

Gendering Narratives: Reflective Perspective On Environmental Novels Of Agary And Okediran

Ikechukwu Asika¹, Ifeoma Akabuike², Obiageli Christiana Okpala³, Oziomachukwu Akunna Ajemba⁴, Tony Nnalue⁵, Nwakaego Obi⁶

¹PhD, Department of English, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, ie.asika@coou.edu.ng, asikaikchukwu@yahoo.com

²PhD, Department of English, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam ig.akabuike@coou.edu.ng, ifyakabuike2014@gmail.com

³PhD, Department of English, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, oc.okpala@ccou.edu.ng

⁴PhD, Department of English Language and Literature, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria, oa.ajemba@unizik.edu.ng

⁵PhD, Department of Theatre Arts, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam

⁶PhD, Department of English, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, gn.obi@coou.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper interrogates gender leanings in ecological novels of two selected male and female environmental writers, Kaine Agary and Wale Okediran– Yellow-Yellow (2006) and After the Flood (2003). Motivated by perceived gender undertones in ecological novels, the study contends that female writers, as exemplified in Agary’s account of the Niger-Delta debacles in Yellow-Yellow, are quick to take recourse to girl-child chronicle in their fictional narrative, which is not replicated in their male counterparts’ accounts. Though these writers elect to decry environmental abuse, their writings are punctuated with significant gender biases: Agary details the girl-child exploitation in the Niger Delta region consequent upon patriarchal abuse, Okediran, in contrast, delineates the lethal consequences of Ogunpa flooding in Ibadan and implicitly implicates his female character in the rot of environmental crisis amounting to unbalanced gender perceptions in the novels. The study, therefore, seeks to engender a conversation on gender questions in ecological novels. The paper surmises that the integrity of literature is sacrosanct and ought not to be perceived to be hinged on gender parochialism and chauvinism.

Keywords: *Ecology, gender, girl-child, exploitation, environment, degradation, pollution*

INTRODUCTION

Gender, in the categorisation of Jennifer Umezina and Patience Yakubu, refers to “the sex-role identity used by humans to emphasise the distinctions between males and females. Gender and sex are usually used interchangeably, but do not refer to the same thing. Sex is biological, while gender is social” (117). Gender is the social attributes and capacities assigned to persons based on their sexual characteristics (Ogundipe-Leslie, 152). Gender discourse has remained consistent among the many important issues that dominate literary scholarship. Consequently, several schools of thought and theorisation have emerged in postcolonial discourses to interrogate gender issues in African literature. African societies are overtly patriarchal, and literary scholarship has often sought to account for their socio-cultural dynamics in many ways. To be sure, issues around gender are no new subject; what is new, as pursued in this study, is the perceived gender bias in ecological writings.

Colonialism, acculturation, civilisation, and their attendant globalisation have not entirely dwarfed gender problems in African societies; rather, they have only raised awareness on myriads of socio-cultural nuances and practices that limit the female folk and militate against their desired peace and progress. In Africa, the feminist movement has birthed theories and feminist strands that negotiate gender parity and liberation for all women in Africa. Popular among them include: Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi’s Womanism (1985), Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie’s Stiwanim (1994), Catherine Obianuju Acholonu’s Motherism (1995) and Obioma Nnaemeka’s Nego-feminism (1999), among others.

Agreeably, African societies have endured decades of patriarchy, making gender issues a popular and important theme in African literature. Emmanuel Ngara traces patriarchal domination in African novels published before 1970 by male African writers, which reflect the largely held view and interest of male members of the African intelligentsia and the way women were once perceived. He argues that:

In most novels of the early period, i.e. novels written before, say, 1970, the hero is almost inevitably a male member of the African intelligentsia - Camara in *The African Child*, Waiyaki in *The River Between*, Obi in *No Longer at Ease*, Odili in *A Man of the People* and so on. In all these and other novels of the time, women play a secondary role in the affairs of society, and the principal female characters are portrayed as adjuncts to the main male characters. In typical fashion, the hero sees himself as incomplete unless he possesses a girlfriend or wife. Thus, female characters are not introduced as individuals in their own right but are part of the array of devices used to portray and develop the male hero (34).

