

ecocriticism. The exclusion of postcolonial realities in early ecocritical theories prompted critics like Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, George B. Handley, Rob Nixon, Byron Caminero-Santangelo, Fatima Fiona Moolla, and Cajetan Iheka to intervene in the field by bringing the ideas of postcoloniality to ecocriticism. Sule Egeya's *Nature, Environment, and Activism in Nigerian Literature* contributes to the growing field of postcolonial ecocriticism. Egeya's introduction situates the book within the context of what Caminero-Santangelo (184) describes as "postcolonial regional particularism." However, Egeya moves beyond this and queries the treatment of Africa as a single postcolonial province. He declares that "ecocriticism in Africa needs to go beyond regional particularism to a national one for greater attentiveness to differences within the region" (1).

Egeya's decision to focus on Nigerian literature for his postcolonial ecocritical study is based on his desire to "pay closer and keener attention to local details, thereby presenting a comprehensive ecocritical study on Nigeria, the type that does not exist yet" (3). Notwithstanding numerous ecocritical readings of "Niger Delta literature" and, more generally, comparative studies of ecocritical literature in which Nigerian literature is represented, Egeya's book is the first attempt to study Nigerian literature holistically from an ecocritical perspective. The book is divided into five chapters and apart from the introduction and conclusion, the other three chapters are titled "Natures", "Environments" and "Activisms". In these chapters, Egeya frames his theoretical and methodological approach, and he interprets texts from all the genres of literature. The book analyses both "canonical and relatively unknown texts" with the aim of showing "the textual depth of Nigerian ecocriticism and [...] to bring the richness of Nigerian eco-writing to the attention of international ecocriticism" (3).

In the second chapter, titled "Natures", Egeya redirects attention from the idea of "environmental justice", which has been a major focus in Nigerian ecocritical literature, to "show how nature, since precolonial Nigeria, is extra-human in the sense that it is beyond human comprehension and control" (22-3). He positions nature as a pre-modern space where humans and non-humans interact. Nature is not constructed by humans even though humans interact with its seen and unseen elements. Referring to Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) and Femi Osofisan's *Another Raft* (1988), as well as the poetry of Niyi Osundare and Christian Otopotekere, nature is read as a pre-modern site where "humans, despite their seeming agential

Nature, Environment, and Activism in Nigerian Literature.

Sule E. Egeya.

London and New York: Routledge, 2020. 187 pp.

ISBN 9780367436056.

Ecocriticism has become a major theoretical handle in the analysis of postcolonial literatures. Drawing from the pioneering scholarship of Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, and Harold Fromm, postcolonial ecocritics have confronted the Euro-American centeredness of

capabilities, are not necessarily superior to, or more powerful than, nonhumans since, in the final analysis, human beings might be rendered helpless by spiritual and material forces from the natural world” (26). Nature is conceived in this chapter in terms of both physical and metaphysical dimensions and man, as a product of both dimensions in indigenous ‘Nigerian’ thought, relates with natural and supernatural forces and is sometimes under their control. Egya also focuses on the changing roles of nature in a postcolonial world and how nature’s physical and metaphysical forces insinuate themselves into human affairs. With specific attention to poetry, Egya engages “the bond between individuals and their birthplace nature, something of personal romanticism, non-spiritualised and yet deeply binding” (26) and he positions nature as a focal point in the “aestheticization of birthplace” (57) and “landscape aesthetics” (63) of Nigerian poets.

In the chapter titled “Environments”, Egya differentiates nature from the human built environment. His focus in this chapter is on “The ecological effects of deliberate transformations of the rural and urban Nigerian landscape from the pre-modern to the modern, or postmodern as the case is now” (70). A significant intervention here is Egya’s separation of “environment” as a human construct from the idea of nature, which is beyond human reality. Focusing on how modernity, colonialism, and postcolonial realities have created certain conditions which have allowed humans to alter and deform the natural world, Egya reads literary texts that depict built environments such as Toni Kan’s *The Carnivorous City* (2016), Denja Abdullahi’s *Abuja Nunyi* (2008), Kaine Agary’s *Yellow-Yellow* (2006), Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* (2010), and two short stories by Samuel Okopi and Olufunmilola Olubunmi Adeniran. His analysis focuses on “the environmental problems [that] are mainly caused by humans” (76) such as urban pollution in Lagos, displacement and de-naturalisation in Abuja, human-induced climate change, and the oil industry’s pollution of the Niger Delta. What is interesting about Egya’s analysis here is the scope of his textual selections. Drawing from a wide range of texts from various regions of Nigeria, Egya’s analysis presents a broad picture of environmental issues in Nigeria.

The chapter titled “Activisms” moves beyond the representation of nature and the environment and focuses on “eco-activism”, a term defined by Egya as “the point at which Nigerian literature’s ecological vigilance becomes crystallised, locating itself within the literary instrumentalism that remains both the condition of possibility for, and the avenue for

critiquing the aesthetic force of, this literature” (129). In this chapter, Egya is concerned with the place of writers and their fictive characters/personae as activists in the cause for environmental justice. Deploying the concepts of “protest aesthetics” (122) and “character-focalisers,” (125) Egya discusses Aliyu Kamal’s *Fire in My Backyard* (2004), Greg Mbajiorgu’s *Wake Up Everyone!* (2011), and May Ifeoma Nwoye’s *Oil Cemetery* (2013). His analysis is hinged on the main character(s) and how the authors use them to inscribe their activism against “institutional powers” and “anti-environment sociocultural practices” (125). This chapter succeeds in its identification of activism, or eco-activism, as a category distinct from mere environmental awareness and the depiction of environmental issues.

Egya’s book contributes to scholarship on post-colonial ecocriticism with its focus on Nigerian socio-ecological particularisms. His framework succeeds because of his awareness of the continuities and discontinuities between pre-modern cultural realities and modern/post-modern/postcolonial realities. Egya’s decision to move beyond the “canon” and bring relatively unknown and minoritised writers into critical discourse is an effective strategy that is justified by the interesting findings of his research. His methodological model and the logic of his textual selections are useful for future studies of ecocritical literature and Nigerian literature.

Work Cited

Camirero-Santangelo, Byron. *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*. U of Virginia P, 2014.

Mathias Iroero Orhero

mathias.orhero@mail.mcgill.ca

McGill University

Montreal, Canada

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1970-4505>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v58i1.9507>