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The displaced Male-Image in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*

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It has been commonly asserted that Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006) presents a sordid account of the deprivation of the protagonist's subsistence livelihood by oil despoilment. This assertion is made without much regard to the repressed and manifest anxieties and desires profoundly induced in the novel's central character by a male who is present, onto whom the absent male-figure is displaced. This article, therefore, investigates the provocations, corollaries, and correlations of the displaced male-image through its absence and presence and examines how the various offshoots of this image, whether as a father, lover, friend, autocrat or deliverer, are posited by the work's major characters. The manifestation of the varied shades of the male-image is vital for the destiny of the main character and a few others, accounting for their sexual behaviours, consequent torture and the work's tragic form. Also closely examined, through the coalescing and the application of Freudian and Jungian theories, are the anxieties stimulated by the absence or presence of the male-image, how they come about, are made manifest in the Nigerian literary tradition and repressed at the same time. From here, works that display the repressed are analysed and aligned to *Yellow-Yellow*. Besides the main characters' heeding of some kind of pleasure code, the super-structural image of the male person hangs, like an unseen shadow, over and above *Yellow-Yellow's* major character, motivating her actions. **Keywords:** Kaine Agary, male-image, Nigerian female writers, twenty-first century Nigerian novel, *Yellow-Yellow*.

The male-image is a regular feature in Nigerian narratives. In an earlier work such as D. O. Fagunwa's *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (1946), the image of the male is that of the chilvarist or a procurer of public good. In Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-wine Drinkard* (1952), he quests for his dead beverage-supplier, whose beverage he is so incurably addicted to and for which he is ready to risk the whole of his life; in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), we observe the image of a hero who by dint of hard work achieves success and a place amongst the elders and custodians of his clan's ageless traditions against which he must zealously guard and before which he will fail to successfully so do; he is a profligate person, who sets aside a people's sacred trust, in *A Man of the People* (1966); and, later, when he is encountered in *Arrow of God* (1964), he is someone who is so inebriated with his exaltation by the stranger, the white man, and the familiar, his people, that he tests his prestige and arrogates to himself a rare status in an uncommon manner. The same male-image is evident in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988) in the form of a dictator before whom all must bow or genuflect, as the

aura of his ego exudes from him. In Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1982), S. O. Mezu's *Behind the Rising Sun* (1972), Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* (1986), and indeed, in all the so-called 'war novels' of Nigerian literature, the image articulated is that of an individual weaving intrigues in which he becomes caught while being bogged down by the carnage and pillage he helped stoke. Interestingly, Ifeoma Okoye's *Chimere* (1992) offers him as one who is willing to love but unwilling to accept the responsibility brought on by the consequences of his actions of love. He rejects being called and accepted as 'father'. By the time we chance upon him in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), having come a long way, he is none other than a male whose staunch religious beliefs have helped to make a domestic dictator. He is a ravisher in Jude Dibia's *Unbridled* (2006), who ravishes not only the person he is ostensibly permitted to, his wife, but one where this act is tabooed, his daughter. A related image is posited in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2006), where an excessive penchant for sexual delights is the source of break-ups amongst certain couples. And now, judging from his displaced career in *Yellow-Yellow* (2006), my sense leads me to affirm that he is almost a conglomeration of all the above shades of the image.

I shall explore a number of these shades through material interpretation and analysis. The displaced male-image, the figure which the male characters, irrespective of age and race, embody in *Yellow-Yellow*, is like the biblical coat of many colours. Since no major male character draws more critical attention than the other, they will be analysed in relation to their degrees of impact on Yellow's (also known as Zilayefa) fate, her young consciousness, and on the environment, all of which we access through her views. The manifestation of these varied strands of the male-image is linked to the turn of Yellow's destiny. It accounts for her sexual behaviours, subsequent torture and the novel's tragic form. Yellow's anxieties, stimulated by the presence of not only the displaced father-image, but also the other strands of the male-image—the lover, friend, deliverer, and seductive autocrat—will be examined. How do these anxieties come about, how do they manifest themselves, or are they repressed in Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*?