The struggle against male superiority and the quest for gender parity has taken centre stage, dictating the tone, content, and form of many literary writings, mostly from African female writers. Simon, E.D. confirms that “the woman’s predicament has always been the concern of female writers in Africa and in the diaspora. This is so because women and children constitute the most oppressed group in society. The woman’s predicament is worsened by patriarchal structures, which further underpin the female’s growth and development. Women, therefore, have to contend with different forms of oppression ranging from sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, prostitution, rape, etc. As the ‘weaker vessels’ or ‘weakened vessels’ to borrow Akachi Ezeigbo’s expression in *Children of the Eagle*, they are often trampled upon and at other times rendered voiceless by the machinations of patriarchy and culture to keep them in check” (158).

African female writers, like Mariama Ba, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Tess Onwuneme, Ifeoma Okoye, Nuruddin Farah, Zaynab Alkali, Rose Acholonu, Nawal el Sadawi, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Chimamanda Adichie, Sefi Attah, Kaine Agary, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh, are but a few African writers that are boldly confronting and negotiating patriarchy and while projecting an imagined future for the African women through their literary works. These literary efforts have no doubt provided African women with the platform and voices, not only to tell their stories but to negotiate their place in their various societies. Nonetheless, despite these commendable efforts, the debates still rage on in literary scholarship on the different sides of the gender divide. While Ebele Okpala and Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh agree that: “Feminist writers have over the years portrayed patriarchy as the major and real source of female exploitation and subjugation and have highlighted the concept in their creative works. [And that] African female experiences, problems, and yearnings are examined through the female character in the selected literary texts. [Supporting that] certain practices in the various cultural milieus, which not only demean women but also debar them from having a say in the daily affairs of the society, are also exposed (1). Maduka, in contrast, disagrees, perceiving feminist agitations in Africa as more or less an academic exercise with a deep-rooted belief and conviction that nobody in Africa is seen to be oppressed based on gender, since both genders in African societies have well-spelt-out roles and complementary engagements. In his view: The idea of male domination is un-African because each sex has specific roles to play in society. Men dominate socio-political spheres of life, while women are prominent in spiritual and metaphysical realms. The idea that men dominate women is false because what determines social status in Africa...is economic power, and hardly gender. A woman who wields such power occupies a respectable status in society (85).

Elsewhere, Chukwuka Nwachukwu and Amaechi UnekeEnyi foreground the overreaching effect of feminist agitations arguing that “feminism in Nigeria, of whatever shade or colouration, has become too partial, too single-voiced and therefore, too dangerous for continued male and female sanctity and the prevailing complacency in the creative, critical and even political drives of the Nigerian society” (42). They therefore, challenge budding and practicing creative writers, critics and stake-holders in Nigeria “to work to reverse or at least curtail and stall the trend as it is poised to pose an intractable danger for, not only the country but the world at large, in terms of cohesion and the paterfamilias in the not-too-distant future” (42).

Ignatius Chukwumah, in his critical examination of the displaced male image in Agary’s *Yellow-Yellow*, notes a familiar trend of assigning condescending roles to the male figure in female-authored novels, citing examples with works of notable Nigerian female writers like Ifeoma Okoye, Chimamanda Adichie, Sefi Atta, and Kaine Agary among a few others. He questions this common trend in Nigerian female writers' fiction, which suggests a significant shift from the male image familiar in the earlier works of D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Fetus Iyayi, and Chukwuemeka Ike. Gender contestations and ‘writing back’ have dominated the African literary space, and this paper contends its perceived influence on ecological novels of two Nigerian male/female writers– Kaine Agary and Wale Okediran, which the subsequent section will delve into.

Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*: A Feminist Re-telling of the Oil Story

Woven around the girl-child protagonist, Zilayefa, a half-caste born of a Nigerian mother and a Greek father who was a sailor, Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* details the travails of a girl-child in the Niger Delta. Agary's protagonist is a teenage girl growing up in the Niger Delta region that is in ruin by oil pollution and impoverished by exploitation and alarming negligence. Not satisfied with the poverty in her village, she escapes to Port-Harcourt into the snares of men, foregrounded as predators in wait to prey on the escaping Niger Delta girls— an inevitable occurrence made possible by alarming poverty complimented by decades of exploitation in the region.

