Surviving Nigeria's Dystopic Bramble:

A Postcolonial Reading of Kaine Agary's *Yellow – Yellow*

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ABSTRACT:*This study sets out to examineKaineAgary's Yellow-Yellow as one of the several novels that thematize Nigeria's unending ills. Its objective is to analyze the novelist's artistic rendition of the unending ills plaguing Nigeria and the solutions proffered, if any. In procedure, the paper textually deploys the theory of Postcolonialism to critique Nigeria's venal climate of corruption, infrastructural decay, ethnic bias, sexual oppression, and poverty, and how these have disrupted the vital strings that once held the traditional communities together in pre-colonial times. The study discovers through the author's thematic appropriations that Nigeria's morbid state of affairs is a consequence of the high level of venality, the continuous mishandling of national ethics, and the constant deployment of disintegrative dynamics that cause contextual dystopia. Such dynamics include ethnicism, religious intolerance, and gender oppression. The paper concludes that the general social realist temper fictionalized in the novel does not evince enough positive indices to portend eventual salvation for the country.What is obvious is that the death of the dictator will not solve Nigeria's leadership problems, since the next leader and his subordinates will possess attributes similar to those of the erstwhile leader and his progenitors in office. It is an unending cycle of socio-political venality. What distinguishes the author's novel, however, is that she connects Nigeria's problems with its lack of identified national values, inability to handle its ethnic, religious and multicultural issues, and failure to have a government that prioritizes the nation's citizens' well-being.*

KEYWORDS*: Dystopia; Postcolonialism; Postcolonial theory; Nigerian fiction; Kaine Agary*

I.   INTRODUCTION

To posit that pre-colonial Nigeria was characterized by cultural homogeneity, religious harmony or cross-ethnic consolidation will be so far from the truth it will be tantamount to rewriting Nigerian history. Within the geographical mass that is Nigeria, there are more than 300 ethnic groups with distinct languages and cultures. These groups, most of them having historical pedigrees made illustrious by conquests and subjugation of other ethnicities, were yoked together in 1914 (as protectorates) and 1960 (as a country at independence) by the British to form a country where the only common features appear to be colonial legacies. In terms of general cross-cultural affinities, it is more difficult to find religious, culinary, sartorial, or general cultural values, which connect, for example, the Fulani man in the north and the Itshekiri man in the south of Nigeria. Aside the fact of being in the same country and continent, for example, the Yoruba man is as close to the Nupe man in the same way that the German is close to the Japanese. According to Siollun,

> There is less difference between an Englishman and a Spaniard, with their shared Latin-derivative languages and culture, than there is between a Muslim northerner and a Christian southerner, with their diametrically opposed religions, language, food, manners, dress and culture. The cultural differences between the ethnic groups made it virtually impossible for Nigerians to have any commonality of purpose (Siollum, 2009, 12).

Even after more than half a century of being yoked together to form a country, the ethnic groups are not in any way closer, in that ethnic differences continue to simmer, ethnic prejudices continue to fester, and divisive schisms continue to deepen. If before independence some ethnic groups, particularly the minorities, were uneasy and fearful of the looming prospects of the eradication of their cultural values in a society that parades cultural multitudes, it is now the major tribes that have become averse to multiculturalism and loss of cultural integrity. In a country where each of the three major ethnic groups - Yoruba, Ibo, and Hausa/Fulani - continuously project conspiracy theories involving any of the other groups' subterranean moves to dominate and probably exterminate the other tribes, the minority groups can only tag along and play ball with any of the big three, for their political and cultural survival.

The level of ethnic distrust, the paranoia that is the foundation for conspiratorial ideation, has never been more pervasive. If it had seemed subtle in the years before independence, that is, if it had once seemed obscene and incongruously untoward to publicly voice sentiments about the colonialist ambitions of other ethnicities within the country, it has become commonplace in contemporary times to abet ethnic chauvinism and emphasize group superiority, as counterpoints to battle the political or religious ambitions of other groups. Now and then, it seems the country is about to crater:

> By 30 May 1967, when Biafra seceded, not only was Nigeria neither happy nor harmonious, but it had for the five previous years stumbled from crisis to crisis, and had three times already come to the verge of disintegration. In each case, although the immediate spark had been political, the fundamental cause had been the tribal hostility embedded in this enormous and artificial nation. For Nigeria had never been more than an amalgam of peoples welded together in the interests and for the benefit of a European Power (Forsyth, 1977, 13).

