

The Niger Delta Violence, Women and Ecofeminism

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Abstract

The Niger delta is a region that has suffered gross neglect and devastation by oil companies who have continued to degrade the environment through oil spills and pollution which has poisoned most of the ecosystem and farmlands. There has also not been any serious effort in developing the infrastructure in this region by successive governments in spite of the fact that the bulk of Nigeria's export revenue is realized from this region. This has in turn resulted in militant action by the indigenous groups against the oil companies through sabotage of the fuel installations, kidnapping of expatriate staff etc. The effort by government to stem this tide of the lawlessness has resulted in fierce fighting with the militants which has in turn had a devastating effect on the helpless mass populace, especially women and children who suffer the double tragedy of the loss of their farms, fishing areas and also the violence from the militancy, which apart from further devastating the environment also visits them with rape, brutalization and other manner of deprivations. In this article, a content analysis of Tess Akaeke Onwueme's play *Then she said it* and Ahmed Yerima's *Little Drops* are used to foreground the phenomenon of violence against women in the Niger delta which has been fuelled by this environmental degradation. We have proposed that a panacea to minimizing violence against women in this region is environmental justice given that when justice is done to the environment, it invariably trickles down to the women, the biggest victims of this degradation. The theory of Ecofeminism is used to underscore this argument.

Keywords: Violence, Ecofeminism, Militancy, Women, Ecosystem, Environment

1. Background: The Niger Delta

The Niger delta in Nigeria is a densely populated region sometimes called the Oil Rivers because it was once a major producer of palm oil. The area was the British Oil Rivers Protectorate from 1885 until 1893, when it was expanded and became the Niger Coast Protectorate. The Niger Delta, as now defined officially by the Nigerian government, extends over about 70,000 km² and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. Historically and cartographically, it consists of present day Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States. In 2000, however, Obasanjo's regime included Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River State, Edo, Imo and Ondo States in the region. Some 31 million people of more than 40 ethnic groups including the Bini, Efik, Ibibio, Annang, Oron, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Isoko, Urhobo, Ukwuani, and Kalabari, are among inhabitants in the Niger Delta, speaking about 250 dialects (*Wikipedia*).

It is interesting to note that this region accounts for over 90 per cent of Nigeria's proven gas and oil reserves. Proven gas reserves were 4.502 trillion (cu m) in 2005 and proven oil reserves were 36 billion (cu m) in 2003. The Niger Delta fuels Nigeria's heavily oil-dependent economy and accounts for 95% of Nigeria's export earnings and over 80% of Federal Government revenue. However, this region remains one of the poorest parts of the country. The extreme neglect of Human Rights and Governance from all levels of Government is endemic throughout the region. Those in power have favoured personal gain over community gain, causing a deeply entrenched resentment and mistrust of the political system (<http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/context.html>). However, economic emasculation of these people through environmental degradation and oil pollution has, in the last four decades or so, bred hostilities, militancy and violence in this region. This has manifested either through milder civil disobedience to the more sinister and militant activism of youths who have organized themselves into guerrilla groups attacking oil installations, killing and maiming personnel of the various oil companies.

In addition to this belligerent acts by these restless youths, they have also engaged in the acts of kidnapping of expatriate workers in many of these oil companies, the release of which entailed the payment of huge sums of money by the employers of these foreigners. This has the resultant effect of drastically reducing the upstream sector in oil production in the region. A number of factors have been identified as having fuelled this militancy, topmost of which is resource control. However, the issue of resource control, itself, might not have been the original point of emphasis at the beginning of the struggle. What has today become a hydra-headed monster started as a protest in the early 1990s when Ken Saro Wiwa, a respected writer and activist, set up the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) to protest the continues oil spillage and consequent wastages of their farmlands and degradation of the environment and ecosystem.