This paper contends that Kaine Agary in *Yellow-Yellow* consciously weaves her agonising narrative around the girl-child, Zilayefa, to satisfy a gender yearning. Laye is first encountered at the beginning of the novel— a young, naïve Niger Delta girl starrng at the sight of oil spillage that was her first time— inhaling the stench, awed by too much of the dark thick liquid spreading all over a field. She is unaware of how her life is about to be altered, forever, by that thick liquid spreading out, covering more land, and drowning small animals in its path (1). Agary describes her:

...It was the first time I saw what crude oil looked like. I watched as the thick liquid spread out, covering more land and drowning small animals in its path. It just kept spreading, and I wondered if it would stop, when it would stop, how far it would spread. Then there was the smell. I can't describe it, but it was strong—so strong it made my head hurt and turned my stomach. 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, "You no go commot for there? You dey look like say na beta tin! Come on, leave dat place!" (3)

Unknown to Laye, the spillage means that her mother, Ibinaebi, can no longer eke out a living from her only farmland now covered in oil, and as a result, can no longer afford to take care of her education and give her the life she had planned leaving Laye with only one viable option— to seek her survival in the city. Yet, before this movement away from the village to the city, she encounters Sergio, a male white expatriate created by Agary to expose the randy and predatory oil expatriates that litter the region and prey on unsuspecting Niger Delta girls. Their first victim in the novel is Laye's mother, barely eighteen and exploited sexually with promises of love and money by Papadopoulos, a Greek sailor, who abandons her with a pregnancy. Now of age, Laye is doomed to become prey, in the same heart-wrenching tunnel of betrayal and abandonment as her mother. Laye embraces Sergio, takes him to a secret hideout, cooks him a meal, and even allows him to kiss her. Sergio, on his part, almost takes advantage of her during their first meeting: 'I think I will feel better after I kiss you.' I turned my head to look up at him quizzically, and he continued. 'Seriously, I think it will help to cool the temperature in my mouth.' I laughed, but I obliged—after all, I did not want this white man dying on my hands, and truthfully, I was beginning to feel butterflies in my stomach... (26). The young naïve Laye falls in love with the white man, and though there was no sexual entanglement at the moment, it seems only inevitable to happen between them, and it is only a matter of time. Sergio abandons her, and his absence gives her the first real taste of heartbreak, steals her joy, leaving her broken for days.

In Port-Harcourt, through the bildungsroman technique, Laye matures and in her search for survival and financial freedom, she encounters the greater evil— Admiral, a retired Nigerian Navy officer, and a divorcee whose last daughter, Alaere, is just the same age as Laye. While Laye seeks love, happiness, and survival, the Admiral seeks mere sexual pleasure from Laye. Ironically, all Laye wants is to make him happy, and hopes that in return she would experience the emotional comfort, attention, and protection that she had seen between him and his daughter Alaere (145). She is unaware of Admiral's reputation for sleeping with young Niger Delta girls. Kenneth Alaowe exploits the situation occasioned by the problems of poverty in the region to not only take Zilayefa's virginity but also win her love and trust. In return, he offers her a peanut, fully aware of the poverty that dictates her life. Not until she becomes pregnant is she able to see through Admiral's deceit. She is abandoned, like many girls who were previously in Admiral's life. Discharging her, he advises: 'Well, take this,' he handed me an envelope full of money. 'Go to Island Clinic and ask for Dr. George. Tell him you need a pregnancy test, and if you are pregnant, he will help you get rid of it' (162). It dawns on Laye that she is only a mere sex object to Admiral and Sergio, whom she meets again in Port Harcourt and offers her body to him. The sexual encounter with Sergio even complicates the paternity of her child. In the end, reality dawns on Laye that the amorous relationship with Admiral and the rest of them is never meant to be. She survives a night of a terrible, unhealthy abortion, but the signs are evident that she will never remain the same naïve Laye. She determines to hold

on to the confidence of Lolo while rejecting the lack of seriousness and the kind of chaos that surrounds Emem's life. She admits: My life was out of focus, and I wished for 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 have to do it myself (177). Armed with her new resolve, she hopes to fulfil her dreams of making her mother and her region proud of her.

Incidentally, as much as we are proud of Laye in her new resolve and determination, it is easier to argue- from Agary's perspective- that as long as these male predators are still on the loose and dominate the Niger-Delta region, the dreams of Laye may continue to witness troubling setbacks. Precious Ona rightly confirms that: "to Agary, the suffering (of the female folk) 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" (35). We sum up from Agary's novel that all Laye aspires for as a young girl from an impoverished region is to live, find love, and make a mark in her world but is exploited and betrayed by the environment, aided by the male folks who are foregrounded as deadly predators lurking in the corners, to share the loots and partake in the spoils of the impoverished Niger Delta region- ruining young Niger-Delta girls and snuffing their dreams.