Since it is a new work on the Nigerian literary landscape, one should contextualize *Yellow-Yellow*. Like Wale Okediran's *Dreams Die at Twilight* (2001), Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008), Abani's *Becoming Abigail* (2007), Bisi Ojediran's *A Daughter for Sale* (2006), and Jude Dibia's *Unbridled* (2007), Kaine Agary's debut is a Nigerian novel published in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Members of this subset of Nigeria's 'twenty-first century voices' are said to posit a heated polity yielding the discursive formation that constitutes the background for the behaviour of their principal characters. Critical comments levelled at these works, owing to their "almost extreme stylistic linguistic and structural sensibilities", include the observation that they carry their epistemic disruptions further by demythologizing the usual, conventional, and traditional in an endeavour to accommodate experimentation (Onukaogu and Onyerionwu 115). A further criticism is articulated in the term "creative distancing" (121)—a term

bespeaking the literary writers' attitude of disinterestedness towards big issues of socio-political and cultural importance. These artists' emphasis, it is claimed, seems to have "shifted from the society to the individual", examples of which are the "explorations of individual figures as they struggle to find existential fulfilment in life" (121). The struggle takes the form of engagement with forces, environments, sub-human leanings and conflicts of identity.

Nonetheless, what seems to be an overt acknowledgement of the distinct but challenging characteristics of the Nigerian novel of the twenty-first century appears not to be holding for all works. I find *Yellow-Yellow*, in this instance, a good example to be used to buttress the above claim. This work is still perceived as having resulted from the despoliation of Nigeria's Niger Delta. In view of this, it won the ANA/Chevron Prize for Environmental Writing and the Nigerian Liquefied and Natural Gas Prize for Literature in respectively 2007 and 2008. This designation is utterly simplistic, in my evaluation. Not only have critics neglected the trademark features of the twenty-first century Nigerian novel in *Yellow-Yellow*, they have also not taken into account the displaced male-image in this work or the fundamental role played by the male-image therein.

The reader notices this image posited by the likes of Papadopoulos, Zilayefa's runaway father, the Ijaw oil-smuggling boys, General Sani Abacha, Admiral, the management of the oil companies, Uthman Kamal (Lolo's fiancé), TT (Lolo's father), and many others, who have contributed in various dimensions to the composition of this image, in its displaced form, in *Yellow-Yellow*. The oil exploration companies constitute an uncommon inclusion in the lot. By virtue of the stimulus provided by these companies, it seems reasonable to approximate human male characteristics to them. We need only to read through Zilayefa's account of the company's devastating presence in the village to conjecture how clearly the latter projects such features:

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. It 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 dry out, black oil that was knee-deep. I stayed there, in a daze, until someone shouted at, "You no go commot for there? You dey look like say na beta tin'! Come on, leave dat place!" (Agary 4).

The oil emitted from a vandalized pipeline provoked uproar throughout the host community. This situation was made possible when the oil companies failed in their commitment to community and environmentally friendly exploration. Pollution

destroyed several hectares of farmland including those of Zilayefa's mother who lost her "main source of sustenance", resulting in impoverishment (4). The oil companies as despoilers are therefore at the heart of the male-image that becomes displaced and aligned with a similar image provoked by other characters. They all combine to release meaning on the textual surface, an issue to which the writer will return in due course. The oil company is one major figure present in Zilayefa's community whose shadow accompanies her as she escapes to a place where the good life abounds, Port Harcourt. While far away from the company that contributes to her leaving the village, she finds it present, paradoxically, through her pains and conditions of existence. Her hopes turn to mirages after she becomes pregnant.

As a major character haunted by a miserable past and goaded through present pain to realize a receding hope, Zilayefa demands a corresponding critical method of analysis. Freud elucidated the concept of the repression of memories arising from daily activities. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1913), he detailed how the forbidden, and the unobserved by the casual observer, are submerged by the superego. Lacan develops this theory: he "promulgate[s] as necessary to any articulation of analytic phenomenon the notion of signifier, as opposed to that of the signified" (284). Freud's discovery, Lacan further claimed, gives the signifier an active function in determining certain effects in which the signifiable appears as submitting to its signifying emblem through a particular passion, the passion of the signified (284). Here, the object or person present is the stimulative agent of signification through some passion. Through the agent of the signified, the male-image as a displaced entity will be analysed in this article. But then, the ability of the human subject to signify is not a peculiar possession of this subject alone; other members of its species also signify. This ability includes that of loving, cherishing, desiring sex and security, and needing supernatural aid in trying situations. As a characteristic present in all human subjects, it is hinted by Jung as the collective unconscious.

The above implies that memory performs a significant function in the act of recollection, where a word cannot be remembered unless it has once been heard or attached to an activity. This process is essential for a narrator or character to displace an entity which is present and effect the presence of an absent being. He or she juggles symbols, objects, and ideal characters to meet his/her inner expectation. The absent image so reduced to the present figure, if it is a male, is the displaced.

