

## Crimes Against Nature: Ecocritical Analysis of Ojaide's *The Activist* and Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

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### **Abstract:**

Human being's interaction with nature is generally verbalized in various forms, and literature is definitely one of these forms. As one of the recurrent themes in writing, nature has managed to attract the attention of numerous writers especially the novelists. The literary interest in nature and environment has resulted in the emergence of ecocriticism which studies the relationship between literature and environment. This new method of ecocriticism has proven itself to be useful in highlighting the spreading environmental issues in today's globalized world. For this reason, this theory, a holistic approach to literature seeking to examine the relationship between man and his environment, has been employed to determine the depth and extent of damage that human beings inflicted on their natural environment. Therefore, the paper attempts to explore and analyze human beings' tireless efforts to damage or destroy their environment towards the satisfaction of their insatiable desires in the light of two invaluable pieces of literature: Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born*.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, environment, human beings, destroy, Ojaide, Armah

### **Introduction**

Ecocriticism is the study of literature from the purview of nature and environment. The need to study literature from the premise of environment and nature is important in today's world and reality because of the ongoing environmental crisis across the globe. Literature in its very nature serves as a tool for intervention and therefore the engagement of literature in discourses within the premises of environmental studies is very important because of its ability to give reorientation and stimulate positive changes. Ecological studies have shown that the human environment in the world today has been compromised and this accounts for re-occurring natural disasters and

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environmental havoc which is always happening around the globe. The need to address the factors paving ways for environmental degradation and collapse is very imperative. Ecocriticism is relatively a recent development in literary appreciation/criticism. The popularity of this field of literary studies became massive in 1990's. According to Gitanjali Gogoi, "... From the very inception, ecocriticism has been based on the assumption that human world and the physical environment are closely interlinked and that one is shaped by the other and therefore the study of the representation of human-nature relationship in literature is of utmost important to understand the environmental predicament of today's world" (2014: 1). The reception of this sphere of literary appreciation is further boosted by the fact that the environment is part and parcel of human existence and that human beings in so far as they are in existence continually do interact with the environment. Sometimes these interactions and explorations of the environment could either be positive or negative. The fact that literary scholars focus attention to environment and nature as represented in literary text further emphasizes the functionality and importance of literature to humanity. Tiiu Speek also explains that:

Ecocriticism is an ecological outgrowth of post-structural criticism that studies human representations of nature. Just as feminist criticism examines traditional genres from gender-conscious perspectives and discovers new women authors to add to literary canon, eco-critics reread canonical texts from earth-centered approaches and promote teaching and research of environmental non-fiction. Eco-critics are interested in how discursive conventions enable and constrain our contact with environment and place, how much does place inform representations, and how do the means of representations inform our sense of place. They examine significant tropes and myths that shape our environmental imagination and action (2000: 162).

From its origin in the USA, ecocriticism gears towards making a connection or creating a nexus between environmental and non-fiction. Romantic poets like John Donne explored environment and nature a whole lot in their poetic creation. Tiiu further explains that "Ecocriticism originated in the USA, largely from the need to study environmental non-fiction called nature writing which is produced mostly in Western states of the USA. The nature and landscapes of the places from which this kind of writing arises is grand and ancient" (162). Going by the origin of ecocriticism as a field of study it could be understood that it evaluates the rapport between animate (humans) and inanimate (non-human) elements represented in a literary text. Literature in its very nature is a representation of social reality. Man and his environment are the major components that make up the society. Ecocriticism as a genre of literary studies therefore brings man in the

mix based on how the physical world which the ecosystem is part of and the human culture are connected. This connection between man and the environment brings about interactions between man and the environment. The way nature is portrayed in a body of text and the examination of their importance with environmental crisis is what ecocritical studies often times try to achieve. African literatures apparently to a great extent contain themes bordering on the relation of human being with the environment. Ecocriticism as a literary trend is very dominant within the premises of African Literary studies. This is so because Africans arguably are suffering from various environmental challenges. These environmental crises in African societies are well represented in African literature. No wonder Stella Okoye-Ugwu thinks that:

Part of the reason Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* was to portray the African ideal of a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural environment. He set out to capture a serene and tranquil traditional society full of love for one another and showcasing people living peacefully with natural elements. This is seen as what encapsulates the overall effect of Achebe's perspective on the African's links with the land, so as to make his African readers realize what it was to dwell in a harmonious relationship with the physical environment (2013: 156).

