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Women and Children as Victims of Environmental Degradation: A Study of Christie Watson's Novel, *Tiny Sunbird Far Away*

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Abstract

Literature has been a reflective and corrective tool, used in the restoration of order in different societies, and amongst these societies, Nigeria is not an exception. The issue of the Niger Delta- an oil producing area in Nigeria has permeated literature in its different genres, with the intention of bringing about a change in the situation, as many writers such as Christie Watson have written literary pieces to expose the dire conditions of individuals living in these areas, who are constantly exposed to life threatening diseases, violence, insecurity and numerous forms of social decadence. Her book- *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* reflects the struggles of women and children in the face of poverty, hunger, disease and pollution, to earn a living. The study "Women and Children as Victims of Environmental Degradation: A Study of Christie Watson's Novel *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*" takes an Ecofeminist stance to analyze the effects of man's actions towards the environment and how these activities instigated by materialism affect women and children in Warri- the primary setting of the book. Women and children are focal in this paper, because they are faced with dual oppression- patriarchy, which continuously relegate them to second fiddle roles and environmental deterioration. This paper shows the resilience of women and children as they navigate through these tools of oppression.

Keywords: Women, Children, Environment, Literature, Ecofeminism

Introduction

The connection between man and his immediate environment can be described as symbiotic, where man and the environment influence and benefit from each other. Man as an inhabitant of the environment has been assigned roles to take care of the environment, while reaping fruits such as

plants, animals and natural resources from the environment. The failure of man to sustainably maintain the environment and its resources to ensure replenishment and the availability of these for the future, has made this relationship one sided. This egoistic attitude portrayed by man towards the environment affects not only the environment, it also affects humans,

especially the minorities who are overshadowed by majority members of society. Shende V.A et al., note that humans' activities have robbed the earth of its resources and have damaged the earth surface, seas and oceans. These damages on the environment, in turn affect humans living in these areas (7). Humans bear the consequences of their negative impact on the environment, as their health, emotions, psychology and total wellbeing are altered. The Niger Delta, an oil producing area in Nigeria, located in the Western section of the South-South Nigeria, has been exposed to environmental degradation since the discovery of oil in this region in the 1950s. This region has experienced a twist of fate, as this discovery of crude oil which should have been an asset to them has led to damages in the lives of the inhabitants of this area and also the environment. Crude oil as a natural resource which should be used in the advancement and development of the area, has been used to promote selfish interests of natives, private companies and foreign companies who have no regard for the lives of the natives. The mining of crude oil and other processes involved in extracting and refining this natural resource have resulted in environmental pollution,

hunger, diseases, death and violence in this area.

In response to the violation of the environment led by materialism and man's quest for getting rich, many groups have resorted to peaceful methods of making the voices of the masses heard by intermediating between the masses and relevant agencies, while to others violence is the only way to make their plight heard. The story of environmental degradation caused by mining is always juxtaposed with violence, as youths and some concerned members have turned to ills such as killing, kidnapping and other violent ways to show their disenchantment about the present condition of their environment and the living standard of the natives. The adoption of violent measures to advocate for the rights of Niger Deltans have been criticized as an overtly futile approach to advocacy, it can be stated that these actions result from the twist in the expectation of these youths and the actual reality that they are confronted by in the present time. Ojakorotu .V and Afiotan L.A note that this violence can be attributed to the Frustration-Aggression theory. According to them, "Frustration, when it builds up, leads to the rising up of suppressed emotions of anger, which is often directed against the party

considered to be the source of deprivation of satisfaction. This strong emotion finally finds an outlet through aggressive and invariably violent disposition towards the environment” (5). Though violence is not justified, the action displayed by these militants as they are called, is as a result of constant deprivation, hunger, poverty, sickness, and death that has plagued their environment, this has increased their vulnerability to being used as tools by politicians to fulfill their selfish desires.

