

**ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TANURE OJAIDE'S *THE ACTIVIST* AND KAINÉ
AGARY'S *YELLOW-YELLOW***

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METU, SOMTOCHUKWU JANEFRANCES

PG/MA/13/65685

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

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TITLE PAGE

**AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TANURE OJAIDE'S *THE ACTIVIST* AND
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APPROVAL PAGE

This work has been read and approved as having met the requirements for the award of the Master of Arts (M.A) degree in English and Literary Studies obtained from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Prof. D.U. Opata
Head of Department

Date

Prof. P. Okpoko
Dean of the Faculty of Arts

Date

External Examiner

Date

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this work is an independent study carried out by Metu, Somtougukwu Janefrances with the registration number PG/MA/13/65685 of the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This work has not been presented as part of the requirements of any diploma or degree in this or any other University.

Dr F.O. Orabueze

Supervisor

Date

Prof. D.U. Oyata

Head of Department

External Examiner

Date

DEDICATION

To Papa and Mummy; if in another world, you choose to repeat the dance of the procreators,
I will still delightedly lead the dance troupe.

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I want to thank Almighty God for his unending grace and mercy that have always sustained me; his love gave me the doggedness to complete this thesis. Saint Anthony of Padua, my Patron Saint has never for once forgotten to whisper my petitions to the ears of the Infant Jesus. He always carries my lighted candle; making sure that I always keep aflame with his motto of Charity.

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ABSTRACT

Ecocritical studies intensely show the relationship between man's environment and literature. In this way, ecocriticism becomes a standpoint that brings environmental discourse to the fore within a literary context; a context that shows the exploitation and decay in man's environment. Following this assertion, the themes that border on environmental degradation are routed in migration, pipeline vandalism, blowouts owing to gas flares and pollution. Most of the analyses on the concept of ecocriticism take the direction of the greenish nature of the environment and the extent of the marginalisation of a people. This research views ecocriticism from a different perspective. It depicts ecocriticism as a theory that deploys the tools of ecoactivism and resistance in the reading and analyses of Tanure Ojiade's *The Activist* and Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. It also shows the manner in which humans strive to unchain themselves from the manacles that hold them bondage by resisting the discourse of ecotrauma. This study also delves into the negative impacts of oil activities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria by connecting the ecocritical patterns of ecoactivism and resistance to the utterances and actions of the characters in the texts.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Man cannot be separated from his environment because his perception and interaction with his surrounding make up his being. The destruction of the natural things that surround man is caused by man himself by the acts of destroying and recreating his habitat. Thus, ecocritical studies examine the way in which humans and the natural environment interact and counter each other. Byron Caminero-Santangelo will comment in his essay that "Laurence Coupe sees ecocriticism as an approach to literature which considers the relationship between human and non-human life as represented in literary texts and which theorizes about the place of literature in the struggle against environmental destruction" (705).

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is rich in crude oil, but it is in a state of omni-hambles because of ecological problems. The discovery, exploration and exploitation of oil in the region have affected agriculture, fishing as well as the living conditions of the people. With the leakage of oil from pipes and its spillage into lands, farms, and water, the Niger Deltans are faced with a threatening disaster. Best Ordinohia and Seiyefa Brisibe note that "oil spillage affected at least 1500 communities in the eight crude oil-producing states in Nigeria, and were mainly from the 5284 oil wells that were drilled as at 2006 and the 7000 km of crude oil pipeline that cross the Niger Delta region. Oil spillage often results in contamination of surface water with hydrocarbons and trace metals, as measured using atomic spectrometry" (4). They further note that "the crude oil of the region contains some naturally occurring radioactive materials. The crude oil spillage reduces soil fertility. It also smothers economic trees and food crops, outrightly killing them or reducing their yield causing a 60% reduction in household food security. The deterioration of the quality of

staple food leads to a 24% increase in the prevalence of childhood malnutrition (4). Crude oil spillage also results in the bio-accumulation of heavy metals in surviving food crops like cassava and pumpkin. Pat Okpoko in *Environmental Impact of Technological Intrusion in Nigeria* notes that crops and economic trees affected by oil spillage show signs of scorching, yellowing and shedding of leaves, stunted growth and death (4). He notes further that "fishes caught from the polluted streams are often unpalatable and show signs of reduced growth and reproductive performance and consequently decreased population" (62).

When pushed to the wall, some Niger Deltans try to make the government and the world to understand their predicament. This has led to untold violence, killing, maiming, gunrunning, destruction and vandalism of pipelines, and the kidnapping of foreigners. Young girls who cannot find jobs find succour in the hands of foreigners and wealthy Nigerian men who after sleeping with them give them money that ought to be naturally theirs. Chris Onyema notes that "since the discovery and commercial exploration of oil in this area in 1958 until date, the people of the Niger Delta have been suffering from acts of bioterrorism, oil pollution of lands and water, gas flaring, hunger, diseases and poverty. Poverty breeds prostitution, gas flaring breeds cancer and respiratory diseases" (189). Sometimes, they feel that violence is the only answer to their problem. After the amnesty that was granted to the militants of Niger Delta, some of its indigenes still resort to thuggery. Ojaide says that "the area boys were fighters attempting not only to reclaim what had been robbed from them, but also holding firmly to what was theirs that others were attempting to snatch away" (55). For Ato Quayson, "violence becomes a means by which some people visit displeasure on those associated with the state, particularly minor officials and those seen as colluding with it" (58). Also, Ngugi wa Thiong'o lends his voice to that of Quayson to say that "violence in order to change an intolerant unjust social order is not savagery, it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust oppressive social order is criminal and diminishes man" (28). It is

against the marginalization of the economic and political deprivation of the people of Niger-Delta that Ken Saro-Wiwa and his Ogoni people fought and died for. Saro Wiwa views the exploration of oil by multinational companies as anti-people exploitation. Ed Simon will subscribe to Sam Uniamikogbo and Stanley Aibieyi view that "considering the role of oil in National Development, the struggle for indigenous control of activities in the industry has persisted over the years. Among oil exploring countries like Mexico and Libya, this struggle has culminated in apparent revolution, which ultimately forced out foreign oil firms from the industry and made way for national control of oil operations" (157). The blame for the pollution and spillage of oil in the Niger Delta region are not supposed to be apportioned to foreigners alone because Nigerian leaders collude in the decay that is threatening to gulp the nation. Oil activities take a toll on the people of the region, and people migrate to other parts of the country in search of a better life. It is ironical that the region that contributes to the growth and development of the nation cannot cater for the needs of its indigenes.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The criticism and analyses of the decay in the environment have been done from different angles, with most researchers focusing on the gaseous and non gaseous state of man's environment, while some researchers critique *The Activist* and *Yellow-Yellow* under the themes of political activism, the girl-child education and the representation of the male figures as depicted in the primary texts. The lacuna the researcher filled is the analyses of *The Activist* and *Yellow-Yellow* using the ecocritical tools of "Ecoactivism and Resistance". The researcher also related the portrayal of the negative impact of oil activities in the primary texts to the tools of ecoactivism and resistance. In the long run, the protagonists are studied, to find out their bearings and the manner in which their environment affects their characters

and their relationship with other characters in the texts. In *the Activist*, the Activist, like Ken Saro-Wiwa is an ecoactivist. As a way of liberating his people from marginalisation, he teams up with Pere Ighogboja, to set up an oil bunkering business. In *Yellow-Yellow*, there is Zilayefa, who leaves her village for the assumed comfort the city offers. There is a chain binding the industrial activities of oil and its result in the lives of the characters of the narratives. With the spillage of oil into water, fishes and water are condemned. When oil spills into farms, many people give up farming and they look for alternative means of livelihood. For some who dare to challenge the status quo, they resort to vandalism of pipelines to get even with the government. For some in the village, migrating to the cities to search for greener pasture become the only alternative, but they end up despondent and disillusioned.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The major aim of this research is to show the disastrous results we get by the rough handling of our environment by man. This we can detect by the actions of the characters in *Yellow-Yellow* and *the Activist* shown through the tools of ecoactivism and resistance. The researcher tries to avoid the repetition of the works previously done by other researchers by sticking to her research problem. Reference is made to other works depending on their connection and relation to this work, but the crux of the work is an in-depth analyses of the primary texts in order to fill the lacuna left by other researchers.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research will add to the growing number of research done on environmental studies. It will also add to the rich and encouraging research done using the Niger Delta literary texts. The authors of the primary texts to be studied; Tanure Ojaide and Kaine Agary are from the rich but impoverished Niger Delta. Ojaide is from Delta State and Agary is from Rivers State. They are aware of the extent of the rot in their region. The significance cuts across almost all fields of life because man cannot be separated from his environment. When the environment is endangered, the responsibility of restoring it to its default nature rests on man. It will also be useful for other researchers whose fields of study border on environmental studies.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is based on the following texts: Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* and Kaine Agary's *Yellow- Yellow*. The choice of these novels is not just because they are close to home, but because, to a great extent, they clearly show the economic and social result of oil exploration and exploitation. Where necessary, reference is made to other works that have ecological or ecocritical background. While analysing the texts, close attention is paid to actions, objects, thoughts, ideas that contribute to the degradation of man's environment.

The analyses in this research are dependent on ecocriticism. This theory shows that there is a relationship between literature and man's environment. Glotfelty and Fromm opine that "most ecocritical works share a common motivation; the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems. Either we change our ways or

we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse (xx). It has been observed that not much work has been done on ecocriticism by black writers and critics. Most of them refused to adopt ecocriticism or the literature of the environment. William Slaymaker notes that they feel that ecoliterature and ecocriticism are another attempt to "white out" black Africa by colouring it green (683). Their hesitation is because of their suspicion of the green discourse emerging from Western centres. But, since the early nineties, black writers have shown interest in their environment, seeking for change, and redressing issues that relate to environmental hazards. It is noted that there is a branch of ecocriticism that sees to the globalization issues in any depth. The branch is referred to as "Environmental Justice". The United States Environmental Protection Agency defines "Environmental Justice" as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, sex, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies" (2). Slaymaker notes further that "it is obvious to black African intellectuals, as well as their white counterparts, that environmental justice, as a global paradigm, will be used in the world marketplace when decisions are made about production, consumption of resources, and pollution caused by modernization, industrialization, and population growth" (684). In the long run, the scope will cover the primary texts of study, and on the theory the research is hinged on.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review of this research is done under man's environment; the environment being the Niger Delta of Nigeria, the review of the key points relating to the research problem like oil spillage, pipeline vandalism and migration, and the review of the scholarly critique done on the primary texts. It is pertinent to do this so that one has an inclination of the reviews that are related to the research. It also helps to ascertain the lacuna to be filled in this research.