This article explores an ecocritical evaluation of the literary texts under study with the sole aim of showing how human factors that contribute to the collapse of the ecosystem and thus enhance environmental degradation and also to pin point possible approaches to address the human factors affecting the environment as represented in the selected texts.

Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born* are two significant works of African literature that vividly depict some of the pertinent environmental challenges bedeviling the African society in this postcolonial period. Man has been widely linked to be the major cause of environmental degradation and ecosystem collapse. Many of the slums and filthy environment inherent in the African society and also represented by Ojaide and Armah in their works are in many instances if not in all occasions, are created and sustained by man and his activities. The havoc that comes with the destruction of the environment in Africa is so horrible yet Africans still indulge in activities that endanger their environments. Wale Okediran in his novel *After the Flood* shows some examples of some of the painful experiences human beings pass through as a result of environmental degradation. The loss of lives and property, infliction of deadly diseases are some of the havocs that come with the destruction of the environment. In conducting this research, two

research questions that have been identified will serve as a guide: What are the impacts and implication of slums and having slums dwellers as reflected in the works of literature under study? What are the reasons why human beings engage in activities that can lead to environmental degradation as represented in *The Activist* and *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born*?

The aim of this study is to conduct an ecocritical analysis of Ojaide's *The Activist* and Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born* and explore the environmental issues in Africa and also address the causes of environmental degradation. This article will be hinged on the theory of Ecocriticism proposed by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in their work *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* and defined the concept of ecocriticism as "the study of relation between literature and physical environment" (1996: 9).

The critical analytical and qualitative research methodology was adopted for this study in order to critically and contextually analyze the texts under study. The adopted research approach is expected to aid the researcher in critically analyzing and applying ecocriticism theory for the study. Where necessary, excerpts are drawn, described and interpreted from the primary texts to show the relevance of ecocriticism to this research. The primary materials for this research are Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful One Are Not Yet Born*. Therefore, the analysis will be traditional content analysis and interpretive analysis. Traditional content analysis will involve presentation and analysis of ecocritical components and elements contained in the primary data. Content analysis will be used to make replicable and valid inferences by interpreting and coding textual material and by systematically evaluating texts. The secondary data for this research includes journal articles, textbooks and other library materials. The essence of thesis study cannot be overstated given the socio economic and environmental damages posed by the increasing effects of unhealthy environmental practices by humans. In addition, the inadequacy of relevant literatures on issues of environmental concerns in Nigeria necessitated this study. Therefore, the study complemented available literature on the environment.

The exploration of ecocriticism focuses majorly on African environmental literary criticism. The rationale behind this is because the scope of this study is within the premise of African environment as represented in the works of literature under study. The mid-eighties is known for the opening of new vista of knowledge and research. Scholars during this period became more open to collaborative research project which also included the environmental literary studies. Before the 1980s, the study of nature and culture from the purview of literature has been ongoing especially in the 1960s. According to Kate Rigby:

Although a growing consciousness of nature and environmental issues started in 1960's and 1970's, but Eco-criticism was not organised as Marxism and Feminism. A number of important resources related to Eco-criticism are mainly found in books of Leo Marx and Raymond Williams. However the birth of the word Eco-criticism has been dated to William Rueckart's publication of the essay: "Literature and Ecology; An Experiment in Eco-criticism" in 1978 (2002: 1).

