria till date remains one of the oil producing nations that still depend solely on crude oil for their sustainability and developmental projects. Until recently, just before the price of crude oil began to crash at the global market, all efforts at making the various governments of the day consider diversifying the nation's economy often received insignificant attention. Of course, before independence, Nigeria depended mostly on agriculture and raw materials like cocoa, cashew, groundnuts, palm oil, and many more. However, following the discovery of oil in Oloibiri, River State, Nigeria, in 1958 (Adeyanju, 2004: 217) and the eventual oil boom of the 1970s and early 80s, there was a shift in the nation's economy from the existing agrarian life to crude oil, thereby "tying the nation's fate to the fortunes of a single commodity: oil" (Larkin, 1997: 108). However, with this discovery come a considerable century of untold hardships due to level exploitations of nature's resources and oil pollution, particularly in the coastal areas and riverine areas. Quoting Adeyanju (2004: 217), Edobor (2017:3) states that: "... the creeks and coastal areas are noted for oil pollution hazard resulting from exploration, transportation, fresh water areas are polluted through waste disposal generated from oil and industrial affluent (sic). Also, the pipeline way and road network are polluted during transportation of petroleum products as well as crude."

It is worthy of note to assert that these several earth pollution and environmental death are caused, greatly by the failures of the government. Edobor (2017:3) stresses this when he expresses that the resultant effects of the failure of the government,

the multinational oil companies and the concerned agencies are evident in the problems of desertification, oil pollution, and land degradation still facing the Niger Delta nation. The attendant problems, of course, have brewed escalating crises in the region. This has compelled the government to embark on community development projects and capacity building initiatives so as to curb incessant militancy that the Niger Delta youths have embraced in demanding some reparation and a restoration of their endangered communities.

In the midst of all these, Nigerian writings with an overriding focus on the environment have begun to emerge. Oseghale Francis, (2006) is of the opinion that Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* depicts four major issues. According to her, the story discusses:

First, the sordid conditions of the people in Niger-Delta, especially the women who are exposed to various exploitations as a result of the ecological problems of the environment. Second, the moral bankruptcy caused by joblessness, poverty, lack of social amenities, and environmental degradation in the Niger-Delta community. Third, a vivid pictorial view of the patriarchal and cultural victimizations that the women are subjected to as a result of the horrible conditions in their environment as the women are sexually exploited by both foreign and local men because they need to survive in this hostile region that is suffocating. Finally, how the gains of exploration of oil elude the people who should have benefit greatly from the exploration of oil in the region.



This, going by, Oseghale's postulation reveals the level of consciousness of the novel and that the author's awareness of his immediate environment influences greatly his writing.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* has been selected for analysis in this paper. The choice of the novels is driven by the fact that there is a drought in critical academic research on it, especially from the eco-critical perspective. Using the sociological approach to Ecocritical studies and adopting a content analysis method, this study intends to interrogate the authors' preoccupation with environmental issues in the novels. For the establishment of eco-criticism as the driving theory of this research, there is close reading of the texts in order to explore and show the suitability of this theory. Where essential, excerpts are drawn and interpreted from the primary texts to show the relevance of eco-criticism to this research.

OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this research work is to explore ecocritical issues in Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow*. It would also determine the level of degradation that has occurred on the society

DATA ANALYSIS

To put mildly, *Yellow-Yellow* tells the story of a mulattress called Zilayefa raised solely by her mother, a peasant farmer in the village. In the novel *Yellow-Yellow*, the author discusses several issues centering on poverty and the Niger-Delta oil problems, sexuality, corruption, racial identity, and the search of a father by Zilayefa.