The Niger Delta story can be referred to as a honey pot narrative where different individuals with various levels of exploitative tendencies feast on, as long as the honey pot has some drops of honey left. The environment signifies the honey pot, it is placed as a commodity for sales, with individuals with the highest bargaining power allowed to have access to crude oil, without taking note of the effect of mining on the natives. Oscar Mateos describes the Niger Delta situation as “capitalgenic”, which means that the actions behind the mining of crude oil and the lack of distribution of the resources obtained from this activity are all inspired by capitalism. In the Niger Delta, the economic system including the finances obtained from the sale of crude oil is controlled by few

individuals who are either the representatives of the masses in government or private sectors.

This paper aims at portraying the effect of mining of crude oil in the Niger Delta on women and children, through the analysis of Christie Watson’s text *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*. Though it will be biased to identify only women and children as victims of environmental pollution, with an in-depth analysis of the novel it will be evident that women and children are identified as minorities and are victims of double oppression (pollution and patriarchy). These individuals are underrepresented by men who assume heads, they suffer from the effect of mining and also struggle to make their voices and plights heard.

Ecofeminism

Eco feminism was coined from two words- “Ecology” and “Feminism”. Ecology is the study of the relationship that exists between organisms and their total environment. It studies how organisms such as plants, animals and humans interact within their surroundings. According to Abdul Ahad and Anas Ferdous, ecology is the study of organisms and their homes, it studies the roles of different organisms in the ecosystem, and how they interact with the environment or their different habitats (4).

On the other hand, feminism is an ideology that seeks to restore the rights of women in the economic, social and political spheres. It observes the relegated state of women in reality and fiction and seeks to restore the lost rights of women as worthy individuals in the society. Feminism seeks to understand the way women are oppressed, in order to reduce this oppression or totally eliminate the tools used in oppressing women (Bressler 144).

Ecofeminism originated in 1974, in Francoise d'Eaubonne's book *Feminism ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death). In her book, she frowns at different activities engaged by humans to oppress nature, and also notes that this ecological neglect affects women and other less privileged members of the society. Alicia Puleo defines ecofeminism as "an attempt to outline a new utopian horizon, addressing the environmental issue from the categories of patriarchy, androcentrism, care, sexism and gender" (30). Ecofeminists do not hope for perfection, they simply want to thrive in an environment where women will not be seen as mere subjects but as effectual and functioning members of the society. Ecofeminism recognizes the various forms of domination including environmental degradation, patriarchy, and exploitation,

that place women in the position of minorities and deprive them of their rightful place in the environment. This ideology has been seen as being biased because of its focus mainly on women and other minorities, when the effect of environmental devaluation affects everyone. Beena G. explains the reason for this focus on women thus "women, as nurtures, creators and sustainers of life are valuable to problems arising out of environmental degradation. Toxins in the soil, air and water adversely affect women, childbearing and children. Men folk in their role as providers move out of their rural environment" (154).

Ecofeminism juxtaposes the environment with women, this means that in the same way the environment is stripped of its natural resources, women are exploited and neglected in various societies. Anjum, Tasneem observes that "Ecofeminists believe that male-dominated culture thrives on sexism, racism, class exploitation, and environmental destruction. Exploitation of women and nature is severely protested by the ecofeminists world over" (846). This implies that the damage inflicted on the environment is a patriarchal invention, as men in every society are law makers and given the opportunity to dictate what is obtainable in the society and

environment. Men either refuse or give consent to the commencement of activities such as mining, deforestation etc. that can cause damage in the ecosystem.

