

RE-EVALUATING THE IMAGE OF THE NIGER DELTAS IN KAINÉ AGARY'S YELLOW YELLOW

Dr. CHINYERE T. OJIAKOR

Department of English Madonna University Nigeria,
Okija Campus, Anambra State.
Phone No: +234803 454 2740

ABSTRACT

It should depress us that aside from the Government and oil companies in the Niger Delta, the indigenes also constitute the problems of the area. According to records, the expatriates who created the Nigeria Delta States set in motion the constitutional and legal framework for the future betterment of the Niger Delta. It is most regrettable that in spite of the establishment of Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) with a view of embarking on the physical development of the area as an equitable recompense for its majority oil reserve which feeds the entire nation, it is still replete with narratives of deprivation, violence and confoundedly the life of pleasure code as is displayed by the work's central character Zilayefa. Critics have commonly viewed Kaine Agary's Yellow Yellow as a sordid account of the deprivation of the people's subsistence livelihood by oil despoliation and the provocations of the displaced male-image as it affected the work's central characters. This assertion is made without much regard to the repressed and manifest avarice profoundly displayed by the novel's protagonist and inhabitants of the area. The present study through the analytical research design interrogates the actions of the people of the Niger Delta in their quest to attain existential fulfilment. Besides the main characters' heeding of some kind of pleasure code, the super-structural attitude of the people of the area hangs, like an unseen shadow, over and above Yellow-Yellow's major characters, motivating their actions and inactions.

Keywords: Re-evaluate, Image, Niger Delta, Pleasure Code

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is rich in crude oil otherwise known as black gold. This singular factor has made this region a cause to celebrate and a hotbed of trouble in the Sub-Saharan region. The region is bedevilled with ecological problems. The discovery of oil in the region has affected agriculture, fishing as well the living conditions of the people. Wumi Raji contends that:

when Shell D'Arcy, the Anglo-Dutch Petroleum Corporation which later transformed to Shell Petroleum Development Company shipped out the first 5,000 barrels in 1958, the price of the mineral resources was only \$4.00 US dollars per barrel. By 1981, when almost 15 oil companies jointly produced over 2 million

barrels daily from the innumerable oil wells strewn all over the Niger Delta, the price per barrel had risen to 40 dollars...(58).

By the '70s the oil industry has become responsible for about 95% of the nation's foreign exchange earnings of which Shell was the major contributor. The Niger Delta region the producer of these natural and mineral resources encompasses the swampy terrain of the coastal area of the South-South compelled with some parts of the South – West and South - East which comprises the following states Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers as states in Niger Delta. The Niger Delta Crisis could be traced through in the 1990s, then Nigeria's military rulers embarked on a policy of pacifying the Niger Delta the oil-rich region populated by many ethnic minorities for social, economic and cultural rights in a country where years of practising power are in favour of majority ethnic groups, notwithstanding that the bulk of the country's wealth comes from petroleum extracted from the Niger Delta. In addition to that, the petroleum industries profoundly undermine the source of their livelihood, and the ethnic minorities are being ignored. Land, - streams, creeks etc have been polluted, roofs of buildings in the area have been perforated and there is also the effect of consistent explosions which cause many of the buildings to shake and the walls to crack. Because of these, many of the villagers have had to abandon their houses, migrating to other villages in search of refuge and livelihood. Apart from these ecological problems, the Niger Delta region lacks basic social amenities like portable drinking water, electricity, roads, hospitals, schools, job opportunities to enable the people to earn their living and become self-reliant, yet the region is the proverbial goose that lays the golden egg that feeds the entire nation. Pushed to the wall, these people have no choice but to kick out in order to force the government and indeed humanity to understand their predicament. The bulk of some of these contacts makes up the tendency toward criminality in the Niger-Delta region: killing, maiming, gunrunning, destruction/vandalization of pipelines and recently kidnapping of foreigners and Nigerians for ransom. 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. Ato Quayson avers that "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).

The oil spillage has untold hardship on women, who are traditionally farmers. Women now travel into the interior to farm and this takes a toll on their wellbeing. Youths become restive and violence erupts. Some boys according to Agiary join others from neighbouring villages to "kidnap oil company executives or bar oil company workers from doing their work" (9-10). Zilayefa (Yellow) 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 else..." (4). It is a well-established fact that there is a crisis in the Niger Delta region. This is still not well managed but the present article solidly

maintains that the people of the Niger Deltas' attitude towards this issue taking the position of the major character Zilayefa leave nothing to be desired.