Right from the beginning of the novel, the rural dwellers regard the soil as a means of sustenance, in that, it supplies them their entire human needs for meaningful existence. Hence, members of the Niger-Delta community who are purely farmers engage in agricultural activities. However, with the discovery of oil in the region, the activities of oil explorers have caused more harm than good to the people. This is vividly manifested in the novel when oil spillage destroys the farms of the people including that of Zilayefa's mother. The people are confused and incapacitated; their immediate reaction is to protest and march to the house of Amananaowe, the traditional ruler of the community. Here, Zilayefa says that:

A group of people, painted in the same black as my mother, some covered from head to toe, was marching to see the Amananaowe, the head of the village ... They were marching to the Amananaowe's house to report the matter and demand that he take it up with the oil company, some were crying, others were talking about compensation. (p. 4)

To worsen their case, the company that owns the oil pipelines tells them that they are not compensating them because the spillage is as a result of the sabotage caused by the activities of the youths. This action goes to show the insensitivity of multi-national companies and capitalists in our society. The oil spillage causes the destruction of plants, animal, and aquatic life in the region. This leads us to believe how low agricultural productivities are.



In *Yellow-Yellow*, the degradation of ecology and break in the sustainable hopes of human inhabitants of the Niger Delta through pollution is presented. The menace of pollution that is presented in the text is very alarming as it works total damage to the vegetation that it covers. This is firstly illustrated by the narrator, that:

During my second to last year in secondary school, one of the crude oil pipes that ran through my village broke and spilled oil over several hectares of land, my mother's farm included... It was the first time I saw what crude oil looked like. I watch as the thick liquid spread out covering more land and drowning small animals in its path. It keep spreading and I wondered if it would stop, when it would stop, how far it would spread. Then there was the smell. (Agary, p.3-4)

As seen from above, the author here portrays a typical picture of what an everyday pollution in the Niger Delta looks like. The oil emitted from vandalized pipeline provoked uproar throughout the host community. This situation is made possible when the oil companies fail in their commitment to the host communities. Pollution destroyed several plots of lands, including that which belongs to Zilayefa's mother, who lost her "main source of sustenance." (Agary, p.4) Here, the narrator is able to express this idea with her use of the first person angle of narration which is very expressive and at the same time narrative. The use of critical words and phrases associated with pollution and its negative impacts especially in the Niger Delta also add to the creation of a mentally feasible pollution outbreak.

The devastation of the pollution scenes shown in *Yellow-Yellow* is very horrible. There is oil spillage and it covers a whole lot of farm lands. In the process, it destroys all the cultivated crops, leaving the human communities with very slim chances of survival as their main occupation is farming. This also impacts the water channels as they are contaminated by the crude oil spillage, destroying aquatic life. The vegetation is totally destroyed. The spillage covers the whole area, thereby choking the land and animals within its reach to condemnation. Aside ecological damage, the occurrence of the pollution also contributes to food poisoning and poses adverse health challenges. The narrator, at a point, cannot breathe because the odor emitted by the crude oil spillage is very offensive and harmful to one's health. Her stomach churns, her head aches and she becomes weak and unable to move. As she inhales this offensive smell and feels the crude oil on her skin alongside the rest of the community members, so likewise will their nerves and respiratory system get damaged. As seen again in the 39th page, the narrator reveals that: "The water that flowed with streaks of blue, purple, and red, as drops of oil escaped from the pipelines...was the same water I drank." (Agary, p. 39) This shows that the waters the people of Niger Delta consume are totally contaminated by oil pollution since, sadly, the people have no other source of water for domestic use apart from the one from the rivers and dug wells. Therefore, drinking and cooking with such contaminated water is a grave threat to their health.

Through an effective characterization, the author of *Yellow-Yellow* vividly brings out the ecological degradation, environmental pollution, and



the social and moral dehumanization of the people of Niger-Delta region.

Aside the degradation and destruction of the Niger-Deltan environment by oil explorers is the sexual exploitation of women by both foreign and local men. These exploitations, evidently, are caused by the destruction of the environment which plunged the women in to abrupt poverty as they could not maintain their main source of livelihood, farming and fishing.