Nigeria's multicultural context makes for a complex society where concrete unifying national ethos never becomes entrenched in the nation's consciousness. A country with so many 'exclusive nations' within its borders is bound to witness cultural chaos and anarchy in its history because of ethnic distrust and hostility. In a country where the people are culture-proud and quite sensitive to the erosion of their cultural values, it becomes more difficult to develop truly national values. Since the development of truly national constructs would naturally mean a gradual undermining of regional or ethnic values, the high level of ethnic jingoism negatively impacts real attempts at developing unifying paradigms for national growth. Rather than provide a fertile context for cross-cultural and multi-voiced countrywide inclusiveness that reconfigures regional and tribal cultural values as state ideo-aesthetics, the celebration of ethnic dichotomies at the expense of nationalizingparadigms can only create unbridgeable gaps, and the veneration of group dissimilarities will never allow for the evolvement of far-reaching nationwide cultural principles.

To further compound this already complex context is the presence of western constructs which complicate the conundrum. The medley of diverse cultural ideological values (from the several tribes and those of the colonial imperialist) provide a perplexing underlayer for a hybrid society characterized by language dislocation, religious anarchism, ethnic convulsion, and general cultural disorder. This is a recipe for national dystopianism:

> How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be

collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable? (Bhabha, 1994, 2)

One of the major upshots of colonialism is urbanization in most regions of the country. The urban settings which are deemed to possess the diverse constructs and instruments of modernization are the intersections of several cultures and where the quirks of hybridization are most prominent. If 'many of the value systems born out of communal living in rural areas become "non-values" in urban settings' (Egbunike,2012, 89), it is because the urban settings appropriate the complexities of modernization and the chaotic dispositions of decentered living. As hubs of multicultural formulations, melting pots of differing and contrasting value systems, both indigenous and foreign, the urban settings continue to create dystopic spaces for unhealthy experiences - so aptly symbolized in the Abiku image of a child of two or several worlds drawn to all and striving for personal significance. Just as Abiku is born of several worlds and is a child of none, and traverses these worlds manifesting no total commitment to any, so does the postcolonial being, living in a dialectically disorganized and radically transformed society which draws intertextual strains and influences from all the several worlds - the several indigenous cultures and the foreign influences. This is why the Abiku trope has been recognized as an apt metaphorical symbolization of the experiential vagaries of the postcolonial estate, a complex context of dystopic displacement which circumscribes a new experience through fractionalization, disconnections, variability, and alienation (Kamalu, 2005).

The objective of this study is to examine the author's exploration of Nigeria's problems as a nation. As one of Nigeria's contemporary authors, the study seeks to locate and analyze the novelist's artistic rendition of the unending ills plaguing Nigeria and the solutions proffered, if any. To achieve this objective, the authors deploy the theory of postcolonialism. The choice of this theory is apt, not only because its focus is on colonialism and its effect on colonized societies, but because its major thrust is also the criticism of the dissolution of monolithic cultures and the creation of heterogeneous societies from the clash of cultures engendered by colonialism.

The study is significant because KaineAgary is one of the contemporary writers in Nigeria, hence a study of his novel shows how contemporary writers perceive the situation of the country and the reasons they adduce for this. This study is also significant in that itacknowledges and concludes that what distinguishes the novel from previous novels that examine Nigeria's problems is how the author explores the connection between the complexities created by the multicultural Nigerian society and the inability of the citizens to find solutions to the myriads of problems facing the country.