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kaine Agary is 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 the subjugation of women and the inhumane subjugation of the masses by those in authority. In a book titled, *Crisis and the Literature of the Niger Delta: The Dual Aesthetics of Lachrymal and the Revolution* Allwell Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu, 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 people that can mobilize themselves to undertake violent protests and other revolution-inclined activities (69).

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. 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, men abuse women physically or pushed objects like bottles into their privates as part of their fun (35).

Ona further states that:

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).

Ignatius Chukwumah in "The Displaced Male Figures in Kaine Agary's Yellow Yellow" notes contrarily to criticism of this novel the neglected trademark features of the twenty-first-century Nigerian novel. He also notes that they have also not taken into account the displaced male-image in this work or the fundamental role played by the male-image therein. The reader notices this image posited by the likes of Papadopoulos, Zilayefa's runaway father, the Ijaw oil-smuggling boys, General Sani Abacha, Admiral, the management of the oil companies, Uthman Kamal (Lolo's fiancé), TT (Lolo's father), and many others, who have contributed in various dimensions to the composition of this image, in its displaced form, in Yellow-Yellow. The oil exploration companies constitute an uncommon inclusion in the lot. By virtue of the stimulus provided by these companies, it seems reasonable to approximate human male characteristics to them. We need only to read through Zilayefa's account of the company's devastating presence in the village to conjecture how clearly the latter projects such features. He further avers that the projection occasioning the displacement of the male-image of the absent male in the present character, besides other sundry factors, is steered by the pleasure principle natural to characters, especially Zilayefa, through whom all is perceived. "The image of the male thus guided and projected in Yellow-Yellow, is, to my mind, the reason why this work bears the marks of the important literary epoch Emenyeonu aptly terms "new voices" of the twenty-first-century Nigerian literature" (ix). This novel expresses one of those voices, and I surmise that, contrary to existing critical remarks, Yellow-Yellow significantly undermines the depiction of those peculiar environmental problems of the region, the sneezing of which causes not only Nigeria to shudder but also a considerable segment of the world whose oil needs are served by her.

3.0 ANALYSIS

Kaine Agary's novel Yellow Yellow explicates a world where the people of the oil-rich Niger-Delta region groan under the evil hands of the multinationals that exploit the land at the detriment of the people. She mirrors the disastrous effects, both human and environmental, of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta and what one sees is a society that is abused and plundered with the collaboration of the profiteering local chiefs and corrupt government bureaucrats. Many Nigerians are ignorant of the issues in Niger Delta. What most people, both inside and outside Nigeria knew was based on media propaganda, which only highlights the youth violence which makes them talk about Niger Deltas as recalcitrant militants forgetting the situation they put the people into. Yellow-Yellow doubles as the book's title and the protagonist's name given to her by villagers because of her complexion. It is the story of an illicit relationship between an eighteen-year-old Ijaw girl, (Ina Binaebi) and a Greek sailor. The result is early pregnancy and Binaebi's ambition of getting a good job is truncated. This is the plight of many young school leavers in the Niger Delta region and this also accounts for the ever-growing number of half-caste children in the oil-rich region today. The children are fathered by Europeans, British, Portuguese, Syrians, Lebanese, Filipinos, Chinese and Americans who come to do business in the region. Agary documents:

I found out there were generations of yellows in the Niger Delta area, and each one had a different story. There were the yellows from the 1800s, the days of the Royal

Niger Company, later known as the United Africa Company (UAC), which the British had set up to maximize their gain from the palm oil trade. There was also the yellow from Portuguese traders who remained in the region until the British took full control and pursued them out... the next generations were those from the Syrian and Lebanese and Greek businessmen and sailors, some of whom had married Nigerian women. These yellows knew their fathers... (74).