Simon E.D. concludes that: "for the young girls in Agary's fiction, the only escape is through prostitution. These girls sell their bodies to foreign oil workers - "the highest bidder" and some procure love portion which they use on these men. 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" (161).

To this end, while agreeing that the novel is a compelling chronicle of the girl-child experiences in the Niger Delta region, this paper contends that there is a conscious effort to tell a girl-child (gender) story and in the process, indict the male figures as a catalyst of ruin in the region which leaves some glaring gender questions and the burden of artistic integrity on Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*.

Wale Okediran's *After the Flood: A Masculine Side of the Ecological Story*

Unlike Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* which centers on the Niger Delta travails, Wale Okediran's *After the Flood* chronicles the environmental crises inspired by the Ogunpa Flood disaster that ravaged Ibadan in 1980, and took a toll on lives and property. Wale Okediran is a male writer, and whether consciously or unconsciously explored, there is the absence of the girl-child narrative evident in ecological novels by the female-authored writers: Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, where we witnessed the experiences of Laye, and one can include Ifeoma Okoye's *The Fourth World*, a 2013 novel that details environmental abuse from the fictional lenses of Chira, the girl-child protagonist. To be sure, Okediran, against the girl-child syndrome, chooses a couple, Stanley and Sade, to share the burden of his narrative. Significantly too, the common trend in female-authored novels- the presence of the overbearing and dominating male figures, ever ready, in their predatory pose, to complicate the environmental issues for the girl-child- is not explicitly pursued in Okediran's novel. In contrast, the build-up to the destruction caused by environmental negligence is blamed on the actions and inactions of the female characters, exemplified by the likes of Sade, the wife of Stanley, and her friend, Nana Okolie.

The tragic atmosphere that pervades the novel is a result of the over-flooding of the Ogunpa River, which claimed hundreds of lives and properties. Unfortunately, on the night Ogunpa flooded, Stanley's wife, Sade, abandons their baby with their housemaid and joins her friend, Nana, for a party, even when the signs are evident that it was going to rain and the weather forecast already predicted flooding. No right-thinking mother is expected to abandon her child to indulge in some frivolous things like a party, as was the case with Sade while the flood was gathering momentum: Sade Lala parted the curtains of her bedroom and gazed at the downpour outside. Perturbed, she hissed and exclaimed, 'Oh, what luck! Why should this happen now of all times! I thought the weatherman said the rain wouldn't get here till midnight!' Suddenly, jagged lightning streaks raced madly across the sky, briefly illuminating the blanket of darkness outside. (1) Sade prioritises the party, leaving her little son, Tomi, with a young maid, Beauty, and two young fellows who are unable to fend for themselves. Despite her initial fears that it might flood since her house is not far from the river, Sade focuses on the party. Celebrating with Nana on her twenty-first birthday becomes her priority. At the party, Sade is busy with exchanges with Sam Boyo, her former boyfriend, while the city floods: "Somewhere in the city centre, a party was going on in a three-storey house not far from the bank of the river when the flood water burst into the compound. Undaunted, the party guests, convinced the flood was only temporary, continued their merry-making" (9). While the city is being engulfed by a tremendous natural disaster, men were making advances on the ladies, and lovers hooked up for the night. Sade too runs into an old boyfriend, Sam Boyo, who discomferts her and makes

her uneasy all through the party. Even James, Nana's man, is all eyes on Sade. Stanley had called severally times that night, and nothing tortured his heart more than the realisation that his wife had left their baby to attend a party on such a night. Just as Stanley feared, the flood invaded their home and met a poor, helpless housemaid, Beauty, on whose shoulders the fate and life of baby Tomi rested heavily. We witness Beauty in a battle of life and death to save the baby:

...the water level rose rapidly, and soon it was waist-high. A bump at her waist made her look down; she noticed a plastic laundry bucket. It was about two feet in length and two feet in circumference... she quickly dropped Tomi in the bucket and the lid shut itself through a spring device attached to the lid.... By now, the water had reached Beauty's breast level. She continued crying, trying to see how to escape with the baby in the bucket. Suddenly, another loud clap of thunder rang out, and the remaining wall caved in. Beauty was knocked unconscious by the falling brick. She did not feel much pain, not even discomfort, as the water swallowed her. But she lost her grip on the laundry bucket as it swept through the open door to join the river, which had now overrun the house. (42)