Ecofeminism can be seen as a socialist ideology because it identifies the unequal classification of people in the society, where one class is placed below because of their race, gender or class. The identification of this hierarchy that exists in the environment makes exploitation visible, as the majority which include men, political and social, benefit from the depletion of the environment, while minorities such as women, children, and animals suffer from these “ecocidal” activities. Jane Birkeland defines ecofeminism as “a social movement, and a practice, but it also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction. It is an awareness that begins with the realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western man’s attitude towards women and tribal cultures” (18). This means that ecofeminism is against political systems such as capitalism, that are aimed at exploiting and destroying people, plants and animals for the sole aim of creating wealth. When this wealth is achieved, it is unequally distributed, hence the rich get richer and remain above the poor

who suffer the consequences of the activities of the rich.

Ecofeminism is an instance of theory and activism being merged to make a change, while activists physically challenge structures that oppress the environment, eco theorists such as literary writers, express their dissatisfaction with the state of the environment. Some literary writers are optimistic in their writings, as they paint the kind of environment that they wish to live, free from patriarchy, pollutants, capitalist structures etc. Val Plumwood describes these stories of hope written by ecofeminists thus:

The story of a land where women live at peace with themselves and with the natural world is a recurrent theme of feminist utopias. This is a land where there is no hierarchy, among humans or between humans and animals, where people care for one another and for nature, where the earth and forest retain their mystery, power and wholeness, where the power of technology and of military and economic force does not rule the earth, or at least that part of it controlled by women (7).

These stories express hope that the focus of the ecofeminist movement will be

actualized, nature and the environment will be free from men's vandalization and women and the minorities will be retaining their position in the environment and order of existence.

Biography of the Author and Synopsis of *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*.

Christie Watson is a British Writer and Professor of Medical Humanities at the University of East Anglia. She has written books such as *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, *Where Women are Kings*, *Here I Stand*, *The language of Kindness: A Nurse's story*, *The Courage to Care: Nurses, Families and Hope*, and *Quilt on Fire, Moral Injuries*.

Set in Lagos and majorly in Warri, the novel *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, tells the story of Blessing whose family scatters immediately her mother Timi catches their father with another woman in their matrimonial bed. This event and her father's reckless attitude of always being drunk, made Blessing and Ezekiel's father to leave the house and move in with his concubine. Timi loses her job because her husband walked away as the job was meant for only married people. Considering the inability of Timi to keep up with the living standard of the city, she decides to relocate to her parent's house in Warri. This relocation changes her life and that of her children, as they are faced with

the realities of living in a rural area faced with environment depletion and pollution, as a result of the mining activities of oil companies who exploit their natural resources. In order to adjust fully, Timi and her children adopt measures to fit into their current environment and its realities.

Women and Children as Victims of Environmental Degradation in Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*.

Women in the novel

In the novel, mama is the first female character who experiences desecration and exploitation, as her husband neglects the love and affection that she gives him and cheats on her, as mama sees her husband on top of another woman. Blessing notes that mama always "...kissed father on the mouth, sometimes twice" (13). Timi's matrimonial bed, which should be sacred, is defiled by her husband. As a result of this, Timi loses everything including her job and this leads to the relocation of the family to Warri. In the novel, Timi symbolizes nature, the way she cares for her husband and how he refuses to reciprocate the love and affection shown to him, shows how nature and its components protect and ensure that man is provided for, but as a result of man's ingratitude nature is not appreciated.

Mama's relocation to Warri, takes the readers through a journey of discovery to Warri, where the environment is endangered by man's activities. This environment does not suffer from noise pollution as Lagos, but poverty, hunger, sickness and death surrounds Warri. The description of the roads, water system, and basic amenities, makes Timi realize that truly a divide exists between the masses and capitalists who exploit the natural resources to enrich themselves. As a breadwinner, who has to take care of children and extended family, she gets a job in the Western Oil Company Bar, which she refers to as paradise, because of the obvious difference between the community and this location. Mama states that:

The Highlife Bar. The oil workers go there to watch the wildlife as much as drink. From the table we were sitting at I could see a troop of monkeys travel across the trees. It's like a national park. Honestly, I can't believe that the other side of the wall is another world. One minute you're in an oily swamp, the next, five star luxury. Cool, air-conditioned, five-star luxury (80)

The Western Oil and its environs, shows the contrast that exists in Warri. While the

masses suffer abject poverty and lack of basic amenities, the oil company workers and individuals involved in exploiting the environment enjoy maximum comfort. In The High Life Bar, monkeys are actively jumping on trees, this means that in this part of the community, plants and animals are alive and healthy, as against what mama is used to in her own part of Warri. Through Mama, we are informed on how individuals spend money on drinks and other luxurious items, while the masses are denied the basic human needs for survival.