From the foregoing, it is clear that Yellow-Yellow also expounds the story of racial prejudice in the Niger Delta region. These biracial children are given different name tags like “mammy water”, “born-troway”, “African profit”, “ashawo pikin”, “father unknown”, etc. Yellow’s mother is saddled with the responsibility of raising her biracial daughter after her abandonment. Her concern for her daughter’s well being leads her to live a life of self-denial. Agary writes thus: “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 fishing... she took care of my needs and sometimes went without...she excelled herself from the women’s group so that she would not be forced to spend money on wrappers for their outings” (8). Binaebi acknowledges the importance of education, hence her insistence on Yellow’s education. She, therefore, subscribes to Nkechi Okoli’s claim, cited in Oduaram and Bhola that, “the education of the female liberate them 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” (431-32). This assertion tallies 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). This agrees with the current research contrary to critics who aver that for the young girls in Agary’s fiction, the only escape is through prostitution. The hazards of prostitution in the words of Agary 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” (37). In addition, the local boys attack the shacks where the girls live, beat, steal and destroy their property. Some of these boys act as pimps. Agary shows the misuse of petro naira in the Niger Delta region. The girls lament “and na our money O! Na our oil money” (38). Money that should have been used to develop the region is squandered on frivolities. Agary’s depiction of moral ineptitude occasioned by joblessness and poverty in the region is unique. This paper subscribes to Chioma Opara’s claim that “the pain of poverty has been born by women in patriarchal and capitalist societies all over the world” (117). Again, Okoli affirms that “poverty in Africa (in Nigeria in particular) has been described as legendary. With insecurity looming in most countries of the world, the resultant effect is threats from regional and ethnic conflicts, growing economic inequity, rising levels of corruption, the expanding HIV/AIDS, epidemic, severe pressure on political and social institutions and poverty increase” (57-58). Perhaps, more pertinent is the ecological problems and the insurrection by the youths of the region which Agary brings to the fore. Agary documents the aftermath of oil spillage in the environment:

A group of people, painted in the same black as my mother, some covered from head to toe, were marching to see the Amananowei, the head of the village. I joined them to find out what had happened. It turned out some had lost their farmland that day...some were crying; others were talking about compensation (4).

The spillage destroys farm lands as well as the aquatic life of the people, thereby causing villagers to lose their source of livelihood. There is also the strong smell from crude:

I can't describe it but it was strong, so strong it made my head hurt and turned my stomach". I bent over, and retched so hard I became dizzy. It felt like everything had turned to black and was spinning around me. There was so much oil, and we could do nothing with it—viscous oil that would dry out, black oil that was knee-deep. I stayed there, in a daze, until someone shouted at, "You no go commot for there? You dey look like say na beta tin"! Come on, leave dat place!" (4).

This quotation explains the sufferings and poverty that await Zilayefa because their only source of sustenance which is the land for farming has been polluted and covered with crude oil. To further compound the plight of the people, the oil company refuse to pay compensation for all the damages done, declaring suspect sabotage among the youths. The oil spillage has untold hardship on women, who are traditionally farmers. Women now travel into the interior to farm and this takes a toll on their wellbeing. The novel examines those issues that are vital to the survival of man in an environment, an environment degraded, exploited and abused. The story recounted in *Yellow Yellow* is a practical representation of a country that waits and hopes for an agent of change or the biblical messiah to come and rescue her from the hands of abusive and hostile rulers. The question this paper expounds is, will the messiah ever come, and will the people just wait perpetually or try to do something meaningful aside villainy.

The protagonist Zilayefa in the researcher's opinion waits for the messiah that is to take her out of degradation, want and backwardness but what she sees is rejection and abandonment because she like the restive youths do not want to lift a hand to upgrade themselves even when it was established (in the case of Zilayefa) that help is at the corner. Her mother before her has to wait for the Greek sailor but 'he left Port Harcourt without saying goodbye...no message: he was just gone, leaving behind his planted seed in my mother's belle. Her father abandons her, left her with her mother to live a life of quiet desperation and so she dreams of finding a prince charming that will come in shining armour and take her away from the colourless, backward and empty existence to a place where she will be seen for her worth. Given the fact that she is portrayed as an extraordinary girl from an ordinary background but very intelligent, a representative of the down-trodden in the Niger-Delta, encountering the difficulties of growing up under the politics of silence and decay. She has to face this harsh reality of living in this debased society, has to survive the decadence and push for a better life for herself giving the circumstances of her mother's goodwill and the feminist support Sisi and lolo showed her. Under the provocation of the oil spill and desiring to give expression to her undying wish to regain her absent father Plato Papadopoulos, Zilayefa accesses happiness through any means. She anticipates escaping pain to reach for pleasure thus:

I started to consider options that had never crossed my mind before, 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 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).