However, the scenario assumed a bigger and more sinister dimension when the Ijaw youths, the largest ethnic nationality in the Niger delta, joined the affray in the late 1990s. They issued the *Kaiama Declaration* which

among other things “called for oil companies to suspend operations and withdraw from Ijaw territory” (Wikipedia). This declaration set the stage for the violence and militancy that will ensue in this territory to date. Incidentally, this claim by the militants in the Niger delta has been vindicated by a recent report released by United Nation’s Environmental Programme (UNEP) which carried out a three year impact assessment analysis of the environment in Ogoniland. UNEP indicts Shell BP, an oil giant, of gross negligence and failure to address issues of oil spillage and environmental degradation. In summary the report, according to Guardian Newspapers, indicates the following which resulted from continues contamination by Shell BP:

- Heavy contamination of land and underground water courses, sometimes more than 40 years after oil was spilled.
- Community drinking water with dangerous concentrations of benzene and other pollutants.
- Soil contamination more than five metres deep in many areas studied.
- Most of the spill sites oil firms claimed to have cleaned still highly contaminated.
- Evidence of oil firms dumping contaminated soil in unlined pits.
- Water coated with hydrocarbons more than 1,000 times the level allowed by Nigerian drinking water standards.
- Failure by Shell and others to meet minimum Nigerian or own standards (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/aug/04/niger-delta-oil-spill-clean-up-un>).

Unfortunately, this militancy and the efforts by government to contain it has had a negative impact on women as they get raped, maimed and brutalized by both the militants who are supposed to fight for the rights of the Niger deltans and government forces who are supposed to be protecting them from the belligerents. What we have done in this work is primarily to look at how persistent violence in the Niger delta has affected the lot of people in the region but must especially women given that in most of these conflict situations, women and children suffer the most. Two plays-*Then she said it* by Tess Akaeke Onwueme and *Little Drops* by Ahmed Yerima- were used as our primary sources of analysis.

2. Violence: A Definition

Violence is defined by *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of English Language* (1989) as “rough or injurious physical force, action or treatment...an unjust or unwarranted exertion of force or power as against rights, laws etc”. Bobichand (2012) considers violence as “any physical, emotional, verbal, institutional, structural or spiritual behaviour, attitude, policy or condition that diminishes, dominates or destroys others and ourselves”.

The most influential classification of violence, however, is that of John Galtung (2003). A Norwegian peace and conflict expert, Galtung argues that violence operates on three levels. He avers that there is what is known as Structural violence which is that type of violence that restricts the rights and privileges of people based on either gender or skin colour or religion or sexual orientation. Galtung refers to this type of violence as indirect in the sense that it “comes from the social structure itself-between humans, between sets of humans (societies), between sets of societies (alliances, regions) in the world”.

Galtung (2003) identifies the second type of violence as Cultural which may also be gender based in the sense that people like women are discriminated upon as a result of their ‘inferior’ status to men. Homosexuals, too, are discriminated upon because society considers them to be abnormal. All these attitudes may be rooted in the socialization processes of society where people are taught to believe certain things right from childhood; these attitudes, therefore, exist within the psyche of individuals, for instance glorifying war exploits may have the effect of creating violence in people. The third category of violence identified by Galtung is Direct Violence. In this situation a person suffers either physical/ or verbal assault through killing, rape, sexual assault, torture, beatings etc. It is said to be the most visible of the three because it “reinforces structural and cultural violence” according to Bobichand (2012).

3. Violence against Women

Violence against women manifest in a variety of ways and may often times be culture specific. It may take the form of physical violence, emotional violence, economic violence, sexual violence or psychological violence.

Physical violence can affect either a person’s possessions or the person himself/herself. It can manifest through such behaviour as pushing, hitting, shoving, slapping choking, punching, etc. on the other hand, a person suffers physical violence through the loss of their prized possessions as they get destroyed by some other person. Emotional violence is experienced when a person’s confidence is undermined. The person is deliberately humiliated, demeaned, threatened with harm etc. Economic violence results when a financially dependent partner is denied access to money by his or her spouse. In the case of women, they can get ensnared in a violent relationship because of the lack of basic human needs. Sexual violence includes violent behaviour like forced

sexual contact, rape, forcing a victim to have sex with others which may cause injury to the person's sex organs. Psychological violence: This is somehow related to emotional violence but in this particular case the objective is to cause fear and disorientation in order to gain control. It is associated with three subclasses which include: intimidation, harassment and threats.

