

Postcolonial Ecofeminism in May Ifeoma Nwoye's *Oil Cemetery*

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Abstract

*Nigeria's post-independence history has been marked by extensive oil and gas exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region, leading to environmental decline. This decline leads to severe consequences like climate change, loss of biodiversity and harm to human health. Following this disturbing phenomenon, 'Postcolonial Ecofeminists' rise to the occasion through their works to expose how colonialism and patriarchal systems create 'compounded subjugation' to colonised women, with a view to challenge the monolithic portrayals of 'Third World women' and the systemic structures of power that lead to the domination of women and the destruction of nature. It is against this backdrop, that this article foregrounds Nwoye's perspective in her novel, *Oil Cemetery*. The study adopted 'Postcolonial Ecofeminism' as its theoretical framework as it explored how the deep interconnectedness of patriarchal system and colonialism have led to significant environmental damage and social injustice in the Niger Delta. It concluded that the complex relationships between the 'colonizer and colonised in the Niger Delta and its devastating consequences in Nwoye's novel, offered a path towards a true environmental justice, gender equality and sustainable practices in a world grappling with socio-ecological crises. The women's collective struggle and fierce resistance in the novel are also viable ethical strategy for sustainable practices that promote empathy and respect for the interdependence of 'women and nature' in postcolonial societies.*

Keywords: Socio-ecological crises, Women/nature, Postcolonial Ecofeminism, Environmental ethics, Sustainable practices,

Introduction

The natural environment holds significant importance in the lives of human and the nonhuman, as it plays a crucial role in their existence and well-being. Without the presence of nature, humans would lack the necessary resources and conditions required for their sustenance and development. The natural environment offers humans a sense of comfort and facilitates a more convenient way of life. Like every other species on the planet, humans depend on a healthy ecosystem for their ecological balance and optimum survival. In addition to this, healthy ecosystems produce the necessities of life, such as oxygen, that purifies and detoxify the air and water, which regulate our weather and climate.

More so, the natural environment provides food and resources for economic growth and means to fight natural hazards. This shows humans and nature dependence for survival and well-being. It is in line with this that ecological theorists like Uriel Bronfenbrenner emphasis on the fact that individuals don't develop in isolation but within a web of interconnected systems. Pansuriya Vibhuti, in "Harmony between Human and Nature in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, also avers

that “Nature is the most important part of human life; without nature, man is nothing. Nature provides human life comfort and makes life easy.”(2). More so, Scott Slovic, in his essay “A Basic Introduction to Ecocriticism and Environmental Literature”, affirms that, “Try to imagine a society or even an individual human being that does not require some form of interaction with the natural world in order to exist.” (1). Thus, the interconnectedness of humans and nature fosters a sense of shared responsibility and encourages actions that support both humans’ health and the health of the environment.

The fact remains that oil exploration in the Niger Delta contribute significantly to the Nigeria’s government revenue and the nation’s export earnings. However, while the oil industry generates revenue and employment, it also leads to environmental damage which is a serious threat to the lives and well-being of both human and nonhuman in the Niger Delta. this is simply why Adorno and Horkheimer observe that, “As humans struggle to establish dominance over nature, they become slaves to the technology they have developed (31). Alexander Jebiminih Moro in his “The Social and Ecological Consequences of Oil Exploration in the Delta”, observes that, “... the utilisation of explosives during seismic operations destroys the habitats” (55). In the same vein, Nnimmo Bassey reveals that, “... oil exploration operations in the Niger Delta are done without the least regard for the safety of the community and the environment...” (45-58). Okonta and Douglas also reports that, “...the ravages of Shell’s seismic activities are most noticeable. Here the aerial roots of tall mangrove trees are mauled and ravaged, and it takes them over three decades to regenerate, that is if the area is not disturbed by renewed oil exploration activities” (69). More so, Joseph Ushie captures this deplorable state as: The Niger Delta [is] completely vandalised, its once fertile land soaked in and sterilised by crude oil...” (8). More so, to Akinyele, “...oil boom in the region has given rise to “militancy, kidnapping, corruption at its peak, higher level of migration, prostitution and disease, increase in the miscegenation syndrome called ‘yellow’, abject poverty and gradual erosion of nationalistic value, among others.” (77).