But before Sergio arrives in her village, the gbein mo episode had already taken place. It was an episode that earned her a rebuke from her mother, yet it suggests the exhibition of the latent pleasure-seeking principle. This dormant yet virile desire for pleasure is contained in the gbein mo tune to which she dances in the company of other teenage girls. The tune instructs them, she says, to “throw our backsides and the boys to pick them up” (15). It was an activity that gave them “so much fun” (15), she recollects. This evidence demonstrates that the talk of her innocence is dubious. She had long ‘lost it’ psychically before Admiral tore into her on her first night with a man. The throw- your-backside dance is not a dance of innocence. And, unable to explain the cause when her mother remonstrated with her, she says: “how stupid I had been for ‘forgetting myself’” (16). She adds that she threw her backside out “like a jobless girl” (16). This rebuke enabled her to repress pleasurable desires while she was with the mother who so much dots on her and wants her to go to school and make something out of her life. She narrates, “to be on the safe side, I went straight to my room and stayed there until I fell asleep. From then until the day I left my village, I tried to occupy my time with activities that my mother approved of, dancing in public was certainly not one of them” (17).

It is also easy to conclude that pleasurable desires were repressed when the reader glimpses the reaction of her body chemistry to Sergio’s kiss and what it calls to her mind:

It wasn’t the same as when one of my classmates had kissed me in primary school. A group of us had been playing during the break, and the boys started a game where they would pick a girl and kiss her. The boy who kissed me was a nice boy, but it was a horrible kiss, and we never talked about it afterwards (26–7).

Such words as “nice” and “never talked about it afterwards” bear echoes of a concealed desire for pleasure, however, repressed, that is already carving out a place in her despite some lingering restraints at the time Sergio kisses her. Yet the agent of this present surge of feelings is Sergio. This brings us to our second submission, that violence, in order to change an intolerance unjust social order, is not savagery: it purifies man. The Niger Delta region so well is known is subjected to structural violence which Oke Ibeanu limns as being expressed “in such conditions as exclusion, deprivation and poverty” (10). The question now is who these perpetrators are and to what end? This brings us to Admiral. There is a comparison of general Sani Abacha indicted in this novel and Admiral. By giving Zilayefa money to terminate the growing foetus in her womb, he has incriminated himself as regards blood-spilling; this, and the image he carves for himself, is no different from that which General Sani Abacha has earned for hanging “Ken Saro-Wiwa, along with nine other Ogonis, for inciting an insurrection that led to the deaths of four elders in Ogoni land” (34). Admiral tends to live this figure out; on the other hand, as regards nonviolence, he displays seductive antics, disrupting the lives of young people. Both end up shedding human blood. We must not forget, too, that what Abacha does with the security agencies, in that they are used as agents of terror, is what Admiral does with the Ijaw boys and, though subtly and almost going unnoticed as posing no harm, with Zilayefa and her likes. Take the following descriptions by the narrator:

The so-called youth groups had become well-oiled extortion machines all in the name of the struggle. They stole, blackmailed, and vandalized for the progress and

development of the Ijaw Nation, the Niger Delta. Some days I appreciated their efforts. ... They talked about how the oil companies were using the Nigerian armed forces as their private security details to terrorise and sometimes kill innocent villagers who questioned the inequity of their situation—living in squalor while barrels of oil pumped out of their land provided the luxury that surrounded the oil workers and the elite of Nigeria (158).

Admiral is an elite member of this tribe, very successful in his military career reaching the highest attainable rank, but shares a common obvious trait with General Abacha. When the environmental activists dared take action, Abacha treated them to death by hanging. Admiral, (son of the soil) tends to live this figure out; on the other hand, as regards nonviolence, he displays seductive antics, disrupting the lives of young people. Both end up shedding human blood. Nevertheless, his eschewing his responsibility seems to match the image of the oil companies. They exhibit similar behavioural patterns. Their “expatriate” staff are those who, these girls are ready to sell their bodies, are always ready to ‘buy’. After the devastating spill and when the community confronts them, the company in question claims that “they suspected sabotage by the youths and were not going to pay compensation for all the destruction that the burst pipes had caused” (4). Hence we find that they display common characteristics of exploitation and not taking responsibility for unexpected occurrences, as also does Abacha. The Ijaw boys according to the narrator, “wondered about the village aimlessly, dropping the phrase *Aluta continua* at the least provocation. As for the girls, they dropped out to have their babies or as my mother would say, to “turn ofogorious with the jobless boys in town” (34). The question on this submission now is, why cry wolf if we contribute to a certain level the degree of our problems?

