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## **Environment as Script of Poverty in the Third Generation Nigerian Novel: A Reading of Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo***

**Douglas E. Kaze**

Jos, Nigeria

dekazemagic@gmail.com

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### **Abstract**

*In this article, I analyse constructions of poverty and precarity in close relation to the overwhelming environmental interests in three contemporary Nigerian novels: Yellow-Yellow by Kaine Agary, Waiting for an Angel by Helon Habila and Eyo by Abidemi Sanusi. All three explore the interconnections that exist among the environment, capitalist exploitation or corrupt governance and communal/individual experiences of poverty. I argue that although the environment is inscribed with the poor social conditions of the marginalized members of the societies imagined, it does not mean that the environment is subservient to the social and political dimensions of existence as they are intertwined. In Yellow-Yellow I explore how the environment subjected to despoliation and pollution by the profit-driven activities of oil companies in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria forms a script of poverty and precarity experienced by the inhabitants of those areas. In Waiting for an Angel and Eyo I discuss how the novelists adopt the urban environment of the poor as a strategy to explore the intermix of ecology, social deprivation and political marginalization. The work concludes that it is impossible engage fruitfully in environmental discourse without looking at the social and political interconnections involved.*

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**Keywords:** *environment; ecocriticism; third generation Nigerian novel; urban ecology; poverty*

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### **1.0 Introduction**

In this paper, I look at the environment as a script of poverty and precarity in the contemporary Nigerian novel. This idea of the environment as script does not imply that the environment only plays a tropological or figurative role in the selected novels. It is not subservient to the social and political drama that happens within it; it is also an actor in the drama. Anthony Vital has argued that to have what he calls an African ecocriticism, the historical (in other words, the social and political) must be factored in (89). By these words he means an entwinement of the domains of environment and history in a way that neither is privileged over the other. While scholars like Yuriko Saito would argue for an objective view of nature as able to tell its own story without human impositions (146), this paper is based on the idea that a separation of nature from human culture or interpretation is impossible as there is no true dividing line between them. The story that nature tells is not a separate story from human history as it is both a witness and actor in the narrative. The environment, both natural and built, is in fact a bank or an accretion of multiple histories recorded within the overlaps of diverse temporalities. When Frantz Fanon, for instance, describes the colonial world as Manichean, his explanation on the polarizations of colonialist-native spaces presents the environment as an embodiment of history. In this discussion I am therefore careful not to subject the environment to a mere metaphoric status; I am very interested in the literality of the environment as I am in its figurative or symbolic implications in the novels under study. Weaving both readings together permit, in my opinion, a truly social-ecological reading as

literality allows the reader to come closer to the truth of environmental degradation, pollution and injustice, while privileging the figurative would only relegate environmental truth to a secondary position. The thrust here is to explore the complex relationship of the social and environmental in ways that neither is placed above the other.

The study is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, in which I explore the complexity that she weaves with an individual's dream, the disempowerment of a community and the marginalizing force of the petroleum industry. The second section studies the urban environment of the poor, or how poverty is inscribed on the urban environment, in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo*, two examples of what can be called the Lagos novel.

## 2.0 The Oil Encounter and the Environment of the Poor

Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* tells the story of a biracial young woman, Zilayefa, who was raised in a Niger-Delta village by her single mother. After her secondary education, which her poor mother has to work very hard to support, she feels a strong yearning to leave the village of her childhood in order to seek another life in a city. In Port Harcourt, she comes of age as she gains exposure to urban life and the life of the rich. Towards the end of the novel she becomes a victim of a failed romantic relationship with an older man, a senior officer in the military. Throughout the novel, she battles with being in different in-betweens such as her bi-racial identity, her station between village and city and her existence between wealth and poverty. Her character typifies a difficulty in finding a resting space as she embodies the postcolonial condition of unhomeliness. More importantly, however, the novel tells her story dialogically along with the story of the Niger Delta of Nigeria, the oil-rich region usually associated with the outrageous extremes of wealth and poverty. The pages are filled with references to the impact of the petroleum industry and its capitalist force on the environment and the people of the Niger Delta – the degradation of the environment and the impoverishment and exploitation of the inhabitants of such zones. It also speaks of the complicated politics that surrounds the industry – the whole web of multinational corporations, corrupt governments, elusive local leaders and dissatisfied youths. In this way, along with other Niger-Delta literary works, the novel seeks "to give voice to the region's experiences of geopolitical upheavals and environmental pollutions in the petro-modernity of the Delta" (Aghoghovwia 52).