The study of literature in connection to the environment continued to develop and gather more momentum as a field of study and hit its peak in the 1990's as it became a major critical theory in the literary studies.

The major trend in the study of literature in relation to environment is that its development and acceptability as a theory grew over time with the publication of works like essays and books by various scholars on the concept of ecocriticism. Rigby also notes that:

Another major text of Eco-criticism is Lawrence Buell's *Environmental Imagination* which offers four criteria to determine whether a text is environmental. First, "the non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device". Second, "the human interest is not the only legitimate interest", third "human accountability to environment is part of the text's ethical orientation" and fourth "there is one sense of the environment as a process". Buell also wrote "Writing for an Endangered World" where he expresses his concern about the threats to the environment (2002: 2-3).

Ecological studies are very imperative in today's world. There are lots of environmental havoc happening in various parts of the world and Africa inclusive occasioned by man's interaction with the environment. The consciousness about ozone depletion is saturated in the public domain and the most common explanation for this depletion is associated with industrial activities perpetuated by man all over the world. Shoba and Nagaraj explain that:

When people slowly started understanding what is happening to the ecosystem where they live, they started relating the ecological study – which considered the ecological problems like pollution, global warming, etc. – to literature. There emerged a new field of study over the last three decades. It was not until the end of the twentieth century that the study of literature and the environment was recognized as a subject to rise. The literary people named it "Ecocriticism" or "Environmental Literary Criticism" (85).

From the foregoing, it is rather clear that the idea of ecocriticism which is the study of literature in relation to literature is a modernist/postmodernist theory in the literary criticism that has evolved during this century.

Stella Okoye-Ugwu is of the opinion that "ecocriticism and environmental literature are recent developments in literary history.

Literature of all kinds, whether preliterate oral or postcolonial pastoral, nature, landscapes and praise poems about homelands are abundant in Africa as well as all among the Diasporic Africans” (2013: 155). This standpoint can be exemplified by some of the foremost African written literature like Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and other works create a nexus between literature and nature and, therefore, should be studied in contemporary times from the purview of ecocriticism. According to Chengyi Coral Wu:

Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), a classic of African literature, for example, has been read and studied as an African postcolonial novel that aims to reconstruct pre-colonial African cultural identity in general and traditional Igbo cultural identity in particular. However, this novel can also be read as an environmental novel (2012:1).

A reading of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* depicts a scenario of the African environment which has rich vegetation with beautiful mountains and forests. The fertile landscape that produces bountiful harvest to solve the food need of the people is the environmental scenario created in *Things Fall Apart*. Wu explains that “Achebe integrates into his writing, such as the imageries of the African forest, especially the forest’s influence on the sustainability of the Igbo community as well as its correlation with Igbo customs” (2012: 1).

African literature has already been propagating works that address themes of environmental issues. Besides Chinua Achebe, other African writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong’o presents literature works that shows a clear relationship between culture, literature and nature. In an essay “A Shot in the Arm for African Eco-Criticism,” Evan Mwangi explains that:

The clarity of symbolism around which the main conflict is built in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o’s *The River Between*, another African classic, resides in the way the author opens the narrative with a meticulous observation of the topography as he painstakingly describes Makuyu and Kameno ridges and valleys (2004: n. p).

Mwangi pointed out some postcolonial ecocritical aesthetics in the works of some African writers. He noted that Ngugi in his work describes vividly the topographies and the environment of the Mukuyu and Kameno ridges in *The River Between*. Mwangi also expressed the relationship between other African postcolonial literatures. He also pointed out ecological themes from Christina Rungano, the Zimbabwean poet. He noted that Rungano created a connection between literature and nature by presenting in her poem powers of nature to relate with the resilience of African woman to widen her human abilities. He acknowledges the poem emphasizes that there are powers of nature to give life. The idea of ecocriticism apparently has been a movement spreading in Africa and there is even a need to consolidate on its

popularity on the pages of text of African literature to widen its horizon. William Slaymaker emphasizes that:

The 1990's was the decade of rapid and global environmentalist literary growth, and anthologies, literary histories, and their likes are notoriously behind the times. Bibliographies of black African literature that appear in the first decade of the twenty-first century will likely reflect a significant growth of interest in ecocriticism and environmental literature. The low visibility of eco-lit and eco-crit in recent black African writing is temporary. The green revolution will spread to and through communities of readers and writers of African literature, 'ecoing' the booming interest in other parts of the literary world (2001: 139).