There are exploitative activities by man in the name of development. The negative impact of this development emanates from his neglect and disregard for the growth of a populace. Ambrose Akinbode in *Introduction to Environmental Resource Management* describes the environment as "the totality of the places and surroundings in which we live, work, and interact with other people in our cultural, religious, political and socio-economic activities for self fulfilment and advancement of our communities, societies or nations. It is within this environment that both natural and man-made things are found" (2). Human activities have continuously revolved around man's environment, the experiences and endeavours of man dwell with his inseparable and unceasing interaction with the environment.

Edward Relph in *The Modern Urban Landscape* notes that "the landscapes and places we live in are important. Whether we shape them or they shape us, they are the expressions of what we are. Our lives are impoverished precisely to the extent that we ignore them" (14). In a strict and natural cause effect interrelationship, the biotic constituents are linked and balanced through the resource system of the environment. Relph's claims connect to that of H.O. Agarwal who in *International Law and Human Rights* reports that "the

tremendous advancement of industrialization resulting in economic development had also continuously degraded the human environment (285). Furthermore, urbanization, overpopulation, and poverty also intensify the problem. In the present age, human activities exert enormous influence on the natural conditions of the entire planet.

Since Nigeria's independence, the nation has been facing environmental challenges. There are some critiques who believe that the people of the Niger Delta are marginalised, while others argue that the degradation in the area is caused by poor management of resources by the government. In *The Nigerian State, Oil Exploration and Community Interest: Issues and Perspectives*, Inya Eteng notes that "the highly exploitative and grossly inequitable endowment/ownership-exchange entitlement relations between the Nigerian state and the oil-bearing communities in particular explain why the enormous oil wealth generated is scarcely reflected in the standard of living and life chances of the peasant inhabitants of the oil-bearing enclave" (21). A significant dent on the socio-economic life of the Niger Deltans is environmental degradation and is largely the outcome of pollution and the exploitation of natural resources. This perspective of Eteng leads W. Reno to state in his article: *Foreign Firms and Financing of Charles Taylor's NPFI* that "the exploitation of natural resources has played a prominent part in conflict in Nigeria. Ever since the discovery of oil in 1956, it is estimated that over USD300 billion has been acquired by the Federal Republic of Nigeria from sales of crude oil over forty years of exploration" (4). Given this enormous capital accumulation, it is expected that the oil bearing communities of whose land oil is extracted from will be more materially prosperous and better off than their ethnic counterparts in the State. But unfortunately, the reverse is the case. For Cyril Obi:

In spite of the overwhelming contribution of the oil minority areas of the Niger Delta to Federal Revenues, they have been excluded from direct access to oil revenues, except through federal and ethnic majority benevolence.

Consequently, the region is one of the least developed and poorest in the Nigerian State. A number of factors accounts for this rather unfortunate fate of oil bearing communities all of which are rooted in historical development of the Nigerian State. The most significant of this factor till date has been the replacement of agriculture by oil, as the basis of capitalist accumulation and State reproduction in Nigeria. (108)

D. Oyesola in *Essentials of Environmental Crisis: The World and Nigeria in Perspective* argues that in the wake of the unbridled assault on the Niger Delta environment informed by the dynamic and logic of ecological imperialism, this region's traditional economies, cultural practices and socio-political wellbeing were mauled into disquiet. The region, which is the economic base of Nigeria, has witnessed one of the uncanny forms of neglect and marginalisation and yet 90% of Nigeria's foreign exchange comes from oil exploration, exploitation and marketing by the multinational corporations (62).

Lending his voice to the woes of the Niger Deltans, Chinyere Nwahunanya opines thus:

The region is the symbol of the ironic contradictions of the consequences of the capitalist exploitation by multinational economic interests teaming up with the local comprador bourgeois class. With the uncontrolled decimation of aquatic life and the flora and fauna of the region, the region has lost its human population to massive emigration, with the consequence that the erstwhile vibrant fully employed farmers and fisherfolk that peopled the area have become migrant labour, seeking non-existent jobs in the sprawling cities. This part of Nigeria that accounts for 90 percent of the nation's revenue ironically seems not to have been included in the calculations concerning how that

revenue would be spent or invested. For decades, this scenario presented itself, and led to the emergence of protesters who instead of being seen as freedom fighters were rather branded militants sabotaging the efforts of the Federal Government of Nigeria. No one in the establishment wants to be told that although nature endowed the Niger Delta with enough wealth that would keep the inhabitants rich for many generations, as is the case with similar endowed regions of the world like Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. It is the activities of human beings who happen to control the region that share the wealth that pauperized the region's indigenes, and ensured that voices of dissent are either muffled or silenced. (xvi)

We will note that one of the causes of the region's degradation is oil spillage. This, S.O. Adelana describes as "the release of a liquid petroleum hydrocarbon into the environment due to human activities. Oil Spillage is a form of pollution and the term is also applied to marine oil spills (release of oil into the ocean/coastal waters). Oil spillage includes releases of crude oil from tankers, offshore platforms, drilling rigs and wells as well as spills of refined petroleum products (such as gasoline, diesel) and their by-products" (835). It destroys vegetation, mangrove forests, food crops, cash crops, fishing ground/marine life, reduce nutrient value of the soil, induce land fragmentation, and, in some cases, set communities on fire. It also has a significant impact on vegetation, water supply, and marine life and local livelihoods dependent on agriculture. Oil companies have often blamed most spills on sabotage, but Adelana contends that "the severity of spillage, measured by the amount of oil spilled, is higher in the Niger Delta than in Western Europe. The reason could be poor contingency planning for rapid response to spills; poor detection procedures; long distance between emergency shutdown valves; or the larger average diameter of pipelines" (5).

C. Opukri and Samuel Ibaba in *Oil Induced Environmental Degradation and Internal Population Displacement in the Nigeria's Niger Delta* note that environmental degradation arising from oil spills result in internal displacement of communities in the Niger Delta. This tends to diminish the productivity of farming and fishing in the community. It causes its members, as a group, to relocate. It also results in occupational and income losses that lead to both voluntary and involuntary migration. Opukri and Ibaba further state:

Environmental degradation, caused by the oil industry does not only have the potentials of exacerbating the tragedy of internal displacements in the Niger Delta, but is responsible for many of the dislocations experienced in the area. The collapse of local economies, induced by oil spillages, and other activities of oil has displaced many from their occupations, without providing viable alternatives. The pressures of survival do encourage forced migration or induced voluntary movement that manifests as rural-urban or rural-rural migration in the area. (173-174)

In an effort to salvage their pride or what is left of it, the Niger Deltans fight to be recognised. Most times, their fight results in conflict with the oil companies and government. While discussing conflict in the area, Caroline Ifeka in *Oil, NGOs and Youth Struggles for Resource Control in the Niger Delta* notes that conflict over the ownership and distribution of resources have been a defining feature of Niger Delta's economic history. For example, in *The Great Ponds*, a novel set in pre-crude oil Niger Delta society, Elechi Amadi captures the violent dispute between two coastal communities over the ownership of fish ponds. The presence of oil companies in the Niger Delta over the last fifty years has not only altered the nature and dynamics of environmental conflicts in the region, but also exacerbated them in ways that have defied solution (110). The level of poverty, squalor and degradation to

which the Niger Deltans are subjected to is captured well in the words of Ray Ekpu. He says that "the story of the Niger Delta is the story of a paradox, grinding poverty in the midst of vulgar opulence. It is the case of a man who lives on the banks of a river and washes his hands with spittle. It is the case of a people who live on the farm and die of famine" (10).

From the perspective of oil companies, oil spillage is a product of sabotage perpetrated by oil thieves and other criminal gangs, rather than equipment failure as the inhabitants of the region will argue. Chris Onyema in *Jungle and Oil Green: Currents of Environmental Discourse in Four Upland Nigerian Niger Delta Narratives* opines that "the endless rain of disasters, genocides and biocides in the Niger Delta are strung together to reveal a collapsed sense of humanity in the world controlled by greedy pacifiers" (206). He further notes that "pipeline vandalism and hostage taking are local reactions to the insurmountable neglect and deprivation of the oil producing communities in the face of seeming government pathological and heinous agenda" (206). Victims of environmental conflicts are forced to abandon their ancestral homes to the relative safety of places other than their original homelands. As should be expected, the most vulnerable inhabitants of the region, the women and children, are often the worst victims of forced migration in the Niger Delta.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF SELECTED TEXTS

Nigerian writers have risen to the occasion by using their writings to address as well as to bring to the knowledge of humanity the various forms of environmental degradation. Chidi Amuta in *Towards a Sociology of African Literature* is of the opinion that "as a refraction of social experience through the prism of the human imagination, the ontological essence of literature is to be located in terms of the extent to which it recycles social

experience and transforms it into an aesthetic proposition (39). Also, Emmanuel Obiechina in *The Writer and His Commitment in Contemporary Nigerian Society* affirms:

Nigerian writers should have a special allegiance to the downtrodden in the Nigerian society, to the socially handicapped, to the women, the children, the unemployed, the sick; all those who are not able to fight their own battles. The writer should put on his armour and charge into battle in defence of the defenceless. It is my view that the writer in Nigeria of today has to take his position against the oppression of the people, all forms of brutalities, and of unwarranted violence against the masses. (4)

The poet and author, Tanure Ojaide is one of these writers. He uses literature to engage the realities in his time. For him, literature is a reproduction of social experiences; a change of the totality of human experience. Discussing his writing, Ojaide says that "every writer must start from the familiar and the Niger Delta is my home terrain. That is where I grew up and know best, and it is natural for me to draw images from my environment for relevance" (87). Ojaide's activism is borne out of the harsh living conditions of his people. He sees change as a function of environmentally committed literature. In buttressing this, a Nigerian environmental expert, Victor Ojatorotu in his article, *The Internationalisation of Oil Violence in the Niger Delta of Nigeria* says that "this activism can be attributed to frustration (on the part of the region) arising from both state and oil companies' negligence and destruction of the Niger Delta's ecology, which is the basic structure that supports life in the region, as elsewhere. It may be said that the struggle by the people of the region have been predicated on certain fundamental issues, namely: their exclusion or marginalisation in terms of access to oil revenue; their struggle for greater access to resource sharing (known in Nigerian parlance as resource control); environmental degradation; and egregious human rights" (93).