II.   METHODOLOGY

Postcolonial Criticism/Theory and the Complicating Epistemology of Overlapping Constructs
Postcolonial criticism focuses on theorizing the 'history, culture, literature, and modes of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France, and other European imperial powers' (Abrams and Harpham,2012,.306). While critics have often disagreed on the meaning and delimitations of the 'post' in Postcolonial criticism, there is general agreement about its basic thrust. And this thrust attempts to evaluate the consequences of colonialism on the erstwhile colonies. Before the end of colonialism, the several years of the process (almost a century for most) had demystified old hierarchies and created novel possibilities that seemed inevitable. For the colonies, there is no return to a pristine, unsullied past, and the present is a 'complex mix and continuation of different cultures and temporalities' (Abrahamsen,2003, 196).
Even before the end of colonialism, its impact had become leviathan, the repercussions of its influence on local cultures and the general cosmological world in traditional African societies had become almost total. For example, in this excerpt taken from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, when a white man on a bicycle appeared in a village, the prognosis for the future relations between the white man and the local community was inauspicious: 'The elders consulted their oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them' (Achebe, 1994, 97). In places where the relationship did not lead to the outright

physical annihilation of the local citizens, like that of the Abame people in the quotation above, the cultural constructs that attended the colonial process upended the socio-cultural life of the people. The underpinnings of their cultural identity were challenged, and the anchors which defined their cosmological existence were disrupted.

The socio-cultural engagements between the Western culture and the local cultures continue to create contestation and complexities which explore the developing incongruities that characterize postcolonial nations. The resultant dislocations strive to harmonize the cultural variables of the two worlds by creating hybridized paradigms that define new experiences, experiences that thrive on the parameters created by the coming together of two different worlds and the dislocating alienation engendered by the throes of societal reconstruction and reconfiguration. Even though African cultural revivalists continue to call for the reclamation and revitalization/revamping of indigenous cultures (Gyekye, 1997) to assist in providing autochthonous bases for African socio-political sustenance in the contemporary world, and others advocate creating a total schism between the present and the pre-modern past (Hountondji, 1996), nevertheless, 'progress in any society requires adapting, changing, and in some cases abandoning traditional ideas and behaviors. It also involves borrowing and adapting ideas from other cultural contexts' (Ciaffa,2008, 142). The issue here is that the contact between Africa and Europe was operated on a level of oppressor/oppressed, and what followed was not a cultural adaptation but an imposition. In Europe, the movement from the (simple) agrarian world of the 18th and 19th centuries to the convoluted industrialized universe of post-world war 20th century was tagged disruptive, even when the transformation was from within and was gradual as several separate and incipient technological, religious, philosophical and cultural constructs had provided early indications of what was to come. However, in Africa, the change was more drastic, because the constructs of (Euro)modernism (that came with colonialism to the African continent) came from outside the cultures, and there were no prior intimations that could have signaled, for the indigenous people, the enormous changes that were to come. The European society in the aftermath of the two world wars 'suddenly' became 'rich in unpredictable evolutions, filled with complex forms and turbulent flows, characterized by non-linear relations between causes and effects, and fractured into multiple-length scales' (Hayles,1991, 8). But in Africa, the movement from traditional ways of life to colonized societies and then to independent nations was swifter and more disruptive in its dynamics as it involved resistance, conquest, submission, oppositionality, and inevitably hybridization.

It is obvious that the 'European culture itself is pluralistic, a crisscross of the most diverse tendencies, so that, when we speak of Western civilization we may not be clear what we are talking about and there is a danger that we will confuse currents that are opposed and irreconcilable' (Hountondji,1996, 156). In the same manner, when we speak of Nigeria's (and indeed Africa's) postcolonial culture, we ignore or forget that there is no exclusive monolithic culture that apprehends homogeneous values which, in their delimitations, define specific socio-cultural and political endemically organic traits. Indeed, when we speak of Nigerian (or indeed African) culture, most times what we have yoked together under an all-inclusive term are mutually exclusive norms and values, diverse religious and cosmological praxes with no manifest affinities.