No doubt, the oil activities in the Niger Delta has severe and far-reaching consequence, impacting on the environment and human health as it leads to the depletion of essential resources like ‘air, water and soil, the destruction of the ecosystems and wildlife and the disruption of natural processes. Consequently, the Niger-Delta region is in a continuous state of environmental decline, leading to severe consequences like climate change, loss of biodiversity, land degradation and harm to human wellbeing and the overall health of the planet. In fact, the continued depletion of resources and the ozone layer and its aftermath repercussions are environmental realities of the Niger Delta, commonly referred to as moving “from boom to doom”. According to Serpil Oppermann, “This is an issue that should be emphasized with the importance that people commit suicide in a sense by destroying water, air, soil, plants, and animals, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, irreversibly, through actions that are accepted as normal by society. As long as nature is seen as a source to be exploited, the human body will also get its share (1-18). This brings to the fore, the extent to which socio-ecological issues are intertwined with postcolonial contemporary literary narratives. It is in view of this that Moses Africa Adakonye in his Thesis asserts that, “It seems that one of the major social challenges that has bedevilled the 21st Century postcolonial literary ecological discourse is the conflict between nature and culture impacted by industrialism and technology deterring on man and his environment ... (1). In the same vein, Cheryll Glotfelty, observes that:

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists, and

philosophers, cannot do the reforming, of course, but they can help with the understanding. (xxi)

The above excerpts account for the reason why certain human activities that endangers the ecosystem must be exposed for people to understand the inherent dangers or risks. It is in view of this that Barack Obama, in his speech announcing the Clean Power Plan on August 3, 2015, in the United State, asserts that, “climate change is no longer a problem of the future that we expect our children and grandchildren to experience. He also states that we are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation to be able to do something about it”. More so, the United Nation Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, at the UN’s Climate Summit in November, 2021, sternly warns that, “addiction of fossil fuels is pushing humanity to the brink: We are faced with stark choice: Either we stop it or it stops us ...” (1).

The desire for industrialization and development and the misconception that everything on planet earth is a ‘human product’ has endangered man and nature. Consequently, the need for solutions to women oppression, ecological destruction and environmental pollution in both literary and non-literary discourse becomes exigent. It is against this backdrop that this study attempts to look at Nwoye’s novel from postcolonial context, in order to reveal Nigerian Ecofeminists’ efforts in the global campaign against ‘ecological subversion and an eco-patriarchal system’ in postcolonial societies.

Nigerian Ecofeminists

Nigerian ecofeminists include: Kaine Agary’s *Yellow, Yellow*, Tess Onwueme’s *Then She Said It* (2002), *What Mama Said* (2003), Nwoye’s *Oil Cemetery* (2015), Christie Watson’s *Tiny Little Sunbirds Far Away*, (2012) among others. The connection between women and nature symbolized ‘Mother Nature’, stems from shared characteristic like life-giving and maturing aspects, cycles and the capacity for creation. To the ecofeminists to be a feminist is to be an ecologist since the plight of women and that of the earth are indeed inseparable. Agary, in her article “My Blessings, My Curse” uses a woman’s perspective to highlight the injustices that the women and nature have faced since the struggle of oil began in Niger Delta region. Most of the Nigerian ecofeminist works explore the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on women, children and the marginalized communities which resonates in Sule Egya’s observation about Nwoye’s novel, that, “it is an exemplar of postcolonial ecofeminist action that leaves the reader wondering the resourcefulness of Nigerian female artists...” (154-155).

To Murphy, “Ecofeminism is a practical movement or social change arising out of the struggle of women to sustain themselves, their families and their communities” (28). Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi also shares the same sentiment in her “Ecological Postcolonialism in African Women’s Literature”, when describes the likes of Nwoye as, “... writers who have seen drastic changes following the movement from colonialism, through independence, to the postcolonial era that have (re)shaped African societies, histories and culture. They contend that woman’s life is more affected by these local and global shifts...” (708). No doubt, Nigerian women have played increasingly vital roles in environmental activism, particularly in response to the impacts of resource extraction and industrialization.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework of this study is ‘Postcolonial ecofeminism’. This is an emerging analytical literary theory that deviates from the mainstream ecofeminists’ views, as advocated by Postcolonial Eco-critics. Rob Nixon as one of the earliest postcolonialists ecocritics in his ground