In the quest to survive financially and escape the realities of the polluted environment, mama finds a lover- Dan, who she describes as only a friend, but Blessing sees them "...kissing underneath the almond tree" (210). Mama is a victim, she falls in love with a man from the group of people that have desecrated their environment. As a result of constant lack, she is blinded by gifts to the point that she objects to Grandma's rejection of her relationship with Dan. When she is confronted by Grandma, Mama replies: "Well, I'm not like you. You want me to be happy here? This fighting? Living in poverty? The best you can hope for is to make a few dollars giving out drinks..." (305). Dan is mama's poverty alleviation scheme, he gives the family money and lifts

them from hunger to eating in abundance as Blessing describes: “Grandma served the food. The amount she put on plates was so big that the plates would have broken if people had not kept one hand underneath the whole time. There was jollof rice, fried fish, fresh fish, pepper soup, smoked fish, spicy stewed snails, barbecue plantain, *banga* soup, *efo riro*, roasted bush meat, cow tail...” (268).

Just like Mama, Celestine is affected by the environment, poverty, patriarchy and illiteracy. She is married off to a man who is old enough to be her father for monetary gains, in the form of her bride price, which Grandpa pays in installment. She is compelled to be submissive to Grandpa, her husband; this submission is compulsory for her, if she does not want her bride wealth to be given back to Grandpa. Though she is not educated, she aspires to be a better version of herself through her lies of having a certificate and having contact with civilization. Her dream of selling clothing materials and fashion accessories is nullified by the environment, as she ends up becoming a professional mourner who is paid to cry during burials in exchange for money and souvenirs. Through the numerous burials that she attends to cry, readers understand the constant death that

happens in Warri, as a result of the effect on the environment of humans. The environment does not only affect Celestine physically, she is affected emotionally and mentally, because she becomes carried away by the Mama’s gifts from Dan and she decides to seduce him. Celestine is Grandma’s opposite, as she makes her voice heard, she talks to Alhaji who is almost worshiped by Grandma, thus:

Me and Grandma get to work morning till night so you can fit carry our money go throwaway for ashewo and brandy for that Executive Club! You have no job! You think we don’t know? *Ashewo!* You think we are stupid women who will be your slaves? Be your bloody slaves? Well, I am not stupid bloody woman! And the money you give to the imam for what? So that other people can come and use the mosque and not pay a single bloody penny... What would my family say to come and live with such a man? I get university degree and for go far with am. I could have gone to anyplace. I for even go America! Here I am no water no food no generator (260).

Celestine achieved what Grandma could not achieve in her many years of marriage, she stands up to Grandpa and voices her disenchantments. Celestine may not be totally exposed to civilization, she knows how to fight for injustice for women and the environment, as she joins Grandma to protest.

Grandma is a traditional woman who has succumbed to patriarchy for many years. She understands that women are being mistreated by men in the family, but she chooses to keep calm. She is a custodian of the old ways, as she intends to keep the old practices, even after realizing that they could be harmful. For instance, Grandma explains the negative effects of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) on women, she explains that it is illegal and could cause “infections and complications in childbirth and death for one out of every ten girls...” (276). The knowledge of these effects of FGM, does not stop Grandma from cutting newborn babies, and this makes Blessing angry and she questions why FGM should be practiced, and Grandma replies “... the main reason is tradition and holding on to culture...” (138). Through Grandma, the effect of the environment on pregnant women is shown in the book, as pregnant women go through complications while giving birth, which

endanger their lives and that of their children. Though Grandma is quiet about patriarchy as part of the customs and traditions that she talks about, she does not hesitate to protest against the harm done to the environment. In this protest, women lament that:

We no want dangerous gas burned in all this pipeline fire, give us cancer, coughing, asthma, like our lungs are less important than any other place. We want our fruits to grow, our animals to be able to eat grass and not drop dead. We want to drink water that has no oil in it. We want you to stop paying people to kill us. To stop funding the military regime. To admit blood on your hands! (370).

The women voice out their disenchantments and frustrations further:

They feel that they have no choice! No future! And that is the fault of the Western Oil Company. But we are angry with them. Those boys have blood on their hands! We are sick of the failed promises. Sick of sickness. Sick of our environment filled with pollution and our rivers filled with oil spills. Sick of guns. Sick of no electricity. Sick of our government

putting billions of pounds in their own pockets. We are sick of the oil company giving these men money, knowing it will not go to people. We are sick of no jobs. We are sick of white men shipped in to do jobs the local men could do if they had the chance... (371).

This protest is significant, as it shows the affinity shared between ecofeminism and activism. This protest results from disappointment and frustration by women, who expect their lives and that of their children to be better with the discovery of oil, but are faced by the opposite. They lament about hunger, sickness, deprivation, death, and lack of amenities. During the protest, the women remove their clothes, showing their private parts. Protesting naked is symbolic, as this uncladness represents nature that has stripped naked of all her qualities and relevance and left bare.

Children

At the beginning of the story, the character Ezekiel is introduced as a focused student, whose search for knowledge is inspiring. When he is told that he will be relocating to Warri, he quickly googles the destination and defines Warri as “oil bunkering, hostage taking, illness, guns, and poverty...” (14). In

Warri, Ezekiel ‘s health declines daily because of his allergy and the inability of his mother to afford his medications. Ezekiel is ambitious, he spends his time studying to become a medical doctor, he takes his education seriously and feels bad when he was suspended from school because his school fees could not be paid. The condition of his environment, alongside with his mother’s choice of a white man disorients Ezekiel as he quits his dreams of becoming a medical doctor and joins the Sibeye Boys. The association with these boys changes Ezekiel, as he picks up habits like drinking and becomes disrespectful to his mother and Dan. He rejects Dan’s gifts and reiterates how men like Dan and the oil company have stripped the environment and also taken their women thus:

“You give me a chocolate bar? A chocolate bar? Offer to help me find a school. Well, instead of that, I’d prefer my country back, please”. “You people come here”- Ezekiel slammed his fist onto the tabletop, making us all jump- “and take our women...and our money. And our jobs”. He looked at Alhaji. Nobody moved. “You pay people to kill us, and rape our

land, then our women! And you give me a chocolate bar?”. (250-251).

Ezekiel is a revolutionist; his statement makes everyone know that Dan and his men are exploiting his family members. He is not carried away by Dan's gifts and assistance, rather he remains realistic, particularly complaining of the exploitative tendencies of men like Dan, who have stripped the environment of its resources and have focused on doing the same to women like Mama.

He warns his mother to stop “prostituting yourself” (212), because of money, as her association with Dan is centered around financial gains. To show his disapproval of this relationship, on mama's wedding day, Ezekiel calls the Sibeye Boys to disrupt the wedding and kidnap Dan. Ezekiel's transition from an ambitious student to a boy who no longer had big dreams for his future is worthy of notice. This shift is significant in the novel, it shows that the behavioral and thought pattern of man is controlled and affected by the environment. Ezekiel is a victim of the environment, he is affected by the degradation of the physical environment, hunger, poverty and death, this causes a shift in his behavior and general attitude towards life. Ezekiel's sickness and asthma did not

stop him from advocating for change, he got burnt in an explosion caused by his group who resorts to violence to restore their natural resources being robbed from them.