Generally speaking, violence against women in Nigeria manifest through rape, forced early marriage, spouse abuse female genital mutilation, sexual harassment widowhood rites confinement, defacement, dis-inheritance, ritual cleansing, ostracism, arrest in home of spouse etc.

Elsewhere, it is argued that violence against women occurs in three levels: the Home, the Community and the State. Jekayinfa maintains that in the home, a woman may suffer violence through battering by her spouse; in the community she is exposed to violence through, rape, sexual assault, commercialization of the female body etc while the State subjects her to violence through discriminatory policies which affects her. It should be noted, though that even bad governance can engender violence against women and other people.

Our analysis of the set texts indicates these various levels of violence against women ranging from the structural to the cultural and the direct. But fundamentally, right from the family to the community and then to the State, women have been suffering one form of violence or the other in the Niger delta as a result of the mismanagement of oil facilities which brought about environmental degradation within the region and the resultant militancy.

4. A Summary of the Two Plays

Then she said it and *Little Drops* are both dramatizations of the suffering of people in the Niger delta. It is, however, pertinent to note that in most conflict situations, women and children suffer the most. They always end up in the crossfire of these terrible situations. It is therefore much easier to attack a group of women and children who are in most occasions unarmed and defenceless making them "soft targets" of these attackers.

In terms of their plotlines, *Then she said it* by Tess Akaeke Onwueme dramatizes the struggle of people who are suffering in the midst of plenty. It showcases the strength and resilience of a people so much emasculated by insensitive leadership. *Then she said it* exposes the multifaceted problems plaguing the contemporary Nigerian nation but especially the region of the Niger delta.

In her synopsis of the play, the playwright summarizes these issues as abject poverty, hunger, starvation, acute fuel, water and electricity shortages, violent rape and abuse of women and girls, state terrorism and genocide, displacement, environmental pollution massive corruption, humiliation and betrayal. The play is also a depiction of high level corruption, international complicity especially through the activities of multinational corporations which leads to hunger and the general squalor of most people in the Niger delta of Hungeria, a metaphor for Nigeria. Onwueme exposes the complicity between leaders in Hungeria with these foreign conglomerates (Atlantic) to steal the nation's oil wealth which results in the pauperization of the masses.

The role of traditional rulers typified with Ethiope also collude with these agencies of exploitation is discussed. The playwright indicts these royal personages showing them to be part of the problem even when they are supposed to be protectors of the people. The issue of oil, a very contentious and highly emotional issue within Nigerian political arena, oil pollution and environmental degradation all come to play a significant role in this thought provoking play.

As the noose tightens on the people's throats, they organize themselves and protest the exploitation. This rag tag army comprising of youths and market women launch into a vicious attack on their oppressors. There is a lot of mayhem and destruction. Law and order breaks down but for the declaration of a state of emergency by the new leadership. The armed forces descend heavily on the villagers, sacking many villages and committing worse crimes than those committed by the protesters. Mass arrests are made by government of many arsonists. However, a "No Guilty" verdict is pronounced when this case is tried in an international court against the people. In *Little Drops* by Ahmed Yerima, the confrontation is more palpable as we come face to face with the action of the militants and their warmongering as they take on the oil companies whom they accuse of degrading the environment. Ironically, they end up brutalizing women more as they daily engage the government forces who have been sent to bring down the militancy. But even more startling and worrying as we see in the play, even the government soldiers, themselves, are not completely innocent of these heinous crimes. They also indulge in raping and sexually assaulting women.

This is the situation as the play opens where we see an old woman, deep in the jungle, all by herself because she has lost her husband. The ferocity of the war has made her to be creative in taking care of herself as she improvises a gun with a long spoon. This she uses to ward off attackers. All around her are sounds of war. People run in and out of her camp. Through her, we are brought in contact with different women fleeing the war. The first to come in was Mukume who had just been severally raped by government forces. A woman with a

baby on her back comes in next. We later identify her as Azue, the queen of the community who barely escaped when the palace was razed down by the militants who also killed the king because of his double standards of collecting money from government while he pretended to be in support of their struggle. The last to come is Bonuwa, a school teacher, whose school was hit by a shell and all the children killed in the attack. She had to flee the wrath of the parents who could not understand why she survived while their children perished. All the women hurdle together in the cold of the night with the sounds of gunfire all around.