breaking essay, *Environmentalism and Postcolonialism*, affirms the need for the merger of ‘postcolonial theory and ecocriticism’. Elizabeth De Loughrey, Didur and Carrigan, also in their essay, *Global Ecologies and Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches and Environmental Approaches*, see ‘Postcolonial Ecocriticism “as an emerging theory that has offered crucial insights regarding the way the current climate crisis is intertwined with Ex-colonies’ narratives, histories and material practices of colonialism and globalization.” (2). More so, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, in their work, emphasised on the major tasks of the merger of ‘post colonialism and ecocriticism’ as, “a contest to western ideologies of development” (27). Huggan and Tiffin also claim that, “the top-down forms of economic management [are] bound to the neo-colonialist imperatives of global corporate commerce and the post-independence state” (52). Postcolonial ecocriticism in this sense, is the analysis of specific circumstance and material conditions faced by women in formerly colonized regions, moving beyond purely symbolic connections between women and nature. It challenges dominant androcentric (male-centred) worldviews for a more just and sustainable future. Thus, the merger of the two becomes necessary as the ‘mainstream’ fails to consider the material realities and circumstances in which the women particularly from ‘ex-colonies’ are living. Neelam Jabeen strongly, shares this sentiment in her article, *Ecofeminism and Pakistan Anglophone Literature* that, “Ecofeminist discourse is primarily developed by Western scholars. It does not always take into account the discrepancies that exist between the non-western and subaltern women-nature relationships provided”. She further introduces how the term “Postcolonial Ecofeminism” seeks to answer those moral questions that the ‘mainstream ecofeminism’ did not.

More so, Hafsa Noor, in her article “Ecofeminism and Postcolonialism in Short Fiction” raises pertinent question to shed more light on the shortcoming of ‘mainstream ecofeminists’, when she asks, “Does ecofeminism incorporate the female from other parts of the world? ...Do the environmentally concerned feminist and ecofeminist consider the material realities of the women of the Third World?” In her responds, she concludes that:

“No”. the relevance of mainstream ecofeminism is questionable, as it does not incorporate the female from all parts of the world. And also it fails to consider the material realities of the women of the Third World. We have seen that mainstream ecofeminism would not be an appropriate Ecofeminist analysis of Ahmad’s story, the Gatekeeper for its analysis, an alternative discourse like Postcolonial ecofeminism” is needed as Postcolonial ecofeminism stresses on a critical analysis of women-nature relationship... (30)

It is in line with the above valid argument that this study deployed ‘postcolonial ecofeminism’ as its theoretical framework because the material realities and circumstances of the women living in two diverse parts of the world cannot be the same. The convergence of the two approaches recognised that various forms of oppression like colonialism, patriarchy, racism, and classism are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Above all, it challenges Western dominance that prioritises scientific progress and development at the expense of the environment and the marginalised communities. It pays close attention to the material realities and the experiences of the postcolonial women.

More so, as an emerging literary criticism, it provides a framework for analysing literature from postcolonial contexts, as it argues that the exploitation of the environment and oppression of women are not separate issues but deeply intertwined with structures of power. Invariably, ‘post-colonialism ecofeminist’ analyses highlight how historical patterns of colonial exploitation continue to affect women and the environment in the postcolonial world. It also demands a deeper

understanding and a more inclusive approach to environmental and feminist thought. In spite of these, it is important to also note that the merger of post colonialism and ecofeminism provides the specific material conditions and unique experiences of women within postcolonial contexts in order to address the “double bind” the colonised women are being subjected to.

Textual Analysis

Ubolu in the Niger Delta, is portrayed in Nwoye’s *Oil Cemetery*, as a community with pristine ecological attributes before the discovery of oil. The women in Ubolu were happy with the coming of Oil Companies like Zebulon Oil International to their community because they thought they would enjoy the fruits of modernity of the oil facilities cited in their communities. However, what follows later after the installations of oil facilities by Zebulon Oil International is directly the opposite of the women’s expectations. This resonates Kein Agary’s poem “My Blessings, My Curse”. In fact, this modern western ideology of development eventually leads to toxic contamination of the environment and frequent death in Ubolu community. The narrator reports that “Both husband and wife were buried near the disaster ground. The community named the place THE OIL CEMETRY, because it harboured the bodies of their sons and daughters, brought down by the greed for oil...” (126). The title of Nwoye’s novel written in capital letters is an allegory that depicts a place of “disaster and consequent death” as a result of oil exploration activities in Ubolu community.