Dead bodies, collapsed buildings, destroyed property, irreplaceable losses, broken dreams, and families are the aftermath of the flood. Following the loss of their only son as a result of her wife's insensitivity, Stanley loses his temper, and for the first time in his marriage with Sade, he raised his hands and did not just beat her but beat her mercilessly to the height of an attempted suicide. The writer depicts Sade in her agony in the hospital after the terrible beating:

As the blood pressure cuff tightened on her left arm, Sade's mind went back to the one-week stay in the hospital. She was glad that she was now fully rested and, except for her swollen left eye and the plaster on her forehead... Stanley had inflicted the injury on her when he lost his temper. Apart from the swollen eye and the deep gash on the forehead, which had required three stitches, her irate husband had also broken one of her teeth. It was the hospital porters who came to her rescue when they heard her cries... (14).

Since Sade attended the party without the consent of her husband, Stanley finds her guilty of promiscuity even as Nana, her girlfriend, accuses her of 'boyfriend snatching' after she finds the colour of Sade's lipstick on James' lips. Sade, on her part, spent the days in the hospital, and it all ended in divorce between the once-happy couple. Struggling through scandal, blackmail, and all bizarre sequences of events, the couple's lives never remained the same after the divorce. Though their missing child was later found at the end of the novel and the couple united once more, nonetheless, a lot of damage had already been done to their lives and the couple will certainly spend the rest of their lives learning how to live and be happy again all as a result of environmental crises made more devastating by the actions of the female protagonist in the novel, Sade Lala.

Ecological Literature: What Gender has to do with it?

The problem that necessitated this study emanates from the discovery that female writers on environmental issues seem apologetic to their gender and largely reflect the girl-child experiences while portraying the male characters as daredevils deployed to thwart the dreams of the girl-child. This contrasts with the male writers' account, as already demonstrated. No doubt, the Niger Delta region has peculiar problems unfamiliar to some other regions in Nigeria and elsewhere. Therefore, it is easy to understand Agary's tirade of the Niger Delta realities. Despite this, this paper makes bold that the Niger Delta experiences impact the lives of an average youth, not just the girl-child in the region, and that there is a lopsided treatment of the boy-child experiences in favour of the girl-child travails in the region. In passing, Agary summarily blankets the boy-child travails in the region as she admits that:

The girls are not the only ones affected by the wreckage and devastation brought in by the environment; the boys, too, are not left out. Unable to go to school and engage in anything meaningful again in the region as their major sources of livelihood have been destroyed by pollution, these local boys formed a community of touts and never do well and begin from unleashing little havoc to transcend to greater menace in society. They embrace drugs and drinks as an escape route and solace to the anger and frustration etched deep in their souls (38).

Suffice it to say that this side of the story is rather botched and parochial. Further critical evaluation of Agary's submission reveals that these boys (male figures) are portrayed as agents of destruction in partnership, motivated by the chaos and rot of the environment to invariably endanger the female folk. Like other overbearing male figures and typical of men in the female-authored novel, the boys militate against the desired peace of the female gender: "These boys occasionally pour their frustration on the girls as a reminder that they still had power in town. They would attack the shacks where the girls lived, beat them up, steal their money, and if their minds had been taken over by the evil spirits in booze and hard

drugs, they would destroy all the property they had gotten during their raid. In some areas, the local boys acted as pimps for the girls. There were cases where one brother killed another over the returns from a girl they were pimping (38). Critics like Ignatius Chukwumah have criticised Agary's overt condemnation of the male figures in her novel, arguing that Laye appears to be the architect of her misfortune. According to Chukwumah: "before Sergio arrives, the gbein mo episode had already taken place....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 [their] backsides and the boys to pick them up" (52). Chukwumah contends that the talk of Laye's innocence is dubious since she had already exposed herself to some sexual urges previously, which only seek satisfaction when she met Sergio: "She had long 'lost it' [her innocence] psychically before Admiral tore into her on her first night with a man. What Laye demonstrated with the men she met later on was repressed feelings, [bottled up emotions] from the viewpoint of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. (53).