#### **Ecocritical Analysis of Ojaide's *The Activist***

Ecocritical evaluation of text is targeted towards raising awareness to the reading audience of works of literature especially prose about the commitment of literature to nature and environment. The discourse in *The Activist* will focus squarely on the negative impacts of oil activities on the Niger Delta environment. The situation in the Niger Delta as depicted in the novel is so bad to the extent that there is completely ecological breakdown and failure. The oil spillage which has destroyed their farmlands and rivers to a pitiable point, such that there is no land to farm on and no river to fish on, their culture and way of life is completely being jeopardized by the oil spillage on their environment.

In the novel, Ojaide portrays the disillusionment of the marginalized and dehumanized people of Niger Delta due to environmental decay caused by oil spillage and carbon emission into the atmosphere caused by the mining of oil. The bitterness, suffering and consequently agitation for emancipation are caused by the cauldron of contraction that graces the activities of government and other companies digging oil on their land. The Activist, who is the major protagonist in the novel on his return from the United States of America puts on the shoes of activism and began to lead an emancipation struggle for the liberation of his people from environmental degradation and havoc that have ruined their lives and left them in abject poverty and penury. According to The Activist, "all I care for is the Niger Delta state. I want us to have our soil, water and air as healthy as it used to be. We have to douse the fire that is threatening our existence" (*The Activist*<sup>1</sup>, 341). The major pre-occupation of The Activist is how to help restore the environment of his community and at the same time restore life to normalcy to his people. He is willing to sacrifice his life for the actualization of the liberation of his people. He is inspired by the anguish, the pains and unjust indignations thousands of his people are daily made to endure due to this environmental havoc and the refusal of

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<sup>1</sup> For convenience, the novel, *The Activist* will be referred to as TA from now onwards.



the perpetrators of this acts to show a human face and help restore the environment and lives of the people of Niger Delta to what it used to be. Ojaide through the major character in the novel explains that “many people are convicted for crimes they do not commit... too many hungry people going to bed at night...even as rich childless couples live in ten-room mansion...many helpless women killed by psychotic men... so many despots hold down large populations by rulers of aimed coercion” (TA, 58).

In his emancipation struggle and activism, The Activist, as presented in Ojaide’s novel, is resolute to challenge the government and oil companies operating in the Niger Delta region. He starts by gathering evidences. The narrator of the story states that the Activist “kept a file with newspaper cuttings of various forms of pollution, clouds of smoke enveloping human beings in their homes, women fetching water from a greenish stream where the multinational companies worked in Africa and Latin America, and many more”(TA, 24). He is troubled because the wealth that enriches this nation is daily pumped out of their veins yet his people are suffering because everything they have, have been taken from them. Their farmland cannot be used for agriculture anymore because of the oil spillage, there are no more fishes alive in the river for them to eat, no water to drink, no access roads, no electricity, no school, no cares and no loves from the government, and the oil companies that have ruined their environment have left them to suffer. So he became poised with ambition to save his people and create a new lease of life for the generations to come hence the idea of eco-resistance in Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist*.