As earlier noted, the oil company as a core male-image pulsates in the background of *Yellow-Yellow*. Other strands of the image relate to it, somewhat. The worsening of Zilayefa's mother's situation by its spillage echoes the presence of a ruthless male and partly helps to remind her and her daughter about the insecure future that awaits them. It also prompts Zilayefa to feel, more intensely, the absence of her father, who perhaps would have cushioned the adverse effects of the spill. Nonetheless, the spill alone is not the source of the predicament. In the past, Zilayefa's mother, an Ijaw,

having passed her School Certificate Examinations, had gone to Port Harcourt city, in search of a good life, but a Greek, Plato Papadopoulos, who would become Zilayefa's father, meets her there. A short while later, Papadopoulos 'mysteriously' disappears. The moment was, however, long enough to father Zilayefa. After she is born, her mother keeps mum over his disappearance for eighteen years, hoping that by so doing she would be keeping the lid that sealed her own trying and painful emotions firmly in place. But her escapist silence did not succeed in the long run. As it turns out, it did very little to wear out the mesmerizing power that Papadopoulos's absence exercises over her daughter. Beginning from the devastating spillage, for which the company refused to compensate her community, Papadopoulos's image of an absent comforting male looms just as large in his absence as if he had been present.

In Port Harcourt, the search for her father, once ignited, subconsciously resurfaces during her chance meeting with Sergio. She voices, "my craving for information about Plato resurfaced. My mother's total devotion to me had succeeded only in suppressing, not erasing, my desire to know about my other half" (Agary 108). In addition the reader discovers nothing about her maternal grandparents: her maternal grandfather and the authority he ought to wield is absent. This alone is enough to help remind her of her father and to impel his displacement onto any ideal male she possibly encounters within her circle of friends. All these effects, we must note, become much more intense after the destructive oil spill in Zilayefa's community.

Under the provocation of this spill and desiring to give an expression to her undying wish to regain her absent father, Zilayefa tries to access happiness through any means. She anticipates escaping pain to reach for pleasure thus:

I started to consider options that had never crossed my mind before, and from what I knew of my mother, those options would never get her approval. I could find my way to a place like Bonny, the base of expatriates working for the oil companies, and sell my body to a whitey. Some girls from my town did that in order to send money home to their families (35).

Her pondering takes us back to Freud, who asserted that:

Life, as we find it, is too hard for us; it brings us too many pains, disappointments and impossible tasks. In order to bear it we cannot dispense with palliative measures. We cannot do without auxiliary constructions', as Theodor Fontane tells us. [...] We must look further afield (Freud, *Civilization* 22).

The presence of pain, we deduce from Freud, is the primary instigator of Zilayefa's attempt at escape rather than the spillage, *per se*. But this primary cause, somehow, links up with the pre-primary cause, the universal characteristic response of escape from life's painful issues. The universal is peripherally absent in Zilayefa when one takes a perfunctory look at her life; nevertheless, this cause serves as a springboard for

her action as she attempts to get over the present unpleasant circumstances.

Repression is one reason why the universal giving heed to pleasure is almost unnoticed. Take, for instance, the coming of Sergio to Zilayefa's village. His presence is all that Zilayefa needs, first, to activate the father-figure of the male-image that was absent, before displacing this same image in Sergio. Being present, Sergio represents the ideal, the somewhat unknowable, like Celie's God in Walker's *The Color Purple* which could only be appreciated by the exercise of imagination, of thinking in layers, as the past is submerged, beyond recognition, by the passage of time and activity. The very first insubstantial and unreachable figment of the past which cannot be reducible to the object now present is very similar to Jung's archetype, the image against which what is present must not only be held up, but also be appreciated alongside the image. It is this image that therefore resonates in all of Zilayefa's actions as she attempts to express the congenital tendency to cast about for her father herself and for pleasure, taking account of the present object or human male when he, in the real sense, cannot substitute for the desirable absent being. Hers is a case of a sinking woman grasping at any twig.

Sergio, the expatriate furniture dealer from Spain who had come to Nigeria to investigate some business proposals with Tarilabo, is to become the entity upon whose presence must be displaced the absent father; his is the image of the absent which now is present and that of the present which correlates with the picture of the remote unrememberable absent past. She summons up the following in her narration:

While I was talking, I noticed a man across the room. I don't know how I missed him before, because his complexion stood out just as mine did in that room. His skin was the colour of ripe plantain peel. His hair was black and had the same big waves as my own. I had been staring at him for much longer than was comfortable, so he smiled at me and I smiled back. I wondered if he was Greek. The similarities in our physical attributes reminded me how different I was from everyone else in the village.