This burn from the explosion leads to Ezekiel's death as Blessing describes that he was burnt like “...suya that had been barbecued for too long and was beginning to turn black” (340). Ezekiel's death shows that except the dangers exposed to Niger Deltans by oil exploiters, they are also faced with dangers caused by natives, who wish to forcefully gain access to crude oil through bunkering and other illegal methods of mining crude oil. This exposes the double threats caused by man's materialism on the environment and its inhabitants in the Niger Delta, the natives who fight oil companies for exploiting them and polluting the environment, also engage in similar activities that they condemn. In the novel, during the women's protest, the women not only complain about the state of environment, they also state that Niger Delta boys have become negatively affected by the environment thus:

...our sons are turning into murderers! No chance of future for our sons. Their only choice is kidnapping a white man, using violence. We are ashamed of our sons' behavior. We want better

future for them. Give us our sons.
Give them chances at jobs.
Health, school. Let our fish live in
our river and our trees grow. Give
us back our sons! (372)

This shows the level of moral decay that is prevalent in Niger Delta, the boys are not ambitious, as they only think of ways of getting back at the exploiters and also get some kinds of financial gains, without considering the harm that these expose them and the environment. When Ezekiel dies, on his grave, flowers of different types start growing even in the face of the adverse effect of mining on the environment. This symbolizes a new beginning, hope and optimism that will spring forth and not be hindered by the environment.

Blessing is the narrator of the story, she transitions from a girl from the urban area who could not cope with their relocation to Warri, to a full Warri girl, who wants to stay in her community. Her closeness to Grandma, makes her gain interest in helping grandma deliver women of their babies and this makes her experience first hand how women are affected by environmental pollution. When she follows Grandma to help women give birth in their homes, she observes the dangers of the environment on women and their unborn children, which

sometimes leads to death and complications. Through her, we notice the effect of the environment on babies, who are sometimes born with some forms of deformities. She tells the readers about one of the deformed babies that she delivers “...the boy’s head was a strange shape and his eyes were close together” (302). This deformity is as a result of pollution, hunger, poverty, and lack of basic amenities such as health care system, this lack exposes pregnant women to numerous health challenges and endangers their unborn children.

In the novel, Blessing takes the readers on a journey of discovering the level of gender inequality that exists in their family. When Grandma explains to her that everyone has to get to the river to take their bath and wash their clothes, except Alhaji, Blessing wonders why Alhaji was not mentioned among people who have to go to the river to clean up as his own bath water had to be fetched and brought to him back, she asks “Alhaji have difficulty getting to the river?” (69). Through her, the readers also notice that female characters in the book are victims of domestic violence, as they are beaten by their husbands. She remembered her mother’s experience who had to deal with physical abuse from their father. “When Father drank, Father hit Mama. Father hit Mama so hard he

broke her nose, making her less beautiful than his other woman. He cut her skin with a broken bottle, giving her a train-track scar across her back” (358). She knows that domestic violence is abnormal in the home, and is not convinced with Grandma’s explanation that “...everyday beatings were normal, but bad beatings could kill a woman” (108).

Blessing does not only fight for her environment, she fights for girls and women’s rights, she is against domestic violence and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), as she quarrels with Grandma for cutting the baby and she decides that she will “never cut a girl” (293). She tells readers about the effect of FGM which she refers to as “cutting” thus:

Grandma had taught me all about cutting, and the different types that women had and how it made childbirth difficult and caused problems. I had seen the purple coming from a woman, which Grandma had told me was caused by her pushing so hard for so long against something closed. I had seen that baby die and the purple come from her. And she had been cut... Cutting girls caused

infection and complications in childbirth and death for one out of every ten girls who had it done (276) .