Nwoye in her struggle to liberate Nigeria women and children from petrodollars capitalism inserts Rita Izundu into union that has been dominated by male. Although, she is not a member of the union but like Susan Griffin in the preface of the second edition of her *Woman and Nature* would say, “we are thinking about the manner in which we live and about how we might create a just world...in the process scrutinized the culture we had inherited for clues to how we might see it differently and thus change it...” (18). Consequently, in the novel Rita’s speech brightens the hope of the Ubolu oil community in order to make the point clear that unless the “Otherness or Women” are giving the chance, sustainable practices in Nigeria remains a wishful thinking.

In the novel, Nwoye uses Rita, a mere female teenager to show that age and gender do not matter in consciousness raising in a society where traditionalism relegate the female child and the woman to passive member. Thus, with ‘an authorial feminist’ voice’ in Ubolu community-meeting, Rita impulsively says:

From the slave trade era to the crude oil era,” Rita began, “the history of our natural resources has remained in the hand of a league of merchants whose key agenda lay in the amount of natural resources they could acquire from our country. In their scheming exploits, they have raids our culture and our communities, brought a string of political, economic and social clashes, introduced conflicts, and ignited the fire of poverty and self-destruction among our people. Parents cannot conveniently send their children to school because, even if they get employed after schooling, they are not sure they will not be sacked the next day. So I pose a question today. What is the oil industry’s contribution to the development of our communities? (Nwoye, p.62-63)

The above passage marks the beginning of Nwoye’s profound eco-moral questions about the impact of oil activities in Ubolu. The male union reacted in the usual masculine manner to shut Rita up. “They scream, it’s a woman! What does she know?” (62), but Nwoye uses Steve who is chairing the meeting to politely reject this patriarchal moves. Steve knows that he may be accused of bringing a ‘mere girl’ to be his mouthpiece in the meeting meant for only the male folk yet he

asks Rita to continue her speech. The eco-feminist's moral question is, if the genesis of the struggles is for the welfare of the entire communities why would women be exempted? Thus, with Steve in the novel, Nwoye confronts the "patriarchal reality" in Ubolu by infusing the young protagonist with courageous spirit to dismantle the 'Patriarchal structures' that perpetuate gender inequality as exhibited by the men in the union meeting. Rita continues that:

The oil spillage causes frequent farmland depletion and forest fires, as well as, serious air pollution. It also poisons the earth, kills crops, and thus plunges many farmers into deeper poverty. More serious is the contamination of rivers, which not only deprives fishermen of their living but causes a shortage of drinking water...The crazy exploitation of oil has disrupted the normal life of our people with nothing to show for it instead, we have moved from oil boom to oil doom. It is time we demand our rights... (Nwoye, p.63)

Rita's above speech in the meeting, affirms what Partha Sharma observed as the basic concepts of ecological degradation in literature. Rita's speech adumbrates the negative and domino effects of fossil fuels on the people of Niger Delta especially women, as well as, inspiring to the entire community to collectively embark on reclamation remediation task. After her speech, while some marvelled at her intelligence and eloquence, others sought to know which department she works in. Suddenly a male voice affirms that, "We have been fooling around; she has hit the crux of the matter. We should be stakeholders' not peanut collectors." (63) Evidently, the peanut collectors are the male folk in the novel who usually negotiates with the oil companies in Ubolu, as well as, the local elites known as the "Men of the Alphabet" Peter and Abbas that collude with the oil companies to short-change the oil communities. Nwoye here tries to depict the men's attitude of embarking on agitation only to be placated with money and agitate again whenever their broke.