As a matter of fact, when it concerns Abacha, TT, Admiral, Sergio, the oil companies, Zilayefa’s mother, Zilayefa herself and the Ijaw youths, the concept manifesting in and underlying all their actions as they adeptly try to negotiate their ways out of immediate predicaments of pain is the pleasure principle. This research is able to explain, using this principle, how Zilayefa swaddles herself in the mess of the city’s life. Zilayefa’s relocation to Port Harcourt exposes her to urban life. She is taken in by Sisi, a mixed race woman, who is caring and supportive. Alongside Lolo, they care for Zilayefa as one of their own. In Lolo, Zilayefa claims “I saw a future image of me in the likeness of Lolo, and that pleased me. Thus, I jumped into her shadow, accepting the possibility that this figure, who had instantly intrigued me, would envelop my own personality” (52). Sisi, despite her standard six education, is a successful businesswoman. Through her exposure and her 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. In the same vein, Lolo, Sisi’s “little friend” (52), is the granddaughter of one of the famous Leslie Cole brothers, emigrants from Sierra Leone. Being the only girl in the family, she remains home to help manage her parent’s investments. She is a contractor and an enterprising young lady. The bond between Sisi and Lolo is reminiscent of that between Efuru and Ajanupu in Nwapa’s *Efuru*. Female bonding helps women nurture and support one another economically. This is what Sisi and Lolo demonstrate in the novel. The duo helps Zilayefa secure a job at the Royal Hotel as a receptionist. They encourage her to save so as to continue her education. In an ironic twist, Zilayefa allows herself to be infatuated by Admiral Kenneth Alaowei Amalayefa a sixty-

year-old man. Admiral is the devourer who capitalizes on a helpless girl's innocence. This untiring predator, noticing her response, starts off by pretending, in the usual seductive nature of his kind, by saying to Zilayefa, when she greeted him in Ijaw: "Seri, I like young Ijaw girls who know where they are coming from. We need young Ijaw girls like you and Lolo" (118). At another time, he remarks: "See, that is why you must go to school and get your degree so that no one has an excuse to give you an opportunity in life" (137). It is from the same fountain of his mouth proceeds firstly: "You do look like you'd be sweet to bite but save it for another day" (130) and secondly, through the narrator:

Admiral turned on the stereo and spread himself out on a couch. I picked a lonely seat as far away from him as possible, but before I could perch myself upon it, he ordered me to come over and sit by him. He ignored my protests that there was not enough room for me. I got up and sat on the arm of the couch, by his head. In one very swift motion, he moved me from the arm onto a seat and rested his head comfortably on my lap. That was more than forty years of wooing experience on display (137).

What Zilayefa suffers is similar to her mother's fate despite the latter's admonitions. Old men like Admiral, Zilayefa's kinsman, who should protect her from all forms of abuses, turn around to exploit her sexuality. This paradigm exposes the socio-economic ills in not only the region but the society at large. Agary, through this exposure, touches on salient feminist issues. Sisi and Lolo are role models that the protagonist should have emulated. Sisi and Lolo stand tall in a society which views women with suspicion and treat them as underdogs. Both women are independent and self-reliant. Sisi and Lolo subscribe to Mary Kolawole's view that "many African women recognise the way patriarchy has been manipulated to put them down and they are struggling against these forms of subjugation and intimidation wherever they exist..."(13). By venturing out of the domestic sphere (the home) into the business arena, Lolo, Inema (her mother) and Sisi demonstrate that the place of women in contemporary times has changed. Agary is of the opinion that women can surmount patriarchal and cultural boundaries in order to assert their selfhood. Agary is, therefore, a committed writer who is poised to change a lot of her people. Binaebi's ability to pick her life after her pregnancy and abandonment is commendable. Agary's rural women are hardworking, they are the biblical hewers of wood and drawers of water, "the mules of the earth" to borrow Zora Neale Hurston's expression in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This author hints on old times when men gave dugout canoes to their wives for fishing, thus empowering them to help feed the family. The art of canoe-carving emphasizes the traditional occupation of the Ijaw people which has been eroded by oil wealth and corruption. Today, the men dominate the women, "the men claimed that, according to tradition it was their exclusive right to make all the decisions inside and outside the home. (40). It is against this backdrop that the concept of social collectivism becomes relevant. Iniobong Uko cites Mazrui as viewing social collection as "that complex of loyalties which tied the individual to his own specific society, which commanded his affection for his kith and kin, which aroused his protectiveness for the soil of his ancestors, which enables him to serve, and ... to love his people" (73). This is true of Saro Wiwa, Sisi and Lolo. This concept is however negated in Admiral, who is a spoiler, morally and ethically bankrupt since he fails in his duty as an elder statesman of his tribe.