In the novel young girls and women are not only victims of environmental degradation, they are affected by culture and tradition which is obviously one-sided in such a way that men are favoured compared to women. The effect of FGM is known by majority, but this practice is observed in communities and done by women to their fellow females. When Blessing asks Grandma why FGM is still carried out, she answers “The main reason is tradition and holding on to culture, but there are many other reasons” (138). Blessing also extends her advocacy to the rights of children, she laments on the suffering and high level of deprivation faced by children during the protest “... children were hungry, and had no school, no electricity, no future.” (366). Throughout the novel, Blessing serves not just as a storyteller, but also as a critic who condemns the ills of society against women and children.

Men in the novel

In the novel, Watson presents male characters as the opposite of female characters. While female characters in the novel struggle with

oppression from the environment and patriarchy, men in the novel on the other hand abuse women, adopt measures to exploit the community and enjoy themselves without taking note of the horrible state of the environment. In the beginning of the novel, Blessing's father is the first male character that readers are exposed to, he goes about drinking and abusing Mama physically even in the presence of Blessing and Ezekiel. Blessing describes her father thus:

Father was a loud man. I could hear him shouting from the neighbors' apartment where he argued about football with Dr. Adeshina, and drank so much Rimy Martin that he could not stand up properly. I could hear him singing when he returned from the Everlasting Open Arms House of Salvation Church, on a bus that had the words UP JESUS DOWN SATAN written on the side. The singing would reach my ears right upon the fourth floor. .. We were so used to Father's loud voice that it became quieter (10).

Father is the first instance in the book of a man being irresponsible, uncaring, abusive and loud. He cares less about the safety of the environment as he contributes to polluting

the environment with his loud voice which makes the environment noisy. Blessing's father defiles his matrimonial bed with mama, which symbolizes nature, as he introduces his concubines who he sleeps with right on the bed that he shares with his wife without thinking about the implication of this act.

Patriarchy is one of the subject matters explored in the novel, through the introduction of some male characters. In the novel, patriarchy is demonstrated in the Niger Delta society and also in the family, which is the smallest unit of a society. Godiya, Makama notes that patriarchal society "sets the parameters for women's structurally unequal position in families and markets by condoning gender-differential terms in inheritance rights and legal adulthood, by tacitly condoning domestic and sexual violence and sanctioning differential wages" (116). Patriarchy creates a divide based on gender between men and women, where the lives of women are ruled, determined and controlled by men in their lives at different times, either as fathers, husbands, brothers, lovers etc. Patriarchy is so broad that it affects women economically, socially, politically, religiously, financially and personally, because women are

disadvantaged in these spheres, while men enjoy all the benefits that women are denied.

In the novel, Alhaji is a symbol of patriarchal values in his immediate family, where he assumes the role of a father figure who should be worshiped by everyone in his family because of his position as the head. He constantly reminds Grandma and Celestine that he is the head of the family, in an argument with Grandma, he says "...I am your husband" (79). This statement exposes the fact that Alhaji is proud and uses his position as the husband to oppress his wives who work hard and submit the money to him. He is a quintessential instance of Makama's description of a patriarchy thus: "A patriarchy is considered the head of the household and within the family he controls productive resources, labour force, and reproductive capacities based on the notions of superiority and inferiority and legitimized by differences in gender and generation" (117). The father figure and the position as the head of the family gives men the authority to control women and children under them by dictating what is obtainable in the lives of individual family members without considering their opinions.