Fundamentally the message by playwright suggests that women from all works of life are affected by conflict situations be they queens as Azue who hitherto had been ensconced in her opulent place but who has been reduced to a beggarly status or the school teacher Bonuwa or even newlyweds like Mukume who was violently wrested from the side of her husband, psychologically brutalized and raped by none other than the soldiers that were sent to protect them.

5. Violence against Women in *Then She Said It and Little Drops*

All manner of violence was unleashed on women in the two plays ranging from the structural to the direct. In the two plays, women suffered economic violence which, itself, is structural in nature through the deliberate policy of pauperization by government and their multinational cohorts who systematically pillage the resources of the Niger delta but without any recourse to serious investment that can help the people sustain their own livelihood. This worrisome scenario is penned thus:

State institutions are unfavourable to communities. Powerless in front of the State and oil companies and unable to influence social, political and economic factors that determine their wellbeing, communities become victims of both corruption and arbitrariness of the government (<http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/context.html>).

The sustained degradation of the ecosystem which involves the farmlands which have been rendered frigid and unproductive through oil spillage; the rivers and water ways have also been polluted by leaking pipes which have aged and yet have not been replaced with new ones. This has resulted in the poisoning of the waterways and destruction of fish and other aquatic life. This has resulted in the destruction of the only means of livelihood for the riverine people of the Niger delta.

Meme: See where I live. My family were fishermen before the war took off. And I was the best fish seller in this part of the Creek, but now the water is polluted. Oil kills the fishes before we get there (*Little Drops* p.61-2).

Women suffer direct violence in both plays, too. All the women in *Little Drops* experienced one form of harrowing experience or the other. Meme has seen one form of suffering or the other ranging from losing her children and husband to the war to the permanent state of angst that she is subjected to on a daily basis as she listens to the booming of guns not too far away from her abode. Mukume was violently raped by the government soldiers as they grabbed her in the hotel room where she was having her honeymoon with Ovieve, her husband, ironically by the soldiers that have been deployed to keep peace in the region. When Meme, pretending to be a militant, threatened her with rape, she replied:

Mukume: No but please. I am all sore

Meme: Sore?

Mukume: Yes. Please! I have been raped three times today already. Kill me instead. Shoot me and let me die... No I will not let another man touch me. Kill me first...I shall die first, not one more finger on me (*Little Drops* p.10).

Onwueme describes this kind of scene with more graphic details in *Then she said it*:

Obida: They did it-did it. Yes they did it! (*More sobbing from KOKO*)

Benue: The soldiers? (*At this point, KOKO explodes into tears...*)

Women: (*Stunned*) Soldiers? Police?

Niger: (*Choking with tears*) B...bu...they were sent here to protect us?

Benue: You think it matters to them?

Niger: Is it the white man? (*Silence.*)

Benue: The government official?

Obida: Or the chief? (*KOKO weeps louder*)

KOKO: (*Tearfully*) All...all of them. Cut deep with their knife. I fought. Tried...tried to close my eyes. Tight. (*Screams*) Aaah!. How I prayed God to close them forever. Bury me alive. But when I opened, I saw him... grinning...grinning into my face...(Then she said it p.30).

Koko was not only raped by the soldiers. She was also raped by Atlantic, the manager of the oil company. But she was also raped by her uncle, the Chief. It is interesting to note that KOKO and by extension women suffer this dehumanizing experience as a result of the economic injustice to the Niger delatans. A region rich in petroleum products and yet where poverty is so rife.

Koko, found herself in this situation because she was forced to hawk oranges by her mother so as to augment the lean family income, and that is how she was lured and severally raped by all and sundry. The same way Meme in *Little Drops* was pauperized and reduced to a life barely existing on the edge, a situation that many women have found themselves trapped in.