The pleasure that prods Zilayefa is enacted, though in a different way, by the Ijaw youths who, capitalizing on the neglect of the communities by the oil companies, take to fomenting trouble by kidnapping their workers and breaking open pipelines to tap crude illegally for personal enrichment. They evolve into “youth groups” that have “become well-oiled extortion machines all in the name of the struggle” (158). According to Zilayefa, “they stole, blackmailed, and vandalized for the progress and development of the Ijaw Nation” (158). The same pleasure driving these youths also, unsurprisingly, leads Admiral Kenneth Alaowei Amalayefa to have carnal knowledge of Yellow and to even secretly encourage the youths to violence by giving them money to aid their purpose. This instance of an innate pleasure drive is evident when the latter tries to give expression to the riotous emotion going on inside of her during the chance meeting with the ‘runaway’ Sergio in Port Harcourt:

I did not need Sergio in the same way anymore, yet I was a bit curious about what it would be like being with a white man. There could have been something they offered besides money, that thing that my mother had fallen for. It was that thing I had been looking to key in to. I had 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. Maybe then I could understand better or with less anger why there were more and more of my kind.... Maybe then I would not hide from the facts of my birth that my yellow skin and curly hair put on display (170–1).

This paper submits that this principle more than the vacuum and nominal existence she utterly detested, which critics have ascribed the cause of her sorry moral mess rules her life. A reason exists for this claim. “I did not care as much as she did about finishing school; I just wanted to leave the village” (40). Again, when weakly proffering a defence to her psyche before it breaks down, she lets slip the remark, which appears to portend future moral failure, that “he [Admiral] is old enough to be my father” (133). To this, Emem, her friend, adds: “when he is rubbing your body, do you think he will be thinking about how old you are? When she also tries to hide her nature she proffers to Emen that Adimral sees her as his daughter to which Emen clears her head by retorting, “ If he wants you to act like his daughter, then he will not ask you to give him things that he cannot have from his daughter ” (133). On a closer look, one discovers that Zilayefa is not merely a fictional character, the product of the author’s imagination, but in fact, every girl at the crossroads into womanhood, wonder-ing which way to turn; every innocent child resulting from complicated adult relations trying so hard to piece together scraps of her origin while wondering what to make of her present and future, she’s every young girl suddenly thrust into a life not exactly as they imagined it, trying to find balance, she’s every girl grasping at anything and everything their hands can find in a bid to solve the coming of age puzzle. As humans, we often wish for a higher station and a better life, endlessly imagining the great and mighty things we could achieve should our dreams come true. The truth is; many like Zilayefa would most likely end up confused and distracted when presented the opportunity much sought after.