The Niger Delta region has gained attention in the international media since the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995. He was the man who drew the world's attention to the environmental pollutions and the impoverishment resulting from the activities of oil companies in the region. His killing by the military regime at that time further ignited interest in the kind of 'slow violence' that the people and the land of that region have been subjected to. By slow violence, Rob Nixon means "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). This kind of violence is central to the novel as it links in various ways the day-to-day experience of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta area to the destructive impact of the oil industry. Aghogovwia's description of Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* as narrating the oil encounter via "a metaphoric trope of rape" (77) points to this kind of violence. He reasons that the novel's concurrent interest in the pollution of the land by the oil industry and the exploitation of women at oil production sites is expressed in a way that "each becomes epiphenomenal of the other" (77). In other words, the novel complicates the oil encounter in a way that links the people to their land and its exploitations inseparably. I shall focus on a few aspects of the novel as the platform for the analysis of how the physical environment works as a script of degradation and exploitation which have led to the impoverishment precarious existence of the people.

The opening of the story is significant to the central themes of the novel in the way we are drawn to witness the loss of farmlands to a sudden oil spillage. Zilayefa narrates: "one of the crude oil pipes that ran through my village broke and spilled oil over several hectares of land, my mother's farm included" (3). She further relates:

I [...] ran to my mother's farm. It was the first time I saw what crude oil looked like. I watched as the thick liquid spread out, covering more land and drowning small animals in its path. It just kept spreading and I wondered if it would stop, when it would stop, how far it would spread. Then there was the smell. I can't describe it but it was strong - so strong it made my head hurt and turned my stomach. I bent over, and retched so hard I became dizzy. I felt like everything had turned to black and was spinning around me. There was so much oil, and we could do nothing with it - viscous oil that would not dry out, black oil that was knee-deep. (4)

This describes Zilayefa's shocking encounter with the ugliness of the contact of the community's land with crude oil. First, it is important to point out the author's particular interest in the actuality of the physical environment's encounter with the threats of the oil industry. The contact between the environment and the crude oil (ironically drawn from the earth itself) is depicted in a purely realistic way that seems to want to draw the reader into the oil issues as a physical reality and not just an elusive subject of environmental rhetoric and politics. The narrating subject presents the experience in different sensory dimensions, speaking in visual, olfactory and somatic terms in order to establish its non-figurative dimension. The experience of *seeing* the black crude oil swallow the land, the description of the *smell* as indescribably repugnant and the effect on her *body* are all too clear to miss the narrator's encounter as a reality. Also, based on the idea of the environment as embodying a narrative, the land described as being covered by the spilled crude oil shows a literal process of inscription on the land, the writing of the story of despoliation and dispossession on the land's face by the oil economy. This is a story that is not primarily allegorical but one in which the items of the environment such as the land, the farmlands, the animals, the oil pipes and the crude oil are as important actors in the narrative as the human narrator and her mother or other members of her human community. This means the poverty of the Niger Delta begins not as a social condition but with the impoverishment of the earth itself and the creation of an imbalance in the relationship between human community and the natural environment.

The literality of the environment in the novel does not however override the figurative and symbolic status of the environmental narrative. In this moment when the familiar has been rendered strange to Zilayefa, the spread of crude oil over the farmland depicts not only a threat to subsistence, but also the suppression of an agricultural economy in a country that once depended successfully on agriculture. Zilayefa's wondering about when and how far the crude oil will spread projects doubts and uncertainties that have come to characterize the unhomeliness of the people in this community. The conquests of the oil industry have rendered the familiar environment uncanny and strange. It becomes the case of the world invading the private but in a rather different way; here the community and its land are the 'private', the familiar that has been invaded by a new order, a new economy and its accompanying threats and dangers. I would like to think of the environment in terms of home even as the term *ecology* was formed from the Greek root word *oikos*, which means home. This home thus becomes threatened by the intrusions of catastrophes that do not originate with the poor inhabitants of the community directly but with an industry totally in the hands a powerful few.