In *The Activist*, Ojaide presents a nameless protagonist, the Activist, who is optimistic that something must be done to change the conditions of his people. The Activist, on his return from America, finds out that his people have lost their land, water, air, lifestyles, economic mainstay, to the activities of oil companies exploring and exploiting oil in his part of the country. Uzoechi Nwagbara in *Political Power and Intellectual Activism in Tanure Ojaide's 'The Activist'* notes that 'the trip through the creeks with Ebi affords the Activist the opportunity to experience and understand the magnitude of the environmental destruction occasioned by the activities of this oil companies. *The Activist* is a fictional representation of what Ojaide has done several times in his poetry like *Delta Blues* and *Home Songs*' (2).

Uzoechi Nwagbara further notes that:

Virtually all literary works by Tanure Ojaide have the same abiding sensibility anchored in ecocriticism as well as environmentalism. *The Activist* is a present-day Nigerian novel, which is timely as Nigeria trudges in the sleazy minefield of environmental injustice and an oppressive political landscape. The devastation of the Niger Delta environment by the multinationals represented by Shell, Texaco, Mobile, Chevron and others, as well as the political class has been a major motif of Ojaide's art, as is demonstrated in *The Activist*. Politics and activism is recycled in the mill of *The Activist* and the upshot is a radical revolutionary consciousness aimed at eradicating the exploitative order for a progressive and environmentally friendly politics. Following this, *The Activist* is a work of art committed to cultural nationalism and resistance. It problematises the brutality in the Niger Delta, which is the setting of the novel. Oil is the cardinal reason for this brand of politics in the region. The politics of oil in the Niger Delta cost the martyred author-activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other Ogoni eight their lives; it is responsible for the

ethnic tensions, wars, mass killings, rise of ethnic militias and ecological imperialism. (5)

Throughout history, man has been content with changing society for the better; this has preoccupied the minds of philosophers, artists, statesmen, and social scientists among others. This change can only come about when the mode of production of material life, which technically determines the ontological shape of other processes of life, is altered. Thus, literary and artistic productions are determined by the architecture of the modes of production that shape material life. It is also Nwagbara's view that:

In *The Activist*, the plausibility of Ojaide's narrative and historicity is founded on the contemporariness of the events, situations and conjunctures in the novel. To an extent, the novel could be mistaken for a sociological tale in view of its historiographic underpinnings. Following this, most of the places mentioned in the novel like Itsekiri, Abuja, Ughelli, Orhobo and others are real places, some of the organisations mentioned like OPEC, CLO and others are actual organizations, and some of the things or circumstances reconstructed in this novel bear semblance with the realities in Nigeria. For example, Shell and other multinationals are represented in the novel as Bell Oil Company and O&G Company. Nigeria, which is mentioned fairly often in the novel, shores up the historicity of *The Activist* as a piece of fiction based on truth. (5)

Uzoечи Nwagbara argues that activism in *The Activist* is politically inclined. He notes that it could be gleaned that the Niger Delta environment is made comatose by the conduct of the multinationals and the Nigerian government. It is an area that Nigerian writers should focus on, as Ojaide has done in *The Activist*. He has used his artistic prowess, and the knowledge

gained from having come from that area himself, to reconstruct the inhumanity and despoliation to which the Niger Delta community and its inhabitants are being subjected. *The Activist* is therefore a burlesque of the postcolonial politics in Nigeria. The situations and circumstances described in *The Activist* are sheer simulacra of the realities in Nigeria (7). The social chaos portrayed in *The Activist*, is also seen in the Niger Delta, as is echoed by Oladoyin Mayowa who in *The State and Ethno-Communal Violence in Nigeria: The Case of Ife-Modakeke* says that violence in Nigeria can be explained from environmental and economic perspectives. It draws its origin from very harsh living conditions, exclusion from political participation and the brutal experience of ethno-communal skirmishes, which have recently become a feature of life in Nigeria. The state has promoted communal violence, and it also reveals the logical contradictions of communal violence in Nigeria (196).

According to the compilation of the reviews on *The Activist* by Farafina, its publisher on (<http://en.wikipedia.org/reviewoftheactivist>), Dike Okoro of the University of Wisconsin notes that *The Activist* is a monumental literary achievement and a passionate exploration of Nigeria's political complexity and social tensions of recent decades. The nameless protagonist, clearly a symbol of the patriotic and visionary Nigerian, irrespective of ethnicity, trades the bliss of life overseas and joins the bandwagon to develop his native land in this deeply moving narrative linked by conflicting ties of moral concern, human rights, environmental pollution, honour, courage, patriotism, love, betrayal, tragedy and triumph.

Lokangaka Losambe, Professor of English and Chair, University of Vermont, while reviewing *The Activist* notes that through the collective consciousness of three enigmatic characters; the Activist, a cosmopolitan and radical scholar; Ebi, a staunch environmentalist and womanist; and Pere, an agent of change and representative of the down-trodden in the Niger Delta society, Ojaide takes the reader into a masterfully woven web of universal issues. This novel is both a befitting tribute to the late novelist, social critic, and environmentalist Ken

Saro-Wiwa and a welcome addition to the fast-growing corpus of radical literature in Africa.

Joseph E. Obi of the University of Richmond opines that "in *The Activist*, Nigeria's acclaimed poet, Tanure Ojaide, brings his sharp sensibilities and writing skills to prose storytelling. The protagonist makes a reverse trip from America to a home whose young and able are straining at the leash to escape to the perceived comforts of the West. The rest of the story is that of a single individual who joins ranks with the long suffering people of Nigeria's Niger Delta who (along with their beleaguered natural environment) are caught in the impersonal cash nexus of Global Oil and the collusive African state. Always aware of the complex links between broad structural forces and the minutiae of everyday life, Ojaide weaves a compelling narrative that illuminates the contradictions of state and society in contemporary Africa. *The Activist*, however, is more than testimonial literature. It is visionary and bold as it attempts to answer the eternal question: What is to be done? At this moment in our densely interlaced world, this book could not be more timely." In *The Poetry of Tanure Ojaide*, Tayo Olafioye is of the opinion that "Ojaide weaves an intricate web of metaphors, analogy, allegory, allusion and vignette-intertwining private, public, cultural, emotional and intellectual experiences together to register a didactic lesson, pas history lecturing the contemporary and the difference in their value-deficits. The poet uses elements of the past to teach and direct the present" (109).

One thing the afore-mentioned reviewers have in common is that Ojaide's *The Activist* relates to the opinion and suffering of the common man. The reviewers are also aware of the aesthetic efficiency of Ojaide's narration of the novel. Understandably, Ojaide's work is a product of his environment. In order to effect change, Ojaide crafted the character of an activist, who returns from a distant travel to explore what modernity, politics, technological development and ethnicity resulting principally from oil exploration in the Niger Delta have done to his roots and to the Niger Deltans.

For Dike Okoro in his article entitled *Courage Under Fire in the Motherland*, the celebrated Nigerian poet and author Tanure Ojaide fires a rifle by bringing us *The Activist*, a provocative novel that articulates to readers the irony of oil exploitation in modern Nigeria. *The Activist* has a mission; to change the livelihood of his impoverished Niger Delta community(1).

Kaine Agary is also from the Niger Delta region, and her experiences are reflected in *Yellow-Yellow*. Most of the reviewers of *Yellow Yellow* critique the text from the angle of subjugation of women and the inhumane subjugation of the masses by those in authority. In Allwell Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu's *Crisis and the Literature of the Niger Delta: The Dual Aesthetics of Lachrymal and the Revolution*, they evaluated several works from the region, including Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. They suggest that there is the dual aesthetics of lamentation and revolution that characterize the literary texts of writers from the Niger Delta. They particularly believe that despite Agary's concerted effort to restrict her exploration to the personal, she also makes profound statements about the people of the Niger Delta as a cornered public that has exhausted its crying, sulking and complaining about its fate. She also presents them as a people that can mobilize themselves to undertake violent protests and other revolution-inclined activities (69).

In Beatrice Orife's critical appraisal of some selected novels of female writers from the Niger Delta, she argues that the central concern of these feminists is the validation of the women's claim that the women are victims of a patriarchal system. She claims that these women writers are redeeming the diminutive image of women by telling their own stories by themselves. She concludes that *Yellow-Yellow*, *Destination Biafra* and *Condolences* raised vital issues about the survival of man in a degraded environment; however, Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* shows that the people of the oil rich Niger Delta region groan under the evil hands of

the multinational that exploit the land, to the detriment of the people. She mirrors the disastrous effects, both human and environmental of oil exploration in the Niger Delta (170).

Also in E.D. Simon's *The Niger Delta and the Women's Predicament: A Study of Kaine Agary's Yellow-Yellow*, the critic sees the novel as depicting the sociological conditions of the woman and the Niger Delta environment. He draws the attention of the reader to the social ills prevalent in the region as well as the female predicament and the dichotomy between the rural and urban areas. J.E Akung and A. Iloeje in *Kaine Agary's Yellow-Yellow: A Study in Eco-criticism* examine the place of women within the political ecology of Nigeria. They suggest that "women in the novel have been sexually polluted. The body of the woman symbolizes nature which man has polluted" (75).