According to Tabron (2003), colonialism involves 'learning the colonizer's language...which...deracinates the culture of the colonized: religion, holidays, food, clothing, furniture, type of work - these are all the ways in which the colonizer eradicates a cultural identity...' (Tabron, 2003, 41-43). With colonialism came a different language, religion, formal education in western constructs, alien philosophies and science, new sartorial and culinary codes, new gender values, and new social organizations, leading to a complete reconfiguration that was never subtle. One of the major consequences was the development of a complex identity little grounded in the indigenous cultures and far from the western culture which had provided the values of the cultural impositions. What grew was a synthesis, a general drive towards making significance out of the ensuing dislocation, out of the complicated hysteria of cultural hybridization. Though there are intersectional cultural variables that could serve as coalescing paradigms, at best these could only lead to the creation of composite identities to manifest the contact engendered through the fragmentations and complexities of multitudinous local and foreign

constructs clashing and then fusing. Consequently, as there are no unifying paradigms, what exists is, ironically, a medley built on heterogeneous decentralization, a complete lack of a stable socio-cultural core that could provide a steady and secure diet of autochthonous cultural values that are definitive of a society. What ensues is a process of enculturation informed by the internalization of new complex traits and affiliations growing out of overlapping influences from local and foreign cultural tropes.

HomiBhabha in *The Location of Culture*(1994) affirms that human existence in the modern world 'is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the "present", for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix "post": postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism' (1). In this seminal postcolonial text, the author theorizes the growth of cultural hybridization, affirming that there is no ethnic group or culture with its pre-colonial characteristics still intact after the 'clash of cultures'. He refutes the sociological dichotomy of the west and the rest, claiming that new discourses and novel constructs are developing which negate, displace or invalidate the old praxes of white/black, self/other, past/present, and private/public.

These discourses and constructs connect the old and the new, subsisting in the liminal spaces, in the interstices which do not easily lend themselves to simple categorizations, or direct classifications. The absence of distinct constructs and monolithic divisions, the development of multicultural societies with fluid and inorganic traits are the inevitable consequences of the contact between multiple cultures, creating cultural imbrications, ambiguities, borderlessness, and dystopic rootlessness leading to a society 'at pains to understand itself, and virtually steeped in a deep-rooted crisis of acute social and economic contradictions, and a painful search for a pathway to the remobilization of...humanity' (Udenta, 2015, 205).

In KaineAgary's*Yellow- Yellow*, the eponymous heroine's quest for personal congruities and imperatives that are significant for the realization of selfhood run through the novel's narration. The product of a whirlwind romance between a love lust Greek sailor and a village belle, the protagonist was birthed at a time when the traditional world is destroyed and replaced by nondescript and conflicting quasi-cultural values, spatialities that dislodge and upset long-established conventions. The protagonist's search for identity is conducted in the foreground of a local wasteland of environmental degradation, cultural dislocation, and national confusion.

III.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Environmental Degradation and the Crisis of Human and Cultural Survival in KaineAgary's*Yellow - Yellow*

The theme of environmental degradation is a recurring feature in Niger Delta literature. The Niger Delta is a region in Nigeria that accounts for more than half of Nigeria's export earnings and ninety-seven percent of Nigeria's foreign revenues (Amnesty International, 2009). For the indigenous population of the region, this does not translate into a high standard of living. Indeed, apart from the fact that only the elites (politicians, monarchs, top civil servants, and money bags) are the principal beneficiaries of oil exploration in the region, the effects of oil spillage on the environment (creeks, swamps, fishing grounds, mangroves, farmlands, wildlife) have been devastating and are mainly felt by the poor masses whose livelihood depends on the natural products got from the land. Oil spillage, gas flaring, and the escape of other chemicals in the process of oil production negatively impact the ecosystem and the biodiversity of the area.

The opening sentence of the first paragraph in Agary's*Yellow - Yellow* sets the tone for its focus: 'During my second to last year in secondary school, 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' (Agary, 2006, 3). Since the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region in the country in 1956, it has been the major source of income for the country. 'As an internationally traded commodity that attracts foreign exchange, oil is a quick source of capital accumulation. Huge revenues are realized from the wide differential between unit production costs and economic rents, royalties, petroleum taxes, oil exports, etc.' (Romanovs,2007, n.p.). Before long, the regions that had earlier

focused on developing their agricultural bases producing food and cash crops for export, discarded all interests as the money from the crude oil provides huge revenues. The discovery of oil did not only lead to this, however, as one of the other major consequences is the destruction of the land and water from which the oil is taken. As Yellow Yellow (real name Zilayefa) says, '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' (Agary, 2006, 4). Because it would not stop, 'the village...gradually lost, year after year, the creatures of the river to oil spills, acid rain, gas flares...' (Agary, 2006, 4).