The peanut collection idea in the novel is very vital to this study as it reveals Nwoye's change of narrative in her quest for collective struggles towards sustainable practices in Nigeria. In the novel, Nwoye reveals men's "shortsightedness and greed," as well as, their inordinate ambition, corruptness and complacency. She succeeded in replacing the idea of peanut collection which validates the idea that to be a feminist is to be an ecologist since the plight of women and that of the earth are inseparable. Kate Soper in her article "Nature and Sexual Politics", lends her voice to this, "[P]atriarchal oppression has frequently been linked with those forms of rationality and technocrats' values that ecologist cites as responsible for the domination and destruction of nature." (121)

Nwoye's use of Rita in the novel to break the monopoly of patriarchy and suggest an imperative in which all genders of human and even the nonhuman can collectively integrate towards a safe environment. Murphy in his *Literature, Nature and Other* lends his voice to this when he says, "only by the recognizing of the existence of the 'other' as a self-existent entity can we begin to comprehend a gender hierarchical continuum in which difference exist without binary opposition and hierarchical valorization." (4-5). The hierarchical relation here implies that each should have respect for each other because without this, the present ecological dream will remain a mirage. Thus, the death of Steve in the novel symbolizes the end to the pillar of 'patriarchal structure which led to the emergence of Rita as the spoke person. Although, she is a fragile young girl in Ubolu community and not an oil worker at Zebulon Oil but becomes a powerful force to reckon with. Nwoye in her collective struggle infuses Rita with the spirit of collective eco-activism and she got deeply involved in the matters that concern the welfare of the oil communities. Thus, the narrator recounts the people's terrible experiences, again that:

Once again it is time for the annual festival. But this year, the festival had lost its sparkle. The usual excitement and joy on the face of Ubolu's villagers had turned gloomy. The land was no longer fertile and harvest too dry. What came out of the

ground that year was more bizarre than bountiful. In some cases, some came out was smaller than what was planted. Even with Izundu's explanations, the farmers could not fathom this new turn of events. The harvest threw the whole community into a panic. It foretold that famine and hunger would confront the community. In the months ahead...Throughout the village everyone is talking about imminent hunger... (Nwoye, p.113)

The above snippet reveals how the Ubolu community are deprived and forced into petrodollars capitalism as an alternative source of survival. The effect of the privation as a result of oil exploration is obvious, as many people became redundant, poor, hungry and frustrated. Consequently, they resort to illegal oil business (oil bunkery). In the heat of the argument in the novel, Among the idling youths, one suggests that, "I am saying we all needed money. Look at the river-the fish have run away and they are now replaced by oil. Why can't we collect the oil and sell? ..." (115-116). One among them interrupted that, "That's is stupid talk. "The first speaker continued, "To you is a stupid talk, but I know what I am talking about." He then asks' "Did you not hear of the scarcity in the country?" (116). The argument ensued here, is about money, their land, dead fish, the farm and the boys and girls who are victims in the village. In the heat of their argument one of them suggested that, "they should try and collect real gasoline, because they knew they could sale it at an exorbitant prize. He suggested that they start immediately. Thus, two boys followed him and in the end, it took little persuasion to sign the others onto the adventurers' plan. Two weeks later, the boys surface again, looking well-dressed and much happier. The narrator recounts that; "That is how children got into fuel business, the boys went to predetermined spot early in the morning and destroyed a pipe to collect the fuel. By late afternoon, they had finished the business and the scope of the business...." (116-117).

The unpalatable consequence of oil explosion as a result of "fuel business" escalates the already worsened environmental situation. In the novel the narrator reports that, "...not less than sixty bodies of human beings were scattered all over the scene. Some were burnt beyond recognition. The stench of burning oil, burnt flesh and burnt plastic filled the air..." (117). This reveals oil havoc in Ubolu communities in the Niger Delta and thus necessitates the emergence of the people's fierce activism in the novel. The Ubolu fire incident resonates Susan Griffin's thought in her essay "Split Culture", that; "Thus, if the discoveries of modern science have given us the means to manipulate nature, they have also terrified us... when science began to challenge our old idea of who we are, the witch burnings began... the Nazi holocaust and now the nuclear holocaust have commenced" (11). In order to prove how women of all ages, educated in the western way or not, can collectively rise and take action to emancipate themselves and the entire society, Nwoye uses 'subaltern' like Rita Izundu and other women in the novel to champion her 'postcolonial Eco-activism'. When community assembled in the village town hall to address the painful realities of their time. Rita says; "We are all gathered here to address a painful situation in the course of justice to all men. ...But where is our once fertile land and livestock? What happened to the rivers and the fish that swam in them? Where are the smiles on the happy faces of our people? (142). These excerpts clearly show how bad things have become in Ubolu communities since their encounter with oil exploration. Rita continues her speech:

...Our land has been given out without our consent for oil exploration. No one cared how we felt: no one sought our opinion. That constitutes a great injustice to our people. And as a result, our environment is totally polluted. Our water is contaminated...; the rivers look like rivers of death. The fish are disappearing for lack of oxygen...Our livestock are dying. Our schools are dilapidated. Our roads are terrible.... Our people are dying in great numbers; there are no hospitals ...there is

an urgent need for action. What we are saying is that we are tired! Enough is enough! (Nwoye, p.142-143)

The above passage also depicts an “act of Eco-subversion” in the oil-producing region which calls for eco-activism. This expresses the view that the present global ecological challenges are retributions for the disregard of the natural order. At the same time, quite sympathetic in a number of ways as there is a complete denial of the economic life in the Niger Delta, as the land is no more fertile for farming and fishing due to oil spillage. Perhaps, this is the reason why Griffin suggests that, “We have learned that we must take control of our environment in order to survive. We believe that it is a cultural order, the order we have willed, and not natural order, the order of which we are a part that makes us safe” (11). Consequently, the women in the oil communities resort to fierce protest against this ‘ecological imperialism’. This resonates Gurpreet Kaur’s view in “Postcolonial Ecofeminism in Indian Novels in English”, “... where it would be necessary to recognise that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are intimately bound up with notions of ..., colonialism and neo-colonialism” (30). With the collective support of Freedom Bench and Rita the protagonist in the novel, Zebulon Oil along with other oil companies were sued, charged and summoned.

The Oil Workers and Ubolu Oil Communities

The relationship between the natives and oil workers in the novel is that of ‘boss-servant relationship’ as defined by ‘colonialism’. This is a system of exploitation where the colonizer extract resources and imposes its culture and institutions on the subordinate colony, often leading to lasting negative consequences as seen in the Niger Delta. Cajetan Iheka in his work reveals that, what is most striking about the behaviour of oil firms in the Niger Delta, “is how they continue to treat African and their environments as if they were empty of people or constituted by disposable people ...” (9). These senses of alienation and insensitivity of the oil workers in the oil region also resonate in Nwoye’s novel as Mr Smith one of the oil expatriates in the novel avers that, “These people can’t be your friends. You used them and let them go” (26). He says, “We have been in the Niger for some years now; all you need to do is to get a smart guy, one of their types and give him money to share to their local chiefs. Then you are on.” (26). Jefferson also one of the oil expatriates, says, “you have the link on ground and ties with the natives, you handle that angle...” (124).

Again, Alex a new director who just joined the oil team suggests that, “I heard that those chiefs of the three communities are planning to proposes to the government that they want us out of the country. Maybe we should go and see them” (124). Hardcast his colleague flared up at his suggestion and ask, “What do you know about the locals and what’s going on here? He continues that, “All they want is money, money and more money. We have paid our dues. So I don’t want to sit here and listen to rubbish about visiting...” (124). Bill one of them, spoke for the first time that, “I believe there is a lot of sense in what Alex said. Even if we do not go to visit them, we must tread very carefully...” (125). Perhaps, this is why Celistia, a native in the novel in a protest voice says, “The people whose drink, I won’t take is the white men. Why? They have destroyed our land, our water, our girls and raped our culture...” (189).

The oil expatriates’ insensitivity and corrupt tendencies is also seen when they try to bribe Rita through her father. The father was given five million dollars for his daughter but he ended up giving her N200, 000 naira but she rejects the bribe from her father as she says, “No!” She shouted, that will not work! If you took anything from anybody, Papa please return it!” (176). Nwoye here, also uses Rita’s father to depict the local complacency to the socio-ecological issues. Mr Smith, one of the oil expatriates’ who during one of their meetings exposes the meanness, tactlessness, as well

as, callousness of the oil workers says, "...our concern here is the "oil". Let them do whatever they like, as long as we get the oil in the end" (76). It is in order to achieve this, that they resort to the "Divide and conquer" tactic as Smith summed up in the novel.