Moreover, the book elucidates on the struggle in the Niger Delta, something which began as a demand for respite from the hardships inflicted on the region and its people by the activities of the oil companies, chief of which is oil spillage; before gradually turning into machinery

for extortion and violence. Worthy of note also is the fact that, unlike the usual play out whereby the hero or heroine leaves the village for the city in search of greener pastures with the principal aim of getting a formal education, Yellow is not too particular about getting an education and assumes a laissez-faire attitude to school in general. Even the overt support of her guardians and mother towards this end means little or nothing to her and by the time she realises her folly, it is almost too late. As with everything in her life, the pleasure code is partly responsible for her woes. What is more, it also is partly the reason she greatly sorrows and regrets the shattering of her dreams. Earlier, considering the prospect of her hosts finding out about her pregnancy, she fears that: "A child with no father was a sure way to throw my education out the window, because all the goodwill I had received from Sisi and Lolo was sure to be packed up with my suitcase, my baby, and me and sent expressly back to the village" (174). Then, during the abortion scene, full of regret and pain, she bites hard on a hanging towel that absorbs her sorrowful cries and the grave emotional disturbances stemming from within her. The following are some of them:

My life was out of focus, and I wished for the days when my mother planned my life, but I could not go back to what I had rejected. I needed to refocus, and this time I would have to do it myself. Everything I had had in life up until that point had been handed to me on a platter, and I had taken it all for granted. I had forgotten the coarseness of my mother's hands, which worked tirelessly so that I could achieve more than she did. [...] That evening I remembered. I saw my mother's face, and though there was very little I had done in Port Harcourt that would have made her happy, she was smiling. I cried because through her smile I could hearsay that I had let her down. [...] I cried but could not feel sorry for myself because I had made the choices that got me into trouble I had allowed myself, like an empty canoe, to drift along with the flow of the river (178).

In sum, Zilayefa is responsible to the failure of the aspirations of her mother, though they were compounded by leadership in the land of her birth.

Works Cited

Agary, Kaine. *Yellow Yellow*. Lagos: Dtalkshop Publishers. 2006.

Chukwumah, Ignatius. "The Displaced Male Figures in Kaine Agary's *Yellow- Yellow*",
Doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/tvl.v5oi24.2013>.

Emenyeonu, Ernest. "The African Novel in the Twenty-First Century: Sustaining the Gains of the 20th Century." *African Literature Today* 27: x–xii. 2010.

Ibeanu, Oke. "Conceptualising Peace" *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa*. Ed. Shedrack Gaya Best. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2006, pp.3 – 14.

Kolawole, Mary. *Womanism and African Consciousness*. Trenton, N. J: Africa World Press. 1997.

Mazrui, A. *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*. London: Heinemann. 1978.

Okoli, Nkechi. 'Women Empowerment: A Panacea for Poverty Alleviation in Africa.' *Journal of Gender Studies*. vol. 5. no. 4. Sept 2008, pp.57 – 65.

Onukaogu, Allwell and Ezechi Onyerionwu. Eds. *21st Century Nigerian Literature: An IntroductoryText*. Ibadan: Kraft, 2009.

Opara, Chioma. *Her Mother's Daughter: the African Writer as a Woman*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2004.

Onyema, Chris. "Jungle and Oil Green: Currents of Environmental Discourse in Four Upland Nigerian Niger Delta Narratives". *From Boom to Doom: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the Literature of the Niger Delta*. Ed. Nwahunanya, Chinyere. New Owerri: Springfield Publishers. 2011, pp.195-206

Ona, Precious. "Beyond Nigerian Nightmare". *The Nation*. Thursday, August 27, 35. 2009.

Ogunjimi, Bayo. "Literature and National Development". *Major Themes in African Literature*. Ed.

Damian U. Opata and Aloysius U. Ohaegbu. Nsukka: AP ExpressPublishers, 2000, pp. 85 – 100.

Quayson, Ato 'For Ken Saro Wiwa: African Post Colonial Relations through a Prism of Tragedy'. Ogoni's *Agonies: Ken Saro Wiwa and the Crisis in Nigeria*. Tenton. Ed.

Abdul Rasheed Na' Allah. New Jersey: Africa World Press.1998, pp. 58-80.

Raji, Wumi. "Oil Resources, Hegemonic Politics and the Struggle for Reinventing PostColonial Nigeria: *Ogoni's agonies: Ken Saro Wiwa and the Crisis in Nigeria*.

Ed. Abdul Rasheed Na'allah. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1998, pp.108- 120.

Simon, ED. "The Niger Delta Region and the Woman's Predicament: A Study of Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow*" in *African Research Review: An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal*. vol 4(3b) july 2010, pp155-166.

Uko, Iniobong. "The Concept of Modern Womanhood in Promise Okekwe's Trilogy".*Journal of Gender Studies*. vol. 5. no. 4 Sept 2008, pp. 66 – 80.