The destruction of the local natural habitat, which had long supported the people's way of life, has become a context for ambiguous experiences. The pollution of the land dispossesses the people of access to their livelihood - farming and fishing - without giving them commensurate alternative means of livelihood. Whereas living in the cosmopolitan centers could open up opportunities tied to the vagaries of urbanization, life in the village is very much intrinsically attached to whatever could be directly got from the land. Without the products of the land and those of the sea, existence becomes arduously aggravating. When Niger Delta indigenes living outside the region begin to talk 'about how the oil companies had destroyed...Niger Delta with impunity' (Agary, 2006, 9), and 'how the Ijaws and other ethnic groups were suffering and even dying while the wealth of their soil fed others' (Agary, 2006, 9), it conveniently leads to the youths taking to criminal activities to subsist. And, when the government and the oil companies would do nothing to assist them, this, in the words of the protagonist

> drove the boys in my village to violence. If we had to suffer amidst such plenty, then those boys would cause so much havoc as possible until someone took interest in our plight and until justice, as they saw it, prevailed. Some of them joined the boys from other villages to kidnap oil company executives or bar oil company workers from doing their work (Agary, 2006, 10).

Although it is the region that provides the country's major revenue, in the villages there are no good roads, no electricity, schools went without textbooks and could not pay teachers. For the majority of the youths in the villages, with the destruction of the habitat, and the dearth of social amenities to improve life in their domains, migrating to the cities is the only means of escape from 'the conflicts, the violence, and the depression that characterized' (Agary, 2006, 24) village life. Those who choose to remain, especially the old men and women and the luckless youth, are resigned to living with the vicissitudes of rural life.

The Corrupt Praxes of Postcolonial Being in KaineAgary's*Yellow - Yellow*
As an integral part of a country that groans under the multiple cavalcades of heteronomous and autochthonic ills, environmental degradation happens to be just one of the several problems confronting the Niger Delta region in Nigeria. According to Achebe (1983), the major problem facing Nigeria is that of ineffective and corrupt leadership, and in *Yellow - Yellow,* the author presents the country as a rudderless place. From top to bottom, everyone seems infested with a venal corruptibility that resists amelioration; from the dictatorial excesses of the military rulers, the deceitful ruthlessness of the oil companies, the devil-may-care attitudes of the militants, to the general lawlessness of the citizenry. What is apparent from *Yellow - Yellow* is the scale of socio-political decadence into which the country has fallen, as not just the leaders or the elites are corrupt, but most citizens are driven by an uncritical self-absorption that utilizes every available opportunity to display an immoral penchant. The case of village boys suspected of stealing and selling the village generator thus throwing the whole village in perpetual darkness evinces the level of greed and self-serving venality that has crept into the social fabric. Every facet of experience is affected; education, religion, politics, etc. The country's university education system has never been worse: aside the constant crises caused by inconsistent staff salaries, political instability, and student conflicts on campus, the dearth of spaces for aspiring students, teachers' strikes, academic malpractices, sexual harassment, and inadequate employment spaces for graduates, all combine to eventuate general decadence in the sector and the narrator gives the damning verdict that it 'was the way things were' (Agary, 2006,

32). For the rich like the Admiral, with their actions, they further destroy the moral fabric that ought to form the substratum for a society striving to come to terms with its cultural hybridization. While they are active participants in the general corruption, they send their children to study or live abroad far away from the decadence at home. 'Admiral's two children arrived in Nigeria on the Tuesday before the party...They both lived with their mother in Spain' (Agary, 2006, 119). And, while he treats his seventeen-year-old daughter wonderfully, the Admiral deploys his wealth and position to sexually exploit Zilayefa's naivety and needs, despite her young age.