Even Oshun, KOKO's elder sister, is forced to go into a life of prostitution because of the tight financial atmosphere. Jeremiah (2011) argues that she typifies the many young people who are daily flooding the streets looking for jobs that are nonexistent. In spite of her impeccable credentials, she is unable to secure any type of decent job. She becomes a courtesan to Atlantic not because she is necessarily a wayward girl but because she is forced by the prevailing circumstances to throw away morality and decency in order to keep body and soul together. Wadkok (2010) observes that most of prostitution is engendered by weak economies, "inequitable distribution of income which is reinforced by corruption and high rate of unemployment". We find evidences of this assertion in the two plays where collusion between Atlantic, symbolizing foreign multinational companies, and their local collaborators like Ethiopie, the Chief, Kainji- the government official in *Then she said it*. Chief pressurizes the oil companies to pay compensation to the people for getting displaced for oil exploration, but he pockets the money so advanced. Kainji inflates contracts and collects monetary handouts from the oil conglomerates so as to look the other way and refuse to bring action against them concerning oil spillages and environmental pollution. In addition, they also collude with the oil firms in stealing petroleum products in the high seas by illegally siphoning same and selling to thieving marketers, the proceeds of which are paid to their foreign accounts.

In *Little Drops*, the chief of Gbaramatu Kingdom typifies this attitude as he collaborates with both camps to further his selfish agenda to the detriment of his people. The attitude described in the play is an example of how influential people collude to steal the resources of the country. The result as we find in Nigeria is a depressed economy. And so government is unable to develop certain sectors of the economy which could have generated employment for the teeming graduates that are on a yearly basis literally pouring into the streets. A recent alarming report indicates that Nigeria has been losing more than 150,000 barrels of crude oil per day. This translates to a whopping estimated \$5 billion yearly lost to oil thieves, money that could have gone into serious developmental effort by government. Even more alarmingly so the identity of the culprits of these economic crimes, apart from the Niger delta militants who pilfer these products and sell in order to purchase guns and recruit members, are said to be top government officials who make available boats with huge tanks for this illegal storage to their 'boys' (<http://www.nigerianoilgas.com/oil-bunkering-in-the-niger-delta/>).

In *Then she said it*, the playwright aptly captures this sad situation when a single position of a security guard is advertized in GRA/Oil club, the headquarters of the multinational oil company, and a mammoth crowd turns out- young and old, men and women. This is a clear indication of the desperateness of the situation within the region like in all other places in the country where unemployment is at a double digit, precisely at 23.9% or about 20.3million people. (<http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/20-3m-nigerians-currently-unemployed-statistics-reveal/127112/>). Ogodo (2012) argues that this attitude is very pervasive in the Niger delta just as it is in other parts of the country given that "those in power have favoured personal gain over community gain, causing a deeply entrenched resentment and mistrust".

But another direct form of violence that the women suffer is, ironically, through the actions of the militants as they fight to get attention from both government and the oil companies. The senseless destruction of pipelines and other oil facilities has, by and large, contributed to the devastation of the environment. It should be noted that this is the point of conflict in the very beginning. The fact that these militants participate in further contaminating the environment also makes them culpable of this crimes of environmental degradation and by extension, they have become agencies of the pauperization of the indigenous communities but especially in the case of this work, women, who have been denied access to fertile land for their agricultural work and fishing.

Azue, the queen of the kingdom lost her husband, the king, and her only son who was shot on the back as she raced away to escape the militants who attacked the palace. Bonuwa, the school teacher would have been lynched by the towns people if she had not run away after a stray shell hit the school where she teaches and killed all the children. All these women suffered direct violence in *Little Drops* just like their counterparts in *Then she said it*.

There is also a high incidence of emotional/psychological violence in the two plays meted out against women. In *Little Drops*, Mukume gives a graphic description of her emotional state as a result of the multiple rape she

suffered in the hands of the soldiers and how unworthy she feels as a woman who has lost her virtue after being violated by some other men.

Mukume: You have seen me.

Meme: Hmm?