Ignatius Chukwumah in *The Displaced Male Figures in Kaine Agary's Yellow Yellow* notes that "Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* is a literary enterprise whose main thrust is to expose further the socio-economic predicament of the people as well as to explore the debilitating effect of poverty on the feminine psyche" (2). Chukwuma also argues that:

Kaine Agary's Yellow-Yellow interrogates the moral consequences of the situation in the Niger Delta. The young girls become easy sex preys to the white oil workers and expatriates. The heroine, Zilayefa is a function of such social malfunctioning, and, unfortunately, later found herself being also a sex object for self-sustenance. This too, is the story of many young ladies, who, against their inner desires, are forced to subject their bodies to sex exploiters (many of whom are the architects of the economic situation that turned them to such in the first place). Agary advocates girl-child education as a solution to this problem. Zilayefa's mother understands from the beginning that only proper education will give her daughter a different kind of future from her

own. The presence of many Yellow-Yellow, with different names such as -African- profitsø -born-trowaysø -ashawo-pickinsø -father- unknownsø is Agaryø's own way of waging war against the moral decadence that has become a feature of the present day realities in the Niger Delta. (4)

Oil spillage destroys farm lands as well as the aquatic life of the people, thereby causing villagers to lose their source of livelihood. Talking about her motherø's farm, Zilayefa recalls that -however, I think she had lost that land a long time ago, because each season yielded less than the season before. Not unlike the way she and others in the village had gradually lost, year after year, the creatures of the river to oil spills, acid rain, gas flares, and who knows what elseø(4). To further worsen the woes of the people, the oil company refuses to pay compensation for all the damages done, declaring sabotage among the youths. Women now travel into the interior to farm and this takes a toll on their wellbeing. Youths become restive and violence erupts. Zilayefaø's mother is saddled with the responsibility of raising her biracial daughter after her abandonment. Her concern for her daughterø's well being leads her to living a life of self denial. Agary says -she would make sure that I accomplished what she had not. She had inherited a small piece of land from her family, which she farmed and sometimes she would go fishingí she took care of my needs and sometimes went without food. She expelled herself from the womanø's group so that she would not be forced to spend money on wrappers for their outingsø(8). The menace of degradation caused by oil spill not only destroys the villagerø's source of income, it also shatters their dream, -The day my motherø's farmland was overrun by crude oil is the day her dream for me started to wither, but she carried on watering it with hopeø (10). Chukwumah notes again that this care and attention calls to mind the womenø's role in Sembene Ousmaneø's *God's Bits of Wood*, where the women sell everything of value to support their families. Binaebi acknowledges the importance of education, hence her insistence on Yellowø's education. She therefore consents

to Nkechi Okoli's claim cited in Oduaram and Bhola that "the education of the girl-child liberate her from the shackles of abuse, oppression, poverty, exclusion, harmful cultural practices and culturally based limitations on their rights. Education elevates the female to the state of partners in progress with men instead of continuing as a liability" (431). This assertion goes with Chioma Opara's view that "simply put female education is projected as the fillip to economic empowerment, which is starkly contrasted with poverty and deprivation" (98).

In an article entitled *Petro-Culture And Eco-Feminism: The Woman's Body As A Metaphor For Ecological Degradation And Domination In Kaine Agary's Yellow-Yellow*, Florence Orabueze notes that "as the Niger Delta region and its people are devastated, dominated and dehumanized, Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* is one of the literary texts that mirrors the suffering of these masses. She writes the novel as one of the eco-feminists, who according to Ann B. Dobie are "combining postmodern approaches with ecological issues. They are interested in the way representations of nature are influenced by gender. They also see the similarities in the oppression of women and their efforts to dominate nature" (247). Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, therefore, do not only narrate the events of the environmental crises in the Niger Delta, it also tells the story of a fictive world that sees the woman's body as simply a sex-object that would be mercilessly exploited like the oil cartel exploits the resources of the region. Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* also explores the emotional and psychological conflict in Zilayefa, a mulatto girl who grows up without a father. This brings to the reader's attention the extra burden of children of inter-racial unions in the Niger Delta. Zilayefa does not have any paternal identity and as such does not know who her father is and she is desirous, like any other normal child, of knowing who her father is. Her not being given any identity underscores the ubiquitous nature of such occurrence. Not only that Agary projects the degradation of women in the world of the novel, she also projects the degradation of the

mulatto children, who are looked down upon. She shows that the contact between the Westerners and the Niger Delta has produced for centuries not only the exploitation and the degradation of the environment, but also the exploitation and degradation of the Niger Delta women and children.

Bayo Ogunjimi in *Literature and National Development* notes that like Saro Wiwa, Agary portrays her people as illiterate, gullible and rural, exploited because of conservative dogmatism and adherence to superstition (85). In a review entitled *Beyond Nigerian Nightmare on Yellow-Yellow*, Precious Ona says that to Agary, the suffering is in two forms: the women suffer in the hands of the foreign oil expatriate and in the hands of local men who discriminate, subjugate and relegate them to the background. For the young girls in Agary's fiction, the only escape is through prostitution. The hazards of prostitution are numerous. Apart from sexually transmitted diseases, the men abuse women physically or pushed objects like bottles into their privates as part of their fun (35). Zilayefa allows herself to be infatuated by Admiral, a sixty year old man. In her assumed naivety, she recalls that 'I felt a deep sense of longing for him not because of the comfort Emem hinted at, 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). Admiral is the devourer who capitalizes on a helpless girl's innocence. Columbus Ogbujah opines that 'while male sexual vices are often overlooked, female infidelity is treated with utmost contempt and hostility, resulting in the woman being publicly disgraced' (24). Precious Ona further lends her voice to Ogbujah's claims by saying:

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 men who flaunt their wealth and gain

access to an extensive network of female sexual partners. Agary portrays more on this point using the character of Admiral who fell in love with Zilayefa and impregnates her. She believes strongly that the Niger Delta environmental predicament contributes to social and economic deprivation; further complicating the development situation of women in the region. What Zilayefa suffers is similar to her mother's fate despite the latter's admonitions. Old men like Admiral who should protect her from all forms of abuses, turn around to exploit her sexuality. This exposes the socio-economic ills in the society emanating from the decay in man's environment. (35)

In conclusion, following the above review, the lacuna to be filled in this particular research which is the textual analyses of *The Activist* and *Yellow-Yellow* using the tools of ecoactivism and resistance has not been treated. Due to this notion, this research will study the characters thrust upon *The Activist* and *Yellow-Yellow* as they interpret their roles as ecoactivists and resistant fighters.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theory plays a huge part in research, or else, every study will stand in isolation. This role sets research as a tool, to provide for powerful abstraction and to enable the development of research links and research networks that can connect and interlink studies. Every theoretical perspective strives to investigate the interrelationship among society. It approaches this immense task by narrowing it, by selecting particular dimension of society, person and behaviour as especially worthy of attention. Theory connects events in a unified web. Nicholas Walliman in *Research Methods: The Basics* states that:

The term theory is rather imprecise. In research, it refers to a statement that makes claim about a phenomenon. It can range from complex large scale, well researched and substantiated claims developed through academic research, to informal guesses or hunches about specific situations. A theory is a system of ideas based on interrelated concepts, definitions and propositions with the purpose of explaining or predicting phenomenon. (67).

The theory that underpins this research is ecocriticism. The term has a broad domain and has been expressed through many literary genres. The fundamental stand of ecocriticism is that the ideas and structures of desire which govern the interactions between humans and their natural environment are important if we can get a handle on our ecological predicament. Invariably, over-exploitation of natural resources and man's disregard for air, water and soil that sustains human life have given rise to the question of survival of both

man and the environment that inhabits him. Ecocriticism is one the ways in which humanists fight for their habitat. This is because there rising frustration exacerbated by people's inability to derive tangible benefits from their God given wealth.

3.2 ECOCRITICISM

Some of the most widely known ecocritics are Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, Simon C. Estok, Harold Fromm, William Howarth, William Rueckert, Suellen Campbell, Michael P. Branch and Glen A. Love. Hojjat and Daronkolae note that "ecocriticism as a term emerged in the world of critical study in the late 1970s by combining "criticism" and "ecology" (1). They further note that M.H. Abrams believes that "ecocriticism or environmental criticism designates the critical writings which explore the relations between literature and biological and physical environment, conducted as an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities" (1). As Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm mention in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, "even in the field of literature, ecocriticism took longer to become established than most recent movement in literary theory" (xvii). They further claim that:

If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed, you might never know that there was an earth at all. In

contrast, if you were to scan the newspaper headlines of the same period, you would learn of oil spills, lead and asbestos poisoning, toxic waste contamination, extinction of species at an unprecedented rate, battles over public land use, protests over nuclear waste dumps, a growing hole in the ozone layer, predictions of global warming, acid rain, loss of topsoil, destruction of the tropical rain forest, famines, droughts, floods, hurricanes, a United Nations special conference on environment and development, a United States president declaring the 1990 "the decade of the environment" and a world population that topped five billion. (xvi)

Geeta Sahu suggests that the word "ecocriticism" first appeared in William Rueckert's essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*, in 1978. However, it was only in the 1990s that ecocriticism emerged as a separate discipline, although it is a fact that the relationship between man and his physical environment had always been interesting to literary critics. The interest is at the scientific level as well as various forms of literary expressions. Human beings have a natural quest to find their roots and be a part of the natural environment that they belong to. But at the same time, they have overexploited natural resources and exploited nature to its fullest. In essence, ecocriticism is concerned with the relationship between literature and environment or how man's relationship with his physical environment is reflected in literature (23).

Ecocriticism shows that literature should be approached in a way that includes man as an ecosystem, and not in isolation. In the words of Chris Onyema, "ecocritics must outgrow the notion that human beings are so special that the earth exists for their comfort alone, to move beyond a narrow ego-consciousness towards a more inclusive eco-consciousness" (196). As Klue argues, "man is neither master nor slave to it, but simply one part of an intricate system" (1). It seeks to inquire into its reach and studies the

interdependence of man and nature. The study is a cautionary warning to mankind that the exploitation of nature over a period of time will lead to its outburst.