The way things are is that poverty in the country has increased the level of corruption. According to the narrator, 'Because of how rough things were in the country, you had to grease someone's palm to get anywhere' (Agary, 2006, 76) and 'law enforcement was so lax, the police so corrupt, that if you had enough money, you could pay your way out of any police trouble' (Agary, 2006, 111). In the Civil Service, in the higher educational institutions, in the Police, the general ambiance of corruption, nepotism, and prebendalism that characterizes citizens' behavior is disillusioning. The disparity between the rich and the poor which has led to an unending gulf, and the sense of ethnic oppression, are constant constructs that engender a peculiar ennui. While the Ijaw people who 'own' the part of the country that produces much of the petroleum that the nation relies on continue to suffer, not just environmental degradation but poverty, infrastructural decay, inadequately funded education and health sectors, there is a high sense of injustice where 'the Ijaws and other ethnic groups were suffering and even dying while the wealth of their soil fed others' (9). According to Soillun, although their region produces the 'majority of Nigeria's wealth, the inhabitants of the oil communities do not have the political strength to resist control of their resources by Nigeria's federal government' (Siollun, 2015, 2). Even the oil companies know the political situation in the country, as they have become adept at manipulating the system by

> using the Nigerian armed forces as their private security details to terrorize and kill
> innocent villagers who questioned the inequity of their situation - living in squalor while
> barrels of oil pumped out of their land provided the luxury that surrounded the oil
> workers and the elite of Nigeria (Agary, 2006, 158).

If the description above aptly deconstructs one of the happenings in the Niger Delta, the ethnic issue is a national one. Although within the Niger Delta space the internecine strife (between the Ijaws and the Itsekiris, for example) has direct consequences on the region, the inter-ethnic crises at the national level have been part of the national narrative before political independence. The conflict between the three major tribes has not only negatively affected the country's development, but it has also led to civil war once and the death of several people. Not surprisingly, the tragedy of the civil war has not forestalled a repeat of the actions and inactions that precipitated the war. Indeed, its aftermath has witnessed several instances when the country had come to the brink of another civil war, and some critics have even opined that another war has not occurred only because of the activities of tribal betrayers. Hence, the atmosphere of distrust, tribalism, and nepotism, a sense of utter lack of national coherence defines the national space, as;

> The Ijaws and the Itsekiris were fighting each other, as were the Ifes and the Modakekes,
> the Kuteps and the Jukun - Chambas, and the Bassas and Ebiras. Thus there was fighting
> in the North and the South. Nigeria no longer appeared able to contain her two hundred
> and fifty ethnic groups. Everywhere, communities that had lived together in peace for
> hundreds of years were taking up arms against each other over land and even personal
> insults (Agary, 2006, 109).

Even though Nigeria has the potentials to become one of the greatest countries in the world, with its natural and human resources [the 13th highest oil-producing country in the world (Wikipedia); the 4th highest cocoa producer in the world (Mattyasovszky, 2018); 12th highest producer of rubber in the world (Nag, 2017); 4th highest producer of groundnut (Sawe, 2020); the most educated ethnic group in the United States, and seventy-

five percent of black doctors in the USA (Wikipedia)], resources are either wasted or underutilized, leading to a dystopic society where nothing works.

Identity Crisis and Postcolonial Gendering in *Yellow - Yellow*

It is not only the natural environment that suffers from the consequences of the clash of cultures. On one hand is physical impact, as exemplified by the environmental degradation happening to the land, while on the other is the erosion of cultural values, particularly gender praxes which have long existed in the communities but which are now being discernibly replaced by nondescript practices. Every society has specific indigenous precepts that modulate gender behavior and attitudes. However, in Nigeria (like other countries in colonized societies) with colonialism came heteronomous gender constructs that have transformed most extant gender customs. According to Zilayefa's mother, even marital constructs have changed:

> My mother told me of the days of her youth when every husband was expected to give his new wife a dugout canoe that he had carved out and crafted himself. The wife would use this canoe to fish, earn a living and help to feed the family. Those were days when boys carved out decorative paddles that carried the legends of the Ijaws in every curve. Those were the days when the Ijaw woman could ignore the nature of the Ijaw man because she had a means of earning a living and providing the needs of her children. Those were the days when Ijaw women cooked a fresh pot of soup every day because the rivers were teeming with fish. Their farms held plantain trees so fertile that there was more plantain than anyone knew what to do with - roasted, boiled, mashed, been, and yellow, the possibilities are endless (Agary, 2006, 39-40).