After her secondary school education, Bibi, Zilayefa's mother, goes to Port-Harcourt where she gets impregnated by a Greek sailor who leaves her unceremoniously without informing her. This makes the burden of the upbringing of Zilayefa rest solely on her mother. Zilayefa's mother denies herself of all social activities in order to be able to raise money for her education since she wants her daughter to be better than herself. This self-expulsion from all social activities is clearly stated in the novel when Zilayefa says:

...she expelled herself from the women's group so that she would not be forced to spend money on wrappers for their outings... better for me to save money. That was the end of woman's group activities for my mother and the beginning of her self-expulsion from all social activities. (Agary, p. 8)

The moral bankruptcy of the men is further exemplified in the novel when Chief Semoke dies and he is brought from Lagos to the village for burial. Zilayefa happens to be one of those serving the people who have come to grace the occasion during

the burial ceremony. During the ceremony, Zilayefa comes in contact with a white from Spain called Sergio who she thinks resembles her father. Out of love that has grown between them, she takes him to an Island across the village in a Canoe, far away from their house so that nobody especially her mother can see them. Zilayefa feeds Sergio with grill plantain and coconut, and also shares a bed with him. With this, the author tries to show that expatriates working in oil companies seduce girls who migrate from the village to the city to engage in prostitution. And Zilayefa wants to be a part in this too, because people like herself who have gone to the city attract a lot of publicity from family members whenever they come to visit the village.

As revealed in the story, the white men give the girls a lot of money and buy expensive things for them. They rent flats for them and at time if the girls are lucky, they take them to their country. As a result of these expensive benefits, these girls go extra miles too to keep the men to themselves. They visit native doctors who prepare love charms for them so the white men can love them more. However, beyond these luxurious benefits, lies an untold level of dehumanization and female maltreatments. As seen in the novel, the white men push objects, like bottles into their privates as part of their fun making. The novel reveals that:

...our visitors told of times when they fell into hands of a crazy whitey that beat them up or pushed objects like bottles into their privates as part of the "fun". It seemed that, sometimes, there were so many unimaginable horrors to get through before



the 'clients' released the money. (Agary, pp. 37-38)

When Zilayefa finally gets to Port-Harcourt with the help of Pastor Ikechukwu who gives her a letter to Sisi, she get to know the little secret of the women in the city. Sisi is described as an influential woman who is equally a contractor with links to the government and oil companies. On the side, she runs a boutique and owns a lot of property. Clara, one of Sisi employees, whom Sisi hands over Zilayefa to while she travel to Aba with her friend Lolo educates Zilayefa on how to relate with Sisi and equally gives her the historical background of Lolo's life. Lolo is also a high social woman who organizes parties for different class of people in the society. Both Sisi and Lolo are influenced by the present of European oil explorers in Port-Harcourt and they live morally-debased life.

CONCLUSION

From the illustrations above, we can see that the author of *Yellow-Yellow* has vividly portrayed the evil consequences of the discovery of oil in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. The discovery of oil that is supposed to be a blessing to the people is now a curse in disguise, because of the acute exploitations the Niger Delta people are subjected to. They are environmentally exploited; their farmlands polluted as a result of oil spillage. Apart from the environment degradation of the region, there is also sexual exploitation of the Niger Delta women by foreign oil company owners. This leads to a huge population of abandoned children who are morally and socially delinquent. Also, the discovery of oil in the region

leads to several cases of violence, youth agitation, and vandalization in the region.

REFERENCES

- Adeyanju, J.A. (2004). *Government and The Oil Pollution Crisis in Nigeria*. International Journal of Environmental. 2 (1 & 2), 217-227.
- Agary, K. (2006) *Yellow Yellow*. Lagos: Dtalkshop.
- Edebor, A. A. (2017) *Rape of A Nation: An Eco-critical Reading of Helon Habila's Oil on Water*. International Journal of Arts Management. September 2017 DOI: 10.18533/journal.v6i9.983 CITATIONS 7 READS 6,151 1
- Larkin, B. (1997). *Hausa dramas and the rise of video culture in Nigeria*. J. Haynes (ed.), *Nigerian video films* (pp. 105-125). Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation.
- Oseghale, F. (2019). *Ecocritical issues in Kaine Agary's Yellow-Yellow*. England, Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company.