Ann B. Dobie in *From Theory to Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism* says the following about ecocriticism:

Several scholars have built on Cherryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's fundamental definition by adding an extra literary purpose to it. Lawrence Bull, for example, points out that "any study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment should be conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis." Simon Estok extends Lawrence Bull's comment by saying that "ecocriticism takes a stand by its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study and by commitment to making connections." Camilo Godinez too recognises its social purpose when he speaks of motivating audience to live within a limit that will be binding over generations. In *Shakespeare and Ecocriticism*, Estok broadens ecocriticism to include the study of "any theory that is committed to effecting change by analysing the faction, thematic, artistic, social, historical and ideological tenets of the environment or aspects of it; represented in documents (literary or otherwise) that contribute to material practices in material worlds (243).

She opines further that "what all these perspectives on the field have in common is that they are interested in examining the relationship of literature and nature as a way to renew a reader's awareness of the nonhuman world and his or her responsibility to sustain it. Sharing the fundamental premise that all things are interrelated, they are actively concerned about the impact of human actions on the environment (239). It is also Dobie who best notes that

reading or analysing as an ecocritic involves being attentive to environmental issues that have been traditionally relegated to the background. Thus, she lists out what one should look out for while analysing a work using ecocriticism. She states that one is expected to show in his essay why the work or issue one has chosen to discuss serves that end. In the course of the research, one should answer the following questions to come to the conclusion that ecocriticism is suitable for one's research work:

- What insights about the natural world does this text or writer have to offer?
- Does it raise questions or issues about nature or the environment that readers should be concerned with?
- Does the work deal with environmental issues that are addressed in the study of history, philosophy, psychology, art or ethics?
- What has been overlooked in traditional readings that can enrich public awareness of humankind's impact on the natural world? (244).

It is in line with these questions that the theoretical framework of this research proves its suitability by employing the tools of ecoactivism and resistance. This way, the characters in the novels are shown as being responsible for their actions. They are revolutionaries who believe that their region is ripe for a revolution. They become ecoactivists and take up their stance against those that dare to stop them from regaining their freedom and obtaining justice. Serpil Oppermann notes that the only discernible pattern among critical definitions is their focus on the importance of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. They also share the common aim to synthesize literary criticism with the natural sciences, and the literary studies with environmental philosophies. Thus, the fight is no longer between people of different colour. It is now between man and his environment. Ecocriticism strives to challenge the status quo, to change the injustice that is meted out on the

environment by man. Thus, ecocriticism is a revolutionary theory, a theory that tries to retrace man's steps and strives to stop him from destroying his environment.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research is qualitative and analytical and is based on the literary research methodology which involves the application of the ecocritical theory to the study of the primary texts, to show its suitability to this work. Thus, there is critical textual analysis of the primary texts to be used for this research. The texts include: Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* and Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. This method of literary analysis is applied to show ecocriticism as the theoretical framework that underpins this research. For the establishment of ecocriticism 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 necessary, excerpts are drawn, described and interpreted from the primary texts to show the relevance of ecocriticism to this research.

In terms of structure, this research comprises five chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic under study and gives background information about the occurrences that form the basis for the topic. Chapter two deals with the literature review of critical works that are related to the study. Chapter three is focused on the theoretical framework that serves the purpose of this study. A brief definition of this theory will be done to show its multidimensional aspect. Chapter four shows the textual analyses of the primary texts while the fifth chapter compares the protagonists and offers the summary and conclusion of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

TEXTUAL ANALYSES OF THE ACTIVIST AND YELLOW-YELLOW

Ecocriticism is committed to raising awareness of the reading public regarding its responsibility to nature. In analysing *Yellow-Yellow* and *The Activist* with the framework adopted by Ann Dobie, what has been relegated or overlooked in the reading of the aforementioned texts that can enrich public awareness of human's impact on the natural world and also treat issues that readers are concerned with are discovered. The issues that will be discussed will border on the negative impact of oil activities on the environment; oil spillage, gas flaring, oil exploiters and their manner of compensations, pipeline vandalism, poverty in the midst of opulence, conflict and migration. These issues are basically what have been neglected in the study of the primary texts that Ann Dobie wants an ecocritic to explore using the theory of ecocriticism. The common ground for ecocriticism is the connection of literature to the environment; the way what has been hidden in the discourse of our environment is brought to light. Thus, an ecocritic tries to see how man's environment is represented in literature, the value of nature as seen in the literary plain. In this way, literature tries to save or salvage man's environment by rejecting the status quo set by those who proclaim they are in authority. The reason for this change is because the actions of man have a negative impact on the environment. Thus, ecocriticism steps in to help restore man's environment to normalcy. In the analysis of *The Activist* and *Yellow-Yellow*, ecocriticism adopts the patterns of ecoactivism and resistance to restore man's environment to order. It is in showing the working of ecoactivism and resistance, their mingling and intricate weave around the characters and actions in *The Activist* and *Yellow-Yellow* that ecocriticism will prove its suitability for this research. Both texts try to adopt ecoactivism and resistance as the necessary tools for their analyses, but while Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* strives to involve all

the characters in the pursuit of freedom, Kaine Agaryo's *Yellow-Yellow* follows the withering dreams of females caught-up in a degraded environment, made worse by patriarchy.

4.1 THE DISCOURSE OF ECOACTIVISM AND RESISTANCE IN *THE ACTIVIST*

From the title of the text, it is obvious that *The Activist* evokes ecoactivism and resistance; politically and intellectually. Ecoactivism breeds resistance and vice versa. Activism and resistance sometimes involve rebellious activities which engage the mind to challenge the accepted prejudiced status quo, norms and dictatorial forms of governance which the masses are subjected to. Intellectual and political ecoactivism deal with the ideological and political education or engagements necessary to raise the awareness of the masses about changing an unjust order. These forms of activism are important in combating the ills in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which is the setting of *The Activist*. The nameless character, the Activist, is a returnee from the United States of America. Ecoactivism and resistance are not just on the part of the Activist; rather they are woven around the other characters in the text.

Ojaide portrays the disillusionment and the despondence of the marginalised Niger Deltans due to the decay in their environment. Their embitterment emanates from the games of oil politics, ethnic marginalisation and environmental predation their leaders play with the wealth of the region. Whatever the Activist has done right from the day he returns to the Niger Delta from the United States of America is for the good of the Niger Deltans. He says, "all I care for is the Niger Delta state. I want us to have our soil, water and air as healthy as it used to be. We have to douse the fire that is threatening our existence" (341). The Activist returns to witness the wake of destructive hurricane as far as the environment is concerned. He feels the anguish of his people and thinks of how to help make their environment

conducive for them. This is because many people are convicted for crimes they do not commit too many hungry people going to bed at night even as rich childless couples live in ten-room mansions many helpless women killed by psychotic men so many despots hold down large populations by rulers of aimed coercion (58). The Activist prepares to challenge the government and the oil companies by gathering evidences, in paper and photo forms. He kept a file with newspaper cuttings of various forms of pollution, clouds of smoke enveloping human beings in their homes, women fetching water from a greenish stream where the multinational companies worked in Africa and Latin America, and many more (24). He is aware that if people cannot have access to the simplest of things like water, then there is a big problem especially when the region that inhabits these people contributes to the wealth of the nation.

The Activist sets out for a resistance mission. He knows that he cannot accomplish his work of resistance and activism alone. He studies his environment and begins to make friends with people that will impart positively on their environment, people who will agree with him that the Niger Delta is ripe for a revolution. With each person he meets, one or two environmental issue are analysed and done away with. The Activist's meeting with Pere Ighogboja portrays the roles of *Area Boys* in the region; Tobi Ishaka's meeting with the Activist helps in treating the issue of oil companies and their manner of compensation. With Omagbemi Mukoro, Ojaide helps us to confront the problems of blowouts due to gas flares and oil spillage. Since his return from the United States of America, the Activist has observed the activities and actions of the *Area Boys* who are also referred to as the *Egba Boys*. Their roles in the violent confrontation of the oil companies always draw the attention of both local and international bodies to the plight of the people of Niger Delta. The narrator of *The Activist* summarizes the actions of the area boys in this way:

The poor economic situation promoted armed robbery. The area boys were not mindless robbers but hardened locals who felt they had to share in whatever they could from the economic life of their communities. They were jobless urchins, capable of robbing, killing, and doing any type of dastardly act for pay to survive the hard times. Their morality and ethics were convoluted by the socio-economic dictates of the time but they knew very well the experience of survival. Call it hustling, harassment, blackmail, or extortion; they were ready to take on the outsider to eke out a living. (59)

From the perspective of the Area Boys, they were fighters attempting not only to reclaim what had been robbed from them but also holding firmly to what was theirs that others were attempting to snatch away (56). The area boys have watched their homeland boom with oil but this oil boom has turned into doom for them. The money realized from the Niger Delta region is used to develop other states while those indigenous to the Niger Delta suffer. The kidnapping of the expatriates working in the oil companies is a major preoccupation of the Area Boys. They build up personal wealth from the proceeds of ransoms, which the companies paid secretly even though they publicly deny dealing with armed gangs and terrorists. The *Area Boys* or *Egba Boys* are fighters attempting not only to reclaim what has been robbed from them, but also holding firmly to what is theirs that others want to snatch away. They believe that their people deserve justice and equity for their wealth that is being used to cater for others. The lackadaisical attitude put up by oil companies and the government is what most times trigger the anger and frustration of the *Area Boys*, who are also part of the resistance fighters recruited by the Activist in the cause for a new Niger Delta. The *Area Boys* are also aware that:

Charity in the form of tidbits thrown about to a desperate crowd should not take the place of justice and fairness. They also knew that among them that

should fight for them, such as the academics and the chiefs, were interested in lining their individual pockets. They wanted a formal share to develop their area and compensate the people for their occupations destroyed by the oil-prospecting activities. They also wanted the oil companies to return a fraction of their profit to restore the environment that had been devastated by various forms of pollution. In their minds, that was not too much to ask for (79).