Her nostalgia for the idyllic past resonates through her daughter who can only imagine how life was in the village in her mother's youth. With the destruction of the habitat, both men and women could not adequately be involved in the traditional chores that characterize the relationship between the genders. As the gender constructs of the colonialists were imposed via the colonialist enterprise, in the cities only the men were allowed to have access to administrative jobs and other employment while the women mostly became full-time stay-at-home mothers. For the men and women who still desire to work the land to earn their living, environmental degradation has taken that option away from them. The only option available to the young men and women (since they are witnesses to how their parents have been made redundant) is migration. With the environmental pollution hampering fishing and farming, even the men are not better off than the women. Because the men are frustrated at the disruption of their societal socio-economic fabric, they have become 'even more oppressive than the women alive could remember' (Agary, 2006, 40). Some of the women who challenged them 'walked around deaf in one ear' (Agary, 2006, 40). So the young women flock to the city, where they bleach their skins, all in an attempt to be more attractive to men. The men in the cities are richer, have loose morals, and are not restrained by vanishing traditional precepts. Without the requisite education, these girls become sexual objects for men like Admiral, who use them to satisfy their sexual urges. Others, like Lolo and Sisi, have become better attuned to the postcolonial climate. They become traders and open shops where they could sell goods.

Because the traditional gender praxes that existed before the colonial/postcolonial experience have been eroded by the values that attended colonialism, the postcolonial gender customs are not only confusing but also alienating. In the new context, marriage is no longer as sacrosanct as it used to be; paternal/maternal duties have lost all allure. Communal spirit has given way to individualistic impulses that thrive on acquisitive self-absorption. Even while living in the village, Zilayefa is alienated from the socio-cultural moorings of her community because of the cultural diffusion that has impacted and disrupted communal interrelationships. In the city, the situation has become worse because of the higher level of socio-cultural disconnect. Albeit the city might possess better social amenities and opportunities which if explored could assist individual growth, the

prevalent ambiance of moral decadence and ubiquitous disorder surpasses the communal disconnect that was beginning to characterize life in the village.

In a way, Zilayefa's youthful quest for personal significance, escaping from the discomfiting uncertainties of rural life to the morbidity of urban venality, symbolizes Nigeria's quest for a specific identity. The complexes and the crises that continue to attend the creation of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. With over 250 (Soillun, 2009) culture-proud nations yoked together for the political convenience of the British colonialists, Nigeria has even before independence been a context for tribal chauvinism and religious animosities. While the major tribes struggle for political supremacy, the minority ethnicities pander along with whichever of the major tribes could provide benefits to improve the lives of their people. The correlations between Nigeria and Zilayefa are apparent. Just as the British created Nigeria unmindful of the consequences of putting together different tribes with irreconcilable values, so did Zilayefa's Greek-sailor-father 'create' her by using her mother to gratify his sexual longing without thinking of the outcome of his actions. Just as Nigeria as a country continues to stumble from one system of government to another, albeit tagged a secular country but battling unending religious crises, and unable to define specific national ideo-paradigms for the country's identity and thus its development, similarly, Zilayefa's frustrations in isolating and identifying with general constructs that would enliven her personality and construe for her a positive orientation and identity, continue almost unabated till the end of the novel. Like Nigeria, Zilayefa continues to founder, and as her name means 'There is nothing like giving birth to a child' (Agary, 2006, 20), she quickly learns that subsistence is equally important.

However, her conscious transformation at the end of the novel from a naive girl from the rural interiors to a determined and refocused individual prepared to navigate the contours of a dystopic postcolonial topography coincides with the death of Nigeria's military ruler as the country is ushered into a direction that apprehends hope, freedom, and development:

> People were dancing and jubilating over the death of the land's leader...the talk in the streets was that he had died of heart attack after taking a drug to enhance his performance with two Indian prostitutes. There was no rioting, she reported, just people celebrating the demise of a villain...I did not know what to expect, what I would feel, or if I would live to see the next day. However, if I lived, it was an opportunity for a personal rebirth along with Nigeria. I promised God and myself that I would focus on completing my education and making my mother, Sisi and Lolo proud of me...I knew in my heart...what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. (Agary, 2006, 177)