Mukume: Down there...where my virtue once lived. Tell me, Mother, will I ever be the same again? I... we got just got married, four days ago. Ovievie, my husband, has just only given me this wedding ring and vowed to treasure and please me till death do us part. (*She begins to cry*). He always says my body was his temple. And I was his goddess. But see what they have done to his temple. They have trampled upon my virtue, turned my passage to marshy swampy ground, and my soul lost, full of shame and pity. (*Grabs Memekize*). I do not deserve this, by the gods, I do not. (*Little Drops* p.16-7).

This threnody must be understood from the core traditional point of view where the chastity of a woman is gauged in her ability to present herself pure and untouched to her husband and to remain so. Salami (1999), in portraying this tradition among the Binis, as in many other African nationalities, says that a woman is even made to swear an oath of chastity to her husband, to remain pure and faithful. Mukume's apprehension is therefore understood given that she considers herself 'worthless' in the eyes of her husband even though it is not her fault that she was raped.

6. Ecofeminism and the Niger Delta Crisis

Ecofeminism, according to Gaard (1995) as quoted by Bile (2011), is a movement that cuts across a whole gamut of feminist disciplines, activisms and advocacy platforms like "peace and anti-nuclear activism, feminist spirituality, animal liberation, environmentalism and antitoxics movements". It is "a convergence of the ecological and feminist analyses and movements. It represents varieties of theoretical, practical and critical efforts to understand and resist the interrelated dominations of women and nature" (Eaton, 2005, p.11). It is rooted in Social ecology, Deep Ecology and other strands of environmental movements (Nhanenge, 2011, p.127). He summarizes the basic preoccupation of Social ecology as propounded by the exponent and founder Murray Bookchin as being "concerned with the abolishment of social hierarchies which he sees as the cultural, traditional and psychological systems of obedience and command". Bookchin formulated his theory of Social ecology by fusing the philosophies of Marxian Socialism, Libertarian Anarchism and the works of Aristotle and Hegel. Bookchin rebels against any form of domination whether of "young by the old, of women by men, of one ethnic group by another, of the masses by the bureaucracy, of rural areas by towns, and of body by mind" (Nhanenge, 2011, p.127). He avers that since humans have the capacity to dominate fellow humans, it follows that nature can be dominated by humans. Therefore, in order for nature to be free from this domination, humans must be free from any measure of domination and control. He concludes that "we must first create a society which has eliminated all forms of human hierarchy before we can hope to achieve an ecological society" (p. 128).

Some other roots of ecofeminism is Deep Ecology which is an environmental philosophy propounded by a Norwegian philosopher by the name of Arne Naess and others. Naes argues in this theory that the major cause of environmental degradation is anthropocentrism, which is a philosophy that puts human beings at the centre of everything while neglecting or even exploiting nature for the comfort of the human being. The theory further maintains that inasmuch as human beings are considered distinct from nature, there will always exist a situation where nature is exploited and misused for them. The careless misuse of nature for the satisfaction of the human beings has continued to encourage the pillaging and brutal exploitation of the environment. Deep ecologists accuse the whole of humanity as guilty of this crime given that, in their opinion, the attitude is already etched in the human psyche and only a fundamental philosophical shift by human beings can solve this problem as they get to the level of sympathizing with the environment and see man as part and parcel of it. They distinguish between Deep Ecology and "Shallow ecology" the latter of which they say is only out to solve the problem at the remedial level as they "fight exclusively against environmental pollution and resource depletion with the objective to promote the health and affluence of people of Northern developed countries" ((Nhanenge, 2011, p.129). But Deep ecology movements are those that strike at the root of environmental degradation which lies in the human psyche because they are more concerned with "metaphysical, ontological and ethical questions". Contrasting this spiritual attitude with the dominant post-modern philosophy of individualism, acquisitiveness and natural human tendencies at exploitation, Deep ecologists question the distinction between the human being and the rest of nature:

People are part of their surrounding; their relations to other elements in the environment constitute people. Thus the environment determines what humans are. When one sees the human subject as

essentially one with the natural world, the strict distinction between object and subject disappears as does the fact-value distinction (Nhanenge, 2011, p.129).

However, Heather Eaton also sees identifies ecofeminism as springing from the anti-war, anti-racism and women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s. For example the use of chemicals like Agent Orange during the Vietnam War by America sparked off serious anti-war demonstrations especially by women who protested "the devastating ruin of the natural world" (Eaton, 2005, p.13).