Alhaji is less concerned about the condition of his environment, he never complains about the effect of mining and exploitation on

plants, vegetation, water and even his immediate family who experience hunger, abject poverty and sickness. His materialism becomes obvious to readers when he starts looking for a job, in his job search he aims at joining the exploiters who have endangered his community with their mining activities. Blessing narrates how Alhaji practices the speech for his interview thus:

"I would monitor the pollution effects on the environment". Alhaji continued. He said each part of the word 'environment' as if it were a separate word and made the last part sound like a tut: en-vi-ron-menT . He looked around the garden, and half closed his eyes... "I know how to check the emissions of the pipeline, how to maintain quality of the oil, how to make it superior, and therefore more money making. And I am only taking small salaries". (129)

Alhaji's first statement and his pronunciation of the environment shows his detachment from the state of the environment. His eyes are symbolic, as it demonstrates that he has decided to turn a blind eye on the polluted environment. What Alhaji seeks in the job is not to care for the environment, he could not hide corrupt and materialist attitude as he

makes it known that he knows how to generate more money for the company. Alhaji is not different from the oil companies and private companies that pollute the environment for materialistic gains, the only difference between him and these exploiters is that he never had the opportunity to exploit his community. In the midst of hunger, sickness and poverty, Alhaji still finds time for self-gratification, Blessing wonders how he is able to enjoy himself considering the situation at home, thus:

Alhaji had left for the Executive Club after morning prayers, carrying a bottle of Remy Martin. He always seemed to be carrying Remy Martin. I wondered where Alhaji got the money to buy expensive brandy, I wondered why Alhaji did not spend the money on Ezikie's medicine. Whenever I asked Grandma about it, she said it was important that Alhaji carried on as normal, even during difficult times (136).

At the Executive Club which Alhaji belongs to, men do nothing but brag and drink in the face of poverty, sickness, pollution and death. Mama scorns Alhaji's association with the club, she is disappointed with the fact that men who should represent the plight of the

community, have failed in their responsibilities. Drinking and discussing irrelevant matters in the face of death, hunger, abject poverty, sickness and lack is considered by Grandma as the highest form of irresponsibility, she complains:

And that Executive Bar! He says he's doing business there, but it's a drain on finances. All the Big Men do there is drink Remy Martin and tell each other how important they are. Executive Club! Just a club for men to go and show off at. Who has the best car, the youngest girlfriend, the most wives- I know, I've seen it. The old men just go there to watch Sky Sports and sit around in the air-conditioning (93).

Alhaji is influenced by the Executive Club; he is reminded that he has just one wife and a daughter at the club; this makes him get married to Celestine who he pays her dowry in installment because of his financial incapability. Alhaji is not different from the oil company men who exploit their community, he also tries to take advantage of the fact that Celestine tries to seduce Dan, and asks Dan to give him a job in the oil company. While Alhaji constantly curses the oil company men and the pollution that they have caused to the environment, he does not

refuse the money and gifts Dan offers him, this makes him a hypocrite.

In the novel, Dan takes advantage of Mama's situation of being the only one taking care of her children. He comes into Mama's life as a lover, and showers Mama with gifts and money because he understands that she is vulnerable and will not hesitate to accept these presents. Though he constantly shows his love and affection for Mama, it cannot be denied that Dan and other members of the oil company are the reason the environment is polluted which has resulted in hunger, cancer, poverty, diseases and death. Ezekiel understands that the money and help that Dan offers was obtained from the blood, life and sweat of the indigenes who are victims of environmental depletion. As a result of this realization, Ezekiel rejects Dan as his mother's partner and also rejects the gifts that Dan offers him. Dan leaving Warri after he was released because he believed that the place was unsafe, symbolizes how the oil company members will leave the community after they have made money from their natural resources and desecrated the land.

Conclusion

Ecofeminism is an ideology that deals with the relationship between the oppression of nature and women. It shows the level at

which man's activities and decisions affect the environment, women and other minority members of the society such as children. Christie Watson in the novel *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, narrates the level at which the environment in Niger Delta is damaged as a result of crude oil mining, she shows the relationship between women and nature and how these individuals suffer in the face of the menace that have plagued the environment. Watson shows how women and children survive in the face of patriarchy and environmental depletion, women are seen standing up for themselves to challenge these tools by making their voices heard through protest and confrontation. Through the strength demonstrated by these women, it is hoped that they will find their voices, equality and the state of the environment will be restored by embracing sustainable practices.

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