I cannot say that I ever really longed for my father; in fact, I barely thought of him at all. My mother hardly spoke about him. I had learnt not to ask questions, because each time I did, she very tactfully dodged them, changed the subject, or she would ask [...] I did not care for him one way or another, but seeing this man brought me thoughts of my father. Where was he? Did he ever come back to Nigeria? Did he ever think of my mother? Would I know him if I saw him? I had no clue what my father looked like. My mother had no pictures of him, and it did not help that, aside from my complexion, I looked just like her, right down to the little birthmark below her left eye. (Agary 19–21)

But before Sergio arrives, the *gbein mo* episode had already taken place. It was an episode that earned her a rebuke from her mother, yet it suggests the exhibition of the

latent universal characteristic of the sex drive that began turning on in her, according to Freud's speculative work in this regard. This dormant yet virile desire for pleasure is contained in the *gbein mo* tune to which she dances in the company of other teenage girls. The tune instructs them, she says, to "throw our backsides and the boys to pick them up" (15). It was an activity that gave them "so much fun" (15), she recollects. This evidence demonstrates that the talk of her innocence is dubious. She had long 'lost it' psychically before Admiral tore into her on her first night with a man. The throw-your-backside dance is not a dance of innocence. And, unable to explain the cause when her mother remonstrated with her, she says: "how stupid I had been for 'forgetting myself'" (16).

She adds that she threw her backside out "like a jobless girl" (16). This rebuke enabled her to repress pleasurable desires. She narrates, "to be on the safe side, I went straight to my room and stayed there until I fell asleep. From then until the day I left my village, I tried to occupy my time with activities that my mother approved of. Dancing in public was certainly not one of them" (17). It is also easy to conclude that pleasurable desires were repressed when the reader glimpses the reaction of her body chemistry to Sergio's kiss and what it calls to her mind:

It wasn't the same as when one of my classmates had kissed me in primary school. A group of us had been playing during break, and the boys started a game where they would pick a girl and kiss her. The boy who kissed me was a nice boy, but it was a horrible kiss, and we never talked about it afterwards. (26-27)

Such words as "nice" and "never talked about it afterwards" bear echoes of a concealed desire for pleasure, however repressed, that is already carving out a place in her despite some lingering restraints at the time Sergio kisses her. Yet the agent of this present surge of feelings is Sergio. By means of these three co-stimulating elements in Zilayefa (namely, *the* primary, the pre-primary, and other environmental spurs), to which she must succumb, having obtained a make-up that is pre-determinately structured to yield, the stage is now set for her to respond to the inimical presence of the oil company and the pleasurable absence of the male-image of her father, displaced onto other ideal men as lovers, friend, and seductive autocrat. Such men include Admiral.

Once out of the village (through the kind help of her mother's local pastor, to whom we could ascribe, from her recurrent reference to him, the displaced image of a caring father), she lands in Port Harcourt city, in the home of Madam George, where she is treated well for a short time. Yet it is long enough for Retired Admiral Kenneth Alaowei Amalayefa, an important character who acquires semantic density with every one of his actions, to find her. With his actions serving as accessories to the male-image that ominously seems to nourish the capricious figure of the oil company in Zilayefa's village, Admiral leeches off her.

To some degree, the oil company and Admiral are elements that bear the same male-image where interfaces of correspondences, complementarity, and opposition are obvious. We understand that while the male-image is present in the village, in the form of the oil company, the pain she feels (which Zilayefa would not have felt had the oil spill not taken place) in the midst of a pacy flourishing life and financial buoyancy in the city bespeaks the oil company's subtle presence in its physical absence, at least, with respect to her, through Admiral. Her financial stability is thanks to Admiral's money, Sisi's homey accommodation and comfort, and Lolo's wealth and sisterly companionship. The company's presence in the village, where poverty has taken root, is somewhat displaced in Admiral's shadow; in other words, it is hidden somewhere in him. It is only a matter of time before it manifests in the form of destroyed hopes. Admiral, in some respects, well fits the male-image discoverable in such characters as Chief Nanga of Achebe's *A Man of the People*, Chief Izongo of Okara's *The Voice* and the *nouveau riche* politicians of Mezu's *Behind the Rising Sun*, to which image the colonialists hand over the reins of power in the newly independent Nigeria as represented in African literature. Admiral and Chief Nanga, for example, are wily, seductive, and quest for female 'pleasure objects' as a predator would hunt a prey. Both qualify as enemies of the society and as seductive autocrats if we call to mind how Nanga lures Odili's girlfriend in Achebe's *A Man of the People*.