Further discoveries advance the crux of the argument in this paper- the revelation that the initial real-life character that informed the writing of *Yellow-Yellow* is a boy, an Asian breed Niger-Delta boy and not a girl. Agary, in an interview with Geosi Reads, reveals her initial lack of intentions to write fiction despite the pressure and promptings from friends to turn some of her early scribbles, especially her short story on Niger Delta travails into a full-length novel. She withstands the pressure until her encounter at the waterside island in Port Harcourt, on a trip to visit a friend on Bonny Island, changes her mind and offers her a story that later transforms into her novel, *Yellow-Yellow*. According to her:

After resisting the pressure to expand the story for over a year, I finally got the inspiration for the novel, quite unexpectedly, on a trip to visit a friend on Bonny Island in Nigeria; it would be my first time on the Island. At the waterside in Port Harcourt, waiting to get a boat to the Island, I saw a young man hustling like every other young man at the waterside, but he was different. He was of mixed Asian descent. I had never seen that mix in Port Harcourt before, and certainly not at a waterside. The story became clearer when I got to Bonny and saw the number of Asians working as part of the Joint Venture with the Nigeria LNG in Bonny. Other things I witnessed in Bonny also contributed to the story" (NP).

To be sure, an encounter with a mixed Asian boy hustling to eke a living along the waterside in Bonny inspires Agary to several sad realities accruing from oil exploitation in her region and forces her to tell the story. The chance encounter with the mixed Asian boy, which was not just odd but strange to Agary, coupled with the sight of many other Asians working as part of the Joint Venture with the Nigeria LNG in Bonny, proves the inspiration she needs to narrate her side of the Niger-Delta story. These are children fathered by Asian fathers, who hap on the poor Niger Delta girls for sexual gratification. After the Bonny encounter, Agary finds the inspiration to tell the story of the plight of the children fathered by these expatriates, raising concerns about the future of these biracial children and the societal perception of them.

Factually, the initial inspiration (a mixed Asian boy), in the course of chronicling Agary's fictional narrative, transfigures to the biracial girl-child, Laye. It follows, therefore, that since Agary is a female writer, she feminises her story, thereby validating the contention of this study. The contention is further concretised by Agary's confession in the interview: "When [she] started, [she] had no real direction. The only thing [she] was certain about was that [she] wanted to tell the Niger Delta story with a female voice, from the female perspective. At the time, most of the voices coming out of the Niger Delta were male voices, and expectedly, the women's issues were rarely in contemplation..." (NP). In the end, Agary feminises a story that ordinarily was motivated by a boy-child. Leaning towards a gender goal, Agary jettisons this unknown Bonny boy of mixed Asian breed and birthed Zilayefe, the girl-child protagonist of *Yellow-Yellow*, with the male characters in the novel foregrounded as progenitors of evil and agents of destruction. As a result, Chukwumah condemns Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* for abandoning the core environmental issues that plague the Niger Delta region to discuss the girl-child, Laye, whom the critic believes, is, to a greater extent, the architect of her misfortune. And contrary to Emenyonu's pronouncement that Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* 'bears the marks of the important literary epoch', Chukwumah contends that: "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. In sum, Zilayefa is culpable of her many woes, though they were notably compounded by displacing the male image" (61).

Furthermore, in Okediran's *After the Flood*, the writer subtly portrays his female characters in a bad light. Sade and Nana are rich examples. Though instances of male perceived exploitation exist in the novel, nonetheless, the female characters in Okediran's novel are not necessarily victims as the female writers

portray them to be rather foregrounded as catalytic agents that aid the environment in achieving desired destructive goals.

CONCLUSION

Environmental issues are receiving deserved literary and critical attention as more writers are lending their voices to this all-important concern. Against this backdrop, this study contends that environmental writers appear to be gender-motivated. While the female writer is saddled with girl-child exploitation, the male writers, on the other hand, do not feel the same compulsion. Recognizing this trend, especially on the overtly female agitations in African literature, Chukwuka Nwachukwu and Amaechi UnekeEnyi assert that this trend is "...too dangerous for continued male and female sanctity and the prevailing complacency in the creative, critical and even political drives of the Nigerian society" (42) This paper aligns with this critical viewpoint. Maduakor, examining selected female writers, notes the parochial character development that favours the female gender and draws a conclusion that only when Nigerian female writers balance their characterization and eschew the inordinate and vindictive urge to get even, to balance the action with men will their 'telling' attain depth and restore poetic energy to the language of their diegesis. (138) To this end, this paper seeks to engender a conversation on gender questions in ecological writing to guarantee that creative truth is not sabotaged on the altar of gender chauvinism. It also advocates that boy-child travails should be given as much literary attention as enjoyed by the girl-child chronicle for a gender-balanced narrative both in the creative and societal spheres.