As this discussion progresses anger built up until it exploded, as the narrator reveals, "The old women, singing ancient sorrowful songs, began to tear their clothing shredding their garments right off their bodies ...They sang in unison. The sight of the naked women made them quite uneasy ... They women were chanting enough is enough and the men certainly agreed" (191). The 'Eco-Anger' here, shows the spirit of collective struggle and the resilience among the Ubolu women and a shift in the paradigm from women being passive voice. In the novel after so much persuasion from the old women, Rita and Barrister Bassey, the oil companies concede to most of the demands of the women because they have incurred losses running to billions of dollars as a result of the protest which leads to suspension of work on exploration sites. The young women who were earlier inspired by Rita's exploits, also had the courage to join the old women by tearing their clothes as a result of the 'eco-depression'. The narrator further states the reasons and nature of the fierce protest:

...They tore their clothing like people in mourning, because abomination and catastrophe had befallen their land in their lifetime. The land had been soaked in oil no fishing, no farming, no jobs, no means of livelihood for their children and grandchildren. The fertility of the river has been destroyed beyond trace and the toxicity of the contaminated water had rendered them perpetually thirsty. Poverty had taken over the land. Who would speak for them? Who would bury them when they died? The oil Companies have lured their husbands and children to early graves. ... (Nwoye, p.192)

The potency in Nwoye's technique of traditional practices of "undressing or nudity protest" in the novel cannot be taken for granted for what it symbolises. This is because stripping naked in Nigeria, traditionally signifies 'a curse' for those targeted and willingness to die for this course. This approach repels the oil companies' executives and their workers as most of them had to vacate work to avoid seeing nakedness of their daughters, wives, mothers and grandmothers. As Mr Hardcast, confesses that, "Believe me... I can face any challenge but I have never been confronted by a toothless naked woman" (194). John Whiskey the head of Sizzle Oil Company also says; "They call me a womanizer but for the first time in my life I saw a woman and ran away..." (194). This becomes a turning point for the oil workers to call themselves to order and have to listen to the demands of the host communities. The female body often used and abused by patriarchal exertions and discourses becomes a strategic means to fight the same system. The successful demonstration of the subaltern women in the novel shows the power of traditional practice and modern approach used by Nwoye to confront modern-day ecological challenges.

After the women fierce successful revolt all the parties are able to rethink and re-strategize for a better understanding. Bill during one of their meetings confesses in the novel that; "...Imagine all that money we have been spending on them over the years! It we'd applied it towards these projects women are demanding now, we all could have been better. Trust the women! Sensible lot! It is from my mother that I learned to respect womenfolk... (207-208). In the same vein, Frank in the same meeting also adds that, "The women are thinking of what will benefit the entire community. All the money the men have collected from us, they used to marry new wives and take ridiculous title. Bastards..." (207-208). Jefferson acknowledges this and calls them to order. He says that, "...These women have got us were it hurt most ..." (208). At the assembly, one of the men present shouted; "Our gallant women have something to say to us... the women have succeeded where men failed! Is that not shame?" (213). Izundu also confesses that, "Our women have done us proud by the challenge they posed to the oil companies..." (214). This resonate in Nfah-Abbenyi's comment

that, "...men and women live in harmony with each other, with the environment and the cosmos, only then shall the new Jasper and Coral, be born" (713). Timi's mother in the novel shouted dreams are transforming into reality ...we have been waiting for a day like this!" (213). This shows how the women of Ubolu have lived up to the expectation of all in ending the domination of nature and oppression of women which Nwoye envisioned. It also re-echoes Nwoye's vision for sustainable practices in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Nwoye's novel vividly depicts how patriarch capitalism and colonization in the Niger Delta affect the environment and lives of women, leading to 'eco-anger and eco-depression'. This reveals Nwoye's *Oil Cemetery* as an exemplar of 'postcolonial ecofeminist novel' because to Huggan and Tiffin, what combines postcolonialism and ecocriticism is the fact that environmental oppression occurs because of colonial and imperial ideology that oppresses humans in ex-colonies. Rosemary Ruether, also aptly describes Nwoye's type of novel as, "... a critique of systems hostile to ex-colonies' women and nature." (232). The women's collective action and perspectives in the novel reveal the experiences of the 'colonized women, as well as, their crucial efforts towards advocating for collective sustainable practices and a healthier planet for all. Consequently, until women are actively involved in the struggle towards 'sustainable practices' in postcolonial countries like Nigeria will continue to be like striving after the wind.

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