The Activist's first point of connection is Pere Ighogboja, who is the chairman of the *Area Boys*. To become the head of the *Area Boys*, he has witnessed various forms of injustice meted out to his environment by those in authority. Pere is aware that "outsiders were not allowing him and his group to live and so he would make life hard for them in their paradise, his hell. He would force them to concede that he and his people had a right to live on their God-given resources" (81). The Activist teams up with Pere to establish the *Delta Cartel*, a pipeline vandalism business which will aid in milking the Bell Oil company dry and always make it count its losses. Ojaide pairs these characters because of the positive results their resistant work will generate. Pere agrees with the Activist that their people need fish and water that have sustained them from the beginning of time but they have been marginalised and robbed of their natural resources. As the narrator puts it:

They needed farmlands to cultivate cassava, yams and other subsistent crops to live on. They also had to grow much needed vegetables, and of course, they had to live a healthy life. The air used to be cool because of constant rain and the luxuriant forest, but oil slicks, blowouts, and gas flares had destroyed that life. Even the rain that fell was so soot-black that no more did anybody drink rainwater, which of all waters, used to be described as God-given water. The people have lost their green refuge as well. Their forest used to deep green and

lush foliage, the pride of the tropics, but that had changed, since fire often followed oil and gas accidents. (82)

Pere believes that the Niger Delta can be transformed from the ramshackle it has become into a region that will not only boost the economy of the nation, but will be a healthy environment for its inhabitants. He has great respect for the Activist, whom he realizes can help liberate their people from the bondage that enslaves them. He gives all the support the Activist needs in his resistance stride which will see all the enemies of the Niger Delta eliminated. The Activist and Pere aim to push out the outsiders or to be accepted and treated respectfully by the oil company owners as the owners of the resources that are being carted away by outsiders. The constant looting of oil in the Niger Delta has made its indigenes to become despondent because outsiders gain more from the exploration of oil from their region. The indigenes become recipients of charities from their children in the cities because there is no way of getting enough money to live on in their rural homes.

From the analyses above, there is a clear pattern of the working of ecoactivism and resistance. This pattern shows itself in the way the Activist weaves and crochets his plan for a better Niger Delta. With the recruitment of a new resistance fighter, a new plan is hatched for the final attainment of that Niger Delta its indigenes dream about. With Pere, the Activist is able to set up the *Delta Cartel*. Having secured the friendship and partnership of Pere, the Activist moves on to another man whose integrity is unquestionable. It is Tobi Ishaka that comes to the Activist's mind. He has heard stories of how upright the chief is. According to the narrator of the text, 'you could count on chief Ishaka to tell the truth and for knowing that his people were being short changed in the oil wealth' (137). Chief Tobi Ishaka is aware of the subjugation of his people. Initially his people cultivate and produce most of their foods, but all of a sudden they travel far and wide to buy fish, cassava, yam, among others. At a time when other chiefs in the region are busy filling their pockets with money they collect from oil

companies, Tobi Ishaka is the only man that stands to challenge and shame the other monarchs about the bad example they set for the youths. To silence the local population from demanding compensation for their decayed environment, oil companies build palaces for local monarch. They not only paid the monarchs and chiefs monthly stipends but also cared for their luxuries that included big cars and jeeps (132). In return, the chiefs are expected to stop the people from protesting against the oil companies. He condemns the actions of his fellow chiefs when he says that the white robe of chieftaincy and the coral beads we wear sets us apart. But we seem not to know our responsibilities. We are supposed to be the clean ones but I am afraid we even stink. We secretly eat forbidden food and wipe our mouths, we cannot deceive our ancestors and they will surely not forgive us (137). He knows that the situation they find themselves in will come to an end someday. Thus, he joins in steering the wheel of change that will make the new Niger Delta a reality.

While dealing with the issue of unemployment in the region, it is Dennis Ishaka that represents the fraction of the educated who despite their literacy are jobless. Dennis's case is a bit different. He is only employed to work in Bell Oil Company because the owners are looking for a way to silence his father who always speaks against the evil meted out to his people by the Bell Oil Company. Tobi Ishaka has rejoiced when oil is first discovered in his farmland. He expects a transformation of the rural place to a city. With Dennis Ishaka's education, Tobi expects that his son will open doors for other indigenes from the region. Dennis is eventually employed by the Bell Oil Company but he is kept away from anything that involves the drilling of oil. According to the narrator, Dennis's bosses placed him where he would never need to soil his hands. He was placed in the corporate hospitality section of the company and was one of the officers that received important Foreign Dignitaries, International Oil Exporters, State Governors, and other visitors classified as Important Personalities (303). The foreigners are scared of the educated indigenes. They know that if

they find out the rudiments of oil digging, drilling and extraction, their help will no longer be needed. They will no longer have to connive with the government to loot the people dry.

The vehicle of ecoactivism and resistance find their way again into the heart of the Niger Delta university students. This time the Activist chooses Omagbemi Mukoro to spearhead this ecoactivism and resistance from an academic environment. As a former cultist, Omagbemi uses his wealth of experience gathered during his days of cultism in school to carry the banner of ecoactivism and resistance. Just like the other ecoactivists in the text, he believes that the major problem of their community is corruption. He watches helplessly as his region falls apart like a pack of cards. In the Niger Delta university, money continues to change hands, lazy female students continue with their lecturers, even as some lecturers continue to force some female students to have sex with them. The environment is not even conducive for learning because most of the equipment and materials that are supposed to be used in the University for the Attainment of academic excellence are not made available for students. Omagbemi and other students, decide to use one voice to speak against the injustice meted out to his people. As the Students' Union president, Omagbemi extends a hand to the villagers to help in their fight for a new Niger Delta. He sees for himself the callousness of both the oil company whose pipes leakage caused the fire outbreak in Ekakpamre town and the federal government that refuse to be responsible for the life of its citizens and their environment. The negligence of the Bell Oil Company sometimes gets to a bile level. The way it always turns its eyes away from the pollution caused by their companies is nauseating. Most times when oil blowouts occur, the natives are thrown into a state of quagmire. Blowouts continue to destroy villagers, and demolish not only their properties, but their sources of livelihood. The narrator describes a scene of blowouts due to gas flares and oil spillage in this way:

An oil blowout, exacerbated by a pipe leakage and fuelled by gas flares, threw Ekakpamre and its people into an unprecedented state of anxiety. The blaze was savage. At first children ran out to watch it but soon parents ran to physically drag them from endangering their lives. With strong winds blowing, anybody nearby, anybody nearby could be engulfed by the flames. Bell Oil company knew very well that there was a blow out 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 material. The poisonous methane gas fumes engulfed plants, wildlife and humans around for days. (260)

As the Activist and his team prepares for the restoration of the Niger Delta, there is also negative activism perpetuated by some characters who wish that the greasing of their palms by the Bell Oil Company will continue. These oppositionists help to fan the embers of decay, injustice and corruption in the Niger Delta environment. They include Professor Tobore Ede, who once serves as the community development officer. While addressing the students of the Niger Delta university, he says that -the villagers set their village on fire because they wanted to extort money from Bell Oil Companyø (202). His utterances are a far cry from what is obtainable in the region. Another intellectual who toils with the emotions of the people is Professor Kokoba, who betrays his people. He plays on their gullibility and rides on the wing of his intellectualism to deceive them. Before the Roko village fire incident, the villagers see the need to protest because of a blowout in the village. Prof. Kokoba, as the spokesman of the oil Bell Oil Company tries to assuage the feelings of the villagers by telling them the village was safe. And since Prof. Kokoba is educated, they believe him. They also believe him because -he is their son and they contributed to send him to England to study Lawø (186). Prof Kokoba chooses to thank his benefactors by sapping them of their last penny. He works

against them by taking the bribe offered to him by the Bell Oil Company. Deception and betrayal roar their heads through these characters who sell the trust of their people so that their hands will be greased by the crisp money of the Bell Oil Company.

Ecoactivism and resistance in the text do not revolve just around the characters. There are organisations and groups that help to promote the positive cause of the Niger Delta. These organisations include the Women of the Niger Delta Forum (WODEFOR) and the United Nations Organisation (UNO). The relationship between the Activist and Ebi Emasheyi and their eventual marriage help to intensify their common goal of liberating their people. Ebi helps to start up the Women of the Delta Forum (WODEFOR) where she is its secretary. Ebi teams up with Mrs Timi to work for the Niger Delta environment. Women in different occupations in life are invited to be part of WODEFOR when it is formed; women farmers, traders, priestesses, chiefs, lawyers, lecturers, doctors. The women in the text are aware of the extent of the decay that is threatening to gulp their environment and they are ready to fix it. They did not leave the men to do all the work while they cheer at the background. Ebi and Timi Taylor as ecofeminists and as the most educated in the group try to sensitize others about infertility, malformed babies, early menstruation, early menopause, sexually transmitted diseases as the problems of the women of Niger Delta and the need to tackle these problems to improve the lives of the women in the region. The WODEFOR is an organization where the women of the Niger Delta can unite about their collective problems. As the narrator puts it, they would look for ways to talk to the oil companies to persuade them to arrest the deteriorating environmental situation in the Niger Delta (243). With encouragement from their husbands and the other women in their community, the Women of the Delta Forum (WODEFOR), plan a nude protest which is aborted at the last minute, due to the inhuman works of the men sent by the Bell Oil Company.