The problem with most of these movements, whether in Social ecology or Deep ecology is that they were mostly controlled by white male activists. This gave women very little space to articulate issues that affect them. Their peripheral status in these movements gave rise to a distinct and woman centred movement where they "...defined and shaped a movement that reflects their perceptions of reality, their experiences and their cultural heritage" (Warren & Erkal, 1997, p.62).

Women especially from the developing world are, by the social construction of power relations, closer to nature as a source of livelihood and hence will try to protect it as much as possible. This construction, itself, is rooted in "patriarchal dualism" in which women's economic production is given a low status, but this also means that women interact more with the environment (Nhanenge, 2011, p.404).

Therefore, parallels are often drawn between society's treatment of the environment, animals, or resources and its treatment of women. In resisting this patriarchal culture, ecofeminists feel that they are also resisting plundering and destroying the Earth. Reuther (1975, p. 204) puts it thus:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of the [modern industrial] society.

Erkal and Warren (1997) suggests that this exploration of real life experiences that have given birth to a multiplicity of grassroots women's movements has encouraged a lot of enquiry from scholars from a myriad of academic disciplines and vocational fields who have tried to understand the arguments of eco-feminists. This social consciousness of eco-feminists, according to these theorists, suggests that exploitation of women and exploitation of the earth have some astonishing parallels with the exploitation of the "non-human nature". They therefore believe that this inextricable linkage of ecology and feminism can best be approached through gender as a focus while also appreciating the ecological dimension to any feminism.

It will therefore appear that ecofeminism is "constructed in different times and places in different ways" (Bile, 2011, p. 10). It is a diverse meeting point of these multi-variegated movements. But the one thing that binds all these advocacy movements together is the agenda of women and ecology.

There is an indication that the violence in the Niger delta is inextricably tied to nature or the devastation of it. The people of the Niger delta, who have been economically disempowered over the years as a result of the sustained and brutal misuse of their environment and ecosystems, have had to rise up in arms against government and multinational corporations. Hitherto, the mangrove had served as a source of wood for the Niger delatans and a "habitat for the area's biodiversity, but is now unable to survive the oil toxicity of its habitat". Anywhere oil settles, whether on beaches or the farms or water, it is bound to produce this toxicity. The consequence of this is the disruption of the food chain by killing the crabs which live in the water, endangers fish hatcheries and contaminates them which may render unfit for human consumption (Nwilo and Badejo).

We pause to suggest that even though the agitation in the Niger delta has gone beyond environmental degradation to resource control, the philosophy of ecofeminism, if applied, will go a long way in dousing the flames of acrimony. Probably, if multinational companies had been up and doing right from the start and had consistently monitored and repaired leaking pipes, but even where there has been oil spillage, promptly cleaned, there would probably not have this storm of protests that graduated into a full blown militancy with the attendant violence in its wake.

7. Conclusion

The question is has the Niger delta militancy brought any succor to the poor masses of the people there? Evidence indicates the contrary of this. Only a few privileged ones have been able to corner resources by making themselves indispensable to government. The Niger delta is still polluted, the oil spillages are still happening almost by the day. Most at times government is forced to make halfhearted statements and appeals to the oil conglomerates, in most other times they only beg the giants to do something. The environment is still devastated, degraded and infertile as a result of the oil spillage. A recent report by the United Nations chronicles the devastation of the Niger delta by Shell BP maintaining that it will take between 25-30 years to "restore the

environment” having devastated it for the past 50 years continuously (Vidal, 2011). What this means is that the lot of women will continue to suffer adversely. Since their destiny is tied to the environment and the environment is still unsafe which means that hostilities still exist. Hostilities, like we have seen outlined in the two plays analysed breed unsettling situations for women. We end this study with a statement by Galtung who prescribes for “partnership with nature, with humans and nature serving each other, providing for each other’s basic needs. Equality and justice within and among societies. The enhancement of life as the end, and as the means” (Galtung, 2003, p.7). Unless this is done in the Niger delta, violence against women will continue unabated.

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