Like most African novels, *Yellow - Yellow* ends in the hope that things will only get better. The death of the military dictator is accompanied by joyous celebrations in the land. Although the long years of postcolonial subsistence have shown that bad leadership is just one of the several problems confronting the nation, it is amazing that the amelioration of the country's ills could be tied to the death of an individual. Outside of the novel in the real world, while one would think a return to democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999 would usher in balanced infrastructural development, focus on eradicating poverty by creating viable economic strategies to tackle the scourge, and a melding of ethnic cleavages, the old problems persist. According to Omowa:

> Instead of bracing up to wipe off the corruptive encumbrances and bad legacies of the past, it is still business as usual by most Nigerian governments. We are faced with instances of politicians treating the problems with kid-gloves, in a rather pretentious attitude of wiping of poverty; stoves, bicycles, sewing machines, motorcycles rice and salt and others are being distributed to some party stalwarts; whereas there ought to have been a more fundamental restructuring of the economy.(2005, cited by Akinyele, 2018, 17)

Nigeria continues to remain a dystopic setting, as, according to Ogunrotimi(2013, 208-209), 'the average Nigerian experience has become so brutalized that things have become extraordinarily surrealistic it has led to the debasement of our collective social value system.'

IV. CONCLUSION

Through her various attempts to create a clear identity for herself, the eponymous heroine of KaineAgary's debut novel projects the image of a dislocated individual. This appropriately resonates with the struggles of a nation in search of national identity. The traditional ideas of a family no longer fit the reality in a postcolonial climate, due to several vagaries engendered by the complex multicultural realities. The parallels between the character attributes of the protagonist and the national peculiarities of Nigeria as a nation underscore a metaphoric imagistic affinity too apparent to ignore; Nigeria as a nation was put together by a foreign colonial power for its materialistic expansionist aggrandizement, so also is Zilayefa a product of an unequal relationship between a sailor looking for the easiest way to gratify his sexual desires and a naive local girl enamored with exotic entities. Zilayefa's major concern is a search for specific congruities and convergences revealingly significant enough to assist in creating an authentic self-identity, so is the history of Nigeria as a nation fraught with checkered crises which are the concomitants of identity anomalies. Zilayefa is unable to identifiably develop a harmonious connection with any real cultural ethos and is alienated as a consequence. Similarly, the existence of Nigeria (a country that has neither a unitary language nor religion and has its citizens made up of around three hundred heterogeneous ethnicities mostly with no cultural affinities) is moderated by conflicting multicultural vagaries (local and foreign) which militate against the development of a homogeneous national identity. The problem with Nigeria inheres less on the socio-cultural affinities that connect the citizens, and more on the extent of ethnic jingoism, nepotism, individual and collective larceny, and a general nonchalance towards the entity 'Nigeria' and national aesthetics. Such a context, much as its dynamics negatively align with Zilayefa's inner confusion, does not in any way provide the necessary fertile ambiance for positive individual or collective growth.

Not surprisingly, the atmosphere of chaos and dystopia in the country (as fictionalized in the novel) following the death of the military dictator does not evince a positive maturation of national developmental sensibilities. Because Nigeria's problem is not only political and tied to the demise of one dictator, what we continue to have, rather, are 'tension, anxiety, crisis of culture and identity, social sterility, economic misery and political directionlessness' (Udenta, 2015, 16), which have all become integral features of national subsistence in the country. KaineAgary's*Yellow - Yellow* is a novel that resonates with the peculiarities of Nigeria's postcolonial concerns. The author not only interrogates the complexities of Nigeria's socio-cultural and political destabilization, but she also anatomizes its culture of greed and corruption, ethnic chaos, human and natural resource waste, personal and collective venality, misuse of power, and the gamut of the country's general malaise. In her thematization of Nigeria's peculiar problems, Agary joins other Nigerian authors like Wole Soyinka (*The Interpreters*), Chinua Achebe (*A Man of the People*, *Anthills of the Savannah*), ChimamandaNgoziAdichie (*Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*), Festus Iyayi (*Violence*), Sefi Atta (*Everything Good Will Come*), and several other writers who have utilized their novels to record and critique Nigeria's unending dystopia. What distinguishes her novel, however, is that she connects Nigeria's problems with its lack of identified national values, inability to handle its ethnic, religious and multicultural issues, and failure to have a government that prioritizes citizens' well-being.

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