In his resistance mission, the Activist is very much aware that he cannot accompany this mission alone. He gets deeply involved with the natives and thus creates a kind of bond and friendship with people who understand his worries, people who also agree with him that the Niger Delta environment is due for emancipation and if this emancipation must happen, it must come in form of a revolution. He therefore engages these natives in very provocative discourses on the harms done to them and their environment and therefore the need for emancipation is imperative. For instance in the novel, the Activist meets with Pere Ighogboja who represents the area boys in the region. His meeting with Tobi Ishaka tackles the issue of oil companies and their manner of compensation to the natives. In his meeting with Omagbemi Mukoro, Ojaide confronts the problems of blowouts due to gas flares and oil spillage which is a reoccurring decimal in the Niger Delta region. Since his arrival back home from the United States of America, he observes the activities and actions of the Area Boys who are also referred to as the Egba Boys. Their violent approaches in confronting the oil companies always draw the attention of both local and international



communities to the plight of the people of Niger Delta. Ojaide in the *Activist* summarizes the actions of the area boys thus in his narration:

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

The area boys though presented as hoodlums in the story are fighting to reclaim what have been forcefully taken away from them and also create new lives for themselves and for the entire people of the region. The narrator states that “they were fighters attempting not only to reclaim what had been robbed from them but also holding firmly to what was theirs that others were attempting to snatch away” (*TA*, 56). The boys are angered because they have watched their homelands boom in oil, oil that have continued to enrich and better the lives of other people living in other states in Nigeria and also wealth that enriches massively the pockets of expatriates and oil workers operating in the region. In their very eyes they watched the wealth and riches of their lands being taken away to improve the lots and lives of others while they throb with the havoc of environmental degradation and ecosystem failure. This ecological failure of their environment broods nothing but pains and poverty. Therefore if these area boys result to kidnapping of expatriates and oil workers and demand a huge sum of money as ransom for their release, they do so because presently at this moment they are those who while their lands creates wealth and riches others, they are left with environmental havoc to contend with, they do so because they are the eaters of leftovers, they are nauseating residue of a consumptive society, they do so because everything they have, have been taken from them and even that which they do not have, it has also been taken from. They do so because they are broken hearted men.

It is the nonchalant attitude of the government and the oil companies operating in this region that triggers off some of the seemingly terrorist acts of the area boys. These boys believe that their people deserve fair share of the oil proceeds and thus they adopt this guerrilla approach as a resistance tactics towards the emancipation of their lives and their environment. No wonder Nseabasi Akpan states that:

Kidnapping has, of recent, assume alarming dimension in the States in the Niger Delta region opening up opportunities and avenues for dangerous degeneration. Its occurrence and impacts started to be felt this early 21st century, a phenomenon induced by oil resource exploration. There are many factors that

have contributed to the emergence of kidnapping in the region. Apart from the wider liberation consciousness of the people over the years, social, economic and political reasons have come to play prominent roles for the rise in the industry of recent (2010: 38).



This situation Akpan explains is not farfetched from the scenario Tanure Ojaide depicts in his novel, *The Activist*. Ojaide narrates that the area boys are aware that

Charity in the form of tidbits thrown about to a desperate crowd should not take the place of justice and fairness. They also knew that among them that should fight for them, such as the academics and the chiefs, were interested in lining their individual pockets. They wanted a formal share to develop their area and compensate the people for their occupations destroyed by the oil prospecting activities. They also wanted the oil companies to return a fraction of their profit to restore the environment that had been devastated by various forms of pollution. In their minds, that was not too much to ask for (*TA*, 79).

Naturally, the Activist finds it very easy to connect with Pere the leader of the area boys because what they stand for and fight for are the very throbs of his hearts. He quickly teams up with Pere in establishing a stronger front to combat the injustice meted on the environment of the Niger Delta and consequently the people of Niger Delta. In their partnership, they form a Delta Cartel. The mandate establishing the Delta Cartel is pipeline vandalism business targeted towards milking the Bell Oil company dry and always making sure they record massive losses. The coming together of these forces, the Activist and Pere, apparently generate a formidable eco-resistance team in the novel. Their purpose conforms to each other and they both came to consensus that the people marginalizing the natives of the Niger Delta must stop and that some must rise to the occasion and fight for these people. The narrator captures it thus:

They needed farmlands to cultivate cassava, yams and other subsistent crops to live on. They also had to grow much needed vegetables, and of course, they had to live a healthy life. The air used to be cool because of constant rain and the luxuriant forest, but oil slicks, blowouts, and gas flares had destroyed that life. Even the rain that fell was so soot-black that no more did anybody drink rainwater, which of all waters, used to be described as God-given water. The people have lost their green refuge as well. Their forest used to be deep green and lush foliage, the pride of the tropics, but that had changed, since fire often followed oil and gas accidents (*TA*, 82).

The battle can be perceived to be a fight for resource control and environmental restoration of the Niger Delta. This is true because the main aim that Pere and the Activist is pursuing is to push outsiders who have invaded their lands and natural resources. The people of Niger

Delta deserve to be treated with respect as landlords and owners of the resources that are tapped and enjoy financial benefits in the form of salaries or monetary gifts. The exploration of oil in the Niger Delta region brings nothing to the native people but despondence and disillusionments.

The Activist is strongly committed to the preservation of the environment in the Niger Delta region and he explores every possible option to actualize their liberation from environmental injustice. The Activist gathered the evidences at his disposal and organized people to attend the United Nations Conference in Amsterdam to present their case. Unfortunately, they were stopped from travelling at the airport by the federal government. The government further sent their operatives to come destroy the evidence. Some of the evidences include:

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

The Activist finally got involved with politics and was elected in governmental position. In office, he restructures many abandoned projects and made laudable impacts towards improving the lives of the natives of Niger Delta. He did not forget his people and thus continues to pioneer the creation of programs and ministries that will help better the lives of his people and also save the environment from the hands of oil workers and miners.

#### **Ecocritical Analysis of Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born***

Armah's novel is very striking in the ways and manner in which it provides a unique paradigm in the reading of Sub-Saharan African literature. The novel presents through deep metaphorical aphorisms, the environmental injustice going on in Ghana during the postcolonial period. The setting and virtually every locale Armah represented in the novel is that of a society that its environment is completely filthy; buried in garbage that reveals the cities of Ghana as dumping grounds for dirt. The image of decay in the society and the inability of the government to address the problems of the decaying environment are used to represent despondent nature the inhabitants in the Ghanaian city as portrayed in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The kind of environment found in the society Ayi Kwei Armah depicts in his novel is one marked with

decay, putrefaction, filth and everything connected with human waste from the body such as odor, vomit, piss, blood and phlegm.

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the author presents a postcolonial Ghana African society and environment that is completely decayed. The presentation of a filthy and dirty environment by Armah serves as a metaphor to represent the level of decay, corruption and collapse within the ruling class in the postcolonial African society. Chiara Giobergia also thinks that:

The ambiguity around which *The Beautiful Ones'* symbolism is built does not only involve the semantic field of 'gleam' but also its opposite: indeed, far from being a mere stinking heap of rotting food and rejects, rubbish is intrinsically correlated with social prestige. The behavior of the Ghanaian native ruling class as portrayed in Armah's work displays that, more often than not, "wealth and status are in fact correlated with the capacity of a person (or a society) to discard commodities (2015: 232).

From the opening chapter, the author through the eye of a bus conductor introduces 'The Man', the protagonist whose journey throughout the novel exposes the various level of environmental havoc on the society. The pertinent thing is that all the environmental issues raised in the novel are all caused by man and his interaction with the environment. This in turn hurts man and backfires as well through inflicting various kinds of health problems on man. The narrator starts to observe from the bus that everything in Accra Ghana as represented in the story is in rots. The bus itself the Man observes that it does not look like a bus but a good example of a bundle of rust. Immediately, he alights from the bus, the author continued to open up more by introducing the filthy environment as found in Accra. Ironically, he presents an inscription demanding of the people to keep the environment clean. This signage is totally polluted with heaps of rubbish. This is evident in the following lines:

...The thing has been a gleaming white sign when it was first installed, and that was not so very long ago. Now even the lettering on it was no longer decipherable. It was covered over thickly with the juice of every imaginable kind of waste matter. But once the letters had said in their brief brightness... That was printed in blue... KEEP YOUR COUNTRY CLEAN BY KEEPING YOUR CITY CLEAN (*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*<sup>2</sup>, 7).