Although this particular incident of oil spillage (one out of many) is sudden and

dramatic, it points to the slow violence that Niger Delta communities have been subjected to. This slow violence is depicted in the impact of the oil industry on the everyday existence of the inhabitants. Aghogovwia, referencing Sule Egya, writes that “the people of the Niger Delta region are mostly rural peasants engaged in farming and fishing. With the soils damaged, the waters polluted, the air invaded by permanent gas flares, and the debasement of the fauna and flora, the people become extremely vulnerable” (12). He adds that “this vulnerability morphs into anxiety which is expressed through insurrectionary acts and violent protests for environmental and social justice” (12). This is how, at the end of the first chapter, Zilayefa portrays the slow violence on her community:

And so it was that, in a single day, my mother lost her main source of sustenance. However, I think she had lost that land a long time ago, because each season yielded less than the season before. Not unlike the way she and others in the village had gradually lost, year after year, the creatures of the river to oil spills, acid rain, gas flares, and who knows what else, according to the voices on radio. (4)

The precarity of the people in the community in the novel is shown in the life-threatening incidents of oil spillage and in the lack or paucity of social amenities and infrastructure in the community. At the centre of everything, it is the environment that bears witness to the condition. Agary seems to want to project education as a way out of poverty, but good education is hardly accessible to the people. This lack of access to education is connected to the people’s poverty, which is a result of their loss of land and means of income. Interventions such as the scholarships that the oil companies offer to Niger Delta indigenes are presented as elusive and inaccessible to those they are supposed to be meant for. The community is so marginalized that even radio reception is very poor. In the following excerpt, Agary presents a vision that pictures how complicated the impact of the slow violence can be as she merges the environmental, the social and the personal together in the experience of its impact. Poverty has deprived the community of access to public and personal healthcare as the environment itself is harmed and rendered harmful. Zilayefa puts it this way:

My ears still rang from maternal wails piercing the foggy days when mothers mourned a child lost to sickness or to the deceptively calm waters that lay hungry below the stilt latrines, waiting to swallow the children whose unsteady feet betrayed them before they had learnt to swim. How many more times could I bear the pain like a hundred razor blades slashing my private part because the river water that washed it was the same water that received the waste rejected by my body in its attempt to cleanse itself? The water that flowed with streaks of blue, purple, and red, as drops of oil escaped from the pipelines that moved the wealth from beneath my land and into the pockets of the select few who ruled Nigeria was the same water I drank. (39)

The near dystopic description of this rural community confronts ideas of the village as pristine or pastoral. Living conditions are shown as largely risky. The body is also subjected to this kind of unhealthy living conditions that contribute to the sense of unhomeliness. The image of the same familiar water presented as strange and both degraded and degrading poses another moment of the unhomely showing the alienations of the postcolonial subject in a neocolonial context.

### **3.0 Poverty and the Urban Environment in the Lagos Novel**

Shifting from the Niger Delta’s oil nightmare, in this section I look into the ways the Lagos

urban novel has employed the environment as both an actor in its story and as a script of the social and ecological precarious conditions that become the lives of the urban poor. Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and Sanusi's *Eyo* are the focal texts here. In my analysis, I draw on the two novels' emphatic depictions of decrepit and squalid slum environments, again depending on the importance of the literality involved in these portrayals.

Chris Dunton writes about the Nigerian city novel, specifically the Lagos novel, spanning from Ekwensi's Lagos in the 1950s to today's Lagos depicted in Nigeria's third generation novels. His concern is focused on the ambiguous functions of entropy (disorder, chaos, diversities) and creative energy in the Lagos novel. He writes that "[t]he documentation and exploration of severe economic and social problems remains as much a concern of the contemporary Lagos novel as it was for Ekwensi fifty years ago" (71). He identifies the continuities that exist between the older and younger generations' imagination of Lagos:

the hybridity of the population, the size of its informal economy (and the fragility of this for individual participants), the lack or breakdown of infrastructure and the misery this causes citizens [...], the attractions of the city's nightlife for those who can afford it, the callousness and rapacity of [...] government and its administration. (71)

While the new Lagos novel still concerns itself with "the depiction of deprivation, of the stresses and privations of Lagos life for those without wealth [...] as before" (72), the distinctive quality of the contemporary Lagos novel is in its "emphasis placed in the possibilities for cognition and action, and in particular the possibilities inherent in the act of writing (or some other form of expressive activity) as a means to assert a meaningful existence" (73).

My intention in this section of the paper, therefore, is to build on works such as Dunton's by pointing to the ecological consciousness embedded in the 'new' works. I shall do this in ways that relate the poverty represented in the novels to the environment, how they reflect each other, in other words, how the urban slum environment functions as a script of poverty in the novels. In the process, I also show how the kinds of slow violence the disempowered are subjected to produces precarious subjects in the urban slum spaces.

Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* is centred on Nigeria's recent history of military rule, especially the Babangida-Abacha years. It uses Lagos as a site for the experience of ordinary people caught in the existential predicaments of surviving under the dehumanizing military regimes. In this discussion, I shall be focusing on only an aspect of the novel, the section named "Kela", which tells not only the story of the boy Kela, but also the story of the slum named Poverty Street, originally known as Morgan Street. Kela comes from Jos, a Northern Nigerian town, to stay with his aunt in Lagos, his father's idea of discipline for failing his senior school certificate examination and dabbling in marihuana use. In Lagos, he joins the story of the community which comprises characters who are dissatisfied with their living conditions and decide to stage a failed protest against the government of the day. Kela thus becomes an observer of, and participant in, this community, observing not only the people but the environment as well.

Kela describes Poverty Street as "one of the many decrepit, disease-ridden quarters that dotted the city of Lagos like ringworm on a beggar's body" (120). It is one of the slums in the city where the people do not feel the presence of governance; whenever they do, it is the presence of intimidating soldiers. The novel's environmental interest is expressed in the descriptions of urban decay that surrounds and intertwines with the lives of the people in the novel. The section opens with emphasis on the heat of the weather:

by eleven a.m. the sun was already high in the sky, and by noon the heat would really begin to show its hand: it would force the people off the main



street and back roads, and since the heat was worse indoors, the people would sit out on their verandahs on old folding chairs; they would throw open the shop doors and sit before the counters, stripped down to their shorts and wrappers, their bare torsos gleaming with sweat. Gasping for breath, they would stare through glazed eyes at the long, tarred road that dissected the street in two. By two o'clock, the tar would start melting, making tearing noises beneath car tyres, holding grimly on to shoe soles. (119)

This heat in both its symbolic and literal dimensions has made the familiar strange and rendered the familiar environment unhomey. In its literality, the heat makes the place rather 'uninhabitable', bringing the world into the home space in its own way, being "worse indoors" (119). This way, the borders of private and public are disrupted in the way that the rooms, the intimate spaces are vacated in favour of the more public spaces where the people are "stripped down to their shorts and wrappers" (119) showing a sort of displacement taking place. This literality of the heat also opens up the novel's ecological consciousness such as in the sentence "And there were no trees on Poverty Street" (119). To read this contrapuntally, to use Edward Said's idea, we would be taken outside the text to the idea that informs the 'treelessness' of the slum. Trees in postcolonial Nigerian urbanity have come to be associated with either whiteness or suburbia, which in turn points to the social division of the privileged and the poor as represented by the difference in the spaces they inhabit. The Nigerian suburbia is also a carry-over from the Manichean colonial world that Fanon has described in *The Wretched of the Earth*. These areas have come to be inherited by the Nigerian postcolonial elite and further perpetuated the colonial spatialization of class. In fact, by renaming the street Poverty Street, the inhabitants of this street quietly subordinate their area to unmentioned spaces occupied by the affluent members of the Lagos society. Because of the absence of trees on this street, Habila writes, the

heat would comb the defenceless street unchecked (like the policemen that came after the demonstration), tearing into doors and windows, advancing from room to room, systematically seeking out and strangling to death the last traces of cool air hiding beneath chairs and behind cabinets, wringing out moisture from the anaemic plants that drooped in old plastic containers on window ledges. (119-20)

In this description, while Habila maintains focus on the literality of the heat's impact on the ordinary existence of the poor inhabitants of this street, he also introduces the heat's figurative dimension. The comparison of the force of the heat to the intrusion of policemen points to the loss of privacy and protection experienced by ordinary Nigerians under the gaze and surveillance of military regimes. In these regimes, to an extent reminiscent of South Africa's apartheid, the borders of private and public are lost. According to Brother, a character in the story, "If the heat no kill you, soja go harrass you" (131). This statement speaks of the doubleness of the people's predicament: political and environmental. Although the heat is natural and hardly have anything to do with human efforts, it does speak of the entrapment of the poor in an uncomfortable situation where they cannot afford such luxuries as air-conditioners. The heat is thus symbolic in that sense as it becomes a part of, and mingles intricately with, the inhabitants' experience of marginality and suffering.