REFERENCES

1. Ning, X., and Lovell, M. R., 2002, "On the Sliding Friction Characteristics of Unidirectional Continuous FRP Composites," *ASME J. Tribol.*, 124(1), pp. 5-13.
2. [2] Barnes, M., 2001, "Stresses in Solenoids," *J. Appl. Phys.*, 48(5), pp. 2000-2008.
3. [3] Jones, J., 2000, *Contact Mechanics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, Chap. 6.
4. Adimora-Ezeigbo, A., 1996, *Gender Issues in Nigeria: A Feminine Perspective*. Vista Books Ltd., Lagos. Chapter 3.
5. Agary, K. 2006, *Yellow-Yellow*. Ikeja: Dtalkshop, Ikeja.
6. Asika, I., 2017, "Against the Backdrop of Feminism: The Images of Men in Female Authored Novels," *Madonna Journal of English and Literary Studies*, 2 (2), pp. 103-110.
7. Chukwumah, I., 2013, "The Displaced Male-Image in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*" *TYDSKRIF VIR LETTERKUNDE*, 50(2), pp. 42-62.
8. Maduakor, O., 2000, "The Nigerian Female Writer as Novelist". *Journal of Women Studies JOWSA*, 2 (2), pp. 42-62.
9. Maduka, C., 2001, "Feminism and the Nigerian Female Critic: A Meta-critical Statement". *Language, Literature, and Communication: A Multi-disciplinary Journal of the Arts*, 2 (2), pp. 15-35.
10. Maduka, C., 20210, "Feminism, Womanism and Motherism in African Literary Discourse" *Journal of Nigeria English and Literature*. 8 (6).
11. Ngara, E., 1986, "The Portrayal of Women in African Literature." *Kunapipi*, 11 (3), pp. 34-40.
12. Njoku, A., & Eke, G., 2016, "Suspense and Catharsis as Devices in Tragic Narratives: A Reading of Uwem Akpan's *Say You're One Of Them* and Wale Okediran's *After The Flood*", *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*.4 (2), pp.22-30.
13. Nwachukwu, C., & UnekeEnyi, A., 2015, "Matriarchy and the Feminist Agenda: Deconstructing the Logocentric Tenets and Posture of Nigerian Critics /Writers on Feminism" *International Journal of Comparative Literature & Translation Studies*, 3 (3) pp. 42-51.
14. Nwahunanya, C. 2011, "Introduction: From Boom to Doom- The Niger Delta in Contemporary Nigerian Literature." *From Boom to Doom: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the Literature of the Niger Delta*. Eds Chinyere Nwahunanya.Owerri: Springfield Publishers.
15. Ogun-dipe-Leslie, M., 1987, "The Female Writer and Her Commitment." *Women in African Literature Today. A Review*. Eds Eldred Durosims Jones, Eustace Palmer Marjorie Jones. Trenton: African World Press. pp 5-13.
16. Ogunyemi, C., 1988, "Woman and Nigerian Literature," *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature*. 1 Lagos: Guardian Books.
17. Okediran, W., 2003, *After The Flood*. Learn Africa P.L.C. Lagos.
18. Okpala, E. & Utoh-Ezeajugh, T., (2018), "Inter and Intra- Gender Discourse in African Prose: An Interrogation of the Female Image in Selected Literary Texts." *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities UJAH*, volume 19, no.2, 2018. pp 1-24.
19. Ona, P., 2009, "Beyond Nigerian nightmare". *The Nation*. (27), pp: 35.
20. Simon, E.D, 2010, "The Niger Delta Region and the Woman's Predicament: A Study of Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*" *African Research Review An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal*, Ethiopia 4 (3), pp. 155-166.
21. Umezinwa, J. and Yakubu, P., 2020 "Gender Discourse and the Portraiture Of Women Activism in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*," *ANSU Journal of Language and Literary Studies (AJLLS)* 2 (1) pp. 177-135.