Notwithstanding, Zilayefa accedes to Admiral's advances. Repeatedly, once she psychologically reduces and approximates him to her father, Plato Papadopoulos, there is no going back. We hear her:

Admiral was a very handsome man, tall with no potbelly and a charming smile that made his eyes shine. He had permanent dimples and, when he smiled, they dug holes in his face. Whenever I saw him, he was dressed in traditional attire and had a little bounce when he walked. In my eyes he looks so dignified. If I had the luxury of creating a dream father, he would definitely have come out looking like Admiral.
(120)

This untiring predator, noticing her response, starts off by pretending, in the usual seductive nature of his kind, by saying to Zilayefa, when she greeted him in Ijaw: "Seri, I like young Ijaw girls who know where they are coming from. We need young Ijaw girls like you and Lolo" (118). At another time, he remarks: "See, that is why you must go to school and get your degree so that no one has an excuse to give you an opportunity in life" (137). But from the same fountain of his mouth proceeds firstly: "You do look like you'd be sweet to bite but save it for another day" (130) and secondly, through the narrator,

Admiral turned on the stereo and spread himself out on a couch. I picked a lonely seat as far away from him as possible, but before I could perch myself upon it, he ordered me to come over and sit by him. He ignored my protests that there was

not enough room for me. I got up and sat on the arm of the couch, by his head. In one very swift motion, he moved me from the arm onto a seat and rested his head comfortably on my lap. That was more than forty years of wooing experience on display. (137)

The rest is history, as the father-searching impulse gets the better of her. This “hoping that the relationship would give me a taste of close paternal affection that I never had” makes matters worse as she descends into the abominable (138), compounding any sort of resistance she could have mustered against a predated and pretending Admiral. His valedictory remark to her maidenhood makes this clear: “You’re a woman now. Don’t worry, it gets better.” (144)

This type of double speaking man, who counsels yet seeks to nullify his counsel and who grooms yet seeks to ravish the groomed in one fell swoop, does not disappoint one’s expectations when the following conversation ensues:

“So have you gone to see a doctor?”

“No, but I’ll go this week,” I said hurriedly.

“Well, take this,” he said, and handed me an envelope full of money. “Go to Island Clinic and ask for Dr. George. Tell him you need a pregnancy test, and if you are pregnant, he will help you get rid of it.”

I looked at him, and I could not find any softness in his face. (162)

He is obliquely referring her to a centre where she could have an abortion after she has told him she was pregnant. It is surprising that he could be as reticent as this, in comparison to his loquacity when he was seeking to violate her. The displaced image in him is gradually being unhooded; this time, it is not by the agency of the displacer, Zilayefa, but by the displaced himself.

By giving Zilayefa money for this purpose, he has incriminated himself as regards blood-spilling; this, and the male-image he carves for himself, is no different from that which General Sani Abacha has earned for hanging “Ken Saro-Wiwa, along with nine other Ogonis, for inciting an insurrection that led to the deaths of four elders in Ogoni land” (34). In his presence is the Abacha that was absent, in faraway Abuja, Nigeria’s capital—a displaced male-image of a seductive autocrat. We must not forget, too, that what Abacha does with the security agencies, in that they are used as agents of terror, is what Admiral does with the Ijaw boys and, though subtly and almost going unnoticed as posing no harm, with Zilayefa and her likes. Take the following descriptions by the narrator:

The so-called youth groups had become well oiled extortion machines all in the name of the struggle. They stole, blackmailed, and vandalized for the progress and development of the Ijaw Nation, the Niger Delta. Some days I appreciated their efforts. [...] They talked about how the oil companies were using the Nigerian

armed forces as their private security details to terrorise and sometimes 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. (158)

Abacha and Admiral are two of the elite members of this nation, a common obvious trait. Both have been very successful in their military careers, reaching the highest attainable rank. My supposition is that their military background is the reason why when the environmental activists dared take action, Abacha treated them to death by hanging. It should be considered that while Abacha perfects his figure of the male as a seductive autocrat (an image foreshadowed in Nigerian literature by Izongo of Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*; General Sam of Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*; the military officers of Festus Iyayi's *Heroes*, Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn*; the Abacha of Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and the Head of State in Chimamanda Adichie's *The Purple Hibiscus*), with respect to violence on the one hand, Admiral tends to live this figure out; on the other hand, as regards nonviolence, he displays seductive antics, disrupting the lives of young people. Both end up shedding human blood.