The conference that is organised by the United Nations Organizations on oil exploration is also an avenue for the Activist and his people to fight the oil companies that have been trying to rob them of what naturally belongs to them. The delegates of the Niger Deltans cannot travel to Amsterdam to plead their case because security men at the airport with directive from the federal government confiscate their passports. Also, some federal agents are sent to the Niger Delta region to confiscate the evidence the delegates want to present to the United Nations. Parts of the evidence include:

Coloured pictures of lakes and streams with green water, no doubt the chlorine and other chemicals used by the companies. They were also pictures of children sitting beside gas flaring sites and innocently inhaling poisonous gas, and of pregnant women sitting in front of their homes with blowouts less than a hundred yards imperilling not only their lives but the lives of their unborn children. There were pictures of impoverished children in the dugouts paddling towards the ocean to have a catch since there was no fish in the nearby creeks and rivers and the few shoals in the nearby waters were not safe for human consumption. (259)

The Activist and his people put up different forms of protest, but always at the last minute, their efforts are sabotaged by government agents. The nude protest is aborted, while most of the women are tear-gassed and raped. The delegates to the United Nations Organisations conference are stopped at the airport and their passports confiscated. But the Activist did not give up. In linking forces together to make the Niger Delta a better place, he establishes a media house. He also publishes a newspaper named *The Patriot* with the motto 'Justice and Humanity for the People'. He sets up this media house for 'he has seen how the concerns of the Niger Delta people had gone unreported. If he controlled a media house, that would not happen. The people needed allies in the media and he would provide one for them' (291). The

media help in shaping a people's opinion about the affairs in their environment. For the Activist, this is a way of gaining political power and contributing to excellent leadership for his people. With the success of *The Patriot*, he also wants to hold a key position in government to serve the people, and decides that the gubernatorial position will allow him to best serve his people. The Activist and Pere rally around and gather the support of other groups. They know that they need a coalition of groups to strengthen their position. Pere says that 'if you add the knowledge of the university teachers to the militancy of the students, we will have a formidable force to move the two mountains of the military government and the multinationals' Big wars are won with large armies, alliances and good strategies' (213). The Activist wages a vigorous campaign. He uses the 'fish' as a symbol for his campaign. Fish is well known to the people and will not be easily forgotten. Fishing and farming have been part of the Niger Deltans for a long time. Using fish as a campaign symbol restores the faith of his people, making them realise that they can be unchained from the manacles that have held them in bondage. This speech by the Activist further reveals another shade to the bondage he wants to disentangle his people from:

If you give me your vote, I will ask the oil companies to clean our creeks, streams, and rivers so that the fish population can return to the waters. My government will provide boats to travel around in the riverine area. We have the resources to help ourselves live better than we now live in the area. (341)

After the Activist wins the election, he restructures many abandoned projects and effects major changes to the state government. He creates a Ministry of Environmental and Mineral Matters to deal with the numerous problems of the Niger Delta, 'to harness its natural resources and also to clean the polluted soil, water and air and put out fires from gas flares and oil blowouts'. The newly elected governor brought back Dennis Ishaka from Amsterdam

and made him the commissioner of the new Ministry (344). He succeeds in restoring the lost glory of the Niger Delta.

What Ojaide has portrayed in *The Activist* is a utopian state. He wants a Niger Delta that is not marred by avarice, corruption and betrayal. He creates a state where the characters rally around to fight and condemn those who subjugate them. With his novel, he has provided us with a *novel* (fiction based on facts), which we can read and apply to the environment of the Niger Delta. We can also conclude that *The Activist* is a literary work committed to ecoactivism and resistance.

4.2 ECOACTIVISM AND RESISTANCE IN YELLOW-YELLOW

The wheels of activism and resistance are also steered in *Yellow-Yellow* through the characters in the text, especially through the female characters; though resistance is the dominant ecocritical tool. While Bibaebi and Sisi represent an older generation that have witnessed the rot in their environment for a long time, Zilayefa and Lolo stand for a new generation; the ones born into the decrepit of oil exploration and environmental degradation. These characters strive to resist and surmount the difficulties hurled to them by their environment. The youths in the nameless village are also part of the tools for the pattern of resistance observed in this text.

Zilayefa is the result of an affair between an Ijaw woman, Binaebi, and a Greek sailor. Agary shows that children are fathered by Europeans, British, Portuguese, Syrians, Lebanese, Filipinos, Chinese and Americans who come to do business in the region. At the expiration of their contracts, they abandon the women they have impregnated and flee the country, leaving these women to bear the brunt of raising their children as single mothers. Zilayefa belongs to

the *born-troways*, rejected by our fathers, or, worse, nonexistent to them (74). With Zilayefa's birth, Binaebi's chance of getting quality education is pruned. After she finds out that her lover has left the city without contacting her, she returns to her village to face the shame of being an unwed mother with nothing but dreams about my future. She would make sure that I accomplished what she had not (8). Agary shows the difficulties faced by a single mother who tries to raise her only child in an environment that is bedeviled by all manner of degradation and exploitation. Agary portrays Binaebi as a mother that is always careful when it comes to taking care of her daughter. Everything she does for Zilayefa is to ensure that she did not end up like her. She wants her daughter to become a better version of her, irrespective of the fact that she has lost her means of livelihood to oil spillage and blowouts due to gas flares. She always chastises Zilayefa whenever she is becoming wayward. Once, for a slight needling of a male friend, she screams at Zilayefa saying, "Yellow-Yellow, don't you have anything better to do than to *gbein mo* your backside like a jobless girl?" (17). Bibi is also one step behind Zilayefa monitoring her behaviour and stages of development. Bibi struggles to change the course of Zilayefa's life, but already she has challenges fulfilling the dream she has for her daughter due to oil spillage. As Zilayefa puts it, "one of the pipes that ran through my village broke and spilled oil over several hectares of land, my mother's included" (3). Due to the destruction on the farmland, Zilayefa says that "by the time I finished school, my mother did not have enough money for university. I could not even take the qualifying examinations because she did not have the registration fee" (10-11). This is the plight of many young school leavers in the Niger Delta.

Agary highlights the brunt borne by school children who are victims cut up in the degradation and exploitation of the wealth in their environment. The way the narrator puts it, "students are grossly cheated even as their region generates the greatest source of revenue for the nation. In school, children do not have all the textbooks, because most of them could not

afford all the textbooks. Schools could barely pay teachers and could not provide books for the students (9). As students struggle to make do with the books they can afford, youths in the village become restive. The decayed region makes it impossible for its indigenes to live a purposeful and profitable life. The whole region is thrown into a state of quagmire. The villagers are restless; the youths are taking up odd jobs from other cities and states even as the wealth generated from their region is used to feed other people. They become the benefactors of charities from the people they are supposed to be feeding. The only way for these youths to resist the injustice meted out to them is to fight back, to fight the companies and the government that have held them captives in their own home. Zilalefa says that her people react to the cruelty meted out to them by the oil companies in this way:

Some boys from my village joined the others from other villages to kidnap oil company executives or oil bar company workers from doing their work. Mostly they were successful, but sometimes one or two of the boys failed to return from a mission. The word around the village was that the police had caught and killed them, but we would not hear about this on the radio. (10)

When fighting and kidnapping seem not to be the solution to the problems in the region, the natives resolve to seek help from their leaders. These aids come in the form of stipends and compensation. But most times, the oil companies refuse to pay for the damage they have done to the environment, rather they claim that they suspected sabotage by the youths and were not going to pay for compensation for all the destruction that the pipelines have caused (4). For this frivolous excuse by the oil companies, the villagers are subjected to an untold hardship and destitution. The farmlands in the village are gone, buried with dead fishes in the belly of the greenish rivers. There is no electricity, people buy food from the cities, these foods are basically what they can cultivate and harvest, but with the decay in their region, there is constant conflict, fights, treachery and betrayal going on in the village. Agary

portrays an environment that is polluted and lacks the most basic things in life like drinking water. The villagers are forced to drink polluted water from the river. Zilayefa reflects on her life, and of the untold hardship meted out to her people. She captures her suffering and that of her people in this way:

How many more times could I bear the pain like a hundred razor blades slashing my private part because the water that washed it was the same water that received the waste rejected by my body in its attempt to cleanse itself? The water that flowed with streaks of blue, purple, and red, as drops of oil escaped from the pipeline that moved the wealth from beneath my land and into the pockets of the selected few who ruled Nigeria was the same water I drank...As petrol prices went up, bus fares went up, the price of bread went up, school fees went up, but salaries remained the same...One could get a licence without driving test, because there is so much palm greasing because of how things are in the country. You grease palms to get anywhere. Prostitutes grease palms of gatemen with crisp notes in order to get into hotels in their search for affluent men. In offices, you have to grease palms, from the front desk person to the secretary to loose her lips about Oga's availability. (110)

Before Zilayefa travels to the city, she has already preconceived what she wants to do with her body. Most of her actions are born out of curiosity. According to her, "I started to consider options that had never crossed my mind, and from what I knew of my mother, those options would never get her approval. I could find my way to a place like Bonny, the base of the expatriates working for the oil companies, and sell my body to a whitey. Some girls from my town did that in order to send money home to their families" (35). She is also curious about the white man, the basic attraction, what girls see in them apart from money. She searches for "that thing that my mother had fallen for. It was that thing that I had been waiting

to key in to. I wanted to understand what it was besides money that made beautiful twenty-year-old girls look at their short, fat, ugly fifty-year-old white husbands with so much affection (171). Agary also portrays the manner in which young girls flock to the cities in search of greener pastures, in search of better life than the one they left behind in their villages which are wrecked and scarred by degradation and exploitation. Most of the girls in the village migrate from the village to Port Harcourt and Bonny where the expatriates are domicile. They involve themselves in all manner of things to keep their white boyfriends and husbands. The way the narrator puts it, 'girls did anything to get a white. If it meant travelling deep into the bushes of Isoko land to get a love potion, then it had to be so. If it meant putting a scar on another girls face for daring to swoon in on the whitey they discovered and laid claims to first, then they were prepared for the battle. Whatever it took, they did (37).

Zilayefa resolves to leave the village because she feels that the answers to all her questions lie there. Her reason for yearning to leave her village for the city is so that she can save herself from 'certain death in my claustrophobic village (17), but her mother wants more for her. Binaebi knows the importance of education, hence her insistence on it. She silently acknowledges the fact that if her daughter is educated, she can take care of herself. She has looked around and she finds out that the kind of life she desires for her child cannot be obtained in their village, and she consents to her travelling to the city in search of a better life despite her initial chant of 'you are not serious; you want to spoil your life. Beautiful girl like you wants to go and throw away her life in Port-Harcourt? You are not going anywhere and that is final (43). In the city, Zilayefa learns that things are not as she assumes they will be because, 'the same poverty and discontent I was running away from was present in Port Harcourt. The only difference was that in Port Harcourt, people do not cry out as they did in the village, or maybe they did and the other sounds of the city swallowed their cries (99). People always hope that things will be different when they migrate to the city. Sometimes,

because of the wealth stolen from the villages which is used to develop the cities, the cost of living is always very high. When Zilayefa gets to Port Harcourt, she meets two women who change her life forever.