The above citation shows clearly that people living in the city depicted in the novel, contribute chiefly to environmental havoc by refusing to abide by the environmental laws, hence their inability to dump refuse on the trash bins provided, but rather they dumped it

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<sup>2</sup> For convenience, the novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* will be referred to as BONYB from now onwards.

⊙ THEORY, HISTORY AND LITERARY CRITICISM

around the trash bins littering the whole society. All through the novel, the offensive odor of vomit and excreta torments the reader's sense of smell and imagination, thereby presenting an environment that has been contaminated by man's activities. The most striking feature of the novel that makes the deployment of ecocriticism as a literary theory for the appreciation and criticism is the striking employment of human excreta as to display the bad level human beings in the environment have degenerated to and how they have consequently degraded the environment. The writer from the opening chapter shows how the natives contribute immensely to the decay and environmental degradation in the society. This, the author captures in the behavior of the bus conductor. When the bus arrives at the bus stop, the conductor alighted from the bus, brings out his manhood and began to urinate in public just very closer to where people are selling edible stuffs. After urinating the narrator records that the conductor walks up to the bread seller buys a loaf and returns to the bus eating the loaf. Inside the bus on his way home, the author through the lamentation of the protagonist; the Man exposes the whole failed Ghana environment thus:

The man gets in the bus choosing a seat by a window. On the way via different streets there is a hot smell of caked shit, rubbish, crushed tomatoes and rotten vegetables. The smell makes people spit so much in the bus. Across the aisle on the seat opposite the man, there is an old man sleeping and his mouth is open to the air rushing in the night with many particles (*BONYB*, 40).

This could be viewed also as a metaphor to show the level of moral decay in Ghana and in Africa as a whole and also how some natives within the African continent are yet to fully evolve. The overriding images of filth, waste, refuse, shit and so on are images and symbols Armah uses to reflect the subhuman beings that are in the African society. Commenting on this Charles Miller remarks:

To the clerk, going to the toilet is a nightmare, not only because the public lavatories which he uses happen to violate every rule of hygiene but because they also represent in very physical sense, the moral contamination which surrounds him-sometimes even tempts him in its foul way and against which he must always be on guard. Armah has treated a most indelicate function with remarkable skill and force (1968: 19).

The interactions of the human beings found in the society Armah depicted in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* are the platforms he uses to discuss some of the causes and effects of environmental havoc, hence, the novel as a tool for correction and development in the area of safeguarding the African environment. To emphasize the kind of slum and filthy environment many Ghanaians live in, the author graphically describes the environment of the bathroom 'the man' takes his bath in.

The bathroom is a very dirty and smelling one that any normal human being will not be able to stay inside and take their bath. This shows that one of the major factors leading to human beings degrading their environment and resorting to slum dwelling is the inability of Africans especially to evolve and develop. Environmental degradation and havoc caused by human activities can therefore be viewed as a developmental issue. Gana and Toba explain that:

The rapid increase in activities today in many cities without proper planning and control is the outcome of slums that has penetrated in our physical environment. This is evident particularly in housing sector, transport, water supply, sanitation, power supply and even in employment sector. Those that are presently not employed are equally polluting our environment by engaging themselves in different harmful activities (2015: 2).