Lolo's father, Tamunotonye Telema Leslie-Cole, or TT, for short, "a playboy in Port Harcourt" who "remained a bachelor for a long time, successfully breaking many hearts with his charm and good looks" (57) and Kamal, the Fulani oil worker whom Lolo meets while working for Elf Petroleum in Lagos, are comparable to Admiral. Both are figured in him. Although, in contrast to Admiral, TT has no trace of violence in his many philanderings, he still breaks women's hearts. Kamal's twice-in-a-month visit to Lolo, when in love, had set her thinking he would marry her. But not long after, she is jilted by him in a typical 'TTish' manner. Zilayefa reports this, "Lolo and Kamal were on the outs" (160). Thus, TT and Kamal, in leaving their women, act out the male-image of a Casanova.

In a subtle way, Zilayefa would later encounter this image in Admiral. By asking her to terminate the growing foetus, he signals that he is not the supportive lover-'father' she desired. He also indicates that he is capable of displaying assorted passion and behaviour. He is not ready to be responsible for the pleasures gained from Zilayefa any more than she is ready for her hosts' discovery of it. His counsel does not seem to work, even when heeded. It does not salvage her dreams. Nevertheless, his eschewing his responsibility seems to round off the image of the oil companies. They exhibit similar behavioural patterns. Their "expatriate" staff are those who, when girls are ready to sell their bodies, are always ready to 'buy'. After the devastating spill and when the community confronts them, the company in question claims that "they suspected sabotage by the youths and were not going to pay compensation for all the destruction that the burst pipes had caused" (4). Hence we find that they display

common characteristics of exploitation and not taking responsibility for unexpected occurrences, as also does Abacha. The farther they move, refraining from what they ought to admit, the closer they become to the image of the male as a seductive autocrat, the sort that Admiral figures and is displaced in Abacha. Zilayefa in the Niger Delta might as well have been dealing, under the stimulations of complex variables, with Abacha in faraway Abuja through a proxy, however distant she thinks she was from him.

In terms of Abacha, TT, Admiral, Sergio, the oil companies, Zilayefa's mother and Zilayefa herself, the concept manifesting in and underlying all their actions as they adeptly try to negotiate their ways out of immediate predicaments of pain is the pleasure principle. One is able to explain, using this principle, how Zilayefa swaddles herself in the mess of the city's life. Before proceeding further, we must first note that the above assertions do not mean that the operation of this principle in her was only externally stimulated and prodded. The *gbein mo* incident supports this. No male figures were about to excite amorous inclinations in her. This is where, to some degree, one can begin to see the relevance of Jung's theory of the natural characteristics in all men, which cause humanity, irrespective of age, race, and region, to act in certain similar ways, be these in terms of dreaming, loving, marrying, articulating codes of morality, or enunciating mythological forms. These are latent in the psyche and explainable with the help of Freud and Jung at the same time, and one only needs to follow the trace of how the environment, given the appropriate circumstances, elicits deviatory tendencies from her. The 'tendencies' are, mythically speaking, like "the double-colored cap of Esu, the sower of eternal conflicts" (Adekoya 154). They can be credited both to unconsciousness and to consciousness (Jung 12,13). The reader has only to read about the lives of the major characters, especially Yellow, in this work to concur.

The pleasure that prods Zilayefa is enacted, though in a different way, by the Ijaw youths who, capitalizing on the neglect of the communities by the oil companies, take to fomenting trouble by kidnapping their workers and breaking open pipelines to tap crude illegally for personal enrichment. They evolve into "youth groups" that have "become well oiled extortion machines all in the name of the struggle" (Agary 158). According to Zilayefa, "they stole, blackmailed, and vandalized for the progress and development of the Ijaw Nation, the Niger Delta" (158). The same pleasure driving these youths also, unsurprisingly, leads Admiral Kenneth Alaowei Amalayefa to have carnal knowledge of Yellow.

With the rule of pleasure finding a ready stimulus in the environment and with it appearing as a phenomenon already possessed by all humans, it is evident why Zilayefa could not heed her mother when told, "Don't go and get carried away and spoil yourself. My back is not ready for grandchildren" (23), long before her arrival in the city. It also untangles the knotty issues arising from why her mother ended up making the same mistake her daughter would, in future, also make. This instance of

an innate pleasure drive is evident when the latter tries to give expression to the riotous emotion going on inside of her during the chance meeting with the 'runaway' Sergio in Port Harcourt.

I did not need Sergio in the same way anymore, yet I was a bit curious about what it would be like being with a white man.