Habila also moves on to imagine the squalor and insecurities of the physical environment of the community in a way that provokes interest in the intersection between the idea of dwelling and environments dotted with garbage heaps and made up of dilapidated buildings. The families, for instance, are portrayed as living in structures that reflect their status of poverty and precarity: "The storey buildings looked shaky, adventitious, as if the first strong wind that passed this way would uproot them. The fronts and backs of the buildings were hidden by huge hills of refuse that overflowed and constricted the path to

Joshua's room" (122). Brother's shop is described as "covered by garbage heaps at the sides and at the back [...]. It was made of corrugated iron, which leaked when it rained and cracked and expanded under the hot sun. In front of the shop was a burst pipe" (125). There are further descriptions of the shelters on Olokun Road as "old and craggy and lichened" (126) and "hastily built wood and zinc structures that housed incredibly large numbers of families" (126). These descriptions of shelter point to the subhumanizing effect of poverty on the population. A shelter is universally regarded as a symbol of security and privacy; here it is a symbol of precarity, dangerous existence. Gaston Bachelard has, for instance, thought of the house as a space that offers protection and peace to its occupant, the dreamer (6). According to him, it is the house that keeps the human being from being a "dispersed being" (7). In the descriptions of the dwelling places above by Habila, these shelters can hardly provide the sort of protection that the dweller craves. A shelter described as "shaky, adventitious" (122) can only point to one thing: a precarious existence resulting from poverty housing the nightmares and insecurities of the poor. Another aspect of the portrayals of the space in question is in the horizontalizing of waste and shelter. The implication of this imagination is the reduction of the poor in the society to the level of garbage: they become the 'garbage' of society, or in Fanonian language, the wretched of the earth. The juxtaposition of homes and refuse dumps serves to constantly remind the members of this society of the injustices that they have become victims of, the destinies enforced upon them by careless and corrupt regimes.

Reading through this novel one would begin to get the sense that poverty is not just a condition of lack but a way of life. In describing a part of the community as "the flux point for all vices on the street: [...] [with] hotels for sex and alcohol, and [...] doorways and alley-mouths for marijuana and cocaine" (121), Habila points to this idea of poverty: as not only an economic condition, but one that is part and parcel of what its victims become psychologically and morally. The poor in Habila's novel do not only lack material things; they are also poor in self-esteem and forced to be poor in their choices regarding morality. However, we must not forget Dunton's idea of Lagos as not only a site of entropy, but of incredible energy as well. According to him, the distinction between the old Lagos novel and the contemporary one lies in "the possibilities for cognition and action" (73). The inhabitants of Poverty Street are overwhelmingly aware of their poverty and the threat of the environment they live in. Hence the change from Morgan to Poverty Street. A character describes Kela's aunt's restaurant located there as "Poor Man's Paradise" (132). Brother and his friends would always sit at his shop and fantasize about their exit from poverty. The intellectually-minded would be at another side of the area trying to contextualize Karl Marx, Fanon and Saro-Wiwa. Their awareness of their condition is not only limited to their immediate experience of poverty, but the cause of the poverty as well. That is why Brother would say "the big big Generals who de steal our country money every day de send am to foreign banks while their country de die of poverty and disease" (134). For the same reason, the intellectuals of the community conclude that "[t]his country is in dire need of a revolution" (157). That is where what Dunton calls "action" comes in. The intellectuals decide to organize a demonstration to voice out their dissatisfaction.

On the surface, the protest staged by the inhabitants of Poverty Street seems to be a solely political one concerned with the misuse of power by the military government. However, when we return to the idea of the environment as complexly interwoven with politics and history, and then to the novelist's overwhelming concern for urban environmental degradation, it becomes difficult not to see the community's act of resistance as a form of environmentalism. I argue that it is, in fact, a form of what Nixon has called the environmentalism of the poor. The novel shows that the poor inhabitants of Poverty Street desire to rise above the social conditions to which they have been subjected. Their resistance thus corresponds to what Nixon says when describing "impoverished resource rebels" (4) as

not able to “afford to be single-issue activists” (4). Looking at the protest clearly, one would not be able to categorically point at immediate causes of the uprising; rather, the reader sees through the rhetoric of the leaders an anger, a deep dissatisfaction at the general conditions of living, a condition narrated by their environment. At this point it is instructive to also return to Brother’s dream of exit from poverty. Note that Brother does not talk about exiting from Poverty Street when the much dreamt about millions finally appear. Instead, he dreams of *transforming* the community in terms of amenities and beautification. He says, “My send-off from life of poverty. I go repaint every house for this street. I go hire labourers to sweep everywhere till everything de shine like glass” (127).