Zilayefa has Sisi and Lolo to thank for her new life in the city which she takes advantage of. During her stay with Sisi and Lolo, she comes in contact with another side of Sisi she has never known before. She and Sisi have the same background. Sisi knows her father but he is never part of her life. She is the voice of reason in the text, one who knows how deteriorated one's environment can be if not properly handled. Sisi is also aware that women become victims due to the exploits and manipulation of some wealthy men, who most times, throw crumbs of bread at them, hoping that they will come back for more. On one of the few occasions she lets her guard down, she says this to Zilayefa:

Well, I knew my father, but I didn't know him as a father. He never lived in the same house with us. You don't know your father and you can't do anything about it. Focus on the things you have control over. Study, pass your exams, and get your education. If you do that, nobody will take your future away from you because your father is not around.

Sisi understands the way of the world, the corrupt nature of her country, the subjugation of women by men. She wants Zilayefa to excel more than her, to become a better person, to show the world that something good can emanate from the slums in the Niger Delta. Sisi, despite her little education is a successful business woman. Through her exposure and brother's influence, she gets contracts and food supply. She also supplies toilet paper and leased pick-up trucks. In addition, she runs a boutique. Being resourceful, Sisi invests in real estate. She employs young girls to work for her, thereby empowering them. Through her humanitarian work, Sisi displays the ecofeminist in her. She becomes an ecofeminist and an

ecoactivist due to the way she rescues young girls and employ them. Young girls with bruised egos and shattered lives are able to become whole again. In Lolo, Zilayefa sees a future image of herself. She jumped into her shadow, accepting the possibility that this figure, who had instantly intrigued me, would envelop my own personality (52).

Zilayefa waddles through the inadequacies of her village, and finds herself facing a higher demon in Port-Harcourt. The issue of patriarchy starts to rear its head. She meets Admiral Kenneth Alaoui in Port Harcourt and everything her mother teaches her flies off the window. She is attracted to Admiral, not because he is wealthy, but she is curious about what having a father will be like. She says, 'I was hoping that the relationship would give me a taste of close paternal affection that I had never had (138). She also sleeps with Sergio out of curiosity. Before she realises her mistakes, she becomes pregnant. Everything her mother has fought for has been defeated. She is not sure if she is pregnant for Sergio or Admiral. Her reason for not wanting the child to turn out to be Sergio's is because, 'he was a white man, and as far as I was concerned, his home was nowhere other than Nigeria; he was a transient man with whom I had no future because as I have learnt, his type left when they had to and without looking back (173). On the other hand, Admiral wants her to terminate her pregnancy. She has never really meant much to him, just someone that tickles his fancy and satisfies his sexual urges. Talking about Admiral's change of attitude, Zilayefa says:

Admiral did not have to tell me he was not ready to have more children. He has two children who he took very care of, and that was it. The other children he was interested in were the ones who kept his bed warm. I had benefited from Admiral, and my bank account was enough proof. For a few months, I had bonded with the man who initiated me into womanhood, and while the going was good, he had taught me a few lessons about how to survive in the world. The best thing to do was hang on to the pronouncement that he wanted

me to succeed in life and to the pledge that he would anything for my success, whether or not it was true(174)

Zilayefa feels betrayed by the man she trusts so much for her emotional stability. She decides her pregnancy cannot stand as a hindrance to her education and a better future for her. She is not ready to be saddled with an unwanted pregnancy like her mother and the other women in her village. She therefore decides to take control of her future in order to continue with her education. She refuses to repeat the mistake of her mother. She steers the wheel of resistance and changes the pattern she wants her life to take. She takes a decision that even her mother may not acquiesce with, but will be proud of. This is because she refuses to be daunted by an environment marred by the injustice meted out to man by his fellow man. She did not want her child to grow up without a father, or find out that he or she is a continuation of the lineage of the born-troways. The only solution to her dilemma is an abortion which she performed by herself without the help of Dr George who must have done countless abortions for girls brought to him by Admiral. In her resolve to focus on her education, she becomes resistant and rejects the standards set by the society. She conquers the situation that tries to drag her back to the degraded environment she starts from.

4.3 THE PROTAGONISTS OF *THE ACTIVIST* AND *YELLOW-YELLOW*: TWO SOULS IN ONE WILDERNESS

The protagonist of Agaryø's *Yellow-Yellow* may be a teenager but that did not stop her from noticing the decay in her little village. From the first sentence in the text, Zilayefa says, -during my second to my 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 motherø's farm includedø(3). She is aware that her people survive on the proceeds from their farms and that with the spillage of oil over several hectares of land; her people are bound to suffer. In *The Activist*, the protagonist, the Activist, on his return from the United States of America is greeted by a new Niger Delta, one he cannot recognise. The rot in his environment has deepened to the extent that his people cannot fish anymore, for most of the fishes are dead and the rivers have turned green. With the withering of dreams which most of the villagers keep watering of hope, most of them tend to migrate to cities in search of a better life.

Zilayefa is determined to leave her village. When she gets to Port Harcourt, she finds out that migration cannot solve the problem of poverty. The Activist leaves his home town for the United States, being the beneficiary of a scholarship given to him by the Nigeriaø's Ambassador to America. But he returns to his country not just because he wants to teach in his own state university, but because, -when he went to bed at night, he thought for a long time about what needed to be addressedø(14). The Activist being one who has always lived the life of Activism is always moved by the degradation of his environment. -He had pasted to his bedroom wall photos of starving children and those of raped and battered women. He kept file with newspaper cuttings of various forms of pollution, clouds of smoke enveloping human beings in their homes, women fetching water from a greenish streamø(24). The Activist cannot believe the sorry state of the Niger Delta he has returned to. The narrator of *The Activist* puts it thus:

The Niger Delta the Activist returned to has changed so much from what it used to be, even as it remained the same land mass. It has been seriously scarred by the Bell Oil company whose emblem of a red-rimmed shell of yellow flames was seen all over the area. In the company's inordinate hunger for more barrels of oil to ship out to increase yearly record profits, the landscape was gradually turning into a wasteland. Residents of the oil-producing areas had become helpless before the monstrous power of their overlords; the oil company and the military governments. (45)

Zilayefa is a character caught up in the harshness and decoy of her environment. She struggles with not having a father or a father figure. She is the result of an affair between an Ijaw woman and a Greek sailor. She sees a father in every man she encounters; first, it is Sergio, and later Admiral. The Activist and Zilayefa are different characters, but their life cycles revolve around environmental degradation in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. The former is a man fighting the demons that intend to reorder the lives of his people; the latter is young girl who is caught up between finding a father figure and escaping her rotten environment.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 TANURE OJAIDE, KAINÉ AGARY AND THE KEN SARO-WIWA CAUSE

The two authors whose works are analysed are from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. They may be different in terms of their gender and their manner of narration, but both aim to achieve the same thing in their narratives; to show the extent of the rot and decay in their environment, caused not by natural disasters but by the rough handling of their environment by man. They recognise the importance of Ken Saro-Wiwa's agitation and activism for a better Niger Delta. In *Yellow-Yellow*, Agary brings to mind the restiveness of youths who drop out of school, while some abandon some miserable jobs that pay them meagre salaries to join the ever growing number of militants. Their restlessness arises from the notion that what should belong to them is being used to develop other parts of the country, and the little they can lay their hands on is either dead or has suddenly disappeared. The narrator puts it thus:

Every young man had visions of dying valiantly for the cause, as Ken Saro-Wiwa just had and as Isaac Adaka Boro had one nearly thirty years before him. The reports were that Ken Saro-Wiwa's last words on the day of his execution were, 'Lord, take my soul but the struggle continues'. So the boys wandered about the village aimlessly dropping the phrase *Aluta Continua* at the slightest provocation. (34)

In *The Activist*, Ojaide shows how the Activist teams up with Pere Ighogboja to set up an oil bunkering business. They did this to get even with those that have denied them and their families the basic things life has to offer. They also wish to continue working for the cause

that Ken Saro-Wiwa died for; justice and equity for the people. The profits made from their bunkering are also used to provide comfort, albeit temporarily to their people. The two authors' manner of narrative points out to one thing; that the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is ripe for a revolution, and with the way their writings are making wave, the people of the region will one day get the justice they deserve.

5.2 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This thesis shows the working of ecocriticism and its attempt to be a descriptive and a revolutionary theory that lends voice to writers who in turn lend their voices to the downtrodden and the subjugated in the society. Oil spillage has led to poverty, death, unemployment, youth restiveness, among those indigenous to the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Thus, peace becomes trifle. The oil companies have not in any way helped matters as they continue to flout environmental regulations in their areas of operations and pay less attention to environmental protection regimes that will help to abate oil pollution. The government on its part has not shown any commitment to enforcing the minimal environmental laws which it created. In the words of Ifeanyi Izuka, "while we have right on our side, our adversaries have the big stick, sovereignty with which they can always beat us back into the line" (276). Onukaogu and Onyerionwu note that "the activities of imperialists, corrupt government officials and local chiefs gave rise to militancy, prostitution and all kinds of moral short-comings in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. They note further that "...Agary and Ojaide puts the growth and development of the Niger Delta in social focus... That the average Niger Delta Youth is a potential criminal or prostitute implicates a most painful kind of loss in the oil war" (128). Thus, Agary and Ojaide are not only passionate in portraying the loss of the present but that of the future. They question their situation, living in squalor while

barrels of oil are pumped every minute of the day, to provide luxury for the oil workers and the elite of Nigeria. With the working of ecocriticism in the analysis of *Yellow-Yellow* and *The Activist*, we will discover that there is no ‘ecohesitation’. Writers are now challenging the status quo; they are not hiding behind their writings to support the evil of the oil exploiters and their constant marginalisation of the people, rather they are arming the people with the tools that will restore their environment to normalcy. Kaine Agary and Tanure Ojaide also shun the notion by some black writers that ecocriticism as a theory is a dominating discourse issuing from the colonizing West, and it is an ‘attempt to white out the black nation by coloring it green’ (Slaymaker, 268). This they did by providing these narratives that authenticate the usefulness of ecocriticism as a literary theory.

What can be deducted from the analyses is that freedom from environmental despoilment and degradation can be attained when victims rid themselves of ecotrauma. Victims must learn to speak out against the constant rape by the oil explorers and exploiters. They can recover but only through the emphatic embrace of their perpetrations and wounds. They must acknowledge their violent histories, grieve out their transgressions, make reparations, and begin the healing process again. This healing process lies with ecoactivism and resistance.

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