There could have been something they offered besides money, that thing that my mother had fallen for. It was that thing I had been looking to key in to. I had wanted to understand what it was besides money that made beautiful twenty-year-old girls to look at their short, fat, ugly fifty-year-old white husbands with so much affection. Maybe then I could understand better or with less anger why there were more and more of my kind. [...] Maybe then I would not hide from the facts of my birth that my yellow skin and curly hair put on display. (170–71)

Her mother may have learnt from her own experience what sort of negative possibilities exist for an adventuring teenage girl, but experience is not easily passed on to the following generation as a baton to a fellow athlete in a relay race, not when she is uncommunicative about it. She "hoped to save herself" through saving her child (9). It happens that she will remain largely unsuccessful at this until the male-image in the shape of her daughter's father, a father-figure, who would bring along with him either salvation or love, or both, emerges from somewhere to register his presence to Zilayefa. This point marks the beginning of the cooperation between the male-image of the father and the principle of pleasure, leading to the ultimate overpowering hand of the latter.

The pleasure code, ever potent, is the orientation and force Zilayefa needs in displacing any ideal image of the male that fits the mould of her father, but not that of a brother or an uncle. This principle agitates the physical manifestation of the psychic motivations in Zilayefa. On her first night with Admiral, she mulls over it thus: "I felt a deep sense of longing for him, not because of the comfort Emem hinted at, which was money, but because I was hoping that the relationship would give me a taste of close paternal affection that I had never had" (138). Admiral was at hand to fill a vacuum that she desired filled. She is the victim of a void created accidentally by no agency of hers, like Celie in *The Color Purple*.

With this principle cooperating with the vacuum in her to rule her so, there is, therefore, something other than the nominal existence she once utterly detested, to which critics have ascribed the cause of her sorry moral mess. A reason exists for this claim. When weakly proffering a defence to her psyche before it breaks down, she lets slip the remark, which appears to portend future moral failure, that "he [Admiral] is old enough to be my father" (133). To this, Emem, her friend, adds: "when he is rubbing your body, do you think he will be thinking about how old you are? If he wants you to act like his daughter, then he will not ask you to give him things that he

cannot have from his daughter" (133). This lack in her psychological development is, incidentally, inherited from her mother. But would she succeed in doing the same to the third generation? The success or failure of her abortion will tell.

When Zilayefa dismisses Dr George and predictable orthodox abortion methods, it is the pleasure principle that presents and confirms her choices to her. We glean this from her:

Dr George was out of the question. He had to be the doctor who rich men sent their girlfriends to for abortions. Admiral had probably sent dozens of girls to him. I could not bear the shame of being seen as one of the poor little girls taken advantage of by her sugar daddy [...] one indiscreet nurse meant that my story would be all over town. I could not risk that. (162, 163)

Again, on the part of Sergio, a significant male-image upon whom the father-image is displaced, the pleasure code is at work. His recurrent references to his family every time he is with her tend to reinforce an obvious suggestion: that he is not ready to give up his entire family, wife and two grown twin children, back in Spain, for someone whose fertility he is not even sure of. His implicit message appears to be that he is not ready to enjoy temporal and transient pleasure, and for the rest of his life, suffer emotional hurt. If anything, and if he is given opportunity, he wants to hold on to both securely and enjoy them to the utmost. As with Sergio, the pleasure code is partly responsible for the stimulation of the absent being in the present sort where the image taken to be present is purely a displacement of the real, unknowable, unfelt, and absent: specifically, the displacement of Papadopoulos in Sergio, Papadopoulos in Admiral, Admiral in Sergio, her mother in herself, the oil companies in her village in Admiral, and Abacha in Admiral.

What is more, it also is partly the reason why she greatly sorrows and regrets the shattering of her dreams. Earlier, considering the prospect of her hosts finding out about her pregnancy, she fears that: "A child with no father was a sure way to throw my education out the window, because all the goodwill I had received from Sisi and Lolo was sure to be packed up with my suitcase, my baby, and me and sent expressly back to the village" (174). Then, during the abortion scene, full of regret and pain, she bites hard on a hanging towel that absorbs her sorrowful cries and the grave emotional disturbances stemming from within her. The following are some of them:

My life was out of focus, and I wished for the days when my mother planned my life, but I could not go back to what I had rejected. I needed to refocus, and this time I would have to do it myself. Everything I had had in life up until that point had been handed to me on a platter, and I had taken it all for granted. I had forgotten the coarseness of my mother's hands, which worked tirelessly so that I could achieve more than she did. [...] That evening I remembered. I saw my mother's face, and though there was very little I had done in Port Harcourt that would have

made her happy, she was smiling. I cried because through her smile I could hear say that I had let her down. [...] I cried but could not feel sorry for myself because I had made the choices that got me into trouble I had allowed myself, like an empty canoe, to drift along with the flow of the river.