Sanusi’s *Eyo* tells the story of a young girl trafficked to London by a relative under the cover of offering the girl a better life outside the poverty of Africa. While the heart of the novel is concerned with the vice of human trafficking and child abuse and an attempt at exposing the deceptions that lead young African women into cross-border slavery, the novel is filled consistently with images and motifs of poverty, especially before and after Eyo’s forced sojourn to London. In other words, it is very much like Habila’s *Poverty Street*. The story opens with descriptions of Ajegunle, a widely-known Lagos slum, whose environment points to the kind of subhuman existence of its inhabitants. This slum, just like Habila’s Morgan Street renamed Poverty Street, is refashioned by its inhabitants as Jungle City or AJ City. According to Sanusi,

Every day, thousands of people poured into the urban jungle from all over Nigeria and the rest of West Africa, lured by glitzy Nollywood images and other people’s embellished tales of success. They came, convinced their tenure would be a short one. Eventually, though, like millions before them, they melted into the sweltering Lagos metropolis. (19)

The novelist describes the Ajegunle slum in strong environmentalist language, as “a seething, sprawling slum on the swampy marshes of Lagos Lagoon, west of Lagos Island” (4). She also writes that Ajegunle “was separated from the opulence of Apapa and Tin Can Ports by a canal and had a reputation for being the most violent, notorious and criminal ghetto in Nigeria” (4). The mention of the opulence of the suburbs that form other parts of Lagos contrasts with the Ajegunle slum whose world is dominated by “narrowed, untarred streets, winding alleys and shanty settlements, [...] [the area standing] defiant on reclaimed marshes, surrounded by decomposing garbage, burning wood and rotting animal carcasses” (4). The precarity of the poor inhabitants of this community is also depicted in the dangerous kinds of shelters they live in. Most of them live in structures popularly known as *Face-me-I-face-you*, “rectangular in shape, sometimes uncompleted, with rows of single rooms facing each other, divided by a corridor with an open doorway at either end” (8). Eyo and her family live in one of these buildings and “[l]ike most of the houses in Jungle City, their building lacked electricity, running water and a bathroom, so the tenants bathed very early in the morning or late at night, in the ‘backyard’, the outback” (9). The kind of threat to health that these people are constantly exposed to is also expressed by the insanitary conditions they live in. For instance, the “*shalanga*, the pit latrine, was also in the windowless hut, hence people didn’t hang out too long in there. The latrine smell only eased during the harmattan season, when the cold winds of the Sahara Desert rolled across West Africa” (9).

Sanusi’s literal and intense descriptions of Ajegunle slums do not only provide a setting background to the story, but a conversation between spaces, classes and economies. The literality, again, of the environmental decay and degradation and the pathetic sanitary conditions of the slum must not be swallowed up by figurative interpretive strategies, but must be seen as the author’s deep interest in the physicality of the environment, the independent status of the environment as an entity worth pondering upon. It provides a conversation between the novel’s central theme of human trafficking and the environment



showing how most victims of human trafficking are forced into it by the precarious and unhomely conditions that characterize the community. The poverty encapsulated in the slum environment and in the existence of its inhabitants results in a sense of displacement, an uprootedness in the inhabitants which make them look outwards to other places that stand for everything that the slum is not. The mention of London or any western metropolises in the community betrays this sense of displacement in which the desire to leave the country to foreign spaces perceived to be utopian is expressed: “London. The word reverberated around the room like the forbidden fruit, as if it were meant to be spoken in more salubrious surroundings” (22). It is this hallowed view of the world outside this postcolonial dystopia that renders individuals and communities susceptible to evils like human trafficking. What Sanusi presents to us in the novel is an impossibility to sever the human trafficking trade (and by extension other social vices) from the politics and the environment, a complex entwinement of these different domains. In short, the sexual enslavement and abuse of young African women in Europe is a story that has to be told from the postcolonial status of the African setting before looking at the psychic and bodily hell the victims go through in the European slave market. It is not a story that must be isolated to only the victims’ European experience, but rather a story that begins with poverty as the failure of a modern postcolonial state. Instead of speaking about the authorities, Sanusi allows the environment to function as a reflection of a failing state.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

In these third generation Nigerian novels, I have explored the diverse ways the writers have represented the environment as a script of poverty and precarity in the different locales they have imagined. The discussion has shown that it is totally impossible to isolate issues of poverty from its intricate interactions with the environment, showing that we can only have a meaningful ecology when social conditions are also taken into account. All three novels show that the degradation of the environment does not only happen from abuse or neglect by corporations and the government as the condition of the poor has also made them (unwilling) agents of environmental abuse.

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