The author captures the slums by explaining that the door of the bathroom is rotten at the button and the smelling coming from the dead wood filled his nostrils and caressed the cavity of the mouth. There is a hole in the bathroom that aids the water from going out to the drainage, which is partly blocked with strands of fibers from various people's sponge since it is a public bathroom. This makes the water to go out very slowly. The consequent effect is the offensive smell that the stagnant water produces and the generation of mosquitoes that terrorize the entire neighborhood. The dirty and filthy environment is not just limited to the slum residents of the citizens but also in government and public offices. The Man, who is a railway worker, arrives at his office only to be greeted with the abandoned vomit of traveller that the whole environments smell of. In the office, he also needed to use the toilet so he goes to the junior staff toilet. The latrine is another representation of a decayed and filthy social environment. In the toilet he reads the inscriptions on the wall: "... vagina sweet, money sweet pass all, who born socialism chop make chop contery broke you broken not so? Pray for detention jail chop free" (*BONYB*, 109).

During the military coup, The Man helped his old school friend Koomson to flee the country. In doing this, the author exposed the politicians and leaders to experience the kind of degraded and filthy environment the masses they lead dwell in. During his escape, the Man made Koomson to escape through faces ridden toilet bucket crevice. The humility experience of Koomson escaping through the slum toilet exposes the horrible environmental havoc thousands of slum dwellers which constitute a large number of the Ghana population are daily made to throb with. Yet, the governmental officials like Koomson and his colleagues are busy feeding fat on the wealth that can help emancipate the people from poverty and thus salvage the environment.

The importance of ecocritical analysis of Armah's novel is its ability to bring to the fore the pertinent environmental issues that are the social reality in the African societies and how human beings living in the environment also do contribute hugely to the devastation of the environment. Here, the efficacy of literature in artistically representing the author's truth is portrayed through ecological reality while taking note of the deterioration and degradation of nature. Ecocriticism in this work is used to express the artistically complexities of the natural world. The works survey the implicit postulations that are contained in the works of the authors studied as they aspire to address the environmental issues.

### **Conclusion**

The study has presented the functionality of the ecocritical study and its goals towards being an expressive and a theoretical approach that lends voice through the works of literature to the destruction of the human environment and the cauldron of contractions that characterizes the issues of environmental degradation in the African society – Nigeria and Ghana. In the Niger Delta society, Ojaide presents in the novel and also in actual reality that there is a lot of restiveness, tension, agitations from various sects, kidnapping due to the environmental havoc done to the region. As shown, this is chiefly caused by oil spillage and other mining activities of the Oil Companies operating in the Niger Delta region. There is perceived poverty and lack of basic social amenities in this region. There is no pipe borne water, no electricity, and no access to schools. These factors breed lots of tension hence the agitation for the restoration and clean-up of the Niger Delta region by the natives.

Likewise, Armah's depiction of the society in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* in which the interactions of the human beings establish platforms through which he discusses some of the causes and effects of environmental havoc. Hence, the novel functions as a tool for correction and development in the area of safeguarding the African environment. In view of this, literature's potential in artistic representation of ecological reality manifests itself in the depiction of the deterioration and degradation of nature through the author's vivid and dexterous portrayal. In this study, ecocriticism is used artistically to reveal and to disclose the complexities of the natural world.

With the ability and functionality of ecocriticism in *The Activist* and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the environmental injustice done to the human environment by constituted authorities and also even members of the society are major factors paving way for the continuous degradation and environmental havoc especially in Africa. Many parts of Africa especially Nigeria and Ghana do not experience constant occurrences of natural disasters like hurricane and earthquakes yet the irresponsibility of both the government and the governed have



contributed significantly to the constant destruction of the environment and collapse of the ecosystems.

The final deduction that this study makes is that the victims of eco-trauma like the natives of Niger Delta can attain their freedom from environmental degradation by uniting to safeguard their environment. They must continue to voice out against the negligence of oil companies on the environmental regimes that can help to abate oil pollution in the Niger Delta. The citizens in the Ghanaian society must also unite to protect their environment by engaging in communal cleaning service without waiting on the government.

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