[...] I lay curled up in the foetal position on the cold tile floor until my sweat and the blood that gushed from between my legs drenched my clothes, and I began to shiver from the cold and the pain. I begged God for forgiveness and called on all my mother spirits for comfort. Even so, I had to bite down on a towel to keep from screaming as my body pushed out blood and clumps of tissue that had been forming a little person inside me for almost three months. [...] I was enveloped in darkness and kept company only by the sounds of the night that lulled me to sleep. (177–78)

Clearly, the pleasure instinct is evident just as her abortion pangs seem to coincide with another sort of 'abortion pangs', her nation's, which has just witnessed the death of the current ruler, Abacha. Hers is a nation that cannot give birth to the new Nigeria of every citizen's dreams.

Like her nation, she says, "My life was out of focus" (176), recalling her mother's presence as the foetus evacuates. But when she recalls her presence, it is the disciplinarian maternal self that she recollects, the father displaced in her mother. The foetus, the third generation to witness the absent male and, therefore, the displaced father-image of the male-image that has successively defeated every positive expectation for goodness and success in life, is already being violently terminated.

After her mother, she also calls God to mind. While experiencing a situation of ease in the city, she articulated God as her deliverer, displacing Him onto Pastor Ikechukwu, through whose magnanimous recommendation letter she secures comfort. Yet some problematics arise from her articulation. The string of successes and comfort she credits to a God-deliverer do not seem to last at all, causing one to think that she might as well have left God in the village, "far away", as she has Ikechukwu and her mother (144). On the other hand, it appears that God is the one whom Zilayefa misses in missing her father and to whom she is eternally drawn without knowing. This is where God as absence and as presence—all in images that represent the absent in *The Color Purple*—comes together as an inseparable entity. God is an image that is by far the superior Father-figure of the overall male-image posited by *Yellow-Yellow's* main male characters, in that he is the conceptual form which one can hardly visualize but might gain an idea of.

Taking the image of the male's regime as a whole, as Zilayefa conceives Him, one discovers that, for her, the God father-figure is a mutable notion, especially, in the relation between pleasure and pain. In pleasure, she must thank God, for she utters, "I thanked God [...] for my luck" (68). At an earlier instance of hopelessness, she calls on God, "I quietly begged God to include an escape from the village in my plan" (43).

Then, later, when in trauma, she begs God, who perhaps was not present, for forgiveness and for deliverance. Yet Celie, in *The Color Purple*, once referred to the same God as “forgetful” (Walker 199). But unlike Celie, Zilayefa goes a step further by transforming God into the distant male-image of the father, the one who has taken the position of her absent physical father. However, if God hears these prayers as a displaced father-deliverer, it would not be the Judaeo-Christian God whose moral code of sexual behaviour she has flouted, for this God would never approve of that in the displaced image of her physical father or a caring friend like Pastor Ikechukwu. Also, by expressing gratitude to God as above, she appears to displace her father-image onto the Almighty male-image of a deliverer. Can her gratitude sustain God’s favour? If her present pain is taken as the consequence of her having enjoyed forbidden pleasure, it is likely that her articulation of God as favourable deliverer will be undermined.

During the abortion scene, various strands of the displaced male-image turn out to be figments of Zilayefa’s projections as she is confronted with the reality of the consequences of forbidden pleasures. Once those projections are made, the figures projected onto respond accordingly, leaving her the way she is. If she were to give a retort to an inquirer’s questions probing the process that has led to her present misery, I suspect she would possibly concur with Shug Avery’s acknowledgment to Celie in *The Color Purple* that “Man corrupt everything. [...] He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain’t” (204). The changeable image of the male in the work, whether as a father, lover, friend, deliverer [God], seductive autocrat, or a careful blend of these, turns out to be only what the mind can conceive and which cannot be conceived unless it is first equated to what is concrete and sensible, man. These conceptions and equations give Zilayefa’s undercurrent motivations a shape.

In other words, the projection occasioning the displacement of the male-image of the absent male in the present character, besides other sundry factors, is steered by the pleasure principle natural to characters, especially Zilayefa, through whom all is perceived. The image of the male, thus guided and projected in *Yellow-Yellow*, is, to my mind, the reason why this work bears the marks of the important literary epoch Emenyeonu aptly terms “new voices” of the twenty-first century Nigerian literature (ix). This novel expresses one of those voices, and I surmise that, contrary to existing critical remarks, *Yellow-Yellow* significantly undermines the depiction of those peculiar environmental problems of the region the sneezing of which causes not only Nigeria to shudder, but also a considerable segment of the world whose oil needs are served by her. In sum, Zilayefa is culpable of her many woes, though they were notably compounded by displacing the male-image.

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